

**VOICES FROM THE MARGINS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE CULTURAL  
POLITICS OF E.M. FORSTER'S FICTION**

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## ABSTRACT

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This thesis seeks to offer an explicitly political reading of E.M. Forster's fiction, focusing on three of his novels (*A Room with a View*, *Howards End* and *Maurice*) and two of his short stories ("The Life to Come" and "The Other Boat"). Throughout I have used a combination of close reading techniques and elements of critical theory to show how Forster's fiction is characterised by a prolonged and ongoing analysis of the political notion of the intersection of mainstream and marginal cultures. In this regard, I argue that the majority of Forster's novels and short stories are concerned with issues surrounding characters who are somehow marginalised from mainstream power structures and who then have to rebel against the cultural centre in their personal quests for political autonomy. It is this cultural issue, I argue, that gives Forster's novels and short stories their thematic unity and continuity. In probing this theme, I hope to move beyond restrictive (and often reductive) liberal humanist styles of criticism, which tend to downplay the political implications of Forster's fiction by foregrounding only the metaphysical questions posed by his writing.

However, this thesis is also informed by certain deconstructive theoretical concepts, which I have loosely drawn upon in tracing the development of this theme. In particular, I argue throughout that the oppositional quality of the novels and short stories identified by the liberal humanist critics is only truly evident in the early novels, such as *A Room with a View*. In the later novels, I argue, it is evident that Forster had significantly re-evaluated his understanding of the relationship between the dominant culture and its dissident, subordinate subcultural strands, and that he had begun to conceive of the interaction between the two in a vastly more fluid and pluralistic manner than has been acknowledged by earlier critics. In particular, Forster seems to apprehend in the later works the manner in which a subject can be simultaneously both at the centre and the margins of his/her respective cultural system. It is for this reason that I stress that Forster sees the relationship between mainstream and marginal cultures as an *intersection* rather than an *opposition*.

I also stress throughout this thesis the fact that the mainstream/marginal theme extends beyond issues raised in the novels and short stories and includes the author himself. As a male homosexual living in a sexually repressive society, Forster was himself a marginalised member of society, and this cultural positioning must therefore

be seen to inform the themes raised in his writings. However, as a middle-class male, Forster was himself also an empowered subject, and his writing thus also reflects his own complicity in the power structures he was seeking to subvert. This is particularly evident when one considers the recurrent misogyny his novels and short stories display. In addition, Forster's particular historical positioning as an early twentieth century writer means that his novels resonate with several of the non-literary discourses so prominent in the period, such as feminism and sexology. It is when one considers the manner in which the novels actively engage with these non-literary discourses that the considerable political invective of Forster's writing becomes apparent.

In the light of the issues outlined above, I interpret Forster's novels as an attempt on the author's part to vocalise the feelings, hopes and aspirations of those groups somehow marginalised from the dominant culture.

**DECLARATION**

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I, James Alfred Linscott, do hereby declare that this thesis is my own unaided work, and that it has not been submitted for examination at any other university.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

As supervisor, I agree/do not agree to the submission of this thesis.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

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Finally, I would like to thank my parents for their support, both financial and emotional, throughout this entire undertaking.

## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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In this thesis, and particularly in the chapter on *Howards End*, I have made a number of references to the manuscript of a critical work on E.M. Forster which had not yet been published at the time this thesis was submitted. I was very kindly offered access to the work, provisionally entitled *Forster's Modernism*, by its author, Dr David Medalie of the University of the Witwatersrand. However, as I received the manuscript on computer disk, I had to insert my own pagination system for ease of reference. As a result, references to page numbers are entirely my own and do not refer to any published version of the work. The fact that the manuscript had not yet been published when the thesis was submitted also accounts for its incomplete citation in the Bibliography.

## INTRODUCTION

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In *The Writings of E.M. Forster*, Rose Macaulay, one of Forster's earliest critics, draws attention to what she considers to be a distinctive and defining feature of E.M. Forster's fiction. She observes that the novels are characterised by an oppositional quality, whereby contrasting sets of values and beliefs are set off from one another in a deliberate and significant manner. In summing up the thematic import of Forster's novels, she describes the oppositional quality of the novels in the following terms:

[It is] this passionate antithesis between the real and the unreal, the true and the false, being and not-being, that gives the whole body of E.M. Forster's work, in whatever genre, its unity. The importance he attaches to this antithesis has the urgency of a religion. There is a Way, a Truth, a Life: you may call it, he seems to tell us, Cambridge; or you may, if you look at other expressions of it, call it Wiltshire, or Italy, or various other names; whatever you call it, it is truth and life, and therefore the way, as opposed to humbug, lifeless conventionalism, and dreary muddle (10-11).

Macaulay's analysis seems to suggest that Forster unequivocally endorses one particular value-system over another and, moreover, that there is a clean and unambiguous division between these two competing and contrasted modes of being. In Macaulay's view, the novels' characters can be uncontroversially separated into two discrete and distinct groups: the "sincere" and the "insincere", or the "true" and the "false". She goes on to list several characters whom she regards as exemplifying Forster's conception of sincerity: Stephen Wonham in *The Longest Journey*, George Emerson in *A Room with a View*, "the young Italian bounder" Gino in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, Mrs Wilcox in *Howards End*, and Mrs Moore in *A Passage to India*, among others (11). Macaulay then comments that "although none of them has been to Cambridge ... [they] stand on the Cambridge side of the gulf that divides Cambridge from Sawston, reality from sham, life from non-existence" (11). Significantly, the word "gulf" crucially conveys the extent to which she sees the sets of characters as entirely disengaged from one other and wholly contrasted in philosophy and manner. In Macaulay's view, Forster's characters are involved in a kind of metaphysical stand-off, and each novel is understood as a prolonged philosophical duel between representatives of opposing sets of values.

Macaulay's approach is broadly representative of the liberal humanist response to Forster's writing, a critical perspective that dominated Forsterian criticism until fairly



recently.<sup>1</sup> In terms of this approach, self-realisation is seen as the primary goal of the self-aware individual – hence the insistence in Macaulay’s criticism on the embodiment of these metaphysical values specifically in individual characters. Moreover, there is a pronounced emphasis on abstract, essentialist conceptions of truth, beauty, reality and sincerity, as well as little, if any, acknowledgement of the manner in which these qualities may have been socially constructed. Furthermore, the liberal humanist approach places an emphasis on the concept of personal morality: characters’ actions and decisions are assessed on a purely individual level, and are accordingly not related to wider contextual issues. In *A Room with a View*, for example, Lucy’s personal struggle is regarded as one towards “truth” and “sincerity”. In accordance with this view, in *The Cave and the Mountain* Wilfred Stone summarises the plot of the novel as “Lucy’s gradual escape from Sawstonian confinement (the lie) into Emersonian freedom (the truth)” (220). As with Macaulay’s observation, Stone assumes that both the “truth” and the “lie” are capable of being definitively and unambiguously identified and understood.

In *E.M. Forster*, Lionel Trilling, another liberal humanist critic, makes a similar observation about the oppositional quality of Forster’s fiction:

**Across each of his novels runs a barricade; the opposed forces on either side are Good and Evil, in the forms of Life and Death, Light and Darkness, Fertility and Sterility, Courage and Respectability, Intelligence and Stupidity – all the great absolutes that are so dull when discussed in themselves (13).**

As in Macaulay’s analysis, Trilling conceives of the oppositions as rigid and obvious, as is suggested by the word “barricade”. Accordingly, the “forces” are seen as “opposed” to one another in a prolonged metaphysical onslaught. In addition, Trilling’s capitalisation of the names of the various “forces” suggests his essentialist conception of these abstract qualities. As he himself goes on to point out, they are “absolutes”, which suggests that they are both identifiable and knowable. Most significantly, there is no acknowledgment in Trilling’s analysis of the potentially culturally constructed nature of these qualities; instead, they are regarded as transhistorical “truths”.

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<sup>1</sup> In his introduction to *E.M. Forster*, Jeremy Tambling writes that E.M. Forster’s writing “has encouraged criticism of usually a strongly liberal-humanist kind. Of this criticism, Lionel Trilling’s book *E.M. Forster* was a pioneering prototype, and P.N. Furbank’s excellent *E.M. Forster: A Life*, indispensable for any work on Forster, is a fine point to mark a limit” (1).

In a similar manner, Jean Middleton's study of Forster's novels reveals many similar liberal humanist preoccupations. For example, at one point in her discussion of *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, she rebukes Forster for the "untruthfulness" of his contention that Gino is representative of all fathers, and that the desire to be a father is "the strongest desire that can come to a man ... stronger even than love or the desire for personal immortality" (132). Underpinning Middleton's critique is the notion that the "truth" exists as a real and essential entity, a contention that poststructuralist theory has assiduously attempted to subvert. In addition, Middleton's emphasis on the truth or falsity of Forster's contention about fatherhood deflects attention from the political implications of his depiction of Gino's paternal impulses towards his infant child. A more politically aware analysis of the novel might interpret the emphasis on the tenderness and closeness between father and son as a subtle rejoinder to notions of motherhood as the principal bond between parent and child. According to this interpretation, Forster might be seen to be endorsing a broader concept of parenthood – one which places equal emphasis on the importance of both the male and female parent in the process of child-rearing.

Macaulay's critical method similarly favours the philosophical at the expense of the political. Her criticism shows an acute awareness of the philosophical dimension of Forster's novels, but crucially fails to apprehend the political implications of much of his work. This results in her embracing and endorsing a rigidly binaristic view of the novels, where "true" or "sincere" characters are pitted against the "conventional" and "insincere" ones. Moreover, there is an implied assumption in her analysis that Forster unequivocally allows the "sincere" characters to triumph over those who embody "humbug, lifeless conventionalism, and dreary muddle". As I will show, the uncompromising binary oppositions advanced by Macaulay are much too simple, and do not apprehend or engage with the considerable ambiguity and complexity inherent in Forster's delineation of character and theme.

Ironically, however, there is a limited degree of value in Macaulay's assessment. In fact, I would go so far as to argue that Macaulay foregrounds a theme which both unifies and gives coherence to the entire body of Forster's writing. Macaulay is correct in apprehending that Forster's novels are characterised by a kind of tension between competing modes of being and attitudes towards society and culture. As she

acknowledges, characters do seem to be engaged in a prolonged dramatised debate with one another, and all of the novels seem to contain within them an ideological friction that is then played out on a personal and highly individualised level. For example, the Wilcox-Schlegel opposition in *Howards End* is really a careful contrast between liberal humanism and the conservative ideologies underpinning the capitalist and imperialist projects. In a similar vein, in *A Room with a View* characters are deliberately and obviously contrasted to underscore the notion of competing value-systems and ideologies. For example, George Emerson is contrasted with Cecil Vyse, Mr Beebe with the Reverend Eager, Mrs Honeychurch with Mrs Vyse, and so on.<sup>2</sup> To a greater or lesser degree, the oppositional structure is evident in all of the novels in Forster's *oeuvre*, and so should rightly be considered a dominant and unifying theme. For example, in Forster's earliest published work, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905), the novel's action is organised around a deliberate and sustained contrast between a repressive suburban English town, Sawston, and a sexually permissive Italy. Similarly, in Forster's final novel, *A Passage to India* (1924), Forster opposes the imperial chauvinism of the Anglo-Indians (as represented by the Turtons) with the sympathetic liberalism of such characters as Mrs Moore and Fielding. The oppositional quality of Forster's fiction also finds its expression in a broader form in Forster's posthumously published novel, *Maurice*, in terms of an opposition between homosexuality and heterosexuality, and in the opposition between two contrasted ideals of male homosexuality.<sup>3</sup>

However, in this thesis I intend to move beyond the liberal humanist approach to Forster's work in two main ways. I want to argue for an explicitly political reading of the fiction, in which questions of cultural identity, gender identity and sexual politics are directly highlighted. In my view, Forster's novels are deeply and thoroughly political in the sense that they are sustained explorations of the notion of the intersection of dominant

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<sup>2</sup> I owe this insight to Jeffrey Meyers, who writes in his essay "Vacant Heart and Hand and Eye: The Homosexual Theme in *A Room with a View*", "Like *Howards End*, *A Room with a View* (1908) is structured by a series of contrasting characters, settings and values which heighten the dramatic tension and enforce the theme ... In *A Room with a View* there are similar polarities [to those supposedly evident in *Howards End*]: Emerson-Eager, George-Cecil, Lucy-Charlotte, Mrs Honeychurch-Mrs Vyse, Italy-England, Surrey-London; and classical-medieval, passion-intellect, instinct-convention, truth-lies, outdoor-indoor, sunlight-shadow" (181).

<sup>3</sup> The notion of *Maurice* representing two competing modes of homosexual identity is made by Robert K. Martin in his essay "Edward Carpenter and the Double Structure of *Maurice*".

and marginal cultures. For this reason, I feel that the *opposition* Macaulay identifies in the novels would be better described as an *intersection* between the mainstream and marginal elements within Edwardian English culture. Whereas Macaulay approaches the characters largely as studies in sincerity and insincerity, I see Forster's thematic concern as being the manner in which subjects might be able to resist and liberate themselves from hegemonic or dominant cultures. Forster's novels are primarily concerned with subjects who are in some way/s marginalised or exiled from the cultural centre. Forster's protagonists exist on the edges of the cultural mainstream, by virtue of their gender, sexual orientation, race or class. The internal tension and dynamism of the novels arise from the resistance to the dominant culture displayed by the protagonists. In line with my re-reading of the traditional liberal humanist response to the novels, then, I would argue that the familiar Forsterian notion of self-realisation should be properly understood as liberation from hegemonic cultural prescriptions. What is most striking (and impressive) about Forster's body of fiction is the manner in which he manages to move between a great variety of instances of marginalisation (women's oppression, homophobia, the alienation that stems from capitalist exploitation and colonialism) and establish meaningful thematic links between these various forms of oppression. In general, I would argue, Forster's novels show a sustained and intelligent sympathy with those who are disempowered or marginalised by hegemonic mainstream discourses.<sup>4</sup>

However, I also want to show in this thesis the insufficiencies of the binaristic, oppositional conception of the novels as put forward by critics such as Trilling, Macaulay and Stone. As was alluded to above, throughout this thesis I choose to describe Forster's presentation of the relationship between marginal and the mainstream as an *intersection* rather than an *opposition*. In this way, I hope to challenge and re-evaluate the binaristic implications of regarding marginal elements in society as being unproblematically disengaged from the dominant culture they are trying to resist. Indeed, Forster is keenly aware of the multiplicity of forms of hegemony and oppression, and his characters often do not fall neatly into one or the other category. As a result, many of Forster's characters

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<sup>4</sup> I feel I should at this point make it clear that my more politicised reading of Forster's fiction is not intended to invalidate or denigrate the earlier, more traditional responses to the novels. There is much that is of value in the criticism of figures such as Trilling, Macaulay, Leavis, Furbank and Stone and, indeed, their critical insights often form a solid starting-point for a more politically attuned reading.

are in some way/s complicit in the power structures they are ostensibly seeking to subvert. In general, I feel that the binaristic understanding of the novels is appropriate to describe only Forster's early novels (*Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905), *The Longest Journey* (1907) and *A Room with a View* (1908)), and that, by the time he came to write his later works (*Howards End* (1910), *Maurice* (1913), *A Passage to India* (1924), and his posthumously published short stories) he had significantly revised this earlier oppositional model. Accordingly, one sees in the later works an acknowledgment of the ambiguity inherent in cultural positioning, as well as an awareness of the paradoxes associated with those characters, like Maurice and the protagonists of "The Life to Come" and "The Other Boat", who are simultaneously at both the centre and margins of their respective cultural systems.

In this thesis, I have chosen to confine my analysis to three of Forster's novels and two of his posthumously published short stories, although, as I have already acknowledged, the mainstream/marginal theme is relevant to all of the novels and most of the short stories (both those posthumously published and those published in his lifetime). Indeed, *The Longest Journey*, which is in fact the most autobiographical of the novels, is itself a sustained analysis of Rickie Elliot's struggle to live free from the suffocating repressiveness of mainstream English society, as represented by the fictional town of Sawston. The three novels I have chosen – *A Room with a View*, *Howards End* and *Maurice* – have much in common with one another, both thematically and structurally, and thus nicely complement each other when studied together. In addition, all three were written prior to the First World War, and so relate specifically to the Edwardian period, unlike *A Passage to India*, which was published in 1924, and which is stylistically and temporally distinct from the preceding works. While *Howards End* displays an incipient modernism in terms of its concerns about modern urban society, it remains, stylistically and thematically, primarily a work of Edwardian literature, unlike *A Passage to India*, whose bleak, even nihilistic, vision of cosmic disconnection and futility seems intimately associated with the later literary movement.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, all three novels are set largely

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<sup>5</sup> Forster's modernism explicitly reveals itself in the aftermath of Mrs Moore's horrifying (and, crucially, unexplained) experience in the first of the Marabar caves. This incident seems to undermine both her former humanistic vision and her sense of cosmic order and unity. Mrs Moore's nihilistic thoughts seem to express the essence of the modernist conception of the individual's relationship with the cosmos: "The

in England (while Part One of *A Room with a View* is set in Italy, I feel that the foreign setting works primarily to foreground issues that are directly relevant to the English cultural *milieu*), and all three directly address several key cultural concerns of the period. For example, both *Howards End* and *A Room with a View* are concerned with the changing role and position of women in Edwardian society, and both have female characters as their protagonists. Even *Maurice*, while not addressing women's issues directly, explores tangentially the manner in which its protagonist exploits his patriarchal power within the Edwardian household, and thus subtly probes the question of gender inequality within Edwardian England. Most importantly, though, all three novels are concerned with rebellion against mainstream culture.

In *A Room with a View* and *Maurice*, both Lucy and Maurice are forced to confront and eventually rebel against mainstream sexual *mores* in their quests for sexual self-realisation. Indeed, so similar are these two novels in terms of theme, structure and dramatic trajectory that I consider *A Room with a View* to be in a sense *Maurice* in an encoded form, its latent homoeroticism displaced into a socially acceptable, ostensibly celebratory heterosexual romance. In essence, the earlier novel is concerned with the difficult process of accepting one's sexuality in the context of a repressive sexual order, and so should be read as a veiled plea for sexual liberation in general. In addition, a careful, politically aware reading of *A Room with a View* uncovers the novel's latent homoeroticism, which further reinforces its decidedly non-mainstream status. The similarities between the two novels can be seen also to exemplify the point made earlier about Forster's sympathy for a wide variety of marginalised groups. As an early novel, *A Room with a View* displays the oppositionality identified by the three critics cited above, although, as I will show, there is an element of cultural "unravelling" already taking place.

In *Howards End*, the most structurally complex of the three novels I critique, Forster tackles the concept of resistance to and rebellion against the dominant culture in a more diffuse and pluralistic manner. I read *Howards End* as a study of two contrasted

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more she thought over it, the more disagreeable and frightening it became ... the echo began in some indescribable way to undermine her hold on life. Coming at a time when she chanced to be fatigued, it had begun to murmur: 'Pathos, piety, courage – they exist, but are identical, and so is filth. Everything exists, nothing has value'" (146).

modes of cultural resistance to the dominant order, as exemplified by the contrary approaches towards social injustice displayed by Margaret and Helen Schlegel. As Paul Delany writes in his essay “‘Islands of Money’: Rentier Culture in *Howards End*”, “The older sister, Margaret, concentrates on trying to understand the class above her, the younger, Helen, on understanding the class below. Each takes her sympathy to the point of sexual connection – Margaret’s willed and reasoned, Helen’s impulsive” (69). I would augment Delany’s analysis by pointing out the explicitly ideological nature of the sisters’ contrasted actions: while Margaret’s “reasoned” approach conforms roughly to the moderation usually associated with classic liberalism, Helen’s is a radical and defiant rejection of the economic (capitalist) basis of her society. The novel proceeds to show, however, the insufficiency of the moderate, liberal response to patriarchal and capitalist oppression by having Margaret ultimately triumph over the values represented by the Wilcox family through her endorsement of Helen’s radical actions, which are explicitly presented by Forster as heroic. There is therefore an ideological disjuncture between the novel’s avowed insistence on “connection” and the ultimate resolution of the cultural conflict it depicts.

However, the point made above about the diffuse and pluralistic nature of resistance to the dominant culture relates to an earlier comment about the insufficiency of the binaristic, oppositional conception of Forster’s novels. As I have pointed out, the starkly oppositional aspect of Forster’s fiction is evident only in the early novels, of which *A Room with a View* is a good example.<sup>6</sup> In this novel, Forster conceives of mainstream and marginal culture largely in a rather schematic and categorical manner, as two wholly distinct sets of values existing in opposition to one another. This conceptual rigidity is given expression in the actual structure of the novel, which is neatly divided into two sections of relatively equal length. The first section is set in Italy (which is associated with emotional spontaneity, sexual expressiveness and personal fulfilment), while the second takes place in England (which, although charming, is nonetheless presented as repressed and restrictive). Similarly, the novel’s characters are also obviously contrasted, so that they can neatly be divided into opposing camps. Lucy’s challenge in the novel is to reject the strictures of the characters who represent repression

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<sup>6</sup> See footnote two, in which Jeffrey Meyers describes the oppositional structure of the novel.

and embrace those values which encourage and validate sexual and emotional self-realisation. In this novel, Forster conceives of each of these cultural positions as static and monolithic, and Lucy is accordingly faced with a choice. By choosing George over both Cecil and a sterile asexuality, she aligns herself with the characters in opposition to the mainstream.

However, in *Howards End* Forster complicates this ostensibly simple opposition, and seems to want to show how characters assume positions of both marginality and centrality in different contexts and when viewed in terms of different criteria. In a sense, then, Forster can be seen to deconstruct the rather rigid binaries he offers in the preceding novel.<sup>7</sup> This seems to suggest a considerable advancement in his understanding of the relationship between the mainstream and marginal elements within his society, and there appears to be an element of slippage in his depiction of exactly who is mainstream and who is marginal. For example, while the Schlegels seem culturally marginal by virtue of their sympathetic, socially conscious liberalism and their German ancestry (a point of great salience given that the novel was published just four years prior to the Great War), they are simultaneously beneficiaries of the capitalist system, and thus possess a considerable degree of economic power within their society. This contradiction is acutely sensed by Margaret, leading to her acknowledgment of the insufficiency of liberal humanism as an ideology capable of satisfactorily explaining or resolving the ethical dilemmas associated with political economy in Edwardian society. This uneasy state of play is apparent also in Forster's depiction of the Wilcoxes, a family broadly representative of the values, aspirations and desires of the national culture.<sup>8</sup> But by showing the inherent *emotional* fragility at the heart of the Wilcox family, together with the manner in which Henry Wilcox is emasculated at the novel's close, Forster succeeds in demonstrating how mainstream culture might be resisted and overthrown – as does in fact happen at the novel's close. Furthermore, Forster seems willing in this novel to acknowledge in a qualified sense the salutary aspects of the national (dominant) culture,

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<sup>7</sup> In this regard, I disagree with Elizabeth Langland's contention that "The novel is built upon a dialectical opposition between male and female, under which several others are subsumed" (84). As I will show in the chapter on *Howards End*, such a rigid conceptualisation of the novel does not adequately explain the varied cultural positions held by the ostensibly "opposed" characters.

<sup>8</sup> Forster's subtle exposure of Henry Wilcox's links to the colonial mission furthers the reader's sense of the family's links with structures of social dominance.



although this validation is ultimately called into question by the novel's ending, where he seems to allow the Schlegels to triumph over the Wilcoxes in a manner strangely discordant with the novel's explicit emphasis on "connection".

In *Maurice*, Forster's posthumously published work on a homosexual theme, the author takes this deconstructive process further, by showing how the intersection between the mainstream and the marginal can reside entirely within the constructed identity of the protagonist himself. Unlike in the preceding novels, *Maurice* has no carefully contrived sets of characters grouped according to their ideological tendencies. As I have already mentioned, the novel's main contrast is between two male homosexual ideals, both of which are marginalised cultural modes. The representatives of reactionary social values (Mr Ducie, Dr Barry, the Reverend Borenius) are so thinly delineated and so sparsely represented that they crucially fail to emerge as a significant cultural bloc. It is not that Forster is suggesting that these characters possess no social power – on the contrary, it is that they play so minor a role in Maurice's personal development that Forster seems to be calling into question the very idea that society has much to do with individual liberation. The intensely psychological quality of the novel (which perhaps reaches its apotheosis in the psychoanalysis scene with Mr Lasker) seems to assert that liberation resides primarily within the psyche of the disempowered subject, and not in external power structures. Oppression, Forster seems to be suggesting, is essentially a construct of the mind.

Furthermore, unlike Forster's other protagonists, such as Lucy Honeychurch and Margaret Schlegel, Maurice finds himself in the peculiar cultural position of being simultaneously both at the centre and the margins of his society.<sup>9</sup> Being male and middle-class means he is invested with a great deal of social power, both within his own household and in Edwardian society more generally. But his homosexuality contradicts and threatens to undermine his privileged cultural position. Maurice's intense and debilitating personal anguish stems directly from this internalised cultural schizophrenia, and it is this internalised conflict that distinguishes this novel from the earlier, and vastly sunnier, *A Room with a View*. Ultimately, though, Maurice's outright rejection of his socially-bestowed power by means of his acceptance of his sexuality enables the very

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<sup>9</sup> Although, as I have pointed out above, there are many similarities between *A Room with a View* and *Maurice*, the novels are fundamentally different in that Lucy makes a clean transition from the mainstream to the marginal, whereas Maurice's identity is composed of both cultural elements.

source of his anguish (his marginalised status within society) to liberate him from the constraints of bourgeois culture, as represented by his symbolic flight to the fictional Greenwood with his lover.

However, the mainstream/marginal theme extends beyond the fiction to include the author himself, and can therefore be seen to frame and inform the ideological conflicts within the literary texts. As several critics have observed, Forster occupies a somewhat uncomfortable and contradictory position within the canon of English literature. In this regard, Elizabeth Langland points out that “Forster claims a precarious stake in the twentieth-century canon” (81). This unstable critical position is particularly evident when one reads the essay on Forster by F.R. Leavis (who may be regarded as the avatar of the mainstream critical response) in *The Common Pursuit*, where the famous critic points out that, while Forster has a “real and very fine distinction”, that distinction is nevertheless “oddly limited”. Leavis’s ambivalence seems to suggest that Forster’s critical reputation is strangely qualified and contradictory. However, this assessment may have a more profound ideological significance. As Christopher Reed points out, “A figure has emerged, with the name E.M. Forster, who is, to the dominant culture, terrifyingly queer” (76). Indeed, a sense of terror permeates Leavis’s strangely ambivalent and reductive essay, in which he repeatedly veers from qualified praise to spiteful deprecation, at once commending his “real and very fine distinction” and then sneering at his “spinsterly” (subtext: effeminate) style. In my opinion, Leavis’s ambivalence is predicated upon his unconscious recognition that Forster cannot be properly included in the pantheon of English literature because his novels destabilise that very structure – hence his insistence on reducing the broad political questions posed by the novels to rather trivial issues of personal morality. For this reason, I argue throughout this thesis that, like his character Maurice, Forster’s body of work is both central and marginal, accepted and rejected, celebrated and derided.

Forster’s schizoid position *vis à vis* the dominant culture is evident also when one considers the film adaptations of his works which, as Christopher Reed also notes, appeal largely to “middlebrow audiences with their picturesque ideal of Edwardian England” (75). Ironically, it seems Forster’s novels, while terrifyingly subversive to a mainstream readership, have been easily converted into cultural products that bolster and validate

conservative conceptions of the dominant culture. Indeed, in his essay “A Disconnected View: Forster, Modernity and Film”, Peter Hutchings draws attention to the essentially conservative nature of these films, all of which were produced in the 1980s and 1990s:

**Yet the films have also been criticised for much the same reasons as they have been celebrated. The appeal to the past in subject matter and modes of presentation offers a conservative, selectively backward-looking view of the issues that are so contemporaneously fraught in the novels. In the era of Thatcher and Reagan, the films have happily met with an audience who conceive of the present as ‘worth living only if it guarantees to be “just like the past”, a desire which makes both present and past into a decorous species of kitsch” (213-4).**

Ironically, then, Forster’s novels have been appropriated by the mainstream culture for essentially conservative ends, and have served to bolster, rather than subvert, dominant cultural values. In this way, the films have tended to occlude, rather than elucidate, the ideologically combative element of Forster’s fiction. It seems that Forster’s novels can only be appreciated and enjoyed by general audiences once their disconcerting subplots and ideological challenges have been substantially muted. As Hutchings goes on to point out, “The vision of these films often presents an historical husk, a static, uncontrolled past only disturbed by the banal negotiations of romantic love” (218). In this sense, then, the film adaptations of Forster’s novels share an ideological commonality with the considerable body of liberal humanist criticism, in which the conflict so characteristic of the novels is downplayed and even elided with more prosaic questions of personal morality. The conservative nature of the films is most explicit when one considers director David Lean’s 1984 film version of *A Passage to India*. In this film, Lean effectively replaces the novel’s acute awareness of the unknowable aspects of India with a sense of ontological certainty and authority more appropriate, ironically, to an imperial vision. In this sense, then, the film actively subverts Forster’s key intention in writing the novel. Furthermore, with their putative appeal to a simpler age free from contemporary anxieties surrounding race and class, the films deflect attention from the central Forsterian theme of the flow of power amid personal relations, as well as the manner in which power plays itself out in the context of personal relations.

In this thesis I have drawn on a fairly eclectic range of theoretical approaches in my exploration of Forster’s fiction. As can be seen from the sporadic use of deconstructive terminology, my analysis of the manner in which Forster deconstructs the binary

mainstream/marginal as set up initially in *A Room with a View* has been informed in part by poststructural theory. In this regard, I am particularly indebted to Jacques Derrida's concept of the absence of the centre as delineated in his essay "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences". However, I have also at times drawn upon certain elements of postcolonial theory, particularly in my discussions of how hegemonic or dominant discourses produce or construct a marginalised, disempowered Other.<sup>10</sup> In addition, in the chapter on *Maurice* I have loosely applied Foucault's theories of power, and the manner in which this is replicated through discourse, to Forster's treatment of the emergent nineteenth-century medico-juridical discourses on homosexuality. Similarly, in the chapter on the short stories I have used Foucauldian theory to analyse the role of textuality as an instrument of power and dominance in these pieces of short fiction. However, I have equally taken care to restrict the extent to which theory dominates and directs the interpretative process, and my observations and arguments are accordingly grounded substantially in the close reading of selected passages from the literary texts themselves. It is hoped that the synthesis of these two rather different approaches will allow for a meaningful and insightful political interpretation of E.M. Forster's work, and will go some way towards finding the common ground between theoretical and more traditional critical methods. I believe that it is in the fusion of these two ostensibly disparate approaches that the voices articulating the longings, fears and hopes of those marginalised and oppressed by Edwardian society become faintly audible.

I hope that this study goes some way towards turning up the volume.

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<sup>10</sup> I am particularly indebted to Edward Said's *Orientalism* for this insight. In his discussion of Edward Said, Bart Moore-Gilbert writes that "In Said's work, then, the regime of disciplinary power inscribed in Orientalism transforms the 'real' East into a discursive 'Orient', or rather substitutes the one for the other" (37).

*A Room with a View* is generally upheld by critics as the most light-hearted, genial and comic of Forster's novels.<sup>11</sup> With its picturesque and aesthetic setting, it ostensibly presents Forster's most optimistic and inclusive conception of society. However, I will argue that *A Room with A View* should properly be regarded as a study of the contrast between bourgeois and unconventional modes of living, and should therefore be considered to be a novel which displays a profound and insightful political awareness.<sup>12</sup> The ideological qualities of *A Room with a View* are clearly evident when one considers the novel's protagonist, Lucy Honeychurch, whose character development might be summed up as a study of a drift from the cultural centre to the margins. It can also be seen that the novel conceives of the relationship between the dominant culture and its subordinate subcultural strands as one characterised largely by oppositionality, as is evident from the manner in which the novel is structured by a series of careful and deliberate contrasts. This suggests that, at this stage in Forster's career, he conceived of mainstream society and its marginalised subcultural strands as entirely disengaged from one another and involved in a hostile, essentially combative stand-off. Furthermore, the novel's political qualities are evident when one considers the manner in which it is characterised by ideological gaps or fissures – issues that do not properly tie up or validate one another, such as its subtle homosexual subplot and its presentation of other minority sexualities, such as spinsterhood and celibacy.

As Oliver Stallybrass points out in his introduction to the Penguin edition of the novel, although the third of his novels to be published, *A Room with a View* was in fact Forster's first serious attempt at writing fiction.<sup>13</sup> Work on the Italian first section of the

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<sup>11</sup> Rose Macaulay writes that the novel has “a wit, a gay brilliance” (78), while Barbara Rosecrance describes the work as “a bright tour-de-force” (*Narrative Vision* 88). Similarly, John Beer writes in *The Achievement of E.M. Forster* that “compared with the short stories, it seems at first sight to be straightforward social comedy” (53).

<sup>12</sup> In “Kissing and Telling: Turning Around in *A Room with a View*”, Jeffrey Heath acknowledges the vast range of issues the novel addresses: “... Forster's novel is “about” such matters as love, art, self-realization, Edwardian manners, feminism, values and their revision, exposure and concealment, completion and interruption, daily life and celestial life, the subconscious mind, language, myth – and so on” (393).

<sup>13</sup> John Stallybrass, writing in the “Introduction” to the 1990 Penguin edition of *A Room with a View*, comments that “Of the six novels that Forster completed, *A Room with a View* has, if not the longest

novel, which Forster called the “Lucy Novel”, was begun as early as 1901-2, but this original draft was abandoned when Forster began working in 1903 on a second draft, which he then referred to as the “New Lucy Novel” (7-8). It is in this second draft that the novel as we know it begins to take shape. Whereas the initial draft concerns a group of English characters who undertake to arrange a concert to raise funds for the English church, the second resembles the published novel far more closely. In particular, it appears from a list of characters contained in a diary entry for December 16, 1903 that it is in this second draft that the idea for the oppositional structure began to take root (Bakshi 134).

Indeed, the published novel is similarly characterised largely by careful and deliberate oppositions. Contrasts are established between characters, countries, national cultures, sexualities, classes and philosophical positions. However, the opposition that embraces and informs all of these subsidiary contrasts is the larger one between the dominant culture and its subordinate, dissident strands. In particular, Forster conceives of the interaction between mainstream and marginal cultural modes in a rigid and somewhat schematic manner, seeing the relationship between the dominant culture and its subordinate subcultures as one characterised largely by oppositionality and conflict. In this novel, power is seen as operating hierarchically; those who are oppressed by it have to rebel against it to attain freedom. As a result, the novel is organised around a number of key binary oppositions, deliberate contrasts set up between characters, themes, and aesthetic concepts. Structurally, the novel is divided into two contrasting parts of relatively equal length, the first set in Italy, the other in England. *A Room with a View* is thus a novel that has its basis in oppositionality, and much of its internal tension and emotional dynamism arises out of its central thematic conflicts. Its protagonist is placed in the position of having to choose between these two competing modes of being; in essence, she has to reject bourgeois convention in favour of sexual self-realisation, and align herself with the Emersons, rather than the Vyses.

The notion of the intersection of mainstream and marginal cultures is strikingly evident when one traces the development of the novel’s protagonist, Lucy Honeychurch,

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gestation period (a distinction claimed by *A Passage to India*), at least the most complicated pre-natal history. As early as the winter of 1901-2, during his first visit to Italy, he began making notes for a novel set in Florence at the Pension Bertolini” (7).

as *A Room with a View* is in certain respects a protracted study in character development. I qualify this point because I argue later in this chapter that the novel's latent homoeroticism serves to deflect attention away from Lucy towards the George-Mr Beebe relationship, with this further undermining the work's usually unchallenged mainstream status. While a casual reading would suggest that the novel is primarily about Lucy, critics such as Parminder Kaur Bakshi have argued that Forster is more concerned with his male characters than with his female protagonist. In this regard, Bakshi avers that the text displays Forster's "fundamental lack of enthusiasm for his subject" (136). Thus, he argues, the celebratory heterosexual romance is ultimately superseded, and even occluded, by the occasional fragments of homoeroticism that break through the novel's veneer of heterosexual respectability.

While I acknowledge that the novel's latent homoeroticism undermines and calls into question the ostensibly celebratory heterosexual romance it delineates, I concur with Barbara Rosecrance, who argues that "Lucy's story remains central, and Forster either did not wish to or dared not undercut it directly. The former explanation seems more likely because, with one exception [the homoerotic bathing scene in Part Two], imagery and structure all advance the central motif" (*Narrative Vision* 97). Closely related to this point is my contention that Forster is deeply and sincerely interested in his female protagonist. As I will show in my analysis of the novel's explicitly feminist tracts, Forster shows an acute and insightful awareness into the position of women in Edwardian society – an insightfulness that is both unusual and unexpected in a male writer of the period. Indeed, it is this insightfulness that allows Forster to chart Lucy's inexorable drift from the mainstream to the margins. In addition, I feel that the dominant narrative actually elucidates and informs the subordinate homosexual one, and thus should not be regarded as the cross behind which the "real" story lurks.

Within the character of Lucy, we see an ongoing and dramatic tension between acculturated mainstream values and dissident marginal desires. Sex plays a dominant role in this novel, with Forster critiquing Edwardian sexual mores and contrasting them with Lucy's own refractory sexual impulses. Lucy's struggle is to shake off the trammels of mainstream sexuality and gratify her own sexual desires. For this reason, the novel's thematic progression seems to be based largely on Lucy's incremental drift from the

cultural centre to the margins, away from Miss Bartlett and Mrs Honeychurch to the Emersons and George. When viewed in this light, the links between this novel and *Maurice* are striking, but, as I will show in the chapter on the homosexual novel, there are a number of subtle, but crucial, distinctions between Forster's presentation of marginality in *A Room with a View* and in the posthumously published work. These discrepancies show that, by the time he had written *Maurice* (in 1913), he had significantly rethought and revised his conception of the relationship between marginal and dominant cultures.

From the novel's very first chapter, Forster counterposes convention and rebellion, both in terms of national cultures and the individuals within them, placing his protagonist in the midst of this key ideological clash. The thematic oppositions are thus established early, and are amplified as the first section develops. The oppositionality of the novel is conveyed powerfully by the description of the dinner with which the novel opens. In this opening description, Forster carefully contrasts the Emersons with the more genteel residents of the pension, and thus prepares the way for the ideological battle that will be fought in the novel's second section. Indeed, the emphasis in this opening chapter on conflict prefigures the increasingly combative character of the novel as a whole. In this memorable opening scene, Forster stresses the contrast between the Emersons and the other tourists by showing the degree to which Miss Bartlett is "startled" by Mr Emerson's "intrusion" into her argument with Lucy over their rooms. Forster remarks that "Generally at a pension people looked them over for a day or two before speaking, and often did not find out that they would 'do' until they had gone" (24). Implied in the comment is the idea that this kind of restraint and reticence has the capacity to thwart potentially positive, beneficial experiences. By maintaining this kind of rigid behavioural code, Forster argues, one shuts oneself off from meaningful and sincere human relationships. The altercation between Miss Bartlett and the Emersons is therefore intended to have a broader metaphorical significance: the quarrel is not simply between two individuals, but between two competing or contrasted modes of existence. This notion is underscored by Forster's pointing out that the majority of the pension tourists appear to validate and endorse her values and opinions, as well as the cool, aloof manner in which she rejects the Emersons' offer: "The better class of tourist was shocked at this [Mr Emerson's offer to exchange his and his son's rooms], and sympathized with the



newcomers” (25). The direct reference to class in the opening pages indicates to the reader the extent to which the novel will be concerned with social gradations and acculturated values, with this suggesting from the outset its political nature.

Forster teases out these issues of repression, convention and duty throughout the description of the dinner, in which the author carefully draws attention to the order, form and predictability of the room’s décor:

**She looked at the two rows of English people who were sitting at the table; at the row of white bottles of water and red bottles of wine that ran between the English people; at the portraits of the late Queen and the late Poet Laureate that hung behind the English people, heavily framed; at the notice of the English church (Rev. Cuthbert Eager, M.A. Oxon.), that was the only other decoration of the wall (23).**

The English tourists are described as being seated in two orderly rows, which suggests order, conformity and lack of originality, and these ideas are extended and amplified in the ensuing description of the bottles of water and wine, which are also arranged methodically and predictably. Forster’s manipulation of syntax and clever use of anaphora are especially effective here. In particular, the repetition of the words “English people” three times in these lines highlights the pomposity of the English within the foreign context, as well as their own sense of national self-importance. The actual syntactical arrangement of the clauses suggests that everything in their physical environment exists solely in relation to them; the English tourists pompously dominate the foreign environment in much the same way as the word “English” dominates the sentence. In addition, the bland, monotonous arrangement of the bottles of wine and water (which is suggested by the plodding, repetitious quality of the clauses) seems to imply the dull and unimaginative character of the tourists themselves.

Forster then extends his observations beyond the tourists themselves, changing his focus now to the reactionary signs and emblems of British cultural dominance. The references to the “late Queen and the late Poet Laureate” suggest not only that the tourists embody a paradigm that is fixated on the past, but also that they defer to established authority. Forster thereby suggests that the pension exudes an air of staid conservatism. It is quite fitting, then, that he should introduce at this point a reference to religion, alluding to both the church at which the tourists worship and the cleric who presides over it. It is customary within Forster’s novels for Christianity to be equated with reactionary social

forces,<sup>14</sup> and here the author importantly exposes the links between Christianity, culture and national identity. For Forster, these issues are always ideologically contiguous, and are not discrete cultural elements existing independently of one another.<sup>15</sup> In Forster's view, religion plays a key role in bolstering and consolidating mainstream cultural values, as well as in assisting the process of marginalising and alienating individuals and social groups. For example, the Reverend Eager is seen throughout the novel as an agent of exclusion and marginalisation, particularly when one considers his treatment of the Emersons, whom he attempts to exclude from the expedition to Fiesole. On a more general level, these kinds of actions might be interpreted as an attempt on Forster's part to suggest the negative impact Christian doctrine has on those social groups to which it is hostile. Furthermore, the English do not worship simply at a Christian church, but only at an "English church", which further suggests the parochialism of the pension's patrons. Finally, the reference to the Reverend Eager's educational qualifications (in which he unnecessarily draws attention to his being an Oxford graduate) suggests his snobbery and insincerity, both of which are manifestly evident when he is introduced some chapters later.

This opening passage is important in that it establishes the milieu in which the novel's early action plays itself out. Forster is keen to emphasise that the Italy the English tourists inhabit is aggressively Anglicised and limited. In a sense, the "real Italy" of the sexually exuberant lovers who drive the English tourists to Fiesole passes before them in much the same way as "the real India" eludes Miss Quested in *A Passage to India*.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, in a charming ironic touch, Forster points out Lucy's disappointment at discovering that the "Signora" of the pension is in fact a Londoner: "'And a Cockney, besides!'" said Lucy, who had been further saddened by the Signora's unexpected accent. 'It might be London'" (23).

Lucy travels to Italy hoping to be exposed to the marginal and the unconventional, but finds herself saturated by the very same Home Counties values (the values of the

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<sup>14</sup> Consider, for example, the characters of Herbert Pembroke in *The Longest Journey* and the Reverend Borenius in *Maurice*. In both of these characters, religious fervour seems intimately connected with insensitivity, cruelty and inhumanity.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Hutchings writes that Forster has a "concern with sexuality as the site of negotiation of class and cultural values" (222).

<sup>16</sup> "But the force that lies behind colour and movement would escape her even more effectually than it did now. She would see India always as a frieze, never as a spirit ..." (*Passage* 60-1).

Edwardian cultural centre) to which she has been exposed all her life. It is worth pointing out here that Forster had first-hand experience of this particular cultural phenomenon. As Oliver Stallybrass points out, during his trips to Italy, the first being in 1901-2, he lived in pensions similar to the one described in the novel, and the inspiration for the *A Room with a View* was in part derived from his rather dismal experience of “pension life”. In this regard, Forster lamented to Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, “But oh what a viewpoint is the English hotel or pension! Our life is where we sleep and eat, and the glimpses of Italy that I get are only accidents”(Stallybrass 9-10).

But the passage also illustrates the considerable political invective beneath the novel’s seemingly light-hearted comedy. Forster’s observations exhibit a wealth of societal detail and cultural insight, and the many links he manages to establish between a number of seemingly disparate social issues (such as nationalism, sexuality, religion and culture) account for the complexity and insight inherent in the novel’s many cultural observations. Furthermore, and in line with my earlier comments about the oppositional quality of the novel, the description is organised around images suggestive of contrasts. The residents are described as seated in two rows, so the reader imagines them opposed to one another across the table. This oppositional image relates nicely to the ensuing conflict between Miss Bartlett and the Emersons. In addition, attention is deliberately drawn to the manner in which the “red bottles of wine” are juxtaposed with the “white bottles of water”. Wine is suggestive of indulgence, water of abstinence, so the idea of contrasting approaches to life is subtly implied through the image itself. Similarly, Miss Bartlett’s altercation with the Emersons bolsters and augments the idea of opposing values and contrasted modes of living.

In this regard, the remainder of the novel’s initial chapter is most instructive. The comic aspect of the opening incident is obvious, but the wealth of cultural observation it exhibits is equally impressive. When Mr Emerson offers his and his son’s rooms to Miss Bartlett and Lucy, he violates social convention on a number of important levels. Most fundamentally, he eschews the usual reserve adopted by the English tourists, who customarily spend some time assessing one another before deciding on whether a newcomer would “do” (24). But this opening incident might also be read rather more politically when one probes more deeply the significance of the notions of restraint,

convention and repression so dominant in this opening chapter. For Forster, these values are those of the cultural mainstream, which seeks to block spontaneous human relationships and sincere social intercourse. He is thus concerned to emphasise that Miss Bartlett's cold and ungracious refusal of what is simply a kind and considerate offer is the response of the dominant culture to any kind of breach of the accepted social code. Given that the novel will go on to show the consequences of a more severe and serious contravention of the accepted morality (Lucy's marrying a man "beneath" her), Miss Bartlett's response to the Emersons' offer seems to prefigure the broader society's treatment of Lucy following her marriage to George, where she is ostracised and alienated from the comfortable bourgeois environs of Windy Corner. Similarly, the Emersons are shunned simply for being spontaneous and sincere, Forster thereby suggesting that this is the response of the dominant culture to any attempt to subvert or challenge its core values. Indeed, the horror with which the tourists greet Mr Emerson's offer suggests the subversive quality of his actions in their minds: "The better class of tourist was shocked at this, and sympathized with the newcomers" (24-25).

Furthermore, Miss Bartlett's refusal is the direct result of having internalised the values of a society in which sincerity and spontaneity are condemned and suppressed in favour of order, formality and a rigid adherence to abstract bourgeois notions of propriety and decency. For Forster, the damaging results of this kind of repression are both personal and social. On a personal level, the individual is taught to subordinate self-realisation and personal autonomy (and defers automatically to the wishes of the establishment), while in the broader social context these kinds of formalised, rigidly policed interactions leave certain groups within society (such as women) disempowered and subordinated. In the course of the novel, both these kinds of damaging effects are energetically explored and challenged. At this point in the novel, Lucy seems to accept, passively and unquestioningly, Miss Bartlett's conventional values ("Lucy mumbled that those seemed very odd people opposite" (25)), but we are given clues as to her natural spontaneity and ebullience: for example, when Mr Beebe enters, we are told that she impulsively rises to her feet and exclaims because "she [has] not yet acquired decency" (26). But it should be pointed out that these notions of self-realisation and personal sincerity were directly informed by Forster's own struggle to resolve his inner torment

over his sexuality. In many respects, Lucy's arduous journey towards sexual self-realisation mirrors that of any individual attempting to come to terms with a proscribed sexual mode – including, of course, homosexuality. It must constantly be borne in mind that, for Forster at least, “convention” is not a trivial or minor societal quirk to be satirised and ridiculed, but a powerfully oppressive and brutal social force. It is for this reason that I ascribe to Forster's presentation of “convention” a more serious political dimension.

As I mentioned earlier, the idea of opposing values being in conflict is foregrounded by the fact that the novel takes as its starting-point a conflict over antithetical attitudes towards etiquette. The idea of conflict also fits in with my contention that Forster conceives of the interaction between mainstream and marginal culture as being binaristic in this early novel; in this instance, the competing social ideologies are conceived of as being discrete cultural positions in an oppositional and antagonistic relationship with one another. Miss Bartlett, articulating the mainstream view, has the backing of the pension inhabitants; in contrast, the Emersons, throughout represented by Forster as the cultural Other, are shunned and alienated. Lucy is caught between the two views, and she is crucially faced with a choice. Although she mumbles that the Emersons appear “odd”, the process of drift to what Forster conceives of as the radical alternative cultural mode has already begun.

It is the Emersons who exemplify the countercultural mode that exerts such a powerful pull on the protagonist, so it is fitting, then, that one should examine closely the novel's most obviously “unconventional” characters, who are immediately introduced as “ill-bred” (24). The Emersons flout middle-class convention on almost every level: they espouse socialism, reject organised religion in favour of an ardent atheism, and are disarmingly honest. The father is initially described as having a childlike appearance (24), and is said to “thump his fists like a naughty child” (25) when Miss Bartlett refuses to acquiesce to his offer. These images suggest that he exhibits the natural exuberance and wilfulness of the as yet unsocialised child; Forster seems to want to stress that he is a human being who has somehow escaped being distorted or disfigured by societal prescriptions and expectations.

I have alluded to the “otherness” of the Emersons above and, indeed, this father and son combination is invested with a considerable degree of ideological import. In this regard, Parminder Kaur Bakshi points out that “George and Mr Emerson carry the connotations of the Other – the passionate and homoerotic – in the novel. Forster emphasises their strangeness in the novel. Lucy feels that ‘they had cast a spell over her. They were so serious and strange that she could not remember how to behave’” (134). The “spell” the Emersons cast over Lucy results in the destabilisation of her conception of a host of bourgeois, mainstream prescriptions about sexuality, gender and class, and this destabilisation ultimately subverts Lucy’s position within the Edwardian social structure.

Given that the Emersons signify much of what is “other” in Edwardian society, it is salutary to examine them in detail, in order to tease out and explicate what they represent ideologically. Most crucially, the Emersons are presented as marginalised figures who, both in Italy and England, consistently articulate ideas and represent values inherently threatening to the Edwardian social order. Although kind-hearted and well-meaning, Mr Emerson repeatedly and vigorously destabilises the smug political and metaphysical certainty of the novel’s conventional characters. For example, he declares fairly early on in the novel his confirmed atheism: “‘You will never go up,’ said his father. ‘You and I, dear boy, will lie at peace in the earth that bore us, and our names will disappear as surely as our work survives’” (44). In much the same vein, he goes so far as to lay the blame for ongoing social conflict on religion itself: “‘And think how he [George] has been brought up – free from all the superstition and ignorance that lead men to hate one another in the name of God’” (46). Forster here introduces the radical notion of religion fostering and perpetuating persecution and bigotry, which follows on nicely from his earlier association of Christianity with reactionary political values.

This fervent atheism is seen in stark contrast to the pious posturing of the Reverend Eager, who was obliquely introduced at the novel’s very beginning. Indeed, one might go so far as to say that Mr Emerson is Reverend Eager’s polar opposite in the novel. This character opposition is one of many in the novel, and serves to reinforce the central binaries around which it is arranged. It is therefore worth examining in detail the altercation that occurs between the two men in Santa Croce cathedral, where they clash

over the interpretation of a Renaissance fresco. In essence, Forster can be seen to set up a contrast between a permissive, tolerant and humanly responsive atheism and a repressive and inhuman Christianity. In this way, he aligns the Emersons with the countercultural forces which eventually serve to “liberate” Lucy from the dominant culture.

Mr Emerson’s atheism is boldly introduced prior to his tiff with Eager by the fervent exclamation ““Hateful bishop!”” (41), which is made in the presence of Lucy. This denunciation suggests that religion is directly associated with persecution and bigotry. In addition, his references to the “hardness” of the cleric suggest also the insensitivity and rigidity of canonical doctrine. Furthermore, given the fact that Forster so carefully presents the Emersons as obviously alienated from the cultural mainstream in the novel’s opening chapter, Forster succeeds in establishing at this point the idea of religion being intimately associated with inherently conservative or reactionary social forces. Atheism, as well as the general rejection of Christian doctrine, is thus celebrated as an act of social subversion, a blatant and thorough repudiation of the metaphysical or spiritual basis of conservative ideology. For Forster, Christianity and conservatism are intricately and inextricably linked (as is made explicit in his depiction of Harriet Herriton in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*), and the rejection of mainstream religion is always a crucial step in the evolution of the liberated individual.<sup>17</sup>

Mr Emerson’s outburst immediately and unequivocally places him in opposition to the religious and cultural mainstream, and also provides the young girl with a sudden blast of countercultural vehemence that prefigures the manner in which she challenges her society in the ensuing drama. In keeping with this countercultural mode, Mr Emerson then exhorts the little boy to embrace his freedom, which is conceptualised as a natural right: ““Go out into the sunshine, little boy, and kiss your hand to the sun, for that is where you ought to be”” (41). The imagery in the above quotation associates Christianity with interiority and stifling repression, while atheism is conceived of as a state of freedom, meaningful integration with the natural world and personal fulfilment. For Forster, the child is evidently meant to symbolise humanity in all its vulnerability and

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<sup>17</sup> This notion is explored more fully in *Maurice*, where Clive’s and the protagonist’s sexual relationship is preceded by numerous discussions about the limitations and inadequacies of Christian doctrine. Forster thereby suggests that it is only when Maurice rejects Christianity that he is free to explore his feelings of sexual attraction for Clive.

wretchedness. This incident seems to imply that, although people turn to religion for comfort and consolation, they are in fact received by the Church with insensitivity and callous indifference. In this way, Forster manages to invert the conventional notion of religion as a soothing, consoling influence in human affairs, and thus propounds a radically subversive understanding of the influence of religion upon society.

Moreover, it should also be added that, by endorsing and ultimately validating Mr Emerson's views in this way, Forster succeeds in transferring from the intellectual margins to the cultural centre the discourse of atheism, together with its insistence on the importance of focusing one's attention on the condition of the material world and the human beings who inhabit it. The contrast Forster sets up between the kindness and sensitivity of the Emersons and the pious hypocrisy of the Reverend Eager must therefore be interpreted as a stinging rejoinder to the usual Christian association of atheism with brutish amorality. In the humanistic sense, Forster seems to be implying, the Emersons are vastly more "moral" and "good" than one who has made a career of religious posturing: unlike Reverend Eager, Mr Emerson believes in "those who make their fellow creatures happy" (42). This must be regarded as a seminal example of Forster using his fiction as a platform for the ideas and values of those groups relegated to the margins of Edwardian society – in this case, atheists or non-conformists. As this thesis progresses, I will attempt to show how this technique is a defining feature of Forster's writing and an energising impetus for many of his creative endeavours.

The contrast between the Reverend Eager and Mr Emerson highlights Forster's somewhat simplistic and dogmatic conception of the intersection between hegemonic culture and its subcultural strands at this relatively early stage in his analysis of this issue. The two outlooks are seen as entirely disengaged from one another, and the verbal duel played out between the two characters literally dramatises the novel's central metaphysical conceptions of the mainstream/marginal binary. As I have already pointed out, conflict is a central motif in the novel, and one which serves to foreground the essentially combative and oppositional theoretical scheme informing it. In contrast, *Howards End* views the relationship between the national religion and the national culture rather differently, and is able to appreciate the degree to which Christianity is in fact at odds with mainstream values. For example, when Margaret goes on a Christmas



shopping expedition with Mrs Wilcox, she is struck by the manner in which religion is estranged from the capitalism that ostensibly celebrates and validates it: “[Margaret] ... felt the grotesque impact of the unseen upon the seen, and saw issuing from a forgotten manger at Bethlehem this torrent of coins and toys. Vulgarity reigned” (90-1). As *Howards End* so adroitly shows, capitalism underpins and characterises modern Edwardian society, but, as the preceding quotation illustrates, Margaret senses how it simultaneously undermines and debases the national religion. But she is equally aware of the alliance between religious doctrine and the masses who constitute the dominant culture: “How many of these vacillating shoppers and tired shop-assistants believed that it was a divine event that drew them together? ... These people, or most of them, believed it, and, if pressed, would affirm it in words” (91). In the later novel, Forster appears less convinced that religion is so clearly and unproblematically implicated in the exercise of repressive power.

It is worth pointing out also the effect the Emersons have on Lucy’s understanding of herself and her relationship with mainstream culture. As was pointed out, they expose Lucy to an outlook on life that is antithetical to that of her affluent bourgeois upbringing, and thereby begin the process of personal transformation that ultimately enables her to reject middle-class notions of Edwardian propriety and marry a man deemed unsuitable in terms of the social code. Forster seems to stress during the incident at Santa Croce that Mr Emerson perceives that Lucy has within her an innate sincerity that is initially smothered by notions of convention and duty:

**‘My dear,’ said the old man gently, ‘I think that you are repeating what you have heard older people say. You are pretending to be touchy; but you are not really. Stop being so tiresome, and tell me instead what part of the church you want to see’ (43).**

Once again, in this carefully articulated insight, Forster sets off duty and conformity against spontaneity and personal fulfilment. Mr Emerson exhorts Lucy to reject the mainstream values of Charlotte Bartlett and Windy Corner and invites her to indulge her own feelings and impulses. Again, the countercultural status of the Emersons is underscored when one considers that this injunction is in direct contrast with Miss Bartlett’s endless directives about behaviour and etiquette, which are stressed by Forster from the very opening chapter: “‘Ah,’ said Miss Bartlett, repressing Lucy, who was about

to speak” (24). In contrast, Mr Emerson specifically encourages Lucy to express herself without fear of sanction or ridicule: “... tell me instead what part of the church *you* want to see’ [emphasis mine]” (43). Implied in this injunction is the idea of personal fulfilment, as Lucy is asked what she wants as a person, and is not told what is right for her. In contrast, the Reverend Eager “directs” his parishioners in the appreciation of Giotto.

However, at this stage in her emotional development, Lucy displays only flickers of countercultural rebellion, and Forster goes to some lengths to impress upon the reader her overwhelmingly bourgeois paradigm. For example, when George explains the manner in which mainstream society responds to his father, Lucy displays precisely the kind of insincerity she comes to abhor in such characters as Miss Lavish and the Reverend Eager, saying “How silly”, but in fact sympathising with those who snub him. In addition, we are told she feels uncomfortable about the radical religious and political views expressed by Mr Emerson. Her genteel Home Counties upbringing has not prepared her for the radicalism to which she is now being exposed, and she appears to defer to the views of authority figures like Miss Bartlett and her mother instead of assessing these disarming opinions for herself:

**She was no theologian, but she felt here was a very foolish old man, as well as a very irreligious one. She also felt that her mother might not like her talking to that kind of person, and that Charlotte would object most strongly (46).**

Significantly, her response is based largely on negative and dismissive reactions to any views clashing with the ones endorsed and disseminated by mainstream society, rather than on any carefully thought out position with regard to the issues in question. In an interesting parallel, this is precisely the kind of uncritical thinking Maurice displays when attempting to defend Christianity in the face of Clive’s attacks on the religion in *Maurice*. Lucy clings defensively and uncritically to her acculturated values, but the unravelling process has already begun. As I pointed out above, the Emersons have a dramatic influence on Lucy’s understanding of herself and her relationship with the cultural mainstream. It is thus ironic that, in the midst of Lucy’s acute bourgeois disapproval, Mr Emerson should directly urge the kind of personal process that her involvement with them actually does ultimately precipitate:

**Let yourself go. Pull out from the depths those thoughts that you do not understand, and spread them out in the sunlight and know the meaning of them. By understanding George you may learn to understand yourself. It will be good for both of you (47).**

Mr Emerson's words are in a sense prophetic; as the novel progresses, she does in fact do all of the things he urges her to. He urges her to shake off the middle-class convention with which she is presently constrained and embrace her liberty, and this is precisely what she does by rejecting Cecil and marrying George. Significantly, also, he exhorts her to reappraise and question the uncritical and intellectually complacent mainstream values she has absorbed from Miss Bartlett and her mother. In this way, he actively encourages and assists in her drift from the cultural centre to the margins, and must therefore be regarded as a key influence in her changed cultural status at the novel's close. Similarly, given that George Emerson is seen throughout as a thoroughly countercultural and marginal figure, Mr Emerson's injunction to Lucy to "understand George" might be interpreted more generally as a call to acknowledge, accept and understand those aspects of her personality that exist in opposition to the mainstream, those feminist impulses and sexual desires which the older generation of women (such as Miss Bartlett, Mrs Honeychurch and Miss Lavish) seek to suppress or disguise.

However, external, circumstantial events conspire to disrupt this life of predictability and intellectual complacency. In turn, these external events facilitate Lucy's gradual acknowledgment of her dissatisfaction with the dominant culture and her position within it. The most notable of external events in the novel's first part is the stabbing Lucy witnesses in the loggia. The significance of this bloody and unexpected occurrence cannot be over-emphasised, particularly in terms of its monumental impact on Lucy's understanding of her own sexuality. The entire scene is suffused with sexual imagery, and it marks the onset of Lucy's emergent sexual impulses. The stabbing is also significant in that it is an example of the unusual and the horrific intruding suddenly upon a life that has hitherto been characterised by the commonplace and the prosaic. The incident destabilises Lucy's conception of what life is. We are told in the novel's second section that "Life, so far as [Lucy] troubled to conceive it was a circle of rich, pleasant people, with identical interests and identical foes" (129). Whereas before she has seen life as genial and predictable, it is now seen as a violent, brutal and unpredictable struggle.

Life is more bloody, desperate and profound than she had previously imagined. But there is a political element to these philosophical insights: the metaphysical dislocation that the stabbing engenders in turn brings about a significant re-evaluation of her own cultural position within society. As is suggested by the blood on the photographs, the physical realm begins to supersede the aesthetic, and increasingly from this point Lucy's sexual desires are in conflict with the decorative cultural norms imposed by Miss Bartlett.

The idea of Lucy being a marginalised, subordinated figure within Edwardian society is strongly suggested in the third chapter, where notions of frustration, longing and unfulfilled desire loom large in Lucy's passionate performance of Beethoven. As in *Howards End*, the German composer marks a symbolic moment in the plot, a point where significant emotional development takes place. In this chapter, Lucy is explicitly presented as a young woman who has had her identity defined for her, whose sexual life is restricted and policed, and who is denied the freedom to walk the streets alone. By presenting Lucy's feminist impulses, Forster begins the process of politicising Lucy's character, by presenting her as a woman subject to a set of power relations she increasingly attempts to resist. Whereas in the opening chapters we saw Lucy as an upper middle-class figure largely representative of the ruling class, we now begin to see her as a victim of that very set of power relations. In a manner similar to Maurice's gradual acknowledgment of his sexuality, which ultimately leads him to see himself in an oppositional relationship with mainstream society, Lucy begins to feel alienated from the social class represented by Miss Bartlett and Reverend Eager. Accordingly, Forster's discourse becomes increasingly politicised, and the novel becomes more expressly ideological in tone as a result. Forster begins this process initially in purely aesthetic terms, by describing Lucy's relationship with music. When she plays Beethoven, we are told, she is transported into a more "solid world" (50) where power relations and hierarchies have no particular meaning or influence:

**She was then no longer deferential or patronizing; no longer either rebel or slave. The kingdom of music is not the kingdom of this world; it will accept those whom breeding and intellect and culture alike have rejected (50).**

Music enables Lucy to escape her various roles in the complex of power relations that constitutes Edwardian society. These roles are often contradictory and even schizoid:

Lucy is both the possessor of social power (being a privileged member of the middle classes) and the victim of social power (being a woman in a patriarchal society). In certain respects, her predicament bears a resemblance to that of Maurice; she is sited both at the centre and the margins of her society – she is both “rebel” and “slave”, “deferential” and “patronizing”. Music offers her a way out of these repressive binaries, and so alerts us to her longing to escape from the roles in which she has been cast. Forster manages to convey her frustration by describing the effect the music has on her. He is keen to stress that she is not a dazzling performer, and he assiduously avoids presenting her performance stereotypically: “She was no dazzling *exécutante* ... Nor was she the passionate young lady, who performs so tragically on a summer’s evening with the window open ... And she was tragical only in the sense that she was great, for she loved to play on the side of Victory” (50).

But there is something profoundly “disturbing” about her performance; it is somehow indicative of a personality that has the capacity for great feeling. As Mr Beebe reflects, there is something inconsistent about Lucy’s music-making; it jars somehow with her outward appearance of good grace and gentility: “Mr Beebe ... pondered over this illogical element in Miss Honeychurch” (51). Of course, this kind of disjuncture relates directly and nicely to the point made about Lucy’s contradictory social roles, and is reinforced by Forster in his reference to Lucy’s performance at “one of those entertainments where the upper classes entertain the lower” (51). Mr Beebe is said to have been “disturbed” by Lucy’s rendition of Beethoven’s Opus III, and the same comment is made by the vicar, who further comments that her musical choice is “perverse” (51). In addition, Forster’s observations that Lucy “play[s] on the side of Victory” and that she had decided that Beethoven’s sonatas should “triumph” suggest a forceful, combative element to her personality. It is this aspect of her personality that will enable her to do battle with mainstream society. These allusions foreshadow the themes of social confrontation and personal resistance that so dominate the second half of the novel.

It is evident that Forster intends Lucy’s piano-playing to have a broader thematic significance. In a sense, it prefigures the manner in which she conducts her life in the novel’s second half. As Mr Beebe comments, “If Miss Honeychurch ever takes to live as

she plays, it will be very exciting – both for us and for her” (52). Just as her playing is perceived as “disturbing” and “perverse”, so are the life choices she makes as the novel progresses. Furthermore, the disjuncture between her mild-mannered appearance and her performance hints at the conflict raging within her self between the mainstream and the marginal. When she plays, those around her are granted a sudden glimpse of those aspects of her personality that exist in opposition to the mainstream, that seem to be in conflict with it. It is for this reason that Mr Beebe is so startled by her when he finally meets her; the two aspects of her personality do not seem mutually compatible. After the intensity of the performance, he is introduced to what appears to be a thoroughly conventional young woman: “... Miss Honeychurch, disjoined from her music-stool, was only a young lady with a quantity of dark hair and a very pretty, pale, undeveloped face” (52).

This notion of there being subversive elements within Lucy’s otherwise conventional character is suggested also by the subtle sexual references inherent in some of the descriptions of her performance: “Like every true performer, she was intoxicated by the mere feel of the notes: they were fingers caressing her own; and by touch, not by sound alone, did she come to her desire “ (51). When one considers the plethora of references to sexual propriety that have occurred in the novel thus far (for example, Miss Bartlett’s concern over Lucy sleeping in George Emerson’s room and Lucy’s worry over being seen alone with George Emerson in Santa Croce cathedral), these sexual allusions again hint at aspects of Lucy’s character that are antithetical to and in conflict with the thoroughly conventional image she projects. Once again, we are made intensely aware of a shadowy psycho-sexual realm beyond the wholesome exterior. Indeed, the very sensuousness of the image, which could be interpreted as being suggestive of masturbation, hints at unfulfilled desires and unrequited physical longing. Indeed, I would further contend that the onanistic suggestiveness of this image also foregrounds the idea that Lucy has to come to terms with her sexuality by herself and for herself. She needs to embrace her sexuality on her own before she can engage in a meaningful sexual relationship with another person.

These notions of frustration and longing are given direct political expression in the chapter that follows, where Lucy’s feminist impulses are described to the reader. This

chapter, simply entitled “Fourth Chapter”, is linked with the similarly entitled “Twelfth Chapter” in Part Two both in terms of subject matter and style. Significantly, the simple numerical titles set these chapters apart from the others in the novel, all of which have descriptive titles. This suggests that these two chapters are markedly different from the others and communicate an especially important message. Both chapters are suffused with sexual imagery, and both mark a profound moment of personal revelation for Lucy and George respectively. As Barbara Rosecrance observes, “The two chapters in the novel that deal with sexual episodes are “Fourth Chapter”, the piazza scene early in Part I, and “Twelfth Chapter” ... In “Fourth Chapter” Lucy undergoes transformation; in “Twelfth Chapter”, George, who had retreated into apathy after Lucy’s flight to Rome, emerges from the pond naked and filled with the desire to live” (*Narrative Vision* 97-8).

The sexual nature of “Fourth Chapter” is made explicit from its opening sentence. The word “desires” is given a position of prominence in the first sentence of this chapter (“Lucy never knew her desires so clearly as after music” (60)), the careful placement of this word linking this brazenly political passage with the sexually suggestive onanistic image discussed above. Forster goes on to say Lucy wants “something big, and she believed that it would have come to her on the windswept platform of the electric tram” (60). This image, with its suggestions of movement and speed, implies a yearning for excitement and exhilaration, both of which are denied the young Edwardian woman. Forster then launches into an incisive description of the disempowered status of women, once again calling into question Lucy’s hitherto unchallenged position of cultural centrality. Lucy, the ostensibly bourgeois and conventional girl from Surrey, is now presented as an oppressed and disempowered subject, frustrated with societal restrictions and tempted by the idea of cultural rebellion. Indeed, this feminist passage is so arresting in terms of the accuracy of its insights that it is worth quoting almost in full:

**This [a ride on the tram] she might not attempt. It was unladylike. Why? Why were most big things unladylike? Charlotte had once explained to her why. It was not that ladies were inferior to men; it was that they were different. Their mission was to inspire others to achievement rather than to achieve themselves. Indirectly, by means of tact and a spotless name, a lady could accomplish much. But if she rushed into the fray herself she would be first censured, then despised, and finally ignored. Poems had been written to illustrate this point.**

**There is much that is immortal in this medieval lady. The dragons have gone, and so have the knights, but still she lingers in our midst. She reigned in many an early Victorian castle, and was queen of much early Victorian song. It is sweet to protect her**

in the intervals of business, sweet to pay her honour when she has cooked our dinner well. But alas! the creature grows degenerate. In her heart also there are springing up strange desires. She too is enamoured of heavy winds, and vast panoramas, and green expanses of sea. She has marked the kingdom of this world, how full it is of wealth, and beauty, and war – a radiant crust, built round the central fires, spinning towards the receding heavens. Men, declaring that she inspires them to it, move joyfully over the surface, having the most delightful meetings with other men, happy, not because they are masculine, but because they are alive. Before the show breaks up she would like to drop the august title of the Eternal Woman, and go there as her transitory self (60-1).

This passage expresses a yearning for self-realisation and personal emancipation, and its significance lies in the fact that it alerts the reader to the subversive, anti-mainstream elements of Lucy's character, as well as to the novel's political dimension. It is both a polemic against Edwardian sexism and an impassioned plea for personal liberation, and therefore ties in with my insistence on the need for an explicitly political reading of Forster's fiction. Forster emphasises that the sanction for resisting sexual stereotyping is social marginalisation: "But if she rushed into the fray herself she would be first censured, then despised, and finally ignored" (60). The irony, of course, is that it is Miss Bartlett herself who, in spite of her almost fetishistic adherence to the rules of sexual propriety, occupies this ultimate position of rejection throughout the novel.<sup>18</sup> In this way, Forster manages to call into question the idea that conformity to mainstream culture genuinely provides the individual with any guarantee of acceptance or protection from social marginalisation. Indeed, although at the novel's close Lucy appears cut off from her family and the bourgeois comforts of Windy Corner, she is nevertheless presented as personally fulfilled, even if this fulfilment is laced with anxiety and alienation. In this sense, then, Miss Bartlett's admonition should, paradoxically, be regarded as both accurate and misleading.

Forster then goes on to describe the increasing frustration felt by women at their restrictive position within Edwardian society. In this way, the novel anticipates the widespread and dramatic changes in the position of women in British society that would take place in successive decades. On a personal level, Lucy feels trapped by the Edwardian insistence on women's passivity, submissiveness and inaction. Indeed,

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<sup>18</sup> When Lucy "pretend[s] to George that she [does] not love him, and pretend[s] to Cecil that she love[s] no one", Forster comments, "The night received her [Lucy], as it has received Miss Bartlett thirty years before" (194). Forster seems to be suggesting that, were Lucy to heed Miss Bartlett's counsel, she would ultimately be shunned and despised. I tackle the politically problematic nature of this insight later in this chapter.



Forster's reference to the concept of the "Eternal Woman" conveys an acute and sympathetic awareness of the oppressive consequences of essentialist thinking. While men are free to be "happy, not because they are masculine, but because they are alive" (60), women have a fixed and rigidly defined identity simply on the basis of their biology. Accordingly, the term "Eternal Woman" accentuates the sexist notion of women's identity being fixed, permanent and immutable. But the second half of the excerpt is thoroughly pervaded by the notion of change. By personifying the notion of women's passivity and inaction as a "medieval lady", Forster seems to be saying this concept is but a hangover from a preceding, and now obsolete, age. However, this reference is also suggestive of the medieval concept of courtly love, so Forster seems to be implying that notions of chivalry – so dominant in Edwardian men's conception and treatment of women, and so clearly evident in Lucy's relationship with Cecil Vyse – are in fact both restrictive and oppressive. The notion of profound social change is introduced by the dramatic declaration "But alas! the creature becomes degenerate. In her heart there are springing up strange desires" (60). Forster is suggesting that women themselves are increasingly resisting the mould into which they have been cast; relations between the sexes are changing, and women are now becoming desirous of men's freedom of movement and identity.

This is precisely what is happening to Lucy at this point in the novel, so this general political insight is also directly related to an essentially personal and individual transformation. Given the political character of this passage, the "strange desires" Lucy feels should also be regarded as yearnings for political emancipation as a woman. Accordingly, her venturing out into the Loggia on her own should be properly interpreted as a defiant act of cultural rebellion, a rejection of the traditionally feminine roles of passivity and inaction described in the above quotation. This act has sexual, political and personal implications, and follows on logically from the defiant tone of the preceding rhetoric.

The violent act Lucy witnesses is preceded by a number of sexual allusions. Forster describes Lucy buying photographs deemed unsuitable by Miss Bartlett because they display nudity ("A pity in art of course signified the nude" (61)). This act of rebellion suggests both frustration with restrictive mainstream values and conventions and

unfulfilled sexual longing. These ideas of sexual frustration and repression are further emphasised by the distinctly phallic quality of the description of the palace tower. This description is immediately preceded by yet another reference to desire: “Lucy desired more” (62). The exaggerated predominance of the word “desire” in this and the previous chapter would suggest that sexual desire is a major element of Lucy’s “peevisishness” (61), a point which further underscores the notion of marginal, countercultural elements in Lucy’s otherwise conventional character. The idea of unfulfilled sexual longing resonates powerfully from the description of the tower:

**She fixed her eyes wistfully on the tower of the palace, which rose out of the lower darkness like a pillar of roughened gold. It seemed no longer a tower, no longer supported by earth, but some unattainable treasure throbbing in the tranquil sky. Its brightness mesmerized her, still dancing before her eyes when she bent them to the ground and started towards home (62)**

The eroticism of this passage hardly requires explication, but it is worth pointing out that it interestingly prefigures an image which occurs in one of Forster’s last pieces of fiction, the posthumously published short story “The Other Boat”,<sup>19</sup> which was written in the late 1950s. In this story, which describes the tragic relationship between a young English army officer and a mixed-race ship hand, Forster, in his only direct reference to male genitalia, describes the English officer’s penis as “a muscle thickened up out of gold” (120). For Lucy, the tower is “an unattainable treasure throbbing in the tranquil sky” – her sexual desire seems almost to taunt her, looming large and tantalising before her, but frustratingly beyond her grasp. She is saddened, and begins her journey back home, back to the pension and the mainstream values of repressed sexuality and self-denial.

But the violent act she witnesses interrupts this submissive return to the values and ideals of the cultural centre. She is suddenly and unexpectedly confronted with an act of passionate intensity that irrevocably alters her bourgeois outlook. Significantly, George Emerson is associated with the stabbing, so sex and violence seem to merge confusingly, to the point of conflation: “She had complained of dullness, and lo! one man was stabbed, and another held her in his arms” (62). The stabbing facilitates physical contact with

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<sup>19</sup> I analyse this short story, which is to be found in *The Life to Come and Other Stories*, at some length in the final chapter.

George Emerson, and allows for Edwardian rules on sexual propriety to be legitimately breached. This experience ushers in a new phase in the protagonist's interaction with the world, and Forster takes great pains to stress the intensity of this metaphysical transformation: "The whole world seemed pale and void of its original meaning" (63). Forster then goes on to link this sense of transformation with the sexual images that preceded the stabbing: "The palace tower had lost the reflection of the declining day, and joined itself to earth" (63). This description seems to suggest that sexual desire is now within reach; it is no longer simply an abstract and unattainable idea, but is now connected to the concrete world of human relations.

The obvious expression of Lucy's sexual desire occurs during the expedition to Fiesole, when she spontaneously kisses George Emerson on the hillside. Although of aesthetic appeal, this event is not nearly as important as the stabbing – it is really simply the literal expression of the change that occurred as a result of the preceding incident.<sup>20</sup> However, in spite of this, the kiss is nevertheless the climactic moment of Part One, and is for that reason deserving of critical attention. The expedition to Fiesole serves the purpose mainly of providing a bridge between the first and second parts of the novel, forming the motivation for Lucy and Miss Bartlett's flight to Rome and her consequent involvement with Cecil Vyse, whom she meets while she is there. The novel's first section builds towards a crescendo of lush aestheticism, as symbolised by the image of the violets: "From her feet the ground sloped sharply into view, and violets ran down in rivulets and streams and cataracts, irrigating the hillside with blue, eddying round the tree stems, collecting into pools in the hollows, covering the grass with spots of azure foam" (89).

Lucy's relationship with Cecil should be properly understood as forming part of a withdrawal from her drift towards the margins that becomes increasingly evident in the second half of Part One. The Cecil affair is characterised by asexuality, restraint, propriety and inequality. It is antithetical to, and grossly contrasted with, the feelings of sexual intensity which dominate the closing chapters of Part One. In her dealings with Cecil, it is the intellectual that dominates, rather than the sexual. It is thus fitting that the

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<sup>20</sup> Rosecrance points out that "The three kisses in the novel punctuate rather than describe" (*Narrative Vision* 98), with this suggesting that they form more of a structural than a thematic function in the development of the narrative.

action should move from passionate, sensuous Florence to the charming, but rather bland, Windy Corner. As was pointed out earlier, the contrast between the Lucy-George relationship and the Lucy-Cecil one is one of the novel's many strategic binary oppositions. The contrasts between the two relationships are thus neatly and obviously established: the spontaneous, epiphanic kiss between Lucy and George at Fiesole is seen in stark contradistinction to the insipid and repressed peck she receives from Cecil back in England. Forster is keen to stress the lack of sexual energy between Lucy and Cecil: "As he approached her he found time to wish that he could recoil. As he touched her, his gold pince-nez became dislodged and was flattened between them" (127). But the themes of sexual longing and repressed desire are continued and intensified in Part Two. There appears to be a kind of sexual diversification in the novel's second section, where the focus of attention shifts from being solely on Lucy to include also her brother, Freddy, Mr Beebe and George Emerson himself. Indeed, as I have suggested earlier, there is a homosexual suggestiveness to the relationship between these three men, an implication all the more subversive and radical given the sedate environment in which it plays itself out. In this way, the theme of marginal values and behaviours looms large in the very picture of bourgeois cultural centrality.

The most obvious development in Part Two is the introduction of Cecil Vyse, Lucy's betrothed, who appears suddenly and without any prior preparation in the opening chapter of the second section. Cecil is succinctly described by Forster as being "medieval", with this suggesting severity, power, rigid hierarchies and obsolete cultural values. This term is also importantly linked with the explicitly feminist tract discussed at length above, where Forster likened conventional notions of femininity with an image of a "medieval lady". It is worth looking in some detail at Forster's exceptionally aesthetic description of this new figure:<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The intense emphasis on aesthetics that accompanies Forster's characterisation of Cecil suggests a displacement of the erotic and the sensual. In Forster's writing, an aesthetic sensibility is often a block to more spontaneous sexual expressiveness. As a result, Forster's most sexual characters (Alec Scudder, Maurice Hall, George Emerson) are presented as indifferent to aesthetics. Conversely, Cecil Vyse and Clive Durham discourse extensively and knowledgably on aesthetics, but are presented as effete and sexually deficient. Cecil's asexuality is thus given definite expression in his aesthetic, but essentially non-sexual, appreciation of Lucy.

He [Cecil] was medieval. Like a Gothic statue. Tall and refined, with shoulders that seemed braced square by an effort of will, and a head that was tilted a little higher than the usual level of vision, he resembled those fastidious saints who guard the portals of a French cathedral. Well educated, well endowed, and not deficient physically, he remained in the grip of a certain devil whom the modern world knows as self-consciousness, and whom the medieval, with dimmer vision, worshipped as asceticism. A Gothic statue implies celibacy, just as a Greek statue implies fruition, and perhaps this is what Mr Beebe meant (106).

Cecil is described as a Gothic statue – impassive, hard, severe in appearance, designed to convey some abstract religious ideal. Unlike the Renaissance sculptures of, say, Cellini and Michelangelo, he does not celebrate physical beauty or suggest eroticism. In this way, Forster stresses that Cecil represents severity, restraint, asceticism, self-denial – in short, the values associated with the cultural mainstream and, more specifically, the attitude of the cultural mainstream towards sexuality. The importance of Cecil's association with medievalism is all the more significant when one considers the manner in which it is contrasted with the barrage of Renaissance and Baroque images in Part One. In this way, Forster associates sexual permissiveness with Italy and sexual repression with England, and it is Cecil who personifies the frigid national attitude towards sexuality. Accordingly, he is described as an “ascetic” and is throughout associated with sterility and asexuality: “A Gothic statue implies celibacy”.

Furthermore, Cecil's haughty demeanour (he is said to have “a head that was tilted a little higher than the usual level of vision”) intensifies our sense of his being a supreme personification of mainstream Edwardian values, as he seems, in a very literal sense, to endorse the class-consciousness of the English tourists as satirised in the novel's first part. Lucy's relationship with Cecil must therefore be regarded as her tentative approach towards the mainstream following her countercultural slip at Fiesole. However, as I will show, there is an element of slippage in Forster's presentation of Cecil that prefigures Forster's later complication of the relationship between the mainstream and the marginal in novels such as *Howards End* and *Maurice*.

The most obviously politically significant element of Lucy's relationship with Cecil is the manner in which he objectifies her within their relationship. In this sense, Cecil exemplifies and embodies the central features of Edwardian sexism; indeed, it may be said that Lucy's relationship with Cecil is a kind of microcosm for the gender inequalities evident in the broader society. Most obviously, Cecil does not regard Lucy as

a sensuous human being; rather, she is conceived of as an *objet d'art*: “She was like a woman of Leonardo da Vinci’s, whom we love not so much for herself as for the things that she will not tell us. The things are assuredly not of this life; no woman of Leonardo’s could have anything so vulgar as a ‘story’” (107-8). Lucy is admired in aesthetic terms by Cecil; she conforms to his conception of what constitutes good taste. But works of art are passive and mute. They exist simply to entertain or impress. And this is precisely what Cecil expects of Lucy as the novel progresses.

The above quotation also shows that Cecil denies Lucy her own narrative. In Cecil’s aesthetic view, Lucy’s “story” (her thoughts, emotions and aspirations) is “vulgar” and should be suppressed. This objectification suggests that Cecil’s conception of women is similar to that attacked in the feminist polemic discussed at length above. In a sense, he expects Lucy to play the part of the “medieval lady”. Forster cleverly suggests the contrasted world-views of Lucy and Cecil by describing Cecil as Gothic, while Lucy is identified consistently with the Renaissance, whose art is gentler, more humanistic, and more sensual than that of the Gothic period. Lucy can never properly be “medieval”, Forster seems to be suggesting, as she is in fact “Renaissance”, Forster using these aesthetic labels to hint at her inability, or her refusal, to conform to the prescribed gender role. In addition, the Renaissance was a period characterised by renewal, re-evaluation and liberation – values which are all deeply relevant to Lucy’s own personal narrative.

Cecil’s sexism is explicitly revealed in the novel’s ninth chapter, “Lucy as a Work of Art”, where he reveals an oppressively essentialist conception of women. When Lucy comments that Mr Emerson could not possibly have murdered his wife because he is “such a nice old man” (117), Cecil laughs at her “feminine inconsequence” (118), implying that women are innately or essentially less logical than men. Ironically, though, Lucy’s comment is both accurate and insightful, and it reveals a depth of emotional connectedness in personal relations (a theme Forster would return to in *Howards End*) that is conspicuously absent in Cecil, who consistently misreads and misjudges those around him, including Lucy. Indeed, when Lucy breaks off her engagement some chapters later, the reason she provides for not going through with the marriage is that Cecil “is the sort who can’t know anyone intimately” (191). But Forster seems also to suggest that Cecil’s sexism derives essentially from a failure in interpersonal relations. It

is because he does not understand Lucy as an individual that he falls back on gender stereotyping. As he himself remarks in the wake of Lucy's rejection, "I have never known you till this evening. I have just used you as a peg for my silly notions of what a woman should be" (192).

Forster continues to draw attention to Cecil's essentialist sexism further on in the ninth chapter. After Lucy has railed against the Reverend Eager's snobbery, Cecil resents her outburst on the grounds that it is inappropriate coming from a woman:

**There was indeed something rather incongruous in Lucy's moral outburst over Mr Eager. It was as if one should see the Leonardo on the ceiling of the Sistine. He longed to hint to her that not here lay her vocation; that a woman's power and charm reside in mystery, not in muscular rant. But possibly rant is a sign of vitality: it mars the beautiful creature, but shows that she is alive (118).**

Once again, Cecil betrays his essentialist conception of woman, but his criticism is paradoxically laced with a certain aesthetic approval. He warms to her "flushed face and excited gestures" (118), but recoils from the vigour of her words. It is the visual and the aesthetic in Lucy that appeal to him, but her mind and her emotions repel him. In other words, her intellectual vitality is perceived as a threat. As in the preceding quotation, Cecil resents the verbal in Lucy – he does not want to hear her "story" or her "muscular rant" – hence the insistence on silence in both excerpts. Forster thereby suggests that Lucy's relationship with Cecil is faintly oppressive. Forster is keen to stress how Lucy chafes against this treatment, saying that "A rebel she was, but not of the kind he understood – a rebel who desires, not a wider dwelling-room, but equality beside the man she loved" (130). The word "equality" imports into the comment a direct and obvious political quality, and shifts the narrative beyond mere questions of personal morality and individual fulfilment. Such diction underscores the fact that this is a brazenly political and culturally engaged text.

Indeed, these are the reasons Lucy furnishes when explaining to Cecil why she has decided to break off their engagement. She explodes when he tells her she doesn't know her own mind: "'Tired!' she retorted, kindling at once. 'That is exactly like you. You always think women don't mean what they say'" (189). In breaking off the engagement, Lucy is asserting her right to equality, while simultaneously rejecting the gender imbalances of Edwardian society:

**‘When we were acquaintances, you let me be myself, but now you’re always protecting me ... I won’t be protected. I will choose for myself what is ladylike and right. To shield me is an insult. Can’t I be trusted to face the truth but I must get it second-hand through you? A woman’s place! (191-2).**

Indeed, Lucy’s rejection of Cecil should be understood as being not simply an expression of personal dissatisfaction, but as a dramatic statement about the position of women in Edwardian society. Lucy rejects Cecil primarily because of his views on women and the manner in which he objectifies, directs and silences her in everyday social intercourse. In this way, then, her rejection of Cecil should be interpreted also as a rejection of mainstream conceptions of women and their position in society.

Indeed, Forster was keenly aware of the debates surrounding the question of women’s suffrage, and here he gives his female protagonist the opportunity to articulate the theoretical views of gender equality that informed this concerted push for voting rights for women in the early years of the twentieth century. In rejecting Cecil, Lucy rejects the patronising chivalry of Edwardian gender relations and asserts her right to personal liberty. Significantly, she adopts the rights-based discourse of activist politics in resolving her personal dilemma, and in so doing unwittingly associates herself with the radical elements of marginalised, extra-parliamentary British politics. In this way, Lucy arrests and begins to reverse the movement towards the mainstream that began with her engagement to Cecil. The political aspect of Lucy’s decision becomes more clearly apparent when one looks closely at the language she uses to explain her choice. Her outbursts and pleas are littered with words referring directly to abstract notions of political emancipation, such as “freedom”, “liberty” and “release”. It is almost as if she is pleading for political emancipation, not simply to be released from a personal obligation. When she feels Cecil has implied that she has ended the engagement because of someone else, she retorts, “‘As if a girl can’t break it off for the sake of freedom’” (193).

Forster is also concerned to stress the effect of this declaration on Lucy’s character, and emphasises the notion of a profound and dramatic internal transformation. Even the usually obtuse Cecil, reeling from the shock of Lucy’s announcement, apprehends this momentous change: “From a Leonardo she had become a living woman, with mysteries and forces of her own, with qualities that even eluded art” (191). By resisting Cecil and his oppressive conceptions of women, she has attained her own individuality and



personal autonomy and has come alive as a self-aware individual. She is no longer an *objet d'art*, but a wholly sentient, intelligent being. The notion of immense personal change is further reinforced by Cecil's comment that "a new person seems speaking through you [Lucy]" (192), an observation that Lucy, guilty about her secret kiss with George Emerson, misinterprets as suspicion of an affair. However, Forster reinforces this sense of personal change by having Cecil reiterate this idea when he says, "I only meant that there was a force in you that I hadn't known of until now" (193).

In this way, Forster manages to have Lucy articulate the ideas and values of the early women's movement. In doing so, he also aligns his protagonist with social forces seeking to subvert, or at least modify, the existing flow of power within society. It is through this realignment that she is able to embrace her lower middle-class lover, George. The transgressive nature of this choice cannot be overstated. At the moment of her recognition of her love for George, Forster has Lucy's mother and Miss Bartlett insistently call for her from the carriage waiting outside. The call is evidently intended by Forster to have a broader metaphorical significance; in a sense, the voices of the mainstream are attempting to lure her back to the comfort and the security of the ideological centre. Lucy turns to Mr Beebe for succour, asking, "Mr Beebe, could you help me?" (225). But the cleric withdraws in a curious about-turn in character. She then turns to Mr Emerson, whose face is described as "reviving" her (225). Mr Emerson's words should be rightly considered as words of encouragement for the strength that will be needed for a life exiled from the dominant culture and the protection it affords. Accordingly, Mr Emerson predicts that Lucy's life with George will be characterised by conflict and struggle: "You have to go cold into a battle that needs warmth, out into the muddle that you have made yourself; and your mother and all your friends will despise you ... " (225). "Despise" is a particularly harsh word, but it aptly communicates Forster's conception of mainstream culture's relationship with those who seek to rebel against it. Of course, this essentially antagonistic relationship relates to and complements the novel's binaristic arrangement. At this early stage in his analysis of this issue, Forster regards Lucy's rejection of Cecil and mainstream culture as leading automatically and unequivocally to personal exclusion.

These notions are made more explicit in the novel's final chapter, where the young lovers' contentment is painfully undercut by Lucy's acute sense of her estrangement from her home environment. Back in Italy, she is in a very literal sense relegated to the periphery of her social context. At the end of the preceding chapter, we are told that she has "spoken" to her mother of her love for George, but in this chapter we learn of the consequences, both personal and political, of that declaration. Forster's most salient commentary on Lucy's cultural position at the novel's close is found in the following sentence:

**His own content was absolute, but hers held bitterness: the Honeychurches had not forgiven them; they were disgusted at her past hypocrisy; she had alienated Windy Corner, perhaps for ever (228).**

While traditional critics understand this comment purely in terms of personal morality and individual choices, I ascribe to it a more political dimension. By saying his content is "absolute", Forster suggests in this sentence that George, marginal from the very first chapter, has not altered his position within the Edwardian system of power relations. But Lucy's situation at the novel's close is altogether different. We are explicitly told that her content holds "bitterness"; in other words, society has exacted a penalty for her rebellion. Furthermore, the Honeychurches, who as a family represent throughout the novel a notion of benign bourgeois affluence, have not forgiven her for her defiance. Lucy's personal victory is thus tragically undermined by societal rejection. The word "disgusted" is especially worthy of comment, as it is the conventional, hackneyed term of rejection employed by the middle classes to denigrate those they do not understand or accept. It is the word frequently used as a means of dismissal and marginalisation, especially towards male homosexuals,<sup>22</sup> and here it is used against Lucy, the bourgeois suburban girl who appeared so culturally central in the opening chapters.

It is thus fitting that Forster should choose to end this brief piece of commentary by describing how Lucy is now "alienated" from Windy Corner. But what is worth focusing on here is the manner in which Forster chooses to place Lucy as the subject of this clause.

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<sup>22</sup> This relates to my earlier point about the sympathy Forster accords Lucy in the novel – a sympathy which, as I have argued, is in part derived from the fact that much of Lucy's predicament is in certain respects analogous to that of the Edwardian homosexual.

Forster writes that *Lucy* had alienated Windy Corner, not that Windy Corner had alienated *her*. At first, this seems like a remarkable oversight on the part of the author, but when analysed more closely its significance lies in what it communicates about Forster's conception of the relationship between the dominant culture and its dissident subcultural strands. Forster's formulation seems to suggest that Lucy is responsible for her cultural shift, that it is she who has transported herself from the centre to the margins. At first this would seem to suggest that Forster is apportioning blame to Lucy for her position of alienation in the final chapter, but it can equally be said that Forster's formulation accords Lucy a degree of power and influence over her position in society that implicitly calls into question the omnipotence or stability of the cultural centre. This in turn suggests that there is a degree of play in the cultural system, that it can be manipulated and reconfigured by those who at first seem entirely subordinate to it. This is a notion that Forster assiduously and powerfully addresses in *Howards End*.

In general, however, the position of marginalisation in which Lucy finds herself at the novel's close relates to an issue I addressed when discussing Forster's feminist polemic on the "Eternal Woman" in Part One. In essence, Lucy's cultural position in the final chapter is analogous in certain respects to that of the Edwardian male homosexual marginalised by mainstream society for daring to transgress the heterosexist code. Like the homosexual, her victory in "acting the truth" (228) is tragically undercut and destabilised by the nagging realisation of the sanction attached to her rebellious actions, which seem to have personal and political consequences far beyond their actual importance or significance. Indeed, Lucy's wish that Mr Beebe would not "influence them so much at Windy Corner" (228) could be read as a veiled plea for an end to the religious indoctrination that informs much bourgeois homophobia.

But the notion of the similarity between Lucy's narrative and the position of the homosexual in Edwardian society hints at and informs the novel's irrefutable homoerotic subtext. A number of critics, including Barbara Rosecrance and Parinder Kaur Bakshi, have drawn attention to the subtle homoeroticism that informs the novel. Rosecrance writes that "... homosexual energy persists in two aspects of the novel that balance and qualify the unmitigated triumph of the heterosexual ideal" (97), while Bakshi avers that "whatever techniques he adopted, homoerotic desire is never completely obliterated from

his texts” (133). As I pointed out early on in this chapter, *A Room with a View* is a novel that contains subtle gaps and omissions – ideas and concepts that do not properly tie up or validate one another. The result is a kind of ideological slippage that hints at issues unresolved and ideas not fully explicated. It is when one interrogates these breaks and fissures that the homoeroticism beneath the heterosexual romance becomes startlingly apparent.

However, I take issue with Bakshi’s contention that Forster is fundamentally not interested in the heterosexual romance which ostensibly forms the novel’s central thematic preoccupation. In this regard, Bakshi goes so far as to assert that “The more he succeeded in concealing homoerotic desire, the more Forster detested his writing. *A Room with a View* marks the beginning of Forster’s alienation from his work which reaches its height in *A Passage to India*” (129). This, I feel, constitutes a severe misinterpretation of the concept of ideological linkage which I see as operating throughout Forster’s *oeuvre*. In this regard, I would argue that Forster uses the similarities between the heterosexual romance and the position of Edwardian homosexuals to advance the key political issues salient to the latter group’s struggle for freedom. In presenting a narrative of sexual liberation, Forster is able to make claims for groups beyond those actually specified in the text. Indeed, so much is suggested by the final sentences of the novel, where the young heterosexual lovers are nonetheless faintly aware of “a love more mysterious than this” (230). Forster deliberately fails to specify exactly what this love is, and this ambiguity has both aesthetic and political dimensions. Aesthetically, it opens up the possibility of more philosophical and abstract conceptions of love, but politically it allows for the importation of other notions of illicit, socially proscribed love. As I will show, the novel is saturated in oblique, deflected presentations of illicit desire, so we see marginalised sexuality being dramatised in the presence of a more dominant and subsuming heterosexual narrative.

The novel’s homoeroticism is subtly evident in Forster’s presentation of George Emerson. Withdrawn and sensitive, he seems to stand as a rebuke to mainstream conceptions of robust, insensitive masculinity. His sensitivity is conveyed from the very opening chapter: “He [George] did not look at the ladies as he spoke, but his voice was perplexed and sorrowful” (25). Later, following the stabbing in the Loggia, George

admits to being as disturbed as Lucy by the bloodied photographs: “I did mind them so ... I may just mean that they frightened me” (64). Similarly, when Lucy expresses embarrassment at fainting, he admits to having had the same impulse, thereby radically abandoning the standard Edwardian male pretence at hardiness: “I nearly fainted myself,’ he said” (65). While these quotations do not in and of themselves imply homoeroticism, they do destabilise traditional masculine gender roles, and therefore make George suitable as a homoerotic subject. George is presented as thoroughly *different* in the context of the mainstream characters, and it is interesting to compare and contrast him with Forster’s more strenuously masculine characters, such as Charles Wilcox, who are usually entirely devoid of intuition or sensitivity.

However, the principal expression of homoeroticism occurs in the bathing scene in Part Two, where George Emerson, Mr Beebe and Freddy Honeychurch impulsively decide to swim in the “Sacred Lake”. As was pointed out above, this chapter is linked with the similarly titled “Fourth Chapter” of Part One. Similar ideas of sexual awakening inform the later chapter, although Forster seems to shy away from making explicit the precise nature of this awakening. In describing the men’s antics, Forster presents an image of masculine unity and homosocial fulfilment which seems at odds within the context of a supposedly heterosexual romance. Consider, for example, the manner in which Forster pointedly eroticises George as he describes him entering the pond:

**Wetting his hair first – a sure sign of apathy – he followed Freddy into the divine, as indifferent as if he were a statue and the pond a pail of soapsuds. It was necessary to use his muscles. It was necessary to keep clean. Mr Beebe watched them, and watched the seeds of the willow-herb dance chorically above their heads (149).**

The transformative nature of the event is suggested by Forster’s description of the pond as “divine”, but the reference to George following Freddy towards “the divine” is also subtly suggestive of orgasmic gratification, and this idea is bolstered later in the chapter, where Forster writes, “But the two young men were delirious” (150). Similarly, the erotic quality of the incident is extended by Forster including the detail of the naked George being watched by Mr Beebe, which intensifies our sense of repressed homoerotic desire. In addition, the reference to George’s muscles reinforces the erotic nature of this description. Although the men’s boisterous actions are stereotypically masculine, Forster

nevertheless displaces conventional gender roles by comparing them to “the nymphs in *Götterdämmerung*” (149). Indeed, the incident is summed up by Forster as “a call to the blood and to the relaxed will” (152), which suggests that it takes place as a result of a temporary abandonment of repressive strictures concerning male relations. When the will is relaxed, Forster seems to be saying, homoerotic tendencies spill forth. The homoeroticism of this episode is reinforced also by the manner in which the women seem to intrude upon the men; in a sense, they are seen to disrupt and interfere with male bonding.

However, the novel’s homoeroticism is not the only instance of a minority sexuality subtly calling into question and informing the mainstream heterosexual narrative. Indeed, the novel presents a range of other sexualities that exist in a relationship of subordination to heterosexuality. In particular, the novel seems acutely concerned with a number of women who choose not to engage in sexual relations with men, such as Miss Bartlett and the Miss Alans. These women are considered by Forster to constitute “the vast armies of the benighted” (194), and are regarded as pitiful figures who have “sinned against passion and truth” (194). Miss Bartlett is throughout presented as an asexual neurotic, while the Miss Alans are described, in the words of Mrs Honeychurch, as “two doddering old ladies” (214). Forster’s condescension towards these characters illustrates the point that Forster himself was not immune to the oppressive discourses surrounding members of society who do not conform to the prescribed sexual norm. Indeed, Forster’s increasing insistence towards the novel’s close on the grave consequences of Lucy’s withdrawal from the sexual realm seems to suggest that – for a woman, at least – participation in a heterosexual relationship is a prerequisite for self-realisation. This suggestion seems curiously at odds with the novel’s emphasis on free choice with regard to sexuality.

Although one of Forster’s earlier novels, *A Room with a View* should be regarded as a deeply politicised text which is organised around a series of careful oppositions, most of which serve the purpose of contrasting bourgeois and unconventional modes of living. In this way, Forster conceives of the interaction of mainstream and marginal cultures in a largely oppositional and combative sense, the two cultural modes seen as being entirely disengaged from one another. As a result, Forster’s heroine is faced with the task of rejecting bourgeois convention and the multitude of religious, political and sexual views

associated with it in her quest for self-realisation. However, the ambiguities surrounding the novel's latent homoeroticism and its own complicity in oppressive discourses around sexuality suggest that, even at this early stage in Forster's career, he was to a degree aware of the insufficiency of this rigidly binaristic conception of the dominant culture and its subordinate subcultures. In this sense, then, *A Room with a View* can be seen to anticipate the problematisation of this issue which is strikingly evident in Forster's 1910 novel, *Howards End*.

*Howards End* marks the beginning of a new phase in Forster’s literary career.<sup>23</sup> First published in 1910, it is generally regarded, along with *A Passage to India* (1924), as the first of his two masterpieces,<sup>24</sup> and it exhibits a structural complexity and thematic breadth that are absent in the earlier novels.<sup>25</sup> In this chapter, I want to show how *Howards End* is a thoroughly politicised text that engages boldly with the themes of marginality and alterity identified in the previous chapters. However, Forster here presents marginality in a diffuse and pluralistic manner, and therefore moves decisively beyond the simplistic binaries presented in *A Room with a View*. In *Howards End*, marginality is conceived of as both cultural (as in the depiction of the Schlegel sisters) and economic (as in the portrait of the Edwardian economic underclass, as represented by the Basts). Meanwhile, the cultural centre, exemplified by the Wilcoxes, while viewed as hegemonic and oppressive, is nevertheless exposed as fundamentally flawed and unstable, capable of being destabilised and overpowered by the subversive elements it seeks to co-opt and subordinate. In this way, *Howards End* in a sense prefigures and is linked with the activism and confrontationalism of Forster’s posthumously published novel, *Maurice*.

Clearly grounded in the contemporary debates surrounding femininity and the position of women in society,<sup>26</sup> *Howards End* may be most succinctly described as the story of two women who, through profound personal exposure to the marginal elements in their society, rebel against the very culture that provides for and sustains their social dominance. As a result of their involvement with the Basts – representatives of the Edwardian economic underclass who, through a potent combination of fate and middle-

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<sup>23</sup> Furbank writes that “*Howards End* marked a turning-point in his career, as it did in his life” (190).

<sup>24</sup> Lionel Trilling has argued that *Howards End* is Forster’s masterpiece (101).

<sup>25</sup> Most obviously, Forster moves from basing his novel on one key protagonist to including a cast of main characters of relatively equal importance, as well as a complex and illuminating subplot.

<sup>26</sup> In her article on the suffragette movement, Jill Liddington describes the prominence of the early women’s movement during the Edwardian period: “The NUWSS [National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies] procession in 13 June 1908 ... captured the public imagination. Special trains from all over the country brought women to London. Up to 15,000 joined the procession to the music of a silver band ... The WSPU’s [Women’s Social and Political Union] own Hyde Park demonstration the following week, 21 June, roused similar popular interest. Then in April 1909 the NUWSS ... staged a Pageant of Women’s Trades and Professions ... Inspired by such pageantry, and by suffragette bravery, the suffrage campaign now reached into every town and village in the land” (37).



class philanthropy, destabilise and ultimately lay waste the Schlegel sisters' essentially naïve conceptions of society, class and culture – the two sisters are forced into a confrontation with the dominant culture, as represented by the Wilcox family. For Margaret, this destabilisation takes the form of a recognition of the crucial necessity of capital in a society founded upon it, resulting in a significant rejection of certain key humanistic assumptions intrinsic to nineteenth-century liberal philanthropy. Margaret's response is not a turn towards socialism, but an embrace of capitalist vigour and pragmatism, as exemplified by her marriage to Henry Wilcox, who is throughout presented as the avatar of both capitalism and colonialism, social projects associated throughout the novel with the values and ambitions of the national (dominant) culture.

In contrast, Helen's response is to combat mainstream Edwardian public morality at its deepest and most significant level by involving herself sexually with a man of another class. This action should be regarded as a radical protest against the moral hypocrisy of a society that unquestionably validates the sexual behaviour of heterosexual men. When viewed in this light, Helen's pregnancy is essential to the cardinal Forsterian theme of the necessity of outright rebellion against the dominant culture. Moreover, Helen's pregnancy (and particularly Henry Wilcox's response to it) has a crucial spill-over effect on Margaret, ultimately destroying her temporary flirtation with the cultural mainstream and entrenching the primacy of the same-sex relationship as the novel's central dramatic impetus.<sup>27</sup> As a result, the novel's ending, far from presenting a conservative image of a return to a traditional England, in fact presents the reader with a radically evolved and progressive image of the family, which is conceived of as something broader and more inclusive than the restrictive nuclear unit. At the novel's close, patriarchy is powerfully superseded by matriarchy, conservatism by progressive liberalism, and hierarchical power relations by a putative egalitarianism.<sup>28</sup> This is

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<sup>27</sup> As I pointed out in the introduction, Forster's novels usually accord same-sex relations (be they sexual or Platonic) a greater prominence and intensity than inter-sex ones, thereby undermining the dominant culture's insistence on the primacy and supremacy of heterosexuality.

<sup>28</sup> Elizabeth Langland has apprehended the politically problematic nature of Margaret's "victory" over the Wilcoxes at the novel's close. Using a Derridean approach to the novel, she argues that the novel's ending is ironic in that "Although the themes of the novel indicate a desire to deconstruct the patriarchal ideology, ultimately, it seems, Forster is forced to reconstruct that ideology in the structure of the novel, in Margaret's 'victory' over Henry. Plot has demanded a hierarchical ordering of terms for a resolution of conflict even though the novel's themes have argued for a replacement of conquest with connection" (91). I return to Langland's critique later in this chapter.

particularly evident when one considers Margaret's speech on "difference", which may be read as a veiled plea on Forster's part for an acceptance of those marginalised by the dominant culture.

*Howards End*'s sustained engagement with the issue of marginality is most clearly evident when one considers the manner in which Forster places issues of social marginality at the very centre of the novel itself. Women's issues are a major political focus throughout the novel, but these are issues usually relatively marginal in the novels of the period, many of which celebrate masculine pursuits and achievements.<sup>29</sup> *Howards End* abounds in references to the notion of sexual equality (for example, the recurring question of women's suffrage),<sup>30</sup> while the glaring discrepancy between masculine and feminine sexual morality, as evidenced by the novel's trenchant exposure of the Edwardian sexual "double-standard", powerfully suggests the gendered power imbalances inherent in Edwardian society. Notions of sexual equality form a kind of screen before which the specifics of plot are played out; we are invited to view the actual events of the novel within a broad context of social change in gender relations. *Howards End* shows throughout a deep and sensitive understanding of the disempowered position from which Edwardian women negotiated their lives, and at times seems to read as a kind of oblique riposte to oppressive mainstream conceptions of women and femininity. Forster throughout seems acutely aware of the limitations and frustrations experienced by women in a society founded on masculine solidarity and patriarchy. For example, when Margaret lures Helen to *Howards End* under Henry's direction, Margaret's fury is directed not simply towards Henry for his dishonesty and duplicity, but also towards a hostile and invasive male society which does not respect or understand the depth and significance of women's relationships: "A new feeling came over her: she was fighting

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<sup>29</sup> I am referring here principally to the cardinal male writers of the early twentieth century, such as Joseph Conrad and Rudyard Kipling, and do not include in this judgement such seminal feminist figures as Virginia Woolf and Rebecca West, for whom women's issues are obviously a core concern. In this regard, David Medalie points out in his manuscript on Forster and modernism that Forster's politics is "agreeably different from the right-wing inclinations of many of the other male modernists" (6).

<sup>30</sup> It is salutary to note that *Howards End* was published just prior to the "time of suffragette militancy in 1912-13" (Weeks 161).

for women against men. She did not care about rights, but if men came into Howards End it should be over her body” (283).<sup>31</sup>

This understanding of the novel as a sympathetic feminist text by a male writer is endorsed by Elizabeth Langland, who argues in her essay “Gesturing Towards an Open Space: Gender, Form and Language in *Howards End*” that the novel seeks to undo patriarchy by means of dismantling essentially patriarchal and hierarchical binary oppositions, such as male/female, logic/intuition, and outer/inner. In other words, Langland argues that Forster engages in a process of deconstructing the terms which place male above female, and which marginalise the terms which in ideology belong to the feminine. By making use of a Derridean notion of binary oppositions, she shows how Forster actively subverts the power structures of patriarchy that are encoded in language and Western metaphysics.

Indeed, there is an emphasis throughout the novel on the primacy and strength of relationships between women (for example, the relationship between Helen and Margaret and that between Margaret and Mrs Wilcox), which suggests that alliances may be forged between members of oppressed groups to destabilise and ultimately subvert mainstream power. Indeed, in a sense this is what happens in *Howards End*, where Mrs Wilcox’s intention that her home be left to Margaret is eventually realised. This point is made explicit when one considers how the fulfilment of Mrs Wilcox’s wish occurs in an environment where patriarchy has been partially superseded. The centrality of women’s issues is immediately apparent in the novel’s opening pages, where Forster begins his narrative with a stream of private correspondence between the novel’s two principal characters, Helen and Margaret. In general, it may be said that Forster’s presentation of the Schlegel sisters is a sustained and insightful study in cultural (as opposed to economic) marginality. Being half-German, the Schlegels are differentiated from the cultural mainstream by their genetic ancestry, Forster using their lineage to convey, in concrete and definite terms, the fact that the family is decidedly *different* within the context of Edwardian England. Indeed, although Mrs Munt is quick to point out that the

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<sup>31</sup> Forster’s presentation of Margaret and Helen shows an acute awareness of the class and type of woman who would be sympathetic to the first-phase feminist programme. Jeffrey Weeks writes that “The suffrage campaigns particularly were led by women from the upper middle class; their families were usually in business or manufacturing, and their religion was often Quaker or Unitarian. They were generally well educated, by a variety of means, some privately, some in schools” (161).

Schlegels are “English to the backbone” (23), she repeatedly explains her nieces’ eccentricities in terms of their national origins. In addition, given the mounting hostility between Britain and Germany in the years leading up to the First World War, this apparently minor detail seems to suggest the essentially hostile and combative relationship that exists between the Schlegels and the larger society they inhabit. Indeed, to take the metaphor even further, both Margaret and Helen seem throughout the novel to be at war with the ideological essence of their society. While Margaret attempts to effect change through reason and affection (particularly through her marriage to Henry Wilcox), Helen rebels against both mainstream sexual morality and her prescribed gender role. Furthermore, while Margaret and Helen are presented as marginal in terms of their gender and their ideological ideals, Tibby is viewed throughout in contradistinction to the conventional Edwardian masculine ideal, as represented by Charles Wilcox, who is initially described as “dark, clean-shaven, and ... accustomed to command” (31). Retiring, querulous and unathletic, Tibby in a sense represents an inversion of all that was expected of the Edwardian male.

Forster stresses the essential alterity of the Schlegels by using private, highly intimate letters to introduce Helen and Margaret. These letters are loaded with the ideological values extolled and represented by the sisters, and from the very outset Forster implicitly sets up a contrast between personal relations (as represented by the private correspondence between the sisters) and the public realm (as evidenced by the Wilcox world of “telegrams and anger”). But the intimacy of the letters, which are swathed in endearments and affectionate references, also suggests the primacy of the women’s relationship in the novel; it is presented as a bond unbreakable even by the mighty forces of male power and dominance. The letters are characterised by a tender equality and intellectual reciprocity that are markedly absent in the interactions between the principal male characters – most notably, those between Charles and Paul (““Yes or no, man; plain question, plain answer”” (36)) and between Henry Wilcox and Charles (we are told, fairly late in the novel, that Mr Wilcox enjoys being addressed as “sir” by his son, with this suggesting the hierarchical, power-laden quality of their relationship).

The first letter begins with the salutation “Dearest Meg”, the informal address suggesting a relationship characterised by egalitarian ease. When one considers the

manner in which relationships seemed so rigidly governed by protocol in *A Room with a View*, these introductory letters seem to read as a kind of implied rebuke to mainstream Edwardian conceptions of acceptable personal relations, which stressed restraint, order and formality. Furthermore, Forster uses these opening letters to stress, from the very outset of the novel, the primacy of the same-sex relationship in the novel. In a similar manner to the way in which the male relationships in *A Room with a View* seem to call into question the primacy of the heterosexual ones, it is Margaret's relationship with Helen that is the novel's dominant focus, rather than her (heterosexual) relationship with Henry Wilcox. In this way, Forster in a sense problematises the concept of marriage (and, by implication, heterosexuality in general), and seems to destabilise its usual unquestioned and categorical dominance in the fiction of the period.<sup>32</sup>

The opening sentence of the letter, "It isn't going to be what we expected", refers to the house Howards End, but Forster's unusual use of tense is worth commenting on. It would have been more conventional to write, "It isn't what we expected", but the use of the future tense ("going to be") is suggestive of events in the future, of troubles and dilemmas to come. Helen's opening comment thus seems to suggest that the Wilcoxes, and the mainstream values the family represents, will not be as omnipotent or stable as they might imagine. In this way, Forster implies from the very opening sentences of the novel the idea that the cultural centre might be challenged and overcome – a significant evolution of Forster's conception of the intersection of marginal and mainstream cultures. In addition, Forster's implied emphasis on the discrepancy between the actual appearance of Howards End and the manner in which the Schlegel sisters had imagined it hints at the idea that Ruth Wilcox's house is more closely associated with the cultural values of the Schlegels than those of the Wilcoxes. With its modest proportions and understated charm, it seems to stand as an implied rebuke to the ostentatious, expansionist values of the Wilcoxes, a family who, as Helen so penetratingly observes, seem to belong in a house that is "all gables and wiggles" (19). In this regard, I would argue that Howards End

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<sup>32</sup> I am thinking in particular of how marriage often forms the basis of so many narratives in early twentieth-century literature – for example, in D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow*, where the novel's plot unfolds by way of a series of marriages for the successive generations, even if it ends with Ursula's eventual rejection of Anton Skrebensky. *Howards End* seems to debunk this idea, and implies that fulfilment may be found, not only in marriage, but also in relationships with persons of the same sex, or in essentially non-sexual relations.

represents the rural, pre-colonial, pre-capitalist England which Forster celebrates in the novel, but, on a more abstract and political level, it is throughout associated with those ideological values running in opposition to the mainstream – egalitarianism, socialism, sensitivity to the environment and feminism. Indeed, it is significant that at the novel's close it is seen as a kind of refuge for Helen against the sexist judgements of a male-dominated society.

The novel begins with an account of Helen's brief, but significant, involvement with Charles Wilcox, and Forster takes great pains to show that this affair is not simply a matter between two individuals but between disparate and competing cultural modes. Helen's brief affair with Charles is the first significant instance in the novel of the intersection of dominant and marginal cultures, but Forster stresses in this opening episode the essential weakness and instability at the core of mainstream cultural values. Given that the Wilcoxes represent much of what was so dominant in England in the early twentieth-century, Forster seems to be suggesting also that there is an essential weakness, or hollowness, at the very heart of the national culture. On a metaphysical level, this sense of uneasiness about the stability of the dominant culture reveals the modernist dimension of the novel, which is pervaded by anxiety about the future of the national culture and the alienated position of the individual within it. The opening episode is instructive also in that it prefigures much of the later action in the novel. Many of Helen's observations about the Wilcoxes are borne out by the subsequent action, and her brief intoxication with the Wilcox outlook provides clues to the motivation for Margaret's eventual marriage to Henry.

Helen's attraction to Charles is not based primarily on his personal attributes, but on the values he and his family represent. She is in a sense intoxicated by the values of the cultural mainstream and, more specifically, by the vigour and pragmatism the Wilcox family represents. She responds to the metaphysical or ontological certainty inherent in the Wilcox mentality, which is seen in contradistinction to the endless equivocation of her own progressive/liberal outlook. For example, Forster points out how Helen briefly eschews her own liberal, egalitarian outlook in favour of the Wilcox's hierarchical conception of social relations:

When Charles said, 'Why be so polite to servants? They don't understand it,' she had not given the Schlegel retort of 'If they don't understand it, I do.' No; she had vowed to be less polite to servants in the future. 'I am swathed in cant,' she thought, 'and it is good for me to be stripped of it' (38).

But Helen accurately perceives that, in the realm of personal relations, the Wilcoxes are weak and fragile, that there is a core of "panic and emptiness" at the centre of their being. This is something she is acutely aware of the morning after her brief affair with Paul. It is when she notices the family's fear of emotional intimacy that she becomes aware of the weakness of the exclusively material outlook of the dominant culture, a culture focused on material progress, the ruthless accumulation of wealth, and the rampant acquisition of overseas territories:

'Somehow, when that kind of man looks frightened it is too awful. It is all right for us to be frightened, or for men of another sort – father, for instance; but for men like that! When I saw all the others so placid, and Paul mad with terror in case I said the wrong thing, I felt for a moment that the whole Wilcox family was just a fraud, just a wall of newspapers and motor-cars and golf-clubs, and that if it fell I should find nothing behind it but panic and emptiness' (40).

It is significant that Forster should choose to include in this analysis a number of gender observations. I mentioned above how Tibby represents an inversion of the Edwardian masculine ideal, and here Forster suggests that the dominant culture is essentially the culture of that particular idealised conception. However, by suggesting that there is an essential weakness at the heart of mainstream culture and ideology, Forster is implying that it might be overcome or transformed in some way. Forster thus seems to be acknowledging that there might be a means of resisting the dominant culture, or at least modifying it in some positive way. Indeed, when viewed as a whole, *Howards End* might be summed up as a study of the way in which mainstream culture might be confronted, resisted and overthrown.

In this regard, the novel seems to proffer two possible modes of cultural resistance – one intellectual and moderate (Margaret's marriage to Henry), the other heroic and radical (Helen's defiant rejection of Edwardian sexual mores). When viewed specifically in terms of character, one of the novel's principal concerns is the contrasted manner in which the two women approach the question of social injustice. Forster seems to be implicitly questioning whether it is better to resist by means of compromise, entreaty and

loving persuasion, or by outright rebellion. I would argue that events in the novel seem to imply that the intellectual response endorsed by Margaret is ineffective and insufficient; indeed, it is Helen's pregnancy that provides the catalyst for Margaret's ultimate rejection of the dominant culture. In this way, *Howards End* is importantly linked with *Maurice* in terms of its elements of social protest and its endorsement of outright rebellion.

Margaret attempts to effect societal transformation through a synthesis of marginal and mainstream political values. Her approach to this ideological conjoinment is essentially a pragmatic, liberal one: while she senses the insufficiency and cloying self-indulgence of philanthropy and liberal humanism, she nevertheless retains throughout the novel a profound scepticism concerning any hope of total or comprehensive societal change, and remains throughout moderate in her goals and ambitions. She tries to appropriate what is energising and positive about the dominant culture and inject it into her own liberal values. Margaret's scepticism about the efficacy of liberal humanism seems to be endorsed, to a certain extent, by the author. Fairly early in the novel, Forster writes that "the world would be a gray, bloodless place were it entirely composed of Miss Schlegels" (42), this implying that the good intentions underlying and informing liberal humanism are insufficient for a truly energised and emotionally vigorous society. Similarly, by pointing out that "Not out of them are the shows of history erected" (42), Forster suggests the extent to which the Schlegels and the values they represent are marginalised from the national culture, as well as their inability to effect meaningful and dramatic change on their society. As the quotation implies, they play little or no part in the historical events that determine the nation's history. This authorial scepticism about liberal humanism finds its expression in the events of the novel, which increasingly endorse the radicalism of Helen's approach to the dominant culture. Forster seems to be implying that radical politics is a more efficacious means of bringing about societal transformation.

The first expression of Margaret's rejection of liberal humanism is evident at the debate that follows a dinner party organised by a group of well-meaning Edwardian women who meet to discuss the hypothetical issue of how a rich man should dispose of his wealth. The broader ideological significance of this debate becomes apparent when one considers the importance of the question of inheritance within Marxist doctrine. This



chapter is of cardinal importance in understanding Margaret's relationship with the dominant culture, in that it shows the degree to which she is prepared to compromise her ideals in order to challenge injustice. When analysing the arguments she puts forward, it is important to note that she is not expressing cynicism when she calls for Leonard Bast to be given money. Her arguments are a kind of compromise with the capitalist system, and her views are correspondingly moderate and realistic:

**'Give them [the poor] a chance. Give them money. Don't dole them out poetry books and railway tickets like babies. Give them the wherewithal to buy these things. When your socialism comes it may be different, and we may think in terms of commodities instead of cash. Till it comes give people cash, for it is the warp of civilisation, whatever the woof may be' (134-5).**

Margaret's comments are curiously ideologically vacant. She neither subscribes to nor repudiates capitalism, but instead resigns herself to the reality of its being the dominant mode of economic production.<sup>33</sup> Significantly, by speaking of socialism as "your socialism", she distances herself from any direct or outright endorsement of socialism as the solution to the problems of wealth distribution. The final image in the above quotation, "... it [money] is the warp of civilisation, whatever the woof may be", similarly connotes that capitalism is a system one must simply accept, even if that system and its effects are morally questionable. It should also be pointed out that the image of weaving is a traditionally feminine one, with this implying that Margaret is commenting on the (male) world of politics from a uniquely feminine perspective. The feminine image reinforces the idea that she is commenting on the mainstream male-dominated sphere of political economy from a marginalised vantage point. What is most crucial, however, is that this is an essentially liberal, moderate approach to political economy; Margaret does not hold out for massive, radical change, but rather pushes for limited, attainable improvements to society. There is an implicit acceptance here that societal perfectibility may not be possible.

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<sup>33</sup> In this regard, Margaret's approach to political economy curiously prefigures Mrs Moore's exhausted withdrawal from active engagement in life in *A Passage to India*, this indicating the extent to which the latter novel reads as a development of the themes raised in *Howards End*. Like Margaret, Mrs Moore resigns herself to the futility of attempting to extract meaning from the world around her.

Margaret accepts that the modern industrial society is founded upon capital, and she further acknowledges that capital has a good deal to do with character. In other words, one's financial wherewithal determines one's identity in society:

**'The imagination ought to play upon money and realize it vividly, for it's the – second most important thing in the world. It is so slurred over and hushed up, there is so little clear thinking – oh, political economy, of course, but so few of us think clearly about our own private incomes, and admit that independent thoughts are nine times out of ten the result of independent means. Money, give Mr Bast money, and don't bother about his ideals. He'll pick those up for himself' (134).**

Margaret's acknowledgment of the economic determinants of identity is primarily a socialist one, but it is carefully and subtly modified to form a synthesis of the political values of the dominant culture and the ideology of the economically and culturally marginalised. Significantly, Margaret does not give money ultimate primacy within society – she points out that it is the “*second* most important thing in the world”, this careful nuance crucially differentiating her from the Wilcoxes. Similarly, she does not say that money is innately or inherently educative or inspiring; rather, she says that “the imagination ought to play upon money and realize it vividly”. This suggests that it is only when money is filtered through the individual human imagination that it acquires its positive, potentially liberating value. This careful appraisal of the value of money *in human terms* diverges starkly from that of the Wilcoxes. In a sense, Margaret's respect for money when compared with that of the Wilcoxes is in line with her appreciation of *Howards End*, which, in the view of Henry Wilcox, is just a smallholding that “does not pay”. But Margaret sees beyond the purely material elements of *Howards End*; in a sense, her imagination “plays upon it”, enabling her to conceptualise its worth in aesthetic and emotional terms.

Margaret's marriage to Henry Wilcox is the novel's most literal expression of this attempt at ideological fusion. Throughout his depiction of their marriage, Forster stresses Margaret's (traditionally feminine) role as a subordinate, but nevertheless important, influence on her husband. She is throughout presented as the one who persuades, entreats and even manipulates, however uncomfortable she may feel in that particular role: “Margaret had winced, but she was influencing Henry now, and though pleased at her little victory she knew that she had won it by the methods of the harem” (228). Although

she has influence over her husband, this comes at the cost of subservience both to Henry and to mainstream, essentially conservative, conceptions of the role and position of women in society.

As was mentioned above, Margaret represents an intellectual approach to the question of how best to effect social change and challenge the dominant culture. Margaret's strategy is an essentially liberal one based on compromise and entreaty. Significantly, it is premised on the notion that social change begins at the level of the individual (another cardinal liberal value); she hopes that she will begin to change society by influencing the character of her husband. It is for this reason that I attribute to Margaret's pleas on behalf of Leonard Bast at Oniton a symbolic dimension: she is pleading not simply for an individual destroyed, both financially and personally, by the capitalist system, but for all victims of that system. When she implores Henry to show compassion for Leonard, she is pleading for mainstream society, personified by Henry Wilcox, to show compassion for all victims alienated and destroyed by the capitalist system. But, ultimately, this approach cannot work, for large-scale social relations are systems of interaction that are not determined by personal relationships. Forster thereby seems to be suggesting, perhaps unconsciously, that the liberal approach to achieving social justice can yield only minor successes.

The events at Oniton, Henry Wilcox's country estate in Shropshire, are of cardinal importance in the novel's exposition of the economic power disparities in Edwardian England. In this episode we see, clearly and powerfully, the politicised, polemical quality of the novel. It is at Oniton that the plight of the economically marginalised quite literally intrudes upon the grotesque opulence spawned by the capitalist system for the enjoyment of an economic elite: "Iced cakes, sandwiches innumerable, coffee, claret-cup, champagne, remained almost intact: their overfed guests could do no more" (226).

The Oniton experience is described in a dreamlike manner, the sequence of events seeming blurred and surreal. At times, the experience seems nightmarish and phantasmagoric, at others, ideal and serene. Indeed, Forster stresses the unreality of the experience by describing the "numbing hilarity" (208) of the passengers in the reserved carriage in which Margaret travels. As the quotation implies, the Oniton experience is characterised by distorted sensations and warped reality. Margaret is the marginal

member of the garrulous upper middle class party; she is ideologically estranged from the chivalrous men and submissive women, both of whom exemplify mainstream gender roles. Indeed, at times the party of guests seems to be a kind of microcosm of the broader society, with Margaret the alienated figure resisting her designated gender role and challenging male dominance. For example, in the railway car Margaret is acutely aware of the oppressive power imbalances that lurk behind the men's chivalrous displays:

Nothing could have exceeded the kindness of the two men. They raised windows for some ladies, and lowered them for others, they rang the bell for the servant, they identified the colleges as they slipped past Oxford, they caught books or bag-purses in the act of tumbling onto the floor. Yet there was nothing finicking about their politeness: it had the Public School touch, and, though sedulous, was virile. More battles than Waterloo have been won on our playing fields, and Margaret bowed to a charm of which she did not wholly approve, and said nothing when the Oxford colleges were identified wrongly. 'Male and female created He them'; the journey to Shrewsbury confirmed this questionable statement, and the long glass saloon, that moved so easily and felt so comfortable, became a forcing-house for the idea of sex (209).

The irony of the opening sentence, which is clearly intended by Forster to be filtered through Margaret's consciousness, immediately suggests his heroine's alterity in this oppressively mainstream context, and this notion is sustained in the description which follows. Margaret sees through the men's chivalrous displays, which masquerade as acts of deference, but which are in fact displays of male power and dominance. Accordingly, although "sedulous", their conduct is nevertheless "virile", with this implying that their assiduous, painstaking displays of subservience are merely another way of demonstrating their triumphant masculinity. Indeed, the word "sedulous" seems to suggest that the chivalry is unrelenting and oppressive. Furthermore, Forster's inclusion of the observation that their actions have "the Public School touch" reinforces the reader's sense that the displays of chivalry stem from the kind of social power and influence similar to the economic power held by those who have attended the elite British schools. However, although she finds the men's actions repellent, Margaret nevertheless submits to their assertions of intellectual superiority over women and fails to upbraid them when they incorrectly identify the Oxford colleges. By "bowing to a charm of which she did not wholly approve", Margaret attempts to effect the kind of ideological compromise exemplified by her marriage.

However, Forster is careful also to stress that the railway carriage is a kind of microcosm of mainstream English society, and he therefore ascribes to the group of passengers a broader ideological significance. This notion is conveyed by the observation “‘Male and female created He them’; the journey to Shrewsbury confirmed this questionable statement”. Forster’s quip reveals scepticism about both Christian dogma and the essentialist thinking about gender that stems directly from it. Crucially, he sees religious doctrine and oppressive thinking about gender as thoroughly intertwined; as the quotation implies, the two seem to bolster, inform and validate each other. More importantly, though, the passengers in the railway carriage “confirm” this cardinal mainstream assumption about gender roles, with this leading to Foster’s conclusion that “the long glass saloon, that moved so easily and felt so comfortable, became a forcing-house for the idea of sex”.

The microcosmic associations of the carriage are made explicit at this point; indeed, the references to the comfort and ease of the car are inherently suggestive of mainstream, middle-class Edwardian society, with its emphasis on materialism, social advancement and the rapacious accumulation of wealth. Mainstream Edwardian society conceives of itself as moving inexorably onwards, in much the same the manner as the railway car, towards ever-greater wealth and prosperity. In addition, the fact that the railway car is “reserved” is suggestive of elitism and estrangement from the social masses, of whom the Basts are representatives. However, Forster’s ambivalence about his own position within this very social stratum is evident in the idea of oppression and restriction contained in the reference to the carriage being a “forcing-house for the idea of sex”. As the quotation implies, oppression lurks amid opulence – there is discomfort in spite of affluence. Given Forster’s own sexual alterity within Edwardian society, the reference seems also to be suggestive of the idea of enforced heterosexuality, and therefore reveals the author’s own deeply held hostility towards the dominant culture.

The surreal, dreamlike qualities of the Oniton experience are clearly evident in the excerpt quoted above, and they manifest themselves again in Forster’s description of the accident which occurs while the party is being driven to the house. This sense of unreality is established by Forster’s descriptions of the Shropshire countryside as faintly deceptive and inscrutable: “Quiet mysteries were in progress behind those tossing horizons: the

west, as ever, was retreating with some secret which may not be worth the discovery, but which no practical man will ever discover” (210). Indeed, following the accident, Margaret herself reflects that “she felt their whole journey from London had been unreal. They had no part in the earth and its emotions” (213).

When Albert Fussell accidentally runs over a cat, Margaret dramatically thwarts Charles’s refusal to stop by leaping out of the moving car. This incident is both bizarre and unexpected, and it is delivered in the cool, anti-climactic tone Forster reserves for his most violent disasters.<sup>34</sup> It is linked with the excerpt above in that it presents Margaret’s rebellion against male-dominated society, but it is also a plea for compassion and sensitivity in human relations. Whereas Mrs Warrington simply scratches her hand to suggest that money alone will see the matter satisfactorily resolved, Margaret recognises the crucial need for genuine human responsiveness to the girl’s shock and grief.

Margaret’s leap from the car could be interpreted as being symbolic of a dramatic and outright rejection of the values represented by the party of guests; in other words, the accident represents the point at which she can no longer tolerate the values of the dominant culture. Furthermore, the leap is essentially a radical act of rebellion that is inconsistent with her earlier, essentially liberal, contention that money is “the warp of civilization, whatever the woof may be” (135). Forster’s comments accordingly become more explicitly and ardently feminist: Margaret is described as “a woman in revolt” (212) who comes to the sudden realisation that the system of gender relations is wrong *in its entirety*: “Ladies sheltering behind men, men sheltering behind servants – the whole system’s wrong, and she must challenge it” (213). This is an essentially radical contention that implicitly calls for total or comprehensive change, rather than for moderate reforms. Given that much of Margaret’s approach has thus far been based mainly on moderation and good-natured compromise (she “playfully” disagrees with Mrs Warrington when discussing tariff reform (210-11), and she refrains from criticising the men in the railway carriage (209)), the accident serves the purpose of revealing the limits of Margaret’s ideological appeasement. There is a point at which radical rebellion is necessary, even for Margaret, Forster seems to be saying. This does not augur well for

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<sup>34</sup> Consider, for example, the death of Lilia’s baby in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and Rickie’s death in *The Longest Journey*. In both these instances, the flat, seemingly expressionless tone intensifies the reader’s sense of the horror and significance of what has occurred.

her marriage to Henry, the basis of which is ideological compromise. It is thus fitting that such an event should precede the disastrous events at Evie's wedding, where Margaret's empathy for the plight of the Basts clashes with her feelings of loyalty to her husband-to-be.

The sudden arrival of the Basts at Evie's wedding reception represents an intrusion of those marginalised by the capitalist system on those who have benefited from it. Significantly, though, this intrusion is both directed and stage-managed by Helen, a member of the middle classes. Helen's actions should thus be regarded as a kind of betrayal of her class privilege and a striking display of solidarity with the economically marginalised. Like Margaret's leap from the car, Helen's is a radical and defiant act intended to bring about instantaneous change. Ostensibly, Helen demands that Henry take personal responsibility for the Basts' plight, but her concern is clearly not simply for two individuals, but also for the entire class of person the Basts represent. This notion is apparent when one considers the broad, general manner in which Helen justifies her actions, in which reference is made to categories of person rather than individuals: "We upper classes have ruined him, and I suppose you'll tell me it's the battle of life ... If you like, I'm mad. But I've brought them. I'll stand this injustice no longer"(223).

However, there is an element of absurdity to Helen's display, which Margaret is keenly aware of. She upbraids Helen, saying, "You have less restraint rather than more as you grow older" (227), implying that her actions are dangerously immature. Forster seems to be suggesting that extreme radicalism – much of which is concerned with bold statements, theatricality and shock tactics – has an element of childish irrationality to it. So much is conveyed by his description of Helen as being "dominated by that tense, wounding excitement that had made her a terror in their nursery days" (222). Helen is motivated by and subject to uncontrolled, unharnessed emotion. Her actions are not properly thought out. Of course, all this is seen in glaring contradistinction to Margaret's deft and manipulative manoeuvring around her husband and his sons. Despite the irrationality of her actions, there is something admirable in Helen's boldness and her outright refusal to compromise. Indeed, the heroism and daring of Helen's actions are carefully contrasted with Margaret's self-deprecatory posturing following the motoring

incident, where she calculatedly plays the part of the hysterical, over-emotional woman in order to diminish and distract attention from the significance of her actions:

**'Oh, Henry,' she exclaimed, 'I have been so naughty,' for she had decided to take up this line. 'We ran over a cat, Charles told me not to jump out, but I would, and look!' She held out her bandaged hand. 'Your poor Meg went such a flop' (214).**

Margaret plays down the radicalism of defiant actions, and invokes gender stereotypes to lessen the significance of her challenge to the men. This is essentially an act of appeasement which is both dishonest and politically problematic, in that it reinforces stereotypical mainstream conceptions of women and dangerously implicates Margaret in the very power structures she is seeking to moderate and control: "His [Charles Wilcox's] father accepted this explanation, and neither knew that Margaret had artfully prepared the way for it. It fitted in too well with their view of feminine nature" (214). Ironically, the intellectual cunning displayed by Margaret inherently contradicts the stereotypical view of women as over-emotional and irrational subscribed to by the Wilcox men. In fact, Margaret is exercising the kind of shrewd, manipulative thinking employed by the men of business themselves. However, this kind of compromise is inherently problematic: Margaret not only surrenders her own political values, but also becomes complicit in the oppressive power structures of the dominant culture. Moreover, she herself also becomes subjected to Henry's patriarchal power, this being subtly indicated by the author describing her as "obeying" her husband's command to "hurry up and change" (214).

Helen's radicalism at Oniton leads directly to her second act of social rebellion. Whereas her actions at the wedding reception are about social and economic injustice ("I'll stand injustice no longer. I'll show up the wretchedness that lies under this luxury, this talk of impersonal forces, this cant about God doing what we're too slack to do ourselves" (223)), her sexual encounter with Leonard Bast, occurring both outside of marriage and between members of different classes, is a deliberate and calculated act of subversion of the Edwardian sexual code. Numerous critics have contended that this plot development is the novel's major flaw, and have accordingly condemned it as



unconvincing.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, Forster's own mother, Lilly, was scandalised by the "immorality" of the concept of a child born out of wedlock, as was the writer Edmund Gosse.<sup>36</sup> Forster himself felt that the event was "inartistic", but nevertheless steadfastly refused to omit it from the final draft. I feel that Helen's pregnancy is neither unconvincing nor ill-suited to what has preceded it. Rather, it is directly linked to the novel's central issue of the intersection between mainstream and marginal cultures, as it precipitates and inspires Margaret's eventual rejection of the model of compromise she has thus far endorsed.

Moreover, one should not regard Helen's pregnancy as accidental, the result of a moment of ill-judged passion. When Helen tells her sister of the manner in which she came to have sex with Leonard, she makes it clear that it was she who seduced him:

**'I pressed him to tell me. He said no one must know; it was something to do with his wife. Right up to the end we were Mr Bast and Miss Schlegel. I was going to tell him that he must be frank with me when I saw his eyes, and guessed that Mr Wilcox had ruined him in two ways, not one. I drew him to me. I made him tell me. I felt very lonely myself. He is not to blame. He would have gone on worshipping me. I want never to see him again, though it sounds appalling. I wanted to give him money and feel finished. Oh, Meg, the little that is known about these things!'** (305).

This admission constitutes a reversal of the stereotype of woman as the passive participant in sexual relations, the body surrendered for the enjoyment of the lustful male. Here Helen is seen as the initiator of the sexual act, while Leonard is cast in the role of the passive recipient of her sexual advances. Moreover, the manner in which the seduction is described suggests that it was a deliberate act on Helen's part, not a mistake made in the heat of passion. Helen's encounter with Leonard is in part an act of sympathy towards a man ruined by both the economic and moral forces of his society, but it also has a broader ideological significance: by sleeping with a lower-class man out of wedlock, and ultimately becoming pregnant as a result of this, Helen intentionally and unequivocally transports herself to the margins of her society. And she is keenly aware of

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<sup>35</sup> Oliver Stallybrass writes in his introduction to the novel that "Reader after reader ... has expressed plain incredulity. Snow Wedgwood ... remarked that it 'could be conceived ... only by a person who knows nothing of the impulses of the Flesh'. Percy Lubbock thought it, more colloquially, 'rather steep'" (13).

<sup>36</sup> In his introduction to the novel, Oliver Stallybrass cites a diary entry by Forster in which the author writes, "Mother is evidently deeply shocked by *Howards End*. The shocking part is also inartistic, and so I cannot comfort myself by a superior standpoint" (13).

this consequence: “... I have no right to trouble people. I cannot fit in with England as I know it. I have done something that the English never pardon” (286).

Furthermore, Margaret realises that, in her need, Helen has had to turn to a form of radical politics for help in her predicament. Margaret’s own brand of well-meaning liberal feminism cannot assist Helen in this instance: “Margaret guessed at Monica’s type ... the crude feminist of the South, whom one respects but avoids. And Helen had turned to it in her need!” (287). Helen is in literal and figurative exile; like Maurice, she can no longer live within the society where once she, however uncomfortably and reluctantly, possessed power. Forster seems to be suggesting that the moderation and compromise displayed by Margaret in her marriage to Henry cannot assist those, like Helen and Maurice, who refuse to conduct themselves on the terms of the dominant culture. Helen’s personal crisis precipitates in Margaret a radical reassessment of her political standpoint, resulting in her decisive clash with Henry. The suffering of her sister at the hands of mainstream society causes her to alter her attitude towards and means of resistance to the dominant culture.

However, it is the Basts who provide the impetus for the Schlegels’ resistance to mainstream society. In addition, it is when one examines the interaction of Leonard Bast and the Schlegels that one sees explicitly the manner in which Forster conceives of the *intersection* (as opposed to the mere opposition) of dominant and marginal cultures, as, despite the very real economic disparities between the Basts and the Schlegels, both sets of characters share a similar estrangement from mainstream power structures, and therefore cannot properly be described as being set off from one another. Rather, the two groups of characters inform one another and show the ideological links that exist between different manifestations of oppression. In *Howards End*, then, we see a more diffuse, extensive conception of marginality. In this way, Forster eschews the rigid binaries of *A Room with a View*, in which the classes are neatly opposed to one another. Indeed, the motivation for the Schlegel sisters’ warming towards Leonard is his sensitivity to art and culture, his rejection of the purely material basis of Edwardian society, his striving for a more holistic and integrated sense of being, as represented by his “heroic” walk.

However, while there are several points of similarity between Leonard and the Schlegel sisters, it can be seen that, in general, while the Schlegels exemplify the concept

of cultural marginality, the Basts generally represent the urban economic underclass of the modern era, thereby importing into the novel the modernist element that differentiates it so significantly from the preceding works. In a sense, they are the Emersons horribly transmogrified. Whereas in *A Room with a View* the lower middle-class characters were the inspiration for social comedy and the exposure of bourgeois hypocrisy and insincerity, the Basts are the “odours from the abyss” (124) exemplifying societal disintegration and urban deprivation. As David Medalie points out, the name “Bast” is suggestive of “bastard”,<sup>37</sup> with this implying the perceived promiscuity and sexual “immorality” widely attributed to the lower classes by the upper ones.<sup>38</sup> On a more specific level, the name also suggests the “immorality” of Leonard’s relationship with Jacky, to whom he is initially not married. More generally, though, and as David Medalie explains, the name suggests a deep and painful estrangement from broader society. Leonard Bast is like the bastard child – rejected, shunned, incapable of social advancement or acceptance. In this sense, then, he must be regarded as the most marginal character in the novel. The principal role of the Basts in the novel is that of introducing the concept of economic marginality into the novel and, with this, the author’s anxiety over the future trajectory of the modern capitalist society.<sup>39</sup> From the moment of the introduction of the Basts, issues of class loom large in the novel.

The Basts and the Schlegels are both fatefully present at a performance of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony. As in *A Room with a View*, the Romantic composer’s music precedes an event of momentous significance for the novel’s central characters, whose very different lives become entangled over a material possession – an umbrella.

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<sup>37</sup> Medalie writes in the manuscript of *E.M. Forster’s Modernism*, “As Leonard Bast’s name suggests, he has become the ‘bastard’, the illegitimate child of society – a particularly unenviable fate in a novel that makes so much of heirs and the value, whether material or transcendent, of legacies. He is a bastard because he is a clerk; being a clerk effectively bars him from social ascendancy. He wears, therefore, an increasingly defeated air and has little in common, with, for instance, H.G.Wells’s resourceful clerks and bourgeois heroes” (18).

<sup>38</sup> Jeffrey Weeks writes in his chapter “Inverts, Perverts, and Mary-Annes: Male Prostitution and the Regulation of Homosexuality in England in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries” (contained in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming Our Gay and Lesbian Past*) that “A related phenomenon [of male prostitution] was the widely recognized upper-middle-class fascination with crossing the class divide, a fascination that shows a direct continuity between male heterosexual and male homosexual mores” (203).

<sup>39</sup> Forster’s conception of the endpoint of the trajectory of the modern society is put forward in his short story “The Machine Stops” (*Collected Short Stories* 109-46), in which the author conceives of a world in the future in which there has been an almost total breakdown in personal relations. In this world, human beings communicate indirectly via a “machine”, a system not unlike the present-day Internet.

Forster's inclusion of this detail is thematically significant: while the umbrella is a trivial, commonplace item for the middle-class Schlegels, for Leonard Bast its loss is an economic catastrophe. The loss of the umbrella, and Leonard's resultant profound agitation, foreground Leonard's position on the economic margins of society. As Forster writes in the following chapter, "The boy, Leonard Bast, stood at the *extreme verge* of gentility" (58, emphasis mine).

The political implications of this loss are expounded in the following chapter, where Forster discusses the socio-political dilemma of his age: the problem of reconciling the democratic ideal of equality with the economic realities of a hierarchically-arranged capitalist society. What Forster is concerned with here is the demise of liberal humanism as a potent ideological force within his society. Leonard Bast is a living example of the tragic insufficiency of a doctrine that upholds equality as the supreme value in a humanly-responsive society, but simultaneously endorses a mode of economic production that undercuts and, in Leonard's case, negates that very ideal. Leonard undermines the validity of the dominant political doctrine of his day – namely, the idea that society is progressing and improving with each successive generation, that justice and dignity are being incrementally extended to increasingly larger numbers of people.

Forster describes Leonard's ideological predicament in thoroughly political terms: "But in his day the angel of Democracy had arisen, enshadowing the classes with leathern wings, and proclaiming, 'All men are equal – all men, that is to say, who possess umbrellas'" (58). This image can be seen to display a curious duality. In terms of conventional Biblical imagery, angels are associated with light and good news, and are generally associated with hope and goodwill. But here the "angel of Democracy" represents the very inverse of these traditional associations. The democratic ideal creates expectations which Forster feels are unable to be met. Leonard Bast is himself the very epitome of those failed expectations. As Margaret acutely – but rather cruelly, I feel – observes, "She knew this type very well – the vague aspirations, the mental dishonesty, the familiarity with the outsides of books" (123). The Basts serve the more subtle purpose of foregrounding the manner in which society has failed certain sectors of the population; in other words, Forster suggests that the ideological perspectives upon which Edwardian society is premised are fundamentally flawed and deceptive. In this way, then, Forster

suggests the inherent instability of the cultural centre, which, he suggests, is based on faulty assumptions about political economy.

Whereas the Basts exemplify the issue of economic marginality, the cultural centre is represented powerfully, and with impressive complexity, by means of Forster's depiction of the Wilcox family. In this regard, it is interesting to peruse the early reviews of the novel, many of which are glowing in their praise of the Wilcox family. Indeed, it seems that Forster's analysis of culturally central values was so accurately transposed to his presentation of the Wilcoxes that the majority of critics failed entirely to apprehend the manner in which the novel destabilises and subverts the very values the family represents. As a *Punch* reviewer wrote, "... the Wilcoxes are England; they contain even more of the essence of England than Sunday afternoon, or Lords, or Sir William Bull" (Furbank 188). The Wilcox family is throughout associated with capitalism and colonialism, the two interlinked expressions of cultural chauvinism so central to the mainstream ideology of the Edwardian period. Moreover, the Wilcox men are specifically presented as conforming to the mainstream Edwardian masculine ideal. The family is throughout associated with athleticism and sporting prowess – an association that is implicitly linked with the physical vigour required for the imperial mission. Furthermore, Henry Wilcox is a superb instance of the archetypal patriarchal figure, this linking him to the skewed gender relations so typical of the period. Almost everything about the Wilcox family is suggestive of hierarchies and unequal power relations. In their relations with each other and the broader society, there is a distinct and pervasive element of domination and submission. As Henry Wilcox so categorically maintains, in the "battle of life" there are always winners and losers. When discoursing on political economy or social issues, Henry Wilcox speaks in terms of struggle and conquest, a discourse of domination and conquest that ties in nicely with his own complicity in the colonial project.

The Wilcoxes' cultural centrality is stressed from the novel's opening letters, where the family's collective fear of sexuality and emotional intimacy is seen as corresponding to that of the wider national culture. Given Forster's own experience of British society's intolerance of sexual alterity, this may be an attempt on the author's part to associate implicitly the Wilcoxes with the sexual repression of Edwardian society. It is suggested

that they are complicit in the oppression of sexual minorities, and this point is certainly reinforced when one considers the family's reaction to, and treatment of, Helen when it is discovered she is pregnant out of wedlock. When Margaret, Henry and the doctor enlisted by the latter are preparing to trap Helen at Howards End, the narrator observes, "The pack was turning on Helen, to deny her human rights, and it seemed to Margaret that all Schlegels were threatened with her. Were they normal? What a question to ask!" (282).

Indeed, the family's endorsement of mainstream sexuality is especially evident in Forster's depiction of Charles Wilcox and his wife, Dolly. Although direct authorial attention is only intermittently focused on these characters, they are nevertheless invested with a good deal of ideological import. This is achieved largely by Forster's insistence on the manner in which they exemplify mainstream heterosexual ideals. This is conveyed largely by means of Forster's emphasis on Charles's burgeoning bourgeois family and Dolly's position of submission in relation to her husband. Margaret senses as much when she examines their wedding photograph when visiting with Mrs Wilcox. In much the same manner as she later sees through the men's "chivalrous" behaviour in the railway car, she keenly apprehends the conventional sexuality informing Charles and Dolly's attraction to one another: "Dolly looked silly, and had one of those triangular faces that so often prove attractive to a robust man. She was very pretty" (81). As this description suggests, Dolly is aesthetic, but insubstantial. When one considers the manner in which Forster deliberately sets off her appearance of physical weakness against her husband's obvious strength, the photograph can be seen to mirror and exemplify the power imbalances in their relationship. Throughout the novel she is variously scolded (186) or ordered to remain silent (106). Although she is persistently ridiculed by Forster, her wretchedness derives in large part from her lack of power in her relationship. Throughout the novel she is seen as a pathetic victim of patriarchal power who, unlike Margaret, does not have the intellectual capacity to exploit her domestic power, and thus moderate her degree of disempowerment.

Just as Charles and Dolly's relationship is fraught with internal tension, so is their relationship with the mainstream power structures tenuous and unstable. In fact, Forster uses Dolly and Charles's marriage to foreground the inescapable contradictions and flaws within the capitalist system, the very system that initially accorded them their social

dominance. As Charles and Dolly seemingly incessantly reproduce (later in the novel the narrator wryly comments that “Nature is turning out Wilcoxes in this peaceful abode, so that they may inherit the earth” (187)), the wealth that sustains them is inexorably whittled down. In other words, mainstream sexuality actually undermines and compromises their economic power within society. This paradox then relates to the manner in which *Howards End* suggests the inherent instability of the national culture and the means by which it might be resisted and even overcome. The Charles and Dolly relationship, at first presented as ideal, is over the course of the novel problematised and exposed as fundamentally unstable. Indeed, at the novel’s close Dolly is presented not as the simpering bride, but as the helpless victim of an economic system that once seemed to offer her seemingly unlimited power and privilege:

**Dolly sighed and stared enviously round the drawing-room. She was beginning to lose her brightness and good looks. The Charleses were not well off, for Mr Wilcox, having brought up his children with expensive tastes, believed in letting them shift for themselves. After all, he had not treated them generously. Yet another baby was expected, she told Margaret, and they would have to give up the motor (259).**

In a sense, Dolly has become like Jacky. While both women are from the start presented as vulgar, these depictions are carefully contrasted to show how women from entirely opposite ends of the social spectrum are the victims of the very same forces of patriarchal oppression. Most crucially, Jacky is seen as the victim of Henry’s mainstream heterosexuality. By resorting to prostitution while stranded in Cyprus, she and Henry enact in a literal and direct sense the sexual exploitation of women so common in the period. In accordance with the skewed power dynamics between men and women, Jacky is destroyed (both personally and economically) by this relationship, whereas Henry emerges entirely unscathed, even when this information is leaked to Margaret. Similarly, over the course of her marriage to Charles, Dolly is ground down, both personally and economically, to a pitiful position of relative poverty and powerlessness.

However, the cultural centrality of the Wilcox family is most clearly apparent in its supreme patriarch, Henry Wilcox.<sup>40</sup> Henry is a man of business who, we are told, has “his hands ... on all the ropes of life” (138). He occupies a stereotypically masculine

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<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth Langland observes that “Henry Wilcox remains inscribed in a male mode of discourse, set within masculine imagery of dominance and conquest” (86).

commercial occupation and expects subservience and obedience from his family. His intensely conservative views on political economy and social justice are nicely expressed in an altercation with Helen over the fate of the Bastis, in which he bluntly states, “I am grieved for your clerk. But it is all in a day’s work. It’s part of the battle of life” (192). As was pointed out above, Henry conceives of human relations as being characterised by conflict and domination. He then goes on to chide Helen for her “sentimentality” over the poor:

**A word of advice. Don’t take up that sentimental attitude over the poor. See that she doesn’t, Margaret. The poor are poor, and one’s sorry for them, but there it is. As civilization moves forward, the shoe is bound to pinch in places, and it’s absurd to pretend that anyone is responsible personally (192).**

Like the broader national culture, Henry conceives of society as essentially progressive – in his view, “civilization is moving forward”. Given the novel’s profound anxiety about the changes in English society in the early twentieth century, one should regard Henry’s view as being implicitly called into question by the novel’s key themes. Like the broader Edwardian society, Henry dismisses philanthropy as utopian and idealistic; in his view, poverty is a given in society, and not something the wealthy should actively try to ameliorate. Poverty and human suffering are justified in terms of the august notion of social progress, which also conveniently absolves Henry of personal responsibility for those he has wronged.

Significantly, though, for all his apparent assertiveness about social justice, he is reticent about sexual matters and, as Margaret finds after their engagement, he is also thoroughly obtuse. His sexual reticence is carefully conveyed by Forster’s description of his first kiss with Margaret:

**The parade and the road after it were well-lighted, but it was darker in Aunt Juley’s garden. As they were going up the side path, through under some rhododendrons, Mr Wilcox, who was in front, said “Margaret” rather huskily, turned, dropped his cigar, and took her in his arms.**

**She was startled, and nearly screamed, but recovered herself at once, and kissed with a genuine love the lips that were pressed against her own. It was their first kiss, and when it was over he saw her safely to the door and rang the bell for her, but disappeared into the night before the maid answered it. On looking back, the incident displeased her. It was so isolated. Nothing in their previous conversation had heralded it, and, worse still, no tenderness had ensued. If a man cannot lead up to passion he can at all events lead down from it, and she had hoped, after her complaisance, for some**



**interchange of gentle words. But he had hurried away as if ashamed, and for an instant she was reminded of Helen and Paul (185-6).**

Henry has a fear of intimacy, and looks upon sexuality with a mixture of fear and distaste, hence the emphasis in the above passage on darkness and obscured visibility. For Henry, the expression of sexual desire is inappropriate in the “well-lighted” parade; rather, it must take place furtively, under the cover of darkness. There is also a predatory element to Henry’s actions, and Forster’s inclusion of the detail of Margaret’s instinct to scream is surely meant to accentuate this notion. Henry is ashamed of his sexual impulses and cannot properly integrate them with non-sexual human relations – hence the need to flee, both literally and figuratively, from the site of sexual intimacy. The kiss takes place in a sudden moment of (incipiently violent) sexual desire which is entirely dissociated from what has preceded it and what follows it. In this way, Forster hints at the lack of integration within Henry’s character of his sexual and non-sexual selves, while the reference to the awkward Helen-Paul affair extends this lack of integration to the Wilcox family in general. But Forster also manages to ascribe to Henry’s repressed behaviour a broader ideological significance. It must be agreed that the sexual reticence which Henry displays is also the reticence of the broader Edwardian society with regard to sexual matters. Like Henry, Edwardian England was furtive and dishonest about sexual matters, espoused and endorsed a separate moral code for men and women with regard to sexual matters, and reacted to issues of sexuality with a mixture of fear and shame. Moreover, the lack of integration Henry displays, as well as his inability to reconcile himself with his sexual impulses, accurately mirrors Edwardian England’s inability to reconcile itself with its own sexuality. These are themes Forster would tackle more directly in the posthumously published *Maurice*. Furthermore, and as the final sentence of the above extract suggests, there is weakness and fragility at the root of Henry’s actions. His behaviour is that of a fearful man; in essence, he exemplifies what Helen correctly observes to be the “panic and emptiness” at the heart of the family – and of the national culture. In this way, Henry’s fear of sexual intimacy can be seen to illustrate Forster’s major contention in the novel: that mainstream culture contains within it an essential fragility which may be taken advantage of so as to effect social change.

Indeed, this is the point that is driven home by the novel's ending, where we are presented with an image of patriarchy superseded by an evolved and vastly more egalitarian family structure. In the novel's final chapter, Forster consciously allows the values and ideals of the marginalised characters to triumph over those of the cultural mainstream. Accordingly, the setting is rural rather than urban, and the discourse is dominated by women, not men. The principal characters in the chapter, Margaret and Helen, are seen as being comfortable and integrated in their environment, in obvious contrast with the novel's sustained treatment of the theme of alienation and estrangement from the modern society: "July would follow with the little red poppies among the wheat, August with the cutting of the wheat. These little events would become part of her, year after year" (326). This image of permanence and duration is starkly juxtaposed with the novel's prior sustained engagement with the concept of flux: "It was the kind of scene that may be observed all over London, whatever the locality – bricks and mortar rising and falling with the restlessness of the water in a fountain" (59).

The chapter begins with Helen allowing the little country boy Tom to hold her baby. This ostensibly minor detail is suggestive of more fluid and evolved gender roles, as we are presented with the image of a young male taking on a nurturing role traditionally ascribed to girls and women. Indeed, Margaret herself comments that the little boy is "a wonderful nursemaid" (325). This opening detail prepares the reader for the more obvious and dramatic gender reversal that occurs later in the chapter, where Henry, formerly the novel's supreme patriarch and representative of mainstream culture, is presented as "weary" (330) and "pitiably tired" (332). Crucially, he is seen in the closing pages as both spiritually broken and subject to Margaret's (feminine) power. This point is reinforced by Forster's comment about Margaret's "triumph" in finally securing Howards End for herself: "There was something uncanny in her triumph. She, who had never expected to conquer anyone, had charged straight through these Wilcoxes and broken up their lives" (331).

Indeed, Margaret's surprise at having "conquered" the Wilcoxes demonstrates a major conceptual advance in Forster's thinking on the interaction of dominant and subordinate cultures. Whereas in *A Room with a View* Forster had conceived of mainstream power as monolithic and omnipotent, essentially incapable of being

subverted or thwarted (although able to be escaped or eluded), in *Howards End* the author allows his heroine to be victorious over the mighty forces of mainstream sexuality, politics and economics – hence the insistence in the final chapter on egalitarianism, the sacred value of the English countryside, and the power of women to confront and overcome patriarchy.

In a similar vein, the dominant image of Margaret and Helen together with her “illegitimate” child must be read as an implied rebuke to standard idealised portrayals of the bourgeois nuclear family. In the final chapter Forster presents an alternative and vastly more inclusive image of the family, an image in which a woman (Margaret) seems to be the empowered figure. In addition, the inclusion of the country boy Tom in this portrait suggests that, in a humane society, caring obligations should extend also to those to whom we are not related by blood. Tolerance of diversity is a key value in this new order, and this is the dominant value in Margaret’s discussion of “difference”, in which she affirms the importance of self-realisation:

**‘It is only that people are far more different than is pretended. All over the world men and women are worrying because they cannot develop as they are supposed to develop ... Don’t fret yourself, Helen. Develop what you have; love your child ... And others – others go further still, and move outside humanity altogether’ (328).**

Margaret stresses that personal development should never be subject to abstract norms and expectations created by society. What matters is that individuals have the freedom to develop themselves in accordance with what is right and natural for them. When one considers that this is precisely the issue that Forster proceeds to grapple with in *Maurice*, his novel on a homosexual theme, Margaret’s comments can be seen to be an indication of the emergence of an activist quality in Forster’s fiction and evidence of a more assertive and combative engagement with the dominant culture. It is precisely this active and brazen opposition to mainstream culture which is the most arresting feature of both *Maurice* and the posthumously published short stories.

*Maurice* was not published until 1971, a year after Forster's death, and, although the last of Forster's novels to be made available to the general public, it is in certain respects the key to grasping the full implications of Forster's cultural concerns in the other five major works. Because it deals most directly and obviously with an illicit and deviant social practice, it is the most brazenly political of Forster's novels, and may be read, when one considers the manner in which the narrative fuses both same-sex and inter-class desire, as a trenchant critique of Edwardian sexual and class hypocrisy. It is for this reason that I contend that the novel has been consistently misinterpreted by the majority of liberal humanist critics, who have regarded it generally as an inferior work, judging it in thoroughly aesthetic terms, such as plot, characterisation and "moral vision".<sup>41</sup> I would argue that this approach does not take into account the vastly different essence of the novel, which was written for different reasons and under different conditions from the others. In particular, an informed reading of the novel has to begin with the acknowledgment that this novel was not written for publication. As a result, it was written primarily not from an aesthetic standpoint, but rather as a personal exploration of a number of political issues relating to homosexual identity and subjectivity with which the author himself was grappling, and which he hoped the novel would help him resolve. *Maurice* is therefore a deeply political novel which demands a politically attuned analysis which is sensitive to the context, both personal and societal, in which it was written.

Before embarking upon such an analysis, it is necessary to preface the inquiry with a number of general observations about the cultural position of the novel's protagonist. In broad terms, Forster's presentation of the character of Maurice shows the author's concern with the notion of the intersection of dominant and marginal cultures as

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<sup>41</sup> Philip Toynbee's assessment of *Maurice*, contained in *The Critical Heritage*, edited by Philip Gardner, is a good example of the consequences of this style of criticism. Toynbee summarily dismisses the novel out of hand as "novelettish, ill-written, humourless and deeply embarrassing" (463). Similarly, Jeffrey Meyers condemns the novel as "thin", saying, "the homosexual theme [which] is oblique, ambiguous and interesting in the earlier work [*The Longest Journey*] becomes flat, banal and dull when it surfaces in *Maurice*" (61). Robert K. Martin points out in his essay "Edward Carpenter and the Double Structure of *Maurice*" that "*Maurice* remains E.M. Forster's least appreciated novel largely because it is also his least understood novel ... as a didactic work, it has been thought to lack the qualities of subtlety and irony that mark Forster's other works" (100).

it manifests itself within one ideologically fragmented subject. This thematically crucial cultural intersection occurs largely as a result of the fact that Maurice is situated simultaneously both at the centre and the margins of Edwardian English society.<sup>42</sup> As a Cambridge-educated, middle-class male, who in many respects embodies and articulates the public school ethos Forster satirises in *The Longest Journey*, Maurice exemplifies much of what is central to his culture, both intellectually and ideologically. But his sexuality cruelly contradicts his ostensible “normality”. Indeed, his sexuality alienates him from any truly meaningful participation in the culture of which he is, it seems, a supreme and hegemonic product. In terms of physical appearance and temperament, he seems to personify all his society erroneously assumes to be the attributes solely of the heterosexual male, and in this respect the novel may be read as a strenuous rejoinder on Forster’s part to stereotypical late-Victorian and Edwardian constructions of the homosexual male.<sup>43</sup> Accordingly, as the novel progresses Maurice finds himself entangled in a brutal, self-destructive paradox.

What differentiates *Maurice* especially from the earlier novels is its strangely empty atmosphere. While the other novels resound with dialogue and chatter, *Maurice* is dominated by our painful sense of the protagonist’s essential aloneness. The novel therefore suggests that the task of forging homosexual identity is a struggle that has to be undertaken alone, and without recourse to external sources of validation. As the novel shows, this is a painful process, but one which is ultimately worthwhile in the personal sense.<sup>44</sup> As a result, I regard Forster’s conception of Maurice’s personal struggle with his identity as one which is essentially solipsistic in nature: *Maurice* is a record of the struggle with the self, the author using this metaphysical view to show how the mainstream and the marginal can reside simultaneously in the consciousness of the

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<sup>42</sup> In *Homophobia: A History*, Byrne Fone writes, “Maurice is in every way a solid representative of English probity. But into his psychology Forster ‘dropped an ingredient that puzzles him, and wakes him up, and torments him, and finally saves him’” (310, quoted portion from the “Terminal Note” to *Maurice*).

<sup>43</sup> Jon Harned points out in his essay “Becoming Gay in E.M. Forster’s *Maurice*” the manner in which Forster deliberately rebuts the Edwardian stereotype of the effeminate male homosexual in his presentation of the protagonist: “... the novel stresses [Maurice’s] masculinity – his fondness for sports, his indifference to aesthetics, his likeness to his father in manner as well as appearance” (51). Byrne Fone writes that Maurice “is neither effete nor effeminate; nor is he possessed of that alleged ‘sympathy’ or ‘sensibility’ that nineteenth-century myth ascribed to homosexuals” (310).

<sup>44</sup> I deal with the novel’s politically problematic ending later in this chapter.

individual. This sense of ideological warfare within the psyche gives the novel its psychological tension and especial poignancy.

The novel begins with the protagonist as a boy on the verge of puberty. In this opening chapter, the novel's dominant themes of exclusion and alienation from the cultural mainstream are conveyed to the reader by means of metaphor and allegory. Most obviously, the image of the schoolboys massed together, unified and uniform, is arguably metaphorically suggestive of the cultural mainstream – the dominant, unified and apparently inviolable cultural mass from which Maurice finds himself increasingly estranged as the novel progresses. It can be argued, therefore, that when Mr Ducie takes Maurice aside, and thereby separates him from the other boys, Forster is suggesting that this is the crucial moment of Maurice's symbolic disjuncture from the cultural mainstream. Essentially, he is singled out by Mr Ducie as "other" and in need of special counsel. Furthermore, given that the novel proceeds to record the fear and hostility with which Edwardian society regarded male homosexuals,<sup>45</sup> it is not, I think, fanciful to point out that at this critical moment of cultural deviation Forster describes the other boys, who up until this point have been depicted as amiable and mutually supportive, as a "pack", with this suggesting latently violent impulses towards those considered "other": "The other masters, seeing that it was no good, called the pack off, and marshalled them along the cliff towards the downs" (16). In addition, the metaphorical qualities of this opening episode are reinforced by Forster's descriptions of the elemental landscape in which it takes place: "The day was grey and windless, with little distinction between clouds and sun" (18). With its connotations of ambiguity and obscured visibility, this monochromatic description is contrasted with the moral certitude and dogmatism displayed by Mr Ducie in his homily on the "mystery of sex" (18), and therefore seems to offer an implicit rejoinder to the simplicity and rigidity of his didacticism.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Jeffrey Weeks writes, "Of all the 'variations' of sexual behaviour, homosexuality has had the most vivid social pressure" (96). He goes on to account for the intensification of homophobic oppression in the Edwardian period as being the consequence of the "social-purity campaigns" of the latter part of the nineteenth century, in which "the dangers of male lust" and "the necessity for public decency" were stressed.

<sup>46</sup> Tariq Rahman writes in his essay "A Study of Alienation in E.M. Forster's *Maurice*", "In *Maurice* alienation from the self and the homosexual partner is symbolically conveyed through the imagery of light and darkness" (82).

Forster implies that Mr Ducie's dogmatic beliefs stem in part from various qualities embedded in his own character. Like Herbert Pembroke in *The Longest Journey*, Mr Ducie evidently considers himself to be a "progressive"<sup>47</sup> ("Mr Ducie would smile, for he was soaked in evolution" (16)), and Forster subtly presents him as displaying latent authoritarian tendencies ("...Mr Ducie was never deterred from doing what was right" (16)). He is deliberately and consciously differentiated from another of the masters, Mr Abrahams, who displays a humanistic permissiveness in his treatment of the boys, and therefore recalls Mr Jackson of the aforementioned novel. But Mr Ducie is also culturally marked in the text: in essence, he articulates the proliferation of sexological theories which attempted to classify, quantify and order human sexuality from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. This profusion of sexological theory was informed mainly by the idea of designating certain sexualities as deviant and pathological, and, indeed, much of Mr Ducie's enquiry may be interpreted as an attempt to propagate mainstream society's narrow conception of acceptable sexuality. Mr Ducie is thus the embodiment of Foucault's insight that, in the modern era, there arose an incitement to discourse around sex: "... sex became something to say, and to say exhaustively in accordance with deployments that were varied, but all, in their own way, compelling" (32).

The irony, of course, is that it is an unequivocal proponent of the values of the mainstream who leads the young Maurice towards a tacit acknowledgment of his own sexually "deviant" social status. As is suggested by his authoritarian impulses and moral fervour, Mr Ducie is intended to represent the dominant moral, religious and cultural values of Edwardian society. For example, his apparent concern about Maurice's largely female family (and therefore his exposure to a disproportionately high degree of feminine influence), can be seen to be motivated by his subscription to a number of highly influential, and widely accepted, Victorian theories about homosexuality, which defined it as a pathology arising from an overabundance of feminine influence and attention, and which, in a peculiar manifestation of misogyny, laid the "blame" for it specifically on the mother, who was believed to have somehow stunted her son's "correct" psycho-sexual

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<sup>47</sup> In this way, like *Howards End*, *Maurice* is deeply sceptical about the notions of "progress" and "social advancement" so predominant in the period.

development.<sup>48</sup> It is thus entirely fitting that Mr Ducie should interrupt Maurice's schoolboy chatter to ask suddenly, "You live with your mother, don't you?" (18), and then to follow up this intrusion with the more direct "So you don't know many men?" (18). This blunt and tactless probing establishes an interrogatory tone, and Mr Ducie from this point onwards becomes an increasingly oppositional figure, lingering throughout the novel as the germ of Maurice's acknowledgment of both his own alterity and mainstream society's hostility towards male homosexuality.

However, Mr Ducie's embrace of mainstream values is not confined simply to the intellectual or psychological debates of the day. Indeed, he is presented by Forster as an arrogant patriarchal figure who manages to patronise women while ostensibly praising them, his patriarchal aspect being reinforced by his appropriation of Maurice's father's role in educating his son about his sexual development and imparting to him the glory of male heterosexuality. However, Forster manages both to convey and critique this supposed patriarchal bond by illustrating that the justification for Mr Ducie's taking on Maurice's father's parental role is, in fact, predicated on a lie:

**'When I was your age, my father told me something that proved very useful and helped me a good deal.' This was untrue: his father had never told him anything. But he needed a prelude to what he was going to say (18).**

This thorough subscription to dominant cultural values and assumptions is sustained by the explanation that follows, where Mr Ducie is seen to invoke religious and moral sanction for heterosexuality. In doing so, he manages not only to convey his acceptance and validation of certain key moralising assumptions about the nature and purpose of human sexuality,<sup>49</sup> but also to deny implicitly all manifestations of sexuality

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<sup>48</sup> There was a proliferation of literature on this subject in the late nineteenth century, most of which was centred on the role of the mother in the psycho-sexual development of the child. Indeed, it is significant that the vast majority of these enquiries were directed towards males only. Such views were prominent in psychological and sociological discourse until well into the 1960s. In this regard, Jon Harned writes, "Forster does not explicitly advance a theory to explain why Maurice becomes homosexual, and one cannot plausibly invoke the misogynistic and homophobic cliché of post-World War II American psychiatry that he is the victim of an overly devoted mother and an absent father" (50-1).

<sup>49</sup> John Marshall observes, "Perhaps the most striking characteristic of the late nineteenth century was the consolidation of ideals relating to domesticity, femininity, marriage and the family. Central to this was a belief in the necessary link between sexuality and marriage ... Since the family was by this time seen as the central symbol of a stable society, it was particularly important in the eyes of the social purity campaigners that male lust be regulated and harmonized in accordance with the highest moral ideals" (137-8).



that do not fall within its narrow ambit. In this way, his religious comments intensify the nascent homophobic tone that has already been established, and which has been alluded to above. There is a comic or satirical element to his simplistic and unproblematic portrayal of what is arguably the most complex, and least understood, aspect of the human condition:

**Then, very simply and kindly, he approached the mystery of sex. He spoke of male and female, created by God in the beginning in order that the earth might be peopled, and of the period when male and female receive their powers (18).**

It is ironic that what is described as a “mystery” is defined and explained so swiftly and sententiously. Mr Ducie is apparently so confident of his understanding of the subject that it presents to him no paradoxes, contradictions or moral dilemmas. However, the speed with which so complex a matter is approached and dealt with does indeed suggest a certain degree of embarrassment on the teacher’s part, with this implying that, despite his apparent progressiveness, he too is afflicted by the mainstream Edwardian reticence about sexual matters. There is an irony, too, in the disjuncture between Mr Ducie’s ostensibly reverent affirmation of the holiness and sanctity of sexuality and his embarrassment at having to discuss it, which suggests an aversion to its perceived baseness. In addition, it might be argued that the purely procreative function he assigns human sexuality further reinforces the heterosexist tone established earlier in the chapter.

Mr Ducie does not specifically or directly refer to homosexuality, but his religious affirmations and the emphasis he places on procreation firmly establish his rejection of all other possible manifestations of human sexuality. Furthermore, while the mock-heroic tone of his comment on the “period when the male and female receive their powers” (18) is evidently intended by Forster to be comic, it can also be seen to have a wider societal and cultural significance. As puberty represents the point at which, at least biologically, boys become men and girls become women, this is also the “period” at which boys and girls learn of the “power” they will possess as adults in a thoroughly and rigorously gendered society. In particular, as boys become men, they learn of the power they are granted over women, and women learn of the lack of power that characterises their relationships with men, and with male-dominated society in general. This point relates nicely to Mr Ducie’s views on women, which occur some paragraphs later. Here he

displays rigidly essentialist thinking, neatly defining and polarising the roles and functions of the sexes:<sup>50</sup>

**He spoke of the ideal man – chaste with asceticism. He sketched the glory of Woman. Engaged to be married himself, he grew more human, and his eyes coloured up behind the strong spectacles; his cheek flushed. To love a noble woman, to protect and serve her – this, he told the little boy, was the crown of life (19).**

Apart from its inflexible prescriptions, this passage suggests an uncompromising and wholehearted embrace of mainstream Edwardian gender stereotypes, with this further bolstering the reader's understanding of Mr Ducie as the supreme representative of the sexual morality of the dominant culture. Furthermore, the certainty with which he imparts his view of the role of women in society implies the position of social empowerment from which he speaks, as well as his own reactionary paradigm. This notion is subtly underscored by Forster's capitalisation of "Woman" while leaving "man" entirely in the lower-case, which suggests that, in Edwardian society, women are assigned a specific, clearly defined and readily identifiable essence. In contrast, as individuals, men are granted a multiplicity of identity and essence which is withheld from the disempowered. His tone is composed and lofty, and apparently unmarred by doubt or reservation; indeed, it is the tone of the one who wields power, defines categories, and assigns roles. Once more, his views are presented as divinely sanctioned – and therefore sacred, unquestionable and inviolable: "It all hangs together – all – and God's in his heaven. All's right with the world" (19).

But Forster includes here a satirical element similar to the one identified in the excerpt above to foreground the comic and absurd aspects of Mr Ducie's views, which, it is suggested, are both untruthful and simplistic. In this case, Mr Ducie's views on the "ideal" man being one who is "chaste with asceticism" are immediately contradicted by his own vastly less than ascetic physical responses to the thought of his impending marriage. He is described as becoming "more human" (with this suggesting that to be ascetic is, in fact, to be repressed and unnatural), while the description of "his eyes colour[ing] up" and his "cheek flush[ing]" (19) implies a passionate sexual urge. This

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<sup>50</sup> This is precisely the conception of the "Eternal Woman" which Lucy struggles to resist in *A Room with a View*.

juxtaposition also hints at the teacher's hypocrisy and insincerity – and, by implication, that of society in general. Forster thus presents the dominant culture's attitude towards sexuality as characterised by dishonesty and duplicity.

However, Forster goes beyond merely suggesting that Mr Ducie's explanation of human sexuality is deficient, limited and subjective and seems actively to imply that it is culturally constructed and socially imposed. This is suggested by the image of Mr Ducie inscribing upon the "smooth piece of sand" (18-19) a diagrammatical representation of his narrow and limited conception of sexuality:

**Still smoking his pipe, Mr Ducie got up, and choosing a smooth piece of sand drew diagrams on it with his walking-stick. 'This will make it easier,' he said to the boy, who watched dully: it bore no relation to his experiences (19).**

What is most striking about this passage is the metaphorical suggestiveness of its central image. The smooth sand is evidently intended by Forster to represent human sexuality in its natural, culturally unmediated state – which is blank, featureless, and devoid of moral prescriptions. However, by carving his diagrams onto it, Mr Ducie can be seen to impose upon the natural realm his own socially constructed and culturally informed understandings of sexuality. Forster therefore suggests that such an act is in fact a *disfigurement* of the aesthetic appeal of a potentially free and permissive sexual realm. The diagrams he draws are hideous and repulsive, and they seem to suggest a conception of human sexuality as something which is essentially primitive and base. It may also be said that, as basic diagrams of the sexual act, they suggest simplified understandings of sexuality in *theory*, which are powerfully contrasted with the complex and paradoxical sexuality in *practice* the novel proceeds to delineate. The ugliness of the diagrams, which appear both base and reductive, is hammered home when one considers that it is Mr Ducie himself who, once the interview has ended, says, "I never scratched out those infernal diagrams" (20). Thus Forster also cleverly exposes the hypocrisy of the Edwardians towards sexual matters, as, although Mr Ducie pretends to be "soaked in evolution", he in fact feels that sex is something essentially shameful that should be effaced from public view.

But Chapter One also represents a sustained introduction to Maurice's own liminal, marginalised position within his society. As was pointed out above, his physical

separation from the rest of the boys is intended by Forster to be a metaphorical representation of his divergence from the cultural centre. This notion is accentuated when the narrator describes Maurice's response to the diagrams Mr Ducie scratches onto the sand: the diagrams are said to "[bear] no relation to his experiences" (19). Superficially, this may be taken to mean that the young Maurice is entirely ignorant of all sexual matters. But it can also be seen to prefigure the irrelevance to him of heterosexuality as a sexual mode in his adult life. The diagrams represent sexual acts he will never perform and body parts he will never encounter. This point is underscored by Forster's emphasis on the young boy's failure to synthesise or process properly the flood of incomprehensible facts:

**He was attentive, as was natural when he was the only one in the class, and he knew that the subject matter was serious and related to his own body. But he could not himself relate it; it fell to pieces as soon as Mr Ducie put it together, like an impossible sum. In vain he tried (19).**

While Forster proceeds to show that this is partly due to the fact that Maurice has not yet properly entered puberty, its relevance to his subsequent position as a homosexual male is arresting in terms of the accuracy of its psychological judgements. As a marginalised and disempowered figure, Maurice will always occupy the position of having to decode, anticipate and wrestle with a confusing system of sexual desire he does not understand. As Forster proceeds to show in the novel, Maurice is wholly aware in theory of the sexual role Edwardian society expects him to play. In a symbolic sense, he has studied Mr Ducie's diagrams, and is able to answer his questions confidently and convincingly. He has the capacity to develop a "spurious intelligence" (19), and thereby delude mainstream society into assuming his cultural centrality. Indeed, the image of Maurice's "surface flicker" responding to Mr Ducie's "beaconing glow" masterfully conveys the power of the dominant cultural figure over the liminal one, who attempts to mirror and reproduce the heterosexuality of the former. In addition, the distinction between Mr Ducie's powerful "glow" and Maurice's meagre "flicker" appropriately conveys the power imbalance between the two, with Forster thereby suggesting how the disempowered figure craves the approval and validation of the dominant one.

In general, this introductory episode can be seen to be permeated by subtle but unremitting irony. Indeed, it is after Mr Ducie's pompous and turgid explanation of human sexuality, which fittingly culminates in a rapturous affirmation of heterosexuality ("Male and female! Ah wonderful!" (19)), that Maurice, not comprehending the full implications of his words, remarks, "I think I shall not marry" (19). Ironically, Mr Ducie's induction of Maurice into his proper role as a heterosexual, Christian, patriarchal male fails abysmally, and succeeds only in alerting Maurice to his own innate and essential alterity, as well as to the hypocrisy, insufficiency and insincerity of traditional late-Victorian and Edwardian explanations of human sexuality. This is conveyed by his sudden and apparently unprovoked outburst of loathing for Mr Ducie and the cultural values he represents: "And suddenly, for an instant of time, the boy despised him. 'Liar,' he thought. 'Liar, coward, he's told me nothing'" (20). This is the first crucial step in Maurice's rejection of the cultural mainstream, but, as the chapter's final image suggests, the movement towards self-realisation (a pressing theme in all of Forster's fiction), what the narrator describes as his "own painful dawn", will be a protracted and arduous one.

This induction scene should not be regarded simply as a decorous preamble; rather, in its contrasting of the central and the marginal, the empowered and the liminal, it provides a metaphorical crystallisation of the novel's most central cultural concerns, which are more directly presented as the narrative unfolds. As I pointed out above, Maurice himself is a tempestuous site of conflicting cultural values and interests, and this curious cultural positioning is at once foregrounded by Forster in the chapter that follows, where the protagonist's hegemonic position within the socio-economic hierarchy is firmly and irrefutably established.

The Halls are an upper middle-class family, securely and comfortably domiciled in the affluent Home Counties. As the narrator comments, "It was a land of facilities, where nothing had to be striven for, and success was indistinguishable from failure" (21). The socially privileged and dominant position the Halls occupy within English society is subtly underscored by Forster in his description of how Maurice's greatcoat is "dropped ... for the servants on the floor of the hall" (21). However, even within this suburban landscape of affluence and ease, the young Maurice's deviancy seeps in to disrupt the atmosphere of "soft chairs" and "easy games" (21). The protagonist notices that George,

a young boy employed by the Halls as a garden-boy, is missing from the home, and suffers a brief emotional breakdown as a result of it. The intensity of this “childish collapse” (21), with its emphasis on the primacy within Maurice’s consciousness of same-sex attachments, alerts the reader to the young protagonist’s emergent homosexual impulses:

**He clenched his teeth, and a great mass of sorrow that had overwhelmed him by rising to the surface began to sink. He could feel it going down into his heart until he was conscious of it no longer. ‘I’m all right.’ He looked around him fiercely and dried his eyes (22).**

This emotionally intense description is suffused with connotations of repression and denial, with this bolstering the reader’s apprehension that these unruly and refractory emotions are dangerously deviant and illicit. Indeed, the tension inherent in the image between surface and core, appearance and reality, furthers our sense that these emotions represent a far more significant and potentially destabilising force than a mere childish expression of disappointment or sorrow. The young Maurice here displays a determination to repress and submerge his essence, while the reference to his “look[ing] around him fiercely” reveals a determination to adhere to traditional masculine ideals of non-emotionalism and level-headed composure. At this point in the novel, Forster seems to suggest that Maurice’s homosexuality is essential and innate – hence the images of depth and conscious repression in the passage quoted above. As the imagery in this incident and the opening chapter suggests, Forster appears to conceive of Maurice’s homosexuality as an objective reality which he as an individual has to struggle to accommodate. Accordingly, Maurice’s sexual “deviancy” is stressed from the outset; he is presented by the author as being “other” from the opening chapter. However, this characteristically essentialist view is not endorsed when one considers the novel as a whole, and Forster goes to great pains to problematise and disrupt essentialist conceptions of and explanations for homosexuality. This is particularly true when one considers his depiction of Clive’s sexual reversal and the bisexual fluidity accorded to Alec Scudder, who is described at one point as flirting with the housemaids. In this respect, too, Forster can be seen to call into question the binaristic conception of sexualities falling neatly and unambiguously into the hierarchies mainstream/marginal

and heterosexual/homosexual. Jon Harned sums up the novel's presentation of the concept of sexual orientation as one which is essentially pluralistic and fluid:

**The novel does not end with Maurice's "coming out", his finding out the truth of his sexuality within himself. The lower-class, bisexual Alec and the middle-class, homosexual Maurice must improvise a new kind of relationship out of the similarities and the differences in their experiences (66).**

Indeed, the intensity of emotion which the young protagonist feels for the working-class garden-boy George prefigures the adult Maurice's intense physical attraction for, and eventual emotional commitment to, the working-class gamekeeper Alec Scudder later in the novel. But this event has also an autobiographical element to it, and is related not only to events in Forster's own childhood, but also to certain dominant patterns of sexual attraction within Forster's adult life more generally. In the biography *E.M. Forster: A Life*, P.N. Furbank details an emotionally intense, and subsequently romanticised and idealised, friendship Forster himself enjoyed with a young garden servant at Rooksnest, his childhood home near the town of Stevenage, and the model for the house *Howards End* in the novel of the same name:

**Morgan [E.M. Forster] had a solace, however, and this was the garden-boys ... Morgan's greatest affection was for Ansell, his first and never-forgotten friend: 'a snub-nosed, pallid, even-tempered youth'. The two used to spend hours larking among the Franklyns' straw-stacks or swinging on the tree in the meadow and enjoyed lying in each other's arms, screaming and tickling . . . The Ansell period was an idyllic one for Morgan, and instinctively he clung to his happiness and was unwilling to grow up . . . Mr Hervey [his tutor at this time], who disapproved of his childish romplings with Ansell, began a campaign to make a regular, manly English boy of him, telling his mother it was high time Morgan learned cricket or some other sensible sport" (30 – 31).**

The significance of Forster's idealisation of his friendship with this young boy is apparent simply when one considers that the name "Ansell" features both in Forster's second novel, *The Longest Journey*, in the character of Stewart Ansell, Rickie Elliot's devoted friend, and in the posthumously published story "Ansell", which details the relationship between an academically repressed Cambridge graduate (presumably, a distillation of Forster himself) and a rural boy who gives the story its title. In this story, Forster again includes a reference to playing in the haystacks, and again imports an autobiographical element into the fiction.

But this acknowledgment of Maurice's nascent sexual deviancy is dramatically interrupted by Forster once again foregrounding the socio-economic dominance which he enjoys as a consequence of his class and gender. Forster draws attention to Maurice's dominance in the Hall household simply by virtue of his being male. We are told that everyone, including his sisters Kitty and Ada, make a fuss over him when he returns from school: "It was nice to be the centre of attraction and show off about school" (21). But even in this depiction there is ideological tension. We are told later in the chapter that, when playing Halma, "He beat Ada, who worshipped him, and Kitty, who did not" (22), with this suggesting that there is a degree of resentment, at least on Kitty's part, of Maurice's privileged status within the bourgeois family. Indeed, these gender issues within the Edwardian household itself are probed more fully as the novel progresses. For example, in Part II of the novel, Kitty expresses her resentment at Maurice's denying her an opportunity to study "Domestic Economy": "Kitty's grievances were mainly financial: she wanted an allowance. Ada had one. Ada, as heiress-apparent, had to 'learn the value of money. But I am not to learn anything.' Clive decided that he would tell his friend to treat the girl better" (109). Maurice wields a disproportionate amount of power in the Hall household, a power imbalance which results in a degree of shared resentment by all three women. Indeed, the harshness of Kitty's treatment seems directly proportional to her intelligence. Unlike Ada, Kitty has a critical mind, speaking out and challenging male views: for example, when Kitty asserts that the purpose of public life is "to give a comfortable home" (94), her mother responds initially by assuming that she cannot possibly grasp basic logic ("'Is and ought are not the same thing,' said her mother" (94)), and then by telling her that she "ought not to be interrupting Mr Durham" (94). On the other hand, Ada is pretty and charming, and more ready to acquiesce to male wishes and desires. As such, she has a higher market value within the heterosexual economy, a point Forster addresses more directly when presenting Mrs Durham's conjugal ambitions for her son (93). Significantly, though, Forster sees the three Hall women as united in their common oppression, a view which seems to foreshadow women's increasing rejection of their subordinate position in society later in the century: "The three women were evidently fond of one another. Clive saw relations that he had not guessed, for they were expanding in the absence of their man. Plants live by the sun, yet a few of them flower at



nightfall, and the Halls reminded him of the evening primroses that starred a deserted valley at Penge” (109-110).

This common oppression is carefully presented in Part Two of the novel, where Forster describes Maurice’s personal hegemony within the family home:

**No one worried Maurice. He had established his power at home, and his mother began to speak of him in the tones she had reserved for her husband. He was not only the son of the house, but more of a personage than had been expected. He kept the servants in order, understood the car, subscribed to this and not to that, tabooed certain of the girls’ acquaintances. By twenty-three he was a promising suburban tyrant, whose rule was the stronger because it was fairly just and mild. Kitty protested, but she had no backing and no experience. In the end she had to say she was sorry and to receive a kiss (93).**

Forster’s depiction of Maurice’s power within the family home raises the notions of alterity and marginality discussed above. The paradox of Maurice’s social and personal position is clearly evident when one considers the manner in which he assumes the power and dominance that come with being male in his society, but is simultaneously disempowered by his acute awareness of his own sexual alterity. This notion is particularly apparent when one considers the manner in which the chapter from which the above extract was taken closes. After pointing out Maurice’s dominance within the home, Forster goes on to provide a description of him which seems to present him as a thoroughly conservative and morally inflexible young man. We are told that his habits were “regular” (with this suggesting both stability and purpose), that his life centred around a fairly stable and predictable work routine, that he read *The Daily Telegraph* (a conservative newspaper) on the train to work, and that he “laid down the law” (93) when he returned home in the evening. But these images of masculine dominance and inflexibility are tenuous and unstable, and are fundamentally based on falsity and misconception. This notion is conveyed in the final paragraph of this chapter, where Forster writes, “But every Wednesday he slept at Clive’s little flat in town. Weekends were also inviolable. They said at home, ‘You must never interfere with Maurice’s Wednesdays or with his weekends. He would be most annoyed’” (93). There is also, surely, within the quotation itself an internal tension between Maurice’s implied weekly illicit tryst and the deference of his female family members, who respond to his actions on the assumption that they are those of the heterosexual male, whose wishes and desires

must not be questioned, scrutinised, or impeded. Forster also evidently intends this tension to have a comic dimension.

A similar ideological clash is evident in Chapter Two of the novel. As was pointed out above, Forster sets up a contrast between Maurice's personal and socio-economic hegemony (with regard to the former, in the family home itself, and, in the case of the latter, within Edwardian English society and culture more generally) and his own disempowered position as a consequence of his essential nature, as is evidenced by his breakdown over the loss of George, the garden boy. But the chapter continues to oscillate violently between these two distinct ideological poles. Such a disjuncture is apparent in Maurice's dealings with the Howells, servants employed by his mother, where the young Maurice is seen to assert his economic and social dominance over the servant class. But even this rather feudalistic exchange is qualified by Maurice's own cultural deviancy: by having Maurice question the Howells over the reasons for George's dismissal, Forster succeeds in importing into the dialogue the very same ideological ambivalence evident in his breakdown before his mother, where prescribed masculine non-emotionalism succumbed to homoerotic passion:

... [He] ran into the garden again to see the coachman. 'How d'ye do, Howell? How's Mrs Howell? How d'ye do, Mrs Howell,' and so on, speaking in a patronising voice, different from that he used to gentlefolks. Then, altering back, 'Isn't it a new garden boy?'

'Yes, Master Maurice.'

'Was George too old?'

'No, Master Maurice. He wanted to better himself.'

'Oh, you mean he gave notice.'

'That's right.'

'Mother said he was too old and you gave him notice.'

'No, Master Maurice.'

'My poor woodstacks'll be glad,' said Mrs Howell. Maurice and the late garden boy had been used to play in them.

'They are Mother's woodstacks, not yours,' said Maurice and went indoors. The Howells were not offended, though they pretended to be so to one another. They had been servants all their lives, and liked a gentleman to be a snob. 'He has quite a way with him already,' they told the cook. 'More like his father' (23).

Apart from illustrating the extent to which the young protagonist appreciates the class distinctions that order his society, this extract reveals the ease with which Maurice operates within this hierarchised, power-laden system. We are made aware that he is able to manipulate and exploit his power over his social subordinates with a degree of skill

and dexterity that exists in counterpoint to his disempowered position as regards his sexuality.

Indeed, much of the novel is concerned with Maurice's position within the Edwardian class system, and this issue provides Forster with a template for exploring two competing ideals of homosexual identity, both of which are directly related to the question of class. Although the novel may legitimately be read as a fairly traditional narrative of self-realisation which is similar in many respects to the earlier Italian comedies, such an analysis would be blind to the novel's important and insightful political dimension. Indeed, as Robert K. Martin has pointed out in his essay "Edward Carpenter and the Double Structure of *Maurice*", *Maurice* is not so much about its protagonist's personal development (an essentially humanist interpretation), as it is an exploration of two competing modes of homosexual identity. As Gregory W. Bredbeck points out in his essay in *Queer Forster*, "'Queer Superstitions': Forster, Carpenter, and the Illusion of (Sexual) Identity", the novel represents a rejection of the Platonic, idealised conception of male homosexuality in favour of a more politically radical and activist understanding of homosexual identity:

**The love affair in that novel [*Maurice*] between Alec Scudder (a gamekeeper) and Maurice represents in Martin's theory an embrace of Carpenter's socialist views of homosexuality, and also functions to dislodge the asceticism and classism associated with Maurice's inaugural affair with Clive Durham.**

**Martin's thesis captures an important facet of the novel. Carpenter's theorization of democratic homosexuality – a theory deeply informed by Walt Whitman's theory of calamitic democracy – does, in fact, provide the motivational image for the Scudder-Maurice affair (32).**

This vastly more politicised reading of the novel opens up an exciting range of possible interpretative implications. Such interpretations would allow the characters in *Maurice* to be understood as representative figures, or cultural personae, who exemplify certain cultural positions (as does Mr Ducie in the opening chapter). A politically informed critique of the novel should therefore be concerned, not simply with questions of personal morality, but also with explicating the cultural context in which the novel's characters operate. However, I would augment Martin's analysis by adding that these two competing modes of homosexual identity represent counterposed cultural positions – the one mainstream, the other marginal. While both homosexual relationships are deviant and

transgressive, Maurice's relationship with Clive Durham is representative of a mode of homosexual identity which seeks to co-exist with mainstream Edwardian English culture in a discreet, essentially non-threatening manner. Accordingly, it does not attempt to challenge Edwardian sexual *mores* in a forthright, ideologically aggressive manner. In fact, with its basis in the assumption that homosexual love is essentially superior to heterosexual love, the Clive-Maurice relationship exemplifies the snobbish, hierarchy-obsessed nature of Edwardian English society. For example, when expressing his love for Maurice, Clive denigrates heterosexuality by saying, "I feel to you as Pippa to her fiancé, only far more nobly, far more deeply, body and soul" (81). In this sense, then, the mode of homosexual identity put forward in the first half of the novel should be regarded as the more mainstream of the two modes, as it does not seek actively to subvert the established system of gender relations and class distinctions. Indeed, being Platonic and rarefied, this kind of homosexual relationship is grudgingly acknowledged within elitist Cambridge, but at the same time discouraged, feared and, if possible, thwarted:

**Mr Cornwallis always suspected such friendships [that between Maurice and Clive]. It was not natural that men of such different characters and tastes should be intimate, and although undergraduates, unlike schoolboys, are officially normal, the dons exercised a certain amount of watchfulness, and felt it right to spoil a love affair when they could (75).**

In some ways, the relationship between Clive and Maurice mirrors the kind of paradoxical duality within the character of Maurice himself. It is a contradictory blend of the acceptable and the illicit, the expected and the unusual. Such paradoxical notions are clearly evident in the extract cited above: the relationship between Maurice and Clive is condemned as "not natural" by the academic authorities, but it is also implied throughout the extract that such relationships are common and, to a degree, to be expected. The view seems to be that homosexual activity amongst schoolboys goes without question, whereas homosexuality among undergraduates, while less common, is nonetheless an expected, albeit irksome, feature of single-sex Cambridge life. The key words in this extract are "officially normal", which suggest a disjuncture between lived reality and the institutionalised ideal. In addition, the reference to the "watchfulness" of the dons seems to imply the need for sustained scrutiny and Panopticon-like micropolitical surveillance

to stem a potentially powerful flood of illicit desire. Moreover, this relationship plays itself out in the context of a site of institutionalised gender and class privilege.

The relationship between Maurice and Clive is one motivated primarily by intellect; it is a union vastly more cerebral than physical. In fact, Clive's insistence on a Platonic relationship with Maurice ties in neatly with widespread Edwardian concerns about the dangers of unbridled male lust,<sup>51</sup> with this further suggesting the curiously "mainstream" status of their relationship. Although the source of Clive's rejection of carnality is a number of key Classical texts, the outcome in practical terms of his thorough subscription to these writings is very much the same as if he had embraced the mainstream Judeo-Christian injunction against homosexual activity. It is therefore ironic that Clive should reject Christianity only to embrace another set of values that preaches abstinence, albeit for different reasons.

The idea that the Maurice-Clive relationship is primarily intellectual, rather than physical, is stressed by Forster when one considers the manner in which the reader's attention is specifically directed towards the absence of stereotypically masculine physical features in the character of Clive Durham, who is described initially as "a small man – very small – with simple manners and a fair face" (37).<sup>52</sup> This notion is followed through by a description of Maurice's nascent sexual feelings for Clive, which are described as being awakened by a recognition of the power and dexterity of the latter's intellect:

**He [Fetherstonhaugh] and Durham were in for the same Tripos, and talked shop, while Maurice listened. His excitement had never ceased. He saw that Durham was not only clever, but had a tranquil and orderly brain. He knew what he wanted to read, where he was weak and how the officials could help him (39).**

Accordingly, the emotional closeness that develops between the two men is facilitated largely by intellectual discussion. Although we are told explicitly by Forster that Maurice has a "slow nature" (57), it is through analysing and deconstructing their

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<sup>51</sup> John Marshall writes that "... it was particularly important in the eyes of the social purity campaigners that male lust be regulated and harmonized in accordance with the highest moral ideals" (138).

<sup>52</sup> This point comes into clearer focus when one considers the manner in which Forster introduces Alec Scudder, where the emphasis on Maurice's physical attraction to the latter's stereotypical masculinity is made explicit. It should also be added that Forster's obviously eroticised characters (such as Gino in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and Lionel in "The Other Boat") usually conform to the stereotypical masculine ideals.

own society and its values that they become intimate. This is prompted largely by Clive's declaration to his family of his rejection of Christianity, a disclosure that results in a good deal of domestic upset. Importantly, though, it is this critical discussion of the intersection of religion, morality and culture that leads Maurice to a direct recognition of his resentment towards the bourgeois culture of which he is in many ways a fitting example. This recognition is also crucially accompanied by a disjuncture from his insipid, conventional minor public school contemporaries, and a more definite movement towards a sub-cultural social position.

It is Clive's recognition of the hypocrisy and insincerity underpinning religious ritual that intensifies and reinforces his anti-religious convictions. As Clive himself explains, when he initially told his mother he no longer subscribed to Christian doctrine, she was not overly troubled by it, and made some "foolish joke" (43) in response. However, it is what Christian ritual signifies to the wider social circle (and to the Durhams' social inferiors in particular) that acts as the catalyst for her subsequent resentment and anger. For Mrs Durham, shows of faith and piety intensify her family's power and influence in the community. What is important for her is not the inner spiritual faith underpinning the sacrament, but the social consequences of its outward, physical enactment: "'... then [she] got cross, said I would damage her reputation as well as my own – we're the local squires and the neighbourhood's uncivilized'" (44). Clive's disgust emanates from the realisation that Christianity serves a political purpose within the feudalistic domain of Penge; in the minds of Mrs Durham and her genteel neighbours, it seems to imply a divinely ordered social hierarchy in which they are the unquestionably supreme members. Any outward and obvious dissent from the official religion therefore compromises the putative naturalness and inviolability of this social order.

These kinds of socially critical discussions destabilise Maurice's heretofore unquestioned conceptions of his own position within bourgeois English culture. The vague childhood unease conveyed in Chapter Two of the novel has now evolved into a more precisely defined and directly focused critique of his own society. Indeed, it is by no means accidental that Forster should follow up this culturally astute discussion with descriptions of the increasingly physical nature of their relationship: "Maurice's fist unclenched to reform with a handful of hair in its grasp ... It was the first time he had

dared to play with Durham” (45). As Maurice and Clive continue to probe at the insincerity, hypocrisy and sheer disingenuousness of their own culture’s prescriptions on religion, sexuality and morality (and the manner in which these three cultural issues importantly intersect), the social fabric which once bound them (especially Maurice) to particular gender and sexual roles begins dramatically to unravel. The rejection of institutionalised religion is a crucial element in this process, indicating both a desire to rid oneself of repressive dogma and a sharpening of the critical faculties with regard to social context.

This honing of Maurice’s insight into his own culture is evident especially in his gradual abandonment of intellectually unfocused, defensive bourgeois religious assumptions in favour of a more critically rigorous agnosticism, which is also poorly received by his family circle. In both his and Durham’s case, it is clear that the rejection of the wholesale validity of Christian doctrine is understood as pointing towards a far more thorough and general dissatisfaction with, and hostility towards, Edwardian English culture, both in the minds of the wayward undergraduate heretics and of their families. The outright acknowledgment on the part of Maurice and Clive of their agnosticism indicates to their respective families their essential estrangement from mainstream culture. Maurice’s bland religious platitudes are described thus:

**During this Lent term Maurice came out as a theologian. It was not humbug entirely. He believed that he believed, and felt genuine pain when anything he was accustomed to met criticism – the pain that masquerades among the middle classes as Faith. It was not Faith, being inactive. It gave him no support, no wider outlook. It didn’t exist till opposition touched it, when it ached like a useless nerve. They all had these nerves at home, and regarded them as divine, though neither the Bible nor the Prayer Book nor the Sacraments nor Christian ethics nor anything spiritual were alive to them. ‘But how can people?’ they exclaimed, when anything was attacked, and subscribed to Defence Societies. Maurice’s father was becoming a pillar of Church and Society when he died, and other things being alike Maurice would have stiffened too (46).**

This extract is not simply a description of Maurice’s own religious assumptions, but is also a scathing indictment of bourgeois values. Indeed, the element of cultural critique inherent in Forster’s fiction is most clearly apparent in this example, where he is seen to satirise and ridicule conventional middle-class cultural values. This is conveyed particularly by the faintly mocking tone of the first sentence, which is sustained throughout the passage. For Forster, the cultural values of the “land of facilities” are

devoid of intellectual rigour or critical awareness. Furthermore, they are enunciated by persons who are seemingly incapable of personal scrutiny or self-examination. This is a vacuous morality sustained by convention and apathy, rather than through any meaningful engagement with the societal context in which it operates. The final sentence of the extract relates nicely to the point made earlier about Maurice's own paradoxical cultural position, where his homosexuality (conceived of by Forster in thoroughly essentialist terms) derails his induction into bourgeois conformity and middle-class hegemony. Most crucially, though, Forster articulately conveys here his view that religion itself is deeply and thoroughly ideological; for him, it seems, it is a construct of the middle-classes, a means by which to justify the social hierarchy and a repressive sexual morality. Furthermore, the reference to the "defence societies" is an important period detail indicating that extent to which the Edwardian period was dominated by the "purity campaigns" – attempts to roll back what was perceived to be the increasing moral degeneracy of British society (Weeks 104).

In the ensuing debate, Maurice attempts to make use of the platitudinous jargon of the middle classes to hammer home his point, and at one point eerily echoes Mr Ducie's rapturous exultation of heterosexuality in Chapter One ("It all hangs together – all – and God's in his heaven, All's right with the world. Male and female! Ah wonderful!" (19)) when he says, "Well, the whole show all hangs together" (48). Although Maurice is referring here only to a religious question, this cultural mimesis imports into the scene the notion that he is attempting to mimic or play out a prescribed and constructed role as a bourgeois heterosexual male. But Clive spots the "humbug", and he is forced to concede his loss. By acknowledging the insincerity of his own views, and the degree to which they are, as Clive puts it, "second-hand tags" (47), Maurice is given the intellectual tools to begin the task of deconstructing and rejecting his own cultural position and the values bound up with it. In this sense, then, the novel must be read as a trenchant critique of bourgeois cultural values, a point which comes into clearer focus when one considers the manner in which Forster presents Maurice's rejection of Christian doctrine (and, by implication, his own cultural values) as an essentially liberatory experience:

**He realized that he had no sense of Christ's existence or of His goodness, and should be positively sorry if there was such a person. His dislike of Christianity grew and became**



profound. In ten days he gave up communicating, in three weeks he cut out all the chapels he dared. Durham was puzzled by the rapidity. They were both puzzled, and Maurice, although he had lost and yielded all his opinions, had a queer feeling that he was really winning and carrying on a campaign that he had begun last term (49).

The significance of this paradigmatic rupture becomes more clearly apparent when one considers the rather tepid response of the Hall household to Maurice's newly-acquired agnosticism. While Clive's admission alerted him to the manner in which religion and social dominance crucially intersect, Maurice's rather clumsy declaration reveals to him the superficiality of public morality, as well as the limitations of its scope and practical applicability. When he does not communicate on Easter Sunday, Maurice becomes aware that "the suburbs no longer exact Christianity" (52); in other words, he seems to apprehend that much of the religious posturing and piety inherent in bourgeois morality is mere cant, something to be expressed verbally, rather than genuinely or sincerely acted upon – a point made all the more glaring by Maurice's pointing out that Dr Barry, the Halls' substitute patriarch, does not attend church himself. As a result, Maurice begins to notice the fissures that exist in the veneer of social respectability, and comes to realise that pretences and shows of decency and morality are in fact more crucial to the illusion of a shared common morality than those qualities themselves: "This disgusted him; it made him look at society with new eyes. Did society, while professing to be so moral and sensitive, really mind anything?" (52).

As I pointed out earlier, Maurice's relationship with Clive is one predicated upon and sustained by intellectualism. Maurice is attracted initially by the dexterity of Clive's mind, and, as is fitting with the origins of their attraction, the two are drawn together via a literary source, Plato's *Symposium*. Clive's declaration of love for Maurice is not directly articulated, but is mediated by a particular literary tradition, Platonic love, in which homosexuality was expressly validated and exalted. As Robert K. Martin has pointed out, the Clive-Maurice relationship owes much of its character to the work of John Addington Symonds,<sup>53</sup> who advanced a view of male homosexual love derived from classical models, and which stressed intellectualism, physical restraint, and social equality in sexual relations between males. It is arguably Plato's *Symposium* that provides

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<sup>53</sup> As Robert K. Martin points out in his essay "Edward Carpenter and the Double Structure of *Maurice*", "In the first half of *Maurice* the attitudes of Symonds prevail: homosexuality is defined as a higher form of love, and its spiritual superiority is preserved by its exclusion of physical consummation" (103).

the crucial connecting bridge between Edwardian sexual propriety and its designated deviancy, between the honourable and the illicit. The Classical link makes the unspeakable and the unpalatable suitable for discussion and exploration, offering some kind of high-minded justification. Mr Cornwallis may denounce “the unspeakable vice of the Greeks” (50), but Clive’s subsequent direct broaching of the subject of male homosexuality, and his validation of it as “the mainstay of Athenian society” (50), draws it back into Edwardian society as a legitimate variant of human sexuality, however vilified and rejected. In other words, the *Phaedrus* (a mainstream Western literary text) provides a mainstream link to a marginal issue. What this means is that Clive provides both himself and Maurice with a means by which to conceive of homosexuality in honourable terms. For Clive, Plato’s ideas allow him to conceive of same-sex desire not as a degenerate perversion, but as one of the esteemed sources of Western culture. Even more importantly, Plato’s work allows for the subject of homosexuality to be vocalised and discussed: it is removed from the pathologising tracts of medico-juridical discourse and reinserted into mainstream culture. As the narrator points out when commenting on the effect of this discussion on Maurice, “He hadn’t known it could be mentioned, and when Durham did so in the middle of the sunlit court a breath of liberty touched him” (50).

Forster thereby uses this incident to show how Edwardian culture maintains sexual repression through the silencing of any forthright discussion of homosexuality, by censoring any direct discourse that might conceptualise it in positive terms. While Mr Cornwallis’s censorship is superficially an act of deference to public morality, in reality it serves the ideological purpose of maintaining rigidly the erasure of the topic of homosexuality from any discursive mode other than the medico-juridical ones. As Foucault is all too aware, knowledge and power are intimate bedfellows. Plato’s writings, as both Clive and Forster are all too aware, show up the falsity of the Edwardian insistence on the universal and pan-historical rejection of homosexuality, and thereby serve to destabilise Edwardian conceptions of “natural” forms of human sexuality. It is not surprising, then, that Clive should again use the *Phaedrus* to express his love for Maurice, the classical text once again providing a way of conceptualising of same-sex desire in positive and honourable terms: “Never could he forget his emotion at first

reading the *Phaedrus*. He saw there his malady described exquisitely, calmly, as a passion which we can direct, like any other, towards good or bad. Here was not invitation to licence” (67). In the absence of validating contemporary discourses on the subject, Clive invokes the classical conception of male homosexuality to conceptualise it in the sense in which it was conceived by an earlier, and greatly esteemed, culture. Significantly, too, the classical texts allow him to analyse and understand his own psyche in coolly rational terms, free from the emotive condemnation of religious dogma. As the narrator points out, Plato offers for Clive “a new guide for life” (68).

Maurice’s shocked response to Clive’s declaration of love is important because of what it reveals of the manner in which the discourse of sexuality is tied in with typically Edwardian conceptions of national identity (56). Much has been written of how the nineteenth century repression of homosexuality was linked with the rise of the bourgeois capitalist state and the consequent imperial project, and here one sees in the protagonist’s equating of sexual propriety with national identity that very conjoinment of ostensibly disparate discourses.<sup>54</sup> It is especially significant that, when confronted with Clive’s declaration, he lapses immediately into what is essentially a nationalist discourse, declaring that Clive’s homosexual feelings are incompatible with his national identity as an Englishman: “Durham, you’re an Englishman. I’m another. Don’t talk nonsense” (56).<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, if one looks closely at the syntactical construction of Maurice’s response, one sees in the clipped, simple sentences and the sudden barrage of militaristic injunctions (“Oh, rot!”, “Don’t talk nonsense”, “a rotten notion really”) a concerted attempt on Maurice’s part to ape the non-emotional, decisive and uncompromising discourse of the morally inflexible Edwardian male.

The influence of Symonds’ theories on homosexuality is clearly apparent in Chapter 13 of the novel, in which Maurice and Clive set out on a motorcycle ride through the countryside. The ride is evidently intended by Forster to have a metaphorical

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<sup>54</sup> Jeffrey Weeks writes, “Attitudes to homosexuality have of course long been linked to fears of imperial decline, from Gibbons’ description of the decline and fall of the Roman empire, through to those who opposed the homosexual law reform of the 1960s” (107).

<sup>55</sup> This conflating of national identity with sexual orientation and morality was not at all uncommon in this period. For example, in a letter written by Edmund Gosse to Edward Marsh (27 December 1910), Gosse argues that the Helen-Leonard Bast subplot in *Howards End* represents “a mark of feminisation” in English literature, and goes on to wonder “how an *Englishman* can calmly write of such a disgusting thing, with such *sang-froid*” (Furbank 189, initial emphasis mine).

resonance, the abandonment of the academic environs of Cambridge arguably being suggestive of a flight from the repressive strictures of society and its sexual mores. In line with this symbolic nature/culture opposition, the narrator writes, “They became a cloud of dust, a stench, and a roar to the world, but the air they breathed was pure, and all the noise they heard was the long drawn cheer of the wind. They cared for no one, they were outside humanity, and death, had it come, would only have continued their pursuit of a retreating horizon” (72). At this point in the novel, Forster seems to present true emancipation for homosexual men as able to come about only through a thorough and wholesale abandonment of society, through an active situating of oneself “outside humanity” (72). However, this episode abounds in images which suggest elitism and misogyny, with this suggesting that the Maurice-Clive relationship is in some ways ideologically linked to the class divisions and gender inequities of mainstream society.

Similar issues loom large in Maurice’s initial visit to Penge, the Durhams’ Wiltshire estate. In this episode, one sees more clearly the ideologically paradoxical qualities of the Maurice-Clive relationship, which contains within it both licit and illicit elements. In particular, we see during this visit the acceptable and the deviant in their relationship coalescing into a single complex of desire, repression and frustration.

In describing the estate itself, Forster is at his most culturally and politically astute, conveying masterfully the complex cultural context in which the Maurice-Clive relationship plays itself out. What is stressed in these descriptions is Penge’s apparently anachronistic presence in a rapidly evolving, and increasingly resentful, society. Indeed, the erosion of the upper classes’ status and mystique is hinted at by the reference to the “vanished hedges” (81), the barriers which formerly screened the estate from public view. Penge is now open to the political scrutiny of social “inferiors”, as represented by Alec Scudder. Accordingly, Penge itself should be understood most generally as being a symbol of Forster’s understanding of conservatism. Indeed, most of the images associated with it suggest an insistent reluctance to adapt to a changing social context. For example, the house is dilapidated, impractical, and oddly disconnected from the society in which it is situated. We are told that the station is situated *behind* the house, and connected to it only via an inhospitable “clayey” road (81), with this suggesting a kind of practical, logistical disjuncture from modern industrial society. Even more

importantly, the house itself is literally decaying and disintegrating. It is a relic of the Old England characterised by unquestioned and uncompromised class power and privilege. But, as Forster is all too aware, modernity is stealthily encroaching on Penge. Furthermore, the geographical remoteness of the estate (“The Durhams lived in a remote part of England” (81)) implies the ideological distance between the Durhams’ feudalistic conception of their position in society and the reality of the rapidly evolving culture they inhabit. This is a culture that produces socially ambitious men like Alec Scudder, who resents the Durhams’ alternating patronage and deprecation. However, as was shown in my discussion of the Leonard Bast subplot in *Howards End*, this is an instance where Forster’s specific cultural observations merge with broader philosophical concerns about the modern society.

The Durham family is one that has, over the years, seen its fortunes decrease. We are told that, in the “nest” that is Penge, “The feathers were inclined to blow about now” (81), but Forster goes on to include a powerful and curiously prescient critique of the institution of marriage, which seems to prefigure the plethora of feminist (and Marxist) analyses of marriage as an essentially commercial transaction, an economic exchange motivated more by monetary necessity than genuine emotion: “A hundred years had nibbled into the fortune, which no wealthy bride had replenished, and both house and estate were marked, not indeed with decay, but with the immobility that precedes it” (81). Forster is suggesting, I would argue, that there is an economic impetus behind the necessity of Clive’s heterosexuality. This is not simply a question of morality and ethics, but also a financial imperative essential to the continuance of the Durham legacy. In so doing, Forster manages to launch a subtle attack on the piety so often associated with heterosexual union, and, as such, issues a powerful rejoinder to the rapturous heterosexual affirmations of Mr Ducie in Chapter One of the novel. In addition, the reference serves the dramatic purpose of obliquely prefiguring Clive’s rather sudden conversion to heterosexuality. In line with this awareness of the economic necessity of enforced heterosexuality, Forster describes in Chapter 19 how Mrs Durham stakes out Maurice’s sister, Ada, as a potential bride for Clive. The irony is, of course, meant to be mildly humorous, given Maurice’s rather more than casual acquaintance with her son, but

her reasons for choosing this girl (who, we are told, is neither intelligent nor sophisticated) elucidates nicely Forster's views on marriage as a cultural institution:

**Mrs Durham had of course her motives. She was looking out for wives for Clive, and put down the Hall girls on her list. She had a theory one ought to cross breeds a bit, and Ada, though suburban, was healthy. No doubt the girl was a fool, but Mrs Durham did not propose to retire to the dower house in practice, whatever she might do in theory, and believed she could best manage Clive through his wife. Kitty had fewer qualifications. She was less foolish, less beautiful, and less rich. Ada would inherit the whole of her grandfather's fortune, and had always inherited his good humour (93).**

This extract, with its crass references to breeding stock and financial gain, exposes the sham of the Edwardian view of heterosexual marriage as divinely sanctioned and spiritually supreme. In Forster's view, marriage is intricately connected with money, status, and extending personal power. His point, I think, is that heterosexuality is deeply implicated in the skewed power relations inherent in capitalism; in a sense, society's insistence on heterosexuality is as much a product of economic necessity as morality.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, when one considers that the widespread juridical repression of homosexuality in the nineteenth century coincided with the rise of Empire and the bourgeois capitalist state, one sees plainly the crucial intersection of these two issues. Heterosexuality means offspring and, with it, labour supplies. As a privileged member of society, it means for Clive the continuance and extension of his social privilege.

The idea that continuance through procreation sustains and perpetuates oppressive power relations seems to call into question the rather reductive contention of Barbara Rosecrance that "the homosexual ideal is barred from nature's pantheon" (*Narrative Vision* 154) as a result of the fact that a homosexual relationship will not produce offspring. Towards the end of Chapter 17, Maurice morbidly reflects on his "sterility", a musing which Rosecrance seizes upon as irrefutable evidence that Forster himself was deeply ambiguous about his own sexuality, and saw it as limiting and invalid in the "natural" sense. This inference is both specious and misleading. Most crucially,

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<sup>56</sup> This awareness of the politics of domination and subordination within the heterosexual marriage obviously relates to the influence of Edward Carpenter on the second half of the novel. As Jeffrey Weeks astutely points out, Carpenter saw the socialist project as one which also involved the transformation of sexual relations: "[Carpenter's] politics looked back to the conception of the earliest socialists, of socialism as not just a transformation of economic relations, but as a whole new way of life ... Hence his espousal of all those things that Hyndman [another British socialist] had dismissed: simple living, dress reform, vegetarianism, mysticism, feminism and homosexual reform" (172).

Rosecrance conveniently forgets that Forster establishes a deliberate and obvious distance between himself and his protagonist,<sup>57</sup> and the careful reader should therefore assume throughout that Maurice's views are not necessarily those of Forster himself. This point is particularly relevant when one considers Maurice's chauvinistic views on the poor (146-7) and his disdain for all things cultural – opinions which Forster himself would quite obviously not have shared. However, in other matters there does seem to be a degree of ideological and philosophical confluence, such as in Forster's relationship with Christianity, which, as Furbank has shown, became increasingly distant, and even hostile: "[Forster's] collapse was hastened by the fact that, when he thought about it, he disliked the personality of Christ: Christ was lacking in humour, and he surrounded himself with disciples; also he seemed to welcome pain; all of which seemed faults to Forster. Within a short while, under Meredith's ministrations, he had lost his faith completely" (62). The attentive reader should therefore assess each philosophical contention separately, and in the context in which it appears. In this case, Maurice's concern about his "sterility" must be read in the context of his own sexual maturation:<sup>58</sup> he suddenly apprehends, with a shock, the very real consequences of his sexuality, and morbidly reflects on his mortality.

But this need not be read as an indictment of homosexuality in general, as does Rosecrance. The recognition of one's mortality is a crucial step in the emotional and intellectual maturation of any human being (as well as being a dominant thematic motif in much Western literature), and it is in this sense that I interpret Maurice's comments and anxieties. Rosecrance allows her own negative assumptions regarding homosexuality to cloud her otherwise astute judgement, and she accordingly ignores the notion of the development of character that is one of the novel's dominant thematic concerns. When Maurice grapples with these issues surrounding the question of procreation, he is a young man in crisis who is still not at ease with his sexuality. It is unlikely, given his composure and defiant poise during his final exchange with Clive, that he would endorse such views

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<sup>57</sup> Forster writes in the "Terminal Note" to the novel, "In *Maurice* I tried to create a character who was completely unlike myself or what I supposed myself to be: someone handsome, healthy, bodily attractive, mentally torpid, not a bad business man and rather a snob" (218).

<sup>58</sup> In his essay "Edward Carpenter and the Double Structure of *Maurice*", Robert K. Martin emphasises the developmental aspect of the novel: "*Maurice* is not a plea for homosexual rights, but an exploration of the growth in awareness of a homosexual protagonist, who moves from a false solution to a truer one" (100-1). I agree that the notion of character development is a major focus in the novel, but disagree that the political dimension of the novel is subordinate to its personal one.

at the novel's close, when Forster's presentation of his predicament is more culturally attuned and politically conscious. Indeed, Maurice's pessimistic comments properly belong only to the first two parts of the novel, which are characterised by self-doubt and uncertainty, and a corresponding attempt to appease mainstream society. In the latter sections of the novel, where the novel becomes vastly more politicised and confrontational, the articulation of such views seems unthinkable. In addition, Forster offers in the closing lines of this chapter an internal rebuke to his protagonist's rather pessimistic understanding of his sexuality, by showing the consoling capacities of human love, whatever the sexual mode in which it manifests itself. When Maurice expresses his fears to Clive, the latter responds first with an intellectual argument ("For love to end where it begins is far more beautiful, and Nature knows it" (90)), but then offers Maurice emotional demonstration of the value of human love, which is said to "soothe" him. This calming influence is, in my opinion, a rebuke to the functionalist argument about "hand[ing] on the torch" (90) which precedes it, effectively negating the value or importance of the former argument about future generations by demonstrating its irrelevance to the concrete emotional needs of human beings in the here and now. I believe that the latter view is the one shared by Forster.

The notion of the hegemonic power represented by the Durhams is further foregrounded by Forster in his depiction of one of the Durhams' aristocratic guests, Mrs Sheepshanks, who wishes that "*everyone* curtsied" (82). Even securely middle-class Maurice is intimidated by the awesome shadow of class distinction which pervades Penge. As Forster puts it, "... these people had the air of settling something: they either just had arranged or soon would rearrange England" (83). But, as was alluded to above, England is inexorably changing, and power relations are shifting. In the opening lines of the chapter, Forster implicitly raised the idea of social decay and class disintegration, but here he tackles the idea more directly and obviously. There is something misguided or delusional about the Durhams' sense of power and influence. Although they conduct themselves as if they were all-powerful and influential, their power is in fact waning: "Yet the gateposts, the roads – he had noticed them on the way up – were in bad repair, and the timber wasn't kept properly, the windows stuck, the boards creaked. He was less impressed than he had expected by Penge" (83). The Durhams, together with the



conservative values they exemplify, are changing; whatever their power, they cannot arrest the tide of progress. Indeed, when one considers that the novel was written in 1913, just a year prior to the outbreak of the First World War, a conflict that altered irrevocably England's social fabric, Forster's apprehension of and comments on societal change are both accurate and prescient. It is in this context of crumbling conservatism and incipient change that the affair between Maurice and Clive plays itself out. Significantly, Clive points out that he has never been comfortable amongst Penge's conservatism, a feeling that seems to dissipate when he adopts the manner and values of the affable country squire. As I pointed out above, their relationship has its basis in intellectualism and Platonic restraint. These qualities are particularly apparent in Chapter 16, where the two are seen to substitute intellectual for physical intercourse. The most sexually explicit action that takes place between the two men is a hasty kiss which Clive delivers to Maurice upon meeting him in his room.

As at Cambridge, the Maurice-Clive relationship is mediated by, and expressed solely through, discourse: it is the "exquisite words" (84) exchanged between them that bind them together, rather than any genuinely intimate sexual act. Indeed, it is the discursive quality of this relationship that differentiates it most significantly from the one Maurice shares with Alec Scudder, which is simultaneously physically intense but emotionally naive. Clive insists that his feelings for Maurice are "nobler" (84) than those of his sister for her fiancé, but, most crucially, his argument is that his feelings are of a higher intellectual order than those of the conventional heterosexual couple. Although he stresses that he feels for Maurice "body and soul" (84), it is soul that elevates their relationship in his eyes, that allows for its justification. For Clive, homosexuality on its own is insufficient; it is only when homosexual physical desire is yoked with intellectualism and physical restraint that it attains a degree of acceptability. For example, whereas Maurice directly expresses sexual desire for Clive's physical attributes and goes on to declare that he "adores" him (85), Clive can only speak of beauty in abstract, theoretical terms, pointing to a Michelangelo painting as an example of beauty, rather than to the human being sitting before him.

Clive blushes and is apparently scandalised by Maurice's passionate declaration of sexual adoration, and insists that they change the subject. The conversation is then

strenuously diverted away from the personal and the intimate, and becomes, in tone and quality, rather like an academic lecture by way of the Socratic method: “Look at that picture, for instance. I love it because ... ” (86). Maurice does not possess Clive’s intellectual sophistication, but he displays throughout, I would argue, a higher emotional intelligence than the latter. Clive’s talk is simply “nonsense” to him, partly because a “slow nature” (57) such as his does not properly understand the subtleties of aesthetics, but also because he intuitively and profoundly realises that the sophisticated dialectic is not especially important in the human, emotional sense. Clive shrinks from sexual intimacy. There is something of the ascetic about him; in a sense, he is like Cecil Vyse of *A Room with a View*, who uses art and culture as a barrier between himself and sexual self-realisation. Significantly, too, Clive refuses to kiss Maurice in the aftermath of their discussion, which itself acts as a kind of intellectual substitute for physical consummation. Indeed, the reference to the awakening sparrows and ringdoves is not mere decorative embellishment, but a suggestion of the artificiality and repression of their relationship, which is carefully distanced from the thoroughly sexual natural world, as represented by the birds’ songs. In essence, Clive wants “perfection” (87) above the messy business of human sexuality.

It is also worth stressing the latent misogyny in Clive’s questioning of whether women are capable of the depth and quality of emotion he feels for Maurice, a point made all the more ironic considering his wholesale embrace of heterosexuality several chapters later, and in spite of the fact that we are told directly that he is a confirmed misogynist (92). Indeed, while critics have pondered over the motivation for Clive’s sudden sexual conversion, I would argue that Clive’s relative asexuality (his connections with those he loves are, in the main, intellectual and emotional, rather than physical) makes the gender of his chosen love-object largely an irrelevance. Indeed, when he begins to notice women, his observations are aesthetic, rather than sexual. We are told that he begins to notice “Little details, a hat, the way a skirt is held, scent, laughter, the delicate walk across mud” (106). The essentially non-sexual character of these observations is markedly apparent, but another reason for the conversion is undoubtedly also the sense of belonging afforded him by embracing the dominant sexual mode. I have addressed the question of marginality and alterity earlier in this chapter, but here again

we see the fear of alienation and outsider status as a major factor in Clive's rejection of homosexuality: "How happy normal people made their lives! On how little he had existed for twenty-four years! ... Passing a cinema palace, he went in. The film was unbearable artistically, but the man who made it, the men and the women who looked on – they knew, and he was one of them" (106).

Critics such as Barbara Rosecrance and John Colmer have alleged that Forster is insufficiently balanced and objective in his treatment of Clive's character, but I feel the author does take care to distance himself from the narrative he is relating. For example, Forster does not present Clive as a hypocrite, as a man who cynically adopts a heterosexual guise to further his career and political influence. Curiously, this vastly more condemnatory line is taken in the 1986 Merchant-Ivory film version of *Maurice*, where Clive's adoption of heterosexuality is associated with severe repression of his genuine homosexual impulses, the final images of the film powerfully contrasting Maurice's passionate venturing to the boathouse with the frigidity of the Durhams' sterile bedchamber. However, in the novel Forster never calls into question the sincerity of Clive's change, but instead presents him merely as deluded and lacking in self-awareness, whatever his intellectual merits may be. For example, he does not seem to dispute the shocking realness of Clive's sexual change, and at no point in the narrative implies that Clive's heterosexuality is simply a cynical ploy. In fact, he takes great pains to stress the trauma associated with this sudden sexual reversal:

**The change had been so shocking that sometimes he thought Maurice was right, and that it was the finish of his illness. It humiliated him, for he had understood his soul, or, as he said, himself, ever since he was fifteen. But the body is deeper than the soul and its secrets inscrutable. There had been no warning – just a blind alteration of the life spirit, just an announcement, 'You who loved men, will henceforth love women. Understand or not, it's the same to me' (106).**

This passage should be read as an implicit rejoinder to the essentialist notions of homosexuality put forward earlier in the novel. Dominant in this extract is the idea that sex is mysterious, inscrutable and unpredictable. Clive is "humiliated" by his own lack of understanding of his own sexual psychology, with this suggesting that it is impossible to identify, categorise and label sexual desire. Forster seems also to reject here the notion of conflating personal identity with sexual orientation. Clive believed he understood himself

because he had identified and labelled his sexual orientation, but he is forced to undertake a “humiliating” re-evaluation. In general, then, Clive’s sexual reversal seems to suggest the inadequacy of monolithic, rigid categorisations of and explanations for sexual orientation. While Maurice’s sexuality seems throughout the novel static and biologically rooted, Clive’s changes with his sexual maturation. In a similar manner, Alec Scudder, who is throughout the novel granted a permissive bisexual fluidity, is in some ways an ultimate example of this cultural slippage. In *Maurice*, then, Forster can be seen to deconstruct the classical opposition heterosexual/homosexual, and also shows, as in *Howards End*, how characters can slip between various mainstream and marginal modes. The multiplicity of accounts of sexual orientation should therefore be understood as an oblique riposte to late nineteenth century and early twentieth century attempts by medical and psychological science to establish the “truth” of sexual orientation in a single definitive theory.

These attempts at the theorisation of sexuality are explored during the interlude between Maurice’s relationships with Clive Durham and Alec Scudder. In this bridging section, Forster moves the novel closer towards a more politically conscious engagement with Edwardian society. With its explicit references to sexological discourses and medical “solutions” to the “problem” of homosexuality, this section of the novel forms an ideological bridge to its more stridently political final phase. In this bridging phase, Maurice grapples with the personal implications of being a homosexual in a hostile and unsympathetic society, an experience which hones his critical faculties and facilitates his ultimate break with mainstream society. In essence, with its lofty intellectualism and its basis in culturally remote classical allusion, the Clive-Maurice affair constituted a flight from social reality. Covert, elitist and sexually restrained, the relationship between the Cambridge undergraduates existed apart from society and, by virtue of its secrecy and the absence of consummation, essentially did not challenge it. The Clive-Maurice relationship was, in essence, complicit with the power relations of mainstream society that ultimately sought to oppress homosexuals. When Maurice finds himself alone following the failure of this relationship, he experiences acutely the alienation and anxiety which are the personal consequences of the political disempowerment of homosexual men in Edwardian society. When separated from Clive, and hence forced to

contend with his identity entirely alone, Maurice's precarious positioning within Edwardian society becomes increasingly prominent. From this point onwards, the novel becomes vastly more politically engaged and polemical, Forster abandoning the refined aestheticism of the first two parts in favour of a more politically engaged and activist understanding of the politics of homosexual identity. It is no coincidence, then, that the novel should shift its focus from the middle and upper classes to the working ones, and from Plato and classical allusion to medicine and psychotherapy. In a sense, society itself now becomes the enemy, as Maurice directs his resentment and loathing away from the self (as evidenced by his musings on the "sterility" of the homosexual relationship) and towards the social institutions and values that facilitate and perpetuate homophobic oppression. As John Colmer notes, the sexual encounters Maurice experiences in the interlude between the novel's two principal relationships are intended by the author to "exhibit something of the possible range of homosexual relations" (121), and, indeed, Forster arguably uses this period to impress upon the reader the idea that homosexual relations can be either rarefied and idealised (as in Maurice's relationship with Clive, and in the theories of John Addington Symonds) or lustful and predatory (as is suggested by his advances on Dickie Barry and his lustful feelings for a "handsome young Frenchman" and a pupil at the East End Mission at which he works (132)).

The process of understanding his own sexuality in purely physical terms is explored initially by means of Forster's depiction of Maurice's lustful feelings for an adolescent boy, Dickie Barry. The boy's age is not specified, but we are told that he is no longer a schoolboy, and that he works at Woolwich, so one can reasonably assume that he is intended by Forster to be about 17 or 18. Maurice's attraction to him is therefore hardly an example of paedophilia, but their association is nonetheless characterised by dramatic power imbalances and experiential inequities, the protagonist's desire presented from the outset by Forster as predatory and self-gratifying. Forster's presentation of this incident situates the novel decisively beyond what Tariq Rahmam identifies as "the ephedophilic literary tradition" which had dominated English writing about male homosexuality in the last three decades of the nineteenth century ("Ephedophilic" 267). In terms of this tradition, love between an older man and a younger boy or youth was idealised. Rhaman argues that *Maurice* is significant in that it shifts the focus of attention away from boys

and youths and towards adult men of roughly the same age (267). Hence in *Maurice* the dominant erotic focus is the sexual relationship between Maurice and Alec – two adult men. The Dickie Barry incident should therefore be read as an explicit example of Forster's rejection of the ephedophilic tradition, as in it Forster is careful to stress the unbalanced, exploitative and faintly sinister aspects of Maurice's feelings towards the boy. What is crucial here is that love for a younger boy is not idealised or exalted; rather, it is seen as insufficient and inappropriate.

Maurice's attraction for the boy has its impetus in Clive's ultimate and unequivocal rejection of him by means of his announcing his engagement. Smarting with pain and indignation, Maurice ventures upstairs "with the tread of an older man" (129) to wake his young guest, and is suddenly confronted with a scene of pristine adolescent beauty:

**He [Dickie Barry] lay with his limbs uncovered. He lay unashamed, embraced and penetrated by the sun. The lips were parted, the down on the upper was touched with gold, the hair broken into countless glories, the body was a delicate amber. To anyone he would have seemed beautiful, and to Maurice who had reached him by two paths he became the World's desire (129).**

As the above description makes clear, Dickie is from the start exposed, vulnerable, subjected to the ruthless scopical power of the older man. He is the voyeuristic object of Maurice's predatory lust. Indeed, the word "penetrated", with its associations of violence and sexual violation, acutely conveys the quite alarming physical vulnerability of the young boy in the face of the older man's passion, a vulnerability made all the more arresting by virtue of the suggestions of purity and cleanliness in the preceding image. Indeed, this word is nicely contrasted with "delicate" in the following sentence. But, with its sensuous descriptions of colour, texture and contour, the extract also makes clear the stunning aesthetic beauty of the adolescent boy. But Forster takes care also to stress subtly the sexuality of the boy, by means of the references to his parted lips and the fine coating of adolescent facial hair, these images suggesting that he is not a child, but a sexually mature young man. Forster is suggesting, then, that Maurice's lust is, paradoxically, both dangerously inappropriate and wholly understandable.

Maurice is smitten on a purely sexual level by the boy; it is made quite clear by Forster that he is indifferent to his personality or character: "This [was] the guest whose arrival last night he had felt rather a bore" (130). Maurice's feelings for the boy are manic

and desperate, and there is a certain pathos to his delusional and frantic libidinous antics over an unresponsive and vaguely fearful adolescent. Most importantly, though, throughout this episode Maurice plays the stereotyped role of the predatory homosexual, the lecherous older figure in constant pursuit of vulnerable, defenceless young boys.<sup>59</sup> I have discussed already the power imbalances evident in the preceding extract, but Forster accentuates and extends this crucial issue in the descriptions that follow. After exacting a promise of tea, Maurice manoeuvres lasciviously around the boy after recognising the extraordinary power he wields over him by virtue of his age and status: “He would not attend to the talk, yet even this advantaged him, for when he said ‘What?’ Dickie came over to the sofa. He passed an arm around him . . .” (130). Dickie is entirely submissive and deferring, and Maurice exploits this power disparity with alarming dexterity.

However, Maurice’s advances are thwarted by the entrance of Aunt Ida, and he is forced to wait until midnight until he sees the boy again. In the interim, we are told that his libidinous designs on Dickie have grown more voracious. In his dealings with the boy, Maurice has been from the start obsessed and manic, but he now begins to descend into delusion and depravity. Meeting Dickie on the stairs, he makes an awkward and unsuccessful sexual advance on him. Maurice’s gauche clumsiness and panting desperation are embarrassing and degrading for both himself and the reader. The scene plays itself out amid the sound of the “women breathing in the other rooms” (131), a veiled reference to the heteronormative context in which the event occurs. As it turns out, Dickie is less naïve than either Maurice or the reader has been led to believe: we are told that “he understood the situation perfectly” (131). Undoubtedly a product of the public school system, his deference to superiors extends also to sexual matters, and he is apparently not unduly horrified by the notion of a homosexual encounter. He has an understandable aversion to an unwanted (and unsolicited) sexual experience, but his socialised respect for Maurice on account of his age is such that he dismisses the “impulse . . . to bolt the door after him . . . as unsoldierly” (131). The final word of this quotation shows the adroit manner in which Forster inverts traditional gender

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<sup>59</sup> Jeffrey Weeks writes, “In the mythology of the twentieth century, the homosexual, as the archetypal sexed being, a person whose sexuality pervaded him in his very existence, threatened to corrupt all those around him, and particularly the young. The most pervasive stereotype of the male homosexual was as a ‘corrupter of youth’”(107).

associations, the author here suggesting that homosexual activity is a discreet element of the stereotypically masculine world of the armed forces.

However, it is the consequences of this episode that are most significant. I mentioned earlier that, in pursuing Dickie Barry in this rather lecherous manner, Maurice is enacting and giving credence to the idea of the predatory homosexual. But Maurice's response to this thankfully averted lapse of judgement essentially constitutes a rebuttal of the aforementioned stereotype. When considering his conduct coldly and soberly, he is ashamed of himself, empathises with the boy, and determines to keep clear of young men to whom he may feel sexually attracted: "What a stoat he had been! Poor little Dickie! He saw the boy leaping from his embrace, to smash through a window and break his limbs, or yelling out like a maniac until help came. He saw the police –" (132). Forster stresses that Maurice has a moral conscience, that he is capable of evaluating the morality of his actions. This recognition throws into relief the essential goodness of the homosexual relationship which has dominated the novel up until this point – namely, that between Clive and the protagonist, which has been characterised by trust, mutual respect and tenderness. As a result, when compared with the potentially exploitative Dickie Barry affair, the condemnation of a consensual, adult homosexual relationship seems all the more unreasonable to the fair-minded reader.<sup>60</sup>

Of course, the reference to the police also underscores Maurice's growing sense of vulnerability with regard to the criminal law, an issue addressed in both his relationship with Alec Scudder and a hostile sexual incident on a train, where an older, unattractive man makes a sexual advance on him.<sup>61</sup> Feigning heterosexual outrage, Maurice knocks him down, whereupon the man offers him money not to pull the alarm cord. Ironically, in

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<sup>60</sup> However, as Philip Gardner records in *E.M. Forster: The Critical Heritage*, Lytton Strachey characteristically took the opposite view, arguing that Forster was throughout excessively moralistic in his presentation of homosexual desire. In a letter to Forster in 1915, Strachey wrote, "It's difficult to distinguish clearly your views from Maurice's sometimes, but so far as I can see, you go much too far in your disapproval of it. For instance, you apparently regard the Dickie incident with grave disapproval. Why? ... What he [Maurice] wanted was a brief honeymoon with that charming young Frenchman who would have shown Mr. Eel that it was possible to take the divagations of a prick too seriously" (112). In any event, I feel Forster's disapproval serves the purpose of underscoring the idea that homosexual desire is inherently neither squalid nor ideal, but instead capable of both moral extremities.

<sup>61</sup> Forster must have been influenced in this regard by the Oscar Wilde trials of the 1890s, in which the famous decadent was imprisoned following his conviction on charges relating to various homosexual offences. Jeffrey Weeks writes that "The downfall of Oscar Wilde was a most significant event, for it created a public image for the 'homosexual', a term by now coming into common usage, and a terrifying moral tale of the dangers that trailed closely behind deviant behaviour" (103).



this instance it is Maurice who plays the role of the younger, less experienced victim of an unwanted advance, Forster thus delicately counterposing this encounter with the Dickie Barry episode. This is a brief incident, but it is one thoroughly suffused with a pathos which even characteristically obtuse Maurice apprehends. Apart from conveying the conditions of fear and mistrust under which homosexual men were forced to live in Edwardian England, the episode is significant in that it acts as the catalyst for his seeking unconventional medical treatment for his sexual “condition”, a move which imports into the novel the pathologising discourses surrounding deviant sexuality so prominent during the period.

Maurice’s meetings with Dr Barry and, later, Mr Lasker Jones constitute an attempt on his part to cure himself of his condition; in a sense, they represent his most thorough subscription to the prevailing sexological and ideological doctrines of the day. In this regard, Jeffrey Weeks writes that “The medicalisation of homosexuality – a transition from notions of sin to concepts of sickness or mental illness – was a vitally significant move, even though, like the new legal model, its application was uneven” (104). In accordance with this pathologising trend, the medical consultations in the novel have little to do with morality, and are focused instead on the peculiarly modern notions of dysfunction, psychological “normalcy” and sexual efficacy. In the culture of modernity, Forster seems to be saying, normality supersedes morality, and it is in the quest for normality that Maurice involves himself in the questionable practices of sexual psychology and hypnosis. The visits Maurice pays to these starkly juxtaposed medical figures are, in essence, attempts at absolution or expiation; in Foucauldian terms, he hopes that, by revealing the “truth” of his sex, he will be granted a respite from his mental purgatory.

Maurice’s interview with Dr Barry conveys both the frightening alienation of the Edwardian homosexual from mainstream authority figures, as well as the deficiency and absurdity of heteronormative understandings of same-sex desire. In his desperation, Maurice turns towards Dr Barry for assistance with his “condition”, but is met instead with a peculiar combination of outright denial and awkward evasion. In a sense, Maurice’s confession to Dr Barry of his sexual desires constitutes a literal confrontation between sexual “deviancy” and bourgeois sexuality. Forster hints at this by references to

the domestic details of the suburban home: "He found him [Dr Barry] in an agreeable mood, playing bridge with his daughter and wife, and urgent that Maurice should make a fourth in their party" (137). Of course, metaphorically speaking, Maurice's sexuality precludes his ever being a genuine member of their group: in an ideological sense, Maurice and Dr Barry meet one another head-on in the doctor's living-room, and the power-tussle that ensues between their competing modes of reality is concerned largely with knowledge and power, and the manner in which these two entities are complexly interlinked. It has been said earlier that Dr Barry is a quintessential patriarchal figure who is thoroughly representative of suburban ideological values and assumptions, and, indeed, in Maurice's emotional interview, suburban understandings and definitions of homosexuality clash absurdly with the tortured reality of Maurice's lived experience. In essence, the suburban response to any admission or evidence of homosexuality is outright denial and dismissal: it cannot exist in the suburbs because it is the condition of the Other.

Forster is concerned to elucidate social hypocrisy with regard to sexual matters, and here he draws attention to Dr Barry's willingness to accept with a chuckle the idea of a young man's consorting with prostitutes. This good-humoured tolerance points towards the obvious power imbalances between the sexes, a point Forster had broached in both *A Room with a View* and *Howards End*, where he explored the injustice of separate moral codes for men and women. In much the same manner as Henry Wilcox, Dr Barry assumes that there are "good" women and "bad" women, but regards men who involve themselves sexually with both as not in any way morally tainted. Indeed, given the restrained and rarefied nature of Maurice's relationship with Clive, the irony of the doctor's light-hearted acceptance of the possibility of venereal disease, but horrified aversion to homosexuality, is all the more striking. Forster's point is that societal condemnation of homosexuality has nothing whatever to do with morality; heterosexual men are notoriously willing to accept and condone immorality in themselves. In fact, it is in being immoral that their heterosexuality and virility are confirmed. Forster therefore implies that morality, religion and decency are taken up as convenient cudgels in the onslaught against those who are different. This point is nicely stressed when one considers Dr Barry's moralistic denial of Maurice's homosexuality towards the end of the

chapter, where he rails, "...Maurice, never let that evil hallucination, that temptation from the devil, occur to you again ... You whom I see and know to be a decent fellow! We'll never mention it again" (139). But, given the doctor's apparent willingness to accept and condone essentially exploitative sexual encounters as both natural and expected in a "normal" young man, these moralistic injunctions emerge as more than a little hollow. In addition, any further discussion of homosexuality is disallowed, and its very existence denied. Earlier in the novel, Maurice and Clive arrived at a positive conception of homosexual identity by violating the Edwardian censorship of all discourse on homosexuality, but here Dr Barry attempts to enforce the discursive ban by refusing any discussion of the issue.

Conventional medicine having failed him, Maurice turns to crude hypnotic therapy. Forster's presentation of Mr Lasker Jones is a fine period touch, and, as Joseph Bristow observes, reveals a keen awareness of the sexological discourses which proliferated in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries (12-13). Here, however, Maurice encounters indifference rather than outrage. Lasker Jones's manner and approach are disarmingly amoral: he is described as "sallow and expressionless", and offers Maurice a "bloodless hand" upon greeting him (157). Forster's description of the hypnotist constitutes a curious inversion of the stereotypical descriptions of male homosexuals that occur in major sexological works such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* and Iwan Bloch's *The Sexual Life of Our Time*, in which homosexuals are described in terms not unlike those Forster chooses for Lasker Jones himself. (Bristow 36). But by suggesting that this kind of pseudo-medical discourse might equally be applied to the very men who direct it against homosexuals and hysterical women, Forster indicates the absurdity and arbitrariness of attempts to classify human beings in this rigid and dehumanising manner. However, the above point also shows how closely the novel engages with contemporaneous, non-literary discourses, and therefore bolsters my contention that, more than any of the other novels, *Maurice* demands to be read in its broad cultural context.

This is not the first instance where Forster calls into question the gross inhumanity inherent in much of the medical and psychological theory of the period. In much the same way as his profound dislike of clergymen is articulated in *A Room with a View*, *The*

*Longest Journey* and *Maurice* itself (in the character of the sanctimonious Mr Borenius), Forster was evidently concerned about the dehumanising capacities of psychological science, particularly with regard to its attempts to account for and treat psychological disorders. This aversion is clearly apparent in *Howards End*, where Margaret initially resents Henry's suggestion that Helen is "mad" (278), and then clashes with the youthful doctor Mansbridge over his brusque and insensitive questioning about her sister's mental health:

The doctor, a very young man, began to ask questions about Helen. Was she normal? Was there anything congenital or hereditary? Had anything occurred that was likely to alienate her from her family? ... Margaret's anger and terror increased every moment. How dare these men label her sister! What horrors lay ahead! What impertinences that shelter under the name of science! The pack was turning on Helen, to deny her human rights, and it seemed to Margaret that all Schlegels were threatened with her (282).

It must surely be agreed that Forster's concerns here have a wider relevance, and are informed by his deeply personal concerns about the uneasy relationship between sexological science and Edwardian homosexuals such as himself. In this respect, the above passage is linked to the Lasker Jones episode in *Maurice* in that both scenarios can be seen to engage with the broader cultural phenomenon of sexology.<sup>62</sup> In particular, the reference to the youthfulness of the doctor (and hence his lack of experience) could suggest the naivety and presumptuousness of the youthful discipline of sexological science, which attempts prematurely to provide simple, definitive answers to complex, arguably inexplicable, matters.

In terms of character, Mr Lasker Jones represents the antithesis of Dr Barry. While the former is cold and emotionally detached, the latter is self-righteous and judgmental. In addition, whereas Dr Barry reinforces the idea of homosexuality as illusory or even non-existent, conceiving of it as a hideous "hallucination", Lasker Jones readily admits its prominence – its abundance, even – by pointing out that seventy-five percent of his clients are "of [Maurice's] type" (157). When one considers the contrast between Dr Barry's fervent moralistic bluster and Lasker Jones's dispassionate inquiries into Maurice's written admission, Forster's counterposing of these two distinct approaches

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<sup>62</sup> Gert Hekma writes, "The second aspect of the new politics of the body was its medical implementation. The flourishing of medical specializations under the designation of "public health" indicated a revived interest of doctors in social policies" (449).

becomes readily apparent: “He [Lasker Jones] neither praised nor blamed nor pitied: he paid no attention to a sudden outburst of Maurice’s against society. And though Maurice yearned for sympathy – he had not had a word of it for a year – he was glad none came, for it might have shattered his purpose” (158).

Importantly, though, both approaches are tragically insufficient and inadequate, as both are entirely devoid of sympathy. Wholly emotionally disengaged, Lasker Jones has no personal interest in Maurice’s personal happiness or otherwise; indeed, his indifference to Maurice’s “outburst” against society is indicative of his indifference to the position of homosexuals within Edwardian society in general. He is not concerned with the politics of sexuality or the injustice accorded to homosexuals within English society, and his diagnosis and treatment consequently display an obvious moral and cultural detachment. In accordance with this view, Lasker Jones advises Maurice simply to relocate to those Continental countries that have adopted Napoleon’s Civil Code, which does not criminalise homosexuality. Importantly, he does not advocate any kind of social or political confrontation, and he never suggests that Maurice should challenge the constraints his society imposes upon him. However, when one considers the ambivalence of the novel’s ending (where Maurice and Scudder effectively retreat from mainstream English society, and therefore do not remain to challenge or transform it), Forster himself seems to prescribe a similar solution.

We are told later that Lasker Jones is bored with Maurice’s particular “condition”, which further reinforces our sense of his ideological and personal indifference. Ironically, though, the boredom with which Lasker Jones greets Maurice’s profound personal anguish, as well as the perfunctory manner in which he dispenses his treatment, subtly conveys the essential *ordinariness* of homosexuality – its relative prevalence within society. In this way, Forster succeeds in refuting the widespread assumption that homosexuality is rare, unusual or bizarre. Indeed, for all Maurice’s anguish over his “otherness”, his encounter with Lasker Jones serves mainly to impress upon the reader an acute awareness that the protagonist is by no means alone in his predicament. In addition, Forster’s presentation of Maurice’s hypnotic state confirms the author’s initial presentation of Maurice’s sexuality as biologically rooted and innate. Indeed, the explanations proffered earlier in the novel for the protagonist’s sexuality seem largely to

validate the hypnotist's diagnosis of Maurice's "condition" as "congenital homosexuality" (158).

While Lasker Jones's hypnotic technique is crude and simplistic, it is nevertheless revealing of the degree to which Maurice's sexual impulses are unshakeable and spontaneous; in essence, Maurice subverts each one of the hypnotist's questions to affirm, rather petulantly and stubbornly, his sexuality. When he is told by Mr Lasker Jones that there is a picture of a Miss Edna May on the wall, he immediately and spontaneously reverses the gender of the image, by referring to it, somewhat oxymoronically, as Mr Edna May. There is an obvious element of transsexualism in this name, the confused nature of which hints at the struggle within Maurice's psyche to reconcile his spontaneous sexual drives with socially conditioned expectations. I have mentioned earlier in the chapter the extent to which, by presenting Maurice as a fatherless child exposed to a torrent of female attention and affection, Forster appears to endorse psychoanalytic explanations for homosexuality, and here he again allows Freud to intrude. When Mr Lasker Jones tells him Miss Edna May is beautiful, he responds with the curiously Oedipal statement "I want to go home to my mother" (159). The suggestion is that Maurice turns away from the female as sex-object towards the maternal figure. The seeming omnipotence of the mother supersedes, and ultimately subsumes, feminine sexuality.<sup>63</sup> When Maurice is told that Edna May is not only beautiful but also attractive, he replies gruffly that she does not attract him. From now on, he is curt and unequivocal, his preference for the masculine clear and unmitigated. If anything, the consultation serves only to confirm his sexual orientation, and does little, if anything, to destabilise it.

But, as was pointed out above, the consultation with Mr Lasker Jones imports into the novel the pathologising medical discourses that began to spring up around the subject of homosexuality during the nineteenth century. Commenting on this proliferation of discourses in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault writes:

**The important thing, in this affair, is not that these men shut their eyes or stopped their ears, or that they were mistaken; it is rather that they constructed around and apropos of sex an immense apparatus for producing truth, even if this truth was to be masked at**

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<sup>63</sup> The paralysing fear of the maternal is predominant also in one of Forster's finest pieces of short fiction, "The Other Boat", which, written in the late 1950s, is also one of his last pieces of fiction.

the last moment. The essential point is that sex was not only a matter of sensation and pleasure, of law and taboo, but also of truth and falsehood, that the truth of sex became something fundamental, useful, or dangerous, precious or formidable; in short, that sex was constituted as a problem of truth. What needs to be situated, therefore, is not the threshold of a new rationality whose discovery was marked by Freud – or someone else – but the progressive formation (and also the transformations) of that “interplay of truth and sex” which was bequeathed to us by the nineteenth century, and which we may have modified, but, lacking evidence to the contrary, have not rid ourselves of (56-57).

Indeed, the consultation with Mr Lasker Jones is thoroughly suffused with contested notions of truth and objectivity; homosexuality is something the doctor feels can be quantified and remedied through language – hence the use of the interview technique. It is apparent also, of course, that, in typical Foucauldian fashion, Maurice locates his identity wholly in his sexuality: in essence, it becomes the truth of himself, the dark secret he has to exorcise. His visits to both Dr Barry and Mr Lasker Jones are desperate attempts at confession, the former directed towards a supreme patriarchal figure from whom he craves absolution or expiation, the latter via the newly emergent discourses of medical science. But both these attempts are failures: suburban culture greets his admission with outright denial, while quasi-medical science seems misguided and ineffectual. Importantly, though, these episodes constitute, I would argue, a profound rebuke on Forster’s part to the very idea that sexuality can somehow be quantified, accounted for or remedied in any meaningful way. Although Forster is not wholly cynical concerning the hypnotic technique, he seems to impress upon the reader his apprehension of its inherent limitations. When Maurice returns to Mr Lasker Jones for a second interview, he is not able even to enter the hypnotic state. As this failure occurs after his sexual encounter with Alec Scudder at Penge (during which, we presume, consummation takes place), Forster seems to be suggesting that just such a profoundly satisfying sexual experience has eclipsed any lurking heterosexuality within his protagonist.

As was pointed out earlier, critics such as Robert K. Martin have alleged that the novel is essentially a political one that counterposes two competing modes of homosexual identity, and in the Maurice-Scudder affair Forster sets about providing a blueprint for social resistance. It is unsurprising, then, that Maurice’s most dramatic personal experiences, and resultant challenges to mainstream society, should take place at Penge, which I have already identified as an image of conservatism. It is here that Maurice

literally defies societal sexual dictates, by engaging in (we presume) penetrative homosexual sex for the first time with a member of the lower classes. Maurice thus defies society on two important issues: the injunction against homosexuality and sexual relations across the class divide. The politically conscious aspect of the Maurice-Scudder relationship is evident when one considers the incident when the two men share an innings in a county cricket match. It is by no means accidental that Forster chooses to express the activist nature of their relationship within the context of a typically masculine English pursuit; indeed, there appears to be a certain latent wry humour in this expression of homoerotic desire and political resolve within this ostensibly mainstream context:

**When he went out to bat, it was a new over, so that Alec received first ball. His style changed. Abandoning caution, he swiped the ball into the fern. Lifting his eyes, he met Maurice's and smiled. Lost ball. Next time he hit a boundary. He was untrained, but had the cricketing build, and the game took on some semblance of reality. Maurice played up too. His mind had cleared, and he felt that they were against the whole world, that not only Mr Borenius and the field but the audience in the shed and all England were closing round the wickets. They played for the sake of each other and of their fragile relationship – if one fell the other would follow. They intended no harm to the world, but so long as it attacked they must punish, they must stand wary, then hit with full strength, they must show that when two are gathered together majorities shall not triumph. And as the game proceeded it connected with the night, and interpreted it (176).**

Forster uses the cricket match as a metaphor for the political struggle awaiting homosexual men living within a repressive and alienating society. Like the cricket match, the struggle for political emancipation will be a tactical battle conducted within a complex set of signs and significations which one might interpret as being representative of the social system. The image of the two men united in political and personal solidarity is a powerful one, and it well expresses Forster's understanding of the need for alliances based on personal commitment to confront mainstream society. The highly politicised quality of this description is apparent in the explicitly political diction, which is revealed in the references to "majorities", strategic alliances, the importance of solidarity, and the need for political "triumph". Furthermore, this passage has strong rhetorical qualities, which suggest that it should be read as an exhortation to political action. In the final sentence of the passage, Forster suggests that the personal pleasure and satisfaction homosexual men receive from their relationships should be translated into practical



political action. The “night” (erotic pleasure) must combine with the “game” (the strategic struggle) in order for change to come about.

However, the novel’s ending does not seem to resonate with this kind of bold activist spirit. In my opinion, this political confusion is what is most unsatisfactory about the *dénouement*. Liberal humanist critics have pointed to Maurice and Alec’s flight to the greenwood as mawkish and sentimental (and there is indeed some validity to this criticism), but I feel that it is the ideological confusion of the final section of the novel that is its most serious flaw. Forster seems to giving us a mixed message: on the one hand, he seems to be advocating a prolonged and arduous political struggle as the only means of attaining liberation (as evidenced by the imagery and rhetoric of the cricket match), but he then suddenly shies away from direct confrontation, and has his heroes flee from Penge and all it represents. Alec and Maurice may well attain personal happiness as outlaws in the greenwood, but one wonders, given the increasing activist tone in the second half of the novel, why the author should choose to end his novel without direct confrontation, without “connecting the night with the game”. This confusion arguably mirrors Forster’s own ambivalence about how to confront English society over the question of homosexuality.

Forster chooses instead to close the novel with a purely personal confrontation and a personal triumph. Maurice’s brutally honest interview with Clive is evidently intended by Forster to substitute for a broader attack on the dominant culture, but it crucially fails to resonate beyond the personal sphere. Maurice’s harsh words may well act as a rebuke to Clive’s moral hypocrisy, but they nevertheless fail to invalidate homophobic oppression in general. Indeed, Maurice’s plea is largely personal and micropolitical: he asks only that he be allowed the personal happiness that Clive purportedly enjoys with Anne. Significantly, also, he frames his request *in terms of* heterosexual love, instead of in its own right, asking that he too be allowed a love “big enough to hang a life on” (214). In this sense, then, he defers to heteronormative society, and does not attempt to challenge it in a radical sense.

The final chapter of *Maurice* is instructive in a number of crucial respects. In essence, it marks a retreat on Forster’s part from the radicalism of Edward Carpenter’s socialism and return to the earlier sections of the novel, in which Maurice’s struggle was

conceived of in largely personal, emotional terms. Maurice is undoubtedly the victor in the realm of personal morality, but his confrontation with Clive has little effect on the broader power relationships in his society. In this sense, his achievement has even less social resonance than Lucy Honeychurch's flagrant rejection of middle-class morality in *A Room with a View*, in which she eventually confronted and defied the bourgeois sexual code. In *Maurice*, only Clive hears of Maurice's relationship with Alec, and it should be remembered that Clive himself is not wholly representative of mainstream sexuality. In *Howards End*, Forster posited the radical notion that mainstream culture could be challenged and even overcome, but in *Maurice* he seems to suggest that it is impossible for homosexual men to live within mainstream society; instead, they have to create their own space elsewhere. Forster seems unable to visualise a means by which homosexual men could reconcile their sexuality with the dominant culture's heteronormative demands. It is this troubling issue which is probed, directly and disturbingly, in two of Forster's posthumously published short stories, "The Life to Come" and "The Other Boat".

As examples of Forster's posthumously published shorter fiction, “The Life to Come” and “The Other Boat” have much in common with one another, both structurally and thematically. Both are concerned primarily and most obviously with the notion of illicit desire, the often contradictory and violent impulses of those individuals implicated in it, and the relationship between these individuals and the larger social fabric of which they are constituent parts. In particular, Forster is concerned with tracing and delineating the relationship between these liminal figures and the cultural mainstream from which they are severed. But he is careful also to problematise this issue by stressing the paradoxical links that exist between the dominant culture and certain of the characters, such as Mr Pinmay and Lionel March, who, like Maurice, are at once both at the centre and the margins of their respective cultural environments. In this sense, both stories are obviously connected with *Maurice* in the sense that they share a similar authorial vision. While both Lionel March and Paul Pinmay are ostensibly supreme representatives and emissaries of the empowered, they are simultaneously subject to the very power structures they themselves serve to bolster and consolidate, and of which they are an integral part. Furthermore, both the protagonists are ultimately the victims of the power structures the dominant culture has established. In addition, in these stories Forster lays great stress on the concept of textuality and discourse, and seems to suggest the manner in which language itself can be used as a weapon of power and dominance.

“The Life to Come” and “The Other Boat” are similar in structure, composition and theme, and both end violently, unexpectedly and tragically. In addition, both stories attempt to decode the notion of political power as it manifests itself in personal relations. Most crucially, though, the stories examine how this plays itself out in terms of racial difference. More specifically, they explore homosexual desire in the context of an inter-racial relationship, and thereby stress the links between racial and homophobic oppression. In this sense, as Gregory W. Bredbeck has noted, “E.M. Forster’s short story ‘The Life to Come’ intersects the concerns of both his colonial fiction (*A Passage to India*) and his homosexual fiction (*Maurice*)” (139). As is evident throughout Forster's fiction, racial and homophobic oppression are viewed not as discrete ideological

conceptions, but as intricately interrelated discourses which are mutually supportive and validating. Indeed, the narratives are marked also by Forster's insistence on the notion of language as a weapon of power and dominance, as a tool with the capacity both to define and determine what is socially acceptable, and to distort human relations for purely ideological ends. The power over discourse, Forster seems to suggest, is what determines how events and identities are construed. Further, the stories examine the consequences of the interaction of two vastly different cultures in the context of severely unequal power relations. Moreover, this interaction is viewed in microcosm, the wider socio-political issues crystallised in and focused on individual same-sex relationships.

In "The Life to Come", British imperial and religious dominance are foregrounded in the character of the cleric Paul Pinmay, while in "The Other Boat" Forster presents Lionel March as the quintessential imperial figure, a young man who is virile and essentially good-natured, but at the same time obtuse and lacking in self-awareness. In detailing these colonial representatives' intimate sexual relations with representative figures of racially subordinate "other" groups, Forster sets about exploring the complex network of power relations associated with homosexual desire (which the racially dominant culture considers abhorrent) and racial dominance and subordination (which it validates and encourages). What is thematically central to these stories is the fact that, by engaging in sexual relations with the disempowered ethnic "other", the stories' protagonists flout cultural policy on two crucial levels. Just as racial dominance as a political credo is essential to the continuance and extension of imperial power, so is heterosexism central to the maintenance of the gender roles and norms around which Edwardian society is structured.

These broadly political themes come into clearer focus when one engages in a close critical analysis of "The Life to Come", where it is evident that images of darkness and obfuscation are employed to underscore the notion of the contradictory and essentially questionable nature of public or religious morality underlying the story's categorical and absolutist rhetoric.<sup>64</sup> The images of disorder and confusion intensify the reader's sense of the essentially murky and innately questionable quality of mainstream

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<sup>64</sup> As was seen in the previous chapter, Forster makes a similar use of imagery of darkness and light in *Maurice*.

moral strictures which, Forster suggests, are capable of being contested and disputed. These images can be seen to work in opposition to the rhetoric espoused by the missionaries and serve continually to undermine it. In addition, the floral images which saturate the story should not be regarded as a mere decorative touch; rather, they serve as a constant reminder of the violent intensity inherent in spontaneous sexual relations which the story's central characters vainly attempt to repress. In this sense, the story is linked with *A Passage to India*, where Forster presents the Indian landscape as resisting any attempts at explanation or elucidation by the British colonials who passively survey it (*Passage* 139). Gregory W. Bredbeck sees a symbolic overlap between "The Life to Come" and *A Passage to India*: "The symbolism at the beginning of 'The Life to Come' is not especially interesting because of its uniqueness, then, but because of its stereotypicality. It is quintessential Forster, and needs to be treated as such" (140).

In "The Life to Come", Paul Pinmay is sent as an emissary of Christian civilisation to a supposedly "primitive tribe" in order to convert them to his faith. But, unable to establish any kind of meaningful dialogue with the chief, Vithobai, he finds himself in a position of weakness and subordination, and is "Forbidden to sleep in the village" (67). As yet untainted by the corrupting influence of colonial and religious power (we are told that he initially "[declared] in his naive way that human nature is the same all over the world" (66)), it is he who is the disempowered, "othered" figure driven away from the dominant culture and fearful of attack by it. But the sexual intimacy that takes place between Pinmay and Vithobai (which, significantly, is described in terms of equality, tenderness and compassion) ultimately empowers Pinmay in a personal capacity and aids in the consolidation of imperial power and its economic interests. Forster foregrounds notions of economics and resources by his repeated emphasis on the environmental degradation of the area (he notes that the forests have been denuded (74), and makes reference to the "polluted stream" (82)), which is the result of the "mining concessions" (74) and the timber-felling (74) of the colonists. This point links the story with the environmental concerns Forster raises in *Howards End*, where he describes the damage done to the English countryside by industrialisation, as exemplified metaphorically by the Wilcox motor-car: "Without replying, he turned round in his seat and contemplated the cloud of dust that they had raised in their passage through the

village. It was settling again, but not all into the road from which he had taken it. Some of it had percolated through the open windows, some had whitened the roses and gooseberries of the wayside gardens, while a certain proportion had entered the lungs of the villagers” (32-3). The ecologically destructive aspect of the Wilcoxes is stressed also in a direct reference to the colonial mission. When Margaret first visits Henry’s offices, she sees a map of Africa on one of the walls: “Another hung opposite, on which the whole continent [Africa] appeared, looking like a whale marked out for blubber” (196).

The story opens with lofty and dramatic rhetoric redolent of the scriptures. Its bold opening proclamation, “Love had been born somewhere in the forest”, is, in its categorical and assured tone, suggestive of the opening verses of *Genesis*, and it foregrounds immediately the themes of religious and moral oppression which the story proceeds to explicate. But the opening paragraph then goes on to impress upon the reader the curiously ambiguous and amorphous qualities of human sexuality, which, it is suggested, can manifest itself in a number of forms and modes. It is for this reason that Forster writes, “... of what quality only the future could decide”. Human love, according to Forster's definition, is a malleable, fluid concept which may be constructed in a variety of ways. This notion is intensified throughout the opening paragraph by a whole series of phrases emphasising the latent potentiality or choice inherent in human sexuality: we are told that the love was “Trivial or immortal”, that it was “Impossible to tell whence the cry had come”, “into what worlds it would echo”, that it “had been born for good or evil”, and “for a life long or short” (65). Love is what we make of it, Forster seems to be saying, and has no innate essence or moral fixity.

Images of darkness can also be seen to pervade the opening paragraph, with Forster thereby foregrounding the murky, morally ambiguous realm inhabited by human sexuality. We are told that a “midnight cry” emanates from two human bodies, the gender of these bodies not being specified, and that it was “Impossible to tell whence the cry had come, so dark was the forest” (65). These images are undoubtedly intended to have a psychological significance: the dark, shadowy and somewhat deceptive physical landscape Forster describes is also the emotional terrain of the human mind grappling with issues of sexual morality. In addition, the reference to the size of the forest (“so vast was the forest” (65)) implies that the bounds of human sexuality are limitless, that the

scope for potential manifestations of human love are inestimable. It may also be said that the images of darkness and confusion subtly introduce the reader to the countercultural and subversive qualities which the story proceeds to delineate: we are concerned not with the aspects of society normally in full and unobstructed view, but with the liminal and shadowy issues which haunt the fringes of human intercourse.

The following paragraph marks a shift from the abstract to the concrete, and introduces one of the characters central to the plot structure of the story. Paul Pinmay is introduced initially only by means of a physical description, his name given to the reader only several pages into the story. From the very start, Forster sets up an important and deliberate contrast between two violently competing aspects of his character, juxtaposing his “pagan limbs” with his “golden ruffled hair”. These images are instructive not simply because they foreshadow the introduction of the “pagan”, native characters which populate the narrative, but because they illustrate the counterposing of uninhibited, expressive physicality and the repressive moral idealism of Christian civilisation. Pinmay’s body (symbolised by his “pagan limbs”) responds positively and warmly to the sexual experience (“A remote a romantic spot ... lovely, lovable ...” (65)), but his mind rejects it as morally repulsive (“ ... he dropped beside it [the Bible] with a dramatic moan” (65)).

The reference to the Bible introduces the question of textuality and the power of discourse into the story. Paul Pinmay is bound and subservient to the dictates of the religious text, but then proceeds to enslave Vithobai in a similar fashion, playing upon his “misunderstanding” of the scriptures to maintain exploitative control over him. Particularly significant is the image of the scarlet flower obscuring a part of the text: “ ... a scarlet flower hid the next word, flowers were everywhere, even round his own neck” (65). Floral images permeate this story, and are present at most of the dramatically salient moments. Here, I would argue, the scarlet flowers represent the passionate intensity of sexual love unfettered by moral strictures. This is conveyed both by the flowers’ vivid colour and their aesthetic attractiveness. This notion is amplified when one considers that Vithobai arrives at the hut as a “gracious and bare-limbed boy, whose only ornaments were scarlet flowers” (67). It is significant that Forster draws a parallel between Pinmay and Vithobai at this point, there being an obvious similarity between the image of the

“pagan limbs” of the Englishman and the “bare-limbed boy” described a page or two later. The sexual connotations inherent in the floral images are undeniable, but they may also be said to have a more generalised significance when one considers how they are employed at other key moments in the story. For example, the dying Vithobai is described as having near him “a curious skein of blue flowers threaded round a knife” (78). We are told that “blue is the colour of despair in the valley, just as red is the colour of love” (78), so one might surmise that the flowers are markers of intense feeling, of overpowering emotion. Of course, the reference to red being the colour of love subtly prefigures the story’s tragic and bloody *dénouement*. Indeed, the flowers are present at the story’s main dramatic junctures, such as the moment after Pinmay has been murdered by Vithobai, where Forster writes, “He had scarcely the strength to push the body onto the asphalt or to spread the skein of blue flowers” (81). Moreover, as natural images, the flowers often underscore the contrast between the passionate intensity inherent in the natural world and the contrived, repressed behaviour of humans. This is certainly the implication of the image of the flower obscuring the text of the Bible; Forster seems to suggest that the essentially natural and powerful impulses of human sexuality obscure and, indeed, supersede any humanly-constructed discourse of morality.

This disjuncture between appearance and reality is carried through to the descriptions of the main characters. When Vithobai is first described to the reader, he seems to validate and confirm many prejudicial European stereotypes about native tribesmen. He is described as “the wildest, strongest, most stubborn of all the inland chiefs” (66), but is simultaneously presented as a regal figure – dignified, composed and in control: “... Vithobai remained impassive and unfriendly behind his amulets and robes” (66). In particular, Forster’s foregrounding of the chief’s amulets (charms worn to fend off evil influences) subtly introduces the question of whether it is in fact the missionary who is the genuinely evil or degenerate influence, and so problematises the traditional stance of religious chauvinists. However, Gregory Bredbeck takes exception to Forster’s depiction of Vithobai, seeing it as a supreme manifestation of the colonial stereotype: “Forster’s eroticisation of Vithobai comes to represent that most pernicious trope of colonial representation, the stereotype” (146). Forster does certainly rely on stereotype in his presentation of Vithobai, but I feel that the events of the story also



actively subvert comfortable European assumptions of colonial subjects, especially when one considers the manner in which the story's ending encourages the reader to applaud Vithobai's revenge. In addition, far from "perfectly capturing Homi K. Bhabha's example of 'the bestial license of the African'" (Bredbeck 147), the sexual relations between the chief and the missionary are seen in passionate, sensitive and humanly responsive terms. The intimacy which takes place between the two characters is hardly an example of stereotypical European conceptions of "bestial" African sexuality.

Accordingly, when Vithobai is presented to the reader in the scene of sexual intimacy between him and the cleric, he is described in sensual, erotic terms, "bare-limbed" and bedecked in flowers. A similar image of the chief is produced by Forster's juxtaposing Pinmay's constricting Western attire with Vithobai's striking and colourful outfit. Pinmay is described as wearing a dull suit of conventional colours, which he himself categorises as "decently clad" (70). In contrast, Vithobai is wearing "but little" (71), in itself a violation of Christian doctrine, which is traditionally fearful and intolerant of the naked human form. Indeed, the chief's uninhibited attitude towards sexual activity is reinforced when one considers the image of free and easy movement suggested by the description of his outfit: "A cincture of bright silks supported his dagger and floated in the fresh wind when he ran" (71). In addition, the descriptions of the jewellery worn by Vithobai (particularly the piece depicting a falcon's head) suggest mystery and glamour, but are also faintly redolent of the ancient civilisations, such as Ancient Egypt. Cumulatively, these images rebuke traditional western perceptions of the "savage" tribesman, as the figure of Vithobai is quite obviously invested with honour and dignity. The image of the falcon, in particular, foreshadows the chief's triumph over the missionary as it is conveyed in the story's final image of him as an empowered bird of prey.

Ultimately, though, it is Pinmay's control over language, or discourse, that facilitates his empowerment. What leads Vithobai to the "miserable hut" (67) is his "misinterpretation" of the Christian doctrine of boundless, infinite love. But, as Forster wryly suggests throughout, Vithobai merely insists on the full implications of the doctrine, and simply argues the Christian point through to its logical conclusion, which is that sexual love between human beings must surely always be divine, regardless of the

genders of those participating in the act.<sup>65</sup> Vithobai embraces Christian doctrine thinking that it sanctions the free expression of sexual love, but this is, in fact, precisely the converse of the Church's teachings on sexual morality. In this way, Forster draws attention to the innately pluralistic, endlessly arguable, nature of religious doctrine, which is capable of being construed in a number of diverse and equally valid ways, and thereby casts doubt on the officially sanctioned and supposedly unassailable interpretation of the scriptures peddled by religious potentates.

The disjuncture between the superficial gloss of infinite love and the reality of power and oppression lurking furtively beneath it then becomes the driving force of the story. Pinmay delays conveying to Vithobai (now renamed "Barnabas" in the first and highly significant stage of the erosion of his personal and political autonomy) that his sexual love for him is, officially speaking, a violation of Christian doctrine, and instead exploits his sexual desire in a premeditated and cynical ploy to consolidate his dominance over him:

**Mr Pinmay had thought over his line of action. He dared not explain the hideous error, nor call upon his fellow sinner to repent; the chief must remain in a state of damnation for a time, for a new church depended on it. His reply to the unholy suggestion was "Not yet" (71).**

What is most significant, though, is Forster's illustration of how the personal and the political feed into one another. Pinmay exploits a highly intimate sexual encounter in order to bolster his power within the missionary community. He manages to subjugate "the wildest, strongest, most stubborn of the inland chiefs" (66) through manipulation of his sexual desire for him. But, as the narrative illustrates, this has devastating – indeed, tragic – consequences for both men. Pinmay's death is a direct consequence of Vithobai again "misinterpreting" fairly seminal Christian doctrine. But on this occasion it is the erstwhile chief who is victorious. As Forster shows, the manipulation or control of discourse is what determines power and dominance, and it is Vithobai who is its master here:

**"And we shall meet in it [the afterlife], you and I?" he asked, with a tender yet reverent caress.**

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<sup>65</sup> Gregory Bredbeck argues that the story illustrates a "clash between literalism and metaphoricity" (141).

“Assuredly, if we keep God's commandments.”  
“Shall we know one another again?”  
“Yes, with all spiritual knowledge.”  
“And will there be love?” “In the real and true sense, there will.”  
“Real and true love! Ah, that would be joyful ... The life to come,” he shouted. “Life, life, eternal life. Wait for me in it.” And he stabbed the missionary through the heart (81).

It is Vithobai's construction of “real and true love” as specifically sexual love that is the basis of his empowerment. He exploits Pinmay's vague and hackneyed discourse to gain his ascendancy over him. Indeed, the question and answer format of the quoted passage serves to intensify the sudden, unexpected quality of Vithobai's killing of Pinmay. In particular, Pinmay's concise, assured answers present him as the unqualified source of spiritual knowledge, the figure invested with the power to define and delimit the nature and precise quality of existence beyond the grave. But it is the dying chief, initially presented as the ignorant, passive recipient of the white man's wisdom, who construes the missionary's words to his own advantage. While the turgid, empty rhetoric of the missionary initially traps him, it is ultimately his source of emancipation. In this way, Forster subtly manages to reject and overthrow the binaristic simplicity of empowered/disempowered and mainstream/marginal. Pinmay, initially the oppressor, becomes the oppressed's victim by the story's close. Furthermore, the exact same discourse used initially to oppress is ultimately invoked as liberation rhetoric. The ideological slippages apparent in *Maurice* are thus apparent also in Forster's later short fiction.

Indeed, the manner in which Forster blurs the distinction between mainstream and marginal is evident throughout in the character of Paul Pinmay. The story's peculiar complexity stems largely from the unusual ideological position of its protagonist, who, like Maurice, is both at the centre and the margins of his cultural system. While he is a white missionary of power and influence, his sexual encounter with Vithobai (who, it is suggested, actively and voluntarily seduces the young missionary) alienates him from the mainstream and compromises his relationship with it. Moreover, the fear that accompanies this acknowledgement reduces him to the position of the oppressed “other”, forever fearful of attack, and always at the risk of exposure and ruination. Beneath the veneer of racial dominance and moral certitude, Pinmay is as marginal and vulnerable as

Vithobai. He is entrapped by his own denial and fear: “He wished that the whole unsavoury business had not been raked up into the light just before his wedding. Its senselessness alarmed him” (76).

This, too, is the position of the protagonist of “The Other Boat”, a story which details the tragic consequences of a homosexual relationship between “Cocoanut” (significantly, we are never told his real name), a mixed-race youth, and Lionel March, a young imperialist *en route* to India. This story is significant because, written in 1958, it is one of Forster’s last pieces of fiction. For this reason, it in many ways presents a final account of Forster’s understanding of the interaction of mainstream and marginal cultures. In many ways it seems redolent of *A Passage to India*, but, written 34 years after that novel, it is temporally and philosophically distanced from Forster’s final novel. In this story, Forster stresses the confused and paradoxical position Lionel occupies with regard to the cultural mainstream: in contrast with Paul Pinmay in “The Life to Come”, Lionel’s apparent masculinity and virility are strongly imparted to the reader.<sup>66</sup> In a “little desert war” (171), we are told, he “displayed dash and decision, had been wounded, and had been mentioned in despatches and got his captaincy early”, and he is described as having “thick fairish hair, blue eyes, glowing cheeks and strong white teeth” and as “[wearing] a mess uniform slightly too small for him, which accentuated his physique” (172). Forster also adds – in a wry ironic touch, given the subject matter at hand – that his looks were “irresistible to the opposite sex” (172).

Superficially, Lionel appears to epitomise a promising young imperialist, ready to survey, subjugate and possess in the colonies. But his character is riven with internal contradictions and ideological schisms, as is his relationship with the “sahibs” representative of the dominant colonial culture. Ironically, his shocked, bewildered response to Cocoanut’s apparent homosexuality is true also of himself: “If only he had found out the fellow’s tastes in England he would never have touched him, no, not with tongs. But could he have found out? You couldn’t tell by just looking. Or could you?” (176-177). While he evidently peddles the racist shorthand of the colonists in his quest for belonging (“dagoes sometimes have marvellous memories” (171), he tells his mother

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<sup>66</sup> In this regard, Lionel March more closely resembles Maurice, whose traditionally masculine character and demeanour are similarly impressed upon the reader.

in a letter), we are told that “his colour prejudices were tribal rather than personal” (174). He frequently expresses homophobic opinions, initially regarding Cocanut’s intimate touch as “an offence against decency” (174) and then later denouncing his relationship as a “mistake” (195) that would jeopardise his career (192), but nevertheless actively and continuously engages in a homosexual relationship as he does so. Indeed, in the final tragic scene, he denounces his sexuality even as he engages in the sexual act, murdering his lover as he supposedly makes love to him. In this way, he literally acts out the paradox that characterises and exemplifies his life.

Lionel March is a vastly more traumatised character than Paul Pinmay, who seems to exude an air of control and assuredness throughout his dealings with Vithobai. In contrast, March is a reckless, tormented figure. When reading the story, one has a pervasive sense of the protagonist careering inexorably and tragically towards a wretched, cataclysmic end. There is also a pathos inherent in his character that is, I feel, absent in Forster’s representation of the missionary. This is largely the result of the fact that Lionel March is essentially good-natured, considerate and kind; indeed, he seems to me to be the victim of unremitting social manipulation who never wholly throws off the ideological yoke of mainstream society. Indeed, in this sense his character is radically contrasted with that of Maurice, whose story ends happily, if fancifully. It seems that, by the time he came to write this story, Forster had largely despaired of any hope of escape from the psychological strain associated with marginalisation – hence the story’s substitution of a brutal and nihilistic ending of rape, murder and suicide for the earlier symbolic flight to the Greenwood.

Lionel March’s simultaneous position of marginality and centrality is evident in the ideological views he espouses, especially with regard to race. I would argue that Lionel March’s avowed racism is largely cultural mimicry when articulated by him; in essence, it is a desperate and ultimately unsuccessful attempt to assert his belonging to a group from which he is deeply and painfully estranged. Hence his touting of simple-minded and intellectually feeble racist epithets:

**At this point Lionel made a shrewd move: everything gets known on a boat and he had better anticipate discovery. “I got a passage all right,” he brayed, “but at the cost of sharing my cabin with a wog” (175).**

Lionel appropriates the racist discourse of the colonists to demonstrate his own social inclusion, to position himself firmly and unequivocally at the ideological centre. Thus, like Paul Pinmay, he realises, albeit subconsciously, that language carries with it a great deal of power. This is made apparent in the ensuing self-congratulatory racist banter.<sup>67</sup> Forster presents the feeble-minded attempts at humour with scathing sarcasm:

**All condoled, and Colonel Arbuthnot in the merriest of moods exclaimed, "Let's hope the blacks don't come off on the sheets," and Mrs Arbuthnot, wittier still, cried, "Of course they won't, dear, if it's a wog it will be the coffees." Everyone shouted with laughter, the good lady basked in the applause, and Lionel could not understand why he suddenly wanted to throw himself into the sea (175).**

As the final phrase of the above extract reveals, Lionel's attempts at social inclusion are undercut by his own innate and deeply felt sense of alienation. His revulsion for the views expressed by the Arbuthnots is subconscious or suppressed and should not be understood as a conscious or outright aversion to the racist orthodoxy. It is for this reason that Forster writes that Lionel "could not understand" (175) the reasons for his feelings of dissociation from "the group of sahibs who would hang together during the voyage and exclude outsiders" (175). Lionel clings to the "sahibs" for validation and identity, but can never fully integrate with them. He is throughout the story a lonely, liminal figure, traumatised by the self-destructive paradox of his "deviant" sexuality and his ostensible "normality".

The reference to his throwing himself into the sea obviously foreshadows his eventual suicide, Forster thereby stressing that the only resolution available to him is the nihil of death. Indeed, this idea is stressed earlier in the story, where it is directly connected with his mother:

**Bridge proceeded without a hitch, as his mother had been given to understand it might. She had not been told that on either side of the players, violet darkening into black, rushed the sea, nor would she have been interested. Her son gazed at it occasionally, his forehead furrowed (172).**

The sea is presented as a seductive, enticing element, an ostensible way out of his tormented predicament. It promises the peace of dissolution, and exists as a powerful natural force circumscribing the niceties and conventions of human culture ("... on either

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<sup>67</sup> This particular brand of colonial racism is similar to that satirised in *A Passage to India*.

side of the players ... rushed the sea ... ”). It is significant, also, that Lionel is identified not by his name but in terms of his mother (“Her son gazed at it occasionally ... ”), with this suggesting both the extent of his mother’s manipulation and his own lack of personal identity. Forster seems to suggest that he exists for, and in terms of, his mother, who controls his destiny by means of a potent blend of guilt and dutiful expectations.

Indeed, it is Forster's presentation of Mrs March that is one of the story’s most striking and ideologically problematic features. She is the quintessential Oedipal figure, assuming gargantuan symbolic proportions in the mind of the young man. Curiously, though, Mrs March does not simply block Lionel March’s sexuality by causing him to fixate on her as the figure of adoration; rather, she is presented throughout as imposing upon Lionel unrealistic expectations of virile and manly conduct, expectations that his sexual essence prevents him from ever being able to fulfil. For example, in the first section of the story, when watching the children play, she calls out to the boys, “Shout as much as you like, boys, but don’t scream, don’t scream” (167). This is arguably not a mere insistence on politeness or consideration for fellow passengers: she actively encourages the boys to shout (a word used usually to denote a more aggressive, robust and typically manly behaviour) but implores them not to scream (which is often associated with effeminacy).

From very early in the story, Lionel is expected to fulfil the sexual and cultural role of his disgraced father, and Mrs March is throughout the story dismissive of what she considers to be unmanliness or weakness. The mystical elements of the story are introduced very early in the narrative with Mrs March's sensing that there is something unnatural or threatening about Cocoanut and his relationship with her son. Although his mixed-race status is certainly a factor in this aversion, it is not, perhaps, fanciful to suggest she picks up on a certain sexual ambiguity in his demeanour. For example, her last words to Cocoanut (and the last spoken directly by her in the story) are: “You're a silly idle useless unmanly little boy” (170). Later in the story, when grappling with his conflicting responses to Cocoanut’s explicitly sexual touch, Lionel reflects, “Dimly, after ten years’ forgetfulness, something stirred in that faraway boat of his childhood and he saw his mother ... Well, she was always objecting to something or other, the poor Mater. No, she couldn’t possibly have known” (176).

It may also be said that her hostility towards Cocoanut is due in part to the fact that he disrupts the orderly and traditionally boyish game of soldiers initially planned by Lionel. The derailment of this game is loaded with symbolic import: Cocoanut intervenes in the children's play and disrupts the highly gendered and culturally scripted game of soldiers just as he later intervenes in Lionel's life and disrupts his rather contrived, schematic marriage to Isabel in India. Just as he thwarts Mrs March's intentions as a child, he again derails her intentions for her son later in the story. This disruption of a childhood game symbolically mimics the disruption of Lionel's prescribed sexuality in later life. However, there is much in Forster's depiction of Mrs March that is irrational and unexplained, with this linking her to the other misogynistic portrayals that populate Forster's fiction. Throughout the story, Lionel is unable to slough off her overwhelming and debilitating psychic presence. Her peremptory, accusatory tone is always present in the background. There is more than a touch of misogyny in Forster's portrayal of the mother-figure, as there is in his depiction of the virgin Perpetua in another of Forster's posthumously published short stories, "The Torque". In this story, which also contains disturbing scenes celebrating violent sexuality,<sup>68</sup> Perpetua seems to attempt to obstruct and impede Marcian's nascent sexuality.

Lionel's fear and resentment of his mother (and, in particular, his fear of her knowing of his sexuality) are apparent when one considers that he lies to her in the letter written at the beginning of the journey. He writes that he has been housed in a single-berth cabin (171), thereby attempting subtly to dismiss the notion that any sexual intimacy will take place between himself and the "weird youth" (171) mentioned in the preceding lines. This point is significant in that it indicates that Lionel is himself anxious about his mother's seemingly unlimited powers of intuition and insight. But the letter also reeks of guilt and denial, hinting at a latent pathology and a violent dysfunctionality which will later manifest itself brutally and masochistically.

As I mentioned above, Forster's presentation of Lionel's mother is coloured with misogyny, but this is not the first time that this problematic issue has appeared in Forster's fiction. Indeed, as has been shown in the chapters on *A Room with a View*,

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<sup>68</sup> In this story, the protagonist, Marcian, is raped by a number of Goths. Disturbingly, Forster describes the incident as a pleasurable one, and has Marcian express that he would like to have the experience again.



*Howards End* and *Maurice*, Forster's appropriation and endorsement of mainstream oppressive conceptions of women show the extent to which the author was himself allied with and complicit in the very power structures he was ostensibly seeking to dismantle. In this way, Forster the artist displays the very same ambiguities and paradoxes he delineates in his protagonist. In this regard, Elizabeth Langland proffers an explanation for the misogynist streak running throughout Forster's fiction: she cites the prominence of the Victorian theory of homosexuality as *anima mulieris in corpore virile inclusa* (a woman's soul trapped in a man's body), and ascribes Forster's creeping misogyny to "Forster's fear of the feminine in himself" (82). In line with these misogynist impulses, Mrs March takes on a broader, more general significance in the story; she is transmogrified from an individual to a terrifying figure seemingly representative of all women. In many respects, I see Forster's depiction of Mrs March as the supreme manifestation of his hostility and resentment towards women, as she seems a combination of all of Forster's negative female characters. She seems particularly reminiscent of the cold, embittered and manipulative Agnes Pembroke of *The Longest Journey*, who makes wretched Rickie Elliot's life, and who is described at one point as a Medusa-figure.

Accordingly, it is Mrs March who is the catalyst for the disaster with which the story closes. It is when ruminating upon his mother's imagined reactions to his sexual relations with a half-caste boy ("... nor could she see, mercifully: the sight of him stripping [Forster's substitution for "topping a dago"] would have killed her" (193)) that the full horror of his own private internal paradox breaks forth. It is also an epiphanic moment in terms of the clarity and insight with which he suddenly perceives his mother and her role in his life:

**But behind Isabel, behind the Army, was another power, whom he could not consider calmly: his mother, blind-eyed in the midst of the enormous web she had spun – filaments drifting everywhere, strands catching. There was no reasoning with her or about her, she understood nothing and controlled everything (193).**

Lionel's acknowledgment of his mother's omnipotence leads to his decision to break off sexual relations with Coconut, which have now moved beyond the bounds of purely carnal enjoyment, as is signified by Lionel's use of the discourse of heterosexual Edwardian love-making: "...All the same, I've fallen for you" (186). Once again,

Forster's insistence on the importance of language in shaping power dynamics is evident here. It is when Lionel articulates his feelings that the horror of the reality of his "deviant" sexuality becomes apparent to him. In raping and murdering Coconut, he simultaneously punishes him and gratifies his lust, violence and sexuality being brutally conflated. This conflation mirrors and amplifies the confused and paradoxical power relations that exist between the two and between Lionel and his colonial compatriots. His death is his acknowledgment of his own inability to escape the cultural paradox in which he is seemingly trapped: he is unable to love another man because he cannot refute or reject mainstream culture, but he also cannot embrace that culture because of his own essential estrangement from it. The only possibility of escape is the seductive fluidity of the Oriental sea, which seems to offer a release from the rigid power dynamics on board the ship.

This dark and pessimistic ending should be regarded as an ideological regression of sorts, and should be contrasted with the vastly more optimistic closing chapter of *Maurice*, where Forster seems to suggest the possibility of moving beyond the rigid binaries of empowered/disempowered and mainstream/marginal. Whereas in that novel Forster offered a putative way of living outside of a heteronormative society, here he seems to offer no such solution. Indeed, the story seems to suggest that there is no solution, that there is no way of reconciling homosexual identity with an otherwise mainstream cultural status. This final story is saturated in frustration and despair: in depicting Lionel's desperate final actions, he seems to give expression to the idea that attempting to move beyond oppressive cultural power dynamics is impossible. This pessimism is, I would argue, closely linked to the darkening vision of *Howards End* and the nihilism expressed in *A Passage to India*.

In detailing the interactions of their marginalised protagonists with the larger cultural mainstream, "The Life to Come" and "The Other Boat" give profound and intimate expression to some of Forster's most deeply-felt themes and also show the manner in which the themes explored in the novels were carried through to the short fiction as well. As Gregory Bredbeck writes, "Forster's trajectory as an artist was vectored by the influence of two topics, homosexuality and British colonialist expansion" (141). Paul Pinmay and Lionel March are simultaneously both at the centre and the

margins of their respective cultural systems, and are thereby simultaneously empowered and vulnerable figures. Forster can therefore be seen to reject in his later short fiction the simplistic binaristic thinking regarding mainstream and marginal culture that was evident in the earlier novels. In this way, these two short stories can be seen to endorse and extend some of the key deconstructive concepts highlighted in both *Howards End* and *Maurice*. However, while the ending to “The Life to Come” admirably demonstrates this more fluid understanding of the relationship between the empowered and the disempowered, the ending to “The Other Boat” seems to indicate a pessimistic ideological regression on Forster’s part, a despairing reversion to an earlier conception of the impossibility of escaping the grip of mainstream culture.

## CONCLUSION

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An explicitly political approach to E.M. Forster's fiction can be seen to yield a number of salutary interpretive insights which heighten our awareness of the importance of this relatively marginalised Edwardian writer. This is particularly true when one considers the manner in which the novels shed light on contemporary questions of gender identity and sexual politics, with this revealing their continuing relevance in a society such as ours, which is currently grappling with the challenges associated with establishing and consolidating a genuinely just and humanly responsive social order. An awareness of the cultural context in which these pieces of fiction were written shows how intensely the novels engage with Edwardian conceptions of sexual and gender identity, and thus illustrates the extent to which Forster's writing was not simply an exercise in detached liberal idealism, but rather a socially conscious and politically attuned engagement with his society. Forster's novels and short stories reveal the author's concerns about the dehumanising effects of gender and sexual stereotyping and the marginalisation of certain social groups as a result of this, and should be read therefore as attempts to outline strategies for resistance to these forms of oppression, and to offer marginalised, subordinate groups the conceptual tools to negotiate a more positive, empowered position within society.

When analysing *A Room with a View*, *Howards End* and *Maurice*, as well as "The Life to Come" and "The Other Boat", it is apparent that all these pieces of fiction are concerned with the problematic issue of the intersection of mainstream and marginal cultures. This notion is clearly evident in *A Room with a View*, which is arranged around a series of careful binary oppositions between characters, belief systems and sexual codes. Moreover, in this novel the oppositions are conceived of hierarchically, with the marginalised cultural elements conceived of as being in a subordinate position with regard to the dominant culture. Accordingly, the only strategy of resistance presented by Forster is that of flight from the cultural centre, this being represented by Forster ending the novel in Italy, with his lovers in literal and figurative exile. However, in *Howards End* Forster complicates and in a sense deconstructs the binaries proffered in *A Room with a View*, and conceives of the marginalised cultural position in a more diffuse and

pluralistic manner. In this novel, Forster distinguishes between cultural and economic marginality, and shows how one can be culturally marginal but economically dominant (as in his depiction of the Schlegels) or wholly marginalised (as in his portrayal of Leonard Bast). Moreover, in this novel Forster presents the dominant culture (as represented by the Wilcox family) as essentially unstable and capable of being challenged and subverted. In *Maurice*, Forster takes this deconstructive process further and shows how both cultural states can co-exist within the individual subject. In this novel, the protagonist has to reject his mainstream identity and actively dissociate himself from mainstream culture in order to attain personal autonomy. Similarly, in the two short stories “The Life to Come” and “The Other Boat”, Forster details the curious manner in which his protagonists uncomfortably straddle the line between mainstream and marginal, and ultimately shows how both eventually succumb to the oppressive social forces which they themselves help to consolidate.

In the conclusion to his critical work *Aspects of the Novel*, Forster addresses the question of whether it was possible that human nature could change over time. His observation was that “If human nature does alter it will be because individuals manage to look at themselves in a new way” (172). In my opinion, Forster’s body of work is such an attempt at envisioning a new identity for those alienated by Edwardian cultural oppression.

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