Place, Paradox, and Transcendental Connection in Three of E. M. Forster's Novels

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Every continent has its own great spirit of place. Every people is polarized in some particular locality, which is home, the heartland. Different places on the face of the earth have different vital effluence, different vibration, different chemical exhalation, different polarity with different stars: call it what you like. But the spirit of place is a great reality.

— D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature*

ABSTRACT

E. M. Forster's fiction reflects his own concern with the spirit of place and his seemingly fruitless search for a spiritual reconciliation between people and places. Three novels, *Where Angels Fear to Tread, Howards End* and *A Passage to India*, set out how place functions in Forster's fiction. In these, Forster poses what appears to be an insoluble question for the reader, and proves himself reluctant to achieve closure. This reluctance to provide answers to the theme of place is a reflection of the philosophical uncertainty which pervades his fiction. Readers are encouraged to arrive at their own conclusions and to negotiate the ambivalence of his novels in order to find their own answers to the baffling nature of life and relationships.

Place, in Forster's fiction, contains an unseen force that is almost tangible. It determines the movement of the characters and guides them towards their intended destinations. The characters in his novels are transformed and manipulated by the device of genius loci; yet their changes never enable them to achieve permanent attachments with others nor with places. Although Forster's fiction shows no final harmonious home where ancestry and roots are established, the eponymous house in *Howards End* offers us a window. In it, the sisters achieve an affinity with place; however, there is still no space in which all of humanity can connect, and paradoxically, exclusion is essential to the final scene of reconciliation.

Contradiction and opposition inform all of Forster's fiction. In each novel there are localities which represent the socially-controlled space on the one hand, and on the other, the unfettered region. Although Forster shows a Modernist tendency to nostalgically idealise the past, he continues to search for that delicate equilibrium

between people and place. But just as he criticises and praises culture, he sees that the rural regions have their own contradictory attributes. This thesis traces Forster's treatment of place through personal, social, cultural, and spiritual sites, and the search for an esoteric home and transcendental reconciliation, becoming as it does an increasingly tentative and paradoxical theme.

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PREFACE

There is a fascination with the mystery of life which eludes rational thought and which can only fleetingly be perceived. This intrigue is Forster's underlying theme and inspires not only the exploration of abstract connection, but also highlights the intangibility of relationships as expressed in his writings. My introduction to E. M. was *A Room With A View*. Although paradoxically I do not examine *A Room With A View* in this thesis, I was fascinated by the diverse characters, the vivid settings, the subtle humour, and Forster's nebulous philosophical approach to life. I felt Forster had something vital to impart about how to live life being true to one's ideals and one's values. Although it was his characters and humour that interested me most, I chose to anaylse three of his novels in light of his depiction of place and the role it plays in contributing to the central theme of human connection.

Forster's own relationship with place throughout his life was one of significant intensity, and this preoccupation is reflected in all his work. The first chapter of this thesis looks at his own homes and sites, and the values he attached to them. Forster's personal attachment to places was extraordinarily intense. The emotions he invested in houses and objects served to pave the way for a dramatic portrayal of place in his fiction, and also in his non-fictional works. Spaces became for Forster more than just locations for action and characters, but a real force embedded with the powers to transform. As is shown in his first short story, "The Story of A Panic" (1904), early in his literary career place was employed to penetrate veneers of hypocrisy and respectability. And his stories are a useful indication of the patterns seen in his longer

fiction. The significance he gives to differing regions of the earth sets up a foundation to what becomes an explicit dichotomy.

Where Angels Fear to Tread, written in 1905, reveals Forster's emphasis on the opposition of socially-controlled conventionality and liberating unfettered places, and the different cultures and geographies that divide and unify the characters. In this novel, as in the later two, there is a similar progression through edifices towards a meeting-ground of balance and communion. In the Italian town of Monteriano, where there is the hotel, with its cultural and personal contentions; the opera house, which encourages spontaneity and instinctual reactions in the characters; the church, which prompts communication and a participation in life; the cafe, where cultural differences are reinforced and diminished, and finally Gino's house, which is conducive to reconciliation, the characters fulfil their quest in learning how to accommodate for all types of experience and alternative values. They gain a greater understanding of themselves and others. However, in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* there is less significance allocated to the topography of a rural countryside and a populated city than is evident in *Howards End*, and unlike *A Passage to India*, there is less focus on finding connection through spiritual transcendence. In *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, the final ambiguous reconciliation displays the indeterminate and paradoxical use of place in Forster's fiction, which reinforces the impossibility of utopian bonding between the characters.

Howards End focuses on the condition of England as a divided country and the possibility of its reconciliation. In this novel Forster presents Howards End as the ideal home for humanity and the basic values that are needed to ensure its survival. He also

identifies the city, London, as a threat to this ideal place and shows the detrimental effects of its rapid growth. Unlike in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, the counterpoint between town and country is forcefully developed in *Howards End.* The countryside, however, no longer takes on that penetrative role it plays in the short stories nor the violent exposure that it insists on in *Where Angels Fear to Tread.* The mysterious forces given to nature in Forster's earlier works are now embedded in a building, Howards End. And so this edifice is given the power to determine the fate of the characters. The Schlegel sisters, who unwittingly are on a mission to find their spiritual home, are transplanted from one house to another. They are forced to vacate their family home, Wickham Place, and they are exposed to the ancient strength of the earth at Oniton. Ducie Street represents a warning to the sisters to avoid emotional repression and grandeur that contribute to the "panic and emptiness" (40) evident in the Wilcoxes. The sisters eventually find their meeting-ground at Howards End. Nevertheless, place continues to reinforce the equivocal synthesis that occurs between the characters and which eludes the reader as to where and how a spiritual home for humanity will be established.

In *A Passage to India* the temple offers itself as a meeting-ground for the characters and specific structures continue to reveal the possibilities of division and separation. Initially the mosque provides a space that is conducive to compromise; the civil station is, as Ian Baucom explains, an "outpost" (102) that is cut off from the rest of India; Aziz's house invites human interaction and an expression of emotion; the courtroom scene anticipates the final spiritual unity, and the Marabar Caves are disruptive to the characters, but at the same time a source of commonality. In all three

novels, there is a place where a kind of spiritual reconciliation is achieved and Forster satisfies his desire for a humanistic connection between people who show kindness and tolerance towards each other. But in *A Passage to India* he fully develops place's paradoxical role and India becomes the ideal site for such confusion. The focus on specific buildings also seem to lose relevance as the novel emphasises spiritual fusion, rather than temporal unity. Exclusion and detachment exist on a realistic level, whereas spiritual unity aligns itself with a supreme and magnificent transcendence that only a romantic tone can accommodate. Forster succeeds in revealing that closure to such disjunction is impossible, and by giving no specific answer he continues to leave the question of how we connect unanswered, and humanity spiritually homeless.

Forster's Earthly Localities

In an address entitled "Three Countries" given to an Italian audience, E. M. Forster spoke of India, Italy and England, and announced: "I want to pay homage to the earthly localities where my books were born" (*Hill of Devi* 289). Forster's novels were born from the geography of Italy, England and India, and undeniably each place is given a spirit which is unique to these novels. However, the places that he constructs as idyllic spaces where a "healthy home" can be temporarily established by the characters, are fictional (Heggland 399). The three novels *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905), *Howards End* (1910), and *A Passage to India* (1924) show a progression in the expression of Forster's hopes for finding a suitable home for humanity. Simultaneously, as specific buildings lose emphasis, Forster attempts to come closer to finding this spiritual home. In each of these novels, there is an opposition between the town and country, the urban and the rural. Forster's portrayal of the rural is primarily idealised and romantic and by no means a rendition of what, in reality, is often a cultivated and specialised region rather than an untouched wilderness. The socially-controlled regions that feature in his novels are, in contrast, often condemned as places which promote the use of the machine and show evidence of a more modern civilization. The urban regions do not offer themselves as a possible ideal home for humanity, or at least not while these cities remain alienated from the natural world.

In Forster's three novels, the characters move towards their spiritual homes and places of compromise, regardless of the divisive forces of civilization and the strength of nature. The characters feel the need to adopt positions that are aligned with the

opposing places, and by integrating these qualities come closer to achieving a balance which enables them to connect. The characters must develop aspects of themselves that previously denied them access to their more "natural" or "instinctual" attributes and balance these with reason and practicality. At the synthesis of each novel, where the characters temporarily discover a bond, there is an indication that the human components of instinct and reason reconcile, thereby enabling the characters to focus on kindness and tolerance that, in Forster's fiction, are so important to successful personal relationships.

Rooksnest: Forster's Spiritual Home

Forster spent his childhood at Rooksnest in Hertfordshire. Here he discovered a community which exemplified the humanistic ideals he endorsed and upheld throughout his life. Forster and his mother, Lily, lived in this small farm house from 1883 to 1893. It appears that for the young boy of four, Rooksnest intensified his already inquisitive personality into the beauty of the world and the significance of small objects and houses. Monie, Forster's aunt, observed him as an infant and concluded:

> One thing I don't believe any body [sic] makes allowances enough for, and that is his intense enjoyment of this world and all it contains. . . . He seems to have the attachment of grown up people for each other, for inanimate objects. . . . (Furbank 1:15)

Forster's enthusiasm for the intangible influence of places and even of the values embedded in objects, such as furniture, is consistently supported in his fiction. Places and objects could represent the manifestation of a healthy morality or the declining state

of humanity. The critic John Beer also comments on the extraordinary affinity Forster established with specific sites and his dependence on their survival. Beer remarks:

> Such emotions for particular places are a part of his essential imaginative universe, of the reality by which he lives: and if they are destroyed, a part of his permanent life is destroyed with them. (42)

In 1945, when Rooksnest was under threat from local government, the severity of Forster's reaction illustrates the attachment he made with this land and the possibility of his own disposition being affected by such a loss. The spectre of such destruction could have been a source of psychological trauma for Forster. As mechanization and technological progress became more central to everyday life in the early twentieth century, Forster's fictional images became tainted by this reality of England. Modern life, according to Forster, was becoming more complex and, as a result he developed, as Wilfred Stone explains: "a favouring of smallness and simplicity against bigness and complication, and a sensitivity to the balance of nature" ("Forster: The Environmentalist" 182). For Forster, who believed that "we can only love what we know personally" ("Tolerance" 44), cities and their cosmopolitanism represented an impersonal and alienating world.

Throughout Forster's life, his desire for permanence was achieved by embedding tangible objects with meaning and value. These objects could then empower Forster, for he strongly believed in ancestral roots and a spirit of place as a source of stability. Forster's notion of the "essential past", which involves gaining strength from the memory of one's ancestors, was substantiated by the place in which he lived (Stone *Cave* 22).[1] Although Rooksnest was never occupied by Forster's

relations, it was a place that could for himself and his mother, represent their own family history. Rooksnest was a source of permanence and hope for Forster, in what was becoming an increasingly restless civilization.

The nostalgia that Forster shows for Rooksnest and the surrounding countryside — in the extract "Rooksnest" written in 1881 — confirms the unusually intense bond he had with the inanimate. The detailed description of the house, its neighbours and the farm, testifies to the acute attentiveness Forster showed to his environment. The account he gives shows a hint of the life he gave to the small beauties of nature:

> We were very fond of the meadow. It had three fine greengage trees . . . and a large oak on which hung a swing. . . . It had hedges full of clematis, primroses, bluebells, dog-roses. . . . In it was a little dell which communicated with our pond in the back garden to prevent it getting too full. From it were most lovely views of the surrounding country. ("Rooksnest" 339)

Just as Forster personifies the pond that interacts with the dell, so too did he give animation to the eponymous house of *Howards End*. Howards End is allocated a position of omniscience that acts as a catalyst to the maturity of the characters as they inadvertently reach the destiny assigned to them and designed for them.

But Forster's appreciation for Nature's innocence and its capacity for greatness resulted in his tendency to idealise the rural life. The rural life he experienced at Rooksnest remained throughout his life the embodiment of an ideal. As Nicola Beauman explains,

> these early years in the country gave . . . Morgan a lifelong empathy with rural values. It is a theme that will often recur but at Rooksnest he concluded that life in the country is more 'real', has more integrity, is more in touch with preceding and successive generations. (41)

The outdoor life represented for Forster the healthy life where physical activity, intimate personal relations and a proximity to nature are sustained. Forster portrays the rural life as closer to the authentic. It is more "real" because it is not as affected by the stimulus of city life and less affected by the pressures of modern life. Forster believed village inhabitants were more in touch with what Alina Slaza calls, "the deeper rhythms of nature" (27); their lives lack pretension and they thoroughly participate in life. The natural processes of the land is not a theme Forster overtly explores, although he does question the relationship between humanity and the earth, and the effects of their detachment and connection.

The contrast between smallness and bigness reveals Forster's admiration for what is intimately knowable.[2] The small village, as opposed to the large and impersonal city, promotes qualities that aid in connection rather than detach the characters from each other and their environment. Forster found Rooksnest to be a symbol of his beliefs in tradition and ancestry, and it represented all those quaint attributes that the increasingly cosmopolitan city had lost. As Nicola Beauman states:

> Rooksnest is small: one reason why Morgan loved it. He, unlike Lily, already felt . . . intimidated by houses like Milton or Abinger, or even beloved Battersea Rise. . . . Rooksnest was old enough to be ageless and

> it was unpretentious. . . . It had been home to generations of simple people and had itself remained simple. (40)

Throughout Forster's novels, sincere and unpretentious characters inhabit small and modest houses. In *Howards End*, Mrs. Wilcox owns Howards End and Leonard Bast lives in a small flat.[3] By endowing these characters with an admirable simplicity, Forster shows a pattern that houses and spaces can often reflect the moral, emotional and physical state of a person or family.

When Forster and his mother were turned out of Rooksnest in 1893, it deeply affected them both. Nicola Beauman claims Forster "felt so bitter" (52) about their eviction that in 1948, when he was an elderly man being turned out of West Hackhurst, he felt the same despair and sense of homelessness. His attachment to West Hackhurst had the same basis as his connection with Rooksnest. Forster regretted, as Beauman states, "that Lily had lost her chance to establish a tradition, an ancestral home. But what he missed most of all was the countryside" (52). Forster's obsession with roots and finding his own spiritual home intensified later in life. When Bob Buckingham, a life-long friend, suggested to him a modern semi-detached house in East Molesey, Forster refused the offer because he could not imagine himself or his furniture living in it.[4] He was offered a place at King's College which he accepted and he lived there until his death in 1970. However, he never had the same sense of security that he had found at Rooksnest: "The house is my childhood and safety. The three attics preserve me" (Furbank 1:16).

After leaving Rooksnest, Forster felt the carefree life he found there had diminished. In 1893 he and Lily moved to Tonbridge and Forster entered the Tonbridge School. Here he suffered persecution from other schoolboys, and his dislike for the public school system began. In later years, Forster claimed the worst thing that school did to him was "to pretend that it was the world in miniature. For it hindered me from discovering how lovely . . . the world can be" (Furbank 1:48). It was not until he attended university and travelled to Europe that Forster felt he could abandon the memory of these unpleasant years. The public school came to represent the aspects of English middle-class life that Forster most despised, such as hypocrisy, pretension and practicality. Forster was also averse to the "undeveloped heart" which was a result of a school system focused on the notion of masculinity ("Notes" 13).[5] In "Notes on the English Character" in *Abinger Harvest*, Forster holds the school system responsible for producing emotionally immature men:

> Just as the heart of England is in the middle class, so is the heart of the middle class in the public school system . . . . [Englishmen] go forth into [the world] with well-developed bodies, fairly developed minds and undeveloped hearts. And it is this undeveloped heart that is largely responsible for the difficulties of Englishmen abroad. (13)

With the help of his Indian friend, Syed Ross Masood, Forster came to understand that emotion was not something to be measured out. On one occasion Forster scolded Masood for displaying an excess of emotion, provoking Masood to reply: "Emotion has nothing to do with appropriateness. It matters only that it shall be sincere" ("Notes" 14). Forster then admitted that Masood had behind him a "tradition, not of middle-

class prudence, but a kingly munificence and splendour" (15). To some extent, in Oriental relationships Forster found a interaction based on kindness and emotion. To him, the East achieved successful personal connection more so than the West. Nonetheless, Forster did not find the East to be a site for connection or India a place free from contention. India was, like other countries in Forster's fiction, a place where cultural and social values can separate characters.

Italy: "Where Things Happen"

In 1901, after Forster had completed his study at Cambridge and had not yet published any writing, he travelled to Europe where he found alternatives to English culture. Italy's picturesque natural surroundings contrasted to the ugliness of the suburbs and the signs of industrial progress that were beginning to invade England's countryside. In *Where Angels Fear to Tread,* Monteriano, an Italian town, is the site of focus, and Forster admits in *The Hill of Devi* that he chose to represent the city based on his Italian experience. Forster wrote:

> On the one hand was the English suburbs with the gray inhibited life that I knew only too well, and on the other was Monteriano, a romantic hill town which I established in Tuscany on the basis of San Gimignano. (291)

Italy was a country that evoked for Forster an unfettered place where his characters could be freed from the restrictions of English conventionality. Within its picturesque environment, Italy gave Forster imaginative inspiration, but it also created the

association he would continue to make between the discovery of one's natural instincts and places foreign to England.

England represented to Forster, as Philip Dodd explains, a repressed life of propriety ("England" 213). For many writers of the modern period, Italy was "the symbolic alternative to late Victorian middle-class values" (214). Dodd elaborates:

> the commitment of the Italians to love and to people rather than to ideas and things is offered as a model for the English, who shelter themselves from experience and each other in ice-houses of customary behaviour. (214)

A conclusion such as this one is, in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, implemented by Forster. The novel exhibits social conventions and class distinctions which are more strictly enforced in England than in Italy. Forster could see that Italian society also had its own limitations and prejudices; nevertheless, throughout his work he tended to idealise the "natural" life that is reinforced in Italy as beneficial, and depict English culture as more repressing and stifling to the individual person. *Where Angels Fear to Tread* reveals Forster's preoccupation with such concerns, but eventually he outgrew this focus and concerned himself with more irreducible and abstract concepts.

In 1901 Forster and his mother toured through Milan and Florence visiting "churches, pictures and museums daily", but it was not until they travelled further south that the country began to have an effect on Forster (Furbank 1:84). Naples, unlike the rest of Italy, successfully avoided creating an atmosphere of English suburbia. It was in Naples that Forster absorbed the exotic atmosphere and experienced the "sensuousness of the East . . . in the heat, noise, squalor, the almost intolerably exotic beauty, the

drains and spices" (Beauman 109). This contrasted to the more ordered atmosphere of the English suburbs with their monotonous appearance. In Italy Forster had arrived into a mess, which like Gino's room in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, "comes of life, not of desolation" (142). Italy — a country with its own social conventions — allowed the mess, which pertains to a more spontaneous approach to life, to enter its domestic and public spaces.

Forster criticised English culture for its conventional standards of behaviour, but his empathy with metropolitan culture also indebted him to England. His associations with the Bloomsbury Group, his literary reviews, his radio broadcasts, and his love for the English countryside, all testify to an element of patriotism he never denied. English culture, to some extent, aided his literary pursuits. Forster was aware that the cultured life was central to his own success as an author and its class system enabled him to lead a relatively privileged life. But the following statement, made when Forster was eighty four, confirms his awareness of the drawbacks of living in places where social conventions dominate over natural expression. He wrote:

> how *annoyed* I am with Society for wasting my time by making homosexuality criminal. The subterfuges, the self-consciousness that might have been avoided. (Summers 30)

Although Italy was not a place in which Forster could openly express his sexuality, it was a country where his imagination flourished. Italy was an earthly locality where the spirit of place took effect, and in an Italian valley Forster, like his characters, was exposed to the power of nature and the influence of the genius loci. In this valley he was inspired to write "The Story of A Panic" (1904), and thereafter he perceived Italy

to be "the beautiful country where they say 'yes', and the place 'where things happen'" (Furbank 1: 96).

"The Story of A Panic": The Unfettered Space

"The Story of a Panic" foreshadows the function place has in Forster's novels. This story sets up an opposition between civilization and the unfettered region of the countryside. In this short story, the idealised place where there is a concentration of earthly forces is the Fontana valley — where the Pan-God attacks a group of English tourists. The characters are propelled to confront their own impulsive reactions and abandon their roles as tourists. Pan, embodying the valley's potent spirit, penetrates the protective barrier which divides the active participant and the passive observer. The tourist must perceive Italy in reality, rather than view it as merely a picturesque Italian valley. As James Buzard explains, the

> special project of Forster's early work (establishing patterns for the later writings) is to investigate existence within the discourse and the 'state' of tourism and the possibilities of circumventing or transcending the obstacles tourism places between 'travellers' and the understanding they seek, both of themselves and of the places they visit. (292)

When the English characters are exposed to Pan, all obstacles are destroyed and for an instant they see themselves and the place in an authentic simplicity. The Fontana valley, which is like a "many-fingered green hand, palm upwards" (19), embraces the characters and transports them to an unfettered public space where interaction with the forces of the earth are all-enveloping. The characters are removed from the tourist state

of only observing another place or culture, to actually exploring the land or participating in cultural activities. Eustace, a young English boy, is driven by the spirit of Pan to escape from the restrictions of his middle-class English conventions.

The place in which these disconcerting and liberating events occur reveals how the outdoor realm and foreign territory are sites for transformation. Forster's aim is to awaken the characters from their unnatural existence into the "real life" — a notion explored in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* — where instinct, intuition and passion are expressed and where stifling conventions are abandoned. Forster, in "The Story of A Panic" shows, as James Buzard reveals, that the

> tourist can participate in the native culture of the visited place by piercing the veil of respectability . . . . To Forster's mind, one must 'give oneself', as it were, 'bodily', with abandon, to the spirit of the place; it will take over from there". (295)

Nature forces the English characters to confront a "brutal overmastering physical fear" which temporarily pierces their veil of respectability ("The Story" 23), but Eustace is the only character who reasserts the role of his carnal impulses and gives himself completely to the genius loci.

In "The Story of a Panic" the Pan-God acts as a catalyst to the English tourists' awakening. Pan's role is ambivalent in the story, and in the novels the forces of nature also shows the potential to be both sinister and benevolent. The English characters are terrified by their experience, whereas Eustace is liberated from social constraints enabling him to find companionship with Gennaro, an Italian fisher boy. It is from his interaction with Nature that Eustace is able to acknowledge his own human impulses

and express his admiration for Gennaro. Mr. Tytler, the narrator of the story — whose inability to see beauty in Nature is reflected in his belief that Pan is dead — remains mostly immune to the power of Italy. Tytler insists that social conventions are upheld and believes the attachment he detects between the boys is unnatural. As an advocate for social-control, Tytler is at odds with Pan and Nature, and feels more at home in England. Mr. Tytler reminds Gennaro of the differences that separate him from Eustace:

> And remember that, though Signor Eustace is sometimes silly and foolish . . . yet you must always behave respectfully to him; for he is a young English gentleman, and you are a poor Italian fisher-boy. (30)

Social convention enforces a separation between Gennaro and Eustace, thereby hindering the possibility of human connection. Patricia Merivale concludes: "Forster's characters die . . . not from the vision [of Pan], but from the consequences of a civilization that denies the vision" (181). This is a tragedy similar to those that overtake Gino's baby in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and Leonard Bast in *Howards End.* But contact with Pan, who operates regardless of social control, allows Eustace to make a connection with Gennaro until the latter's death.

Forster's romanticised unfettered regions contain a beauty and brutality that is reflected in Pan's interchangeable qualities as a sinister and benevolent force. The penetrative power of such a raw and primal energy finds its source from the earth. The earth's chthonic forces are necessary to liberate the characters from the shackles of society and promote a better understanding of themselves, but they are also unthinking and ignore the delicacy of humanity. Nevertheless, such unfettered places have often

been idealised throughout literary history as a sort of paradise; a Garden of Eden. Raymond Williams reveals the consistent patterns evident in literature: "the country has gathered the idea of a natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue" (1). But this glorification suits Forster, who emphasizes the ability of the natural or rural life to transform his characters, to attach them to the land and reestablish, what Jeane Olsen describes as, their "intuitive link with his or her own inner human qualities" (391). The unfettered regions encourage passion and mystery within the characters.

The urban setting, in contrast to the country, promotes the cultured life of art and literature; emphasises education, and enables the characters to achieve what Forster believed was refinement. Raymond Williams also substantiates the notion that "the city has gathered the idea of an achieved centre: of learning, communication and light" (1). Forster recognises the moral, social and intellectual benefits of English culture; a culture that also emphasises, as Calvin Bedient states, "a provincial colony of duty, conventionality, science, work, and charity . . . " (183). In the city, integrity and repression can coexist. Forster's empathy with the cultured life aligns him with the Matthew Arnold. In *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold expresses the same kind of hopes as Forster: "that culture can oppose the forces of selfishness and materialism and bring society to an awareness of its ideal destiny" (Duckworth "Critical" 301).[6] But the failure of Arnold's idealised state of perfection through the pursuit of culture is shown in Forster's novels, and this contributes to the paradoxical nature of the theme of human connection. In reality, a fundamental need in the pursuit of culture is money. Tensions arise that Forster cannot resolve.

"The Story of A Panic" presents an extreme case of the paradoxes and oppositions that are exemplified in the later novels. In Forster's fiction houses and specific buildings are restricting because they are a domestic space and, to some extent, prevent the characters from interacting with each other. But there are houses which, like Rooksnest, offer an example of integration; an integration of the domestic space with the outdoors, and therefore, with the properties of the earth. People can connect within this house, for the rooms may be small, but they can expand to accommodate different views and one's life experiences. Architecturally small houses can have a large capacity for events and people. Eustace's room, in contrast, is a space of imprisonment and stifles his moral and physical growth. Gennaro refuses to fetch Eustace from the garden where he is praising nature, for in the house "he might die" (35). His room comes to represent the limitations of society and when the other English characters have retrieved him from the garden, Eustace pleads: "Not to my room. . . . It is so small . . . I nearly saw everything, and now I see nothing at all" (36). Although smallness is an attribute Forster admired, this smallness is a reflection on the opportunities that are missed as a result of both imaginative confinement and social constraints. The paradoxical qualities Forster gives to spaces and buildings reinforces the uncertain scale he appropriates to place in his fiction.

As in Forster's novels, the successful connection Eustace makes within his own nature and with Gennaro comes at a price. Gennaro dies, while Eustace escapes from society; these events confirm that reconciliation does not necessarily conclude with a utopian bond which stretches across culture and race. "The Story of A Panic" shows the opposition between town and country, but it also clearly reveals the paradoxical

progression the characters make towards detachment from humanity and a place conducive to compromise where human connection can be achieved.

Modernity, "The Machine Stops", and World War

Between 1901 and 1908, Forster developed objections to the pestilent nature of modern progress. His focus on place in his fiction also took a shift from that of a purely natural setting to a greater concern with the effects of civilization on nature. Industrial progress and the machine age disconcerted Forster, and his anxiety is illustrated in this statement:

> It really *is* a new civilization. I have been born at the end of the age of peace and can't expect to feel anything but despair. Science instead of freeing man . . . is enslaving him to machines. . . . The little houses that I am used to will be swept away, the fields will reek of petrol, and the airships will shatter the stars. (Stone "Forster: The Environmentalist" 172, original emphasis)

The threat posed to Forster's intimate and knowable houses by the spread of suburbia, the polluted cities and the rapid growth of industrialism, intensified his perception of the urban place as a toxic and malignant force that was destructive to the natural beauty of the rural areas. Although Forster knew that his little houses were also made from modern materials, he could never equate the problem. In *Two Cheers for Democracy* (1951), a collection of his essays, Forster wrote of his dilemma: "People must have houses" , but "I wonder what compensation there is in the world of the spirit for the destruction of the life here, the life of tradition" (57). In Forster's fiction, it is the

grand and ostentatious houses occupying the city that he disapproves of, and he views their dominating presence as a sign of the break between humanity and what is personally knowable. The towering flats, factories, and crowded suburbs were a reflection of the general detachment of humanity from nature, and an indication of civilization's moral decay.

Forster's short story "The Machine Stops" (1909) exemplifies the pattern in his longer fiction: that the machine and socially-controlled places cause division and separation. This story situates the machine at the centre of the universe; all nature has been destroyed. Kuno, a young man who wishes to visit his mother Vashti, is warned by her that "the surface of the earth is only dust and mud . . . the cold of the outer air would kill you" ("The Machine" 110). In this futuristic story Forster depicts a place devoid of human intimacy and nature. This detachment, taken as it is to the extreme, causes humanity to become a victim of its own invention: "the entire communication system broke down . . . and the world . . . ended" ("The Machine" 137). In this place, what Wilfred Stone terms an "anti-Wellsian dystopia", Forster's pessimistic attitude towards the machine age climaxes ("The Environmentalist" 184). Ten years after *A Passage to India* was published, Forster wrote in the pageant for the Abinger Church Preservation Fund in 1934 — which progresses through the history of the Abinger Woods — an epilogue. In it Forster remarks:

> Houses and bungalows . . . flats, arterial roads, petrol pumps and pylons — are these going to be England? Are these man's final triumph?. . . look into the past, and remember that all this beauty is a gift which you can never replace, which no money can buy. . . . ("The Abinger" 399)

The endurance of Nature and family houses, for example, were essential to what Forster viewed as a rooted civilization, which would preserve what was priceless and prevent ugliness from invading the countryside. An emphasis on inherited values and family pride could somehow begin to transform the indifferent attitude taken by humanity towards the survival of tradition. Forster believed that by safeguarding the spiritual home and the earth, where roots can be laid and intangible values embedded, a sense of stability could be regained. Forster feared that value was being found in the wrong places and in the wrong objects and that it was not until Nature had been ruined would civilization see its error.

Critics have located Forster's concern for the destruction of nature and the decline of civilization as a part of the shift in values brought about by World War One. The war put an abrupt end to the relative calm of the Edwardian era and destroyed people's faith in the goodness of humanity.[7] The war disturbed Forster and his contemporaries in the Bloomsbury Group. As P. N. Furbank explains, the Group believed that

> it was not their war . . . that all they had stood for, the new age of tolerance and enlightenment inaugurated in G. E. Moore's Cambridge, was about to be destroyed. (2:1)

World War One brought about a questioning of the fundamental ideals of liberal humanism, and confirmed to Forster the decline of humanity's moral integrity. Previously in 1924 when Forster was having difficulty finishing *A Passage to India*, he explained:

> I find it less possible to finish novels since the war than before it . . . when all contemporary life seems crumbling I find more difficulty than ever in attempting a picture of it, and turn with greater relief to criticism, and the past. (Stallybrass 12)

Although Forster expressed displeasure towards the disharmony climaxing with the war and the rapid changes occurring within civilization, his imagination could create places where people might bond and where the earth had a power to resist man's machinations. In fiction Forster could create edifices and regions which — once spaces of contention and divisive forces — could transform into spaces of harmony; spaces where his notion of a utopia could be attained.

In his fiction, Forster was able to express his hopes and address the issues that he believed to be significant. But as is shown in his three novels, *Where Angels Fear to Tread, Howards End* and *A Passage to India*, there is a tension between reality and imagination; between the spiritual and the physical; between the transcendent and the temporal. This tension is undoubtedly influenced by the particular emotions he felt for places he owned, inhabited, and visited. The tension between the town and country can be used as a trope for the opposition of qualities that exist and require reconciling within the characters. The opposition between town and country is also between urban and rural, socially-controlled and unfettered. Thus the dichotomy created within the novels opposes the city, often representing the qualities of reason, practicality, pragmatism, and social conventionality, against the country which perpetuates the mysterious, innocent, and instinctual attributes within the characters. And with Forster's idealisation of the countryside, the unfettered regions are associated with the

imagination, and the city with a physical reality. Yet, when the characters do temporarily reconcile, they must balance attributes from both districts.