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The Architecture of Identity: E.M. Forster and the Use of Space

by

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Introduction

E.M. Forster begins his short story "The Machine Stops" by asking his readers to imagine a small, hexagonal room "like the cell of a bee," that contains only an armchair and a reading desk.[1] While there is music, fresh air, and light, there are neither instruments nor windows nor lamps. A pale woman sits in an armchair, connecting to people in identical rooms across the world through "the Machine," a giant system that provides all of its subjects' basic needs, from communication to food. The story's world eliminates physical human interaction, replacing it with conversations and messages transferred through the machine; it is a portrait of a society that has become purely aesthetic, concerned only with ideas, not experiences. Experiences are so shunned that even firsthand ideas are thought to be dangerous: "[T]here will come a generation that has got beyond facts, beyond impressions, a generation absolutely colourless, a generation seraphically free from taint of personality."[2] While the rooms keep people largely isolated from experience, even the world outside the rooms is shielded. The entire society exists underground, and each room is connected to others by ultra-fast trains, or air-ships for longer distances. Kuno, the story's protagonist, attempts to rebel against the machine. He sees the relationship with space as central to the society's problems: "[W]e have lost the sense of space. We say 'space is annihilated', but we have

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[1] E.M. Forster, "The Machine Stops," in *Selected Stories,* ed. David Leavitt and Mark Mitchell (New York: Penguin, 2001), 91.

[2] Ibid., 115.

annihilated not space but the sense thereof. We have lost a part of ourselves."[3] The relativism here is indicative of the way Forster views space generally—it does not exist merely in itself, but in its relation to his characters. What Kuno focuses on is not whether space itself exists—clearly, proportion and distance are as present as ever—but rather the way we interact with it. Space is a framework for our interpretation. As Kuno explains, "Man is the measure."[4]

Forster addresses similar questions throughout his six novels, both explicitly and implicitly. While the novels cover different locations, regions, and buildings, the relationship between a space and those who view and inhabit it is always central to Forster's understanding of both character and space. Neither is fully responsible for creating the other; they are always seen in relation to each other. For Forster, as people interpret and project onto spaces, they also reshape and redefine them. Space is at once a reflection and a determinant of identity; characters both form and react to the spaces they inhabit.

Forster lived at a time of transitions in England, both literary and cultural. Born in 1879, Forster was raised mostly by his mother; his father died before Forster was two. He attended the Tonbridge School as a day boy and then King's College, Cambridge, where he was a member of a discussion society called the Apostles. Many members of the Apostles would go on to form what became known as the Bloomsbury Group in London. Forster wrote his six novels between 1904 and 1924, at a point in English life between Victorianism and modernism, on the

[4] Ibid.

cusp of change but not wholly swept up in it. While many of Forster's contemporaries in the Bloomsbury Group were experimenting radically with form and perception, his novels tended toward a more straightforward narrative style; Malcolm Bradbury describes Forster as "not, in the conventional sense, a modernist, but rather a central figure of the transition into modernism."[5] Likewise, Forster described himself as belonging to the "fag-end of Victorian liberalism."[6] Forster's historical situation plays itself out spatially in the discomfort many of his characters feel in Victorian houses—their modern lives cannot be wholly contained in Victorian walls. But Forster's novels also deal with themes of the natural and the domestic, nationalism, colonialism, and queer desire, all of which must be accommodated by their surroundings. This essay focuses on that accommodation—the way spaces and manners are structured together and how that structure shapes identity, and the way space, identity, and nationality inform and complicate each other. While these elements constantly work to construct, influence, and house each other, they are far from forming a cohesive or unified whole—rather, they constantly press against and redefine each other.

Forster's six novels can be divided roughly into three groups. His English novels, which focus largely on conflicts between the natural and the domestic, are *The Longest Journey* (1907), *Howards End* (1910), and *Maurice* (written 1913–1914). Forster's two Italian novels, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905) and *A Room with a View* (1908), contrast English and Italian societies using the interactions between spaces

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[5] Malcolm Bradbury, "Two Passages to India: Forster as Victorian and Modern," in *Aspects of E.M. Forster*, ed. Oliver Stallybrass (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1969), 125.

[6] Qtd. in ibid., 124.

and and the cultural system of manners. Forster's last novel, *A Passage to India* (1924), stands in a category of its own among his works. It is his only novel that explores places outside Europe, and is often considered his most modernist work, displaying a much higher tolerance for ambiguity than his earlier novels. While *Passage* fits into many of the themes that Forster explores in those earlier works, it largely complicates them with the issues surrounding colonialism, representation, and perception. Spatially, the novel draws much stronger contrasts than its predecessors do, depicting Indian architecture as essentially formless while European architecture demonstrates order and reason, bringing both Forster's rootedness in and his critique of English society into a much starker light. At the heart of the Indian space Forster describes are the Marabar Caves, which form the void that makes up the central metaphor of the novel.

Rather than separating my exploration of space by novel, I explore Forster's use of space thematically, looking first at the divisions between the public and the private, and then moving to the larger questions of identity and space, particularly as they relate to the idea of a collective identity or nationality. My first chapter argues that spaces and systems of manners are constructed in tandem, each relying on the other for reinforcement. The investigation centers on divisions between the public and the private in houses, streets, flats, and hotels, finding that the thresholds between spaces demonstrate the conflicting and overlapping roles they are expected to play.

My second chapter broadens the discussion of space in Forster's novels to include the way space and identity interact. I look at identity on two scales:

personal identity, and a generalized national identity. Forster demonstrates the way his characters are influenced by spaces, even as they project themselves back onto those spaces. Moving from personal identity to national identity, I look at the way Forster uses his individual characters and their relationships with space to form a sense of national identity, even as he rejects the idea that any individual can be wholly representative. This rejection is a central tension in Forster's dealing with space—the individual both does and does not represent nationality, just as identity and space rely on each other, but can never fully be fused.

There is a temptation in writing on Forster's novels to read them largely in light of his biography. The explicit connections abound: portions of *The Longest Journey* adhere closely to Forster's early life and the school at Sawston is especially similar to his own school, Tonbridge.[7] Forster's father was an architect, explaining some of the fascination Forster demonstrates with architecture and descriptions of space.[8] Specific spaces also gesture toward real-world models, including the Pension Bertolini in *A Room with a View,* which resembles a pension Forster stayed in with his mother in Florence;[9] Howards End, which is almost identical to Forster's childhood home of Rooksnest;[10] and the numerous uses of Cambridge, which are informed by Forster's undergraduate days there as a member of the Apostles. While looking at Forster's spaces in light of his own experiences might be a

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[7] Francis King, *E.M. Forster and His World* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 17.

[8] Ibid., 5–9.

[9] Malcolm Bradbury, in E.M. Forster, *A Room with a View*, (New York: Penguin, 2000), 197n1 (chap. 1).

[10] King, *E.M. Forster and His World,* 11–14.

rewarding investigation, I am more interested here in doing original readings of the texts themselves, and finding the connections among them. Considering the texts as productions of the same mind under relatively similar conditions—all but *A Passage to India* were written within a single ten year period—I am less concerned with chronology than with thematic connections. In this way, I hope to establish an understanding of the way Forster viewed questions of space, identity, and the divisions between the public and the private, and demonstrate the way those elements interact and come together, but are ultimately unable to form a cohesive whole, as they constantly slip into, reshape, and redefine each other.

Private and Public Space

Forster's fiction deals with the intersection of worlds, the coming together of conflicting realities. In the houses, streets, and hotels of his six novels, we find the uncomfortable meeting of diverse social, moral, and class attitudes, as public and private spaces push against one another. Forster uses social interactions in these spaces to emphasize the degradation of the Victorian domestic ideal in the modern world, while using his depictions of space and his characters' interactions with it to trouble the logic of that ideal.

In her book on housing in Paris and London in the mid-19th century, Sharon Marcus discusses the organization of space in the Victorian ideal and explains some of the tensions that Forster's characters feel. Englishness, Marcus writes, was defined by an emphasis on private space, with the adage "an Englishman's home is his castle" serving as the national motto for ideal living.[1] While Parisians adapted quickly to the idea of the apartment house at the beginning of the 19th century, Londoners tended to resist its adoption, fearing it might be foreign, immoral, cosmopolitan, and commercial.[2] But while the ideal of a free-standing home with closed, private rooms for specific functions, secure from observation and intrusion defined Englishness for the Victorian,[3] that system, like most normative systems, had a dubious existence and seemed to be constantly breaking down. Before 1880

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[1] Sharon Marcus, *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth Century Paris and London* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 91.

[2] Ibid., 86–87.

[3] Ibid., 94.

the London housing stock included almost no purpose-built apartment houses, but did include a large number of buildings with chambers for single men, luxury flats that shared walls (though they usually had separate entrances), and other "lodging houses masquerading as private single-family homes."[4]

But even where private single-family houses did exist, the domestic ideal was troubled in other ways. In her book *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life*, Victoria Rosner discusses the organization of rooms by class and gender in the Victorian and modern eras. Masculine rooms tended to be enclosed and emphasize privacy while feminine rooms were open and relatively public, designed for entertaining and socializing. While the rooms of the owning class were leisure-focused, the servants' rooms were small, densely populated, and strictly purposed. Rosner refers to a 19th century book on domestic architecture that argued that rooms should avoid "intercommunication"—the ideal was a strict compartmentalization to avoid the mingling of different identities. As architect Gilbert Scott wrote, "A gentleman's house … should protect the womanliness of woman and encourage the manliness of men."[5] But while these divisions were strictly enforced in the Victorian era, their separation even then began to break down at the thresholds. While the Victorian house contained a number of opposing forces, each rigidly defined and strictly compartmentalized, in the very act of working to conceal and limit one another, Rosner argues, they demonstrated their

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[4] Ibid., 87–88.

[5] Qtd. in Victoria Rosner, *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life* (New York: Columbia UP, 2005), 118.

incompleteness.[6] Doors that were supposed to ensure privacy did not prevent noises from spreading throughout the house, and the concealing of the unclean required constant vigilance. Using cleanliness in both the moral and literal senses, Rosner finds that the way "household dirt" constantly appeared and was concealed indicated that the Victorian social system "remains an imperfect version of itself. The domesticated Victorian body is not a clean body, but rather a body that willingly conceals its dirt. The proper Victorian household is not a household with nothing to hide, but one where secrets are well kept."[7]

I separate this chapter into three sections in order to explore the relationship between the public and the private, while illuminating how such distinctions fall apart. As Rosner shows, the most interesting points of these separate spaces are their thresholds, where they demonstrate the impossibility of complete separation while illustrating the conflicting roles they are asked to play. I start with houses and look at both the presumed privacy of the house and the way that privacy becomes, or is intruded upon by, the public. I then focus on the street and other comparable outdoor spaces to contrast their supposedly public position with that of the house, while demonstrating that it is not merely the public which intrudes on the private, but vice versa. This is made most clear in the third section, where I look at Forster's use of hotels and flats, sites at once private and public, masculine and feminine, and occupying dubious class and moral positions.

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[6] Ibid., 69–74.

[7] Ibid., 81.

Houses

Howards End serves as the best example in Forster's fiction of a house that shapes its characters' relationships with the outside world, both mirroring the larger societal changes of early 20th century England and presenting a possible solution to the encroaching publicness of the city. Malcolm Bradbury, however, argues that Forster is "not a novelist of solutions, but rather of reservations,"[8] bringing into question whether the situation at the end of *Howards End* can be seen as a solution at all, or merely as a possible outcome for its characters.

At the beginning of the novel, the country house Howards End is owned by the Wilcoxes, a wealthy family involved in the London business community, with a pragmatic view of the world and a traditional family structure. The first chapter shows Mr. and Mrs. Wilcox and their three children living in the house with guests of the family passing through. By the end of the novel, this traditional family structure has been upset by sex, death, love, violence, and class politics: the novel concludes with the more confused and modern arrangement of Mr. Wilcox and Margaret as heads of the house, Helen and her illegitimate child in residence, and the Wilcox children passing through (with the exception of Charles, who is in prison). That this new order is to be the future is emphasized in the last lines of the novel, with Helen carrying her child and walking alongside Tom, a neighborhood boy, saying, "The field's cut!… The big meadow! We've seen to the very end, and

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[8] Malcolm Bradbury, "Two Passages to India: Forster as Victorian and Modern," in *Aspects of E.M. Forster*, ed. Oliver Stallybrass (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1969), 130.

it'll be such a crop of hay as never"[9]—with all that came before, the new social structure will have positive results, perhaps even improving on the past.

By marking the future in terms of this open land—a buffer around the house providing the privacy that would have been impossible in the London flats—Forster reinforces the importance of private space, but his claim does nothing to deal with the larger societal forces he addresses. The novel is intent on demonstrating the rapid urbanization of London, a vision of buildings which "might be pulled down, and new buildings, of a vastness at present unimaginable, might arise where they had fallen."[10] The land surrounding London was not immune from its growth, as Forster points out in the final pages of the novel, with Margaret thinking that rural houses like Howards End "were all survivals, and the melting-pot was being prepared for them."[11] Here Bradbury's point is clear—Forster does not provide a solution to the problems of space in the modern world, but merely airs his apprehensions about it.

Even within a house that supposedly fits the ideal, Forster demonstrates the interruption of the secure privacy of the home. In *Howards End* after Helen Schlegel inadvertently takes a man's umbrella during the concert in Queen's Hall, the publicness of the concert hall and its crushing together of classes and manners is literally brought to the home. Margaret escorts Leonard Bast back to Wickham Place to retrieve the umbrella her sister has taken, and after rambling on about vague aesthetic concerns en route, she invites him to tea. While a proper Victorian

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[9] E.M. Forster, *Howards End* (New York: Penguin, 2000), 293.

[10] Ibid., 40.

[11] Ibid., 290.

house should certainly be able to accommodate guests, the difficulties of class play into Leonard's reaction to both the space and its inhabitants. After Leonard has received his umbrella, Forster dismisses him with little more than a sentence, leaving the Schlegels to ponder his reaction. Why did Leonard flee? Margaret's first thought is the most obvious, that it was Helen's talking about stealing umbrellas and then unintentionally insulting Leonard's. But soon their speculation turns to the general feeling of the house, conjecturing that it is too feminine. Wanting a more powerful masculine presence than her brother Tibby, Margaret says, "I wish we had a real boy in the house—the kind of boy who cares for men. It would make entertaining so much easier."[12] She goes on to describe the atmosphere of the house as "swamped by screaming women" and "a regular hen-coop."[13] But even the women are not the problem—it is the space itself:

> I suppose that ours is a female house.… I don't mean that this house is full of women. I am trying to say something much more clever. I mean that it was irrevocably feminine, even in father's time.… [Our house] must be feminine, and all we can do is see that it isn't effeminate.[14]

If the house were a purely private concern, this femininity would be one thing, but the fact that it must serve both public and private functions, being public in its privateness, and sufficiently private in its public uses, makes the house a conflicted space. Margaret compares it to the Wilcox's Howards End, noting that the latter house "sounded irrevocably masculine, and all its inmates can do is to see that it

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[12] Ibid., 36.

[13] Ibid., 36–37.

[14] Ibid., 37.

isn't brutal."[15] This tension between the public and the private connects with the larger contradiction in the national British interest in a specific ordered privacy in the home. By virtue of being appropriately private, the house thus serves the public interest and, indeed, becomes public. In *Maurice*, Forster states this idea more explicitly, writing that "to give a comfortable home's what public life is."[16]

Leonard's reaction to Wickham Hall in *Howards End* also brings into question the way space is perceived through the lens of class. While the Schlegels are far from the wealthiest family in London, they are solidly among the leisure class, not having to work and occupying their time with aesthetic rather than pecuniary concerns. Thus for them, the stealing of an umbrella is a silly joke, an absent-minded privilege that reveals their blasé attitude toward property. For Leonard, the umbrella is much more important, and though it is ratty, his preoccupation indicates that he can hardly afford another one—it is a status symbol with which he "asserts gentility," as "All men are equal—all men, that is to say, who possess umbrellas."[17] Despite what the Schlegels later say about the gendered character of their house, the house might be more welcoming to someone of their own class status, who was not immediately confronted with their stand of umbrellas all of a better quality than his own or a drawing room full of "very tempting little things"[18] (or the obvious suspicion that he might take them). The class-based understanding of the interaction between Leonard and Margaret traces itself back even to their

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[16] E.M. Forster, *Maurice* (New York: Norton, 1971), 103.

[17] Forster, *Howards End,* 39.

[18] Ibid., 36.

interaction in Queen's Hall, where the question of seat location and frequency of attendance marks a further separation between the two. While Leonard says proudly that he "attends" the gallery at Covent Garden, Margaret thinks to herself that she prefers the more expensive seats and so says nothing—here, the spatial division by class in one place interferes with successful interaction in another, exactly as it is intended to.

Forster further demonstrates the interplay of space, culture, and class in an earlier section where the Schlegels' judgmental aunt, Mrs. Munt, appraises their home life. She sees the proper distinctions between public and private eroding as Margaret and Helen bring artists not deemed genteel enough into their house:

> They saw too many people at Wickham Place—unshaven musicians, an actress even, German cousins (one knows what foreigners are), acquaintances picked up at continental hotels (one knows what they are too). It was interesting, and down at Swanage no one appreciated culture more than Mrs Munt; but it was dangerous, and disaster was bound to come.[19]

The home space becomes public here as it projects an image to the world, and also, Mrs. Munt fears, as it begins to appear more like a theater or hotel than a proper residence. Though desirable, "culture" is to be kept in the public spaces, and undoubtedly, as Margaret and Leonard's interaction shows, it would be best if those public spaces were also properly segregated. There is a power in the organization—and separation—of space, and Mrs. Munt fears her nieces are not exercising it effectively.

In *Maurice*, Forster's posthumously published bildungsroman about a young man who desires other men, we see again the way that space conveys power, but

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[19] Ibid., 12.

this time, it is a moralizing and normalizing power that Forster discusses, where private and public ultimately serve the same function. The novel traces Maurice's development from his time in primary school through his undergraduate years and early adulthood, focusing on a few key relationships. While at Cambridge, Maurice meets the wealthy Clive, and the two develop an intimate relationship. At Penge, Clive's estate, we first see a separate wing of the house accommodating a certain kind of queer desire, but later see the place's inability to house that desire. When Clive first brings Maurice home from school, they go to a room with no fireplace, up a separate stairway from the other rooms. Upon entering the room, Clive exclaims, "Maurice, Maurice! you've actually come. You're here. This place'll never be the same again, I shall love it at last.… We're up this staircase by ourselves. It's as like college as I could manage."[20] Though the house is in disrepair at Maurice's first visit—the grounds are poorly kept, the windows stick, and the boards creak—it is a happy place for Clive and Maurice. Forster notes that despite the poor state of the house, its occupants "had the air of settling something; they either just had or soon would rearrange England."[21]

Years later, after Clive has rejected Maurice and gotten married, Maurice's return to Penge reveals a house where "the sense of dilapidation had increased."[22] While the separate wing was able to accommodate with some difficulty Maurice's and Clive's queerness, queer desire has no place to express itself in the new arrangement. If the lack of a fireplace marked their old room, it is now water that

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[20] Forster, *Maurice*, 88.

[21] Ibid., 89.

[22] Ibid., 166.

marks the house. At first, it merely surrounds the house in a downpour, as Maurice waits for Clive throughout the day in the house. When Clive finally arrives from his political canvassing, Maurice greets him warmly in the drawing room, but the space is invaded by the symbol of a force that no longer has a means to express itself. Water leaks through the ceiling, disrupting the group's evening. Forster tells us that Maurice feels "a complete break between his public and private actions," and we see the literary expression of this break in the water. The connection between queer desire and water imagery is made most explicit in Maurice's room during a conversation between him and Clive late at night. Clive kisses Maurice's hand, and Maurice, full of yearning, shudders. But Clive asks him to keep all that in the past. Not finding expression through Clive, Maurice's desires are sublimated into the water:

> Clive stopped talking while the water gurgled over the dormer. When he had gone Maurice drew the curtains and fell on his knees, leaning his chin upon the window sill and allowing the drops to sprinkle his hair.
>
> "Come!" he cried suddenly, surprising himself. Whom had he called? He had been thinking of nothing and the word had leapt out. As quickly as possible he shut out the air and the darkness, and re-enclosed his body in the Russet Room.[23]

Maurice uses the water and the natural world outside of the house to realize his desires, and when he has reached his emotional climax, he withdraws back to the confining space of the house, ashamed. While the private desires could earlier be carried on with complicity in a separate wing of the house, when they are suppressed, they tear at the house's very structure.

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[23] Ibid., 176.

Victoria Rosner sees the move toward the natural over restrictive domestic space as a trend in modernist literature. She writes, "In modernist texts whatever smacks of the radical—transgressive sexuality, feminism, or the spirit of the avant-garde—is either accommodated with difficulty by the domestic or shunted outdoors."[24] Maurice's desire ultimately does find its best expression outside the house in his relationship with the Penge gamekeeper, Alec. Their first personal encounter is in Maurice's bedroom at Penge, to which Alec climbs using the ladder left by workers fixing the leak in the drawing room ceiling—the attempt to patch the holes in the house's public space enables this encounter in its private rooms. Further, the leak reinforces the idea that while the queer desire can be temporarily suppressed, the active disguising of signs of transgression only allows other breaches. The relationship cannot exist happily in the strict domestic space of the house, though, and the lovers' final reunion is in the boathouse. In the paragraphs leading up to this scene, Forster is at his most critical of the way architecture and power interact in England, using the natural world as opposed to the built one to represent the characters' queer existence:

> [Maurice] was bound for his new home.… They must live outside class, without relations or money … But England belonged to them. That, besides companionship, was their reward. Her air and sky were theirs, not the timorous millions' who own stuffy little boxes, but never their own souls.[25]

The implication underlying passages like this one is that the domestic space of the early 20th century not only fails to accommodate queer desire, it is stifling for

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[24] Rosner, *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life*, 2.

[25] Forster, *Maurice*, 239.

everyone. By extending his argument beyond those whose sexuality differs from the norm to the "timorous millions," Forster questions the idea of the normalized culture itself, finding a dishonesty in its regulation of the population. As Maurice enters the Penge estate, "it struck him once more how derelict it was, how unfit to set standards or control the future."[26] For Maurice and Alec, the future is to be in the wilderness, and after they meet in the boathouse—all but surrounded by water—Maurice says goodbye to Clive, "leaving no trace of his presence except a little pile of the petals of the evening primrose, which mourned from the ground like an expiring fire."[27]

That there is an option for Alec and Maurice outside of the restricting private spaces and oppressive public spaces of populated England was a historical reality that belonged to the "last moment of the greenwood," Forster writes in his "Terminal Note":

> Our greenwood ended catastrophically and inevitably. Two great wars demanded and bequeathed regimentation which the public services adopted and extended, science lent her aid, and the wilderness of our island, never extensive, was stamped upon and built over and patrolled in no time. There is no forest or fell to escape to today, no cave in which to curl up, no deserted valley for those who wish neither to reform nor corrupt society but to be left alone.[28]

The organization of space in 1913 and 1914, when Forster wrote the novel, was markedly different from that of the world he left at his death in 1970. For a lucky few it was at one point possible to escape the carefully controlled system of private

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[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., 246.

[28] Ibid., 254.

and public spaces, where a national ideal is enforced throughout, by denial, repression, and careful supervision. The greenwood briefly provided an escape, but as mentioned earlier, Bradbury writes that Forster is not a novelist of solutions but of reservations. For those in Maurice and Alec's positions when Forster died in 1970, the only answer was to hide in plain view, to adopt the anonymity of public spaces for private uses. Forster described it thus: "People do still escape, one can see them any night at it in the films. But they are gangsters, not outlaws, they can dodge civilization because they are a part of it."[29] While in the decades since Forster's death this description has come to characterize the lives of men like Maurice and Alec less and less, the description of spatial relations still rings true. The private and the public exist to play off one another, and in their constant overlapping, they form an integral part of each other. In a normative system—for Forster the spatial and social system of a modernizing Victorian England—the public investment in the shape of the private means that it cannot remain wholly independent, thereby guaranteeing that the public cannot always live up to its own ideal.

Streets

Where Forster writes of the urban escape in his note at the end of *Maurice* —"dodg[ing] civilization because they are a part of it"—we see his understanding of queer life in the decades after World War II. But at the time he wrote his novels —between 1904 and 1924—this difficulty of being both a part of and separate from

[29] Ibid.

society already existed for the poor, whom Forster treats glancingly, but memorably. In *Howards End* he writes, "We are not concerned with the very poor. They are unthinkable, and only to be approached by the statistician or the poet. This story deals with gentlefolk, or with those who are obliged to pretend that they are gentlefolk."[30] In that novel, "gentlefolk" extends to the Basts, who are "at the extreme verge of gentility."[31] But in the street scenes of his novels, Forster presents interactions between classes—even those who extend beyond the "extreme verge of gentility"—helping to define his characters by what they are not. They are bourgeois because they are not poor, and they are English because they are neither Italian nor Indian. Spatially these differences are marked in numerous ways, from the characters' attitudes toward different spaces and their amount of access to them to the clashes between their values, manners, and assumptions that are manifested on the streets.

For the English tourist of Forster's time, travel meant the opportunity to see the great buildings and artworks of other countries. But while the main reason for travel was to see the architectural and artistic masterpieces of a culture, many travelers also sought an experience that would demonstrate more about a place than its artistic past. This view of tourism was expressed in Philip's advice to his sister-in-law, Lilia, on the first page of Forster's first novel, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*: "And don't, let me beg you, go with that awful tourist idea that Italy's only a museum of antiquities and art. Love and understand the Italians, for the people are

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[30] Forster, *Howards End*, 38.

[31] Ibid.

more marvellous than the land."[32] As Forster demonstrates through Lilia's relationship with Gino, the Italian man she meets and quickly marries, cultural differences—particularly as they relate to space—greatly hinder love and understanding.

While these cultural differences can be borne out in spatial terms, it is useful here to make a distinction between two different kinds of cultural differences. One has to do with national customs and social systems, while the other is tied up with the particular power dynamics and assumptions that are associated with being a tourist. For the tourist, the entire experience seems a package, where each moment is connected to the others with a collective sense of novelty. The places, foods, and people all blend into a single conception of the exciting new experience. For the resident, though, most elements are familiar and it is only new things, or particular people which form the sense of experience; everything else is taken for granted. Forster demonstrates the traveler's tendency to conflate people and places when he describes the house that Gino buys for Lilia:

> She made Gino buy it for her, because it was there she had first seen him sitting on the mud wall that faced the Volterra gate. She remembered how the evening sun had struck his hair, and how he had smiled down at her, and being both sentimental and unrefined, was determined to have the man and the place together.[33]

Following this passage, Forster goes on to write of Gino's viewpoint, valuing the person above the place because he takes the place for granted: "Things in Italy are cheap for an Italian."[34] But the most striking tension in their relationship is not that

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[32] E.M. Forster, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (New York: Dover, 1993), 1.

[33] Ibid., 26.

[34] Ibid.

between the rich tourist and the poor local, though it pervades almost every aspect of their relationship; it is the tension between the Italian concept of public and private and the English one.

While for both Italian and English, the line between public and private exists nominally between the home and the street, it is hardly that simple. In his book *Home*, Witold Rybczynski traces the development of the idea of privacy from the medieval period to the present, noting that the concept barely existed in the middle ages, and began to develop mostly in Northern Europe during the 17th century.[35] In the middle ages the "big house" was the standard housing unit, completely devoid of private space. The "big house" was usually only a few rooms, which housed all the activities of a loosely connected group of family members, workers, and servants. It was cooking space, work space, sleeping space, and socializing space, all mixed together without real distinctions.

For the English at the turn of the 20th century, though, privacy had become an essential part of the organization of the home, an idea that had taken root in the Georgian period. During that period, the "home was a social place, but it was so in a curiously private way."[36] While the house was organized for guests, the system of manners carefully controlled the flow of visitors. Etiquette created a strong buffer between the family and outsiders, with notes delivered by servant—even to neighbors—and visits arranged through the system of visiting cards. Visits themselves followed a strict trajectory, especially with dinners, where different

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[35] Witold Rybczynski, *Home: A Short History of an Idea* (New York: Penguin, 1986), 43–44.

[36] Ibid., 107.

public rooms were used throughout the evening. The buffering between the street and the home, and then again between public and private spaces in the home was particularly apparent in the practice of having guests wait in the hall, visible from most other main rooms, until their presence had been announced and a family member had greeted them.[37] In an essay from *A History of Private Life,* Michelle Perrot writes of these divisions between public and private within the house:

> Fortress of privacy, the home was protected by walls, servants, and darkness. But it was also a place seething with internal conflict, a microcosm through which ran the torturous boundary between public and private, male and female, master and servant, parent and child, family and individual. The assignment of rooms for various uses, the location of stairways and corridors, the availability of space for private meditation, for grooming, for physical and spiritual pleasures—all these were governed by strategies of encounter and avoidance shaped by desire and concern for the self.[38]

The line between public and private, constantly shifting and being negotiated along thresholds, existed mainly in two places. First, it separated the house from the street, then the public lower floors from the private rooms upstairs, with the special further buffering function of entryways, halls, stairs, and corridors.

For the Italians, as Forster expresses in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, the breakdowns were at once more and less rigid. While public space was restricted almost entirely to the streets and cafes, as evidenced by Gino's social life, the "private" space of the house seems to have had less strict boundaries within it than in English houses. The house at Monteriano demonstrates what an English person might describe as the problem with Italian home life. The house is built into a hill,

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[37] Ibid., 108.

[38] Michelle Perrot, "At Home," *A History of Private Life Vol. IV: From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War*, ed. Michelle Perrot, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1990), 346.

and is best accessed from the back, though Forster indicates that such access depends on a "knowing person."[39] At the back of the house, the visitor, "now on a level with the cellars … lifts up his head and shouts."[40] Here we see the first interaction between the visitor and the house, and it hardly has the feeling of stiff, subtle manners that would feel appropriate to the English—the separation between street and house is much stricter and more forbidding. For deliveries, the transaction would be operated through a basket, lowered from a window by string. Visitors would be "interrogated, then bidden or forbidden to ascend."[41] Inside the house, Forster describes an odd assortment of rooms, noting especially "a living-room, which insensibly glides into a bedroom when the refining sense of hospitality is absent."[42] This connection between a bedroom and a living room would seem the height of immorality to an English sensibility, which Forster emphasizes when he contrasts the living-room adjacent bedroom with "real" bedrooms in another part of the house.

The characters' attitudes toward space also demonstrate strong cultural differences. While Gino's family is intent on moving into the large house, which they see as an open, family space, Lilia is determined to keep it individual and private. While Forster mentions both public and private spaces in writing about the possibility of Gino's family moving in, the emphasis seems to be on the mass of people and togetherness that would ensue:

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[39] Forster, *Where Angels Fear to Tread,* 25.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid., 25–26.

> The house was far too big for [Gino and Lilia], and there was a general concourse of his relatives to fill it up. His father wished to make it a patriarchal concern, where all the family should have their rooms and meet together for meals, and was perfectly willing to give up the new [dental] practice at Poggibongi and preside. Gino was quite willing, too, for he was an affectionate youth who liked a large home-circle, and he told it as a pleasant bit of news to Lilia, who did not attempt to conceal her horror.[43]

By describing the family as a "general concourse" of relatives, Forster gives the impression of a large, raucous group. With the term "affectionate youth," he further indicates what seems an improper intimacy, a closeness of the family structure that appears distinctly Italian, and completely unsuited to English custom.

The other side of the Italians' stricter distinction between the familial space of the home and the public space of the street is made clear in a conversation between Gino and Lilia. After he has sat in the house depressed for days, she encourages him to be active: "Go out and see your friends, and bring them to see me. We both of us like society."[44] While this statement is true, the societies it refers to are organized in different ways, as becomes increasingly clear. Lilia suggests, "Let's have plenty of men—and make them bring their womenkind. I mean to have real English tea-parties."[45] While she expects a party in the home to have a mix of guests, Gino only associates the home with family: "There is my aunt and her husband; but I thought you did not want to receive my relatives."[46] Class, of

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[43] Ibid., 26.

[44] Ibid., 28.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

course, also informs their discussion, as she tries to identify leaders of society with whom to associate, and he speaks of his working-class acquaintances.

The most telling moment about the spatial division of society comes at the end of the conversation, where Forster gives us access to Lilia's thoughts: "Lilia gathered somehow from this conversation that Continental society was not the go-as-you-please thing she had expected. Indeed, she could not see where Continental society was."[47] Society, as Lilia conceives it, not only has a set of morals and codes of conduct, but is also a spatial system, which she finds in Italy is organized to keep women exclusively engaged with the life of the family. As an Italian man, Gino understands that "you make friends with your neighbour at the theatre or in the train" but "you need never enter his home, nor he yours. All your lives you will meet under the open air, the only roof-tree of the South."[48] With Lilia having rejected the Italian form of home life, and Gino refusing to allow her to indulge in the English version—he forbids her to walk alone, and declines to bring his friends to the house, for he does "not see why an English wife should be treated differently"[49]—the relationship, founded on different conceptions of space, is a failure.

If the street in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* highlights the differences between the Italians and the English, the street in *Howards End* foregrounds class tensions. The clearest of these tensions occurs during a conversation between Mr. Wilcox and Margaret on an evening stroll in Swanage. While it is common to have private

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[47] Ibid., 29.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid., 34.

conversations in public spaces, perhaps even conferences one might wish to keep secret, the truly public nature of those conversations is rarely exposed, at least for a certain class. But even in the quiet seaside resort of Swanage, the street brings people of different classes into close proximity, leading them ultimately to subtly react to each other, pushing some of their beliefs and desires to the surface. Before Mr. Wilcox and Margaret are interrupted by a group of working class youths, their conversation demonstrates the reticence of middle class English society during the transition from the Victorian to the modern period. Sexual and financial questions abound regarding the couple's pending marriage, but these questions remain firmly below the surface as Mr. Wilcox attempts to address them obliquely. While Margaret finds it "extraordinarily interesting" to know when exactly Mr. Wilcox had begun to think of proposing to her, Forster explains that "He misliked the very word 'interesting', connoting it with wasted energy and even with morbidity. Hard facts were enough for him."[50] As Mr. Wilcox attempts to spend the evening discussing the "business" of their marriage in vague terms, first Margaret then the youths dig in to his discomfort. When he makes reference to the family's economic situation—"I am anxious, in my own happiness, not to be unjust to others"—Margaret gets to the heart of the matter: "You mean money."[51] He winces, and then is reluctant to speak in definite terms about any particular sum, eventually changing the subject entirely.

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[50] Forster, *Howards End*, 152.

[51] Ibid., 153.

The youths begin interjecting shortly thereafter, revealing the sexual nature of a seemingly reserved conversation. When Margaret asks, "When do you want to marry me?" one of the youths says, "Getting a bit hot, eh?"[52] With the topic thus broached, Margaret becomes slightly daring in the conversation, and says of the union, "The earlier the nicer, Henry. Females are not supposed to say such things, but the earlier the nicer."[53] Mr. Wilcox appears unmoved, responding "rather dryly."[54] The next time the youths interrupt, he exclaims, "And these are the men to whom we give the vote,"[55] adding a political dimension to the already charged conversation. Forster editorializes that "they were also the men to whom he gave work as clerks—work that scarcely encouraged them to grow into other men."[56] In this comment, we see the way the mixing of different classes in public space influences all aspects of the characters' thoughts. This influence is made most explicit at the end of the scene, where the sexual tension that has been built in part by the prodding of the youths overcomes Mr. Wilcox. On the path to Margaret's aunt's house, hidden by rhododendrons, Mr. Wilcox abruptly kisses Margaret, then just as abruptly ends the encounter, leaving her at the door. The outburst is a departure from his strict manners, and shows a distinct break from the proper Victorian reserve he generally displays. But that departure makes sense in the modern world Forster depicts, where his characters are surrounded by—and very

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[52] Ibid., 154.

[53] Ibid., 155.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid., 156.

[56] Ibid.

much a part of—an inherited tradition, but are also being pulled out of the old paradigms. For Mr. Wilcox it seems not entirely conscious—he is clearly conflicted—but the kiss is certainly a genuine expression of his desire, a desire which is subtly encouraged by the conditions of public space. The lower class morality, occupying the same space as its haughty cousin, thus demonstrates its influence, even on the private lives of the well-off.

But while *Howards End* demonstrates the "modernizing" effect this public discourse can have on Mr. Wilcox's expression of his affections, Forster also sees a different side to the role public space plays. The sexual discourse that Mr. Wilcox experiences, though it offends him, reinforces his desires. In *Maurice*, that public discourse acts against the characters' desires. When Clive renounces his homosexuality, public spaces offer him a whole new set of meanings. Women, though "they might be offended or coy… understood, and welcomed him into a world of delicious interchange."[57] Statues, advertisements, and films all serve a signifying system that supports heterosexuality: "How happy normal people made their lives!"[58] As discussed in regards to Maurice's relationship with the space of Penge, public morals are projected onto private spaces. Analogously, the public discourse attempts to map itself onto private desire. For Mr. Wilcox, that discourse reinforces and brings forward a desire that he already felt but kept within the Victorian code of manners. For Maurice, it drives him to reject all aspects of society, not being able to reconcile his desire with the organization of rooms or the

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[57] Forster, *Maurice*, 118–119.

[58] Ibid., 119.

pressure of public discourse. For Clive, the public discourse he finds available to him once he renounces his private desires affirms his commitment to that normalized identity—above all, it is easier to be "normal."

Flats and Hotels

While public spaces like the street are the site of much class tension and interaction in Forster's world, it is hotels and flats that are most feared. Almost universally labelled immoral, the hotel is a frequent backdrop to the lives of the English middle class of Forster's novels. Without the money to own a house in every place they visit, but still maintaining an active travel schedule, the characters make do with these accommodations that provide a unique mix of private and public space. The hotel generally has public spaces downstairs and private rooms upstairs, and is ordered in many ways like an English house. But while the house has the buffering system of etiquette, notes, and visiting cards to control public access, the hotel's system is not as well-defined. Though the staff of the best hotels may provide some of the social buffering that household staff and spatial organization might normally provide, such a system is neither guaranteed nor reliable. Thus the public space of the hotel is truly public, thereby making its private rooms less private. With the national English investment in the privacy of home spaces, this decreased privacy in hotels seems particularly dangerous. Analogous to the immorality the English saw in the hotel is the fear they had of the apartment house, which also had private spaces packed together into public buildings. As noted earlier, apartment houses in London took a number of forms, ranging from chambers for single men to luxury

flats with shared walls but private entrances.[59] With the broad array of apartment houses available, it is difficult to group them all together—they spanned the entire spectrum of class statuses—but it may be instructive to look at the *way* in which they signaled those various class statuses.

In *A Room With a View*, the hotel features prominently, both as a site where the system of English manners that would protect a house's privacy fails to operate, and as a place where morals are neither as strict nor as easily enforceable as they are in houses. But when Lucy seeks independence after breaking off her engagement, she muses about living in a flat in London. The result is a much graver concern from those around her than is evident when she stays at hotels. The idea that Lucy "might share a flat for a little with some other girl" is met with her mother's immediate disgust at the social and moral consequences of the idea:

> "And mess with typewriters and latchkeys," exploded Mrs Honeychurch. "And agitate and scream, and be carried off kicking by the police. And call it a Mission—when no one wants you! And call it Duty—when it means that you can't stand your own home! And call it Work—when thousands of men are starving with the competition as it is!"[60]

In Mrs. Honeychurch's response the flat is strongly identified with the working class, categorized as both unfeminine and against the national interest. Further, Mrs. Honeychurch contrasts the idea of a well-founded tradition with the immoral rootlessness of modern city life:

> Very well. Take your independence and be gone. Rush up and down and round the world, and come back as thin as a lath with the bad food. Despise the house that your father built and the garden that he

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[59] Marcus, *Apartment Stories*, 87–88

[60] E.M. Forster, A *Room With a View* (New York: Penguin, 2000), 180–181.

> planted, and our dear view—and then share a flat with another girl.[61]

The sense of connection to a flat, as well as its ability to form morally acceptable relationships is thus questioned. While the family Lucy would be leaving behind in her house has a definite shape and character, the "other girl" she might live with is unknown, and Mrs. Honeychurch manages to make the idea of her distinctly unappealing.

The moral and class-based objections to flats are made more explicit in *Howard's End* when Forster describes Leonard Bast's walk across London, ending in the apartment Forster finds immoral because it "had been too easily gained, and could be relinquished too easily."[62] Leonard's neighborhood, around Camelia Road, is undergoing a construction boom, with old houses being torn down to make room for cheap modern apartment houses. The energy that creates these conditions is "restless" and Forster emphasizes the crush of the population in London that necessitates it, "as the city receives more and more men upon her soil."[63] For Forster, there is nothing to be romanticized about the modern urbanism he sees rising. His distaste for the new flats is evident in his description of the interior of Leonard's, which he portrays in a haltingly reproachful manner: "It was an amorous and not unpleasant little hole when the curtains were drawn, and the lights turned on, and the gas stove unlit."[64] He further describes the furniture as

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[61] Ibid., 181.

[62] Forster, *Howard's End*, 41.

[63] Ibid., 40.

[64] Ibid., 41.

"encumbering" the flat, and indicates the smallness of the space by the objects' proximity to each other; Leonard is unable to kick off his boots without knocking the table, and when the table is knocked, a picture frame from it falls directly into the fireplace, as if nothing is more than a few inches from anything else. Cramped and poorly lit, the flat is a locus of immorality both because of the disheartening effect the space has on its occupants and because of its impermanence. Forster notes that the Basts are renting the space furnished, so even the interior of their home can give them no sense of connection to their surroundings—they don't own any of it.

Forster further emphasizes the space's inability to establish its inhabitants' connections with England as Leonard sits down to read John Ruskin, the 19th century architectural thinker and social critic whom Leonard considers "the greatest master of English Prose."[65] In attempting to reform Ruskin's sentence describing a Venetian church into one describing his own flat, Leonard finds that Ruskin's style simply does not fit his circumstances; while Ruskin's language is "full of high purpose, full of beauty, full even of sympathy and love of men," it "elud[es] all that was actual and insistent in Leonard's life."[66] Given the space that serves as his frame of reference, shaping his feelings about the world, Leonard is denied the ideal English existence and the terms in which one might express it.

While the worst flats, demonstrated by Leonard's cramped basement apartment, show a lack of space and separation from the neighbors, the luxury flats

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[65] Ibid., 42.

[66] Ibid.

of London use some of the same strategies as hotels to convey wealth and status and to allay fears of an overly public home environment. In contrast to Leonard's apartment, the luxury flats in the "ornate block" opposite the Schlegels' Wickham Place are expensive and striking. Mrs. Munt thinks that these "flats house a flashy type of person," and though they are not a particularly flashy family, the wealthy Wilcoxes wind up renting one of the flats.[67] Like a hotel, the building has porters and separate lifts for passengers and provisions, and one can assume the staff includes maids and doormen, though these flats do not appear to have the separate entrances most preferred in London. But because of the careful system of separation the staff can provide, the luxury flat escapes much of the stigma attached to cheaper apartments.

Hotels and luxury flats also have in common their relationship to property ownership. While the moral reservations about low-class flats are centered on their impermanence and their lack of solid social grounding through property ownership, neither hotels nor luxury flats are really intended as permanent homes. Rather, families like the Wilcoxes stay at hotels only briefly, or rent luxury flats just for the duration of the London social season.[68] In a sense, luxury flats—and still more, hotels—serve to confirm the importance of a morally acceptable home by contrasting with rather than replacing it; the Wilcoxes may have a flat because they are still associated with their ancestral home in the country.

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[67] Ibid., 48.

[68] Marcus, *Apartment Stories,* 88.

But while the concerns over rootlessness are somewhat allayed, there are other moral issues that attach to hotels. In *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, the pressing question of the social atmosphere in hotels is put plainly: "What nice person, too, do you meet in a hotel?"[69] As it turns out, Forster's characters meet plenty of nice people in hotels—the Schlegels and the Wilcoxes meet in one, and Lucy and Charlotte meet the Emersons and run into their old vicar in a Florentine pension. Some encounters, however, are less auspicious. It is a hotel that provides the environment for Helen and Leonard's sexual encounter in *Howards End*, and in *Where Angels Fear to Tread,* wealthy English Lilia meets the poorer Italian Gino in a hotel, leading to a quick and ill-fated marriage. Though some hotel encounters turn out positively, the problems of different worlds colliding and the ever-present dangers of sex lead to the hotel's designation as a morally questionable place. The opening chapter of *A Room with a View,* set at the beginning of Miss Bartlett and Miss Honeychurch's stay in Florence, explores the issue most fully, but consideration also must be given to Helen and Leonard's one night hotel encounter in *Howards End*, which clearly demonstrates the sexual problems of the private-public mix of the hotel space.

In the opening of *A Room with a View,* Lucy and Charlotte model the way British manners are supposed to work in their discussion of the poor rooms they are given in their pension and which of them should get the first chance at a better room. Each is eager to thrust the privilege on the other, with the subtle undercurrent of Charlotte's indebtedness to Lucy's mother for paying part of her traveling expenses

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[69] Forster, *Where Angels Fear to Tread,* 10.

entering into the conversation. The discussion reinforces their ties by enlisting their shared acquaintances—each claims Lucy's mother would never forgive her—and demonstrates that their relationship is firmly established, and though there are tensions over money there is no significant class difference.

Mr. Emerson, in contrast, introduces himself by completely ignoring the reticent decorum of private relations and jumps into a conversation on which he was eavesdropping. The closeness of the public areas of the pension, as I noted earlier, makes the typical screening processes for proper English houses impossible, but Forster demonstrates that Mr Emerson breaks even the weaker standards of the hotel: "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."[70] Forster's criticism here seems to cut at the system of British manners itself as failing to allow people to connect in a socially acceptable way, demonstrating how untenable the system is.

This criticism is furthered in the person of Mr. Beebe who in describing Mr. Emerson addresses the general strategy of British manners in a somewhat Wildean remark, "He has the merit—if it is one—of saying exactly what he means.... It is so difficult—at least, I find it difficult—to understand people who speak the truth."[71] This criticism, though, is placed in an environment—like Forster's other criticisms of the way spaces and manners interact—that demonstrates how often the

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[70] Forster, *A Room with a View*, 4.

[71] Ibid., 8.

established system falls apart, or is always in a position of undermining its own established ideals.

Indeed, rather than viewing this scene as a criticism, it might be more accurate to say it attempts to demonstrate the reality of English interactions, showing that like so many other things in the transition period between the Victorian and the modern that Forster describes, the old systems remain in place while being routinely undermined by their own internal contradictions. This reading is supported by the necessity of interactions between Charlotte, Lucy, and the other patrons, who shortly after the interaction with Mr. Emerson all seem to warm to them, overflowing with travel advice: "The Pension Bertolini had decided, almost enthusiastically, that they would do."[72] So it is not the danger of interacting with people in hotels, but rather the danger of interacting with the *wrong* people, which the system of manners is apparently not equipped to prevent. When asked about his relationship with Mr. Emerson, Mr. Beebe says "We are friendly—as one is in pensions."[73] If one is to be friendly with all of a place's residents, their class status in the strictly hierarchical English system matters immensely, and the subtle distinction drawn in the response—between "friend" and "friendly"—must be maintained at all costs.

A parallel situation occurs in *A Passage to India,* Forster's last novel, which deals with the lives of a group of English visitors and colonists in India and their Indian acquaintances. At the English club in Chandrapore, a space similar to the Pension

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[72] Ibid., 6.

[73] Ibid., 7.

Bertolini in the sense that it is an oasis of English manners in a largely foreign space, the young Adela Quested is followed and watched by the other English people, even within the space of the club compound. Another guest explains that this sort of surveillance is standard: "They notice everything, until they're perfectly sure you're their sort."[74] Mrs. Moore, Adela's older traveling companion, is confused by such vigilance, which Forster explains: "Accustomed to the privacy of London, she could not realize that India, seemingly so mysterious, contains none, and that consequently the conventions have greater force."[75] Here both the conditions of the country, and the conditions of the club reduce personal privacy to allow for the group's strict observation. The adherence to social customs seems to be the only remaining barrier against what is often described as the formlessness of Indian space, and even something as minor as Adela's idle wanderings sends a dangerous signal of what else might happen.

The code of manners that Mr. Emerson breaches, and that the club's members fear Adela might transgress, is founded not only on the dangers of class interactions, but upon a deeper fear, that of the sexual possibilities of private space —or unsurveilled public space—and of the social risks that such intermingling of classes would bring. Though Mr. Emerson and his son George turn out to be respectable and decent enough people, their disregard for the established system is disturbing to Charlotte and Lucy. The situation the women most fear is illustrated in *Howards End*, when another hotel affords Helen and Leonard, also of different

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[74] E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1924), 49.

[75] Ibid.

classes, the peculiar combination of private and public spaces that ultimately leads to their sexual encounter. Talking late at night while Jacky, Leonard's wife, is asleep in the next room, they discuss Life, Death, Money, and Leonard's marriage, and ultimately, we learn later, succumb to their desires. Without the surveillance of the semi-public space of a house's drawing room or the fully public space of the hotel's lobby, where this conversation should have taken place, Leonard and Helen have no structural barriers, but only social ones preventing their actions. The social barriers are, of course, feeble, and the hotel highlights the precise problem with them; because social restrictions alone are unreliable to police individuals, society must mix them with structural barriers to inhibit the kind of things that might go on in hotels.

But that is not to say the space of the hotel is completely without controls. The following morning, upon approaching the hotel, Margaret does not go in, "for discussion would have been perilous," but instead gives notes for Leonard and her sister, Helen, to a hotel waitress.[76] For Margaret, the hotel is so strongly tainted that the surveillance she worries about exists not at the public-private divide of the staircase between the lobby and the rooms, but at the building's entrance itself. With the particular combination of public and private spaces in the building, private matters become public quickly through rumor and insinuation, and it can be difficult to keep up appearances. In fact, the possibility of being caught in an immoral situation within the hotel is demonstrated as Margaret walks away from the hotel: "As she recrossed the square she saw Helen and Mr Bast looking out of

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[76] Forster, *Howard's End,* 206.

the window of the coffeeroom, and feared she was already too late."[77] The publicness of the hotel projects even to the street, as it fails to hold its secrets within its walls. While the Victorian house—even in Forster's more modern time—is able to, as Rosner writes, conceal its dirt and keep its secrets,[78] the hotel cannot live up to that standard.

Through the interactions of the private and the public, we see the way manners and spaces must rely on each other to reinforce the English domestic ideal, but at the borders, that ideal is constantly breaking down. Wickham Place should be an ideal domestic space, but it is threatened by the presence of artists, "unshaven musicians," and the poor. Penge, in *Maurice*, is undermined by its own attempts at repression, with the water that symbolizes sexual transgression tearing the house apart when it is not allowed space to express itself. In the Italy of *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, Gino and Lilia's new home is structured to uphold a domestic ideal, but the conflict between that Italian spatial order and the English manners Lilia attempts to project onto it is ultimately unreconcilable. In *A Passage to India,* the system of manners must attempt to compensate for the lack of support provided by the available architecture, but that solution is also untenable. All these novels show characters recognizing the problems with the spaces around them, and trying to operate within the gap between a system of manners, a spatial order, and their own desires. While the private and the public form convenient lines of discursive

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[77] Ibid.

[78] Rosner, *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life,* 81.

demarcation, they intrude upon each other to such an extent that the distinctions ultimately appear purely imagined. The spaces that Forster describes, in their constant negotiation with systems of manners, attempt to make those demarcations real, but the internal contradictions of the systems make the exact division impossible. In the note at the end of *Maurice,* Forster writes that though the greenwood was no longer a solution to the problem of queer desire in the 1960s, "People do still escape, one can see them any night at it in the films. But they are gangsters, not outlaws, they can dodge civilization because they are a part of it."[79] This passage perfectly reflects Forster's sense of space in relation to the public and the private: to be able to use space effectively is predicated on a keen understanding of the system of manners, but that system is readily undermined by conflicting desires, which can write their own meanings onto spaces. The gap between manners, space, and desire is central to the operation of society, and indeed, the construction of each is premised upon the weakness of the others; each element shifts in relation to the other two, trying to occupy the space between them.

[79] Forster, *Maurice,* 254.

Identity and Space

In his essay "The United States," Forster writes that he was not looking for "representative individuals" in his travels, "but people who existed on their own account and with whom it might therefore be possible to be friends."[1] But while his focus is at first on individual people, he necessarily generalizes them, and through them the character of their nation. A few pages later he writes,

> The individuals I met were mostly of Anglo-Saxon stock; I also knew some Swedish and some Italian farming people, made some oriental contacts, and had one or two Mexican friends. I did not have the good fortune to get to know any Negroes. On the whole I saw as much of the human landscape as an elderly traveller may reasonably expect, and I liked it.[2]

In defining this "human landscape" Forster moves away from the notion of avoiding representative individuals and instead tries to make all individuals representative through categorization. Personal identity here becomes an essential element of national identity, but national identity also takes a role in forming personal identity. The tension between the personal and the national, between the specific and the general, is one that plays out consistently in Forster's novels. He writes that "it is the function of the novelist to reveal the hidden life at its source,"[3] but the best novels also transcend that specificity, making larger statements about their time and place.

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[1] E.M. Forster, "The United States," in *Two Cheers for Democracy* (London: Edward Arnold, 1972), 327.

[2] Ibid., 329.

[3] E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1927), 72.

These statements about time and place, though, do not only cut one way. While expressions of personal identity make statements about time and place, spaces and moments also affect character, both national and personal. Forster uses spaces to help illustrate his characters, but the spaces also form tensions with those characters, creating a give and take where they mutually work to define each other, and through that struggle, establish or cement larger identities. In describing the role of a few of Forster's older characters, Elizabeth Bowen writes, "They are Nature. One passes directly on from them into weather and landscape. 'Landscape'? — I mean, the formidable, ever-amazing shapes of pieces of country. The concern is with what these shapes give off, what they do to man."[4] The concern is also, of course, what man does to them — how the representation of character and characters' own perceptions form the landscape as much as space shapes identity.

In this chapter, I explore the intersections of space and identity — how they create and inform each other, and also how Forster uses each as a tool to represent the other. I divide this exploration into two sections — personal identity and national identity — to draw a distinction between the specific uses of space in describing individual characters and the abstracted idea of space that attempts to define entire nationalities. I also explore both how space is invested with the power to create and shape identity and how it is used to describe that identity through careful representation. It is often not the way space exists as such, but the way it is perceived and described that frames its place within the conceptualization and

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[4] Elizabeth Bowen, "A Passage to E.M. Forster," *Aspects of E.M. Forster*, ed. Oliver Stallybrass (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1969), 11.

expression of national identity. This issue of perception and description—representation—happens at two levels in Forster's novels: that of the characters' perceptions within the novels, and at the level of the writing itself, particularly in light of Forster's famous use of an occasionally slippery narrative voice.

Personal Identity

In *The Longest Journey*, Forster posits an architecture that allows man to see himself as he wishes. In the circular reading room of the British Museum, Stewart Ansell finds peace, the space giving him the feeling that "his life was not ignoble."[5] The space defines Ansell, but that definition is composed of his own projected thoughts. Looking at the passage closely, we see the way Forster's prose slides into Ansell's point of view, and then projects Ansell's thoughts onto the space:

> Ansell was in his favourite haunt—the reading-room of the British Museum. In that book-encircled space he always could find peace. He loved to see the volumes rising tier above tier into the misty dome. He loved the chairs that glide so noiselessly, and the radiating desks, and the central area, where the catalogue shelves curve round the superintendent's throne. There he knew that his life was not ignoble. It was worth while to grow old and dusty seeking for truth though truth is unattainable, restating questions that have been stated at the beginning of the world. Failure would await him, but not disillusionment. He was not a hero, and he knew it. His father and sisters, by their steady goodness, had made this life possible. But, all the same, it was not the life of a spoilt child.[6]

Forster's narrative starts from his third-person view, but as he repeats "He loved" we get closer to Ansell's thoughts. With "There he knew that his life was ignoble" Forster allows his narrator to fully enter Ansell's thoughts, and only exits them

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[5] E.M. Forster, *The Longest Journey* (London: Edward Arnold, 1984), 177.

[6] Ibid.

with the next paragraph; the "he knew it" toward the end serves to reinforces this positioning of the narrative voice within Ansell's thoughts. Our understanding of the space is thus shaped by Ansell's vision—we see only what he appreciates, and his conclusions (and preoccupations) are presented through the authority of the narrator's voice. In the elevation of the books we see Ansell's ennoblement and in the noiseless glide of the chairs and the circular pattern of the desks we see the harmony and repetition he cherishes. While the description at the beginning of this passage focuses on small features of the room, the room's most impressive feature is its scale. That scale is suggested by the books rising along the wall "into the misty dome," but it is really Ansell's reaction that fully forms the scale of the space in the reader's mind, with the dual impression that life is not ignoble and that the shelves could contain the redundant questions of all of history—the space emboldens the individual without overpowering him.

In *A Room with a View* we see the same kind of characterization using space, but there it is not only one individual's vision that shapes our perception, but rather we see the opposing perspectives of two characters. If Ansell has a conversation with the reader about space and identity through the voice of the narrator, then Cecil and Lucy demonstrate this playing of space, perception, and identity in a conversation between themselves. Cecil, Lucy's pretentious and uptight fiancé, complains to her: "I had got an idea—I dare say wrongly—that you feel more at home with me in a room.… Or, at the most, in a garden, or on a road. Never in the real country."[7] Rather than his own perception of space ennobling him, as we see

[7] E.M. Forster, *A Room with a View* (New York: Penguin, 2000), 99.

with Ansell in *The Longest Journey*, Cecil claims to feel limited by domesticated spaces—that they might define him is especially troubling. The relationship with space he displays is an inner struggle for Cecil, so it appears especially confusing to Lucy. Rather than having a consistent expression of identity through space, Cecil attempts to redefine himself and the spaces around him to fit his self-conscious presentation of identity. When the couple come to a pond in the woods, Lucy exclaims "The Sacred Lake!" and recounts a delightful childhood swimming there. Cecil's reaction is tempered both by his strong penchant for propriety and his conflicting desire to be seen as spontaneous and earthly. Forster writes, "At another time, he might have been shocked, for he had depths of prudishness about him. But now, with his momentary cult of the fresh air, he was delighted at [Lucy's] admirable simplicity."[8] Here Cecil shapes himself to the surroundings, desiring himself to be reflected in them, thereby giving up his reservations so that the image might fit. Later in the Honeychurches' garden, though, he thinks of shaping the environment to fit his own "refined" and "fastidious" sensibility.[9] After the tennis match, which Cecil repeatedly refuses to participate in, George Emerson interrupts his attempts to read to Lucy, and Cecil becomes indignant: "Cecil got up: [Mr Emerson] was ill-bred—he hadn't put on his coat after tennis—he didn't do."[10] Where Cecil earlier drew the distinction between those who belong outside and those who are confined to rooms, here he attempts to turn the domesticated space of the garden into an even more controlled interior, both by his insistence on

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[8] Ibid., 100.

[9] Ibid., 81.

[10] Ibid., 148.

reading rather than playing and in his desire to project the strictest manners of the house into the outdoor space.

While Cecil is afraid that Lucy associates him with rooms (worst of all, he wonders: "A drawing-room, pray? With no view?"[11]), he connects her with views. This split between the room and the view is the central metaphor of the novel, and runs throughout, from the first scene to the last. The connection with views plays especially well with Lucy's place in the novel, where she is certainly not fully restrained by her society but is also not wholly given over to the natural world, most strongly associated with the spontaneous and passionate George Emerson. Lucy is comfortable with both sides of the window, but is best described in the looking through, as she attempts to reconcile desire and propriety. When Lucy plays Beethoven on the piano, Mr. Beebe remarks, "If Miss Honeychurch ever takes to live as she plays, it will be very exciting both for us and for her,"[12] highlighting the disconnect between Lucy's full possibility and what she expresses outwardly. The same holds true in her walk through the woods with Cecil. While she is comfortable—indeed joyous—in the path through the woods, she wonders whether, given the circumstances, it is the best one: "Perhaps the road is more sensible, as we're got up smart."[13] Later, as Lucy ponders whether to break off her engagement with Cecil, Forster uses a description of the surrounding air, punctuated by pressing but vague questions, to bring her toward her decision:

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[11] Ibid., 99.

[12] Ibid., 30.

[13] Ibid., 99.

> But, once in the open air, she paused. Some emotion—pity, terror, love, but the emotion was strong—seized her, and she was aware of autumn. Summer was ending, and the evening brought her odours of decay, the more pathetic because they were reminiscent of spring. That something or other mattered intellectually? A leaf, violently agitated, danced past her, while other leaves lay motionless. That the earth was hastening to re-enter darkness, and the shadows of those trees over Windy Corner?[14]

It is telling that this passage is set in the space of the garden, already established as a site of contention between the natural and spontaneous represented by George and the tennis game, and the mannered and studious tied to Cecil and his books. The summer and the spring smell the same, but are separated by our interpretations and associations with them. The space's influence on Lucy is certainly present, but does not overpower her thinking; rather, it presents a rich backdrop upon which she can project her thoughts, just as Ansell used the British Museum's reading room to project his.

Howards End deals explicitly with the questions of shaping or projecting an identity in space. The novel is "a hunt for home,"[15] but is also a search for identity, which for Margaret Schlegel becomes inextricably tied to the home. Margaret's concerns about houses focus on what they might project about her, but also how they might shape or change her. Her relationships with spaces also reflect consistently that it is not merely the structure of spaces but also the meanings she projects onto them (and the meanings that have been projected onto them in the past) that create their power.

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[14] Ibid., 156.

[15] E.M. Forster, "A View without a Room," *New York Times*, July 27, 1958, BR4.

At Wickham Place, the Schlegels' first residence in the novel, Margaret feels a sense of connection to her past. Every piece of furniture tells a story, and "round every knob and cushion in the house, sentiment gathered."[16] As the family thinks of leaving this house so central to their past, they realize that "it had helped to balance their lives, and almost to counsel them."[17] The space is powerful because of the history which it has absorbed over the years—it reflects back projected meanings, but also lives its own life. When the Schlegels are forced to leave the house, Forster writes of the soul of the house slipping away before it is torn down, demonstrating that while connected the Schlegels' presence, it does not exactly correspond to their actions:

> Houses have their own way of dying, falling as variously as the generations of men, some with a tragic roar, some quietly but to an afterlife in the city of ghosts, while from others—and thus was the death of Wickham Place—the spirit slips before the body perishes. It had decayed in the spring, disintegrating the girls more than they knew, and causing either to accost unfamiliar regions. By September it was a corpse, void of emotion, and scarcely hallowed by the memories of thirty years of happiness.[18]

Before the Schlegels begin to move out, the house anticipates their absence and its own coming demise. That it was "scarcely hallowed by the memories of thirty years of happiness" indicates that the house has a life outside its connection with the Schlegel family, but also that it is in large part the interior decoration that constitutes its power; the house loses its sense when its furniture has been removed.

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[16] E.M. Forster, *Howards End* (New York: Penguin, 2000), 128.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid., 219.

Howards End has the same kind of relationship with its inhabitants. In addition to being a reflection of its inhabitants, it also displays its own drive, at various points seemingly pulling Margaret toward it. This apparent agency to get Margaret into the house is derived from its connection with Mrs. Wilcox; to her, the house "had been a spirit, for which she sought a spiritual heir."[19] She leaves the house to Margaret in an unofficial last-minute will, and then the house seemingly acts toward this end on its own. When Margaret first visits Howards End Mr. Wilcox forgets the key, but while he goes to retrieve it the house beckons her in through the unlocked door, then "the draught from inside slammed the door behind."[20] In the house she feels calmed against her search for a home and the emphasis on space as a material possession rather than a feeling and an atmosphere: "she recaptured the sense of space which the motor had tried to rob from her. She remembered again that ten square miles are not ten times as wonderful as one square mile, that a thousand square miles are not practically the same as heaven."[21] This sense of space that Margaret finds at Howards End speaks to the importance of connection that Forster makes the central concern of his novel with the epigraph "Only connect…." While space can have a certain power on its own, it is the connection between space and inhabitant that is most valuable. If the impermanence of Leonard Bast's apartment is marked as immoral—he rents all the furniture and controls little of the feeling of the space—Howards End and its connection with Mrs. Wilcox and later Margaret is the ideal. After her trying modern journey from

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[19] Ibid., 84.

[20] Ibid., 171.

[21] Ibid., 171–172.

Howards End back to Wickham Place, Margaret again feels this sense of connection between space and identity:

> The sense of flux which had haunted her all year disappeared for a time. She forgot the luggage and the motor-cars, and the hurrying men who know so much and connect so little. She recaptured the sense of space, which is the basis of all earthly beauty, and starting from Howards End, she attempted to realize England.[22]

This passage hints at the shift in Margaret's thinking of Wickham Place as home to Howards End. If a private home is the essence of Englishness, then England must properly be seen through the lens of home. Margaret here begins to form that connection with Howards End. She decides that the house "was English, and the wych-elm that she saw from the window was an English tree."[23] In the relationship between the tree and the house, she sees the ideal of connection: "House and tree transcended any simile of sex … Yet they kept within limits of the human. Their message was not of eternity, but of hope on this side of the grave. As she stood in one, gazing at the other, truer relationships had gleamed."[24] After this recognition and identification with Howards End, though, Margaret does not immediately move in to Howards End; we are first given the counterexample of Oniton.

In her movement between Howards End and Wickham Place, Margaret is disturbed by the sense of motion, the constant crush of people she experiences outside the home. Modern rootlessness is the heart of the concern, identified as losing the "sense of space." One journey is described succinctly but vividly:

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[22] Ibid., 174.

[23] Ibid., 176.

[24] Ibid.

"[T]rees, houses, people, animals, hills, merged and heaved into one dirtiness."[25] Oniton, "a genuine country house," with its many servants and numerous rooms makes Margaret feel similarly rootless: "She felt as if she had again jumped out of the car while it was moving."[26] Rather than a firm resting place that can build a strong connection, Oniton is an abrupt and forced solution to the question of where Mr. Wilcox and Margaret might live after their wedding. For Margaret, living in the house is not described in terms of forming a connection and joint identity, but merely coping, which she resigns herself to do:

> Certainly Oniton would take some digesting. It would be no small business to remain herself, and yet to assimilate such an establishment. She must remain herself, for his sake as well as her own, since a shadowy wife degrades the husband whom she accompanies; and she must assimilate for reasons of common honesty, since she had no right to marry a man and make him uncomfortable. Her only ally was the power of Home. The loss of Wickham Place had taught her more than its possession. Howards End had repeated the lesson.[27]

While Wickham Place and Howards End taught Margaret a lesson about the way this "power of Home" should operate, it is not merely forceful assimilation. It is a mutual construction of identity, absorbing the space but also shaping it as it in turn shapes personal identity.

Margaret realizes this ideal assimilation—the mutual construction of identity—in Howards End. The house certainly has its own character and past, and as Margaret redecorates it, a "truth" of the house emerges. As Margaret also becomes fully comfortable with her new surroundings she shapes them to her—and her

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[25] Ibid., 174.

[26] Ibid., 189.

[27] Ibid.

family's—particular needs. To contextualize the changes Margaret makes, it is first necessary to recognize the past of the house, which Mr. Wilcox explains. The house had once been a small farm, but its 30 acres were sold off slowly, due to mismanagement and the decline of small-scale farming. When Mr. Wilcox gained control, he did away with the last vestiges of the house's farming past:

> I did what I could: sold off the two and a half animals, and the mangy pony, and the superannuated tools; pulled down the outhouses; drained; thinned out I don't know how many guelder roses and elder trees; and inside the house I turned the old kitchen into a hall, and made a kitchen behind where the dairy was. Garage and so on came later. But one could still tell it's been an old farm.[28]

In effect, Mr. Wilcox attempted to turn the house into the kind of country house to which a person of his class might aspire, with a strict separation between the public rooms of the front and the servants' space—including the relocated kitchen—in the back.

Margaret makes her own observations on another aspect of Mr. Wilcox's remodeling: beams run the length of the ceiling in the front three rooms, "but the drawing-room's was match-boarded—because the facts of life must be concealed from ladies?"[29] She takes issue with this gendering of the space, and later seeks to rework the house's understandings of gender (though she does not redesign the ceiling). Her first act of redecoration is a highly symbolic one: the inscribing of a motto on the wall of the house in the collected dust from the house's period of disuse. She writes "affection," which Victoria Rosner argues is an attempt not only to accommodate Margaret's needs but her pregnant, unwed sister Helen's as well:

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[28] Ibid., 175.

[29] Ibid., 171.

> Helen's pregnancy means that she is no longer entitled to the shelter of the domestic interior.… Helen can be considered dirty from a number of viewpoints: she is sexually impure by dint of her extramarital promiscuity and indiscreet in allowing her condition to be known; further, her pregnancy places her in a threshold or transitional state such as is commonly associated with uncleanness. … Accommodating Helen requires redefining the clean and the dirty, and Margaret takes an initial step in that process when she posts her motto in the dust on the walls, redecorating in dirt.[30]

Rosner also points to another instance of the sisters' work to replace Mr. Wilcox's gendering of the space with a more accepting feeling:

> When Margaret and Helen are arranging their furniture at Howards End, they find that the caretaker has set the chairs in the dining room in partners. They shift them 'so that anyone sitting will see the lawn,' taking the emphasis away from coupling and placing it on contemplation and the outdoor life.[31]

As Margaret and Helen make these small changes, Forster gives the sense that their remodeling occurs in tandem with the house. As the two women air out the upper floors, the light reveals "this bed obviously in its right place, that in its wrong one," as if the house had an inner truth which the women could work to realize (and, by extension, Mr. Wilcox had tried to conceal).[32]

National Identity

Just as the home space and personal identity are linked, with the two interacting to mutually define each other, public spaces interact with surrounding people and things while also helping to shape the public's conception of itself. When Margaret

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[30] Victoria Rosner, *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 144.

[31] Ibid., 146. Quotation from Forster, *Howards End*, 253.

[32] Forster, *Howards End,* 256.

Schlegel stops in St. Paul's Cathedral in London, Forster describes exactly this kind of relationship:

> She went for a few moments into St. Paul's, whose dome stands out of the welter so bravely, as if preaching the gospel of form. But, within, St Paul's is as its surroundings—echoes and whispers, inaudible songs, invisible mosaics, wet footmarks crossing and recrossing the floor. *Si monumentum requiris, circumspice:* it points us back to London.[33]

Forster indicates with the cathedral's echo and the image of the footmarks that the public has a large part in shaping the space from the inside—the space does not stand up to the confused "welter" around it, but rather participates in it. But the relationship does not end there. The Latin inscription Forster quotes, from the tomb of Christopher Wren, the architect of St. Paul's, translates to "If you seek his monument, look around you."[34] At first this would seem to refer us only as far as the cathedral's walls, but Forster writes that "it points us back to London." The temporality of the inscription is part of this referencing of context other than the building itself. While the text was inscribed at a moment in time, it directs the reader to consider his surroundings when he reads it, taking into account the effect of the space long after Wren designed it. Perhaps, then, it is not the building itself—or even the city, which an earlier part of the inscription also notes Wren helped create—but the *experiencing* of these spaces that is central to their meaning. The

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[33] Ibid., 239.

[34] This translation of the inscription is provided in a footnote to the Penguin edition of *Howards End*, page 301. The full inscription makes reference to Wren as architect of both church and city, thus explaining Forster's reading. Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, *The Legacy of Sir Christopher Wren, Architect and Urban Planner,* http://spencer.lib.ku.edu/exhibits/wren/p3.html (accessed March 22, 2008).

legacy of the space is Margaret's ability to pass through it and interpret it—to look around herself—and in that interpreting, contribute her own meanings to it.

St. Paul's is unquestionably one of the most recognizable symbols of London, and in declaring that it acts "as if preaching the gospel of form," Forster presents a recurring motif in the way he describes England. English space, he routinely notes, is clear and ennobling. St. Paul's is easily legible, and stands out against what Forster would later describe as the "muddle" of London. The reading room at the British Library that Ansell found so personally affirming also speaks to the English character as a whole; it is ordered, dutiful, and studious. These spaces do not only interact with particular individuals, as Forster depicts them in these cases, but also form a larger picture of England and Englishness. Forster constructs nationality effectively in his novels, and is very much aware of the strategies he must employ, both to build up the idea of English national identity, and then to contrast it with the Indian and Italian, the other settings for his novels. In his depictions Forster shows spaces and identities mutually constructing each other on the national, as well as on the personal level. In this interaction, it is the moments of interpretation and representation that become essential, mediating the relationship between identity and space. Both Forster's and his characters' perceptions are central to the understanding of space, as in the novels we always view space through their eyes.

In this section, I use the term "national identity," but must be aware of the problems such an idea carries with it. While the topic has been discussed at length in other works, it is not sufficiently central to my analysis to merit a full

consideration.[35] The basic idea that nationality is constructed, though, is an important one, and becomes especially key in understanding Forster's relationship with India. In many if not most cases, nationalism as it developed in the 19th and 20th centuries did not preexist colonialism, but was indeed a result of it. In *A Passage to India,* though Forster draws careful distinction between different groups —particularly Muslims and Hindus, as demonstrated in the names of two of the novel's three sections, "Mosque" and "Temple"—his narrator and characters routinely use "India" and "Indian" as a general category, which collapse the identities and begin to form this idea of a nation with identifiable characteristics. While he disavows this reductionistic view of India, Forster consistently expresses it. That creation of national character—especially through the use of space—echoes the way the colonialist project collectivized and created national identities, leading to the troubled nationalisms of the postcolonial era. The construction of national identity in England is depicted rather differently, generally tied to the public school system, but again carries with it some uncomfortable generalities which we must bear in order to approach the broader point of the way space is used in creating—and legitimating—these generalizations.

In *The Longest Journey*, Forster writes directly about the way spatial organization is used in the public school system to construct and perpetuate a sense of camaraderie that translates into a national feeling of Englishness, ironically called *esprit de corps*. The Sawston School which Forster describes, modeled on the

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[35] The introduction of E.J. Hobsbawm's *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) provides a good overview of the literature on nationalism, and Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983) is one of the most influential works in the field.

Tonbridge School he attended,[36] "aimed at producing the average Englishman."[37] The school is divided into boarding-houses, but Mr. Pembroke, a master at the school, notices a flaw in the system: the day students have much less allegiance to the school than the boarders, and "were weak in *esprit de corps*."[38] A proponent of organizational systems and the instructional power they can have, Mr. Pembroke seeks to better integrate the day students by using the same spatial and disciplinary structures imposed on boarders. Forster describes Mr. Pembroke's organizational style as focused on goals rather than methods: "He organized. If no organization existed, he would create one. If one did exist, he would modify it. 'An organization,' he would say, 'is after all not an end in itself. It must contribute to a movement.'"[39] Mr. Pembroke's description of an organization existing only for certain ends might very well describe his understanding of architecture, as he sought to rectify the day boys' problems through spatial controls. The boys' lack of allegiance to the school was because "they were apt to regard home, not school, as the most important thing in their lives."[40] To assert the same rules over the day boys as already existed for the boarders, Mr. Pembroke imposes a curfew, and fixed hours for working, sleeping, and eating, requiring that the boys be in specific places at specific times for specific functions. The overarching theme of the

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[36] Francis King, *E.M. Forster and His World* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 17.

[37] Forster, *The Longest Journey,* 43.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

reforms, as Forster describes it, is that the boys "must keep to bounds."[41] Eventually, finding these restrictions not quite enough, Mr. Pembroke organizes them into their own house "with housemaster and colours of their own."[42] Mr. Pembroke's explanation of the change is perhaps most revealing about the power he sees in space: "Through the house … one learns patriotism for the school, just as through the school one learns patriotism for the country. Our only course, therefore, is to organize the day-boys into a House."[43]

In his essay "On the English Character," Forster writes again of the power of the public school system for indoctrinating English boys, finding it the perfect application of English middle-class values onto the youth of that middle-class. He writes about "how perfectly it expresses their character" but goes on to show how it indeed forms their character, "with its boarding-houses, its compulsory games, its system of prefects and fagging, its insistence on good form and on *esprit de corps*."[44] The disciplinary structures, reified in the controlling structures of the buildings, are both the product and the source of what Forster sees as the defining feature of these boys' Englishness, the idea that "feeling is bad form."[45] While an analysis of the specific ways in which the space is organized to produce such feelings would be particularly interesting and might follow closely the way Foucault looks at prisons and schools in *Discipline and Punish*, with their "hierarchical observation,

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[41] Ibid., 44.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

[44] E.M. Forster, "Notes on the English Character," in *Abinger Harvest* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1936), 4.

[45] Ibid., 5

normalizing judgement and … examination," Forster doesn't give quite enough detail to the structure of Sawston to make such an investigation fruitful.[46]

What is especially revealing about the way that Forster describes the system, though, is how particularly English he thinks it is. In his essay, Forster writes of the public school system that "it remains unique, because it was created by the Anglo-Saxon middle-classes, and can flourish only where they flourish."[47] As Mr. Pembroke and Rickie, the novel's protagonist, are looking at the school's chapel and thinking about plans for its completion, they see in it a symbol of their national identity. Forster writes that they "looked with reverence at the morsel of Jacobean brickwork, ruddy and beautiful amidst the machine-squared stones of the modern apse. The two men, who had so little in common, were thrilled with patriotism. They rejoiced that their country was great, noble, and old."[48] Here is the history of England condensed: an idyllic past brought into an industrialized present, an old space reshaped and reinterpreted for a new time. Moreover, this spark of patriotism leads directly to national comparisons for the two men, following the tradition that patriotism is a competition instilled in them by house competitions and school rivalries. "'Thank God I'm English,' said Rickie suddenly.… 'We've been nearly as great as the Greeks, I do believe. Greater, I'm sure, than the Italians, though they did get closer to beauty. Greater than the French, though we do take

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[46] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison,* trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1977), 170.

[47] Forster, "Notes on the English Character," 4.

[48] Forster, *The Longest Journey,* 45.

all their ideas.'"[49] Forster begins to twist the idea, to play with this English greatness by expressing Rickie's somewhat incomplete thoughts, but then solidifies it with Mr. Pembroke's reaction:

> He found such patriotism somewhat craven. Genuine patriotism comes only from the heart. It knows no parleying with reason. English ladies will declare abroad that there are no fogs in London, and Mr Pembroke, though he would not go to this, was only restrained by the certainty of being found out.[50]

At the base of this passage is the idea that only generalized space represents national identity—it is abstracted through our interpretations of it, and so it inspires the feelings and reactions in us without having to actually be one particular thing or another. The English ladies read the space of London in a certain way, remember it a certain way, and express it a certain way, all of which becomes somewhat removed from the truth of it. But the sense of the space is a result of their impressions and desires—not the actual fog—just as the chapel evokes feelings from Rickie as he interprets its brickwork, and St. Paul's echoes the people inside it. "Genuine patriotism comes only from the heart," and architecture, too, finds its meaning there.

While Forster gestures briefly toward foreign nationalities in *The Longest Journey*, it is in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and his last novel, *A Passage to India*, that he deals directly with national identities other than the English.[51] He again demonstrates the way a sense of space and identity are constructed in tandem, with

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[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid.

[51] While portions of *A Room with a View* are set in Italy, the book has very few Italian characters, and their influence on the novel is slight. Though the novel does explore Italian space, it is not particularly interested in Italian character.

social codes overlaid with particular places creating a national idea of space and identity. The way Forster writes about spaces outside England becomes especially interesting when considering the idea of representation and perception—not only how characters look at spaces, but how Forster deliberately tries to give his readers a certain idea of them.

Where Angels Fear to Tread centers on an English woman, Lilia, who leaves her family for a tour of Italy, and once there, quickly meets and marries an Italian man and—somewhat unsuccessfully—attempts to settle into a life with him. The novel follows Lilia to her death during childbirth, then chronicles the subsequent attempts by her English family to reclaim her son from his Italian father. Fraught with culture differences, incorrect assumptions, and family problems, the novel is full of Italians misunderstanding English family structures, and the English not feeling fully comfortable in the Italy they visit. Whereas *A Room with a View* stays largely on the surface of the Italian space, using it mostly as a backdrop for English society and enhancing some of that society's strangeness when taken out of its own context, *Where Angels Fear to Tread,* by mixing the Italians and the English more completely, goes deeper into the question of an Italian national identity, both spatially and culturally.

In his book *Art and Order,* Alan Wilde looks at the way Forster represents Italy as a place where art is "a living force … something shared" and the general spirit is one of exuberance and open good cheer.[52] He sees the best representation of this spirit expressed in the scene where the Herriton family, having come to Italy to

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[52] Alan Wilde, *Art and Order: A Study of E.M. Forster* (New York: New York University Press, 1964), 19.

rescue the baby, stop by the opera, though "a little shamefaced" at its triviality.[53] The theater itself is recently renovated, with terra-cotta draperies on the boxes, and paintings of "many a lady lightly clad" around the arch of the stage, steadying a clock.[54] Forster finds the style gaudy, but attributes the gaudiness more to a characteristic national style than to Monteriano being a small town. He finds a lack of self-awareness, a carefree sense in the decor that translates into a reading of the Italian character itself:

> There is something majestic in the bad taste of Italy; it is not the bad taste of a country which knows no better; it has not the nervous vulgarity of England, or the blinded vulgarity of Germany. It observes beauty, and chooses to pass it by. But it attains to beauty's confidence. This tiny theatre of Monteriano spraddled and swaggered with the best of them, and these ladies with their clock would have nodded to the young men on the ceiling of the Sistine.[55]

The behavior of the English family inside the theater is particularly revealing of their national character, as Forster describes it, as opposed to the Italian character modeled by the audience. Having failed to get box tickets (which made Harriet "fretful and insular"), they sit in the stalls. Harriet is appalled by the audience's habit of speaking during the music, and quiets them with an "acid 'shish!'"[56] The audience is briefly brought to order,

> but soon the boxes began to fill, and Harriet's power was over. Families greeted each other across the auditorium. People in the pit hailed their brothers and sons in the chorus, and told them how well

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[53] E.M. Forster, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (New York: Dover, 1993), *73*.

[54] Ibid., *74*.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid.

> they were singing. When Lucia appeared by the fountain there was loud applause, and cries of "Welcome to Monteriano!"[57]

Wilde reads this scene as "Forster's Italy at its best: music and laughter, high spirits bounding back and forth from stage to audience, art as a living force, as something shared, and majestic bad taste which 'attains to beauty's confidence.' Exuberance and enjoyment and honesty of feelings, these are the hallmarks of the Italians."[58] Here Wilde captures the way Forster perfectly uses space to not only set mood but to establish broad generalizations about the characteristics and identities of groups of people. It is not only the Italian space and the exuberance of its audience, but the contrast with the restrained English Harriet that paint the picture of what is Italian and what is English. In order for the Italian mass to fully make sense, they must be placed in the gaudy theater, and their understanding of that space—and by extension, the world—contrasted with Harriet and the reserved English manners of which she cannot let go: "[T]hough she did not care for music, [she] knew how to listen to it."[59] Forster thus builds identity and space together here, but also constructs national identities as necessarily opposing; each is to be understood as a contrast to the other.

Earlier in the novel, Lilia's understanding of Italian public spaces shows a similar collapsing of individual and national identity as well as strong parallels between spacial organization and social structure. She is disappointed with the amount of social interaction she gets in her new Italian home, remaining there and

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[57] Ibid., 75.

[58] Wilde, *Art and Order*, 19.

[59] Forster, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, 74.

expecting her husband, Gino, to bring his acquaintances to her in the style of English house-visits and tea parties. Gino, meanwhile, keeps most of his socializing in streets and cafes, often among "low-class men." Though Lilia had thought Italian society especially open, as one might assume from the novel's later scene at the theater, she finds it is also strictly organized along gender lines:

> Continental society was not the go-as-you-please thing she had expected. Indeed, she could not see where Continental society was. Italy is such a delightful place to live in if you happen to be a man.… In the democracy of the *caffè* or the street the great question of our life has been solved, and the brotherhood of man is a reality. But it is accomplished at the expense of the sisterhood of women. Why should you not make friends with your neighbour at the theatre or in the train, when you know and he knows that feminine criticism and feminine insight and feminine prejudice will never come between you![60]

Here the spatial organization of society reflects its structure—but also determines the possibilities for Lilia, who is not quite part of that structure. As Forster goes on to explain, men interact socially only with women in their family or in families into which they are expected to marry. Lilia expects Italy to operate similarly to England, with the community leaders visiting her at her house and socializing, but instead finds that the socializing goes on almost entirely in public contexts, where Gino expressly forbids her to go without proper supervision. While for Lilia the private house was supposed to also serve as a semi-public zone for socializing, for Gino socializing is only appropriate in public space. Gino also sees that public space as a place from which women need to be protected: "He must save her from the dangers, physical and social, for after all she was a woman."[61]

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[60] Ibid., 29.

[61] Ibid., 30.

This private-public split along gender lines is particularly interesting given what I discussed in the chapter on public and private space about Gino and Lilia's house. In the same chapter of *Where Angels Fear to Tread* quoted above, Forster expresses a concern with the amount of openness in the house itself—he depicts it, ironically, as too public, with a living-room "which insensibly glides into a bedroom."[62] Forster demonstrates the way different codes of manners interact as both Gino and Lilia attempt to inflict them on the same space. The home is too public for Lilia's English manners, partly because of the assumption that there will be guests in it. But Gino's understanding of Italian society forbids him to bring guests to the house, thus making the suggestion that he might bring his whole family to the house—if only to populate it and give Lilia someone to talk to—more reasonable. In a way, then, for the English the house is both too public and not public enough. But this question centers on the social structure that surrounds the house and the attached assumptions of cultural identity that accompany it: the culture requires the separate spatial systems of the street and the home, but those spatial systems in turn work to control the culture. Lilia quickly finds that trying to stick with the spatial system of the house but impose a different cultural paradigm will not work—the two must work together, or neither can be successful. That Lilia's life ends so sadly, and so shortly thereafter, is a testament to the unworkability of the tenuous connection she tries to establish between English custom and Italian space.

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[62] Ibid., 25.

The idea of an imposed identity upon a space is even more central to Forster's last novel, *A Passage to India*, which deals with the British colonial system in India. There are a number of places where questions of identity, culture, and space come up, mostly centering on the general theme of India being formless while Europe is ordered and clear (interestingly, even Italy and Alexandria are included in the ordered idea of the West). The formlessness Forster describes as characteristically Indian provides a rich space for the invention of meanings, both by his characters and by his narrator, giving shape to what he otherwise describes as a "muddle." Sara Suleri points out that this projection of meaning onto India is more a reflection of the imperialist gaze than of any truth of the colonized land:

> From *A Passage to India* on, "books about India" have been more accurately books about the representation of India, with each offering variants of the peculiar logic through which a failure of representation becomes transformed into a characteristically Indian failure.[63]

This emphasis on representation makes even clearer the way identity is constructed —on personal and national levels—not only through space, but through relationships with, understandings of, and deliberate readings and presentations of space.

If Forster does not represent India, or his Indian characters, accurately (which is certainly a matter that could be debated), the way in which he relates them to space is telling of the way he would like them to be interpreted. That the space at the heart of the novel—and by extension, of India—is a dark cave which holds echoes but no real moments, and in which both representation and memory seem

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[63] Sara Suleri, "The Geography of *A Passage to India,*" in *E.M. Forster*, ed. Howard Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1987), 169.

impossible, demonstrates the extent to which Forster sees space, particularly Indian space, as a place into which identities can be written. Adela Quested's supposed rape in the Marabar Caves is a reaction to the space, but after making the accusation, her retraction in the courtroom reveals that it was not the possibility of the space that allowed her to be violated, but her perception of that space that led her to imagine the violation. In the novel, instead of space demonstrating the identity of Indians or India, it reflects back on those perceiving it, and as Suleri explains, the space of India becomes really an attempt to understand England and its power: the novel "represents India as a metaphor of something other than itself, as a certain metaphysical posture that translates into an image of profound unreality."[64]

At the most basic level, Forster's description of India's formlessness focuses on confusion, which reinforces the idea that identity and space here become linked only through the mediation of perception and representation. The opening of the novel plays on the notion of blurred boundaries, a confusion that leads to the perception of formlessness:

> Edged rather than washed by the river Ganges, [Chandrapore] trails for a couple of miles along the bank, scarcely distinguishable from the rubbish it deposits so freely.… The very wood [of the houses] seems made of mud, the inhabitants of mud moving. So abased, so monotonous is everything that meets the eye, that when the Ganges comes down it might be expected to wash the excrescence back into the soil. Houses do fall, people are drowned and left rotting, but the general outline of the town persists, swelling here, shrinking there, like some low but indestructible form of life.[65]

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[64] Ibid., 170.

[65] E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1924), 7.

The dirt of the river blends with the dirt of the bank, the dirt of the ground blends with the dirt of the buildings and the dirt of the people, and the dirt of the city itself throbs, the city's border constantly in flux. The city's boundaries are unclear and the city is dirty. In this passage Forster combines the people into an indistinguishable mass, and attaches them so firmly to the place as to be inseparable from it. The collapsing of space and identity in the voice of the narrator establishes the connection between them, but also demonstrates the extent to which perception is at play; Malcolm Bradbury points out that the novel's first chapter is "deceptively guide-bookish," emphasizing the place of Forster's representation within the relationship.[66] If the style makes itself apparent, then the presence of the author comes closer to the fore, making the reader more aware of the subjective nature of the narrator's judgments. While we see Indian space and identity being collapsed, we also see Forster forming and asserting a certain perception of India while trying to use it for his own metaphorical ends which, as Suleri claims, have little to do with India itself.

Slightly later, in a scene at the club, Forster again writes of the formlessness of Indian space, but rather than making apparent his presentation of the impression he gets from the space, he universalizes that impression. Mrs. Moore finds a wasp on her coat peg inside the club, and Forster writes: "Perhaps he mistook the peg for a branch—no Indian animal has any sense of an interior."[67] Even a wasp fails to distinguish between indoors and out. The claim is that confusion about space is

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[66] Malcolm Bradbury, "Two Passages to India: Forster as Victorian and Modern," in *Aspects of E.M. Forster*, ed. Oliver Stallybrass (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1969), 136.

[67] Forster, *A Passage to India*, 35.

endemic to India; rather than focusing on people who are confused in the space, Forster asserts that it is the space *itself* that is confusing. By using the animal here, Forster makes the reading especially elemental and primitive, claiming that his conception of space preexists human perception—what he sees is universally understood. Alan Wilde writes of this general use of India as elemental, original, and primitive:

> [Forster's] last novel substitutes for the primitivism of the English Stephen or the Italian Gino the primal quality of India itself. For the first time Forster looks beneath all structures, beneath all man's efforts at civilization, and attempts to see unambiguously what, if anything, was in the beginning.[68]

It is this kind of reading with which Suleri takes issue, finding it indicative of a "symbolic violence" which seeks to "empty the area out of history."[69] Forster here denies the role his own perceptions play, while earlier his narrative brought those perceptions to the fore. This shifting of tone, typical of Forster's slippage of narrative voice as discussed briefly earlier in relation to *The Longest Journey*, only serves to emphasize the amount to which the narrative is shaped to fit certain ends. While space and identity are used to inform and influence each other, their position in relation to each other is used to a larger purpose of constructing the idea of what India is for the English reader.

To examine the way perception works for Forster's characters, we can look into Aziz's understanding of space, and the way it is presented in the novel, which will give us some insight into the connections between space and identity, especially as

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[68] Wilde, *Art and Order*, 124.

[69] Suleri, "The Geography of *A Passage to India,*" 169.

individual characters can seem to stand in for a national identity. Upon inviting Adela and the others to his house, Aziz thinks of how it might appear to the English visitors, and quickly changes the topic to the room they are in:

> "I wish I lived here. See this beautiful room! Let us admire it together for a little. See those curves at the bottom of the arches. What delicacy! It is the architecture of Question and Answer. Mrs. Moore, you are in India; I am not joking." The room inspired him. It was an audience hall built in the eighteenth century for some high official, and though of wood had reminded Fielding of the Loggia de' Lanzi at Florence. Little rooms, now Europeanized, clung to it on either side, but the central hall was unpapered and unglassed, and the air of the garden poured in freely. One sat in public—on exhibition, as it were—in full view of the gardeners who were screaming at the birds and of the man who rented the tank for the cultivation of water chestnut. Fielding let the mango trees too—there was no knowing who might not come in—and his servants sat on his steps night and day to discourage thieves. Beautiful certainly, and the Englishman had not spoilt it, whereas Aziz in an occidental moment would have hung Maude Goodmans on the walls. Yet there was no doubt to whom the room really belonged.[70]

This passage shows Aziz as a part of one culture while trying to assume or understand another. He is clearly shown as identifying with the space, with its openness to the outdoors and its indistinct boundaries much like Forster's earlier description of Chandrapore itself. But Forster also shows Aziz's "occidental moment" in wishing to decorate with overly-sentimental and domestic Victorian paintings. Aziz understands space through what Forster shows as a typical Indian context—openness, naturalness, and lacking in a strong divide between public and private. The central hall is "on exhibition" and is not free from intrusion—"There was no knowing who might not come in." Though this openness might give pause to an English observer, it "inspires" Aziz. As his taste for and understanding of

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[70] Forster, *A Passage to India,* 70.

space has been shaped by buildings like this one, Aziz finds something in it that represents him and defines him, leading him to say of it, "Mrs. Moore, you are in India." As Aziz claims the space, it becomes a part of him, just as from its influence on him, he has become a part of it. From this connection, the metaphor of the "architecture of Question and Answer" is an apt one. Individual identity and individual spaces interact, responding to each other and ultimately forming a national sense.

But there is a trick in what Forster seems to be doing as he forms this national sense. Rather than identifying Aziz exactly with India, making him wholly representative of the place, Forster questions whether such a representative can exist. In this questioning, he calls attention to the authority of his narrative and its consistent use of space as descriptive of a larger "Indian" feeling, without fully invalidating that narrative. After speaking of the beauty of the "architecture of Question and Answer," Aziz speaks of the miraculous way in which water gets into the water tower at the Mosque, "a skilful arrangement of the Emperors."[71] Forster's narrator, though, corrects Aziz's mistaken understanding of spatial relations, writing, "He was wrong about the water, which no Emperor, however skilful, can cause to gravitate uphill."[72] He goes on to discuss the various ways in which the English characters in the novel would react to Aziz's notion, finally discussing Adela, who "accepted everything Aziz said as true verbally. In her ignorance, she regarded him as 'India,' and never surmised that his outlook was

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[71] Ibid., 71.

[72] Ibid., 71–72.

limited and his method inaccurate, and that no one is India."[73] Though only two pages before, Aziz asserted that the shape of the space clearly signified that "you are in India," here his—or anyone's—ability to fully define what that Indian space actually means is questioned.

But Forster himself does ultimately define that space and generalize the idea of Indianness. He finds the heart of India in the Marabar Caves, an indescribable void populated only by echoes, and uses that image, however empty it is, as descriptive of India. In his use of the caves, as with his earlier attention to Aziz's view of space, Forster both describes India and claims that it is beyond description; he defines India as amorphous, and finds meaning in its lack of meaning. His description of the caves demonstrates this duality:

> The caves are readily described. A tunnel of eight feet long, five feet high, three feet wide, leads to a circular chamber about twenty feet in diameter. This arrangement occurs again and again throughout the group of hills, and this is all, this is a Marabar Cave.… [The visitor] finds it difficult to discuss the caves, or to keep them apart in his mind, for the pattern never varies, and no carving, not even a bees'-nest or a bat distinguishes one from another. Nothing, nothing attaches to them, and their reputation—for they have one—does not depend upon human speech. It is as if the surrounding plain or the passing birds have taken upon themselves to exclaim "extraordinary," and the word has taken root in the air, and been inhaled by mankind.[74]

While "nothing attaches" to the caves, they are still defined by their environment and by the idea of them that takes "root in the air" and is "inhaled by mankind." Here, at the heart of his novel, Forster demonstrates exactly where the combination of space and identity leads. While both disappear into each other, they

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[73] Ibid., 72.

[74] Ibid., 124.

also reveal each other. They become an empty space into which the environment projects itself, and which people take up, unconsciously (though they are very much implicated in the creation), and project once again.

The conclusion of *A Passage to India* is Forster's complicated response to his deceptively simple epigraph in *Howards End*, "Only connect…." While *A Passage to India* chronicles the attempts at cross-cultural friendship through a series of misread invitations,[75] like *Howards End* it also investigates the connections between people and the space around them. The end of the novel expresses the ultimate impossibility of the connection between the English Fielding and the Indian Aziz, but expresses it in spatial terms. Fielding asks of Aziz, "Why can't we be friends?" and the concluding paragraph of the novel provides Forster's answer:

> But the horses didn't want it—they swerved apart; the earth didn't want it, sending up rocks through which riders must pass single file; the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace, the birds, the carrion, the Guest House, that came into view as they issued from the gap and saw Mau beneath: they didn't want it, they said in their hundred voices, "No, not yet," and the sky said, "No, not there."[76]

Space here is given agency, but the real meaning is found in the way that space reflects identity. The differences it reflects and the different ways it is understood make the connection impossible. Where space could be a unifying force, it is not understood or appreciated in the same way, so it magnifies divisions. While Aziz is inspired by the openness of Indian space, Fielding finds joy in the form of the Mediterranean and European worlds, where "everything stood in the right place" and the well-attuned observer can see "the harmony between the works of man and

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[75] Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 132.

[76] Forster, *A Passage to India,* 322.

the earth that upholds them."[77] At the end of the novel, Aziz and Fielding are directly opposed to each other on political lines, but very much attached to each other personally. It is in space that Forster finds the final expression of this tension—even as it holds both men, it separates them, by religion, by rank, by affiliation, by cultural modes of perception and representation. As Forster writes in the beginning of the novel, referring to the enormity and diversity of space, "the sky settles everything."[78]

While space informs identity, it does not write it, just as the characters—and Forster—ultimately find that they cannot fully construct or conceive space on their own terms. Each gives a little, and ultimately the novel demonstrates the extent to which a full connection between space and identity and between personal and national identities is impossible. What makes *A Passage to India* so fascinating—particularly as a work of modernist fiction—is the points at which those connections break down. Where Forster can attempt to represent and yet trouble the very idea of India, and where he can use Aziz to represent Indianness and yet constantly remind us that Aziz could never encompass the whole thing—if it exists at all—is where the heart of modernist literature rests; Forster revels in these tensions. The idea of the lack of connection is a troubling one, which he sought to avoid in the end of *Howards End* with the bond between Margaret and her new home. But given the changes in the world between the publication of these two novels—1910 to 1924—the shift toward a more ambiguous, and perhaps less

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[77] Ibid., 282.

[78] Ibid., 9.

hopeful, view is understandable. While the idea of connection shifts between Forster's earlier novels and *A Passage to India*, the way he uses space and identity together is remarkably similar. What is added in the latter novel is a greater subtlety to that representation—the questioning of the idea and methods of representation—along with the gaps between individual and national identities and space and identity. While the earlier novels depict these as fusing with little trouble, here Forster shows them to mutually rely on each other, but to never fully meet. For Forster, space and identity, like personal and national identities, wind up deeply implicated in one another, but always—and forever—separate.

Conclusion

That *A Passage to India* is so tolerant of ambiguity demonstrates the telos of Forster's examinations of space. The elements of public, private, natural, constructed, personal, and collective all build toward what seems as if it might make a cohesive whole, but they can never be perfectly fused. Just as the Victorian system of manners must constantly undermine itself to continue and individuals cannot be fully representative of a national identity, yet are still used in that way, understandings of space are in a constant tension with the surrounding forces. The architecture of St. Paul's Cathedral in London seems fixed and timeless, and yet it is in the footsteps through it that Forster finds its meaning. Similarly, Gino and Lilia's house in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* means distinctly different things to each member of the couple based on their cultural assumptions about space and social organization. Forster's representations of space evince a relativism that shows spaces to be at once active and passive participants in their surroundings, both receiving and projecting meaning. Spaces display agency at some points, as in Howards End's drive to bring Margaret to it, but they also act as purely passive entities, as demonstrated most vividly in the void of the Marabar Caves, where interpretations—and even solid events—are thrust onto the space while it receives all meanings without reaction or change.

While this essay has touched on questions of the racial, sexual, gender, and class implications and codes inscribed onto, perpetuated by, and enforced through space, taking any of these elements as the primary focus of investigation might

reveal still more about the relationships between people, social structures, and the spaces they inhabit. Sara Suleri's essay "Forster's Imperial Erotic" investigates the connections between the representations of race and sexuality in *A Passage to India*.[1] In *Queer Forster,* Robert K. Martin and George Piggford bring together a number of essays that focus on readings of Forster's works in light of queer theory.[2] In "Gesturing toward an Open Space: Gender, Form, and Language in E.M. Forster's *Howards End,*" Elizabeth Langland looks at the relationship between gender and space, arguing that Forster attempts to bring them together without melding them —he puts them in "a condition that preserves difference."[3]

For Forster, as the above essays demonstrate, space is implicated in almost every relationship, be it thematic or personal. Architecture is an important part of identity, but only insofar as that identity inserts itself into and reacts to architecture. Investigations of the public and the private and national and personal identities reveal the separation between spaces and the ideas we project onto and reinforce through them, but also the way those ideas and spaces are mutually dependent upon one another.

At the end of his short story "The Machine Stops," where the machine produces a culture in which the sense of space is annihilated, Forster sees the future of the culture in the connections it could make. While the society's citizens

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[1] Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[2] Robert K. Martin and George Piggford, *Queer Forster* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

[3] Elizabeth Langland, "Gesturing toward an Open Space: Gender, Form, and Language in E.M. Forster's *Howards End," Out of Bounds: Male Writers and Gender(ed) Criticism,* ed. Laura Claridge and Elizabeth Langland (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), 256.

have been separated from nature, separated from each other, and separated from the reality of their own bodies, Forster envisions a future after the machine where having a home does not mean the removal from nature and having privacy does not mean the eternal absence of human companionship. While he cannot fully express how manners, spaces, and identity might form a cohesive whole, he hopes for a future where they will. His conclusion, like that of *A Passage to India,* offers the kind of Victorian liberal hope that Forster claimed as his own, against what could be seen as the pessimism of other modernists. As in *Passage*, "The Machine Stops" uses the image of the sky as a great unifying force, enduring beyond the failed connections and impossible logic of the modern world, ending with a description of "scraps of the untainted sky" seen through the wreckage of the machine.[4]

[4] E.M. Forster, "The Machine Stops," in *Selected Stories,* ed. David Leavitt and Mark Mitchell (New York: Penguin, 2001), 123.

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