



Études britanniques contemporaines

Revue de la Société d'études anglaises contemporaines

58 | 2020

"Literature's exception(s)", E.M. Forster, V. Woolf

Of Dust and Rubber: Rereading *Howards End*

De la poussière et du caoutchouc: une relecture de Howards End

Andrew Thacker



Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ebc/8856>

DOI: 10.4000/ebc.8856

ISSN: 2271-5444

Publisher

Presses universitaires de la Méditerranée

Electronic reference

Andrew Thacker, « Of Dust and Rubber: Rereading *Howards End* », *Études britanniques contemporaines* [Online], 58 | 2020, Online since 01 March 2020, connection on 23 April 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/ebc/8856> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/ebc.8856>

This text was automatically generated on 23 April 2020.



Études britanniques contemporaines est mise à disposition selon les termes de la Licence Creative Commons Attribution - Pas d'Utilisation Commerciale - Pas de Modification 4.0 International.

Of Dust and Rubber: Rereading *Howards End*

De la poussière et du caoutchouc: une relecture de Howards End

Andrew Thacker

- 1 It is almost twenty years since I published an article on 'E. M. Forster and the Motor Car,' an article which formed the basis for a more extended discussion of *Howards End* in my 2003 book, *Moving Through Modernity*. So it is hardly surprising that in re-reading the novel and what I originally wrote about it, I have noticed some rather different features of the book; or at least, my thinking on some of the spatial and geographical themes I identified in the book could be extended in new directions, particularly in the light of the concept of the Anthropocene.¹ Here I want to just reprise some of the main themes of my earlier arguments, and then sketch out some of the ways in which my thinking has changed and developed by focussing upon images of two materials that intrigued me when encountering the novel once again: dust and rubber.
- 2 In my earlier publications, I focussed upon how Forster represented what he described as the flux of modernity, exemplified by several comments made by Margaret Schlegel in the novel, such as the following complaint: 'I hate this continual flux of London. It is an epitome of us at our worst—eternal formlessness' (Forster 1989, 1989, 184).² I understood this notion by means of the categories of space and place that I had conceptualised by means of various theorists (Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, and Michel Foucault amongst others). Flux is repeatedly juxtaposed to fixity in *Howards End* but, I argued, not in a simplistic fashion. I thus explored the idea of *movement* in the novel as both a literary theme and also as a way to capture the narrative drive to connect explored in the novel, and most obviously perceived in the interlinking of the three main families (the Schlegels, Wilcoxes, and Basts). Connection in *Howards End*, I argued, is not just a description of human relationships in the novel. We should, to an extent, understand it more literally as this is a novel about conjoining different forms of space, and about the experience of moving between these spaces in the process of making connections (to pick up Forster's motto). This, as I argued, is seen most clearly in the treatment of transport, particularly that of the motorcar. *Howards End*, then, is a

novel that yearns to connect together the modern metropolis, the new Edwardian suburbs, the pastoral landscape of the English countryside, and the imperial domains upon which so much of the wealth of the European empires was based. It is thus a fascinating novel for the way in which it explores multiple geographies of modernity.

- 3 I still think these are crucial aspects that the novel explores, but I would now want to try to re-think through these spatial and geographical features with the addition of some of the more recent work in the environmental humanities upon the Anthropocene. I would also want to engage with the constellation of theories identified as the ‘new materialism’.³ As someone whose own intellectual formation lies very much in the old materialisms I have found it fascinating to engage with new modes of thinking about materialism that, as Diana Coole and Samantha Frost suggest, continue to interrogate what they call the ‘multitiered ontologies’ of global capitalism, operating both at the ‘microlevel or everyday,’ just as much as the ‘macrolevel or structural’ (Coole and Frost 32). *Howards End* is, I would suggest, a fascinating novel for the way in which it also attempts to think through the connections between micro- and macro-levels of materiality. Thus the novel investigates many kinds of material entity within its pages, including natural objects, such as the wych-elm in the garden of *Howards End* or the surrounding fields of hay that are mown at the novel’s end; the ‘creeping rust’ (Forster 1989, 329) of suburban houses spreading out from the metropolis of London; the fateful but broken umbrella that Helen Schlegel mistakenly takes from Leonard Bast; the Schlegel’s carpet and furniture from their London house that mysteriously fits so well into the idyllic dwelling that is the house at *Howards End* (290); the dust blown up on the untarmacked roads by motor cars; or, finally, the rubber on the wheels of the many motor cars in the novel that, as I previously argued, connect to the Wilcoxes’ economic work in imperial Africa. This panoply of things—and many others in the novel—can be understood, in Jane Bennett’s terms, as ‘vibrant matter,’ whereby inorganic matter can be seen to possess an efficacy and agency of its own. Here, to illustrate this idea, is a quote from Bennett outlining her approach:

The political project of the book is . . . to encourage more intelligent and sustainable engagements with vibrant matter and lively things. A guiding question: How would political responses to public problems change were we to take seriously the vitality of (nonhuman) bodies? By ‘vitality’ I mean the capacity of things—edibles, commodities, storms, metals—not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own. My aspiration is to articulate a vibrant materiality that runs alongside and inside humans to see how analyses of political events might change if we gave the force of things more due. How, for example, would patterns of consumption change if we faced not litter, rubbish, trash, or ‘the recycling’, but an accumulating pile of lively and potentially dangerous matter? . . . What difference would it make to the course of energy policy were electricity to be figured not simply as a resource, commodity, or instrumentality but also and more radically as an ‘actant’? (Bennett viii)⁴

- 4 In a sense, then, my re-reading of *Howards End* would start by emphasising the prescient qualities of Forster’s text in terms of his own interrogation of the vitality of material objects as ‘actants.’ Consider, for instance, what many critics have acknowledged as the rather artificial narrative machinations in the novel which bring Helen and Leonard together and which result in a baby that ‘connects’ them across the class divide. Katherine Mansfield once mischievously speculated ‘whether Helen was got with child by Leonard Bast or by his fatal forgotten umbrella.’ (Mansfield 121) This is probably not

what Bennett means by ‘vibrant matter,’ but it is certainly true that it is the lost (and symbolically broken) umbrella that acts to bring Leonard Bast, and then his wife Jacky, first into the orbit of the Schlegels and then into that of the Wilcoxes, in the course of which the earlier relationship between Jacky Bast and Henry Wilcox is also revealed.

- 5 However, another form of vibrant matter central to the novel is that of dust, suggested by Bennett’s encouragement to view litter or rubbish as ‘dangerous matter,’ and which is produced by the effect of the motor car upon the spatial environment. In *Howards End*, Forster clearly depicts the motor car as an agent of modernity in its focus on speed and the conquest of space by time; it is thus a literal representation of the movements of global capital wrought by the Wilcoxes, who own multiple cars. As Henry Wilcox announces at one point, the fact that ‘things are moving,’ exemplified by the car, is clearly ‘Good for trade’ (Forster 1989, 184). But Forster also envisages the motor car as an invention that negatively affects the natural and human environment through which it moves, as noted in the first depiction of transport by motorcar in the novel, when Mrs Munt is met at the railway station and is driven by Charles Wilcox to meet Helen Schlegel at *Howards End*:

he [Charles] turned round in his seat, and contemplated the cloud of dust that they had raised in their passage through the village. It was settling again, but not all into the road from which he had taken it. Some of it had percolated through the open windows, some had whitened the roses and gooseberries of the wayside gardens, while a certain proportion had entered the lungs of the villagers. ‘I wonder when they’ll learn wisdom and tar the roads,’ was his comment (33).

- 6 When I originally considered this moment in the novel I argued that Charles’s disregard for anything other than road quality associates the Wilcox family with modernity and the idea of movement, whether literally as here, or metaphorically, as in Margaret’s view that ‘Henry was always moving and causing others to move, until the ends of the earth met’ (323).
- 7 However, Forster’s attention to the dusty debris ignored by the Wilcoxes’ rush to traverse space also picks up a common set of complaints that were made about motoring in the early years of the twentieth century. A Royal Commission on Motor-Cars was set up by the British parliament in 1903 to explore the impact of dust and related motoring issues around speed and taxation. When the report was published in 1906 a number of testimonies, such as the following from a Miss Everett-Green from Guildford, indicated the more distressing effects that were experienced by some non-motorists:

all the plants under glass were spoiled, all the flowers were spoiled, all the strawberries and grapes were spoiled, and our health was injured. I had an inflamed throat all summer, and my eyes were very troublesome . . . I had to get new typewriters . . . in 1902 and I had to change them again this year, they got so gritty. (Plowden 60)

- 8 Besides the harmful effect upon the body, it is noteworthy that this discourse around dust is part of an ongoing spatial conflict between the car as an emblem of the city and the countryside that is being ‘spoiled’ by the malignity of modern machinery. As the cultural historian William Plowden noted, the ‘conflict between motorists and others was partly an urban/rural one’ with motorists being ‘criticized for endangering relationships between the gentry and the peasantry.’ (Plowden 23–24). This city versus country opposition echoes throughout *Howards End* and indicates how Forster’s

ambivalent view of the car is bound up with a variety of other representational spaces in his narrative.

- 9 Re-reading the novel now I would place more emphasis upon how the vibrant matter of dust churned up by the motorcar is central to the ecological concerns that Forster presents in several places in the novel. It is fascinating, for example, to see the shared focus upon how the residue of dust ruins fruit crops ('some had whitened the roses and gooseberries of the wayside gardens'; 'all the strawberries and grapes were spoiled') in both the novel and the evidence to the Royal Commission. After the car journey to Oniton for Evie's wedding, during which the car hits a cat, Margaret feels that 'their whole journey from London had been unreal. They had no part with the earth and its emotions. They were dust, and a stink' (Forster 1989, 213). Then, when the Wilcoxes leave Oniton, they are said to have 'swept into the valley and swept out of it, leaving a little dust and a little money behind.' (246) Earlier in the novel, Forster's narrator notes that 'month by month the roads smelt more strongly of petrol . . . human beings . . . breathed less of the air, and saw less of the sky. Nature withdrew . . . the sun shone through dirt with an admired obscurity' (115). Vibrant matter here directly assaults nature and its products.
- 10 There is no evidence that Forster had read the Royal Commission as such, but he certainly read two articles published in *The Independent Review* by his close friend and mentor, Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, 'Motoring' (1904) and 'The Motor Tyranny' (1906). Editors of *Howards End* have noted how certain images and phrases from these works were employed by Forster in the novel (Stallybrass 11).⁵ In the second of these articles Dickinson quotes extensively from the Royal Commission (including the evidence of Miss Everett-Green on the spoiled strawberries and grapes). Many of the quotations focus upon the negative qualities of the dust produced:
- The effect of the dust from motor cars is so to destroy the marketable value of the produce on either side of the road, more particularly fruit, flowers, and salads [Mr. Steel, a market gardener . . .]. The herbage on both sides of the road within fifty yards of the hedge is absolutely useless either for feeding cattle or harvesting [Mr. Mason, of Ascot and Windsor . . .]. Considerable injury has been done to hedges by dust. Hay and grain crops are rendered dangerous as feeding for live stock by fine dust adhering to them. (Lowes Dickinson 17-18)
- 11 The cultural geographer Peter Merriman has noted how dust became a major concern surrounding early twentieth-century motoring in three ways: the damage caused to the roads; the effect upon local residents and farmers; and the possible effects upon public health (Merriman 90). Public health experts, notes Merriman, in cities such as London and Paris explored the possibility that airborne dust particles might cause illnesses such as tetanus or tuberculosis. However, rather bizarrely to our minds today, their conclusion, argues Merriman, was that the motor car was to be 'praised for its "hygienic qualities",' leading to 'the lessening of disease which is caused by the wholesale dissemination of organic material contained in horse manure.' Motor cars were identified as 'progressive and hygienic vehicles which could in turn replace the humble horse and its unhealthy by-products.' (Merriman 90-91)
- 12 In contrast to these opinions we might say that Forster's novel seems more sceptical of the claims of the motor car to be hygienic, shown in statements such as 'a certain proportion [of the dust] had entered the lungs of the villagers' (Forster 1989, 33) and 'human beings . . . breathed less of the air' (115). So I would now connect the movements of the modernizing Wilcoxes much more strongly with the environmental

damage produced by dust and other automobile emissions. This would mean rereading the figure of *movement* in the novel in terms of a conception of *energy*. ‘The energy of the Wilcoxes had fascinated her’ (37) thinks Helen. But the energy of the Wilcoxes is thus also that of the fossil fuel capitalism that developed in a new phase during the early decades of the twentieth century; this energy, we now know, not only enters our lungs in harmful fashion as CO² and N₂O, but has also contributed massively to the current climate crisis/emergency. Dust in the novel can thus be seen as an example of what Rob Nixon has termed the ‘slow violence’ of the atmospheric and environmental effects of fossil fuel extraction and consumption (Nixon).

- 13 Energy then is not just a metaphor for the modernity of the Wilcox family, but is also a statement about the vibrant life of two particular materials: first, the polluting dust that the movements of the Wilcox motor cars produce; and, second, the extraction of the earth’s finite resources to fuel the energy systems of the internal combustion engine. We might, then, view *Howards End* as an early instance of what Graeme MacDonald, in an essay on ‘The Resources of Fiction,’ calls ‘petrofiction,’ developed from work on ‘petroculture,’ and which attempts to understand the ‘relationship of cultural forms to a material life sustained and underpinned by hegemonic forms of energy extraction, production and consumption.’ (Graeme 3)⁶ Macdonald thus invites us think energy systems in relation to fiction, analysing the putative links between the ‘energy of fiction’ (in features such as narrative drive, stylistic patterns, as well as in the production, circulation and reading of literary texts) and ‘energy in fiction’, which he defines as ‘the stuff that makes things go and happen in literary worlds’, and which we might readily identify as the multiple motor cars of the Wilcox family and with Forster’s repeated use of the term ‘continual flux’ (Macdonald 5). A key question that Macdonald articulates for the growing field of petrofiction (a term perhaps first used by the novelist Amitav Ghosh in a 1992 review) is the following:

does literature shape and shift in accordance with the dominant energy forms of the era it registers? . . . ‘What happens’, as Patricia Yaeger asks, ‘if we sort texts according to the energy sources that made them possible . . . if we re-chart literary periods and make energy sources a matter of urgency to literary criticism?’ Can we think, for example, of modernism outside an oil-electric context? (Macdonald 6)⁷

- 14 It is a provocative and important question for scholars and students of modernism and, in an unconscious fashion, one that I think Forster’s novel also might be said to pose.
- 15 In an excellent analysis Ted Howell has suggested, therefore, that *Howards End* is a ‘mid-Anthropocene’ novel that exhibits ‘an awareness of the environmental damage caused by polluting fossil fuels’ in the early twentieth century, as well as being informed by Forster’s engagement with contemporary ‘back to the land’ environmentalists such as the socialist Edward Carpenter (Howell 551).⁸ Howell notes how Carpenter had written in his 1889 book, *Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure*, how ‘Our climate is greatly of our own creation. . . . It is we who have covered the lands with a pall of smoke, and are walking to our own funerals under it.’ (Howell 557) *Howards End*, suggests Howell, also offers a tentative future vision of climate catastrophe outlined in the novel’s references to a ‘craze for motion’ entailing that ‘Life’s going to be melted down, all over the world.’ (Forster 329) Howell also draws attention to how Forster’s dystopian short story, ‘The Machine Stops,’ composed at roughly the same time as the novel, interrogates similar themes to *Howards End* in its response to environmental change, as the story is set in a world where the surface of the earth has become uninhabitable. Howell thus suggests that,

Planted throughout *Howards End* are the seeds of many dramatic forms of climate change that subsequently dominated the twentieth century, including car culture, urban development and suburban sprawl, deforestation in England and the global South, and pollution with its attendant effects on public health. (Howell 549)

- 16 One of these seeds is a feature that I noticed when re-reading the novel, which again caused me to revise my understanding of the trope of movement in the text. This is a contrast between the way that the Wilcoxes and Schlegels are associated with journeys by motorised transport (cars and railways respectively, with the Schlegels also owning shares in railway companies), and the commitment to walking displayed by Leonard Bast. Howell draws attention to Leonard's reading of 'back to the land' authors such as Richard Jeffries, R. L. Stevenson, and E. V. Lucas's *Open Road*. 'I wanted to get back to the earth,' says Leonard to Margaret (Forster 125), while telling of his long tramp into the countryside south of London. Partly, of course, Leonard's walking is conditioned by his class status, and his worries about being able to afford tube or bus fares. But despite the novel's narratorial ambivalence about Bast, the representation of a movement not by machine is significant. By walking Leonard connects to the vibrant matter of the earth in a way that the Wilcoxes, for instance, rarely do. It is only at the novel's end, for example, that Henry Wilcox rejects a car journey for a short walk; even so, his son, Charles, protests, 'It's a good half-mile', to which Henry replies, 'You young fellows' one idea is to get into a motor.' (319).
- 17 The many motor cars of the Wilcox family are also connected to another interesting material 'actant,' that of the rubber of which their wheels were made. Again, re-reading how I discussed these topics earlier produced some new ideas. Both Edward Said and Fredric Jameson have pointed briefly to how Henry Wilcox's work for the Imperial and West African Rubber Company relates the novel to the production of imperial spaces abroad.⁹ This connection between the metropolis and imperial domains, I argued, also draws upon another kind of movement across space. In Henry's office Margaret views a map of Africa, 'on which the whole continent appeared, looking like a whale marked out for blubber' (196). The rubber industry expanded greatly towards the end of the nineteenth century, with imports from British colonies forming the majority of such trade. The explorers Stanley and Livingstone had both indicated to the rubber industry (which had previously relied upon Amazon rubber) the importance of developing the trade in central Africa and one of the main uses for imports of rubber was for the pneumatic tyre to equip bicycles and motorcars. The rubber wheels of the Wilcoxes' motorcars were first invented in 1888 by John Dunlop and bring together the spaces of imperialism and the metropolis with its 'craze for motion' and 'continual flux.' Henry's work in the rubber industry thus shows how the text combines different spaces, and that the textual transit in the novel between city and country echoes this wider geographical movement of imperialist trade, one that enables the Wilcoxes quite literally to travel by car from London to *Howards End*.
- 18 More, I now think, could be said about the role of rubber in *Howards End* as vibrant matter. Unlike the fossil fuels of the Wilcox motor cars it is not a finite energy source but a renewable natural commodity. British and Dutch imperialists planted it in African and South East Asia towards the end of the nineteenth century using cheap colonial labour to undercut production costs in Brazil (where most natural rubber occurred and which had been the centre of the industry in the nineteenth century). Rubber production today is again undergoing a massive growth due to increased global car usage (particularly in China), but not without potential cost to the environment.

Clearing habitats for plantation rubber affects biodiversity and there is some evidence that it can pollute rivers; one recent scientific paper notes ‘the speed and scale of the new rubber boom means environmental and social considerations have so far been sidelined.’ (Warren-Thomas, Dolman, and Edwards 238) There is no actual depiction of the African rubber industry or what the Wilcoxes’ actual involvement amounts to in Forster’s novel, bearing out Jameson’s point that in such modernist texts there is a representational absence marking the overseas colony and its relation to the metropolis which, nevertheless, can be detected ‘spatially, as formal symptoms’ in the text (Jameson 23).¹⁰

- 19 However, Forster’s specific choice of West Africa for the location of the Wilcox business is more than just a ‘formal symptom’ of this spatial occlusion. In fact, although little detail is presented of their activities developing and selling rubber in this part of Britain’s empire the choice is still quite revealing, indicating in particular the novel’s implied critique of the Wilcox version of capitalism. Another way to put this is by saying that the vibrant matter of rubber in the novel illustrates what Coole and Frost call the ‘multitiered ontologies’ of global capitalism (Coole and Frost 32). As David Bradshaw notes, for a brief period in the early twentieth century ‘rubber had become nothing less than the raw material of modernity’ (Bradshaw 164). The boom in the demand for rubber due to motorcar production resulted in a spike in the basic costs of the raw material in 1910.¹¹ In turn this led to a boom in new companies based in the City of London—like the Wilcoxes—devoted to developing the rubber industry in West Africa: by 1910 the City, notes David Kynaston, was ‘in the middle of rubber fever’ (Kynaston 520). Within a decade some 55 companies trading in rubber quickly sprang up, producing what one historian calls a ‘rubber shares mania of 1909–10’ or, alternatively, a ‘national pastime of gambling in rubber shares.’ (Monro 272) Shares were offered at much cheaper rates than for previous boom materials, leading to a slight widening of the social base. The *Financial Times* even started a new column—‘Voice of the Rubber Public’—to represent the craze (Kynaston 521). Soon the popularity of rubber shares led to a number of fraudsters issuing prospectuses that were intentionally misleading, inflating the number of trees planted and the profits to be made, many of which were issues by businessmen that had never actually visited Africa. One respected trader of a leading company specialising in rubber, Arthur Lampard, noted that though there companies ‘honestly floated and honestly managed’ there were also ‘a great number that have been formed, particularly recently, which are nothing more than absolute swindles . . . and . . . can only end in disaster to the Shareholders.’¹² The mania for rubber shares, as with many such crazes for material products in this period, rapidly disappeared, with little or no real impact upon the production of rubber in West Africa or economic development per se. The rubber boom, notes Forbes Munro, of 1909–10 thus became just another ‘investment bubble’ inflated and deflated in quick fashion (Monro 274).
- 20 Should we then see the Wilcox family not as solid and dependable representatives of English capitalism, but a bunch of swindlers on the make for a quick profit? Forster does not go into sufficient detail for us to substantiate this perception, though clearly he was drawing upon several well-publicised features of contemporary imperialist economics. David Bradshaw argues that Forster’s choice of African rubber was probably not a neutral one, since the scandal of how rubber in the Belgian Congo had been violently expropriated had been in the British public eye since the 1904 revelations by Roger Casement—in addition, of course, to the most famous representation of the

African rubber industry in modernist literature, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1900). As Bradshaw comments, many of the first readers of *Howards End* 'may well have placed particular stress on the words 'African' and 'Rubber' and drawn their own conclusion about the lucrative exploits' of the Wilcox business (Bradshaw 164). Indeed, although there was no company with the name 'Imperial and West Africa Rubber Company,' there was a 'West African Rubber Plantation' company established in 1905 (Monro 272). Equally, we might say, readers of the novel aware of the boom and bust mania for rubber shares in the period might also have pondered whether the fraudulent practices it engendered were also practised by the Wilcoxes. There is, of course, something of a question mark over Henry Wilcox's business acumen in the novel, suggested by the way that he dispenses advice to the Schlegel sisters over where Leonard Bast works: Henry advises that the Porphyryion where Leonard works is in a bad state and Leonard leaves to a company that proves to be a worse option, while the Porphyryion thrives—Leonard's financial crash and eventual demise is therefore the end result, as acknowledged by the Schlegels. However, when Henry is confronted by the sisters over his culpability in Leonard's plight he seeks to avoid all responsibility. It is, perhaps, just the kind of *laissez-faire* moral attitude to economic catastrophe that one might expect from a trader involved in an area of business where some companies were labelled as 'absolute swindles.'

- 21 Finally, the unseen trees of African rubber plantations can be contrasted with a very different kind of vibrant materiality—that of the wych-elm in the garden of *Howards End*. Rather than a plant ripe for exploitation, the wych-elm represents a nonhuman entity with just the sort of force and agency Bennett imagines for matter: 'The tree rustled. It had made music before they were born, and would continue after their deaths, but its song was of the moment . . . The tree rustled again' (Forster 1989, 306). As Ted Howell comments, in *Howards End*, 'trees are actants, not mere symbols' (Howell 558). Forster goes further, in a passage where Margaret contemplates the wych-elm:

No report had prepared her for its peculiar glory. It was neither warrior, nor lover, nor god; in none of these roles do the English excel. It was a comrade, bending over the house, strength and adventure in its roots, but in its utmost fingers tenderness. . . . It was a comrade (Forster 1989, 206).

- 22 'Comrade' is a fascinating term for Forster to use, connecting at one level to the socialist and environmental thinking of Edward Carpenter, while also indicating Carpenter's campaign for homosexual rights: in his afterword to *Maurice*, for example, Forster noted of Carpenter that he 'was a believer in the Love of Comrades, whom he sometimes called Uranians.'¹³ But Forster's text also points to another sense of the tree as a 'comrade,' suggesting that the fate of human beings is intimately intertwined with the vibrant matter of our environment, and the 'strength and adventure' of such non-human materiality as that of trees. Of course, we now know the vital role that trees play in our Anthropocene epoch, as they possess the capacity to store the carbon emissions from automobiles and elsewhere that are a major feature of our climate crisis.¹⁴ To see trees as our 'comrades' is thus to understand the vital connections between human actions and the vibrant matter of the non-human environment: it is mode of Forsterian connection that we are—with some urgency—still in need of learning.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BEAUMAN, Nicola, *Morgan: A Biography of E. M. Forster*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1993.
- BENNETT, Jane, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Duke University Press, 2010.
- BENNETT, Tony, and Patrick JOYCE, eds., *Material Powers: Cultural Studies, History and the Material Turn*, London: Routledge, 2010.
- COOLE, Diana, and Samantha FROST, eds., *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010.
- BONNEUIL, Christophe, and Jean-Baptiste FRESSOZ, *The Shock of the Anthropocene: The Earth, History and Us*, London: Verso, 2016.
- BRADSHAW, David, 'Howards End.' *The Cambridge Companion to E. M. Forster*, ed. David BRADSHAW, Cambridge: CUP, 2007.
- BROWN, Bill, 'Thing Theory,' *Critical Inquiry* 28 (Autumn 2001): 1–22.
- FORSTER, E. M., *Howards End*, 1910, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989.
- FORSTER, E. M., *Maurice*, 1970, London: Penguin, 2009.
- GHOSH, Amitav, 'Petrofiction,' *The New Republic* 2 March 1992: 29–34.
- HOWELL, Ted, 'An Imperialist Inherits the Earth: *Howards End* in the Anthropocene,' *Modern Language Quarterly* 77.4 (December 2016): 547–72.
- JAMESON, Fredric, *Modernism and Imperialism*, Derry: Field Day Pamphlet, 1988.
- KYNASTON, David, *The City of London vol.II: Golden Years 1890–1914*, London: Pimlico, 1996.
- LOWES DICKINSON, Goldsworthy, 'The Motor Tyranny,' *The Independent Review* (October 1906): 17–18.
- MACDONALD, Graeme, 'The Resources of Fiction,' *Reviews in Cultural Theory* 4.2 (2013): 1–24.
- MACFARLANE, Robert, *Underland: A Deep Time Journey*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 2019.
- Mansfield, Katherine, *Journal, Definitive Edition*, ed. J. Middleton Murry, London: Constable, 1954.
- MERRIMAN, Peter, *Mobility, Space, and Culture*, London: Routledge, 2012.
- MONRO, J. Forbes, 'Monopolists and Speculators: British Investment in West African Rubber, 1905–1914,' *Journal of African History* 22.2 (1981): 263–78.
- NIXON, Rob, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2011.
- PLOWDEN, William, *The Motor Car and Politics in Britain*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973.
- SAID, Edward, *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Vintage, 1994.
- STALLYBRASS, Oliver, ed., 'Editor's Introduction,' *Howards End* (1910), Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989.
- THACKER, Andrew, 'E.M. Forster and the Motor Car,' *Literature & History* 9.2 (Autumn 2000): 37–52.
- THACKER, Andrew, *Moving Through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism*, Manchester: Manchester UP, 2003.

WARREN-THOMAS, Eleanor, Paul DOLMAN, and David P. EDWARDS, 'Increasing Demand for Natural Rubber Necessitates a Robust Sustainability Initiative to Mitigate Impacts on Tropical Biodiversity,' *Conservation Letters* 8.4 (July/August 2015): 230–41.

NOTES

1. For an overview of the debates see Christophe BONNEUIL and Jean-Baptiste FRESSOZ.
2. E. M. FORSTER, *Howards End* (1910; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989) 184. Subsequent references will be given in the main text by *HE* and page numbers.
3. See, for example, BROWN, 'Thing Theory' (2001); BENNETT and JOYCE (2010); COOLE and FROST (2010).
4. BENNETT here derives her understanding of actants from Bruno Latour's actor-network theory.
5. See, for example, Oliver STALLYBRASS, 'Editor's Introduction' to the Penguin edition of *Howards End* (11).
6. For the petrocultures interdisciplinary research group see <http://petrocultures.com> [last accessed 8/1/20].
7. Macdonald is here quoting from YAEGER 306.
8. CARPENTER's ideas upon sexuality were also very influential upon Forster, as was their meetings in 1910 and 1913; see BEAUMAN 1993, 230–34 and FORSTER's 'Terminal Note' (1960) to *Maurice* (London: Penguin, 1972) 217.
9. See JAMESON and SAID 77.
10. Within modernism the major text that represents the negative effects of rubber plantations is, of course, CONRAD's *Heart of Darkness*, which focuses upon the brutality of Belgium's economic imperialism.
11. See the table in MONRO 264.
12. Cited in KYNASTON 522.
13. FORSTER, *Maurice*, 217. It also recalls the work of contemporary plant scientists upon the phenomenon known as the 'wood wide web,' developed first by Suzanne Simard, and which suggests that trees operate in a comradely manner to support one another; see the account in Macfarlane 87–116.
14. See, for example, <https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/environment-and-conservation/2019/07/how-erase-100-years-carbon-emissions-plant-trees-lots-them>

ABSTRACTS

The article starts by reviewing what has been called 'the flux of modernity' that it goes on to examine in terms of connection of different forms of space to explore the multiple geographies of modernity. The article borrows from the field of green studies, thing theory and new materialism to investigate how *Howards End* thinks through the connections between micro- and macro-levels of materiality. It investigates things as actants and addresses Forster's ecological concerns which leads to a re-reading of movement in terms of energy in relation to fossil-fuel capitalism.

L'article commence par passer en revue ce que l'on a appelé 'le flux de la modernité' qu'il examine ensuite en termes de connexion de différentes formes d'espace pour explorer les

multiples géographies de la modernité. L'article emprunte au domaine des études environnementales, de la théorie des choses et du nouveau matérialisme pour étudier comment *Howards End* travaille les connexions entre les micro- et les macro-niveaux de matérialité. Il étudie les choses en tant qu'actants et met au jour les préoccupations écologiques de Forster, pour proposer à une relecture du mouvement en tant qu'associé à l'énergie et aussi au capitalisme fondé sur la consommation des combustibles fossiles.

INDEX

Mots-clés: *Howards End*, Forster (E. M.), anthropocène, automobile, caoutchouc, impérialisme, modernité, néo-matérialisme

Keywords: *Howards End*, Forster (E.M.), motor car, modernity, Anthropocene, new materialism, rubber, imperialism

AUTHOR

ANDREW THACKER

Andrew Thacker is Professor of Twentieth Century Literature at Nottingham Trent University. He is the author or editor of several books on modernism, including the three volumes of *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines* (2009-13) and, most recently, *Modernism, Space and the City* (2019). He was a founder member and the first Chair of the British Association for Modernist Studies. He is currently working on two projects: a cultural history of the modern bookshop, and a new series of volumes for Oxford University Press on global modernist magazines.⁵