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**International E. M. Forster Society**

# **NEW ASPECTS OF E. M. FORSTER**

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## Introduction

This collection of essays grew from a scholarly meeting, a conference entitled "Polish Aspects of E. M. Forster", held at the University of Warsaw, intended as a celebration of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of E. M. Forster's death. The meeting proved very creative – the participants unanimously decided that the novelist deserved further studies and more scholarly interest. Consequently, we decided to start the International E. M. Forster Society, aimed at supporting such studies and serving as a platform for exchange of ideas connected with the writer and his works. The present volume is the first publication supported by the Society.

The variety of subjects proposed and discussed during the conference was so diverse and interesting that we decided that they would form an appropriate basis for the present volume, although invitations to participate in the publication were extended also to scholars who could not take part in our meeting. This collection can hardly claim to form a complete companion to Forster's works. Nevertheless, interested readers will find here studies touching upon quite a broad range of subjects – from Forster's irony and Forster's works in translation and their reception in Poland, through modern critical approaches to his works, to probably the least known part of his oeuvre, his co-operation on the libretto for the opera *Billy Budd* composed by Benjamin Britten, and the place which E. M. Forster may and should have in modern academia.

As we gathered on the anniversary of Forster's death, an allusion to his most important work of literary criticism, *Aspects of the Novel*, and also to a conference held to commemorate his birthday over forty years ago as well as the resulting volume of studies, *Aspects of E. M. Forster*, seemed an appropriate choice for the title. We hope that the title we chose, *New Aspects of E. M. Forster*, will be read in more ways than one – not only as a reference to the long-established tradition of Forsterian studies but also as an indication that the included studies indeed reveal new insights in the works of the novelist, new aspects of E. M. Forster.

I would like to thank Prof. Piotr Wilczek for prompt and constructive review of the volume, Weronika Szemińska for her help with editing it, Marek Łukasik for his advice concerning its publication, Paweł Wojtas for proof-reading the text, Przemysław Klonowski for designing the cover, Marta Koziarska, Heiko Zimmermann, and Tadeusz Sokołowski for their allowing us to use their photographs on the cover. Without their kind assistance the volume would never be published in its present form.

*Krzysztof Fordoński*

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**Ironic Reflections on Life: E. M. Forster's Novels  
and Henri Bergson's Philosophy of Laughter**

**Introduction**

The use of irony by E. M. Forster is so obvious that very often we do not stop to consider it more thoroughly. We seem to take it for granted that almost all, if not all, Forster's works manifest quite an ironic perspective. When turning to his novels, quite ironically they are all openly dramatic (maybe except for *A Room with a View*). Death, murder, exile and loneliness as well as hypocrisy, violence and other human vices permeate the said works (this time *A Room with a View* with its happy ending being no exception). Thus a question appears: how come that we laugh while reading about all this nastiness?

The answer has presented itself to me while re-reading Henri Bergson's "Le Rire. Essai sur la signification du comique" ("Laughter. An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic") (1900). Reading Bergson's essay with Forster's approach to and his use of irony in mind leads to an overwhelming feeling that the two men must have been endowed with a very similar view on laughter and humour. The ideas one finds in the essay correspond with those found in the works by Forster. To be more precise, the fiction of Forster, both in terms

of themes and plot on the one hand and narrative patterns on the other, serves as a practical manifestation, an illustration of the theoretical and philosophical disputes of Bergson.

Before, however, getting down to the practical consideration of the selected passages from the essay and the related quotations from the novels, let us focus briefly on the very notion of irony and its Modernist context since both Bergson and Forster were undoubtedly inextricably linked to that epoch.

### **Irony and Modernism**

Irony has been a useful, likeable, and thus eagerly employed tool for centuries. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the derision-prone Modernists were especially fond of irony. From the modern perspective, it is quite clear that a distinct ironic approach became a must for all the artists creating at the very beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Quite frequently the employment of this technique determined whether an artist/poet/writer was referred to as a Modernist.

The omnipresent status of irony in Modernism falls into the general philosophy of the period. The rapid changes and transformation in all fields of human activity, the pending war and its unprecedented outcomes, the urban whirl and the first traces of sexual freedom, all these imposed on people the feeling of spiritual alienation, overrun frustration, and general disillusionment. Consequently, an antidote for the chaos of the present reality and the unknown of the new that was soon to come was eagerly sought for. Although it might sound like a paradox, in the times when the old



and the traditional would be rejected almost instantly, the antidote in the form of irony came from that very unwanted and depreciated order of the world.

The term *irony* is a long established one since it can be traced back as far as the ancient Greece. Under the Greek notion known as *eirôn* (one of the stock characters in comedy) it was first recorded in *Republic* by Plato. The term used in the said text approximately meant “a glib and underhand way of taking people in” (Cuddon 1999: 427). However, in Modernism, due to the socio-historical circumstances, irony stopped to be treated merely as a rhetorical figure employed by poets or writers. Now it was “a mode of consciousness, an all-embracing vision of life, a vision of life, a vision of existence, a perpetual response to a world without unity and cohesion” (Walczuk 2005: 35). Therefore, irony was used by the Modernists in order to “distance” themselves, to use Alan Wilde’s terminology, from the surrounding reality. Similarly to other critics, Wilde disagreed with the traditional perception of irony as a contrast between reality and its appearance since, according to him, it leads to “the separation between the individual consciousness and the world of which each consciousness forms a part” (Walczuk 2005: 35).

### **Forster’s Approach to Irony**

Forster is by far the case in question. Although quite a few of his contemporaries refrained from labelling him a true Modernist, still there were those, including Virginia Woolf and her husband Leonard, who held an entirely opposite view. Nevertheless, both proponents and opponents of Forsterian Modernism admitted

that there was “something” in the works of Forster that precluded a straightforward classification. This “something” was hardly definable, as some of the critics observed. I. A. Richards described Forster as “the most puzzling figure in contemporary (1927) English letters” whereas Virginia Woolf could not fight the feeling that there was something “baffling and evasive” in his writings (Martin 1976: 1). Another scholar, Lionel Trilling, the pioneer in the field of criticism of Forster’s works, perceives him as a “moral realist, but an evasive one” (Martin 1976: 1).

Nevertheless, the point that all the critics and readers of the writings of Forster agree upon is that his use of irony is marked by strong individual traits. His intriguing, specific sense of humour won over a lot of members of artistic and literary élite of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century England. Forster’s treatment of irony resulted in the situation in which the writer, despite his quite traditional approach to narration, was highly regarded not only by the regular, traditionally-oriented readership, but also, or should we rather say chiefly, by the leading avant-garde writers, artists, and intellectuals of Modernism associated in, among others, the famous Bloomsbury Group, to which the writer informally belonged. Forster’s interest in irony is thus in accordance with the Modernists’ approach to it.

As regards the Bergson–Forster connection, looking through the non-fiction writings of Forster I have not come across any direct traces referring to Bergson’s philosophy of laughter. However, it seems that Forster must have known Bergson, if not personally, then definitely through his philosophical works and lectures. First of all, the articles on the Bergsonian thought were

highly popular in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century England. Mary A. Gillies gives three main reasons directly responsible for this interest in Bergson's writings (1996: 29). Undoubtedly, the major factor was the access to numerous translations of his main works; the second factor was Bergson's set of lectures delivered in England (Oxford, Birmingham, London) in 1911. The lectures were so popular that tickets and special invitations were issued, limiting the access to lecturing halls, leaving thus quite a large audience dissatisfied.

Such a situation certainly stimulated further an already intense interest in Bergson and his works, encouraging in turn more translations. Finally, Bergson touched upon the issues that were of great significance to Modernists. Moreover, he not only straightforwardly expressed his fears, but also suggested solutions to the questions that engaged the mind of modern man (Gillies 1996: 29-30). Nevertheless, the lack of a direct proof that Forster was familiar with Bergson and his ideas does not lessen the impression that reading Forster resembles reading Bergson to some extent. They address the same moral questions using same standards, though not necessarily the same language.

Coming back to Forster and his ideas about laughter, it might be rightly expected that since his works are marked by certain individuality and distinctiveness when viewed against the techniques and modes of writing employed by the Modernists on a large scale, his approach to irony will also be marked by unique Forsterian traces. And the assumption is by all means correct. At first glance the sense of humour demonstrated in the works by Forster seems to fall into the Modernist ironic mode due to the fact that it goes

beyond its traditional role (i.e. amusing the reader), playing with paradox and suggesting a certain vision of the world.

However, considering the subject more closely, one eventually has to conclude that the use of irony by Forster is quite outstanding. As Frederic A. Crews notices, "Forster punishes every error with an ironic appropriateness" (1962: 99). In other words, irony in the works of the writer appears not that much as a corrective tool, but as a form of punishment. Moreover, the vision of the world that emerges from the ironic style of Forster seems to be far less pessimistic than the Modernists would call for. Nonetheless, the very fact does not spell his works as social comedies. For in spite of an indirect disposal of the serious social issues or of the meaninglessness of some aspects of the modern world, Forster apparently does manage to deal with the crucial, complex and therefore ambiguous moral questions frequently considered by many Modernist writers like Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, or Joseph Conrad.

Thus the moral problems the English society faced at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to the multifarious socio-economic changes and transformations, the moral chaos produced by the Great War, the dilemmas regarding human relations and sex (e.g. homosexuality), and above all human vices let loose and breeding, create the true core of Forster's novels. To quote Mike Edwards,

Everywhere that Forster sees creed overtaking honesty or role suppressing man, he is ready to take

the issue; and in the novels, that means using his pervasive weapon, irony (2001: 189).

Yet, as some critics observe, the irony of the writer is so subtle, refined, and thus respectable that it is highly presumable that some of the readers may miss the (ironically) understated message. J. O. Oliver states that the mockery applied by the author against some of the characters of his novels is so delicate that one might think that he takes them and their manners/conventions as solemnly as they take themselves (1960: 29). Furthermore, Forster earned his respectable title of ironist also or primarily because of his ability to decide when enough is enough. He always knows the proportions while mixing irony, mockery and humour with the grave, serious and ordinary ingredients. The deftly combined elements of the mixture are worthy of a skilful chef. As a consequence, the reader is presented with a delicious intellectual feast.

All in all, Forster's irony, seemingly simple and clearly decipherable, turns out to be quite demanding. The reader has to make some effort to truly and fully appreciate the messages in order to disclose the vision of the world as seen by Forster. One should agree with W. C. Booth when he says that Forster in a way invented a Forster who looks like a real man addressing the readers, "a man who wears something like the same ironic smile", with the use of which he wants to disclose his opinions about the world and human nature (1975: 185). As Edwards puts it,

[i]rony is Forster's natural habit of mind. . . . irony pervades every aspect of Forster's work. We hear it in his tone of voice and, since they are like him, often in the tones of many of his sophisticated characters (2001: 190).

## **Henri Bergson and irony**

In very general terms, Bergson's approach to irony is within the limits of a common dictionary definition. Namely, the philosopher's point of departure for more thorough "ironic" considerations is the basic division into the verbal (intentional) irony and the situational (structural) one (Baldick 1990: 14). We talk about the former when there is at least some discrepancy between what is said and what is actually meant. Whereas the latter includes the notion of superiority when someone who knows more (in a literary work it could be a narrator or the reader or both), is more experienced or better in some activity, and laughs at the expense of someone more naïve, clumsy, etc. (in a literary work it could be the reader laughing at a fictional character or the implied author grinning at the implied reader). Bergson, additionally, discusses laughter stemming from character.

Yet the deeper deliberation in the field of laughter does not, in case of Bergson, concentrate that much on its types and classification of them, though certainly this is also important, but on the very mechanisms of laughter. In other words, Bergson wanted to plumb the mysteries of the causes of laughter. His essay on laughter opens with the following questions and some introductory explanations related to them:

What does laughter mean? What is the basal element in the laughable? What common ground can we find between the grimace of a merry-andrew, a play upon words, an equivocal situation in a burlesque and a scene of high comedy? What method of distillation will yield us invariably the same essence from which so many different products borrow either their obtrusive odour or their delicate perfume? The greatest of thinkers, from Aristotle downwards, have tackled this little problem, which has a knack of *baffling* every effort, of slipping away and escaping only to bob up again, a pert challenge flung at philosophic speculation. Our excuse for *attacking the problem in our turn must lie in the fact that we shall not aim at imprisoning the comic spirit within a definition*. We regard it, above all, as a *living thing*. However trivial it may be, we shall treat it with the respect due to life (Chapter 1).

The word *baffling* alone brings certain associations with Forster, or shall I rather say with those who tried to define his works and thus classify him but failed. Then, there is also the notion of the impossibility of a simple definition and a straightforward answer concerning the “problem” of laughing on the one hand and the idea of a life-like treatment of the topic on the other, which also points out to the English writer.

Turning to Bergson, one of the elements that reappears throughout the essay is a constant underlining of the fact that laughter as such cannot be treated or discussed in separation from the social issue. “Our laughter is always the laughter of a group” (Chapter 1), says Bergson. Therefore the purely psychological treatment is not his concern. This he would leave for others like Freud (Colletta 2003: 17). Consequently, the foundations of his comic theory should be looked

for in the social circumstances, and in particular, in the place of an individual in it. Following, the comic, according to Bergson, is inevitably created when we deal with some sort of alienated individual. Usually the alienation is based on the individual's incongruity with the group. Additionally, an external circumstance is also indispensable. Using Bergson's words, "[t]he comic is therefore accidental: it remains, so to speak, in superficial contact with the person" (Chapter 1). Lisa Colletta summarizes the philosopher's approach in the following way:

[Bergson argues] that laughter arises when a rigidity in character or behavior precludes individuals from responding to changing situations in a living, vital way. Truly living beings, . . . adjust their behavior to fit varying circumstances; when individuals do not accommodate themselves to the exigencies of social circumstances, relying on "automatism of acquired habits", they become inflexible and mechanical (2003: 18).

This very citation may serve as a conclusion to the basic background fitting the needs of the hereby article. Its length precludes further development of the theoretical part. The next part of the article will thus be a practical application including exemplifying quotations from Bergson's essay and a handful of passages from Forster's selected novels.



## Practical Consideration

Let us start with the following quote from the essay:

To understand laughter, we must put it back into its natural environment, which is society, and above all must we determine the utility of its function, which is a social one. Such, let us say at once, will be the leading idea of all our investigations. Laughter must answer to certain requirements of life in common. It must have a *SOCIAL signification* (Chapter 1).

To give an example, Bergson describes the following scene:

A man, running along the street, stumbles and falls; the passers-by burst out laughing. They would not laugh at him . . . could they suppose that the whim had suddenly seized him to sit down on the ground. They laugh because his sitting down is involuntary (Chapter 1).

Does it not sound familiar? Let us look at the following quotation from *Where Angels Fear to Tread*:

[Lilia] learnt to bicycle, for the purpose of walking the place up, and coasted down the High Street one Sunday evening, falling off at the turn by the church. If she had *not been a relative*, it would have been entertaining. But even Philip, who *in theory loved outraging English conventions*, rose to the occasion, and gave her a talking which she remembered to her dying day (1976: 24).

According to Bergson's theory, the whole accident with Lilia should be perceived by an observer as funny due to, what he called, "the involuntary element

of change, clumsiness, in fact" (Chapter 2). The incident was not artificially brought about and therefore it makes us laugh. However, in the quoted passage the comic is definitely more complex. The observer, that is Philip Herriton, does not laugh! Still, after reading the passage, the reader laughs. But the reader does not laugh at Lilia, either. Strangely as it may seem, the reader laughs at Philip who refrains from laughing. On the one hand there is the reason that Philip gives – Lilia was his relative; and on the other there is the reason supplied by the narrator – English conventions.

Only on the surface these are two different explanations of Philip's reaction, since in fact they are both about Philip's mechanical subordination to the rigid social conventions: if Lilia is laughed at, then, by analogy, the whole family of Herritons is mocked. Thus it is not the situation, the accident itself that matters, but the person involved. This artificial, since selective, approach to humour is mocked by the narrator, who, while commenting on Philip's behaviour, uses a couple of contradictions, namely "love" linked to "theory" and "outraging" combined with "conventions". Thus, the naturally comic situation becomes less important for the reader when juxtaposed with the unnatural reaction of young Herriton. The artificiality of the said behaviour is thus perceived as funnier and also more important, for it humorously comments not only on Philip himself but, by extension, on the family he belongs to and the society he lives in.

This leads us to another point made by Bergson in his essay on laughter:

Laughter must be . . . a sort of SOCIAL GESTURE. By the fear which it inspires, it restrains eccentricity, keeps constantly awake and in mutual contact certain activities of a secondary order which might retire into their shell and go to sleep, and, in short, softens down whatever the surface of the social body may retain of mechanical inelasticity. Laughter, then, does not belong to the province of aesthetics alone, since unconsciously (and even immorally in many particular instances) it pursues a utilitarian aim of general improvement. And yet there is something aesthetic about it, since the comic comes into being just when society and the individual, freed from the worry of self-preservation, begin to regard themselves as works of art (Chapter 1).

The comic is that side of a person which reveals his likeness to a thing, that aspect of human events which . . . conveys the impression of pure mechanism, of automatism, of movement without life. Consequently it expresses an individual or collective imperfection which calls for an immediate corrective. This corrective is laughter, a social gesture that singles out and represses a special kind of absentmindedness in men and in events (Chapter 2).

The corresponding fragment comes this time from  
*A Room with a View*:

He [Cecil] was medieval. Like a Gothic statue. Tall and refined, with shoulders that seemed square by an effort of the will, and a head that was tilted a little higher than the usual level of vision, he resembled those fastidious saints who guard the portals of a French cathedral. Well educated, well endowed, and not deficient physically, he remained in the grip of a certain devil whom the medieval, with dimmer vision, worshipped as asceticism (Forster 2000a: 106).

Those who have read the novel may remember that Cecil would eagerly compare others (e.g. his treatment of Lucy as a work of art) to objects. It is thus interesting to note that in the passage quoted above the narrator describes the character using Cecil's own ways, namely employing art and making use of a comparison.

Looking at the passage, it seems to be a solemn description again. Additionally, the mock seriousness is doubled by the object Cecil is compared to, namely a medieval statue. The aforementioned Bergsonian "movement without life" is depicted in the very statue – the characteristic features associated with such a statue are first of all heaviness, the lack of movement, the material it is made of (for example stone); even if we imagine a statue of a knight, it still bears similar characteristics though the material might be different (metal armour of the knight). This way or that Cecil is compared to an object that is very difficult to get through or/and to see through. Therefore, by analogy, the reader assumes that the protagonist is unable to move and lacks open-mindedness (for he is "in the grip").

Surprisingly or not, his positive features, both mental and physical ("well educated, well endowed, and not deficient physically") are far less important here since, due to the object Cecil is related to, he is immediately associated with awkwardness. Again, the seriousness that overgrows or exceeds the frames of an ordinary description, making it thus artificial, results in a comic effect. Instead of admiring the various abilities of the hero, the reader laughs at his inability to use those skills in practice. At that point we come back in a way to the question posed earlier in the article concerning the hidden link between the dramatic and the comic

that for sure must exist. Since a similar question is asked by Bergson in his essay, there is also an answer to it there:

But that is what comedy has in common with drama; and in order to keep distinct from it, to prevent our taking a serious action seriously, in short, in order to prepare us for laughter, comedy utilises a method, the formula of which may be given as follows: INSTEAD OF CONCENTRATING OUR ATTENTION ON ACTIONS, COMEDY DIRECTS IT RATHER TO GESTURES. By GESTURES we here mean the attitudes, the movements and even the language by which a mental state expresses itself outwardly without any aim or profit, from no other cause than a kind of inner itching. Gesture, thus defined, is profoundly different from action. Action is intentional or, at any rate, conscious; gesture slips out unawares, it is automatic. In action, the entire person is engaged; in gesture, an isolated part of the person is expressed, unknown to, or at least apart from, the whole of the personality (Chapter 3).

In Forster's works the conscious (ACTION) and the unconscious or unintentional (GESTURE) are skilfully combined and interwoven into the texture of both the plot and the narrative structure. Although the characters from his novels tend to focus on ACTION – that is social norms and conventions that they try to follow impeccably, they are in a way “given away” by their GESTURES – so “the attitudes, the movements and even the language”, to quote Bergson once again. Let us then consider the notions separately, i.e. one at a time.

## **The attitude: *The Longest Journey***

She began to pace Rickie's room . . . There was nothing much to see in it. The pictures were not attractive, nor did they attract her – school groups, Watts' „Sir Percival“, a dog running after a rabbit, a man running after a maid, a cheap brown Madonna in a cheap green frame – in short, a collection where one mediocrity was generally cancelled by another. Over the door there hung a long photograph of a city with waterways, which Agnes, who had never been to Venice, took to be Venice, but which people who had been to Stockholm knew to be Stockholm (Forster 1960: 13).

Undeniably, this is the opinion of Agnes although rendered by the narrator. The proof is further in the description when the reader learns that “the pictures were not attractive” and their framing is “cheap”. Other objects in Rickie's room are classified by Miss Pembroke quite thoughtlessly as “mediocrity”. In her eyes, there was virtually nothing of interest in the very room. Following, her attitude towards art is disclosed as totally indifferent. She uses the measure for the pictures by George Watts and the cheap Madonna plus a photo of the city that for Agnes is, of course, Venice and which is known to others as Stockholm. It is a real shame, for the boring (according to her) themes of Watts' pictures could tell inquisitive Agnes a lot about the owner of the very room.

This English artist (painter and sculptor) was not only well-known to a wide Victorian audience but also highly appreciated by them. He believed that art has a power to transform the life of ordinary people, making it better and more refined. Therefore, Watts

produced many works that were meant for public places like parks (sculptures) or building interiors (murals in staircases) (Gibka 1992: 748, Treuherz 1996: 155-157).

The fact that Miss Pembroke is not familiar with such a recognized Victorian artist as Watts, and that she mistakes Stockholm for the Italian city on water, points straightforwardly to her artistic reception in general, or rather lack of it. As a consequence, Agnes's aesthetic ignorance reveals her personality: her evaluation of the surrounding reality is based on external, often shallow, signs of affluence. Following, the room lacking such signs is promptly labelled by her as uninteresting, boring, but above all, below the aesthetic social standards Miss Pembroke duly pays homage to. As it might be inferred from the above, art is strictly related to social status in the social circles Agnes Pembroke belongs to. Furthermore, it appears to be its indicator. For that very reason the lack of appreciation towards the room entails simultaneously negative criticism applied to the owner of the place.

On the basis of the interior Agnes thus marks Rickie down as lacking good (juxtaposed with "the drawing room" one) taste and strong financial status. In such a context, the last utterance of the above passage becomes very telling, indeed. Later on, we can observe a certain modification of perspective, because the voice of Agnes mingles with the voice of the narrator, which functions as an openly ironic commentary on the protagonist's perception of the world. The narrator clearly mocks Agnes, thus letting the reader know that for him she is patronizing, shallow, and limited. She not only lacks general knowledge about the contemporary art but also about the surrounding world. Al-

though she has never been to Venice, it does not preclude her from voicing her opinion about the picture explicitly and unequivocally.<sup>1</sup> Her knowledge about this Italian city is limited to one fact, namely that it has waterways instead of regular streets. This is why she so promptly labels the place in the picture. As for Stockholm, Agnes knows nothing about it and it is quite probable she has never heard of it. Paradoxically, her negative evaluation of Rickie and his surroundings becomes an evaluation of herself and the world she lives in.

### **The movement: *A Room with a View***

At that supreme moment he was conscious of nothing but absurdities. Her reply was inadequate. She gave such a businesslike lift to her veil. As he approached her he found time to wish that he could recoil. As he touched her, his gold pincez became flattened between them.

Such was the embrace. He considered, with truth, that it had been a failure. Passion should believe itself irresistible. It should forget civility and consideration and all the other curses of refined nature (Forster 2000a: 127).

Also in this case an artistic stereotype is verified by life. Cecil first quite absurdly asks a work of art<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This is how the stereotypical thinking of Agnes is disclosed. She acts exactly as the “programmed” Victorian audience: she does not spend much time looking at the picture and being satisfied with a couple of generalities, she guesses “rightly”, of course, the name of the place. In other words, the process of art reception works like a matrix.

<sup>2</sup> One of the chapters of the novel in question is entitled “Lucy as a Work of Art” and it refers to the perception of Lucy by Cecil.



for the permission and then he kisses it. What is more, he seems to be extremely surprised that the kiss does not work out. Obviously, Cecil, being unprepared for a physical contact with a living person, loses when confronted with the reality.<sup>3</sup> Such an uncritical and mindless transfer of the values that prevail in the realm of art into the reality surrounding the protagonist results in a distorted picture of the empirical reality.

Moreover, the above presentation of Cecil not only crushes the image he had of himself but it also disposes of the fictitiousness of his ideas concerning his visions about the world as such (including thus Lucy). Artistic images preoccupy his mind and life so much that in a way he stops noticing people around him. Subconsciously, he changes them into works of art, pretty objects which can be manipulated and moved at leisure. Taking such a meticulous care about his spiritual life, Cecil forgets about the spiritual as well as emotional lives of others. Paradoxically, the more he works on the development of his inner self (e.g. reading or discussing books), the less open-minded

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<sup>3</sup> This clash of the two worlds (on the one hand there is the reality the protagonist lives in and on the other there is the realm created by his imagination) becomes even more vivid when juxtaposed with another famous kiss scene: "For a moment he [George] contemplated her, as one who had fallen out of heaven. He saw radiant joy in her face, he saw the flowers beat against her dress in blue waves. The bushes above them closed. He stepped quickly forward and kissed her" (Forster 2000a: 89). This natural, for in accordance with the broadly understood nature, behaviour of the young man is later on confirmed by the action undertaken by the protagonist who, unlike other participants of the trip going back to the hotel by coach, decides to go on foot in pouring rain.

he becomes. The ironic picture of Cecil that emerges from the contradiction shows a man in a dark, crammed room, dominated by the smell of old volumes and theories, with almost no space for real people, their feelings and actions, the interior that eventually becomes a symbol of him both to the readers and to other characters from the novel.

### **The language: *Howards End***

In the following passage we will see the distorted attitude towards reality of Leonard Bast, one of the main characters from *Howards End*. This time the falsity is disclosed by the language he uses. To be more precise, it happens when the protagonist attempts to use complex grammatical structures and sophisticated vocabulary found in a book by Ruskin to describe the reality around him. Thus his basement flat which is “dark as well as stuffy” (Forster 2000b: 62) is theoretically turned into a thoroughly different place:

Leonard was trying to form his style on Ruskin: he understood him to be the greatest master of English Prose. He read forward steadily, occasionally making a few notes. ‘Let us consider a little each of these characters in succession; and first (for of the shafts enough has been said already), what is very peculiar to this church, its luminousness.’ Could he introduce it with modifications, when next wrote a letter to his brother, the lay-reader? For example - ‘Let us consider a little each of these characters in succession; and first (for of the absence of ventilation enough has been said already), what is very peculiar to this flat, its obscurity’ (Forster 2000b: 62).

Quite soon, though, Leonard realizes that this transformation somehow does not bring him closer to Culture: "Something told him, that the modification would not do" (Forster 2000b: 62). Unfortunately, Bast does not know the name of this "something". But if he only had a chance to hear the comment of the narrator, he would know "that something . . . was the spirit of English Prose" (Forster 2000b: 62). The word "spirit" clearly points to a spiritual nature of the value in question. It cannot be measured, weighed, copied from others or simply learnt by heart and used as something own and personal. Culture and art require personal contact and understanding; the imitation is definitely not enough.

The expectations and artistic fancies drawn on the basis of written word this time too do not tally with the harsh reality of the protagonist. The inability at first to notice the discrepancy and then to realize the impossibility of bridging the two realms induces an ironic smile on the part of the reader. The irony is additionally reinforced by the knowledge of the narrator shared with the reader that the protagonist's naïve attempts to change his fate with the help of art (via reading books, listening to music, etc.) are doomed to failure.

## **Conclusion**

As it can be seen from the above, Bergson and Forster share a lot as for the ironic perception of life. Considering the works of the two, it appears virtually impossible that Forster knew nothing about Bergson's ideas on laughter, so widely spread and popularized in Eng-

land at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The traces of the French philosopher's ideology are clearly perceptible in Forster's novels. Following, the writer employed the ideas concerning laughter and its corrective power into his prose works. The employment is visible both on the level of plot and the scenes, events and descriptions it includes, as well as on the level of narration and communication (utterances), when the contact of the narrator with the implied reader is utilized. The levels cross and mix, offering as a result a thorough, irony-based picture of the society and its vices.

The quotation from the final part of Bergson's essay may very well serve as the final part of the present article:

Laughter comes into being in the self-same fashion. It indicates a slight revolt on the surface of social life. It instantly adopts the changing forms of the disturbance. It, also, is a froth with a saline base. Like froth, it sparkles. It is gaiety itself. But the philosopher who gathers a handful to taste may find that the substance is scanty, and the after-taste bitter (Chapter 3).

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**E. M. Forster's Uneasy Bildungsroman:  
Exploring the Meanders of Existential Aporias  
in *The Longest Journey***

Uneasy Bildungsroman; the very caption of my article may in fact smack of truism as it would be far more difficult to come across an existential modern novel which does not present – as I put it – uneasy, distorted, always deferred, Bildungsroman features, because there is no such thing as a normative, cut and dried receipt for Bildungsroman in modernity. Nevertheless, E. M. Forster's by all accounts controversial *The Longest Journey* does sketch a peculiar silhouette of an existentialist novel, whose stylistic ambiguities as well as hypodermic semantic heterogeneity call for alternative critical approaches and sensibilities.

The novel invites a plethora of diverse hermeneutic slants via which to come to terms with the very intricacies. Bearing in mind its historical milieu it ceases to strike as baffling that the novel pulls a number of hermeneutic strings deeming it so excruciatingly complex; yet not necessarily complex in terms of its difficulty or stylistic artistry, but interpretative heterogeneity. With this in mind, my proposition to read it through the lens of existentialism or fit it in the stencil of the (inverted?) Bildungsroman model may appear

to be reductionist, and so it undeniably is in isolation. For this reason, albeit existentialism in the post/modern context will appear in the article as a backbone of my critical inquiry, I will attempt to filter the existential aporias of protagonists through supplementary approaches of psychoanalytical, deconstructive and hermeneutic reading. Furthermore, in order to do justice to the novel's irreducible singularity it is vital that I scrutinize the hypodermic workings of Forster's symbolism and mysticism as the writer's idiosyncratic imprints of textual alterity.

My article will seek to propose that minor characters in Forster's oeuvre serve not only as symbolic supplements to the main characters' personal development as well as existential concerns, but in fact epitomize or entail prime narrative issues, rendering thus the main characters every so often secondary ventriloquists of these problems. The novel presents traditional Bildungsroman at its most convulsive, even inverted, as the main character Rickie ineluctably suppresses traditional existential innocence-experience trajectory characteristic of Bildungsroman, namely fails to resist social conventions at the expense of the manifestation of his individuality and personal fulfilment. This cliché-ridden classification of the character would require no further commentary had it not been attributed to his peculiar complexes as well as neurotic stylistic and narrative turns, which require explanation in the proposed context.

At the outset, what is essentially meant by Bildungsroman tradition in literary theory and in what ways does it serve to dissect the character's constitution? Broadly, Bildungsroman - standing for the novel



of upbringing or coming-of-age – would adopt a character (typically a young male heterosexual), whose existential trajectory from innocence to maturity comes to fruition through experience and a chain of thrills and spills, which gradually shape the protagonist's standpoints (Cuddon 1998: 82). Interaction with society plays the first fiddle in the formation of one's individuality; namely the protagonist is necessarily sceptical about social conventions, yet the scepticism is not to deepen his/her antisocial or anarchic proclivities, but in fact is to form individuality within the confines of social conventions,<sup>4</sup> which also marks progression from rebellion to reconciliation (not obsequiousness, though) with society.

Rickie's (the main protagonist's) existential trajectory epitomizes a blatant asymmetry of a conventional Bildungsroman character. In a nutshell, Rickie, a Cambridge graduate and a promising writer-to-be, instead of pursuing his writing flair, ends up marrying a repulsive femme fatale Agnes, and gets entangled in social conventions entailing his intellectual and artistic stagnation. Rickie's personal inclinations are hence given up for the mundane, which hampers his anticipated line of experience in the Sartrean sense. Also the ending of the novel, that is the protagonist's abrupt death, appears to stand at variance with an emblematic Bildungsroman character, whose long journey to experience and knowledge is expected by the convention to be rewarded with a happy ending. What is it there

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<sup>4</sup> Which perhaps distinguishes the traditional Bildungsroman model from its related picaresque genre, whose characters are fundamentally antisocial and at odds with society.

in *The Longest Journey* that defers Bildungsroman, yet still can be read through its lens?

For the most part, a historical facet calls for attention. Needless to say that modern literature and philosophy were subject to manifest aesthetic schism at the outset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Forster, univocally deemed an Edwardian and – by many – a non-modernist writer, appeared to have shunned linguistic intricacies of his high-modernist contemporaries. Nevertheless, the very reduction of the writer to a position of a bard of Victorian-Edwardian literary sentiments, if more applicable to his Italian novels, would leave the problematic of *The Longest Journey* unaccounted for.

The oft-quoted contradicting stances of a renowned Forsterian Lionel Trilling affirming that the novel is simultaneously “the least perfect” and “the most brilliant” of all Forster’s novels provokes a commentary (Harvey 1966: 117). The reason for the paradox is the novel’s clash between the linearity of plot and aesthetic, on which Wilde comments that Forster:

fails to achieve sufficient distance from the problems that most interest him to use them as proper grist for his artistic mill. When that happens, the novel that results is likely to fail in coherence and integrality (1964: 27).

The formal incoherence may thus be either attributed to the proposed author’s solipsistically conditioned conflation of plot, or to the overall modernist tendency towards aesthetic fragmentation and disintegration.

The very question of modernist tendencies stealthily creeping in the 20<sup>th</sup> century literature does not remain without resonance within Bildungsroman convention.

A fitted out model of existential trajectory from innocence to experience developed by the Enlightenment requires a univocal classification of the character. Thus a dialectical constitution of the character challenged by modern sensibilities, deferring normativism and empirical dogmatism, create an alternative model of a character pursuing his existential Via Dolorosa. The Forsterian trajectory, ornamented with modernist concerns of inner complexity and fragmentation of personality, renders the conventional existential trajectory in terms of the Bildungsroman canon thwarted. A modern existential character will thus still strive for maturity, yet the socio-cultural context requires a character able to respond to the arbitrariness of the world. Accordingly, the existential meanders may gain in unprecedented complexity, which in the case of the protagonist of *The Longest Journey* takes place on the level of the unconscious.

Although English Enlightenment, Romanticism, and Victorian literature witnessed notable modifications of Bildungsroman characters, a fundamental nexus linking the influences, namely dialectics, rendered the genre decipherable in terms of a normative convention. Modernist fragmentariness and reversal of normative dichotomies (vide Bakhtin) made the Bildungsroman project less doable. It can be argued that Bildungsroman in the postmodern context, where the modernist heritage of fragmentation is further accelerated by the tenets of paranoia and schizophrenia, is not viable due to the assumed arbitrariness of moral and aesthetic premises, which defer smooth transition of elementary normative notions of the convention - pertaining

to a character's progress or narrative linearity - to the postmodern literary venue.

Another aspect in Forster's fiction testifying to a modernist propensity towards deconstructing normative dichotomies on the characters' existential axes is the ominous hypodermic use of irony, perhaps best summarized by Wallace as:

the combination of friendly and accessible, prosaic and commonplace liberal-humanism, and the wry, ironic sense of the potential fragility of this whole humanist project, is precisely what might be identified as modernist in Forster's fiction (2007: 24).

Indeed the use of irony in the existential context in *The Longest Journey* is particularly manifest in the writer's treatment of death and its impact on the character's experience. Forster's undoing of death-existence dichotomy draws particular attention, since not only does it entail complex existential concerns but also analogously affects the narrative and language.

In Forster, a high fatality rate and abruptness of characters' death, as well as its existential consequences appear to be perplexing; the reader learns out of the blue, unassisted by any narrator's preludes, that: "while he was out his mother died. She only survived her husband eleven days" (1973: 33); straight after the narrator's ample description of his athletic features "Gerald died that afternoon. He was broken up in the football match" (1973: 56); and when suddenly Rickie spots his half-brother Stephen on the rails, he does not hesitate to rescue him before the train drives him over yet:

it is also a man's duty to save his own life, and therefore he tried. The train went over his knees. He died up in Cadover (1973: 281).

It must be admitted that the prose appears to be painfully scanty and mundane for Forster's customary sophisticated Edwardian language and inadequate to the gravity of situations described. Such an approach to death is at odds with Bildungsroman convention (especially with regards to the main character's death), where the death of secondary characters is utilized as another stimulus for the protagonists' existential progress and not a destructive force annihilating his/her existence. Death in *The Longest Journey* may partially fit in the template, especially in the invoked instances of Mrs Elliot's and Gerald's death, which inaugurate new chapters in the protagonist's life, and each augur different journeys for Rickie to come, and by the same token Rickie's death harbingers the continuation of the existential journey through the salvaged Stephen.

What strikes as vexing though is the very terseness of death, which via black irony not only exposes modernist proclivities but also deconstructs the conventional existential trajectory. The author takes pains to render death as invisible through unexpected narrative shifts, and as seemingly unimportant via prosaic language as possible. As a result, the reader along with the subsequent deaths becomes emotionally "anaesthetized" and existence-absence axis becomes as complicated as to be blurred at all. It is inferred that although Rickie dies, Stephen lives on and continues the former's longest journey by most probably marrying Agnes, which adds

to the plot a tinge of mystique and otherness symptomatic of Forster fiction.

Existence in the Sartrean sense is understood by a state of being of an entity whose becoming is contingent on his/her own autonomy of choice. Forster's mystical transmission of Rickie's existential ballast to Stephen destabilizes the existentialist fundamentals, yet points at other existential aporias, that is the conflict between the subjective and objective; the real and imaginary; existence and absence. Rickie's mother's death entails the protagonist's strong desire to seek her counterpart in Agnes, and Gerald's (Rickie's bully at primary school and Agnes' fiancée) death motivates him to idolize Agnes in order to put himself in the athlete's shoes, and get rid of his complexes. The boundary between the real and imaginary becomes thus blurred. Rickie visibly creates subjective realities, which confronted with the objective real bring about his existential fiasco, and, as mentioned, death.

Should I go on invoking psychoanalytical reading of Forster, it must be noted that Rickie tends to construct his peculiar imaginary ideals, namely nature, idiosyncratic enclave of books, Agnes as substitution for his mother. If any of the ideals either supersedes another or collides with reality, the protagonist experiences existential aporia, which paralyzes his autonomy. Rickie's casus can be read through the prism of Baudrillard's notion of simulacrum, that is a supplementary version of reality created artificially, which substitutes and destabilizes the original reality (Selden 2005). Indeed, Rickie creates a subjective simulacrum of reality on the level of the imaginary, which substitutes the tangible reality, and since the imaginary and the real

prove to be irreconcilable, the character intensifies his complexes further.

It will be observed that Rickie's dedication to fiction he idolizes dangerously encroaches upon the real:

How could Rickie . . . make a living by pretending that Greek gods were alive, or that young ladies could vanish into trees? (Forster 1973: 156).

He tries to express all modern life in the terms of Greek mythology, because the Greeks looked very straight at things, and Demeter or Aphrodite are thinner veils than "The survival of the fittest" (Forster 1973: 178).

To him the world shall be beautiful and pure. When it is not, he ignores it (Forster 1973: 119).

It is implied that Rickie not only (ironically put as it may be) pretends that the fiction is real but he also interprets the tangible reality through the lens of the fictional one. As a result, when the world he physically encounters does not match the idolized one, "he ignores it". The very ignorance is crucial to understanding Rickie's impossibility of dealing with existence and his eventual failure. Bildungsroman characters would typically use their existential stimuli, be it imaginary or tangible, for building and enhancing their experience through understanding and adapting to the real world and society. Through experience they become enriched, with each encounter contributing to the character's maturity and synthesizing his individual constitution. Rickie subjectively substitutes the real for the imaginary, yet since he cannot renounce the objective, he experiences anti-Bildungsroman existential regression, concluded by the narrator after the chain of his existential failures: "He remained conscientious and decent,

but the spiritual part of him proceeded towards ruin" (Forster 1973: 197).

In the case of his perception of Agnes, there is a notable clash between the real and imaginary. When during a walk Agnes insists on being shown a dell depicted in one of Rickie's stories, he responds:

'We passed it.' He had meant to pass it. It was too beautiful. All he read, all he had hoped, all he had loved, seemed to quiver in its enchanted air. It was perilous. He dared not enter it with such a woman (Forster 1973: 78).

Why would he refuse to show the dell to Agnes, whom he after all – at this point of the plot at least – adores? Both the dell and the glorified Agnes lie within the confines of the unreal, to which Rickie assigns absolute values. The translation of the unreal into the real simply breaks its spell. All of a sudden, the woman he loves is referred to by a pejorative epithet and reduced to merely 'such a woman', as if unfit, nay 'perilous', to the world he has given himself entirely to. Rickie does not intend to show Agnes the dell since he does not wish to endow her with the knowledge which would mean a sheer profanity of his sacrum (imagination and writing).

From existentialist standpoint, a Bildungsroman character takes a decision, but the very resolution is to be precarious even if sometimes fraught with consequences. The marriage seems to be opportunistic, not because it is cliché-ridden, but mainly because it constitutes Rickie's confusion of the real and the subjective. The reader is uneasy about the fact that Rickie chooses to satiate his peculiar unconscious proclivities



as opposed to natural - auguring personal development - ambitions, namely writing career which he renounces for the unhappy marriage and conventional life. Agnes as myth is favoured over Agnes as human being; the myth which is not realized in her genuine qualities, but in the semblance with his mother as well as Rickie's adulation of her tragedy so much akin to romantic ideals, resulting from Gerald's death: "the tragedy that he deemed immortal" (Forster 1973: 79).

An accurate epitome of the tensions within the double reality has been provided by Ansell tenaciously drawing circles in squares. When Rickie asks whether they are real Ansell answers: "The inside one - the one in the middle of everything, that there's never room enough to draw" (Forster 1973: 23). According to Thomson, whereas the circle stands for reality, square epitomizes the imaginary (1967: 142). Since the process of inscribing circles in squares is inexhaustible, the moment of obtaining the sense of the real is unattainable either. Translated into the matrix of Rickie's experience, the real is being incessantly deferred and never obtains the status of the pure real, since it will always welcome another square, the unseen to substitute it. The very deferral of the real, in the vein of the Derridean notion of *différance*, producing the tension brought about by marrying off the real to the imaginary, and the impossibility of dealing with the very tension harbingers disillusionment.

This clash also pulsates in the tissue of Bildungsroman and is attributed to the protagonist's lack of existential experience, observed by the omniscient narrator:

He has no knowledge of the world; for example, he thinks that if you don't want money you can give it to friends who do. He believes in humanity because he knows a dozen decent people. He believes in women because he loves his mother (Forster 1973: 66).

This wry narratorial report on the protagonist's idealistic, misguided sense of reality not only matter-of-factly summarizes humanism, but also smacks of misogyny. The fragment embraces facets generating Rickie's complexes, which in the long-run spawn the split reality preventing him from obtaining maturity and happiness. As rightly observed by McConkey, since the world around Rickie is not a patch on the idealized values of the unseen, the protagonist endows others with these supreme qualities (1971: 65). Nevertheless, when reality verifies and exposes the subjective, the fallacy provokes disenchantment.

Apart from the marriage with Agnes, one of such existential erroneous beliefs is epitomized by Rickie's half-brother Stephen - a reckless, uncouth drunkard referred to as "a law to himself" (Forster 1973: 280). Rickie - remorseful about his former rejection of his brother - decides to look after him and help him break even, providing the other promises not to touch alcohol. When the promise is broken, Rickie is shattered, which objectively seems slightly far-fetched, yet superbly exposes Rickie's idiosyncratic aporia. Hence, he exclaims that Stephen is "suddenly ruined" and admonishes himself for having "[p]retended again that the people were real" (Forster 1973: 280). Rickie again, having taken the promise for granted, confuses myth with reality.

However, why should Rickie be so affected about the broken promise? Is it another token of his naively idealistic tic of bestowing others on absolute values, wide of the real as it may be? According to Page, Stephen "is not an incarnation of the spirit of the landscape" which Rickie believes him to be (1987: 70). To Rickie, reality equates with nature and nature transfigures into myth through imagination. Rickie loves nature which betrays him, hinting thus at Edwardian dedication to naturalism confronted with modernist schism of values. Since the established myth returns to and collides with reality, which forms a peculiar vicious existential circle involving a trajectory from the imaginary to the real, Rickie experiences his existential defeat; hence the hyperbolized reaction. Rickie appears to be exposed and vulnerable to the undoing of his imaginary myths, affecting every existential aspect he attaches importance to.

As argued before, such blows, stirring from the hopelessness of fulfilment of the subjective, are struck by Stephen and Agnes. By the same token, the rejection of his fiction by a publisher, birth and subsequent death of his lame daughter, awareness that Stephen is in reality his beloved mother's and not - as he had thought - father's illegitimate son, will all lead to Rickie's demise, which tells him apart from an archetypal model of a Bildungsroman character, whose mishaps entail a protagonist's eventual success as well as ontic and moral synthesis.

Another aspect - that contributes to *The Longest Journey* as being a flawed Bildungsroman - to consider is a function and representation of the secondary characters. Rickie's entourage serve as a fixed set of existential

“signposts”. They all can be univocally classified and provide the exemplification of an ideological integrity; they are all symbols which stand for broader existential and social templates; they are defined. Ansell – an academic mind – for instance, represents the world of books, Agnes and her brother Mr. Pembroke personify convention, and Stephen represents nature. Rickie’s inner clash consists in his inability to define himself.

This however may portray Rickie as an existentialist character, yet what constitutes his existential aporia is the inability to come to terms with freedom-convention dichotomy. He in fact epitomizes both, hence the preference of any of them is bound to entail the other and defy its pure existence, amply reflected in Rickie’s sense of double reality and subjective contriving of myths. Accordingly, the conventional Rickie will yearn for freedom, the free one will fail to make use of it, which thus renders him bordering on a representation of a tragic romantic hero as opposed to a Bildungsroman protagonist. Characters as noted above may in fact have a uniform constitution, yet Rickie’s misconceptions and intended complexity of their portrayal by the narrator who is painfully committed to relativizing their seemingly uniform representations make matters complicated in terms of fashioning an overall fixed framework of the characters’ profile.

Forster’s characters prove to be ambiguous and intermittently escape the form they have been initially fit in by the narrator or Rickie himself. The former in fact adroitly deconstructs characters he creates, by forming a particular behavioural silhouette, just to further reverse it. Therefore, the reader observes that Rickie’s mother, who epitomizes good and purity, is later con-

ceived of from a different ethical angle after the revelation of her having had an affair with a farmer resulting in an illegitimate son Stephen's birth; the idolized Agnes suddenly experiences a sadistic "shrill of joy when she thought of the weak boy in the clutches of the strong one" after she learns from Gerald that he had bullied Rickie as a child (Forster 1973: 56); also Gerald's image is deprecatingly reversed, as after the narrator's ample description of his Greek-like physique and belligerent dispositions, he becomes all of a sudden broken up in a trifle football match and in death "[h]e was crying like a little, frightened child" (Forster 1973: 57), most probably like young Rickie whom he had bullied.

These ambiguous moral and behavioural edges of the characters are deliberately confounded in order not to make them fit in a reductionist diachronic classification, which – as regards Forster fiction – is elucidated by Harvey as follows:

But in his novels the moral impulse is usually held in check, because, having accepted the framework of social comedy as his literary mode, he must to some extent fulfil the expectations aroused by that framework, and . . . such a crude division of humanity into black and white would, if enforced, only arouse the hostility of the reader (1966: 121).

This necessity to problematize the characters, be it contingent on the reader's expectations as imputed by the critic, or modernist tendency towards the reversal of moral values, has an enormous impact on distorting Bildungsroman features, ever since Rickie's existential demise is caused by his misunderstanding of the surrounding world. The more complicated the secondary

characters, the more confused and less visible the protagonist, and the farther deconstructed social relations.

While conventional Bildungsroman is based on the evil-towards-good trajectory, and blatantly underscores the very dichotomy, Forster conflates moral values and renders the dichotomy destabilized, which is even directly referred to by the narrator:

Rickie suffered from the Primal Curse, which is not – as the Authorised Version suggests – the knowledge of good and evil, but the knowledge of good-and-evil (Forster 1973: 194).

This hyphenated combination of contradictory values testifies to the postulated arbitrariness of good-evil dialectic corroborated by the narrator. Furthermore, the reference to the Bible itself and the biblical “Primal Curse” intensify an archetypal dialectic division of the moral values, which Rickie blindly reverences and thus “suffers from”. The very notion of suffering also suggests that Rickie through the misapprehension of fundamental truths will be subject to misery, which is mystically irrevocable and imprinted on (like the primal curse itself) in his destiny.

The Bildungsroman model usually involves protagonists who are central figures of the plot and treat other people and places as stop-overs from which to further their existential route. The secondary characters are then expected to *function*, and not necessarily to *be*. By underscoring the utilitarian as opposed to ontological role, the characters are supposed to fulfil certain part in the society; they are meant to be pigeonholed and straightforward to guard the protagonist

and redirect the reader's focus on the protagonist. Forster's *Bildungsroman* gives the impression of being unremittingly deferred as the narrator introduces secondary characters, who are as crucial to the plot as to sometimes confuse the reader about the actual centrality of the protagonist. Hence, technically, it is Stephen who emerges as the hero, despite the fact that the lion's share of the narration is centralized upon Rickie. After all it is Stephen who survives the protagonist, mystically continues his ongoing existence and it is through him that happy ending (so central for *Bildungsroman*) is plausible. Why does the narrator decentralize the protagonist by accentuating supplementary characters then?

As argued above, Rickie tends to endow others with absolute values and hence deify them at the expense of his self-depreciation. Hadaczek, for instance, quotes a passage from Ewski's diaries, where the latter postulates that a (*Bildungsroman*) protagonist suffers from the split self which is caused by the fact that "a man ... regards himself unimportant against the man, whom he is to surface from himself" (1985: 84). Accordingly, a typical *Bildungsroman* characters may, like Rickie, depreciate themselves, but such downgrading is the result of the investment in the potential self which is to evolve. Nevertheless, Rickie seems to be oddly aware of his irrevocable deficiency (lame-ness) and sacrifices himself to the self-inflicted fate. However, since the desire to institute the superiority remains unquenched, the responsibility is redirected to others (the mythologized Gerald or naturalized Steven). The very notion of self-depreciation substantially

contradicts the Bildungsroman existential foundations, as it does not promise the character's development.

Perhaps the most striking feature testifying to Rickie's capitulation against existentialist *élan vital* and manifestation of repudiation of personal ambitions is reflected in the following passage expressed straight before the birth of his lame daughter: "His mother had forgotten herself in him. He would forget himself in his son" (Forster 1973: 187). It is not only Rickie's blind dedication that comes as bewildering, but primarily his reluctance to cut loose the form he is inscribed in. He adores his mother, hence he will gladly follow her footsteps and live her life. Rickie thus renounces his own existence not only for the sake of his unborn child, but also his mother by emulating her, and, as it will turn out later, for the sake of Stephen, whom he rescues and dies for. Hence death in Bildungsroman tradition is an unlikely undertaking, ever since the responsibility for existence can be taken only by undergoing the very existence, and death evinces itself as opportunistic and pointless if the goal is the cultivation of the soil of experience.

Rickie is obviously reluctant to fulfil his duties as a main protagonist, hence the secondary characters intermittently relieve him of the responsibilities, and – comically enough – even by living his life after his death, as in the case of Stephen. The self-depreciation blocks a genuine trajectory of experience, which normally should be realized by the self, yet since the latter is unattainable, other characters are burdened by the task. The fact that it is Stephen who continues the eponymous longest journey constitutes another twist



in the convention, which, however mystically, is still inscribed in the existentialist narrative trajectory.

The reduction of the self may be also filtered through Royle's reading of *The Longest Journey*. The critic states that the novel's main concern is deformity which is an underlying narrative and structural spine of the novel. Hence "[l]ameness and failure are inscribed in the very structure of Forster's work" (1999: 25). Lameness, being Rickie's greatest complex, is indeed calqued to all narrative dimensions: clash between plot and form, existential regression, frequent deaths, moral turbulences, flawed decisions blatantly incongruent with conventional existentialist (heading towards maturity) decisions of Bildungsroman. All the aspects testify to the interpretative indeterminacy of this by all means complex novel, and multidimensional deformity might be a proposition that hints at the deconstructive, relentlessly deferred, indeterminate nature of the work. Bildungsroman is by no means a taken for granted backbone of the novel, nor is it meant to be. It is yet a fertile soil to start from, should one delve into the existential grounding of the characters. The Forsterian, flawed as it is, Bildungsroman may be far from fitting in the customary existentialist stencil, but it indubitably underscores necessary existential aporias and lacunae imperative for the complex scrutiny of the characters' inner constitution.

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**Deletion, Metaphor and Footnote: the Analysis  
of Polish Translations of *A Room with a View***

In this paper I shall analyse and compare two Polish translations of E. M. Forster's *A Room with a View*. The author of the first translation, published in 1992, is Agnieszka Majchrzak. The author of the second translation is Halina Najder. This version was first published in 2003. The analysis focuses on the issues which appear in a translator's work rather rarely, and hence they seem particularly interesting. The issues include the approach towards foreign elements, such as Italian words and phrases, as well as elements of literature by other authors, quoted by Forster's characters. Due to the limited space, I do not examine the translation in terms of lexical or syntactical equivalence. This type of analysis, however, has been conducted in my MA thesis, in which I analyse the translations from a broader angle.

Translation criticism (also known as translation testing and translation quality assessment) is a set of actions meant to examine and unify the work of a translator (Kielar 2003: 122). Translation quality assessment may be perceived as a process consisting of three stages, namely: the analysis of SL text in order to find items significant from the point of view of translation, comparison of the translation with the original text

and quality assessment (Kielar 2007: 124). Another model consists of four stages (Dąbska-Prokop 2007: 53). This model differs significantly from the previous one, as it suggests starting from the reading and analysis of the target language (TL) text. The second stage is the analysis of the source language (SL) text. The main object of the third stage is the translator himself - his perspective, approach to the texts etc. The last stage is "the actual criticism" aimed at four aspects: clarity, reflectivity, discursiveness and usage of footnotes and comments.

In the translation criticism conducted herein, I applied the model that requires start from the analysis of the SL text and finding items that may be significant in the quality assessment. I found it useful, however, to analyse the TL text on its own as well, in order to make sure that it does not contain blatant linguistic errors. Certain errors, such as awkward and artificial expressions in the TL, can be identified without reference to the original text (Reiss 2000: 11). However, it is no surprise that such an analysis is not sufficient to assess the translation. Obviously, this aspect of translation cannot be neglected, as it is very important that the translation meets all TL linguistic norms, but such an approach gives no information about the relation of the SL text with the TL text. Linguistic errors are not necessarily connected with translational errors, but they are equally important in the global assessment of the TL text.

There is no agreement on the unit of assessment. Some scholars, like Balcerzan (1982: 224), suggest focusing on details and the smallest, basic units of work and claim that only this attitude may lead to credible,

objective criticism. I tend to support the opinion that critics should pay attention to the smallest units as it is impossible to predict, without any doubt, response to a translation. Obviously those units are not necessarily words or structures – they might be whole thoughts and ideas as well. On the other hand, translation should be also assessed from a “global” point of view, aimed at such features as “the overall spirit of the book” (Nossack in Reiss 2000: 15).

In my analysis I decided to combine both points of view: global and detailed. Each of them is valuable but neither is sufficient on its own. Attention paid to details may indeed not give enough insight into the spirit and general shape of a work, while judgments on “the overall spirit” are not necessarily objective enough and rarely make a scholarly analysis.

Translation criticism may be subdivided into “assessing” criticism and “descriptive” criticism. The first model consists in judgment of a translation or its components and gives room for subjectivity. In the second model, a critic is supposed to analyse discrepancies (and possibly convergences) between texts and show the result of changes within elements of the texts in other elements, and the text as a whole. In this case, one may assume that the criticism will be as objective as possible. Nonetheless, total objectivity is impossible to achieve, since every critic (just like every translator) is endowed with their own outlook, cultural heritage, etc. (Bednarczyk 1999: 187-200). I tend to agree with the opinion that descriptive criticism is more constructive, as it does not impose solutions provided by a critic, who also may be wrong. I support the model which, instead, consists in highlighting errors and subjecting them to discussion.

Even in descriptive criticism there might be room for a critic's invention but the critic should not present their own solutions as unconditionally superior.

Both translators display different approaches towards foreign elements. *A Room with a View* is abundant in quotations as well as allusions and references to other works. In the second chapter, Mr. Emerson quotes Alfred Edward Housman's poem. Housman, who lived between 1859 and 1936, was well-known to the readers of novels such as *A Room with a View*, and hence Forster did not find it necessary to explain the origin of the quotation and probably assumed that it was obvious. The issue with Polish translation is a bit different – Polish readers are usually not familiar with Housman's poetry and certainly they will not be able to identify the translated quotation. The poem has not been translated into Polish before, and the stanza in question was translated exclusively for the need of the novel.

From far, from eve and morning  
And yon twelve-winded sky,  
The stuff of life to knit me  
Blew hither: here am I.  
(Forster 1990: 26)

Z daleka, z ciemności i ze światła,  
I z nieba wietrzystego  
Duch życia wionął na mnie – otom jest.  
(Majchrzak 1992: 29)

Z oddali, z wieczora i ranka,  
Z dwunastu wiatrów nieba,  
Coś, co tka moje życie,  
Przygnało mnie aż tu  
(Najder 2003: 35)

Najder translated the poem more faithfully than Majchrzak and managed to translate even relatively tricky items ("twelve-winded sky" as "dwanaście wiatrów nieba") and save the original form of the stanza. Majchrzak, on the other hand, totally mistranslated the stanza, replacing "eve and morning" with "ciemność i światło" ('darkness and light'), which are not necessarily equivalent, and "twelve winded sky" with "niebo wietrzyste" ('windy sky'), which is an obvious simplification. What is more, she omitted the line "The stuff of life to knit me", which was quite accurately translated by Najder as "Coś, co tka moje życie" ('Something that weaves my life').

The fact that the translation seems somewhat faulty is an important but not the crucial issue here. More significant is the approach towards this foreign piece of literature, unrecognizable for Polish reader. Najder did not identify the poem, so that it looks as if it were written by Forster himself. Majchrzak, on the other hand, uses a footnote to explain the origin of the poem. However, she is not precise enough. Her footnote reads "Alfred Edward Housman, "A Shropshire Lad", tłum. Agnieszka Majchrzak". In fact, *A Shropshire Lad*, published in 1896, is a cycle of sixty-three poems, and the correct title of the specific poem used in *A Room with a View* is "From Far, From Eve and Morning". Despite this flaw, the reader is provided with the name of the author and it gives him room for further research.

A similar problem appears once again in the ninth chapter of the novel, but is tackled in a bit different way as the poem was translated before. Here Cecil quotes a poem which is not identified in *A Room with a View*:



“Come down, O maid, from yonder mountain height,”  
he quoted, and touched her knee with his own.  
She flushed again and said: ‘What height?’

‘Come down, O maid, from yonder mountain height:  
What pleasure lives in height (the shepherd sang),  
In height and in the splendour of the hills?’  
(Forster 1990: 97)

– *W płatki swe całą słodycz zagarnęła lilia,  
Ze słodyczą zapada w głębinę jeziora: – wyrecytował  
i dotknął jej kolana swoim.*  
– *W głębinę jeziora? – zapytała rumieniąc się.*  
– *Tak się ty spowij w siebie, miła, i w głębinę  
Zapadaj moją, póki nie zatoniesz we mnie.\**

\*Alfred Tennyson, fragment poematu *Królewna*,  
tłum. Zygmunt Kubiak.  
(Majchrzak 1992: 85)

– „Szczyty wysokie porzuć, dziewczeczko” – zacytował i kolanem dotknął jej kolana.  
Zaczerwieniła się i zapytała:  
– Jakie szczyty?

Szczyty wysokie porzuć, dziewczeczko,  
Pasterze nuć o gór majestacie.  
Cóż za rozkosze znajdziesz na wyżynach?  
(Najder 2003: 115)

The case, at the first sight, is similar to the previous one. In the text of the novel there appears a poem written by someone else that Forster. It may seem that the solution is also similar to the one applied before. Indeed, Majchrzak added a footnote which explains the origin of the quotation. Unlike in the previous “borrowed” text, here she did not translate the poem herself.

Instead, she used an already existent translation by Zygmunt Kubiak. This puts the Polish reader in the same situation as the English one, i.e. they find in the novel a text which can be found on its own in another source.

Najder translated the poem herself and did not add the information on the origin of the stanza. In other words, she delivered as much (or rather as little) information as the original author, which is understandable and totally acceptable. Najder's translation is correct. It contains a repetition of the first line, as in the original text, while Majchrzak's version does not. However, the most important issue concerning the excerpt above is Majchrzak's blatant error which puts in question the very sense of translating the quotation. She quoted the translation of another part of the poem "Princess" than the one used in the original text. Therefore, the only thing that the Polish and English version have in common is the name of the author and the title of the poem, and not the content. The stanza used by Majchrzak looks in English as follows:

Now folds the lily all her sweetness up,  
And slips into the bosom of the lake;  
So fold thyself, my dearest, thou, and slip  
Into my bosom, and be lost in me.  
(Tennyson 1882: 578)

Clearly, this is a completely different stanza. In terms of accuracy, Kubiak translated it correctly, but this piece by no means should be used in the translation of *A Room with a View* as it does not appear in the original text. One cannot help but wonder what the reason of such a controversial action was.

One of the first things that could possibly come to one's mind is an error of a critic who compared different excerpts. This is certainly not the case here. If the error in the course of analysis is excluded, it must have been the decision of the translator herself. One of the possible reasons is a confusion of the translated stanzas. The translator who identified the original source of the quotation (by Tennyson) and the Polish version (by Kubiak) might have mistakenly chosen a wrong Polish stanza. This scenario, however, is not very likely, as either the editor or the translator would have possibly spotted the mistake in the course of proofreading and replaced the stanza in question with the equivalent one. If one rejects the hypotheses presented above, the only possibility that is left is a conscious decision of the translator. Such an intervention seems to be closer to the creation of one's own piece of literature rather than to translation. Translator is endowed with certain freedom when it comes to the choice of means of expression, but they cannot change SL meanings to totally different TL meaning. The violation of the rule is particularly visible in the above case as the employed TL item has its prototype in the SL text, but this is clearly not the item used by the original author. In other words, the stanza translated by Kubiak and used by Majchrzak does exist in the SL text, as it is an accurately translated excerpt from Tennyson's poem, but it does not appear in the original text of the novel and hence cannot be used in the translation.

Let us follow the consequences of the alteration. Majchrzak's version is fairly risqué and the words:

Tak się ty spowij w siebie, miła, i w głębinę,  
Zapadaj moją, póki nie zatoniesz we mnie  
(Majchrzak 2003: 85).

could possibly be understood by Lucy as an invitation to some kind of relationship. However, it triggers hardly any reaction. It is so, because Lucy's reaction is translated faithfully, i.e. it is based on the reaction to a totally different phrase, definitely not as risqué as the one provided by Majchrzak. In other words, in this scene the cause and result chain is distorted and does not make sense as it consists of two elements that do not fit each other. The first element (cause) comes from the translator's alteration and is not rooted in the original text, while the second (result) comes from the original text where it is triggered by an utterly different cause.

Whatever the reasons behind the decision, the most certain thing is that Majchrzak displayed disloyalty towards the author as she did not even try to reproduce the original text in the TL (and the task was not difficult, as demonstrated by Najder), even though the reproduction seems to be the main task of a translator. One may assume that Majchrzak felt limited only by her own imagination. However, such an approach is a privilege of authors and not translators. Translator cannot modify the text and change the events according to their own taste. Some scholars, including Krzysztofiak (1996), maintain that translators should be granted some freedom and I fully agree with that point of view, but such a deep change within the structure of a text is closer to the freedom of an author rather than of a translator. Najder seems to use the freedom more responsibly -

she is not a slave of the text and she is not afraid of modifying it, but she alters certain elements in order to make the text more intelligible and suitable in the TC (Target Culture) reality. Majchrzak did something opposite – in the quoted excerpt she misled the reader.

The foreign elements in *A Room with a View* include phrases in foreign languages. In the case of the novel, the languages are Italian and French. Bednarczyk (1999: 112-117) concludes that such additions (or interpolations) are usually introduced in order to inform the reader about the place of action or the nationality of a speaker.

Forster's characters often speak Italian. He does not translate Italian and either assumes that his average reader would understand it or deliberately leaves them with foreign elements. The following passage is supposed to "place" the action within clearly defined culture.

'So I saw. Were you indeed? Andante via! Sono occupato!' – The last remark was made to a vendor of panoramic photographs who was approaching with a courteous smile (Forster 1990: 48).

Najder (or her editor) saved the Italian phrase exactly as it is in the original, i.e. without footnotes or explanation, while Majchrzak (or the editor) used footnotes with Polish translation: "*Andante via! Sono occupato!* (wł.) – Odejdź! Jestem zajęty!" (Majchrzak 1992: 48).

I tend to favour the second solution, as in the quoted text it is fairly important to understand this phrase. Even if it was possible to assume that a British reader

living in the age of travels to Italy may understand the phrase, assumptions that a Polish reader would find it intelligible are unfounded. Majchrzak's footnote makes the text understandable while Najder's mere quotation will be omitted by a reader who does not speak Italian. None of the solutions is absolutely wrong or right as they just reflect potential readers and their capabilities imagined by a translator.

It seems that Majchrzak and Najder predicted somewhat different readers with different background knowledge. It may seem that Majchrzak's imaginary readers need additional information as they are more curious or less willing to check unknown elements in additional sources, while Najder's readers are endowed with great linguistic knowledge or, at least, a few volumes of dictionaries. It needs to be mentioned that Majchrzak is consistent in the usage of footnotes and explains even quite commonly understandable phrases such as *Buon giorno*. One could argue that this explanation is unnecessary, but, as a matter of fact, it proves that the usage of footnotes is a consistent, planned strategy applied to every foreign word or phrase. Majchrzak seems to have assumed that every foreign phrase may pose difficulties in understanding and decided to explain each of them.

Another matter that has always attracted translators and translation critics is the issue of wordplays. There may be no classical wordplays (i.e. those based on synonyms, unconventional typography and spelling, anagrams, palindromes, plays with syntax etc.) but such phrases as "a parson fenceless would mean a parson defenceless" require a similar approach. The phrase

requires broader context, as the author himself explains that the phrase makes an epigram.

'We weren't talking of real fences,' said Lucy, laughing.

'Oh, I see, dear - poetry.'

She leant placidly back. Cecil wondered why Lucy had been amused.

'I tell you who has no "fences", as you call them,' she said, 'and that's Mr Beebe.'

'A parson fenceless would mean a parson defenceless.'

Lucy was slow to follow what people said, but quick enough to detect what they meant. She missed Cecil's epigram, but grasped the feeling that prompted it.

'Don't you like Mr Beebe?' she asked thoughtfully (Forster 1990: 95).

The information in the last sentence should be used by the translator as a tip about the appropriate approach towards the phrase in question, if they have not noticed its playful nature before.

- Nie mówiliśmy o prawdziwych murach - zawołała Lucy ze śmiechem. Cecil spojrzał na nią, nie rozumiejąc przyczyny wesołości.

- Rozumiem - poezja... - odrzekła pani Honeychurch i oparła się z powrotem wygodnie.

- Jest ktoś, dla kogo „mury” nie istnieją - powiedziała Lucy. - Ten ktoś to pan Beebe.

Cecil milczał, nie okazując zainteresowania.

- Nie lubisz pana Beebe'a? - zapytała Lucy (Majchrzak 1992: 84).

- Nie mówiliśmy o prawdziwych płotach - powiedziała ze śmiechem Lucy.

- A, rozumiem, kochanie, to poezja.

Pani Honeychurch usadowiła się spokojnie, a Cecil zastanawiał się, co Lucy tak rozbawiło.

- Ja wam powiem, kto nie ma „płatów”, czy jak wy tam to nazywacie - odezwała się znowu pani Honeychurch. - Ksiądz Beebe nie ma żadnych płatów.

- Proboszcz bez płatów to proboszcz bezbronny.

Lucy zawsze wolno śledziła tok rozmowy, ale szybko się orientowała, o co komu chodzi. Epigram Cecilia przeleciał jej mimo uszu, lecz dobrze zrozumiała, co go wywołało.

- Nie lubisz księdza? - spytała zamyślona (Najder 2003: 112).

For an unknown reason, Majchrzak did not make much use of the tip. She ignored the whole of Cecil's phrase which itself is unacceptable, but what is worse, instead of a quotation, she put in a sentence saying that Cecil was silent, while, in the original, he shared an epigram. Usually, the causes of errors can be explained, and sometimes errors can be even justified to some extent, but this particular error cannot be justified as an intentional, profound intervention into the text. There is hardly any situation that would call for a replacement of a description of something (action, object, sensation) with a description of something clearly opposite (the only exception is antonymic translation, but this is definitely not the case here). This is exactly what Majchrzak did by writing that Cecil, who in fact spoke, remained silent and indifferent. This is a profound change that goes even beyond the frames of adaptation or free translation. Such a change is nothing short of making translator's own order of events and own novel, which cannot happen if the outcome of the translator's work is meant to be a translation and not a text loosely connected



or not connected at all with the original text. It needs to be stressed that what Majchrzak applied is not antonymic translation. Altogether, Majchrzak deleted three sentences (compared both with the original text and the other translation) and added one sentence, totally unrelated with the original text.

Najder translated the epigram in such a way that its meaning remained intact but she lost the humorous, rhyming form that is particularly interesting from the morphological point of view, as it looks as if one word was derived from another by means of a prefix even though they have nothing in common. The translation differs substantially when compared with the original text, but looks absolutely correct in the TL convention. What is important, unlike in the first analysed version, there is no distortion.

There might be several reasons of not recreating the wordplay. The translator might have not been skilful enough to do so, there may be lack of appropriate TL linguistic items (which is hardly possible, but theoretically may happen) or they did not notice the wordplay. I suppose that this applies not only to the allusive wordplays but also to the language-bound wordplays. However, the excerpt above shows that some translators tend to omit wordplays even if the original author himself informs about the wordplay. I believe that the troublesome sentence is not untranslatable. Indeed, in Polish it is hardly possible to find two words that would suit the context, and one would look like the root of the other, but the translators could, at least, have made an attempt to recreate the rhyme. This might lead to such possible versions as “proboszcz bez płotów ma więcej kłopotów” or “proboszcz nieogrodzony

nie ma możliwości obrony”. However, if there is a danger that such a sentence will seem unnatural and it still does not convey the whole humorous potential of the original, the best solution is the one applied by Najder, that is literal translation and preservation of the message rather than form.

If the goal of a translator is to “place meanings in the target text in such a way that the reader is led to derive the appropriate intermediate and final macrostructures” as suggested by Neubert and Shreve (1992: 138), then only Halina Najder seems to have accomplished the task. Agnieszka Majchrzak resorted to deletion too eagerly, distorting the original much more than absolutely unavoidable. Moreover, Majchrzak’s version, classified by a publishing house as a translation and not as an adaptation or a novel inspired by *A Room with a View*, has numerous features of adaptation, including completions and replacements. At some points it connected with the original text even more loosely than an adaptation. Majchrzak replaced some of the original items with totally unrelated ones. Hence, it is impossible to classify her work as a correct, accurate translation. Seemingly, the major drawback of the version is the fact that it is located between two tendencies, i.e. translation and adaptation, and hence it is hardly possible to determine what kind of addressee is the target of Majchrzak’s translation. Najder’s version complies with the requirements of a correct translation much better and there would be not much room for an improvement in a potential new version of the translation.

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**A Passage to OU-BOUM:  
Homi Bhabha reads E. M. Forster**

Conservative and traditional criticism sees *A Passage to India*, Forster's last novel published in his lifetime (though 45 years before his death), as

a powerfully influential middle-class text . . . the pinnacle of Anglo-Indian literature . . . that best delivers the truth about the British Raj and about India (Hubel 1996: 85-86).

Its great success upon publication secured Forster a position of "one of Britain's foremost interpreters of modern India" (Hubel 1996: 85), the book has been subsequently treated as

a social and historical document . . . an exact depiction of the mood which characterized the Anglo-Indian/Indian relationship in the early 1920s (Hubel 1996: 85).

In time, critics noticed in the novel, apart from "liberal criticism of politics and life in British India", also "an existential meditation" (Parry 2004: 163). Seen as one of the great achievements of literary modernism in Britain, *A Passage to India*, with its meticulous structure

and indeterminate rich symbolism, was perceived as a mythopoeia rather than a socio-historical record and

a humanist affirmation of the sanctity of human relationships egregiously violated by colonialism (Parry 2004: 163).

For decades readers and critics have seen Forster's novel as "a text sympathetic to the nationalist movement and cynical about British imperialism" (Hubel 1996: 89), which raises strong objections of many postcolonial critics, such as Sara Suleri, who finds it "a matter of some perplexity" (1987: 174). However, after the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978, the school of post-colonial criticism flourished, providing new readings of the novel, able to see in it "the racial, cultural, and sexual Other that is India" (Monk 1994). One of such interpretations was suggested by Homi Bhabha in his 1994 study *The Location of Culture*. This paper endeavours to see Bhabha's reading of Forster's classic in a broader critical context and also attempts to represent its innovation.

*A Passage to India* centres around the impossibility to answer the question: "What happened in the Marabar Caves?" In *The Location of Culture*, mostly in its chapter "Articulating the archaic: cultural difference and colonial nonsense", Bhabha offers his conception of resolving the enigma:

*There*, the loss of the narrative of cultural plurality; *there* the implausibility of conversation and commentability; *there* the enactment of an undecidable, uncanny colonial present, an Anglo-Indian difficulty, which repeats but is never itself fully represented. . . .

It all seems such nonsense. . . . It is the echochamber of memory (2007: 180).

Subsequent parts of this paper venture to explicate the approach voiced here.

A mere cursory look at the surface of *A Passage to India* reveals that the novel attempts to show a critical attitude towards the manner of the British rule of India. Forster gives countless examples of racially prejudiced behaviour, racial injustice and British heartless domination. When Ronny Heaslop, the magistrate of the city of Chandrapore, is accused by his mother, Mrs Moore, of having a disposition of a god in his relation to the native people and the country in general, he gives a cocksure answer: "India likes gods" (Forster 1985: 69). There are certainly numerous instances of the native behaviour which can ensure his belief - the attitude of Indian people often appears respectful and submissive, but the origins of this attitude are not what Ronny expects them to be. The reverent awe of the Indians comes mostly from appreciating English strength. Mahmood Ali says:

When we poor blacks take bribes, we perform what we are bribed to perform. . . . The English take and do nothing. I admire them (Forster 1985: 34).

The British domination is imposed on every aspect of Indian life, but what perhaps seems most acute is the enforcing of the logic of the Empire:

The roads, named after victorious generals and intersecting at right angles, were symbolic of the net

Great Britain had thrown over India. [Aziz] felt caught in their meshes (Forster 1985: 39).

Obviously, criticism has amply acknowledged Forster's critical attitude to the Imperial spider devouring the Indian body and soul.

However, a number of post-colonial critics have disagreed. Suleri compares Forster's approach with the archetypally Orientalist writings of Kipling, which used the code

divid[ing] the world into two sections, the East and the West, and the aim of the West was to apprehend the essence of the East in order to understand and hence to rule it (qtd. in Hubel 1996: 88).

Suleri censures *A Passage to India* on the basis of its inability to recognise the "otherness" of India. She asserts that Forster accounts the "unreadability" of India not to the limitations of the Western mind, but to idiosyncrasies of the subcontinent itself. The Marabar Caves represent the fissure, the hollow in the European modernist literary imagination, preoccupied with its own impairment (Cf. Hubel 87-88).<sup>5</sup> Forster's narrator claims:

In Europe life retreats out of the cold and exquisite fireside myths have resulted - Balder, Persephone - but here the retreat is from the source of life, the treacherous sun, and no poetry adorns it, because disillusionment cannot be beautiful. Men yearn for poetry though they may not confess it; they desire that joy shall be graceful, and sorrow august,

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<sup>5</sup> A similar charge is submitted by Chinua Achebe against Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, which he sees as focusing on "the break-up of one petty European mind" (1997: 120).



and infinity have a form, and India fails to accommodate them (Forster 1985: 214-215).

No doubt, the emphasis is here on the westernized poets, not on India.

From a more traditional critical perspective, John Beer observes that

if the caves represent one extreme of India, its 'reality' in one sense, Godbole's spirit of love, rising to ecstasy, expresses its other extreme, its other 'reality' (1962: 146).

Bhabha seems to contradict such traditional readings, for him the Marabar Caves enact "an undecidable, uncanny colonial present", he complains that they symbolize "an Anglo-Indian difficulty, which . . . is never itself fully represented" in Forster's novel (2007: 180). Bhabha compellingly focuses on the question of cultural difference, but understands it very unlike Adela Quested. For her, an "Anglo-Indian difficulty" is a problem which boils down to plurality of cultures and, accordingly, can be resolved by evoking to some ethical or spiritual universality: "I want . . . 'universal religion' or the equivalent to keep me decent and sensible" (Forster 1985: 157). However, in the nonsense of the caves Adela experiences a different dimension of cultural difference; it is, Bhabha claims,

not the acquisition or accumulation of additional cultural knowledge; it is the momentous, if momentary, extinction of the recognizable object of culture in the disturbed artifice of its signification, at the edge of experience (2007: 179-180).

When Bhabha calls the present of colonial culture “uncanny”, he refers to Freud’s essay of this title, in which Freud, searching for the root of the German word *unheimlich* (unhomely) in its apparent opposite, *heimlich* (homely), identifies the direct correspondence between the two: the unfamiliar which raises our utmost horror is, in fact, something most familiar to us. What is familiar in culture is

its disciplinary generalizations, its mimetic narratives . . . its seriality, its progress, its customs and coherence (Bhabha 2007: 195).

At the same time, culture is, in its authority, *unfamiliar*, because

to be distinctive, signficatory, influential and identifiable, it has to be translated, disseminated, differentiated, interdisciplinary, intertextual, international, inter-racial (Bhabha 2007: 195).

It is this undecidability, the simultaneous emergence of apparent opposites, which puts Bhabha close to Derrida’s thought.

Forster’s novel apparently disapproves of British disrespect for Indian native culture. It reprehends Mrs Turton, who has learned merely a few words in Urdu

but only to speak to her servants, so she knew none of the politer forms, and of verbs only the imperative mood (Forster 1985: 62).

At the same time, though, the novel fails to realize the artificiality of Anglo-Indian speech. When Aziz talks

about his house to Fielding, he calls it “an oriental interior” (Forster 1985: 127), which seems a typically trained coded phrase. As Parry observes, the novel at times even flaunts “irascible reprimands of Indian unreliability, obsequiousness and evasiveness” (2004: 164), which can go even as far as referring to their way of expressing opinion. When the narration focalizes close to Fielding’s point of view, it seems rather derogatory about the way Indian people approach speech:

Unless a sentence paid a few compliments to Justice and Morality in passing, its grammar wounded their ears and paralysed their minds. What they said and what they felt were (except in the case of affection) seldom the same (Forster 1985: 125).

Moreover, Parry further notes that *A Passage to India*

approaches Indian forms of knowledge with uncertainty, without asserting the authority of its representations (2004: 169).

Hubel goes even further, claiming that the novel “constructs Indian . . . spirituality as a danger to the western mind” (1996: 93).

The “implausibility of conversation” mentioned by Bhabha (2007: 180) materialises to a large extent through the incommensurability of the English language used. It might be a cheap excuse of an Indian schoolboy that

the bad English grammar the Government obliged them to use often gave the wrong meanings for words (Forster 1985: 122),

but the inadequacy of the colonizer's system of communication often stands behind the conflict of cultures. Faced with "an unfortunate slip" in the inscription in a Hindu temple - "composed in English to indicate [God's] universality" - "God si Love", Forster's narrator asks "Is this the final message of India?" (1985: 283). Sadly, it is not within modernist reach to discuss the idea of hybridity of language (and culture), so the novel does not develop this issue.

Bhabha examines one more intriguing characteristics of the English language used in the colonial context. Investigating the discourse of colonial governmentality, he traces within it multifarious examples of contradiction. Being another example of undecidability between oppositions, those instances - such as John Stuart Mill's "the virtually despotic government of a dependency by a free people" from his "On Representative Government" - constitute "the act of splitting [of] the colonial signifier" (Bhabha 2007: 182) in its enunciation.<sup>6</sup> *A Passage to India* acquires its discursive authority from this enunciatory space, in which, like in the Marabar caves, "the work of signification voids the act of meaning in articulating a split-response" (Bhabha 2007: 188). Quite clearly, if the British wish to retain their authority, they have to accept the fact that their government in India is something anomalous, otherwise their slip into meaninglessness. Referring to psychoanalysis, Bhabha explains:

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<sup>6</sup> Bhabha uses the word "enunciation" in the Lacanian meaning of the unconscious speech - not the language that I speak, but the language that speaks me.

Splitting constitutes an intricate strategy of defence and differentiation in the colonial discourse. Two contradictory and independent attitudes inhabit the *same place*, one takes account of reality, the other is under the influence of instincts which detach the ego from reality. This results in the production of multiple and contradictory belief. The enunciatory moment of multiple belief is both a defence against the anxiety of difference, and itself *productive* of differentiations. Splitting is then a form of enunciatory, intellectual uncertainty and anxiety that stems from the fact that disavowal is not merely a principle of negation or elision; it is a strategy for articulating contradictory and coeval statements of belief (2007: 188).

*A Passage to India* also reaches a connection to psychoanalysis at the very basic roots of Freud's studies – the female hysteria. In point of fact, Forster's novel presents the worst of the British rule of India in characters of Englishwomen. They are much more explicit in expressing unfavourable opinions about the natives than their husbands. Mrs Callendar, for instance, says:

the kindest thing one can do to a native is to let him die . . . He can go where he likes as long as he doesn't come near me. They give me the creeps (Forster 1985: 48).

Mrs Turton, in turn, divulges:

they ought to crawl from here to the caves on their hands and knees whenever an Englishwoman's in sight, they oughtn't be spoken to, they ought to be spat at, they ought to be ground into the dust (Forster 1985: 220).

Fielding observes that if Englishmen would tolerate him making friends with Indians, Englishwomen would not (Forster 1985: 80). In Hubel's view,

Anglo-Indian women are the novel's scapegoats; they bear the brunt of Forster's anger about English conduct in India. The Anglo-Indian men, on the other hand, are criticized but are usually accorded some sympathy (1996: 99).

This contrast in attitude earned Forster some harsh feminist criticism: Elaine Showalter claims "I think we must accept the fact that Forster often saw women as part of the enemy camp" (qtd. in Hubel 1996: 95). But it may well be that the accurate explanation was the one Ashis Nandy voices:

white women in India were generally more exclusive and racist because they unconsciously saw themselves as the sexual competitors of Indian men, with whom their men had established an unconscious homo-eroticized bonding (qtd. in Lane 1995: 147).

The most obvious example of a woman infringing upon the rights of an Indian person is obviously Adela's claim that she has been abused by Aziz. And this is exactly where the issue of female hysteria comes to view.

In some connection to this psychoanalytic reading, Nancy Paxton offers the interpretation of "the significance of Forster's strategic silences about Adela's sexual desires" (1999: 234). Paxton sees Adela as an example of an "uncolonized" woman, the modernist New Woman newly arrived from Britain of "women's suffrage,

feminism, and free love" of the 1920s" (1999: 238). Adela thus

demonstrate[s] some of the new conflicts posed by British women's redefined relationship to the social and sexual contract in the 1920s (1999: 234).

Her fiancé, Ronny,

recognizes that, because Adela is a New Woman, he cannot be certain that she will deny her sexual desire or submit to the chaste monogamy expected of colonial wives. Likewise, he cannot be sure that she will comply with colonial taboos against cross-racial unions (1999: 239).

In this way, Forster seems to express his concern about the challenge posed by the Modern Woman to Anglo-Indian colonial society. However, using the Marabar caves scenario, the novel manages to illustrate

how the New Woman, who was relatively successful in freeing herself from the constraints of Victorian sex and gender roles in the period between 1890 and 1914, was recaptured in the 1920s by Freudian psychology (Paxton 1999: 236).

Adela's reaction after the cave incident is clearly indicative of hysteria, but perhaps more interesting is the narrative silence – the narrative disavowal – which covers the incident itself, as well as any Adela's report on it. Paxton sees in this silence the enactment of Adela's choice:

either she must describe her experience according to the rape script of colonialism's favorite melodrama or she must remain voiceless (1999: 241).

The colonial clichéd judgement is demonstrated by Forster in "Oriental Pathology" voiced by Major McBryde in his court statement in which he pronounces "a general truth" that

the darker races are physically attracted by the fairer, but not vice versa - not a matter for bitterness this, not a matter for abuse, but just a fact which any scientific observer will confirm (Forster 1985: 222).

Beer finds explanation for Adela's hysterical behaviour in the "muddled state of her mind at the crucial moment" (1962: 149). He sees her recover from hysteria through the influence of contact with Mrs Moore, which enables her head to make contact with her heart again and enter the true reality (1962: 150-152). The problem of this approach lies in the fact that, for one thing, it focuses on Adela, the European mind again, and that, for another, it does not truly see her as a woman. A more convincing view is presented by Paxton, who compares Forster to Freud:

Ten years later, when asked what happened to Adela in the Marabar Caves, Forster, like Freud, insisted that the workings of female desire remained beyond words (1999: 234).

Paxton ventures to show how Adela's cave nightmare and the subsequent gaps in her memory parallel Freudian conservative theory of feminine sexuality. She observes that



the 'gaps' in Adela's story are used to show that the sexual repression of the modern woman discredits her autonomy and reliability as a political agent (1999: 241).

The fact that Adela resembles the New Woman can be seen from the sexual impulses presented, though quite implicitly, by the novel. Before entering the cave, she displays some attraction to Aziz, thinking that "he might attract the women of his own race and rank" (Forster 1985: 163). At the same moment she thinks about her marriage to Ronny, no doubt bearing in mind the sexual aspect of it. She must remember the scene which has previously reunited her with her fiancé after a row, when, in a rather Lawrencean manner, "one of the thrills so frequent in the animal kingdom passed between them" (Forster 1985: 103). The caves themselves, as presented in the narration, seem to be a potent sexual symbol, in their description Forster uses vivid imagery, referring to "lovers" or "kiss" and "touch" of flames (1985: 138-139). Hubel spots an interesting parallel between another modernist "colonial" text: Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, in which, like in *A Passage to India*,

the image of the colonized country is a construction which participates in the mutually constitutive discourses of both exoticism and eroticism (1996: 104).

However, in the case of Forster's novel, an integral part of this eroticism lies in the homosexual realm.

Christopher Lane observes that while Forster makes racial difference responsible for the distance between men and women, it does not prevent him from bringing

“men of different races and nationalities into closer proximity” (1995: 146). He further claims that

interracial sexuality usually compels Forster’s characters to disavow or redefine the precise meaning of their national and sexual identities (1995: 146).

Indeed, insofar as the two instances of the New Women presented by the novel, Adela and Mrs Moore, are not given erotic qualities (Aziz frequently refers to Adela’s unattractiveness and Mrs Moore is an elderly lady), the two most sensual characters of *A Passage to India* are masculine: a punkah-wallah pulling a fan in the courtroom and a temple servitor who during the Hindu celebration causes Aziz’s and Fielding’s boats to collide. Hubel discerns the homoerotic gaze of the narrator in the description of the punkah-wallah, seeing in the eroticised descriptions of natives the expression of Forster’s fascination with “India’s attractions and its relationship to the West” (1996: 105-106). However, she asserts that the two seductive figures are

products of Orientalism, for both are imaged as somehow existing outside time, in that eternal and changeless India that the West cannot and should not touch (1996: 107)

and thus the homoerotic aesthetics of the novel is still set within imperialist discourse. A similar view seems to be advocated by Parry, who asserts:

The accounts of easeful male associations to which Fielding is admitted resonate the courtly same-sex eroticism of the Arab-Persian-Islamic literary tradition and fulfil a fantasy of unconcealed homosexual

associations still forced into secrecy in Britain (2004: 172).

Lane, in turn, notices that

Forster's difficulty in representing homosexual and racial intimacy raises unconscious meanings that resonate beyond his writing (1995: 146).

Indeed, this difficulty is detectable in the novel even despite its ending, which gives some hope to the homoerotic drama between two protagonists divided by some abstract forces:

"We shall drive every blasted Englishman into the sea, and then" - [Aziz] rode against [Fielding] furiously - "and then," he concluded, half kissing him, "you and I shall be friends."  
"Why can't we be friends now?" said [Fielding], holding him affectionately. "It's what I want. It's what you want."  
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 . . . : they didn't want it" (Forster 1985: 316).

Thus in the last scene of the novel Forster creates a gap between the two male protagonists which is not bridgeable, or not yet, at least. This scene, however, is not perceived by critics as climactic; what, for instance, Beer calls "the culminating horror of the novel" (1962: 156) is the echo of the Marabar caves. The echo which Bhabha approaches in the following way:

from those dark corners of the earth, there comes another, more ominous silence that utters an archaic colonial 'otherness', that speaks in riddles, obliterating proper names and proper places. It is a silence that turns imperial triumphalism into the testimony of colonial confusion and those who hear its echo lose their historic memories (2007: 176).

Here is Forster's description:

The echo in a Marabar cave . . . is entirely devoid of distinction. Whatever is said, the same monotonous noise replies, and quivers up and down the walls until it is absorbed into the roof. 'Boum' is the sound as far as the human alphabet can express it, or 'bou-oum', or 'ou-boum' - utterly dull. Hope, politeness, the blowing of a nose, the squeak of a boot, all produce 'boum'. . . . And if several people talk at once an overlapping howling noise begins, echoes generate echoes, and the cave is stuffed with a snake composed of small snakes, which writhe independently (158-159).

If a Marabar cave is, as Bhabha wants it, the "echo-chamber of memory" (2007: 180), it raises echoes that resonate not only in Adela, evoking her colonial hysteria, but also in Mrs Moore, rupturing her proper Christianity, the faith which was, indeed, one of the main instruments of British colonization of India. The primal archaic emptiness reverberates inside Mrs Moore's Christian soul - "in a cave, in a church - boum, it amounts to the same" (Forster 1985: 213). It is, indeed, unspeakable:

"[Adela:] Mrs Moore, what is this echo?" [Mrs Moore:] "Don't you know? . . . If you don't know, you don't know; I can't tell you" (Forster 1985: 205).

But its force is radically disruptive:

'Pathos, piety, courage - they exist, but are identical, and so is filth. Everything exists, nothing has value.' If one had spoken vileness in that place, or quoted lofty poetry, the comment would have been the same - 'ou-boum'. If one had spoken with the tongues of angels and pleaded for all the unhappiness and misunderstanding in the world, past, present, and to come, for all the misery men must undergo whatever their opinion and position, and however they dodge or bluff - it would amount to the same, the serpent would descend and return to the ceiling. . . . suddenly, at the edge of her mind, Religion appeared, poor little talkative Christianity, and she knew that all its divine words from 'Let there be light' to 'It is finished' only amounted to 'boum' (Forster 1985: 160-161).

The religion of Word is thus juxtaposed against the archaic silence and thus, deconstructed. The Christian Word - the constitutive "Let there be light" or the sacrificial "It is finished" - is devoured by the gaping aperture of Oriental caves and grossly dismantled. And what is offered by the echo of the Marabar caves in return? Nonsense.

Bhabha states:

What emerges . . . is the language of a colonial nonsense that displaces those dualities in which the colonial space is traditionally divided: nature/culture, chaos/civility. Ouboum [is] not [a] naturalized or primitivistic [description] of colonial 'otherness', [it is] the [inscription] of an uncertain colonial silence that mocks the social performance of language with [its] non-sense; that baffles the communicable

verities of culture with [its] refusal to translate (2007: 177).

As Parry divulges,

the catastrophic entry of Mrs Moore and Adela Quested into an untranslatable sphere is inseparable from the cultural constraints on their capacity to confront the otherness of meanings both immanent in and attached to India's material spaces and forms (2004: 172).

This nonsense of Marabar caves is the archaic element of India which resists translation, and as such stands for the incommensurability of Indian culture, but also for its defiance. For Bhabha, this "colonial non-sense . . . is productive of powerful, if ambivalent, strategies of cultural authority and resistance" (2007: 188).

Also a critical look upon the essence of the caves itself seems quite purposeful: Marabar caves are presented as a regional attraction to British "tourists", but, in truth, they hide nothing of particular interest inside: no ancient inscriptions, no carvings, no ornamentations, no sculptures. Beer claims that "Everything in the novel has to be confronted by the caves" (1962: 160), also the main question for most readers of *A Passage to India* is "What happened in the Marabar caves?". But, in fact, the most basic, the most straightforward, the most true, and the most absurd answer is: "nothing". Nothing happened in Marabar caves. As Monk asserts,

[t]he 'Caves' section of the novel is, quite literally, about nothing. . . . an excavated cave offers to the archaeologist, or the novelist, substantively - nothing (1994).

Facing this substantial nothingness, *A Passage to India* also has to face the problem of representation and expression. Forster's novel is, after all, written within the "limits" of Eurocentric modernism, using the fictional modes available to a western novelist, and this is perhaps why Said asserts that the book uses India "to represent material that according to the canons of the novel form cannot in fact be represented" (qtd. in Parry 2004: 162). The colonial archaic nonsense produced by the Marabar caves is for Forster "ou-boum" – "as far as the *human* alphabet can express it" (Forster 1985: 158, italics mine). Parry lucidly notes that "[c]aves are a symptom of what the novel is unable to comprehend intellectually, accommodate within its preferred sensibility or possess in its available language" (2004: 170). And even if Forster's narrator decides to cross the boundary of the English language and seems open to accept non-words, he still remains within the constraints of the Roman alphabet, which is *not* the only *human* alphabet available, especially not in India.

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### **E. M. Forster's Geography of Homosexual Desire**

When the geographic locations which can be found in E. M. Forster's fiction are put together, they chart a map which, on the one hand, commemorates his voyages during the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. On the other hand, however, this imaginary map emerges as curiously close to the image of foreign countries popular among the educated and wealthy British homosexuals at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The task of the present paper is to retrace the voyages which first took Forster to places conventionally perceived as homosexual havens and then back to England where he created a homosexual haven of his own making.

The belief that there is a distant foreign place more appropriate and sympathetic for gay people can be traced back to the Ancient times when the theme of homosexual love was introduced into the myth of Arcadia (Woods 1998: 17-31). The belief is strongly present also in modern gay culture, as Henning Bech describes it:

Happiness is not now, at most in existing memory  
or in yearning; and it is not found here but in another

country, a foreign country – [which is] a stock theme in the homosexual experience (1997: 37).

Specific location of such a foreign country has been changing over the years and largely depends on local cultural traditions or fashions.<sup>7</sup> At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century the geography of homosexual desire of the educated wealthy British concentrated almost exclusively on two places: Greece and Italy. It was reflected in the terms “Greek love” and “Italian vice” which were used as popular synonyms of homosexuality.<sup>8</sup> They came to be associated with homosexual love primarily due to the Ancient literary tradition the works of which, such as Platonic dialogues, were in those times the only generally available “gay literature” (Jenkyns 1980: 282).

In the case of Italy it was also widely believed that this country was more willing to accept or at least tolerate homosexuality. The association had been quite common in Great Britain for several centuries. Obviously, for the majority it was a negative association, hence “the Italian vice”. It was one of the qualities which constituted Italy as a morally dangerous place

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<sup>7</sup> These days middle-class Western Europeans would probably choose Gran Canaria or the Greek island of Mykonos, while Americans would prefer Fire Island.

<sup>8</sup> However, this meaning of the adjective “Greek” should not be applied to Forster’s works. “While it would certainly be simplistic to suggest that Forster meant Greek as a code word for homosexual, much as Dorian, Platonic, or Sapphic had become, it would be equally misleading to attempt to explain Forster’s “Greek” without including in the ideas of harmony, peace, nature, and so on, the idea of an accepted and recognized place for the homosexual relationship” (Martin 1977: 70).

("the academy of crime") along with her Catholic faith and effeminacy.

However, there were also those who found the popular belief rather promising and wanted to use the opportunity. Their list includes such well-known Victorians as John Addington Symonds, Frederick Rolfe (Baron Corvo), and Horatio Forbes Brown who either wrote about their erotic liaisons with Italian youths or settled down in Italy giving grounds to the belief that homosexual practices were possible there rather than in other European countries (Rahman 1988: 54).<sup>9</sup> On a more mundane level, it was important that Italy belonged to the countries the legal system of which had been influenced by the Napoleonic Code in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and did not penalize homosexuality, which in Great Britain from the latter part of Queen Victoria's reign to the 1960s was considered a criminal offense.

The myth of Italy as a homosexual haven was also strengthened by graphic arts, especially photographs of Wilhelm von Gloeden and his followers. The subjects of the photographs of von Gloeden and Rolfe, most often teenage boys from Taormina or Venice, should draw our attention to the fact that the conventional vision of homosexuality connected with the Mediterranean (and also the Orient) was that of ephebophilia (love of older men for boys).

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<sup>9</sup> "For Forster, undoubtedly, Italy was the place where homophobia was irremovable . . . but not particularly high" (Altman 1978: 538), [Italy] "was associated in Forster's mind with homosexuality, as [it] was notorious since the Renaissance as the land where homosexual pleasures could be procured" (Rahman 1988: 54).

It is difficult to state with any certainty to what extent Forster was aware of all that when he first visited Italy with his mother in 1902. It is certain, however, that his early works such as the two novels: *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905) and *A Room with a View* (1908) are characterized by the extensive usage of foreign settings. The actual setting of his early fiction is not limited to Italy but, especially in the short stories, includes also Greece. The importance of Greece in these works is almost equal to that of Italy and the two influences tend to mingle for example in such works as the short story "Albergo Empedocle", the action of which takes place in Grigenti, a Greek colony in Italy, and in "The Story of a Panic", where English tourists encounter the Greek god Pan in the North of Italy. To be more precise then, one might say that the two locales tend sometimes to be perceived as one.

I am by no means the first to attempt to discuss the issue. Peter J. Hutchings sees it in an extremely simple way, claiming that

Forster's sexual geography [is as follows]: Italy, for heterosexual romance, Greece for homosexual love, Constantinople as a gateway to polymorphous perversity (1995: 224).

I find the matter, however, somewhat more complicated. Hutchings seems both misled by the final draft of *A Room with a View* and not curious enough to read closely *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, not to mention the fact that Constantinople plays an extremely minor role in Forster's fiction, only as the aim of the voyage of the Misses Alan in *A Room with a View*. Hutchings

seems to have mistaken here Forster for Gustave Flaubert, Pierre Loti or, which may be the most probable, for Evelyn Waugh and his *Brideshead Revisited*.

Robert K. Martin more precisely describes Forster's usage of the Mediterranean settings as follows:

Throughout most of his stories, Forster opposes a Greek world to a more modern, English world, or in some cases, an Italian, Mediterranean world to a northern, Anglo-Saxon world. His use of the Italian theme is almost identical to that of Henry James, who consistently opposed the sensuality and moral complexity of Italy to the materialism and moral simplicity of England (Martin 1977: 70).

The first source of Forster's interest in the Mediterranean was his preoccupation with the Antiquity which started already in secondary school and was strengthened during his stay at Cambridge and studies in history and Classics (Furbank 1979, 1: 44-80). The influence of such people as Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson or Walter Pater combined with very wide reading both in the classics and contemporary studies in Ancient culture.<sup>10</sup> The voyages to the Mediterranean, which Forster began upon his graduation in 1902 and was to continue until the 1950s, only further strengthened this interest.

Still it would be limiting to point out his interest in Classic literary tradition and travels as the only sources of the use of such settings. It would be just as wrong to present these interests as of exclusively personal origin. The latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century

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<sup>10</sup> See for example Forster's reading list from 1899 in Furbank 1979, 1: 70.

was a period of increased preoccupation with the Antiquity especially in Great Britain. Victorian culture ascribed to the region new meanings which fit the needs of the emerging empire. Perception of Greece and Rome was greatly influenced by the famous distinction between "hebraism" and "hellenism" formed by Matthew Arnold, who

did not condemn the Victorian cultivation of the private conscience, which he called 'hebraism' (in allusion to the Old Testament Hebrews) and he defined as 'strictness of conscience' but he thought it needed supplementing. The culture with which he wished to supplement hebraism he called 'hellenism' in allusion to the ancient Greeks and defined as 'spontaneity of consciousness' (Gillie 1983: 57).

Forster initially follows Arnold in his works though he treats his concepts only as a point of departure (cf. Ross 1980). He was further influenced by the works of Symonds and Lowes Dickinson, who developed this distinction so that it meant not only freedom of the soul as opposed to moral rigidity, but also sexual freedom as opposed to the rigid patriarchy and heterosexuality associated with hebraism (Martin 1977: 70).

Mediterranean culture becomes in Forster's fiction "the stimulus to the physical, instinctive self" (Adams 1980: 113) yet at the same time any attempts at revealing one's true identity are perceived and presented as potentially dangerous. The curate from the short story "The Curate's Friend" is a perfect example of this attitude, as speaking of his friendship with a faun, which may be read as a veiled presentation of homosexuality, he says:

if I breathed one word of that, my present life, so agreeable and profitable, would come to an end, my congregation would depart, and so should I, and instead of being an asset to my parish, I might find myself an expense to the nation (Forster 1997: 74).

Especially in the earliest works the influence is far from exclusively beneficial and

one easily recognizes a pattern common in Forster's early fiction: a symbolic journey to Italy or Greece, the realization of an identity with the Greek spirit, and a sudden transformation, into madness or death (Martin 1982: 102).

This is what happens to the hero of the short story "Albergo Empedocle" who discovers his "affinity" with an ancient Greek in Akragas (Agrigento) and as a madman is sent to a lunatic asylum. Achieving awareness of one's own homosexuality through the influence of a foreign setting is thus presented as madness, clearly reflecting Forster's own attitude to his situation in the period. Yet the rejection of the spirit can be equally devastating as its acceptance. It is so in the case of Mr Lucas in "The Road from Colonus",<sup>11</sup> who is "saved" by his daughter from accepting the ancient influence only to survive as a living dead.

The influence is far less dangerous when felt outside Greece itself as it occurs in "The Story of a Panic" (though in this case the ending is left open) and in

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<sup>11</sup> However, this short story does not allude to homosexuality in any way.



“The Curate’s Friend” quoted above. In both stories the Greek half-gods (Pan and a faun) appear without their element and exercise a more beneficial influence.

The Greece of Forster’s early works was rather a variation on the ideal Arnoldian Greece than the actual country, of which he had at the time extremely limited experience. Judith Scherer Hertz goes as far as to claim that

the very earliest of the strategies Forster developed to contain his sexual energy was the creation of a fantasy landscape. Often in Greece, sometimes in Italy, or even in an England inhabited by the semi-divinities, it is the place where one encounters one’s true nature, where one is allowed one’s real sexual identity, not the one so incongruously provided by the Peaslakes, the Tytlers and the Worters (1978: 255).

This view is not accepted generally and Forster’s presentation of the Mediterranean is elsewhere (e.g. Michońska-Stadnik 1980: 428-429) praised for realism and lack of idealisation. One has to agree, however, that Greece itself plays a secondary role in Forster’s fiction. It has decidedly meant very much to him yet

in his early work . . . it is an ideal to be approached with awe and reverence. Possibly too much awe and reverence is shown; for it is contemporary Italy rather than ancient or modern Greece that provides Forster, in his early novels, with the world to be opposed to his contemporary English scene (Warner 1954: 8).

An explanation for that attitude may be found in *A Room with a View*, where the reverend Beebe confesses:

I haven't been to Greece myself, and don't mean to go, and I can't imagine any of my friends going. It is altogether too big for our little lot. Don't you think so? Italy is just about as much as we can manage. Italy is heroic, but Greece is godlike or devilish - I am not sure which, and in either case absolutely out of our suburban focus (Forster 1977: 177).

These conclusions may be partially Forster's own, as rather quickly he concentrated on Italy as a more appropriate setting of his fiction. In this respect he belongs again to an established

Romantic tradition of embracing Italy as the home of brilliance and passion, of emergence from the English fog and snobbery. Like Shelley and Browning, Forster finds Italy rich in moral and emotional extremes that make the stuff of melodrama (Crews 1962: 71).

Yet just as it was in the previously presented cases, Forster immediately departs from a tradition only to use it in his own way. Although his Italy may, indeed, be perceived as the Italy of the Grand Tour, of Shelley and of Pater, it has, nevertheless, certain special features.

Italy is seen as a land of spontaneity; its social traditions and moral restraints are either ignored altogether, or else shown as wonderfully and inexplicably encouraging the free play of impulse. In Italy what you ought to do, and what you are expected

to do, and what you do mysteriously tends to be one and the same thing (Cockshut 1978: 173).

Italy becomes thus for Forster a place for a

rebellion against middle-class conformity and the possibility of escape – often literally and usually to Italy (Altman 1978: 537-538),<sup>12</sup>

where such a rebellion seems quite acceptable. A place where lovers who offended the system can find at least temporary refuge, as it is *A Room with a View*. It is quite telling that if anyone stands in the way of lovers (cf. Forster 1977: 69-79), it is always the English, not the Italians. Naturally, in the published texts Forster writes only about straight lovers.

Apart from the Classical tradition the choice of Italy as the ideal refuge was also influenced by Forster's perception of Italian society marked with masculine domination "free from feminine criticism" (Wilde 1973: 295), which makes the country an ideal of Forster's vision of homosexuality even though he is ready to recognise that it happens at the expense of women.

Italy is such a delightful place to live in if you happen to be a man. There one may enjoy that exquisite luxury of Socialism – that true Socialism which is based not on equality of income or character, but on the equality of manners. In the democracy of the cafe or the street the great question of our life has been solved, and the brotherhood of man is a reality (Forster 1975: 35-36).

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<sup>12</sup> The issue of escape or self-imposed exile in E. M. Forster's fiction was presented in Fordoński 2003.

Quite obviously, though the choice of place just as that of references in the text (e.g. repeated allusions to Michelangelo or poems of A. E. Housman) may lead a queer oriented critic to notice that Forster's foreign settings are homoerotically charged, it is more a matter of allusion or unspoken mood than of anything that can be specifically pointed out. The fact is that as the surviving manuscripts prove Forster consciously removed from the texts submitted for publication anything that might have suggested homosexuality or homoeroticism.

Yet even so, in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* we can find this surprising description of an encounter of the main hero Philip Herriton with a group of young Italian gentlemen in the Monteriano opera, during which

Philip would have a spasm of horror at the muddle he had made. But the spasm would pass, and again he would be enchanted by the kind, cheerful voices, the laughter that was never vapid, and the light caress of the arm across his back (Forster 1975: 97).

More recent analyses of the novel, such as that of Nicholas Royle published in 1999, attempt to prove that a queer subtext is much more prominent in the two novels that it might seem at the first glance:

Forster's novel mixes the crude and ambiguous; it plays with the sexual suggestiveness of language, with innuendo and double meaning. [Two] brief examples: in Forster's novel a 'knowing person' does not enter the back door of the house but rather 'take[s] the edifice in the rear', at the opera Philip finds 'amiable youths bent . . . and invited him to enter' (Royle 1999: 9-10).

Even if it is disputable whether we should unconditionally accept at face value Royle's statement that "a queer reading of *Where Angels Fear to Tread* is absolutely necessary" (1999: 11), yet it surely offers a new approach to the text.

Such a reading is of little value in the case of *A Room with a View* and even Royle agrees that "the novel's 'queer emanations' are only of limited force and value" (1999: 41). This, however, becomes more comprehensible when we realise that the published text is the third version of the novel. The two early drafts survived at least in part and a comparison is possible that explains the direction which Forster's self-censorship<sup>13</sup> took to make the novel the heterosexual romance it is now.

The most striking change applied to the first crucial event in the novel, the murder in the Piazza Signoria in the "Fourth Chapter":

[In *Old Lucy*] the most significant incident, "a catastrophe," is the death of a young Italian in the Piazza Signoria, an incident similar to the murder which brings Lucy and George Emerson together in *A Room with a View*. But in the early draft, Lucy is not present. Narrated from Arthur's [in later versions: George's] point of view, the episode consists largely of a lurid and erotic description of the dying "naked youth". The sight of "the young Italian's perfect form lying on the fountain brim" (*Old Lucy* 37) causes Arthur to renounce art in favour of life, as he tells Lucy "to promote human intercourse and bring about the brotherhood of Man" (*Old Lucy* 47). Forster

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<sup>13</sup> Forster's own attitude to it is best summed up in a sentence from his 1958 appendix to the novel entitled 'A View without a Room' - "It is not my preferred novel - *The Longest Journey* is that - but it may fairly be called the nicest" (Forster 1977: 210).

did not include this piece of adolescent homosexuality in the finished novel; by 1903 in *New Lucy* his story became a heterosexual romance (Rosenkrance 1982: 87).

Similar changes made in the early drafts brought about a text in which most of the more direct representations of homoerotic atmosphere are all but gone. The changes, however, did not touch such basically homosexual characters as Cecil Vyse “the ideal bachelor” of “the sort who can’t know any one intimately” (Forster 1977: 171) and the Reverend Beebe who

was, from rather profound reasons, somewhat chilly in his attitude towards the other sex, and preferred to be interested rather than enthralled (Forster 1977: 32).

The Italian novels were actually quite successful, sufficiently so as to have a number of successors such as Norman Douglas’s *South Wind* (1917), Huxley’s *Those Barren Leaves* (1923), and Elisabeth Bowen’s *The Hotel* (1927), which followed his descriptions of Italy “as a liberating force on Anglo-Saxon temperaments” (Cavaliere 1979: 63).<sup>14</sup> Yet the author himself was decidedly not satisfied with the direction his work took and the way censored homoerotic foreign settings were presented in his novels. The year 1908 with the publication of *A Room with a View* marked a temporary departure from the Mediterranean themes in his fiction.

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<sup>14</sup> In a somewhat different way *A Room with a View* was also the inspiration behind Virginia Woolf’s debut *The Voyage Out* (1915).

The next stage of Forster's voyage in search for a homosexual haven took him to the Orient, India and Egypt, unsurprisingly, as according to Edward Said<sup>15</sup> it was

the place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe. Virtually no European writer who wrote on or travelled to the Orient in the period after 1800 exempted himself or herself from this quest (1991 : 190).

Forster's first voyages there were no exception. They were voyages of discovery in a number of ways – not only cultural or literary but also physical and personal. It was in Alexandria that he found his first sexual experience and then fulfilment in love. India, although only when Forster visited it again in the early 1920s, also gave him a chance to have sex as freely as never before.

These experiences, however, came quite late in Forster's creative life, or, as Wendy Moffat seems to suggest in her recent biography, they put an end to his creative life as a writer. Consequently, the number of works which refer to them is quite limited. Just as was the case of the Mediterranean themes, the officially published works such as *A Passage to India* or *The Hill of Devi* allude to homosexuality in most oblique ways. According to Parminder Kaur Bakshi, in the former novel

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<sup>15</sup> An analysis of *A Passage to India* in the context of Said's studies can be found in Bakshi 1996: 207-234.

ironically, while Forster endeavoured to use the racial and political prohibitions of the friendship of Fielding and Aziz to signify the wider oppression of homosexual love, the political issues of the time proved to be so powerful that they completely subsumed homoerotic desire in the text (1996: 208).

Much more direct depictions of the erotic aspect of the Orient can be found in his posthumously published works, of which the most accomplished is certainly the short story "The Other Boat" and the most direct an autobiographical fragment "Kanaya" (Forster 1983: 310-324), first published from the manuscript in the critical edition of *The Hill of Devi*.

Forster returned to the Mediterranean settings temporarily in 1913 when he started to write his only overtly homosexual novel *Maurice*, which he was to go on correcting for another forty years. The beginning of the novel offers a direct presentation of the influence of Classical Greek culture upon the heroes – students of Cambridge Maurice and Clive. Borrowing and discussing Plato's *Symposium* become the first signs of their affection (cf. Dowling 1994). The reader is to a point led to believe that the heroes follow the rules set by the Victorian understanding of homosexuality. The impression is the stronger as there was still some degree of acceptance for homosexual behaviour in the academic setting, although not quite as much when the behaviour was discussed in public, as the controversy over Alec Waugh's *The Loom of Youth* was soon to prove (Byrne 2010: 18-20). All such expectations, however, are soon proven wrong.

As his relationship with Clive drags on Maurice grows more and more disillusioned with Greece,



“a heap of old stones without any paint on it” (Forster 1999: 92), just as he is more and more frustrated with his sexless relationship. Clive, who finally goes to Greece alone, “Against [his] will . . . become[s] normal” (Forster 1999: 97). Greece is no longer a storehouse of art but simply a reminder of last things, with its culture dead, and thus an appropriate place for Clive to ‘become normal’. It is thus relegated to museums, which is symbolically done in Chapter XLIII of the novel. Greek antiquities remain in the British Museum where they belong while Maurice and Alec go to “a place” to spend the night together. In further chapters it is the English “greenwood” that takes the place of Greece as the idyllic location where gay lovers can find refuge. This change quite naturally followed a change in Forster’s interests and his choice of English settings so visible in *The Longest Journey* and *Howards End*.

According to Martin’s probably most influential essay “Edward Carpenter and the Double Structure of *Maurice*,” this change marks Forster’s rejection of the Victorian (one might call it “Platonic”) vision of homosexuality in favour of a more modern one professed by Edward Carpenter. A similar opinion was voiced almost contemporaneously by Tariq Rahman in his article “*Maurice* and *The Longest Journey*: A Study of E. M. Forster’s Deviation from the Representation of Male Homosexuality in Literature,” in which he argues that *Maurice* is a groundbreaking novel, the first to move from describing ephebophilia (love of boys) or erotic friendship between men towards androphilia (love of men) (1988: 74).

Forster both in his life and his works started from re-charting the map of homosexual destinations of the previous generations. His life and his works, however, belonged to another generation and he had to find a new path both for his life and for his writing, create a new geography of homosexual desire for himself. This process of defining himself and his works led him to a surprising discovery both in his personal life and in his writing – that if one is ready to accept the price, the place where homosexuality is possible, the place which he sought far away, can exist here and now as it happened for the heroes of *Maurice* and Forster himself in his uneasy and unconventional relationship with Bob Buckingham.

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**“The love that passes understanding has come to me”:  
Remarks on Staging *Billy Budd***

(1)

In Allan Hollinghurst’s novel *The Swimming Pool Library* (1988, where the plot takes place a couple of years earlier, in 1983) William Beckwith – the protagonist and narrator – and his friend James Brook visit Covent Garden Opera run by William’s grandfather, where they watch the performance of *Billy Budd*: “It’s a funny old production, but there’s something quite touching about that” (Hollinghurst 1998: 120). This outstanding production has scarcely altered since its opening in 1951 (the other, already canonical two-act version, was performed thirteen years later, in 1964). Will remarks:

It was *Billy Budd*, an opera I recalled as a gauche, almost amateur affair, and I had not in the least expected to enjoy it; and yet, when captain Vere’s monologue ended and the scene on board the *Indomitable* opened up, with the men holy-stoning the deck and singing their oppressed, surging chorus, I was covered in goose-flesh. When Bill, press-ganged from his old ship, sang his farewell to his former life and comrades – ‘Farewell, old *Rights o’ Man*, farewell’ – the tears streamed down my face. The young baritone, singing with the greatest beauty and freshness, brought an ex-

traordinary quality of resisted pathos to Billy; in the stammering music physiognomy, handsome and forthright and yet with a curious fleshy debility about the mouth, made me believe it as his own tragedy (Hollinghurst 1998: 119).

Unquestionably, the way the narrator refers to the opera resonates with passages from Forster's *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, as well as the way its characters watch and experience *Lucia di Lammermoore*: the opera watching becomes (merely?) an excuse for describing social affairs (cf. Fordoński 2010: 456-461). The scene related by Hollinghurst along with following conversations becomes crucial for the reader for other reasons. First and foremost, *Billy Budd* is employed in the novel as a symbol of gay culture, an opera motivated by unequivocal homosocial and homoerotic aspects, on which the present author will elaborate below.

It must be observed that Peter Pears, Britten's partner and the first performer of tenor parts in the latter's works, including that of Captain Vere, was sitting in the audience unnoticed by spectators. Secondly, the main character's grandfather, who witnessed the opera's opening, informs about Forster's peculiar reaction to Britten's music and the novelist's statement expressed during a long conversation at the opening-night reception. Importantly, the very statement cannot be conceived as merely fictional, as it is based on the facts recorded in documents, namely in Forster's letters as well as a radio broadcast he participated in:

He seemed satisfied with it, but there was something distinctly contrary about him. I was quite surprised when he openly criticized some of music. Claggart's



monologue in particular he thought was wrong. He wanted it to be much more . . . open, and sexy, as Willy puts it. I think *soggy* was the word he used to describe Britten's music for it (Hollinhurst 1998: 121).

The word "soggy" was used by Forster indeed. In a letter to Britten – before the premiere – he complained about the music in Claggart's monologue:

Returning to it, I want **passion** – love constricted, perverted, poisoned, but nevertheless **flowing** down its agonising channel; a sexual discharge gone evil. Not soggy depression or growling remorse (qt. after Frantzen 2007: 63).

(2)

For the sake of order some facts and interpretative issues related to Britten's *Billy Budd* need to be reminded. The libretto was based on Herman Melville's short story *Billy Budd, Sailor (An Inside Narrative)*, which was selected for stage adaptation by Forster himself (Law 1985: 297). On account of his lack of experience in stage production did the latter ask for assistance Eric Crozier, the author of the libretto to Britten's *Albert Herring* and *The Little Sweep*. The libretto was being composed in the late forties, ordered by the Arts Council of Great Britain for the Festival of Britain planned for 1951. The premiere of the four-act opera took place on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 1951, to become later transformed by the composer and presented in two-act version on the 9<sup>th</sup> of January 1964.

The action of the opera takes place in the summer of 1797 on the board of HMS *Indomitable* as well

as in its Captain's Edward Fairfax Vere's consciousness, who - already quite aged - recounts some events that he either witnessed or attended. Afterwards, there come press-ganged navy conscripts, among whom Billy Budd the "able seaman" - the only one who appreciates the new circumstances. He gladly abandons the merchant ship, where he hitherto has served. No room for summarizing the plot at this point; yet it needs to be noted that Master-at-Arms John Claggart groundlessly accuses Budd of mutiny, so that he - struck by Billy - dies, and Captain Vere has no other choice - as typical of a martial law trial - but to sentence the seaman to death by hanging.

Soon after the opening, Britten's opera was regarded by Andrew Porter as unrealistic, poetic, smacking of fairy tale. The critic also noticed that the librettists rendered - secondary in Melville's account - Vere-Budd relation the focal point of the work, considerably aggrandizing the Captain's role and making him both the main character and narrator. By the same token, Claggart has been reduced "to those of actors who bring about Vere's tragedy". Furthermore, the fact that the threat of mutiny on board was real was also disregarded and unconvincingly rendered (Porter 1952: 111-113). Accordingly, Vere's role differs in the story and opera: he does not die of wounds straight after Budd's death, but survives to expire at an old age; becomes the narrator; remains silent during the trial. Vere's salvation by Budd as well as transcending sexuality are also novelty (Law 1985: 297, 300; Hindley 1994: 106-107). Interestingly enough, Forster's statements proved he never fully realized such a manifest overdoing of Vere's role, and that he was convinced

that the eponymous hero was still to remain the protagonist, which strikes as perplexing, since this fact had been noticed no later than after the first staging.

Billy Budd, Melville's protagonist, lives in a world wherein officers expected of their subordinates more than only due salutes. He is described as an embodiment of innocence, irrespective of physical virginity. Claggart, however, is an epitome of evil; he evokes the frustration of desire (Austen 1974: 353, 355). Moreover, the antiwar, pacifist dimension of the work is underscored, which classifies it thus as – like Melville's text – an ethical treatise. Finally, attention needs to be paid to miscellaneous allegorical interpretations of *Billy Budd* (Berthoff 1960: 337).

(3)

Nevertheless, the most crucial facet here is the interrelation between the texts of Melville's short story, the opera libretto as well as its staging, which will be represented here by two stage productions of *Billy Budd* released on DVD, making a summary of the proposed interpretative traditions. The first of them is a studio production of BBC, recorded in September 1966 and staged for the first time on the 11<sup>th</sup> of December 1966. It was directed by Basil Coleman, who prepared the premieres for both versions. In the recording Captain Vere's part is sung by Peter Pears, Billy's – Peter Glossop, John Claggart's – Michael Langdon, Charles Mackerras conducts (Ambrosian Opera Chorus, London Symphony Orchestra) (DVD release date: 2008). The other production was recorded in 1988, directed by Tim Albery, David Atherton conducts (English National Opera Cho-

rus, English National Opera Orchestra). The main performers are Philips Langridge (Vere), Thomas Allen (Billy), and Richard van Allan (Claggart) (DVD release date: 2004).

Coleman's production emerged in collaboration with Britten himself and best summarizes the staging tradition of Covent Garden, creatively developing the earlier experiences. Britten himself valued this production immensely. It was also widely said that *Billy Budd* was very much a film opera, working better as a film than performed on stage (cf. Graham 1979: 53). It is a hyperrealist and historical production. The conditions of warships from the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (based on Nelson's HMS Victory) were faithfully rendered in terms of stage design, costumes, drills, and procedures. The spectator gains an impression of full illusion, in the vein of historical film genre, which is related to the accepted notion of camera technique:

His [Coleman's] camera technique is used not only to progress the narrative but also to develop characterisation in way quite impossible in the theater. For example, he emphasizes many of the opera's key events by use of abrupt cutting from one camera to another, and Claggart is often shown from a low-angle shot that serves to emphasise his authority and threatening demeanour on board the ship. Through his camerawork, Coleman also reveals layers of the complex triangular relationship between Budd, Vere and Claggart which lies at the work's core. At the moment of Billy's hanging, for example, we see Vere (for the only time) also shot from below (Reed 2008: 8).

In addition, a peculiar sense of antitheatricity of this opera film is of much interest here (as this is possibly the best classification of the work), which cannot come to fruition only through the monologues – full of stage gestures characteristic of opera singers (Vere, Claggart) – retarding the dynamics of the plot.

Evidently, it is a performance that might have been seen by the characters of *The Swimming Pool Library*. A record of conversation between Basil Coleman and John Piper testifies to an engagement in the formation of the stage production (1951: 13-14 and 21-25). An aspiration towards realism, even to historicism, can be inferred from the conversation, that is the reconstruction of the minute bits of the fictional world depicted according to the characteristics of the period. The crew members' outfits serving various purposes ought to be as authentic as possible. In fact, as it was in the case of the seamen: "[t]here was no official Naval uniform for the men until 1830s" (Coleman 1979: 35), yet gunners already wore blue uniforms in line with iconographic productions of the period. The number of seamen in different parts of the ship must be compatible with the contemporary reality, Britten's expectations and vocal potential of a particular ensemble.

For the producers the realism of the battle scene was particularly vital; they were pondering upon different ways of presenting the mist, crucial for the symbolism of the work (Vere remarks that it was blown straight after Claggart had been killed). In the same way, in Coleman's view the very fact that the events take place in Vere's consciousness – whose story constitutes a compositional framework – was of high importance

(namely old Vere in the prologue and epilogue, who returns to the events from 1797). It must be admitted that years later Coleman stated that what he had meant after all was to avoid excessive realism, abandoned on account of the subject of the opera (1979: 35). The subject was formulated as a universal issue: that is good-evil dichotomy, as well as the problem of our strength or weakness in the face of a dilemma.

In the invoked interview Coleman dedicated much room to the scene of Claggart's first appearance, crucial for the commencement of the opera tragedy:

For me one of the most arresting moments is the arrival of Claggart. I feel he should tower above the whole scene, as if he had been pacing the Main Deck above. I would like him to be at the top of the companion-way or stairs, with Squeak lying at the foot of them where Billy has thrown him. Also, I want to be able to isolate Claggart from the rest of the scene for his Monologue and scene with the Novice that follows. Can you make this companion-way prominent enough for Claggart to be able to play below and around it - a sort of den where he can entice the Novice, and where the Novice in turn can bring Billy? But from the arrival of Claggart the tragedy really begins. It must be an arresting moment (Coleman -- Piper 1951: 24).

To remind, certain words used in the scene will be questioned further - that is the Claggart's assessment of the mustered Billy: "A find in a thousand, your honour. A beauty. A jewel. The pearl of great price" (Britten 1979: 186).

The discussed method of staging is corroborated by Piper in his account for *Designed for Britten* (Piper

1979: 6), where he informs about the necessity of reconstructing historical realities in a most realistic manner. The other staging pertinent to this scrutiny is fundamental mainly on account of Thomas Allen's participation, who played Billy in several operas, developing thus a tradition of the character's interpretation. Hence, the spectator is aware of the theatricality of the stage production, which is underscored by the conventionality and symbolism of many realities and situations. For instance, in the prologue (Vere: "I am an old man who has experienced much", Britten 1979: 183) books arranged on proscenium can be spotted – as distinctive items of Captain Vere's, who manages to draw parallels between Greek and Roman history and events taking place in his times – which are soon to serve as tools for washing the board.

Furthermore, the composition framework, which is determined by the old Captain's appearance in the prologue and epilogue (attired in a dustcoat and a suit most certainly from the 1950s or 1960s), relating events taking place in the summer of 1797, is being extended due to the fact that Vere appears on proscenium also at the beginning of act II, as well as scene 3 of act III (after Budd being sentenced to death) and hence becomes not only the narrator, but also the witness of the course of events: he lurches, sits in the chair, and in the interlude remains alone on the empty stage; he is also present after Claggart's death: the old Captain's image, cheerfully waving from Billy's mast as well as deceased Master-at-Arms overlap in the backdrop of the interlude.

Finally, having heard Budd's remark uttered straight after the pronouncement of the sentence: "Starry

Vere, God bless you!" (Britten 1979: 205), Vere leaps out of the chair, covers the ears; becomes challenged by a bunch of dangerous seamen, as well as by Dansker's gaze. Since the sentence is announced, a young Captain of 1797 has gone and become replaced by a narrator, which indubitably is to underscore a subjective nature of the recounted occurrences by himself.

Moreover, a huge, artificial, unrealistic, muster book carried on the boys' backs attracts much attention, as it allegorizes violence and humiliation dominant on board. The production accurately utilizes the convention of singing to the audience from the front stage. Also the prologue and epilogue have been incorporated in proscenium, without arranging a space for the interior of Vere's house.

(4)

The researchers of Britten's opera have described in detail the connections between Forster and Crozier's libretto and Melville's short story, with the latter being the subject of their adaptation. It can be inferred, however, that the spectator may consider Melville's text as a point of reference, a context for what has been seen in the performance, especially when it comes to constructing the characters and their mutual interrelations. The context is all the more essential, since stage directions do not hold much information concerning not only the stage movement, but also the characters' age and appearance. The reference to memory of the novella enables one to complete the indefinite spots left over by the opera; to substantiate their purpose, as well



as their past, which has an enormous influence on the sequence of the events in the opera.

It is also interesting to inquire about the adequacy of the characters' representation – shaped by the theatre tradition – with respect to Melville's imagination, as well as to judge whether and to what extent the additional knowledge can either change or intensify the interpretation of both the opera and its production. Forster was unquestionably aware of all this, hence the characters' peculiar transparency which emerges from the writer's libretto (to say it again: it is devoid of any information pertaining to the protagonists' age or appearance) was bound up with the allusive language of the work, which could not manifest the characters' sexuality directly (homosexual acts were illegal and penalized in England well until 1969, and the censorship would not permit homoerotic aspects in arts). As it has already been mentioned, *Billy Budd* has become one of the icons of gay culture just because of its emotional triangle between the characters: Billy, Vere and Claggart. Nevertheless – intriguingly – both productions appear to deliberately question the details found in the short story.

This is clearly discernible in the formation of Master-at-Arms John Claggart's persona. Melville informs his readers about the protagonist's concealed mystery (as Vere has it: "it is 'a mystery of iniquity,' a matter for psychologic theologians to discuss", Melville 1998: 359), vague circumstances, as a result of which a high-born man has become an ordinary seaman, compelled to resume his biography from scratch.

The narrator's description of the character follows:

Claggart was a man about five and thirty, somewhat spare and tall, yet of no ill figure upon the whole. His hand was too small and shapely to have been accustomed to hard toil. The face was a notable one; the features all except the chin cleanly cut as those on a Greek medallion; yet the chin, beardless as Tecumseh's, had something of strange protuberant heaviness in its make that recalled the prints of the Rev. Dr. Titus Oates, the historic deponent with the clerical drawl in the time of Charles II and the fraud of the alleged Popish Plot. It served Claggart in his office that his eye could cast a tutoring glance. His brow was of the sort phrenologically associated with more than average intellect; silken jet curls partly clustering over it, making a foil to the pallor below, a pallor tinged with a faint shade of amber akin to the hue of time-tinted marbles of old (Melville 1998: 313).

Melville's text hints at some sexual relations which push Claggart out of the margin of the society, coercing him to reconstruct his life anew, which renders the character a cultural Other, thus partially justifying his conduct. He is depicted as a thirty-five year-old, tall, slender, high-minded man in his prime, whose physique is indicative of a mental flaw and ominous past. It has been indicated that Claggart's portrayal resembles the description of emperor Trajan's bust, provided by Melville in his diary in 1857: "a look of sickly evil - intellect without manliness and sadness without goodness" (Henderson 1964: 31). The very controversial ancient parallel does not appear as unsubstantiated, seeing as Trajan was deemed by historians an excellent emperor (Edward Gibbon popularized the notion of the Five Good Emperors, of which Trajan was the second). Hence Claggart's appearance would undeniably contradict a common

opinion, affirmed by a Polish monographer of Britten, among others, that he is an embodiment of evil – “physically and morally repulsive” (Tuchowski 1994: 155).

In both productions Claggart is much older, roughly fifty or sixty-year-old. He also falls short of the physical features presented in the invoked passage. Michael Langdon is a portly man with large hands and chubby face, and the way camera is positioned renders every grimace of his plebeian face repulsive to the spectator. Alternatively, in Albery’s staging Richard van Allan is tall, grey-haired, dressed in black, austere, demonic yet aristocratic, almost statuesque, distancing himself from the world he has been forced into, and from Captain Vere. He becomes the main and dominating hero of the performance and his monologue in scene 3 act I (“O beauty, o handsomeness, goodness!”, Britten 1979: 191) – constituting a parallel of the prologue – is arguably the most poignant scene of the opera, wherein the ensuing passage absent in the original text is articulated:

With hate and envy I’m stronger than love. . . .  
I, John Claggart, Master-at-Arms upon the *Indomitable*, have you in my power, and I will destroy you  
(Britten 1979: 191).

Correspondingly, Billy has very little in common with the young man described by Melville in terms of physical appearance:

He was young; and despite his all but fully developed frame, in aspect looked even younger than he really was, owing to a lingering adolescent expression in the as yet smooth face, all but feminine

in purity of natural complexion, but where, thanks to his seagoing, the lily was quite suppressed and the rose had some ado visibly to flush through the tan (Melville 1998: 299).

Budd – as stated by the Captain – is

such a fine specimen of the *genus homo*, who in the nude might have posed for a statue of young Adam before the Fall (Melville 1998: 345).

Meanwhile, as Patricia Howard spitefully commented on Glossop, he is “more a ‘St Bernard’s dog’ than a ‘Celtic Apollo!’” (1968: 1125). Both Glossop (born in 1928) and Allen (1944) are around forty in the productions under consideration. It has been affirmed in studies devoted to Britten’s opera that that the librettists came to a decision to considerably increase the protagonist’s age, to make it possible, in interpretative terms, to rule out the implied father-son bond and substitute it by a – more or less – peer relation (however, in my opinion, this analysis is not based on the libretto, but rather on the stage productions). Broadly speaking, this is to imply that the productions are to shift the focus from homoerotic to homosocial relations, and, indisputably, Forster’s statement quoted in Hollinghurst’s novel may allude to this argument.

One of the most interesting communication links between the characters in Tim Albery’s staging is the notion of glance. Since the conscription scene, Claggart has been avoiding Billy’s glance. In Melville’s version, on the other hand,

that glance would follow the cheerful sea-Hyperion with a settled meditative and melancholy expression, his eyes strangely suffused with incipient feverish tears. Then would Claggart look like the man of sorrows. Yes, and sometimes the melancholy expression would have in it a touch of soft yearning, as if Claggart could even have loved Billy but for fate and ban (Melville 1998: 338).

In Coleman's staging the issue of glance was scarcely brought into play. From the standpoint of this study a scene in which the intriguing statement is to be expressed is of particular substance, that is: "Handsomely done, my lad. And handsome is as handsome did it, too" (Britten 1979: 191). Here comes Squeek – an instigator working for Claggart – who gets caught red handed when fumbling through Budd's belongings. Squeek rushes to attack Billy just to become knocked down to the deck himself. Upon Claggart's request Dansker explains the incident. Having uttered the quoted sentence, Claggart gives them the command to be dismissed. However, as included in the stage directions: "Claggart turns away. A Boy stumbles against him. He lashes savagely at him with his rattan. [Boy] crying out" (Britten 1979: 191). The director develops the scene: Billy Budd hugs the lurching boy, Claggart's and Billy's glances meet – which is in stark contrast to the smile which accompanies the above quoted words and which is to be mentioned by the seaman during the conversation with Dansker, warning the latter against Master-at-Arms' bad intentions (cf. Britten 1979: 192-193); since their glance cross they have been deliberately avoidind each other's gaze and tended to absently look at the air.

Furthermore, in the scene when Claggart accuses Budd, the former is positioned behind Vere. Hence the characters cannot examine their reactions (it remains unclear whether this step was taken on purpose, or if the point was to allow the audience to see both faces simultaneously). It is not until Vere talks about false witness that their gazes meet. Vere has to bear up Budd's downcast look, when - against the latter's will - he refuses to inform the court about the possible reasons why Claggart has groundlessly accused the seaman. Finally, the Captain is forced to look at Bill in the scene of pronouncement of the sentence by First Lieutenant - as he stands next to him, which is not proposed by stage directions.

In Albery's staging, the glance plays an important role in building up dramatic tensions and emotions. Billy is the only one of the three conscripts who plucks up the courage to look into Claggart's eyes - since he knows that, as an "able seaman", he is at home. Master-at-Arms avoids his gaze; leaves, as if recollecting something; he reacts bizarrely to the word "foundling", as if to suggest he has a knowledge of the young man's past. Claggart's gaze gives away his awkwardness and is more and more persistently directed at the deck.

In this scene Billy removes a red scarf from his neck (which has been part and parcel of his outfit from the very beginning, that is since the opening of stage design) - is this gesture to symbolize his - also sexual - submissiveness? Further on, during his conversation with officers about Billy Budd (act I scene 2: "just youthful spirits. . . . No danger, gentlemen", Britten 1979: 189), Vere's gaze is evidently pensive, and his interlocutors look at each other surprised, even dismayed, as if sus-

pecting something, as if this unforeseen seaman's praise concealed something "inappropriate" (i.e. desire).

(5)

Coming back to the previously proposed thesis, the only peculiar game between what is said and what is suggested in Melville's story as well as Forster and Crozier's libretto allow the audience of both productions mentioned to unravel "the other bottom" of the opera plot above all, to pin down its interpretative meaning. Without these supplementary contexts, especially those related to Claggart's past, *Billy Budd* must astonish the audience by the protagonists' lack of a coherent code of behaviour - probably even more substantial in Melville's unfinished novella - typical of all three works.

The spectator is thus extraordinarily bemused when hearing Billy's groundless enthusiasm addressed to Vere and his assurances that he would be prepared to die for him ("I'd have died for you . . ."), as well as by the fact that he would like to be near him - as in the statement directly preceding the accusation and confrontation with Claggart. Billy wishes to be the "Captain of the mizzen" or "Vere's coxswain" just to be near him: "To be near you. I'd serve you well, indeed I would. You'd be safe with me" (Britten 1979: 201). In the first four-act version of the opera, the introduction of the Captain served as an excuse to render Budd his ardent follower, even - as he reassured - he would be ready to sacrifice his life for him. In the final two-act version, his zealous veneration for a person whom he knows only by hearsay is totally

unjustified. It remains unclear whether Forster and Britten hint at the possibility of erotic fascination.

Without considering the fact that Billy and Claggart could have met before (which has been proposed in some interpretations of the novella), as well as acknowledging that Claggart's mystery was associated with an (homo)erotic relation, finally without admitting that Melville's descriptions of both characters imply that they are competitive with each other in terms of sexual attractiveness - there is no explanation for the reciprocal enmity between Master-at-Arms and his subordinate. Would it be only a "disinterested" hatred, associated with his sociopathy and the conviction that Claggart is stronger than love?

With hate and envy I am stronger than love.  
... you are surly in my power tonight. Nothing can  
defend you. Nothing! ... If love still lives and grows  
strong where I cannot enter, what hope is there  
in my own dark world for me? (Britten 1979: 191).

Captain Vere finally utters the word "love" (Epilogue: "and the love that passes understanding has come to me", Britten 1979: 205), yet for reasons unknown resolves not to save Billy, against the others' expectations. The librettists have skipped a vague element, included in the story, concerning the Captain's supervision of the trial aiming at sentencing Billy to death, as well as the resolution not to let the trial be postponed until they have reached the shore.

In the opera Vere merely relates what he has seen, then becomes silent and does not add anything to this indifferent account - against Billy's hope. To my mind the interpretation linking the hero's death



to the concept of salvation or sacrifice is not, with respect to the opera, convincingly justified. In fact, Billy, awaiting his death, recalls that the chaplain has told him about Christ's crucifixion ("the good boy hung and gone to glory, hung for the likes of me", Britten 1979: 204), and Vere exclaims: "The angel of God has struck and the angel must hang - through me" (Britten 1979: 204, in Melville's version this quote is used once, in Forster and Crozier's twice), however the parallel Jesus-Billy is by no means obvious since Budd himself is not a Christian himself (as it seems, it might have been the first time he heard of Christ) (cf. Fuller 2006, *passim*). According to Hindley, the quoted fragment touching upon love conveys an evidently unreligious meaning:

He is concerned instead with the earthly and particular experience of love between Billy and Vere. It is a very human love which is 'Billy's solution' (Hindley 1989: 372).

Moreover, Vere is a man attached more to his pagan wisdom than Christianity:

Plutarch - the Greek and the Romans - their troubles and ours are the same. May their virtues be ours, and their courage! O God, grant me light to guide us, to guide us all (Britten 1979: 188).

Undoubtedly, Melville's masterpiece could be read as a manifest of stoicism, especially taking Budd's final monologue into account, which illustrates his assertion that all that has happened is indeed meant to happen - however, it does not refer to providence, but fate: "But I had to strike down that Jemmy Legs - it's fate.

And Captain Vere has had to strike me down - Fate" (Britten 1979: 204). The motif of irrational destiny is represented by mode F-minor in the score (cf. Hindley 1994: 103ff.).

Vere's dilemma, emphasized intermittently before and after Billy's sentence, the assumption: "My heart's broken, my life's broken" (Britten 1979: 202) point to an evident emotional, erotic fascination with the beautiful seaman, returning - and unequivocally expressed - in the epilogue:

For I could have saved him. He knew it, even his shipmates knew it, though earthly laws silenced them. O what have I done? But he has saved me, and blessed me, and the love that passes understanding has come to me (Britten 1979: 205).

It is noteworthy to mention that the epilogue seems to be woven by the earlier words articulated by Claggart and Budd, as well as Vere in the prologue (Law 1985: 308).

(6)

The two productions of *Billy Budd* go in two different directions in terms of stage design (oppositions: realism, historicism and symbolism; film as opposed to theatre features), especially when it comes to the character profile. Albery's staging is manifestly dominated by Richard van Allan's outstanding cast and vocal performance, hence renders Claggart the main protagonist, with a runner-up being Vere, and the third the eponymous hero. Furthermore, due to Peter Pears' cast - and, admittedly, his legend - Vere makes the best lead character

in the first production. Although outstanding in terms of vocals, Glossop is not highly acclaimed as an actor, hence his cast of Billy is barely convincing.

It can be also assumed that the differences between the two stage productions in question are premeditated. They undoubtedly have to do with a different technique of scene composition. Let us, for instance, scrutinize a scene that precedes Claggart's killing by Billy. Here the Captain calls for Budd in order to confront Master-at-Arms. Unaware of what is to come, Billy is convinced he has been called to be informed of his much expected promotion which would enable him to become close with Vere. Since Claggart's entry the eye contact between the accused and accuser has started. Vere's order to stand at the indicated places brings them even nearer. It is Claggart, as if with the intention to dominate Budd, that approaches Budd, draws dangerously near, so near in fact that only one punch suffices to knock him down.

Notably, the Captain, who encourages Budd to defend himself and overcome his stuttering fit, holds his hand on the latter's shoulder: he might not push him towards Claggart, yet does not stop him either. On the other hand, Albery arranges the scene in another way. Two identical (musical and dramatic) entries of Master-at-Arms attract attention: before the denunciation and before confrontation. Standing behind Vere, no sooner does Claggart meet the Captain's glance than the word "mutiny" - feared by all - is uttered. Billy and Claggart will be kept at a considerable distance by the Captain, which is shortened by Budd, as during Claggart's announcement of accusations he is gradually approaching Claggart, cowered and vulnerable.

(7)

Both stage productions under debate testify to certain ways the 20<sup>th</sup> century opera theatre dealt with homoeroticism implied by the work. It needs to be mentioned that the stage production of *Billy Budd* as well as its studio production by Coleman emerged in the period wherein homosexual acts were penalized by the British law, which resulted in understatements, about which Forster complains in Hollighurst's novel. Melville's characters seemed to constitute an excellent excuse for the replacement or suppression of sexual relations by the introduction of the issues of domination and submission, underscored chiefly by the second production. Forster (he is after all the main protagonist of his libretto) adopted a writing technique in *Billy Budd* akin to that his readers will remember from *Maurice*, namely the strategy of understatement, silence, nicknaming; to put it metaphorically: the resolution to leave "sensitive" textual spots untranslated from Greek into English.

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*Billy Budd* is by no means the opera directors' first choice. In 2009/2010 it was staged only in Bilbao, Frankfurt, and Paris. Hence the new production in Glyndebourne, directed by Michael Grandage, with Mark Elder as the conductor, whose opening took place on the 20<sup>th</sup> of May 2010, is very much welcome. New productions in Amsterdam and Düsseldorf are planned for 2010, and the resumption in Paris. The Glyndebourne production testifies to the magnitude of the productions being discussed in the paper. Herein Billy (Jacques Imbrailo, Thomas Allen's student) is no longer a young man

(which is at odds with his description of “boy”, used in the libretto after all), and Phillip Ens – starring as Claggart – was made older by at least ten years in order to deepen the age discrepancy known from the previous productions.

*Translated by Paweł Wojtas*

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**Teaching E. M. Forster in 2010:  
Essayistic Reflections**

**Preface**

At first glance, occupying oneself with the question of why to study and why to teach literature seems to ill befit younger scholars and teachers of literature. It seems to be the realm of the more experienced decision makers in the educational system. However, in my opinion, it should be the first question to be asked once the teachers involved are not merely forced to teach given subjects without any right to share in decisions about the curriculum, the methods and the standards. How else can topics that are not objectivizable be taught? In physics, for example, a calculus done using the Maxwell's equations is either right or wrong. The success of the teaching can be measured in the ability of the students to replicate the right solutions of the formulae. There is also a very practical test of the application of Maxwell's equation which is based on nature as such: Either there is, for example, an electric current that makes a filament glow, or it stays dark in the room.

However, there is not such an easy answer to the question of how to understand a literary text

and how to deal with it – at least if one wants to take up a democratic approach. The relations to the individual lives are much more manifold, depending on the own experience, on class, ethnicity, nationality and time. The light bulb – to stick with the chosen example – emits electro-magnetic radiation, no matter who looks at it and no matter who teaches the basics of electrodynamics and how. The effects of the ways we read and analyse literary texts are much less predictable; they are infinitely more subjective. Equally subjective are the reasons, texts, and methods which are chosen in the literary classroom. As these reasons precede and influence the teaching, it befits every teacher of literature – who has the freedom of choice – to ponder about them. This includes the younger scholars. I have taken the liberty of sharing my thoughts on this topic in a rather essayistic form.

## **Introduction**

E. M. Forster is not topical. He is old-fashioned, a relict from bygone days before the heydays of Modernism and before the failure of the great project of Modernity in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is what many people would agree on. However, taking a fresh glance at his life and oeuvre, it becomes obvious that this stance is incorrect. Forster was an in-between figure, a transitional author writing in and about his transitional time, bridging the gap between the most diverse cultures and influences, contemplating on how all these differing approaches to life could possibly be combined to achieve what he believed to be a humane future of humankind.

We are living in equally transitional times; the internet revolution and other globalising forces have come upon us; we have to renegotiate the terms and conditions of our coexistence. This is why an occupation with this – again – most topical author and his writings can be beneficial to us today.

In my essay, I would like to focus on the variety of problems we have to contemplate upon and address in our teaching today, and in how far Forster can be a vehicle for this purpose in the literature classrooms at universities in 2010. Some of the topics that have to be addressed and re-addressed are questions of gender and sexual orientation roles, questions of ethnicity and nationality and the educational canon with the values that shall be conveyed through it.

### **Challenges for University Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

In her 2003 monograph *Teaching Literature*, Elaine Showalter notices that

[i]n the past 40 years, a whole new vocabulary of pedagogy has developed, with distinctions between compulsory and post-compulsory education, young and adult learners, Bloom's taxonomy of learning objectives, Kolb's cycle of learning modes, and Dale's learning cones (2003: vii).

This kind of pedagogy or didactics is not what I would like to meditate upon in this essay. I am more interested in the underlying principles. Why do we teach literature? What is its aim? What is the underlying ideal?

Some people argue that the recent idea of the European Bologna process was initiated foremost by eco-

nomic forces.<sup>16</sup> These forces also focus on a faster acquisition of university degrees. Ball points out that central elements of such educational reforms are common around the globe (cf. 1998: 122). According to the activists in the students' protests of 2009, the change from the Magister to the Bachelor and Master system in Germany impedes interested students not only in the participation in students' self governance, but it also forces them to follow courses of study which are organised more along school lines, often not providing much time for own projects, like having literary circles, discussion groups or working on a voluntary basis. These are, however, the places where social interactions shape the point of view towards society, the future, capitalism and towards the own purpose of life. As educational agents, new courses of study, in my opinion, have to reflect the reduction of students' self-organised formative activities and the resulting increase in responsibility towards the students and towards society. The humanities and the social sciences are the fields that deal directly with the most important subject: the human - medicine and biology, admittedly, do so too, but from another perspective. We are responsible

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<sup>16</sup> The most critical comments about the process originate from the left wing of the political spectrum. The Bologna process is seen as being intertwined with the Lisbon Strategy of making Europe "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world" ("Lisbon European Council 23 and 24 March Presidency Conclusion"). Additionally, it is observed that the opening of the education sector for privatisation and trade, as outlined in WTO's General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), has helped to rethink education along the lines of market economy (cf. Stern 2010 or Hirsch 2008).

for discussing values, society and the arts, which are an expression of the first.

How is it possible to define the social goals of university education? Elaine Showalter puts it this way:

If we can't agree on a definition of literature, can we agree on the goals of teaching literary texts? Probably not (2003: 22),

yet the point of literary education in the past was to make people better (cf. Showalter 2003: 22). As we know, the idea of creating better people by offering them education, the project of Enlightenment Modernity, failed in major parts – one could discuss when and how precisely; for many, surely with the Second World War and the Shoah. While at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most often

teaching was preaching, literature became quickly the province of dilettantes and gentlemanly aesthetes in the 1930s who opposed the vulgarity of the industrial urban mass society (cf. Showalter 2003: 22).

Terry Eagleton puts it this way:

in the early 1920s it was desperately unclear why English was worth studying at all; by the early 1930s it had become a question of why it was worth wasting your time on anything else (1996: 27).

In the 1960s and 70s, the field was often the place for political discussion and reform. Today, we are confronted with other challenges. Showalter writes that

[i]n dark times, moments of personal or collective anguish, literature professors have to think about the abstractions of professional ethics in a much more urgent and existential way. At these moments, the clichés of our field suddenly take on startling life, and the platitudes of the humanities become credos that confront us with real choices and decisions on how to act (2003: 131).

One of the darker hours was surely the time of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Showalter recounts the classroom experiences of a graduate student teaching a course at Columbia:

On the day of the attacks, we were supposed to finish Homer's *Iliad*. A mere 48 hours later, our oldest epic – a story of humans facing death and replacing anger with compassion – resonated with a profundity that I had never experienced in the classroom (2003: 138).<sup>17</sup>

This extreme example shall serve to illustrate the importance of literary education at universities. However, it is seldom terrorism or acute catastrophe we are confronted with. It is rather processes like globalisation that demand a reaction from literary scholars. As Gogh as well as Edwards and Usher point out, the impact of globalisation on the curriculum and on pedagogy is mainly two-fold (cf. Edwards 2008: 53). First, the aim is

to enable learners to engage as global citizens or consumers – covering, for example, issues such as global

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<sup>17</sup> Original source: Crosby 2001.

values, social justice, sustainable development and environmental education (Edwards 2008: 53).<sup>18</sup>

Second, there is the examination of the impact of information and communication technologies as well as of space-time compression (cf. Edwards 2008 and Mason 1998). The demand of such objectives in university education is amplified by the fact that two levels of reflection are to be taught as students on teacher courses shall be enabled to teach these issues later on to their own classes at school. The resulting challenges stem not only from globalisation as an interaction between citizens of different nation states but also, as Edwards suggests, from within these states, given their multiculturalism (cf. 2008: 69). He concludes, however, that

if the curriculum is taken to be a selection from the dominant culture and if the pedagogy is one of transmission, it could be construed as an attempt to impose a certain order, engendering dislocations of its own (2008: 72).

This cannot be the aim. Knowledge should rather be socially situated and constructed; learning should be a personal act, the curricula delimited by the students and their backgrounds. What the teacher can offer

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<sup>18</sup> Rowan describes the effects of globalisation on identity very aptly as follows: "Generally speaking, globalisation is not about military battles fought over borders . . . but rather it is about a colonisation of signs, symbols, language and culture. Eventually it becomes a matter of identity, as people begin to identify themselves in ways which transcend their traditional cultural borders and engage with global entities" (1997: 3).

is material which, on the one hand, shows strategies of coping with problems similar to the current issues, and, on the other hand, provides objects to come up against, objects that productively create friction while dealing with them. Forster and his texts offer both. Two examples shall suffice.

### **1<sup>st</sup> Example: Gender and Sexual Orientation Roles**

Forster's writings have been said to contain implausible depictions of romantic love between women and men, for example in his Italian novels, but is this true and if so, why? This is a topic that can be dealt with controversially and productively in literature classrooms. Today, the approaches to love between heterosexual people are surely more diverse than the common consent in the decades before the current standard of individualism (i.e. after, for example, the sexual revolution) would suggest. Hence, the views on the depicted relationships in fiction might differ as well, which opens Forster's writings to new debates.

Moreover, the rising acceptance and cultural integration of homosexuality in the Western world clashes with an archaic worldview of recently re-religionised or traditionally homophobic parts of the world<sup>19</sup> that are in closer contact with each other due to new means of communication and political involvements.

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<sup>19</sup> This is, of course, an oversimplification. With "traditionally homophobic" I mean regions in which, in contrast to the Western world, the universality of human rights and the outcome of the human rights movements are, for diverse reasons, in contradiction with the established cultural practice in terms of the status of homosexuality within the society.



There seem to be many fields in which the human rights and findings of science that used to be taken for granted are questioned again.<sup>20</sup> Forster with his covert homosexual undertone, his overt portrayal of homosexuality in *Maurice* and the slightly exaggerated meditations about it, e.g. in "Little Imber", can be a basis for discussions of the subject.

Issues that have to be addressed in present day university classrooms are the history and the status of gender and sexual orientation, such as stereotypes, legislation and power relationships, e.g. the concept of heteronormativity. Talking about Forster's oeuvre, two approaches to the texts seem to be fruitful. A biographical approach that centres around the author's sexuality, resulting in conjectures about his stopping publishing prose, seems to be rather old-fashioned. Using intrinsic approaches, one can help students to connect to the topic without the necessity of them being interested in the author.

First, there is the question of the plausibility and credibility of heterosexual encounters, love and romance in his novels that has been discussed frequently and can be reviewed with students. Here, novel points of view towards roles in flirting or in relation-

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<sup>20</sup> An example might be the seemingly growing influence of evangelical fundamentalists in various parts of the globe. The idea of, again, understanding homosexuality, which had been deleted from the World Health Organization's ICD list of illnesses in 1990, as a disease that ought to be cured is not only the basis of re-education seminars at fundamentalist mass events like the German Christival (cf. Deutscher Bundestag 2008) but even plays a role in reforms in state legislation, e.g. most recently in Uganda (cf. Pan Africa International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association 2009).

ships might emerge. Second, “weird” homosexual encounters can be another topic. The endings of some of Forster’s homoerotic pieces of prose are especially interesting, be it the violent murder in “The Life to Come” (an escape to the afterlife), the fantastic plot of “The Classical Annex” (a narrative escape to classical mythology), the bloody ending of “The Other Boat” (no escape at all, an end in death – the image of gays being punished for their sexual identity), the implausible and dissatisfying ending of *Maurice* (an escape to pastoral nature) or the grotesque deconstruction of nature and heteronormative society in the whimsical dystopian fiction “Little Imber” (an escape to implausibility and/or an improbable future). Comradeship and a tension between a homosocial society and homoerotic attraction is also a topic that can be traced in most of Forster’s longer prose texts.

Parminder Kaur Bakshi’s *Distant Desire* argues that not political and social critique but homosexual love forms the major part of *A Passage to India*. Aziz’s and Fielding’s friendship, complemented with Indian mythology, shall convey intimacy between the two men. In the end, their friendship, or, if you follow Bakshi, the ideal homoerotic love fails due to political and social circumstance. George Piggford’s *Queer Forster* moves along similar lines, arguing quite biographically that Forster’s homosexual desires resulted in a fetishisation of the colonial or social other, i.e. people of other ethnicity or class.

From my experience, I can say that an intrinsic approach is more promising. Teaching “Little Imber” to an undergraduate class, I was astounded by the positive reception by the students. I had thought that

they would consider the story's implausibility cheap, the plot and especially its ending somehow even disgusting. Quite the contrary was the case. The discussion which had started with an analysis of male and female roles within the story ended with the conclusion that the text represented a very welcomed finger exercise in deconstructing heteronormativity. Indeed, this is one of the most striking features of the story. Heteronormativity which makes up binary "natural" roles such as the ordered pairs male/female (sex), male/female (gender), masculine/feminine (appearance and behaviour), father/mother (parental roles), active/passive (behaviour) is ignored in almost every aspect of the story, even the roles during sexual intercourse are addressed and then dismissed,

"There's my bed. Are you frightened to come off in it with me?"

"I'll come off with you."

"Will you lay warm under me afterwards?"

"I'll lay warm above you."

"That's fair enough. Come" (1980: 234).<sup>21</sup>

The variety of Forster's approaches to questions of gender and sexual orientation offers plenty of intersections with today's questions. Of course, one can also take a glance at the author's biography, but this does not seem to be necessary at all.

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<sup>21</sup> For a detailed analysis of the story, cf. ch. 6 from Meyer 2000.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Example: Ethnicity and Nationality

*A Passage to India* is not the only text dealing with the differences, the misunderstandings and the struggle for ground of different cultures in Forster's oeuvre. There are, next to the obvious Italian novels, short stories as well as non-fictional texts that deal with national and racial stereotypes and identities (e.g. *Hills of Devi* or "Recollections of Nassenheide"). Many of them share the belief that underneath all the differences, there is a human core that needs to be addressed by transcending or discussing the separating differences. This shall be exemplified looking specifically at Forster's image of Germany.

The columnist Julie Burchill writes in her essay "Thinking the Wurst", "it's fair to say that Not Being German - in fact, being The Opposite Of German - did in some way define my life" (2001). By stating this, she supports the findings of image and identity studies (cf. Zimmermann 2003 ch. 1.1). "Othering", the discursive constitution of identity, is traceable in Forster's writings, too. Forster does not only construct the English national identity by othering it from Germany, e.g. he also deconstructs the contrast that is the core of his definition to eventually outline the unavoidable convergence of various cultures in the future.

According to Forster, a distinctive feature of English society is its middle-class character:

Solidity, caution, integrity, efficiency. Lack of imagination, hypocrisy. These qualities characterize the middle classes in every country, but in England they are national characteristics also, because only

in England have the middle classes been in power for one hundred and fifty years (1967a: 13).

Forster maintains that he can find the traces of these characteristics in literature as well. An example might be a "Boy Scout Manual" (1985: 9) written by Daniel Defoe:

Robinson Crusoe an English book, and only the English could have accepted it as adult literature: comforted by feeling [sic!] that the life of adventure could be led by a man duller than themselves. No gaiety wit or invention. . . . Defoe never really leaves Newgate or Bartholomew Close. . . . Passing on to the dreary Bloomsbury conclusion that the pot's perspective may be as satisfying as the universe if the writer believed in a pot with sufficient intensity. I say such a writer's a bore merely (Forster 1985: 9-10).

The main target of Forster's criticism of *the English*, however, is their underdeveloped hearts (cf. 1967a: 4-5). This lack is so obvious that it even is displayed in the capital city.

London is [to Forster] a 'caricature of infinity', expressing all that is formless, everything that is opposed to the spirit of love (Beer 1962: 110).

This spiritual deficiency has traditionally been explained by the supremacy of the empirical method in England. Philosophers like Carlyle have enviously discussed German mysticism (cf. Blaicher 1992: 100-101). Forster writes about German emotionality:

In Germany the Reformation was due to the passionate conviction of Luther. In England it was due to a palace intrigue (1967a: 21).

The criticism of the English character is omnipresent in Forster's writings. However, in the comparison to Germany, he does also detect similarities. In his essay "Tolerance", he finds alarming parallels.

Take the evil of racial prejudice. We can easily detect it in the Nazis; their conduct has been infamous ever since they rose to power. But we ourselves - are we guiltless? We are far less guilty than they are. Yet is there racial prejudice in the British Empire? Is there no colour question? (1941: 57).

Interestingly, Forster especially notices the beautiful landscape of Germany that reminds him very much of the once pastoral history of England. Just to give one example from his "Recollections of Nassenheide":

It is curious that Germany, a country which I do not know well or instinctively embrace, should twice have seduced me through her countryside. I have described the first occasion. The second was half a century later when I stayed in a remote hamlet in Franconia. The scenery was more scenic than in Pomerania. There were swelling green hills rising into woodlands. There were picturesque castles and distant views. But the two districts resembled each other in their vastness and openness and in their freedom from industrialism. They were free from smoke and wires, and masts and placards, and they were full of living air: they remind me of what our own countryside used to be before it was ruined (1959: 14).

Many of Forster's texts can serve to discuss issues of national stereotypes and national identities. The following could be a possible line of thought while teaching one of Forster's major works, *Howards End*.

One may as well begin with Helen's letter to her sister. In this letter, she writes about her first visit to *Howards End*:

I quite love that tree already. Also ordinary elms, oaks - no nastier than ordinary oaks - pear-trees, apple-trees, and a vine (Forster 2000: 1).

The tree which she loves is a large wych-elm. The young lady compares English oaks with German ones, and she concludes that they were no nastier than ordinary, probably German - because German trees are familiar to her - oaks. The oak as well as the wych-elm serve as symbols in Forster's 1910 novel. Due to the inflationary use in German romantic writing, the traditional symbol for power and strength is also a symbol for Germany. Without doubt, the narrator of the novel presents the reader the main topoi at the very beginning of the text. Later on he/she also explains that "the wych-elm . . . was an English tree" (Forster 2000: 203). Following the symbolism of the trees, one would have to see Germany and England in the focus of interest in the novel. Lionell Trilling supports this observation. For him, the main question of the novel is "Who shall inherit England" (cf. Colmer 1969: 12), or to put it more generally, one could just say that the book moves along the lines of the *Condition of England* debate started by C. F. G. Masterman one year

before *Howards End* was published. P. N. Furbank puts it this way:

Edwardian England . . . was obsessed with Germany, and Forster's novel subtly probes this obsession, so that, for instance, Mr Wilcox stammers when the word 'Germany' rises to his lips: 'England will never keep to her trade overseas unless she is prepared to make sacrifices. Unless we get firm in West Africa. Ger. . . untold complications may follow.' Forster carpeted the common notion that Prussian strength spelled 'manhood' and let it discredit itself. He even gave weight, a limited weight, to the idea of war as a purifier: thus, it is a German sword, sheathed after Sedan, which finally cuts through the tragic muddle in *Howards End* (1974: 153).

The idea of national identity is discussed openly and in great detail in the novel itself, e.g. discussing the background of the Schlegel family:

A word on their origin. They were not 'English to the backbone,' as their aunt had piously asserted. But, on the other hand, they were not 'Germans of the dreadful sort.' Their father had belonged to a type that was more prominent in Germany fifty years ago than now. He was not the aggressive German, so dear to the English journalist. Nor the domestic German, so dear to the English wit (Forster 2000: 26).

In the latter, Winkgens sees the representatives of the new Germany after 1870/71, the representants of a naval, colonial and trading power (cf. Winkgens 1986: 175). After 1870/71, the spirit of materialism, utilitarianism and imperialism had arrived in Germany and resulted in the megalomaniac belief that God



had appointed Germany to power. Another effect was a deterioration of the special German intellect and imagination (cf. *ibid.*). The turning away of Helen and Margaret's father, Ernst Schlegel, from the new Germany produces a connection of the whole family with the idealistic Germany. This is also supported by their qualities as described in the novel. The Schlegels are, in contrast to the new Germany, unpractical (cf. Forster 2000: 144), and they represent truth in argument, whereas the Wilcoxes represent quickness (cf. Forster 2000: 128). The Schlegels are compatriots of Hegel and Kant, they are idealistic, dreamy, and their imperialism is the "imperialism of the air" (cf. Beer 1962: 102-103); thus, they represent, in the contrast between public and private, the *inner life* in the novel.

There are all kinds of reflections and echoes in the description of national and transnational issues in the novel. As Müllenbrock states, it is Forster's intention to show the pointlessness of a misled national pride. The end of one of the fruitless debates of Mrs. Munt and Fräulein Mosebach in the novel is marked by a sardonic comment by the narrator, "'Yes, that is so,' conceded Frieda; and another international incident was closed" (cf. Forster 2000: 143). Episodes like these do not only show a criticism of unthinking nationalism but also an evaluation of both sides: they are comparable. Forster constructs the novel with a number of parallels in the two camps. The correspondence of Frieda Mosebach on the German side, for example, is the chauvinistic Mrs Munt on the English. These characters, often not too congenial ones, present, on the one hand, the limits of a spectrum of views, and, on the other,

they produce polarities which are helpful for a dialectical treatment of the challenges.

The novel does not only dwell on tradition and history, but it also outlines new developments. The narrator of *Howards End* himself sees a general change in the attitude of people all over the world. He observes a denationalization of which the first indications can already be found in the English capital:

London was but a foretaste of this nomadic civilization which is altering human nature so profoundly, and throws upon personal relations a stress greater than they have ever borne before. Under cosmopolitanism . . . we shall receive no help from the earth (Forster 2000: 259).

The proposed change towards a very different global society can also be found in more direct words elsewhere in Forster. Talking about his political aims in 1920, Forster concluded that

[t]he nations must understand one another, and quickly; and without the interposition of their government, for the shrinkage of the globe is throwing them into one another's arm (1967a: 25).

The example of *Howards End* shall suffice to illustrate the teaching potential of Forster's texts in the field of national identity and national stereotypes. Questions that can be discussed using these texts are: What are national stereotypes? How are national stereotypes created? How are they related to national identity? What is the function of them? How can they change over time? By which mechanisms are stereotypes maintained? How do they affect perception and action?

As already pointed out, Forster's texts offer both: a discussion of the problems within the text with model solutions and a surface against which contemporary problems can be projected and discussed.

## Conclusion

In transitional times, the educational canon has to be revised as well. Forster offers a guideline in many of his writings. In his short story, "The Celestial Omnibus," for instance, he questions the idea of detached and effectively inhumane education and educational standards. Literature "omnibus est," as a means and not as an end in itself. This idea is also an argument in the fight against cuttings in the humanities in favour of more "useful" subjects, demanded by an economy feeling the pressure of global competition.

This essay could only offer a glimpse into the manifold aspects to be taught in modern university education for which Forster's writings can be an ideal vehicle. Other topics include the history and the ideas of humanism in a discourse about the importance of belief and religion - cf. Forster's *What I Believe: And Other Essays* published by the British Humanist Association, the questions of literary periods - cf. David Medalie's monograph *E. M. Forster's Modernism*, issues of colonialism and imperialism - cf. Mohammad Shaheen's *E. M. Forster and the Politics of Imperialism*, or even environmental questions - as pointed out in the texts about the German landscape and a number of essays about England.

As stated at the beginning, knowledge should be socially situated and constructed; learning should

be a personal act, the curricula delimited by the students and their backgrounds. With the help of Forster's texts, the teacher can offer material which, on the one hand, shows strategies of coping with problems similar to the current issues, and, on the other hand, provides objects to come up against. E. M. Forster and his texts offer both, and they offer a clear conviction – the belief in humanity.

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### **Polish Aspects of E. M. Forster: A Postscript**

The articles included in this volume so far aimed at seeking and discussing new aspects of E. M. Forster and his works. However, the question which the original theme of our conference, "Polish Aspects of E. M. Forster", unexpectedly brought up, still remains, as none of the papers answered it in any way. Are there any truly Polish aspects of Forster then? As I have taken the blame for the muddle upon myself, I would like to attempt to provide an answer to this question in this brief postscript.

The first answer that comes to mind is rather obvious – no, there are none. Poland does not appear on Forster's radar – it is too far and does not have anything much to offer. Our literature is quite parochial, our fine arts completely unknown outside our borders, even our music apparently did not speak to him at all – Chopin appears in an essay in the volume *Two Cheers for Democracy* (Forster 1972: 105) but only as a random name of a famous composer. Even our men are not his favourite type – dark hair, dark eyes and olive skin are not often encountered among blue-eyed blonds. And yet careful research reveals a few Polish traces in his biography and oeuvre.

Forster first came to Poland in 1905 when he accepted the job offer of Countess Elizabeth von Arnim as the tutor of her three daughters. As he later remarked: "I wanted to learn German and do some writing" (Lago -- Hughes -- MacLeod Walls 2008: 456). The Countess, famous for her German Garden and its literary description, lived in the manor in village called Rzędziny, 22 kilometres north from Szczecin in Western-Pomeranian province. Obviously, neither Forster nor the Countess, nor anybody else knew that they were in Poland, because the village was then called Nassenheide, while Poland arrived in these parts exactly forty years later.

The village itself had by then quite a history of moving from state to state: as established in the Duchy of Pomerania in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, it was from 1637 to 1720 part of Kingdom of Sweden (with a brief spell of Danish occupation), and afterwards Kingdom of Prussia, German Reich, to be ultimately awarded to Poland in 1945. Actually, it is only by some weird whim of history and geography that Nassenheide is now in Poland, since the border with Germany is approximately one kilometre away. It also had some literary history, as in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century it belonged to relatives of Johann Wolfgang Goethe.

Unfortunately, Forster's fans will not find many traces of his presence there. The manor did not survive the Second World War. According to Polish historians of the region, it was destroyed by the Allies in August 1944 during a bombing attack on the nearby synthetic fuel plant Hydrierwerke Poelitz AG in Police (Kalita-Skwierzyńska -- Opęchowski 2007: 104). Nicola Beauman, however, claims that "the house was destroyed

by Russian shells in 1945" (1994: 175). Regardless of which version is true (and the house could have been bombed twice in the final months of the war), only the stable block and chestnut avenue have survived to this day.

I tried to look for some Polish traces in Forster's letters from Nassenheide and, quite obviously, found nothing. However, Forster returned to his recollections of Nassenheide in 1958 when he reviewed a recently published biography of his hostess there, Countess Elizabeth von Arnim, written by Leslie de Charms (Lago -- Hughes -- MacLeod Walls 2008: 456-462),<sup>22</sup> and in his broadcast I found the following sentence:

The light from the trees fell marvellously on the moving hay carts and on the shoeless Poles (Lago - Hughes - MacLeod Walls: 461).

Were there any Poles there then? Yes, there were, but they were most probably farmhands who regularly migrated to Germany in search of employment.

Forster visited Poland again in the summer of 1932. He first travelled to Romania, where his old friend was First Secretary at the British Embassy at Bucharest, and then on his own to Cracow. The city, which he found a strange place (Furbank 2: 174), held for him a surprise. Forster arrived with an introduction to an English-speaking lady, Mrs Helena Mysłakowska, whom he visited several times during his stay. As she was a literary translator (e.g. her translation of Eugene O'Neill's *The Moon of the Caribbees* as 'Księżyc nad Kary-

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<sup>22</sup> The broadcast was also published in *The Listener* vol. 1 (1959): 12-14.

bami' appeared in 1934), "the idea soon occurred to them that she might translate his novels" (Furbank 1981, 2: 174). The situation turned rather awkward when Mysłakowska started to share with Forster the more intimate details of her marital life (she wanted to divorce her husband, who, as she claimed, had threatened her with a revolver) and asked him for help.

When Forster returned to England, Mysłakowska sent him a proposal of marriage, a few weeks later she arrived in person and, during a walk in the woods in West Hackhurst, she repeated her proposal in person. To make matters even worse, Forster's mother found the visitor highly attractive and the writer "half suspected she wanted to marry him off" (Furbank 1981, 2: 175) at the tender age of fifty-three. Forster managed to extricate himself from the affair with fair grace, even retaining the friendship of Mysłakowska. In August 1934 he wrote to Christopher Isherwood about his current employments among which he listed:

[I] prepare to entertain Mrs Myslakowska, who tried to seduce me in Cracow two years ago in order to get rid of her husband, and is now in England (Lago -- Furbank 1985: 122).

A more literary souvenir of the visit is Forster's essay "Chess at Cracow" (first published in *Time and Tide*, 13 August 1932, and later reprinted in *Abinger Harvest*), which is a recollection of a game of chess played with human pieces in the courtyard of the Wawel Royal Castle. It is probably the only text in which Forster speaks about Poland at any length. Still another recollection of the voyage can be found in his *Commonplace Book*.

While travelling through Poland on the train Forster thought about "Invocation by Rhetoric" in Shakespeare's plays, a thought originally brought to him by remembered lines from *Hamlet*: "So frowned he once when in an angry parle / He smote the sledded Polack on the ice" (Forster 1988: 94).

Forster was not very popular (or, more precisely, he was almost completely unknown) in Poland in the period between the Great and the Second World War. In the 1930s, he was mentioned in Polish press mostly in connection with his public activities. Consequently, in May 1936 a brief note „Skonfiskowana książka E. M. Forstera" ("Confiscated Book of E. M. Forster") in *Wiadomości Literackie* by Jan Ciepliński misinformed Polish readers about the problems Forster had with the first edition of *Abinger Harvest*. Apparently oblivious to facts of the case,<sup>23</sup> Ciepliński claimed that Forster

well known for his leftist views fell into disfavour with the English censorship which ordered the whole print-run to be withdrawn from the market (1936: 6).

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<sup>23</sup> The case was actually quite complex - Forster referred in his essay entitled "Flood in the Office" to conflict between two representatives of British administration in Egypt which took place during the Great War. Not knowing that the matter had been the subject of court proceedings some two decades earlier, he repeated what the court of justice had found as libel. Consequently, the first edition had to be withdrawn and replaced with another which did not include the essay (Heine 1996: XIII-XVI), which was republished only in the *Abinger* edition in 1996.

The note ends in a wish that some of Forster's books should be published in Poland. It received an immediate reply from the publishing house Towarzystwo Wydawnicze "Rój", which informed the readers in June 1936 in the same weekly that *A Passage to India* would be available in the autumn of the same year (1936: 8). Apparently, the optimism was unfounded as Mysłakowska's translation of *A Passage to India* as *W słońcu Indii* ('In the Sunshine of India') was published only in 1938 with the note "by permission of the Author".

The book was quite well publicized and even *As. Ilustrowany Magazyn Tygodniowy*, a weekly magazine for ladies, included a review (Kurowska 1987: 74). However, the reviews in serious literary press were rather critical. In his review for *Wiadomości Literackie* Zbigniew Grabowski called the story "diligently banal and honestly boring" while his conclusion was that it was "yet another translator's mistake, yet another wasted effort" (1938: 5). The novel was also quite unfavourably reviewed in *Rocznik Literacki* by Andrzej Tretiak. The reviewer is critical towards the original, which he found "provincial . . . regardless of its artistic merit" and consequently "rather boring from the point of view of a prospective Polish reader" (1939: 124). His opinion of the quality of the translation is far worse; he quoted some of the more unhappy translator's choices such as replacing "buffalo" with the most Polish of animals "żubr" ('wisent') or translating "caterpillars" as "motive" ('butterflies') and went on to quote a lengthy passage, the meaning and style of which is rendered in a rather grotesque way. Tretiak's conclusion is scathing: "artistic prose must not be translated in this way" (1939: 125).

It is uncertain if Forster made more lasting friends during his brief visit in 1932. One could expect that such contacts with Poland would be traceable among Forster's letters, but this assumption does not seem very rational when we consider the fact that letters sent to Poland before the Second World War probably perished, and after the war the Iron Curtain quite successfully cut Poland off from Great Britain. If any letters survived in Poland, they were certainly not accessible to Mary Lago, who compiled *Calendar of the Letters of E. M. Forster* published in 1985. We can find in the volume two Poles – the poet, playwright, and literary critic Antoni Słonimski (1895-1976) and the expressionist painter Feliks Topolski (1907-1989) – but the correspondence dates from the period when the two gentlemen resided in Great Britain. The two letters to Słonimski are especially interesting as they were written in September 1944 during the Warsaw Uprising and Forster expressed his compassion towards the fighting Polish capital (Lago 1985: 160). Unfortunately, they have not been published and they are now in private hands.

Forster never returned to Poland and during his lifetime no more of his works were published here. The first Polish translation of the short story "The Other Side of the Hedge" appeared in 1964 in the London based émigré magazine *Kontynenty*, which did not circulate in Poland. The first novel which came out after the Second World War in Poland was *Howards End*, published in 1977 as *Domostwo pani Wilcox* ("Mrs Wilcox's Manor"), translated by Ewa Krasieńska. The centenary of Forster's birth was celebrated in 1979 with a new translation of *A Passage to India* by Krystyna Tarnowska and And-

rzej Konarek. For over a decade they were the only Forster's novels available to Polish readers.

As anywhere else in the world, the movie productions of Merchant and Ivory renewed interest in Forster's works in the early 1990s. The first, moderately successful, translation of *A Room with a View* by Agnieszka Majchrzak appeared in 1992. Krasieńska's translation was published again in 1993, this time as *Howards End*,<sup>24</sup> as the cover design clearly suggests to accompany the Academy Award winning film which was shown in Poland at the same time. A new edition of Tarnowska and Konarek's translation of *A Passage to India* appeared in the same year. They were soon followed by a translation of *Maurice* by Maria Olejniczak-Skarsgard (1994), after which Forster disappeared from Polish bookstores for another decade.

The translation of Majchrzak was not well received, so when Polish branch of Bertelsmann started to reissue Forster's novels in 2003, they used the formerly mentioned translation of *A Passage to India* but ordered a new translation of *A Room with a View* from Halina Najder, which first appeared in 2003. Most of these translations have been in print since, no more titles, however, have become available. The first two novels, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *The Longest Journey*, have not been translated still.

Forster's short stories were even less popularised. The first translation of "The Other Side of the Hedge" has been mentioned before. The first translation

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<sup>24</sup> It was published yet again in 2009, this time as *Powrót do Howards End* ('Return to Howards End'), which was the title given to the film based on the novel by its Polish distributors.



of "Machine Stops" by Hanna Kobus ("Maszyna staje") was published in a science-fiction anthology in 1986. Another, by Piotr Szymor ("Koniec maszyny"), is available on the Internet. There are also two short stories published in literary magazines in the year 2000 by the present author. Complete bibliography of Forster's works available in Polish, including subsequent reprints of earlier translations, is included below.

Scholarly interest in Forster has been even more limited - there are two PhD theses and probably a handful of MA and BA theses (there are no generally accessible data bases, while appropriate data base of the University of Warsaw includes only two such MA theses). The number of published scholarly studies is also far from impressive; this volume most probably doubles the number of studies in Forster originating from Poland. We all hope, however, that this collection will mark the beginning of a renewed interest in Forster's works - resulting both in new translations of his novels, short stories, and essays, as well as in new scholarly studies (including the first monograph on Forster in Polish), which shall reveal even newer aspects of this great British novelist.

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