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Howards End

Chalky cheese

No reader of the opening chapters of *Howards End* could fail to gather that the Schlegels and the Wilcoxes are meant to be contrasted. But whether these families are really as different as chalk and cheese is a conundrum that grows in significance as Forster's fourth novel unfolds. And even if a reader still thinks that the two households are fundamentally unalike in their conduct and convictions on completing the book, the thornier question of where Forster's deepest sympathies lie, with his heavy-handed idealists or his sports-mad philistines, may well remain unsettled. For despite its narrator's poise and its assured (if sparse) social comedy, not to mention the clear overlap between Forster's interests and those of the Schlegels, it is not *Howards End*'s certainties that catch the eye but its hesitations, tensions, 'rich ambiguity . . . [and] fundamental *irresolution*'.[1] Like Charles Wilcox and Aunt Juley on their fateful journey from Hilton station to Howards End, Forster can seem at 'cross-purposes'[2] in this novel 'composed of contraries',[3] yet that only makes it all the more intriguing in the context of his contrast-driven work as a whole and all the more absorbing in its own right. 'Whatever the flaws, weaknesses and contradictions we may perceive in Forster's own ideological position', Peter Widdowson comments astutely, '[*Howards End*], by containing them, gains rather than loses'.[4]

The narrator must be reckoned with from the beginning of *Howards End* and not least because his first utterance ('One may as well begin with Helen's letters to her sister') suggests either a curious indifference to form or a weary, Tibby Schlegel-like disinclination to 'begin' the novel at all; possibly both. But no matter how we gloss his opening words, the narrator's role is accentuated at the start of the book and it is impossible to ignore him from then on. Time and again, he turns audaciously from story-telling and underscores his sizeable presence in the text, either by making direct reference to himself or by assuming the flamboyantly characterful yet oddly effacing, frequently

skittish yet withal rather earnest, here sagacious there facetious, at times magniloquent and often magnificent, maxim-wielding yet far from emphatic manner which is the hallmark not just of Forster's companionable narrators but also (if to a lesser extent) the signature style of his essays, lectures, broadcasts, reviews, and criticism. In *Howards End*, however, Forster's unmistakable voice is particularly audible. The narrator tells us, for example, of his spats with his grocer about 'the quality of his sultanas' (p. 184); he speaks disparagingly (and seemingly from personal experience) about 'those who coquet with friendship' (p. 89); he notes despondently that 'man is an odd, sad creature as yet, intent on pilfering the earth, and heedless of the growths within himself' (p. 273), while in Chapter 5 he extols the unrivalled pleasures of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony and the meaning of its constituent parts, rubbishing *en passant* both the Queen's Hall in London and the Free Trade Hall in Manchester (pp. 44–5). Earlier in the novel, having waxed lyrical about the railway stations of London, the narrator informs us that Margaret Schlegel thinks King's Cross 'always suggested infinity' and its 'situation – withdrawn a little behind the facile splendours of St Pancras – implied a comment on the materialism of life'. 'If you think this ridiculous', the narrator continues, 'remember that it is not Margaret who is telling you about it' (p. 27). How could we possibly forget? With the notable exceptions of the novels with a purpose that H. G. Wells wrote after *The History of Mr Polly* (1910), and Lawrence's novels of the 1920s, such as *Kangaroo* (1923), obtrusive narrators are more or less absent from modernist literature, unless their function, like Marlow in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), is to draw attention to their own untrustworthiness. But the narrator of *Howards End* is both conspicuous and (it seems) dependable, his chatty ubiquity only reinforced by his frequently quirky diction. As Barbara Rosecrance has remarked:

> The narrator's techniques of omniscience and engagement are familiar, but his voice goes further in self-dramatization, in manipulation of the reader, in the frequency and length of intervention than in any other Forster novel. The tendency of the narrator to step out of the action to formulate its larger significance also reaches its height in *Howards End*. No other Forster narrator establishes so personal a hegemony.[5]

Furthermore, while he may be as reliable as he is approachable, the narrator must be treated with considerable caution because it is far from easy, here and there, to reconcile the tolerant, live-and-let-live values on which Forster's wider reputation rests with the occasional tartness and unflagging class bias of his 'commentator'(p. 107). It is all too easy to fall for the narrator's charm, to be won over by his verbal idiosyncrasies, his appealing eccentricities, and his amiable, off the cuff judiciousness, but such captivation needs to be

resisted (as well as savoured), because when he is at his most disarming the narrator can also be at his most disquieting. So much so, in fact, that some readers might wish to reconsider whether, on the evidence of *Howards End*, Forster's status as a liberal icon is really as secure as some critics would have us believe. One way or another, questions of 'contrast'[6] dominate *Howards End*, the criticism it has generated and the challenges it presents.

The cleavage between the *Weltanschauung* of the Schlegels and the Wilcoxian worldview is something about which every critic of the novel has had something to say. 'It is the story of a conflict between two points of view', the *Athenaeum*'s reviewer declared with assurance in 1910. 'The Schlegels are clever, sensitive, refined; they have a feeling for beauty and truth, a sense of justice and of proportion; they stand for what is best in modern civilization: the Wilcoxes are vulgar, blatant and brutal; such time as they can spare from money-making they devote to motors and bridge and suburban society; they stand for all that is worst.'[7] The Ismail Merchant and James Ivory film adaptation of 1992 only lent further weight to this time-honoured view that each family is the converse of the other, and, of course, there is a great deal in the text to support such an interpretation. The motoring Wilcoxes, for example, are undoubtedly driven by the 'blatant' values of the market-place – so much so, in fact, that they comprise more of a business concern than a family unit, with Charles Wilcox filling 'the post of chairman' (p. 109). Charles, his sister Evie, and their father Henry disregard the handwritten and 'unbusinesslike' (p. 108) note by means of which Ruth Wilcox had hoped to leave Howards End to Margaret because such an act of generosity would have failed to take account of their material 'improvements' to the property, such as the addition of a garage (p. 108) and a kitchen extension (p. 205). In addition, their commercial mindset is clearly allied to a 'brutal' (picking up another of the *Athenaeum*'s terms) streak in the Wilcoxes. Henry is adept at '*bullying porters*' (p. 19) and will be casually responsible for Leonard abandoning his relatively safe job at the Porphyrian Fire Insurance Company and indifferent to his being 'turned out' (p. 223) of Dempster's Bank, just as Charles is peremptory with a railway porter at Hilton (p. 31) and gives Crane, his chauffeur, a thorough dressing-down in Chapter 11, having previously 'got rid of the little Italian beast' (p. 103) who preceded him. In fact, Charles's inadvertently lethal assault on Leonard in Chapter 41 is but the tragicomic nadir of his bullying and bad-tempered stomp from one chapter to the next. Sentenced to three years in prison, the only things Charles is likely to miss behind bars are 'money-making', motoring, and games, for, like the rest of his family (apart from his mother), Charles is obsessed with sport. Evie does '*callisthenic exercises on a machine that is tacked on to a greengage tree*' (p. 20), and she, her brother, and father are all observed either playing or

practising croquet, bridge, tennis, golf or cricket or are known to be devoted to them: Helen recalls that 'Evie talked cricket averages till I nearly screamed' (p. 40) during her first visit to Howards End. When the Wilcoxes are not whacking balls or playing cards they spend their time fishing, swimming, and shooting. Interestingly, the Schlegels see the Wilcoxes as having 'their hands on all the ropes' (p. 41), as if the family were engaged in nothing less than a consummate gymnastics display.

But *are* the Schlegels the *antithesis* of the Wilcoxes? In some obvious ways they are, but in other, more interesting ways they are not. Tibby, for example, is a perfect match for the Wilcox men in his indifference to Leonard, yet this sedentary, 'dyspeptic and difficile' (p. 44) egghead could not be further removed from their milieu of unthinking stretching and striving. His sisters (especially Margaret), on the other hand, reveal unexpected affinities with it. When Henry travels down to Swanage with an engagement ring for Margaret, for example, the two lovers greet each other with 'a *hearty* cordiality' (p. 179; emphasis added), while Margaret says at another point that she desires 'activity without civilization' (p. 119), as though she aspires to nothing more than a good round of golf. In a similar manner, when Helen visits Howards End at the beginning of the novel she falls not just for Paul but for the relentless 'energy' (p. 37) of his family as a whole, the 'robust ideal' (p. 38) they embody. '*Men like the Wilcoxes would do Tibby a power of good*' (p. 19), Helen reports back to Margaret not irrelevantly.

Initially, Helen enjoys being browbeaten by the Wilcox men, 'being told that her notions of life were sheltered or academic; that Equality was nonsense, Votes for Women nonsense, Socialism nonsense, Art and Literature, except when conducive to strengthening the character, nonsense' (pp. 37–8), but whereas she soon sets herself against the Wilcoxes, Forster repeatedly stresses Margaret's growing attraction to their view of life, how 'collision with them stimulated her . . . they had grit as well as grittiness, and she valued grit enormously' (pp. 111–12). The more intimate Margaret becomes with Henry, the closer she gets to the 'depths of his soul' (p. 185), the more she approves of what she finds there – at least before she finds out about his liaison with Jacky. Margaret's susceptibility to the sheer drive of Henry and their fundamental compatibility is the principal reason why readers are best advised to probe the juxtaposition of the two families rather than simply taking it as read. Even the core distinction between the Wilcoxes' 'outer life of telegrams and anger' (p. 176; see also p. 112) and a Schlegelian inner world of 'Literature and Art' (p. 23) is not as clear-cut as it seems. Certainly, the Wilcoxes are no bookworms, and Charles is recalled from his Naples honeymoon by the telegram which informs him of his mother's death (p. 101). Similarly, an angry telegram is sent by Henry to his unsatisfactory tenant,

Hamar Bryce (p. 197), and Paul Wilcox sends a (presumably congratulatory) 'cablegram' (p. 254) to his father and Margaret on their wedding day and one to Evie on hers (p. 208). But the Schlegels dispatch telegrams even more promptly – pp. 27, 35, 40 (twice), 247, 270, 271, 274 – and it is important to bear in mind that the first time the 'telegrams and anger' phrase (a favourite Wilcoxian duality with many commentators on the novel) occurs, it applies not to the twin poles of the Wilcoxian world, but to the telegrams which Helen and Margaret exchange at the beginning of the novel and the upset they cause (p. 41).

Likewise, although Leonard wants to 'improve [him]self by means of Literature and Art' (p. 65), these cultural agencies have a lot to answer for in *Howards End*. 'Books', according to Margaret, is a 'holy word' (p. 259), but a 'shower' of books (p. 315) plays a hefty role in Leonard's death, while the London clerk would never have ended up on the gravel of Howards End in the first place had it not been for his fetishization of such authors as Ruskin and Stevenson and his devotion to the 'Art' of Beethoven. Of course, it is just possible that Forster wishes us to *disapprove* of the Schlegels' blinkered immersion in Literature and Art – even the narrator concedes that 'the world would be a gray bloodless place were it entirely comprised of Miss Schlegels' (p. 42) – but it is rather unlikely.

With their professed interest in theosophy (pp. 158, 257, 323), socialism, feminism, and egalitarianism, and their liberated disdain for society's petty conventions, Helen and Margaret's progressive credentials could not be more blatant. From a modern-day perspective, however, they harbour a number of less open-minded attitudes and an aptitude for gross insensitivity which make them seem at times anything but advanced or enlightened. The 'impetuous' (p. 24) and 'impulsive' (p. 26) Margaret, for example, dispatches a well-meaning but discourteous letter to Ruth Wilcox (p. 77) and shortly afterwards snubs her suggestion that they travel down to Howards End together (p. 93), while even Aunt Juley (Mrs Munt) has a capacity for 'imprudence' (p. 37), as her 'hideous blunder' (p. 33) in mistaking Charles for Paul all too clearly reveals. Rashness and clumsiness, we soon realise, run in the Schlegel family (the grotesquely inactive and self-sufficient Tibby excepted), and although they claim to think 'personal relationships' 'supreme' (as did Forster), they are at times staggeringly badly handled by them. Above all, the main blame for Leonard's death (as well as Jacky's off-stage but inevitable plunge into destitution) may be laid squarely at the feet of the 'ramshackly' (p. 54) Helen. She and Leonard first meet because she absent-mindedly walks off with his brolly. 'I do nothing but steal umbrellas' (p. 54), she airily admits when Leonard calls to collect his own, before offering him a selection from the horde she has thoughtlessly accumulated over the years:

'I steal umbrellas even oftener than I hear Beethoven', Helen confesses later in the novel (p. 123). And when rummaging around for Leonard's umbrella, Helen reminds Margaret that she cannot simply stand by and tut-tut with disapproval, as at some previous date Margaret 'stole an old gentleman's silk top-hat', mistaking it for a muff (p. 54). Are the Schlegel sisters refreshingly emancipated from the bridles of convention, the reader might ask, or are they simply careless and self-centred (like their appalling younger brother)?

According to Margaret, Helen is 'too relentless. One can't deal in her high-handed manner with the world' (p. 183) and many readers might well be inclined to agree. When Helen bursts into Evie's wedding party with the Basts in tow, for example, Margaret angrily condemns her 'perverted notion of philanthropy' (p. 223). Having gone on to convince herself later that night that 'she loved [Leonard] absolutely, perhaps for half an hour' (p. 308), Helen leaves him a note in the morning 'intended to be most kind' but which 'hurt' him 'terribly' (p. 308). 'The expedition to Shropshire crippled the Basts permanently', we are told. 'Helen in her flight forgot to settle the hotel bill, and took their return tickets away with her; they had to pawn Jacky's bangles to get home, and the smash came a few days afterwards . . . He turned to his family, and degraded himself to a professional beggar. There was nothing else for him to do' (p. 309). The contrast between Leonard's slump into 'unemployable' (p. 309) idleness and the self-indulgent indolence of Tibby, who is asleep after a 'good lunch' when Leonard calls at Wickham Place a little further on in the novel (p. 312), is hard to overlook. Earlier, the narrator has referred to the Schlegel household's 'life of cultured but not ignoble ease' (p. 115), but his qualification becomes increasingly difficult to swallow. 'Tibbikins', in particular, is little more than a 'frigid' (p. 274) *rentier*, as gluttonous in his craving for food as he is for bookish absorption; in Chapter 30, for example, as Helen weeps before him, he simply carries on eating his lunch before taking up his Chinese grammar. It is Henry's conviction that '[l]ack of education makes people very casual' (p. 203), but in *Howards End* the most casual characters by some distance are the far from uneducated Helen and Tibby Schlegel.

Following Jacky's desperate visit to Wickham Place (when she interrupts Helen in full spate on the topic of social reform) Helen makes fun of her for the enjoyment of Margaret and Tibby (p. 120). She calls Jacky 'Mrs Lanoline' (p. 120) – that is, 'Mrs Wool-fat' – accuses her of having a 'face like a silkworm' and claims she is not 'capable of tragedy' (p. 121). Further on in the novel, we are told that Margaret, too, finds Jacky 'repellent' (p. 229). Indeed, for two women supposedly committed to feminism and social justice, both sisters possess some distinctly snobbish and objectionable social attitudes.

Margaret, notably, refers not to the 'lower orders' (p. 34) as does the narrator, but to the 'lower animals' (p. 94). She pens an odious letter to Helen about Leonard and Jacky – '*The Basts are no good . . . The Basts are not at all the type we should trouble about*' (p. 239) – and is 'distressed . . . by odours from the abyss' when Leonard visits Wickham Place in pursuit of his wife (p. 124). The nightmarish horrors of the social 'abyss', so alarmingly laid before the reading public in such volumes as C. F. G. Masterman's *From the Abyss* (1902) and Jack London's *The People of the Abyss* (1903), haunted the genteel mind, and it is this profound anxiety which lies just beneath Margaret's comment above and her remark about Jacky trailing 'odours from the abyss' (p. 229) when she appears at Oniton. By the end of the novel, Margaret is relieved that she and her sister have crossed over 'the black abyss of the past' and are living 'a new life . . . gilded with tranquility' (p. 326), but she seems oblivious to the fact that Jacky, at that very moment, must either be teetering on the edge of a far from figurative abyss or, more likely, already well on her way to the bottom of it. This further evidence of the Schlegels' blindness, crassness, hypocrisy, and bigotry might be parcelled together in support of the view that Forster never intended us to be as favourably disposed towards them as the first few chapters of the novel seem to encourage us to be. Forster's aim may have been to discredit the Schlegels by exposing them as merely skin-deep progressives. And in making the siblings and their aunt dependent on unearned income from railway stock and other shares (beneficiaries, in other words, of successful entrepreneurs like Henry Wilcox), Forster appears to underline the Schlegels' *kinship* with the Wilcoxes, not the gulf between the two families. After all, one of the 'Foreign Things' (p. 28) in which Margaret so successfully invests may well be Henry's highly profitable Imperial and West African Rubber Company (see below).

The woman problem and the prig problem

Although he calls Leonard a 'chap' (p. 130) at one point, Forster's 'commentator' has an obvious distaste for the clerk. For instance, after Leonard has retrieved his threadbare umbrella and returned to his lodgings, the narrator proceeds to describe his sitting-room with a sickly relish, fitting it up, among other things, with 'one of the masterpieces of Maude Goodman' (p. 60). Had this object been described more simply as a print or some other kind of reproduction after the intensely sentimental but hugely popular Maude Goodman (d.1938), the narrator might have been thought to be doing no more than portraying Leonard and Jacky's lowly accommodation as realistically as possible. But 'masterpieces' sneers both at Goodman's saccharine

scenes of domestic bliss and her basement-bound admirers. Again, it might be argued that the narrator's disdain is targeted not at Leonard's poor taste, but Jacky's. But when he adds that the whole 'amorous and not unpleasant little hole . . . struck that shallow makeshift note that is often heard in the modern dwelling-place. It had been too easily gained and could be relinquished too easily' (p. 60), he seems to condemn *both* Jacky and Leonard for being unable to afford anything better or more permanent of their own. Elsewhere, the narrator speaks of Leonard's 'cramped little mind' (p. 127) and gives him a top hat which is too big for him, 'the ears bending outwards at the touch of the curly brim' (p. 131), suggesting that he also thinks of him as having a cramped little head.

Forster's unease with Leonard comes across just as clearly in the treatment of his voice: his attempts to represent the language of the clerk just don't sound convincing ('It really is too bad when a fellow isn't trusted. It makes one feel so wild' (p. 65); 'I say, Jacky, I'm going out for a bit' (p. 313)). Now, it could be that Forster burdens Leonard with the idiom of his 'betters', equips him with the words of a man who has gobbled up Ruskin and feels intimidated by the polish of the Schlegels, in order to emphasise the nasty discordance of the class system. But his portrayal of Leonard's partner makes this reading rather less plausible. Jacky is first encountered through her beaming photographic likeness: 'Teeth of dazzling whiteness extended along either of Jacky's jaws, and positively weighed her head sideways, so large were they and so numerous' (pp. 60–1). Intentionally or not, Forster's words evoke the myth of the *vagina dentata* (vagina with teeth), the age-old association of women 'with orality, digestion and incorporation; and with women's (fantasised) jealousy of and power over men'.[8] But when Jacky enters the room shortly afterwards, she could not be less vampiric, being merely, we are told, a 'woman . . . of whom it is simplest to say that she was not respectable' (p. 63). By employing this common-or-garden put-down, the narrator simply betrays his genteel class prejudice: it is just the kind of priggish slight that Aunt Juley might be expected to come out with. Moreover, in spite of himself, the narrator does go on to detail Jacky's gaudy apparel at some length, but 'her hair', we are informed, 'or rather hairs . . . are too complicated to describe' and her 'face does not signify. It was the face of the photograph, but older, and the teeth were not so numerous as the photograph had suggested, and certainly not so white. Yes, Jacky was past her prime, whatever that prime may have been. She was descending quicker than most women into the colourless years' (p. 63). While these words may or may not be misogynistic, they most certainly lack compassion, and this impression is only reinforced when the narrator goes on to tell us that Jacky is 'on the shelf' at thirty-three, invoking a music hall ditty to that effect.

Furthermore, although Jacky is hard of hearing, the narrator chooses to refer to her '*degraded* deafness' (p. 67; emphasis added), while at Oniton she is said to be 'so *bestially* stupid that she could not grasp what was happening' (p. 224; emphasis added). By employing intensifiers such as these, the narrator assumes a position of contemptuous superiority over Jacky and for the modern reader this can be jarring to say the least. Something similar occurs when a young woodcutter is described as descending from a tree '[w]ith a grunt' in Chapter 11, 'for he was mating', and when Charles's wife Dolly is dismissed as 'a rubbishy little creature, and she knew it' (p. 101). As Michael Levenson has pointed out, 'these colloquialisms – "rubbishy," and "she knew it . . ."' ensure that the narrator's attitude to Dolly has 'more the tone of a personal crotchet than an Olympian edict'.[9] Awkwardly, Aunt Juley is not the only person in *Howards End* in whom '[e]sprit de classe' is 'strong' (p. 34).

But it is not just the treatment of Dolly and Jacky that raises eyebrows. Henry Wilcox '*says the most horrid things about women's suffrage*' (p. 21) to Helen and some readers may wonder whether the narrator is in cahoots with his 'masterly ways' (p. 185). At the beginning of Chapter 18, for example, when Margaret receives a letter from Henry announcing his willingness to let his Ducie Street house to the Schlegels, we are told that, should the sisters be in favour of his proposal, 'Margaret was to come up *at once* – the words were underlined, as is necessary when dealing with women – and to go over the house with him' (p. 161). Does the parenthesis convey Henry's point of view (presented as indirect discourse) or the author's (as filtered through the narrator)? Similarly, when Henry's Cyprian 'episode' (p. 255) with Jacky comes to light Margaret feels justifiably angry with him, but only a little further on, as she undresses for bed, her irritation has collapsed into forgiveness. 'Pity . . . is at the bottom of woman', the male narrator opines. 'When men like us, it is for our better qualities . . . But unworthiness stimulates woman. It brings out her deeper nature, for good or evil' (p. 240). By the following morning Margaret has entirely absolved Henry: 'She played the girl, until he could rebuild his fortress and hide his soul from the world' (p. 243). But if Margaret is only 'play[ing]' on this occasion, by the time of her Austrian honeymoon she has become little more than a literate plaything. Henry enjoys watching her 'reading poetry or something about social questions', but he only has 'to call, and she clapped the book up and was ready to do what he wished. Then they would argue so jollily, and once or twice she had him in quite a tight corner, but as soon as he grew really serious she gave in. Man is for war, woman for the recreation of the warrior, but he does not dislike it if she makes a show of fight. She cannot win a real battle, having no muscles, only nerves' (p. 255). Soon afterwards Henry says patronisingly

(but meaning to be tender), 'What a practical little woman it is! What's it been reading?' (p. 257). After her marriage, Margaret effectively cuts herself off from new ideas and defers entirely to a husband who symbolically infantilises her, calls her (even though she is in her thirties) his 'girl' (pp. 276, 281, 296, 297), and who is convinced that all women are unteachably illogical (p. 278). By the end of the novel, of course, Henry has been neutered and is shut up in a dark room with hay fever (p. 326) while Margaret and Helen rule the roost at Howards End, but it is difficult to misremember the compromises Margaret has had to make, the psychological and ideological elisions which have had to be enforced by the author, in order for this idyll to come into being. Does the final sentence's bumper 'crop of hay' (p. 332) really compensate for all that has had to be scythed down to make way for it? *Howards End* was written at a time when 'The Woman Question' was a matter of grave and growing concern in England. The first imprisonment of suffragettes occurred in 1905 and it is difficult to read the novel's negative representations of and comments about women without bringing that disturbed context of prejudice, militancy, and repression into play.

Eugenics and the looming big one

Eugenics, another of the novel's underlying concerns, filled many newspaper columns during the Edwardian period, with the Eugenics Education Society being founded in 1907 to fight what it saw as two threats to national survival.[10] The first was a drop in the birth rate, which alarmed eugenicists because it contrasted with a rising birth rate in competitor nations, such as Germany. This anxiety looms large in Chapter 6 when Leonard is hailed by a fellow clerk outside his lodgings in Camelia Road. 'Very serious thing this decline of the birth rate in Manchester' (p. 59), Cunningham remarks. Leonard is taken aback by his comment and Cunningham repeats it, this time 'tapping at the Sunday paper in which the calamity in question had just been announced to him' (pp. 60–1). The second, related threat was internal, in that the eugenics lobby argued that the fall in the British birth rate was far steeper among the affluent and educated classes than among those deemed to be less socially meritorious, giving rise to widespread fears about the so-called 'multiplication of the unfit'.

While the decline in the birth-rate is referred to only once, the racial degeneration of which it was thought to be indicative is brought into focus whenever Leonard tittups into view. 'The population still rose', the narrator muses at one point, 'but what was the quality of the men born?' (pp. 116–17). If Leonard is typical, it is not impressive. His bent spine and narrow chest (p. 122) bespeak his membership of the dysgenic underclass and he is said

to be a 'colourless, toneless' man who has 'already the mournful eyes above a drooping moustache that are so common in London . . . one of the thousands who have lost the life of the body and failed to reach the life of the spirit' (p. 122). 'During the second half of the nineteenth century the majority of the British people began to live and work in cities', Derek Fraser has noted. 'By the Edwardian years that majority had become overwhelming – 77 per cent in 1901 and 80 per cent in 1911.'[11] It was widely believed, however, that modern city life was by its very nature dysgenic and Leonard's feeble, deformed, and undernourished body is the incarnation of all that dread. A curious aspect of this aspect of the novel, though, is that the puny Leonard has to carry Forster's degenerationist forebodings almost on his own. London is said to be growing ever more populous, but the 'satanic' (p. 94) megopolis the reader encounters is surprisingly deserted, with, it appears, only Leonard and one or two other lower-middle-class clerks stalking its streets. The seething masses of Victorian fiction are nowhere to be seen, never mind the even more multitudinous hosts of the Edwardian city.[12]

The weak-hearted Leonard is contrasted with two sturdier models of British manhood, the well-nourished yeoman and the 'Imperial' type. 'Healthy, ever in motion, [the Imperial type] hopes to inherit the earth. It breeds as quickly as the yeoman, and as soundly; strong is the temptation to acclaim it as a super-yeoman, who carries his country's virtues overseas' (pp. 314–15). Despite the narrator going on to say that 'the Imperialist is not what he thinks or seems. He is a destroyer. He prepares the way for cosmopolitanism' (p. 315), his grudging admiration for the Imperial type comes across so strongly in the novel that it is as if the narrator, too, has fallen for the 'temptation' of the 'super-yeoman'. The narrator's observations have been prompted by an embodiment of the 'Imperial' type (probably Charles) driving past Leonard as he walks towards Howards End and his death. Charles, a 'robust man' (p. 81), is the eugenically sound and fecund offspring of Henry Wilcox, a man with a 'robust' complexion (p. 165) and no need of Eustace Miles' 'body-building dishes' (p. 161). By Chapter 21, in sharp contrast to the increasingly sterile men of Manchester (and 'Auntie Tibby' (p. 55)), Charles has emulated Henry in fathering three children and by Chapter 33 Dolly is expecting their fourth. Evie, too, is 'built firmly' (p. 154), and the 'broad-shouldered' (p. 40) Paul goes out to Africa both in fulfilment of his national 'duty' (p. 119) and to forge his manhood, while Margaret's admiration for the Wilcoxes' dynamism, her belief that they 'keep England going' (p. 268), only increases as the novel progresses. Miss Avery upsets her by observing, uninhibitedly, 'Ay, they breed like rabbits' (pp. 268–9), but the truth is that from a novel haunted by the spectre of degeneration, the virile and fruitful Wilcoxes emerge with a lot of eugenic credit. What is more, when

Charles fells Leonard he enacts the eugenicists' most cherished fantasy, the eradication of the unfit by the fit, and while it would be going much too far to suggest that this kind of wish-fulfilment was at the front of Forster's mind when he conceived his novel, it is quite possible that it was not as firmly filed away at the back of his mind as we might like to imagine.

In spite of his unimpressive physique, Leonard is Jacky's protector and without him, as Helen points out in Chapter 30, she is likely to 'sink' as countless women had done before her and were likely to do in her wake, 'till the lunatic asylums and the workhouses are full of them, and cause Mr Wilcox to write to the papers complaining of our national degeneracy' (p. 249). Her comment sounds like a fiery retort to the eugenicist preoccupations of Edwardian England and William Greenslade has argued that Forster, too, shows himself:

> to be contemptuously hostile to the discursive apparatus which, with such facile certainty, separated the healthy from the weak, the fit from the unfit, the normal from the tainted.
>
> Forster's achievement is to give full play to the most socially and ideologically arrogant of these discourses at this period with a telling raid on the territory of masculinity with its coercive discourses of power, its command of social and economic space, its emotional hollowness and deep repressions: the fortress that Henry Wilcox inhabits in *Howards End*.[13]

Greenslade may be right and some readers will tune into Forster's subversive hostility more easily than others. But it is also possible that Forster's own fear of 'the people of the abyss' and his anxieties about the dysgenic effects of city life led him to admire Henry Wilcox and his family rather more than the liberal *bien-pensant* within him would have cared to acknowledge. Indeed, far from being the villains of *Howards End*, the impressively fit and fertile Wilcoxes might be its unlikely heroes. This is certainly the impression D. H. Lawrence picked up, writing to Forster in 1922: 'I think you *did* make a nearly deadly mistake glorifying those *business* people in *Howards End*'.[14]

Nor is it just the urban masses that have lost their evolutionary thrust. 'I think . . . that our race is degenerating', Margaret sighs in exasperation when her brother and sister are unable to decide whether they want to live in Ducie Street or not. 'We cannot settle even this little thing; what will it be like when we have to settle a big one?' (p. 162), she continues with reference to the ominous state of European relations and the impending 'big one' against Germany which would finally arrive in 1914. *Howards End* emerged from Forster's pen as Anglo-German tensions – 'England and Germany are bound to fight' (p. 74) – plumbed new depths, and these frictions shade the novel

in a number of ways. There are passing references to the precarious state of Anglo-German relations in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (Chapter 6) and *The Longest Journey* (Chapters 8 and 33), but in *Howards End* they burst forth in Fräulein Mosebach's 'patriotic' determination to marry Helen to a German in Chapter 12 and Aunt Juley's conviction that Britain, rather than Germany, has been 'appointed by God to rule the world' (p. 43), while Henry makes it clear that one of the principal reasons why Paul is in Nigeria is because 'England will never keep her trade overseas unless she is prepared to make sacrifices. Unless we get firm in West Africa, Ger – untold complications may follow' (p. 137). In Simpson's, a well-known London restaurant, a bellicose clergyman declares (with Kaiser Wilhelm II in mind), 'The Emperor wants war; well, let him have it' (p. 158), while Mrs Wilcox observes that 'people do not seem quite to like Germany' (p. 86) following Margaret's 'patriotic' words in favour of 'things Teutonic'.

Anglo-German rivalry is epitomised in Aunt Juley's and Herr Liesecke's competitiveness about music (Elgar versus Beethoven) in Chapter 5, and so Forster's celebrated account of the sublimity of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony could be read as a defiantly anti-jingoistic gesture, just as the narrator has been quick to emphasise that the Schlegels are not 'Germans of the dreadful sort' (p. 42). But like so many other facets of the novel, nothing is simply black or white. Is it the case that Forster is being bold and provocative in 1910 when he represents Beethoven's 'Hun music'[15] as incomparable and half-Germans sympathetically, engaging head on with the popular prejudice against 'things Teutonic'? Or is he suggesting, in the Schlegel sisters' blundering insensitivity, that a kind of Prussianism is already at large in Liberal England? If so, is it significant that a *German* sword is instrumental in Leonard's death? And who hands the sword to Charles when he asks for 'a stick'? One of the Schlegel sisters, presumably (p. 315).

England, the empire, and the rubber boom

Though set in London, Hertfordshire, Dorset, and Shropshire, the British Empire casts its long shadow over *Howards End*, and while it seems likely that Forster set out to critique imperialism as unequivocally as he wished to pillory the materialistic Wilcoxes, yet again the situation turns out to be more complex than we might have anticipated in view of the opening chapters. Two 'Anglo-Indian ladies' attend Evie's wedding (p. 208) and one of them describes it as 'quite like a Durbar' (p. 221), while another guest, Mrs Warrington, has just come 'back from the Colonies' (p. 211). Similarly, though 'rubbishy', Dolly is the daughter of a retired Indian Army officer (p. 80) and her brother is currently serving in the subcontinent, just as Charles

is a Boer War (1899–1902) veteran (p. 167). Most notably of all, of course, the Wilcoxes' family business is the *Imperial* and West African Rubber Company, which, according to the map in the antechamber to Henry's office, owned 'a helping of West Africa . . . Another map hung opposite, on which the whole continent appeared, looking like a whale marked out for blubber' (pp. 196, 276; emphasis added).

The latter map no doubt reflects the carving up of Africa which the Congress of Berlin (1884–5) sanctioned and it was the escalating demand for rubber in particular which made that carving, in places, all the more ferocious. Within a few years, rubber had become nothing less than the raw material of modernity, insulating the ever increasing range of electrical goods and enabling the burgeoning number of bicycles and cars to speed along ever more rapidly. In fact, between 1880 and 1910 'rubber became the most important, most market-sensitive, most sought-after new commodity in the world'.[16] Demand for it took off exponentially precisely at the time when Forster was writing *Howards End* (1908–10) and its price boomed in a manner 'reminiscent of the railway mania before 1845'.[17] 'Hardly a week went by in 1909 without the formation of a new rubber plantation company being announced in the London press. Often it was more than one a week' and by 20 April 1910, the price of rubber on the London Stock Exchange peaked at twelve shillings a pound.[18] No wonder Margaret tells Helen that the Wilcoxes' company is 'a big business' (p. 114), and it is against this background of feverish speculation and mushrooming profits that Henry Wilcox's fortune swells to such an extent that within two years of his wife's death he has 'almost doubled his income' (p. 137) and become a near millionaire (p. 139), nothing remarkable by today's standards but a formidable level of wealth in the Edwardian period.

But African rubber was also a deeply tainted commodity by the time Forster began writing *Howards End*. In 1904, a shocking exposé of the systematic barbarity which attended the exploitation of rubber in Leopold II's Congo territory had been published by Roger Casement[19] and this resulted, four years later, in the international community insisting on a major reorganisation of Belgian rule there. Nigeria was not mired in scandal like the Congo when Forster sat down to write his novel, but many of its first readers may well have placed particular stress on the words 'African' and 'Rubber' and drawn their own conclusions about the lucrative exploits of the Imperial and West African Rubber Company. Indeed, they may have eyed Henry Wilcox in the same kind of way (if not quite with the same level of disapproval) that we now view the ivory-grabbing Kurtz and his colleagues in *Heart of Darkness*. Tellingly, when Henry, Margaret, Tibby, and Charles are discussing Helen's strange and elusive behaviour in Chapter 34, Henry's genial

demeanour suddenly slips away 'and they saw instead the man who had carved money out of Greece and Africa, and bought forests from the natives for a few bottles of gin' (p. 277).

All the more noteworthy, then, that Margaret thinks the kind of imperialist qualities that Henry possesses in such abundance have also been responsible for the suppression of savage customs at home. 'If Wilcoxes hadn't worked and died in England for thousands of years, you and I couldn't sit here without having our throats cut. There would be no trains, no ships to carry us literary people about in, no fields even. Just savagery . . . Without their spirit life might never have moved out of protoplasm' (pp. 177–8). She sees the Wilcoxes, in other words, as an efficient evolutionary organism, perfectly adapted to succeeding in the capitalist jungle either at home or abroad. But Henry's overseas activities also lead to his downfall. Britain had occupied Cyprus following an earlier Congress of Berlin (1878), and it was on that island, ten years prior to Evie's wedding, that Henry's fling with Jacky took place in 'a garrison town' (p. 243). With the elapse of almost a century since the publication of the novel, it is unlikely that many modern readers will be as anxious as Margaret to extol Henry's capitalist and imperialist qualities, and his patriarchal womanising is likely to be viewed as equally unappealing.

'Imperialism', we are told at one point, 'had always been one of [Margaret's] difficulties' (p. 197), but this does not prevent her, during her Christmas shopping expedition with Mrs Wilcox, buying 'a golliwog' for a girl of her acquaintance (p. 90). In 1910 such a purchase had none of the unsavoury significance it would have today, but even so it suggests a degree of blinkeredness on Margaret's part. Or perhaps it indicates her real attitude towards black people. For although Margaret claims to be out of sympathy with the Empire, at times she sounds very much like a typical imperialist. She belittles Nigeria and Nigerians, for example, in words which she may well have picked up in the Wilcox household – 'dull country, dishonest natives, an eternal fidget over fresh water and food' – adding, with Paul in mind, 'A nation who can produce men of that sort may well be proud. No wonder England has become an Empire' (p. 119). And although she and Helen 'would at times dismiss the whole British Empire', they do so, significantly, 'with a puzzled, if *reverent*, sigh' (p. 42; emphasis added). Indeed, it is Margaret, not the Wilcoxes, who introduce imperialist rhetoric into Howards End. She is aware on first entering the house, for instance, that she 'would *double her kingdom* by opening the door that concealed the stairs' (p. 202; emphasis added) before thinking immediately, among other things, 'of the map of Africa; of empires' – presumably because she knows the home improvements she has in mind would be funded by the overflowing coffers of the Imperial

and West African Rubber Company. Oddly, given its peaceful location, the heart of the house beats 'martially' (p. 202), yet if *Howards End is* a synecdoche for England as a whole, as some critics have argued, what could be more appropriate? A martial spirit, after all, was one of the main factors which brought the Empire into being.

Another contrast worth highlighting is that between the idealised rural England which the narrator evokes and the real state of the English countryside at the time the novel was written. Standing on the Purbeck hills at the beginning of Chapter 19, for instance, the narrator apostrophises the Isle of Wight in terms which link it with the novel's broader concern with good breeding and racial fitness. He exalts it as 'the island that will guard the Island's purity till the end of time . . . It is as if a fragment of England floated forward to greet the foreigner – chalk of our chalk, turf of our turf, epitome of what will follow' (p. 170). His words amount to nothing less than an encomium to his native land in which 'the imagination swells, spreads and deepens, until it becomes geographic and encircles England' (p. 171), with the chapter as a whole culminating in a crescendo of national pride: 'England was alive, throbbing through all her estuaries, crying for joy through the mouths of all her gulls . . . For what end are her fair complexities, her changes of soil, her sinuous coast? Does she belong to those who have moulded her and made her feared by other lands, or to those who have added nothing to her power, but have somehow seen her, seen the whole island at once, lying as a jewel in a silver sea, sailing as a ship of souls, with all the brave world's fleet accompanying her towards eternity?' (p. 178). A cluster of literary allusions, the most obvious to John of Gaunt's famous speech in Shakespeare's *Richard II* (II.i), are set in train during this passage, but it may come across as distinctly chauvinistic to contemporary ears, even though Forster was almost certainly trying to achieve the opposite effect by acting as a spokesman for those who had 'added nothing' to England's power. Something similar happens when the narrator turns his attention to London's 'various railway termini', which he says 'are our gates to the glorious and the unknown. Through them we pass into adventure and sunshine . . . In Paddington all Cornwall is latent and the remoter west; down the inclines of Liverpool Street lie fenlands and the illimitable Broads; Scotland is through the pylons of Euston; Wessex behind the poised chaos of Waterloo' (p. 27). Here the narrator mixes the real and the mythical rhapsodically, while at another point in the novel he laments the absence of 'a great mythology' of England (p. 262), his own heightened discourse, quite possibly, being an attempt to set that right.

Beneath the narrator's soaring words, however, the first readers of *Howards End* would have known that all was not well in rural England. They would have known, as Henry knows, that 'the days for small farms are

over' (p. 205). From around 1875 to 1895 England experienced a severe agricultural depression caused by the importation of cheap American wheat, a succession of poor summers, and livestock epidemics, and on the back of these catastrophes came bankruptcy, evictions, and rural depopulation. Between 1881 and 1911 the agricultural population of England fell by nearly 20 per cent.[20] So although the narrator might claim (with an authority borrowed from Matthew Arnold[21]) that on farms such as the Averys' 'one might see life steadily and see it whole . . . connect without bitterness until all men are brothers' (p. 264), by this point in the novel we sense that all is not right even on this particular farm, never mind the farms of England in general. Miss Avery's niece, Madge, for instance, despite being a farmer's wife, is 'mortified by innumerable chickens, who rushed up to her feet for food, and by a shameless and maternal sow. She did not know what animals were coming to' (p. 264). Madge's discomfort with her own livestock tells us far more about the true state of things in rural England than the narrator's nostalgia for a pre-motorcar-and-suburbia golden age.

In Chapter 41, when Leonard makes the final journey of his life, he observes agricultural labourers who have 'been up since dawn'. The narrator expands on this passing encounter, building it into a quasi-eugenicist *cri de cœur*: 'they were men of the finest type . . . They are England's hope. Clumsily they carry forward the torch of the sun, until such time as the nation sees fit to take it up. Half clodhopper, half board-school prig, they can still throw back to a nobler stock, and breed yeomen' (p. 314). Yet at Oniton, a shamefaced Leonard tells Helen that his grandparents were precisely such 'agricultural labourers' (p. 234) from Lincolnshire and Shropshire, a biographical tit-bit that emphasises just how much physical damage city life has inflicted on England's manhood in just two generations. Once again, Leonard is made to stand before the reader as a scapegoat, the personification of a degenerate, less 'noble' kind of Englishman.

Ruth Wilcox, on the other hand, is more a genius loci than a mother of three, the frail personification of Forster's stand against the noisy new England of movement, motoring, and materialism. Having been born at Howards End, Mrs Wilcox glides 'noiselessly', over the lawn in Chapter 3, with 'a wisp of hay in her hands' (p. 36), an allusion to Ceres, the Roman corn goddess. She can sniff hay without any adverse effect (p. 20), whereas Henry, Charles, Evie, and Tibby are all hay-fever sufferers. And if Mrs Wilcox is a kind of high priestess of the fields with extraordinary powers of communion, her life-long home is nothing less than a 'sacred place' (p. 325). Howards End was based on a house near Stevenage in Hertfordshire called Rooksnest where Forster lived from 1883 to 1893, and a good deal of the significance the narrator attaches to the fictional dwelling reflects the author's nostalgia

for the only childhood home in which he appears to have been truly happy. According to Margaret, Howards End has 'wonderful powers . . . It kills what is dreadful and makes what is beautiful live' (p. 293) and, like Rooksnest,[22] it is protected by a wych-elm with teeth embedded in it (pp. 19, 191, 206). But the house where Forster lived as a child was surrounded by extensive meadows, whereas the location of Howards End, in the words of Paul, is 'not really the country, and it's not the town' (p. 330). Situated only an hour from London by train, it will not be long before Howards End and nearby Hilton are consumed by suburban sprawl. Even Henry notices that the neighbourhood's 'getting suburban' (p. 141), with a 'stream of residences . . . thickening up' (p. 199) towards it. Hilton High Street is really no more than a settlement 'strung upon the North Road, with its accreting suburbs' (p. 97) and Hilton station strikes 'an indeterminate note. Into which country will it lead, England or Suburbia? It was new, it had island platforms and a subway, and the superficial comfort exacted by businessmen' (pp. 29–30). The answer to the narrator's question could not be clearer and at the end of the novel 'London's creeping' ever nearer, with the 'red rust' of suburbia visible only a few meadows away (p. 329). Nor is London only spreading northwards. When Leonard attempts to escape southwards from the city by walking at night into Surrey, it is just as impossible to shake off the suburbs: after Wimbledon, 'It was gas lamps for hours' (p. 126). Leonard pitches up among 'suburban hills' (p. 131) before travelling back to the city by commuter train.

Pollution, panic, and emptiness

Forster's acute unease with modernity is most evident in his treatment of the motorcar. Like many Edwardian intellectuals, he was appalled by the racket and 'stench' (p. 29) of the automobile and he regarded its intrusive and newfangled power as symptomatic of the 'brutal', speeded-up and money-orientated culture which he loathed so intensely, a 'culture as is implied by the advertisements of anti-bilious pills' (p. 29). Even Charles, a man whose language is peppered with the jargon of motoring ('tooling' (p. 31); 'a longer spin' (p. 32)), whose idea of a perfect holiday is a 'motor tour in England' (p. 81), and who receives a car from his father as a wedding present (p. 81), gets a headache when he is unwise enough to go 'motoring before food' (p. 319). Forster's anti-car position anticipates latter-day concerns about the environmental impact of exhaust emissions and the alienating effects of noise pollution, of course, and Nicholas Royle has even suggested that '*Howards End* might in fact be called the first modern ecological novel in English'.[23]

It is also worth noting that the car is not only associated with noise, stink, and discharge, but also with blunders, accidents, and low comedy. Henry and Evie return early from Yorkshire not only because 'police [speed] traps' (p. 94) are unsportingly pervasive in that county but also because their 'vermilion giant' (p. 164) has been involved in a 'motor smash' with a horse and cart near Ripon (p. 96), just as Albert Fussell's vehicle flattens 'a rotten cat' (p. 213) in Shropshire and a similar fate nearly befalls baby 'Porglywoggles' in Chapter 35. When cars pass through Summer Street, we read at the beginning of Chapter 12 of *A Room with a View*, 'they raised only a little dust, and their stench was soon dispersed by the wind and replaced by the scent of the wet birches or of the pines' (*RV*, p. 124), but by the time he wrote *Howards End* Forster clearly felt the car problem had become far more intrusive, disruptive, and indelible. '[M]onth by month', the narrator tells us at the beginning of Chapter 13, 'the roads smelt more strongly of petrol, and were more difficult to cross' while 'human beings . . . breathed less of the air, and saw less of the sky' (p. 115). 'The dust problem caused great resentment and was a factor in political debate on automobilism', comments Peter Thorold.[24] A speed limit of twenty miles per hour was in force between 1903 and 1930, though it was widely disregarded,[25] and when cars thunder by in *Howards End*, lungs and gardens fill with dust (pp. 32–3), just as when they are stationary their engines 'ooz[e] grease on the gravel' (p. 308). Yet when Charles accelerates past the 'lower orders' at one point in his father's 'throbbing, stinking car' (p. 36) – with a heedlessness reminiscent of that more notorious Edwardian road-hog, Toad of Toad Hall – and they vanish 'in a cloud of dust' (p. 34), the reader might wonder whether, like Leonard's elimination and the fairy-tale close of the novel, this is not another moment of wish fulfilment on Forster's part. The car is undoubtedly a loud and filthy menace, but its colonisation of England seems to offer a radical solution to the nation's social and demographic problems: they disappear from sight in an instant.

The epigraph to *Howards End*, 'Only connect . . .', is almost as well known as the novel itself. It most obviously refers to Margaret's efforts to unite the (supposed) spirituality and culture of the Schlegels with the grounded commercial nous of the Wilcoxes and it turns out to be an abbreviation of the novel's most heartfelt *donnée*: 'Only connect! That was the whole of [Margaret's] sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its highest. Live in fragments no longer' (p. 188). By Chapter 22, however, Margaret thinks she has failed to achieve such a fusion because of Henry's 'obtuseness' and by Chapter 38 she turns her full fury on her husband:

> You shall see the connection if it kills you, Henry! You have had a mistress – I forgave you. My sister has a lover – you drive her from the house. Do you see the connection? Stupid, hypocritical, cruel – oh, contemptible! – a man who insults his wife when she's alive and cants with her memory when she's dead. A man who ruins a woman for his pleasure, and casts her off to ruin other men. And gives bad financial advice, and then says he is not responsible. These men are you. You can't recognise them, because you cannot connect . . . No one has ever told you what you are – muddled, criminally muddled.
>
> (p. 300)

'It is those who cannot connect who hasten to cast the first stone' (p. 304), the narrator pronounces with kind of Biblical authority soon afterwards, but could it be that he himself is the novel's principal stone-caster, in that he cannot connect with the likes of Leonard and Jacky? By Chapter 31, the narrator is referring to Henry and Margaret as 'our hero and heroine', but many readers may wish to resist such tags and the novel's improbably optimistic conclusion. The 'time for telegrams and anger was over' (p. 321) the narrator observes, but there will be readers unable or unwilling to banish the time of 'telegrams and anger' so readily from their minds. Margaret has straightened out the 'tangle' (p. 329) which Henry's involvement with Jacky and Leonard's with Helen has brought about, and Margaret and Henry (who seems not only tired but moribund at the end) have 'learned to understand one another and forgive' (p. 328), just as there has been a rapprochement between Helen and Henry: but some readers will feel that the heaped-up 'muddledom' (p. 310) of the past few years cannot be ironed out so easily. Like the melding of the spiritual and the commercial which Margaret and Henry's marriage represents, Helen's child is literally the offshoot of a connection (albeit fleeting) between England's gentlefolk and her urban masses, between England and Germany, but is this contrast-defying mongrelism any more than a fantasy on Forster's part? A more fitting epigraph, perhaps, might have been 'panic and emptiness', a phrase which is repeated on a number of occasions throughout the novel (pp. 40, 46, 47, 102, 175, 232) and which is generally applied to the high-octane vacuity of Wilcoxdom. However, behind the Wilcoxes' 'wall of newspapers and motor-cars and golf-clubs' (p. 40), as this chapter has tried to show, are to be found not only 'panic and emptiness' but also traits which Forster seems to have found rather more attractive.

If Forster's original intention was to write a 'Condition of England' novel focusing, among other things, on how the mercantile bourgeoisie was fast superseding the aristocracy and rural gentry as the nation's most powerful social group (as Henry informs Margaret as they look out of one of Howards End's upper windows, 'Most of the land you see . . . belongs to the people

at the Park – they made their pile over copper – good chaps' (p. 205)), it did not end up that way. Just as Helen tells Margaret at the beginning of the novel that Howards End is not '*going to be what we expected*' (p. 19), so *Howards End* does not quite turn out as the reader might have anticipated on the strength of its early chapters. Rather it turns into a far more enthralling novel which spotlights not the sturdiness of Forster's liberal values, but their relative frailty. Patently a novel of contrasts, *Howards End* is no less fundamentally a novel of contradictions.

Notes

1. Peter Widdowson, *E. M. Forster's 'Howards End': Fiction as History* (London: Chatto and Windus for Sussex University Press, 1977), p. 12.
2. E. M. Forster, *Howards End* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 33. All further page references are embodied in the text.
3. John Sayre Martin, *E. M. Forster: The Endless Journey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 110.
4. Widdowson, *E. M. Forster's 'Howards End'*, p. 12.
5. Barbara Rosecrance, *Forster's Narrative Vision* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 131.
6. This is Forster's own term. See *Selected Letters of E. M. Forster*, ed. Mary Lago and P. N. Furbank vol. 1. (1879–1920), (London: Collins, 1985), p. 187.
7. Anonymous review, *Athenaeum*, 4336 (3 December 1910), p. 696.
8. Elizabeth Grosz,'Animal Sex: Libido as Desire and Death', in *Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism*, ed. Elizabeth Grosz and Elspeth Probyn (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 281; see also pp. 284, 293.
9. Michael Levenson, 'Liberalism and Symbolism in *Howards End*', in *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality: Character and Novelistic Form from Conrad to Woolf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 78–101. Quote from p. 84.
10. For an overview of the origins and literary appeal of eugenics in the period c.1880–1939, see David Bradshaw 'Eugenics: "They Should Certainly be Killed"', in *A Concise Companion to Modernism*, ed. David Bradshaw (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 34–55. See also Dan Stone, *Breeding Superman: Nietzsche, Race and Eugenics in Edwardian and Inter-war Britain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002).
11. Derek Fraser, 'The Edwardian City' in *Edwardian England*, ed. Donald Read (London and Canberra: Croom Helm in Association with the Historical Association, 1982), pp. 56–74. Quote from p. 56.
12. For a subtle contextualisation of the novel's engagement with inter-related anxieties about the mushrooming city of London, the state of England, its growing population and modernity, and Forster's position with regard to New Liberal thinking on these matters, see David Medalie, *E. M. Forster's Modernism* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 1–25.
13. William Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel, 1880–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 213.

14. *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. Warren Roberts, James T. Boulton, and Elizabeth Mansfield, vol. IV (June 1921–March 1924) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 301.
15. This is a phrase Forster twice uses in 'A View without a Room' (1958), a short essay in which he speculates about what might have happened to George and Lucy Emerson in the years following their marriage, including Lucy 'continuing to play Beethoven. Hun music!' during the First World War. ('Appendix', *A Room with a View*, ed. Oliver Stallybrass (1908; London: Penguin Books, 2000), pp. 232, 233.)
16. Henry Hobhouse, 'Rubber: Wheels Shod for Speed', in *Seeds of Wealth: Four Plants that Made Men Rich* (Basingstoke and Oxford: Macmillan, 2003), pp. 125–85. Quote from p. 130.
17. Hobhouse, *Seeds of Wealth*, p. 161.
18. Austin Coates, *The Commerce in Rubber: The First 250 Years* (Singapore, Oxford, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 144, 154.
19. *Correspondence and Report from His Majesty's Consul at Boma Respecting the Administration of the Independent State of the Congo* (London: HMSO, 1904). See also 'The King and the Congo', ch. 7 of John Loadman, *Tears of the Tree: The Story of Rubber – A Modern Marvel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 108–42.
20. See Christabel S. Orwin and Edith H. Whetham, *History of British Agriculture* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1964), pp. 258–386.
21. According to Matthew Arnold in his poem 'To a Friend' (1848), the Greek poet Sophocles 'saw life steadily, and saw it whole'. There are further allusions to this famous Arnoldian phrase on pp. 67, 165, and 314.
22. See 'Rooksnest', an appendix to the Penguin edition, pp. 333–43, esp. p. 338.
23. Nicholas Royle, *E. M. Forster* (Plymouth: Northcote House in Association with the British Council, 1999), p. 49. See also Wilfred H. Stone, 'Forster, the Environmentalist', in *Seeing Double: Revisioning Edwardian and Modernist Literature*, ed. Carola M. Kaplan and Anne B. Simpson (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 171–92.
24. Peter Thorold, *The Motoring Age: The Automobile and Britain 1896–1939* (London: Profile Books, 2003), p. 38.
25. Sean O'Connell, *The Car and British Society: Class, Gender and Motoring 1896–1939* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 115.