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Title	Personal Relationships in Howards End
Author(s)	Kawaguchi, Yoshihisa
Citation	Osaka Literary Review. 1977, 16, p. 59-72
Version Type	VoR
URL	https://doi.org/10.18910/25653
rights	
Note	

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Personal Relationships in *Howards End*

Yoshihisa Kawaguchi

> Temperamentally, I am an individualist.
> Professionally, I am a writer, and my books emphasize the importance of personal relationships and the private life, for I believe in them.[1] —E. M. Forster

The novels of Forster are essentially concerned with personal relationships. Among the six novels, the first four published from 1905 to 1910 can be regarded as one group. In *Howards End* the three earlier novels are, as it were, included: what they had to say is summarized and developed.[2] The purpose of the present essay is to study personal relationships in *Howards End.*

Howards End, together with *A Passage to India,* is regarded as Forster's masterpiece by many critics. The subject matter of *Howards End* is already dealt with in the three preceding novels. But in them he does not discuss it convicingly nor does he express adequately his thought upon personal relationships. In Trilling's words, "... Forster... has not fully done his job as a novelist: he represents the truth but he does not show the difficulties the truth must meet."[3] In *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *A Room with a View* he portrayed the clash of the opposite but his attitude is optimistic and he does not treat it with a will. In *The Longest Journey* Rickie made an unconscious effort to connect and died a tragic death. These three novels are more or less concerned with the dual theme —salvation of a hero and the clash of the opposite—and what is more important, the emphasis of a book as a whole is laid upon salvation

rather than reconciliation of the opposite. Besides, the world of them is rather private and comparatively small.

Howards End is different from the first three novels in some points. In the first place it is the least autobiographical. As for the technique, it is most symbolical, and at the same time "...it is Forster's first major experiment with the technique of 'rhythm.' "[4] Last but not least is that it is a novel whose scale and scope are evidently greater than those of the earlier novels and that it treats of personal relationships most seriously.

Forster is, as he himself declares,[5] an individualist, and "he is interested passionately in human beings; not only in the idea of them...but in their actual living selves."[6] So it is quite natural that he should take account of the social background when he deals with personal relationships in good earnest. "With *Howards End*," writes Wilfred Stone, "Forster broadened his subject from a private to a public world, confronting for the first time not just personal or domestic antagonist, but representatives of England's social, political, and economical power."[7] The part England plays is very small in the Italian novels. It grows larger in *The Longest Journey* and becomes largest in *Howards End*. The view is right that "*Howards End* is a novel about England's fate." and that "it asks the question, 'Who shall inherit England?' "[8] In fact Howards End, a red brick building, stands for England, and the novel has a national scale which the three novels have not.

The novels from *Where Angels Fear to Tread* to *Howards End* appeared during the Edwardian period: "that is, before the arrival of wireless, television or aviation, in the robust and threatening infancy of the motor-car...."[9] Of the novels of Forster, *Howards End* is most Edwardian in that it reflects most vividly the social changes which were occurring in the period.[10] For instance, "the throbbing, stinking car" stands as the supreme symbol of the detested "new civilization."[11] We cannot find here the English countryside he celebrated in *The Longest Journey*. What we find here instead is

London, a symbol of "nomadic civilization which is altering human nature so profoundly, and throws upon personal relations a stress greater than they have ever borne before."[12] Forster reluctantly admits that it is London, not the earth, that is dominating.

> To speak against London is no longer fashionable. The earth as an artistic cult has had its day, and the literature of the near future will probably ignore the country and seek inspiration from the town.[13]

The world of Forster is, on the whole, that of the English middle class in which he was brought up. *Howards End* is most characteristic of Forster in the sense that it depicts the world of the middle class. It should be noted that there are differences and conflicts within the single class. "In *Howards End* the lower middle, the middle, the upper middle classes of English society are so built up into a complete fabric."[14] The lower middle class is represented by Leonard Bast, the middle by the Schlegels, and the upper by the Wilcoxes. Forster has nothing to do with the aristocracy and in particular with the very poor. This he declares at the beginning of Chapter 6: "We are not concerned with the very poor. They are unthinkable, and only approached by the statistician or the poet. This story deals with gentle folk, or with those who are obliged to pretend that they are gentlefolk."[15]

As the epigram "Only connect..." explicitly shows, Forster attempts in *Howards End* to connect—which is by no means easy—most seriously and consciously. That is why the novel, unlike the earlier ones, is almost exclusively concerned with reconciliation of the opposite. Indeed there are connections in the three novels. But they are neither serious nor intentional in the strict sense of the words. Rex Warner rightly says about the connection in *Howards End*: "The efforts to 'connect' are various and usually unsuccesful. But here the efforts seem to have a general urgency and seriousness that make them different from their counterparts in the earlier books."[16]

Any reader of Forster would admit that he has two contradictory aspects. He is, on the one hand, intelligent and reasonable, and is in a cultured liberal tradition.[17] On the other, he is passionate, irrational, and aspires after the mysterious. The former we may call "prose," and it is represented by Margaret Schlegel. The latter is, as it were, "passion," and is stood for by Helen Schlegel. The way of their love-making shows the difference clearly. Margaret's way is "prose"—"a very good kind of prose, but well considered, well thought out" while Helen's is "romance."[18] It is the very conflict between these two aspects that has been afflicting Forster. In the earlier novels he vacillates between them. So the epigram—"Only connect the prose and passion...."[19] is primarily an order on the part of Forster that he should connect the two conflicting elements within himself.

In *Howards End* the clash is between the Schlegels and the Wilcoxes, namely, women and men, the spiritual and the practical, the inner life and the outer life, those who believe in the unseen and personal relationships and those who do not. It is worthy of note that " 'Wilcoxes' and 'Schlegels' are presented with as exact a balance of sympathy as is possible...."[20] This is partly because of Forster's view of good-and-evil and partly because of his serious attempt to connect.

In *Howards End* there are two personal connections essential to the novel. One is the marriage of Margaret to Henry, and the other is Helen's union with Leonard. Henry is not a mere individual but a man representative of the Wilcoxes and the English upper middle class both in a good sense and in a bad one. "He is... weak beneath the manliness, pathetic beneath the success, obtuse in all that concerned people and feelings."[21] He does not believe in personal relationships and so cannot have true personal relationships. In Helen's word, he is one of those who never say "I." Like Cecil Vyse, the Middle Ages is his only moral teacher. He will not take the responsibility for his wrong advice which throws Leonard out of

employment, saying that "...It's part of the battle of life."[22] Nor does he feel a sincere remorse for having had a mistress. For him Howards End is nothing but a mere building.

Margaret knows quite well all these faults of Henry. And yet she marries him because she fully recognizes his virtures also. It is this effort to connect on the part of Margaret that makes *Howards End* a novel different from the earlier ones. Perhaps K. W. Gransden means this attitude of Margaret by saying that "the author's moral attitudes, while not changed, are modified...."[23]

The success of *Howards End* owes much to the characterization of Margaret. She is a character of supreme importance because she expresses the author's central thought. "Forster takes her side throughout the book; he himself never criticises her; he speaks through her, more clearly perhaps than through any one of his other characters.[24] Unlike idealistic Helen she recognizes not only the defects of the Wilcoxes but the significance of them. She realizes that she and Helen receive the benefits of the Wilcoxes and that without them the spiritual life they so value is impossible.

> They [the Wilcoxes] led a life she could not attain to—the outer life of "telegrams and anger"....To Margaret this life was to remain a real force. She could not despise it, as Helen and Tibby affected to do. It forstered such virtues as neatness, decision and obedience, virtues of the second rank, no doubt, but they have formed our civilization. They form character, too; Margaret could not doubt it: they keep the soul from becoming sloppy. How dare Schlegels despise Wilcoxes, when it takes all sorts to make a world?[25]

Indeed it is Henry who saved Howards End. If it had not been for him, it would certainly have ruined.

The importance of money is repeatedly emphasized by Margaret.[26] Her conversation with Mrs. Munt affords a good example.

> "But after all," she continued with a smile, "there's never any

great risk as long as you have money."
"Oh, shame! What a shocking speech."
"Money pads the edges of things," said Miss Schlegel.
"But this is something quite new!" said Mrs Munt....
"New for me.... You and I and the Wilcoxes stand upon money as upon island.... Last night... I began to think that the very soul of the world is economic, and that the lowest abyss is not the absence of love, but the absence of coin."[27]

Forster himself fully realizes the significance of money. In *Marianne Thornton* he expresses the virtue of money he inherited: "This £8000 has been the finincial salvation of my life. Thanks to it, I was able to go to Cambridge.... After Cambridge I was able to travel for a couple of years and travelling inclined me to write."[28] Leonard ultimately acknowledges that it is of no use to read Ruskin and to go to the Queen's Hall concerts, and that Henry is "king of this world."[29] He says to Helen, "'... Miss Schlegel, the real thing's money, and all the rest is a dream.'"[30]

For all the faults of the middle class and the hatred against them, Forster tenaciously clings to the class. He says: "I am actually what my age and my upbringing have made me—a bourgeois who adheres to the British constitution, adheres to it rather than supports it, and the fact that this isn't dignified doesn't worry me."[31] It is precisely because he holds a conviction that the spiritual life he believes in depends upon money the class produces. "Forster is certain that poverty of pocket is related to poverty of spirit, that salvation is inseparable from the health and leisure and dignity that money buys."[32] So it follows that he is not concerned with the very poor. Stone points out that "his art is concerned with the creation of a spiritual aristocracy, not a welfare state, and the 'very poor' are beyond his imaginative reach."[33]

The marriage of Margaret and Henry has two symbolical meanings. One is the connection between the opposite we have mentioned, especially, between the spiritual and the practical. What

Forster insists upon is that both are indispensable and so they must connect and co-operate. Margaret articulates this thought.

> "Don't brood too much," she wrote to Helen, "on the superiority of the unseen to the seen. It's true, but to brood on it is medieval. Our business is not to contrast the two, but to reconcile them."[34]

The other meaning is to be discussed later.

Mrs. Wilcox is a very important character. It is she who teaches Margaret that the spiritual and the practical must unite. Though she dies early in the novel, she continues to influence other people, and makes possible the final reconciliation. It is to be noted that she has "the instinctive wisdom"[35] unlike Margaret.

> Mrs. Wilcox had no idea; she paid little attention to grounds. She was not intellectual, nor even alert, and it was odd that, all the same, she should give the idea of greatness.[36]

Margaret is intellectual, to be sure, but she cannot connect by herself. In short the intellectual is not sufficient for connection. Though Forster himself is an intellectual and holds fast to reason, he never ignores the mysterious or the irrational. That is why he introduces into each of his novels what is called "an elemental character; one who sees straight through perplexities and complications, who is utterly percipient of the reality behind appearances, both in matters of general truth and of incidents in the story."[37]

The connection between Helen and Leonard is also vital to the novel. They put into practice Forster's belief that class system must be broken down. The works of Forster including the short stories always remind us of the intense class consciousness, or "'Esprit de class.'"[38] G. S. Fraser writes that "English people have, or had in Forster's day and in the world he writes about, a very strong sense of the exact social group they belong to, of its shibboleths, its taboos."[39] One of the most insuperable barriers to true personal relationships is class. We have pointed out that Forster clings to the middle class. But on the other hand he firmly holds that class

distinction must be abolished. It is this conflict that has been afflicting Forster. But it seems to me that he adheres to the class to the last.

The suggestion seems to the point that Margaret is the heroine of the practical life and Helen is of the ideal. life.[40] In fact she is more idealistic, passionate, and impulsive than Margaret. Her way of love-making is "romance" and her affair with Paul Wilcox is a good example of it. What she falls in love with is not Paul himself but the masculinity of the Wilcoxes, that is, "the subjective product of a diseased imagination."[41] And a "symbolic moment" comes when she finds Paul frightened.

> "Somehow, when that kind of man looks frightened it is too awfull.... I felt for a moment that the whole Wilcox family was a fraud...and if it fell I should find nothing behind it but panic and emptiness."[42]

Ever since she hates the Wilcoxes, and comes to believe more firmly in the inner life and personal relationships. Her attitude to the Wilcoxes and all they stand for present a striking contrast to Margaret's.

Leonard plays an important role in the novel. He is much concerned with the plot and symbolizes the lower middle class, or rather the lower class.

> The boy...stood at the extreme verge of gentility. He was not in the abyss, but could see it.... He was not as courteous as the average rich man, nor as intelligent, nor as lovable. His mind and his body had been alike underfed, because he was poor.[43]

As a result he underscores wealth and culture of the Wilcoxes and the Schlegels. At the same time he makes the Schlegels conscious of the poor.

The hatred to Henry drives Helen to the impulsive fleshly union with Leonard.

> Helen loved the absolute. Leonard had been ruined absolutely,

> and had appeared to her as a man apart, isolated from the world .... She and the victim seemed alone in a world of unreality, and she loved him absolutely, perhaps for half an hour.[44]

Helen does not love Leonard in any sense. She gives herself to him out of revenge upon Henry. Such a relation cannot last long. After this she goes to Germany and Leonard becomes a professional beggar.

The union means two things. One is a connection between the lower middle class and the middle class, and the other is ineffectuality of passion or everything impulsive in personal relationships. The connecton between Helen and Leonard forms a remarkable contrast with the one between Margaret and Henry. The latter connection is neither sexual nor impetuous. It is the very opposite to such a connection. The essence of it is love, and this is the other meaning of the marriage. In spite of the faults of Henry, she tries to marry him.

> Mature as he was, she might yet be able to help him to the building of the rainbow bridge that should connect the prose in us with the passion. Without it we are meaningless fragments, half monks, half beasts, unconnected arches that have never joined into a man. With it love is born, and alights on the highest curve, glowing against the gray, sober against the fire.[45]

Indeed the fact that Henry had once a mistress makes her agitated and restless. But she is not "a barren theorist"[46] and thinks that "Henry must be forgiven, and made better by love; nothing else mattered."[47] This she actually carries out.

> To have no illusions and yet to love—what stronger surety can a woman find? She had seen her husband's past as well as his heart. She knew her own heart with a thoroughness that commonplace people believe impossinle.... They were married quietly....[48]

What Forster thinks an ideal of personal relationships is not a connection by sex or passion. It is a connection by love, namely,

comradeship. The author blames Helen's way of love-making.

> Helen forgot people.... She could pity, or sacrifice herself, or have instincts, but had she ever loved in the noblest way, where man and woman, having lost themselves in sex, desire to lose sex itself in comradeship ?[49]

Comradeship is the "highest gift"[50] of the English and it is symbolized by the whych-elm, "the genius of the house."[51]

> ...it [Howards End] was English, and the wych-elm...was an English tree.... It was neither warrior, nor lover, nor god; in none of these roles do the English excel. It was a comrade.... House and tree transcend any simile of sex.... Yet they kept within limits of the human.... As she [Margaret] stood in the one, gazing at the other, truer relationships had gleamed.[52]

The thought of comradeship is already expressed by old Mr. Emerson and Stephen Wonham. In order to have such a relation, one has to accept a man personally regardless of sex or class, and this is nothing but reality which has been pursued in *The Longest Journey*. It should be noted that comradeship is grounded upon the essence of Forster's thought, the acceptance of personal differences. Margaret persuades Helen to accept them.

> She said: "It is only that people are far more different than is pretended. All over the world men and women are worrying because they cannot develop as they are supposed to develop.... Develop what you have.... It is part of the battle against sameness. Differences—eternal differences, planted by God in a single family, so that there may always be colour ; sorrow perhaps, but colour in the daily gray...."[53]

The death of Leonard, like that of Rickie, is by no means fruitless. It is the death that directly makes possible the final reconciliation of the three symbolical characters—Henry, Margaret, and Helen. Margaret becomes a wife of Henry, and Helen comes to like him. The marriage makes Margaret a legal heir of Howards End, and

she inherits it as a spiritual heir of Mrs. Milcox. This means that the intellectual and the instinctive combine. Howards End is to pass to the classless child of Helen and Leonard. In this sense Helen becomes a physical heir of the house. Significant is the child. He is not only the symbol of the classless society but of the "Only connect!" which was Margaret's clue to the good life.[54] He is the very answer to the question, " 'Who shall inherit England?' " and this makes a prediction that class barrier will break down. In *Howards End* also, we can recognize a "survival theme." Just as Rickie lives on through Stephen's child, so Leonard does through Helen's. The hope for the future is symbolically attached to the child.

> To what ultimate harmony we tend she [Margaret] did not know, but there seemed great chance that a child would be born into the world, to take the great chances of beauty and adventure that the world offers.[55]

The ending of *Howards End* has been criticized as evasive and unsatisfactory.[56] Stone goes so far as to say that "...Forster does not really want connection at all, but only the rewards of connection; he does not want sex, but only the heir."[57] Such a criticism is not groundless altogether. There is no solid foundation that Howards End, the English countryside, and all they symbolize will survive.

> Howards End, Oniton, the Purbeck downs, the Oderberge, were all survivals, and the meling-pot was being prepared for them. Logically, they had no right to be alive. One's hope was in the weakness of logic.[58]

We cannot but admit that Forster is evasive. But perhaps the more acceptable explanation will be that he is essentially optimistic. Still there remains some incompleteness. But it is in the very incompleteness that the significance of *Howards End* lies. "As for the book's conclusion, the final results of the effort 'to connect,'" Rex Warner writes, "one may not feel wholly saitsfied; yet it is fair to

say that the book's value is in the definition rather than in the solution of a problem."[59] What the novel shows us is not so much the solution as the difficulty of the problem.[60] There may be some objection to *Howards End*. But undoubtedly Forster attempts in it to connect most seriously and consciously, and supplies an answer to the theme of personal relationships.

Notes

1) "The Challenge of our Time," E. M. Forster, *Two Cheers for Democracy* (Abinger Edition; London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1972), p. 54.
2) H. J. Oliver, *The Art of E. M. Forster* (Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1962), p. 39.
3) Lionell Trilling, *E. M. Forster* (Revised Edition; London: The Hogarth Press Ltd., 1969), p. 101.
4) Wilfred Stone, *The Cave and the Mountain: A Study of E. M. Forster* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969), p. 267.
5) E. M. Forster, *Two Cheers for Democracy*, p. 54. and pp. 72 f.
6) Peter Burra "The Novels of E. M. Forster," *Forster: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury ("Twentieth Century Views"; New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 27.
7) Stone, *op. cit.*, p. 235.
8) Trilling, *op. cit.*, p. 102.
9) K. W. Gransden, *E. M. Forster* ("Writers and Critics"; Revised Edition; Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1970), p. 3.
10) Cf. Malcolm Bradbury "*Howards End*," Bradbury (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 134.
11) E. M. Forster, *Howards End* (Abinger Edition; London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1973), p. xi.
12) *Ibid.*, p. 258.
13) *Ibid.*, p. 106.
14) Virginia Woolf "The Novels of E. M. Forster," *Collected Essays: Virginia Woolf*, ed. Leonard Woolf (London: Chatto & Windus, 1975), I, p. 348.
15) E. M. Forster, *Howards End*, p. 43.
16) Rex Warner, *E. M. Forster* ("Writers and Their Work"; Revised Edition; London: Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd., 1954), p. 20.
17) Cf. *ibid.*, p. 5.
18) E. M. Forster, *Howards End*, p. 171.
19) *Ibid.*, p. 183.
20) Bradbury (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 31 f.

21) Gransden, *op. cit.*, p. 72.
22) E. M. Forster, *Howards End*, p. 187.
23) Gransden, *op. cit.*, p. 54.
Cf. Oliver, *op. cit.*, p. 42.
24) Gransden, *op. cit.*, p. 60.
25) E. M. Forster, *Howards End*, p. 101.
26) Cf. Wilfred Stone "Forster on Love and Money," *Aspects of E. M. Forster*, ed. Oliver Stallybrass (London : Edward Arnold Ltd., 1969), p. 110.
27) E. M. Forster, *Howards End*, p. 58.
28) E. M. Forster, *Marianne Thornton* (London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1956), p. 289.
29) E. M. Forster, *Howards End*, p. 236.
30) *Ibid.*, p. 235.
31) "Liberty in England," E. M. Forster, *Abinger Harvest* (Pocket Edition; London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1965), p. 79.
32) Stone, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
33) *Ibid.*, p. 36.
34) E. M. Forster, *Howards End*, pp. 101f.
35) *Ibid.*, p. 19.
36) *Ibid.*, p. 73.
37) Bradbury (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 29.
Cf. G. S. Fraser, *The Modern Writer and His World* ("Pelican Books"; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1972), p. 94.
38) E. M. Forster, *Howards End*, p. 18.
39) Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 92.
40) Trilling, *op. cit.*, p. 116.
41) E. M. Forster, *The Longest Journey* (Pocket Edition; London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1964), p. 24.
42) E. M. Forster, *Howards End*, p. 23.
43) *Ibid.*, p. 43.
44) *Ibid.*, p. 314.
45) *Ibid.*, p. 183.
46) *Ibid.*, p. 240.
47) *Loc. cit.*
48) *Ibid.*, p. 255.
49) *Ibid.*, p. 309.
50) *Ibid.*, p. 265.
51) Malcolm Cowley (ed.), *Writers at Work: A Paris Review Interviews* (Viking Compass Edition; New York: The Viking Press, 1959), p. 30.

52) E. M. Forster, *Howards End*, p. 203.
53) *Ibid.*, pp. 335 f.
54) Trilling, *op. cit.*, p. 116.
55) E. M. Forster, *Howards End*, p. 327.
56) Cf. Alan Wilde, *Art and Order: A Study of E. M. Forster* ("The Gotham Library"; New York: New York University Press, 1964), p. 117.
Cf. Arnold Kettle, *An Introduction to the English Novel* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1974), II, pp. 145-146.
Cf. Bradbury (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 142.
57) Stone, *op. cit.*, p. 266.
58) E. M. Forster, *Howards End*, p. 337.
59) Warner, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
60) Cf. E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* ("Pelican Books"; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1974), p. 62.

(This essay is a corrected version of Chapter 4 of my M. A. thesis submitted to Osaka University in 1977.)