

critical essays on E.M.Forster

Critical Essays on E. M. Forster

Alan Wilde

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Critical Essays on
E. M. Forster

CRITICAL ESSAYS ON MODERN BRITISH LITERATURE

The critical essays series on modern British literature provides a variety of approaches to both the modern classical writers of Britain and Ireland and the best contemporary authors. In general, the series seeks to represent the best in published criticism, augmented, where appropriate, by original essays by recognized authorities. The goal of each volume is to suggest a new perspective on its particular subject.

Alan Wilde's thesis deals with the consistency of E. M. Forster's work. In the plethora of Forster scholarship from all critical quarters (Marxist, psychological, etc.) there is remarkable agreement regarding Forster's beliefs and his "consistent and definable voice." The difficulty arises in assigning Forster a historical niche. The questions of whether he was an Edwardian, a modernist, a postmodernist, even a member of the Bloomsbury group are still the subjects of critical controversy. As disparate as his beliefs and methods seem to be, however, there is a strong unity of effect his work produces and it is this effect that Wilde brilliantly manages to define.

Wilde's is the first major study to place Forster's homosexuality in perspective against his liberal humanism and morality. The importance of the topic, while not paramount, is real in shaping the author's life and his views as they translate into his fiction. Forster's work, especially the major contributions, will continue to be part of the classical canon of modern British Literature, and Wilde's book will play no small role in keeping it there.

Zack Bowen, GENERAL EDITOR

University of Delaware

for Peggy Moan Rowe

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INTRODUCTION

What can one reasonably and usefully say about a body of critical writing that numbered, as of the mid-1970s, some 1,913 items, and that by now easily exceeds the 2,000 mark?¹ It is hardly an exaggeration to assert that the mere bulk of writing devoted to Forster's works and, more recently, to his life threatens to overwhelm not only the beginning student but even those whose interest in Forster spans several decades. And to overwhelm Forster too, sinking his relatively slim production of fiction and nonfiction under the massive weight of interpretation, explanation, and evaluation. The problem, however, is in some sense more apparent than real. The amount of commentary lavished on Forster exceeds by far its diversity, and there is to the almost eighty years' worth of accumulated essays, reviews, and books that take him as their subject a quite remarkable uniformity. This is not to say that critics have failed to bring to bear on Forster their own special perspectives—Marxist, Christian, feminist, psychological, psychoanalytic, and so on. But it is to maintain that, whatever their ideological divergencies, those perspectives—whether thematic or technical in emphasis, whether their aim is to praise or to attack—tend to presuppose the same literary criteria, the same value structures, and the same methodological emphases and procedures. In short, a handful of structuralist and poststructuralist essays notwithstanding, almost all commentary on Forster exists within a relatively familiar and traditional realm of critical discourse.

Needless to say, so summary and capacious a generalization derives from a rather distant, bird's-eye view of the field, and it will be necessary later on to modify it in the light of those differences that inevitably present themselves to a more proximate scrutiny. For the moment, however, it may be allowed to stand, since it permits us to ask not only how but why Forster criticism has responded in the way it has—why, that is, it has proved so much less various than the criticism directed at such contemporaries of Forster as D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, or James Joyce. The most plausible, albeit speculative, answer is that Forster has, in a manner of speaking, called forth and controlled precisely the kind of criticism he has received. Is this possible? Can one imagine the man who, according to his biographer, "was inconspicuous,

sometimes to the point of vanishing,"² exerting so strong and far-reaching an influence on those drawn to define for themselves the values and meanings of his writing? In fact, yes; but to test the validity of the hypothesis one needs to define what is irreducible in Forster—or, rather, in the Forster who emerges from the fiction and the nonfiction alike by way of a particularly clear set of beliefs and a remarkably consistent and definable voice. Clear, consistent, definable? Immediately and again, questions present themselves. The adjectives may seem at best misguided, at worst perverse, given the quality to which, almost from the beginning, friends and critics have overwhelmingly responded in Forster: his elusiveness. The comparisons of him, for example, to "a vaguely rambling butterfly," "whimsical & vagulous," to "the Cheshire Cat," or to "the elusive colt of a dark horse"³ (always something animal or fantastic, not quite human or socialized) are only the most imaginative and striking descriptions to be found among the remarks that run from the earliest observations to the most recent.⁴ But it is equally important to note that if, as Woolf maintains in the essay reprinted here, "there is something baffling and evasive in the very nature of his gifts"; if, as John Beer suggests, that quality "brings out the difficulty of aligning Forster with any preceding tradition";⁵ and if, finally, as Philip Gardner remarks, his elusiveness constitutes "an element which partly accounts for the difficulty experienced by many critics . . . in assigning him his precise 'magnitude,'"⁶ still it is no less true that Forster's elusiveness is a stance that describes his strength as much as, or even more than, it does his slipperiness.

No doubt it is difficult to "assign" Forster—to discover not only his magnitude but his filiations. Was he a member of the Bloomsbury Group? Included by S. P. Rosenbaum in *The Bloomsbury Group: A Collection of Memoirs, Commentary and Criticism* (1975), he is excluded from Leon Edel's collective biography, *Bloomsbury: A House of Lions* (1979); and both choices can be seen as plausible. Is his fiction Edwardian and premodernist? Modernist? Both? Again, convincing arguments can be, have been, advanced. At any rate, the questions, while not unimportant, are peripheral: attempts to slot Forster into the categories by which literary history makes sense of literature's always stubborn variousness. What is clear is that, in his life as in his art, the "'outsider's' view of things" that Beer attributes to Forster,⁷ and that for P. N. Furbank makes him "a master of *angle*" determines not only the elusiveness or complexity of his vision but—the word bears repeating—its consistency (consistency but not necessarily coherence, a different and more difficult matter, of which more later).

To speak of complexity is inevitably to summon up Forster's familiar distinction, propounded by Rickie Elliot in *The Longest Journey*, between "the knowledge of good and evil" and "the knowledge of good-and-evil"⁸—to recognize, that is, Forster's temperamental irony and to

discover in that irony not merely a collection of satiric techniques but a characteristic way of apprehending the world: a perception of and a response to its fundamental disunity. To speak of consistency, on the other hand, is to gauge the effect of that response on Forster's readers. If the voice of the fiction, and of the nonfiction as well, is continuously busy making us aware of life's disjunctions, unsettling our assurances and certainties, forcing us to make distinctions, it is no less intent on overcoming separation and antinomy. Whether the healing, reconciling countervision succeeds as fully as the originating vision (or irritation)—and whether, incidentally, the source of the latter is to be located in temperament, personality, or, as some more recent commentators hold, sexuality—is not an immediate concern. What matters is the steadying effect of that voice: the assurance it offers, whatever is being said, that we can, not resolve, but come to terms with life's inherent fractures, that we are capable, at the least, of turning the world's muddle into mystery and, at best, of realizing the values that are (so it is implied) within our power to understand and grasp.

↪ All of which is to say that, along with Lawrence, Forster is the preeminent moralist of his age. Speaking of his "passion for moralising," Furbank comments: "He was moralising busily when he was twenty; and he continued, without intermission, for the next seventy years. He plainly regarded it as the business of life; one was on earth to improve oneself and to improve others, and the path to this was moral generalisations." The comparison with Lawrence, however, though valid in some respects, may be misleading. Forster's moral position is less radical, his tone less hectic, his hope more tempered. The last Victorian rather than one of the last Romantics, he seeks not a new order but, as he says in "What I Believe," a reordering of what already exists. Not for Forster Lawrence's injunction to "smash the frame";⁹ and it may well be (to return to my original argument) that Forster's critics respond as much to the limits he implicitly imposes on his subversions as to the subversions themselves. Or, alternatively, that Forster elicits, has elicited, a kind of criticism more attentive to the manifest intricacies of his texts than to the less obvious forces that subtend them, the point being that commentary has inclined to take him on his own, ultimately self-limiting and, to a degree, conservative terms, and so to meet him, even when antagonistic, on his own apparently preferred ground.

But these observations, even if true, are too narrowly based, too restrictive in their assessment of Forster as a latter-day sage spooning out dollops of wisdom for the edification of his readers. In fact, just as his "passion for moralising" is absorbed into the aesthetic texture of his fiction, so the aesthetic effect of the novels and stories is moral in a way that transcends the separable generalizations Furbank speaks about—lying instead, as in so much modernist fiction, in its ability to conjure up, by way of hope and desire, alternatives to a world that is, as For-

ster's fiction envisions it, increasingly out of control. Furthermore, if, like Forster's novels, modernism enacts a dialectic of disorder and order, of thematic irresolution and formal closure, the criticism that it called into being—New Criticism, with its ideal of maximal complexity resolved into unity—offers a way of doing justice to any amount of irony, paradox (*apparent* paradox), and qualification while preserving a belief in the integrity of the work as a whole. It follows, finally, since Forster's critics (when they are not simply impressionistic) fall overwhelmingly into the New Critical camp, that his fictions tend to be valued or devalued to the degree that, in the face of their complexities, they achieve or fail to achieve at the last a demonstrable unity of effect.

Still, to point up the congruence between Forster and his critics is very likely to say no more than can be alleged of Forster's contemporaries and their critics. The question remains: What is it that, despite his elusiveness, constrains his critics to see him as he would be seen? The answer, it appears, is to be found in Lionel Trilling's shrewd observation that Forster "is not merely a writer, he is a figure"—one, he explains, who "acts out in public the role of the private man."¹⁰ In other words, Forster, from the beginning to the end of his career, and in a way different from Joyce or Woolf, imposed on his readers, consciously or not, a particular way of perceiving him which has persisted into the present and which accounts for the fact that at the moment he seems to many rather old-fashioned. "I used to admire Forster's work much more than I do now," Angus Wilson said in a recent interview, adding with an eerie echo of Trilling's words: "Forster has receded from me as a figure."¹¹ And in a still more recent comment, Lillian D. Bloom describes the writers discussed in the book she is reviewing as "all of them (with the arguable exception of E. M. Forster) 'great' and presumably secure in a literary galaxy."¹²

Has Forster in fact, despite the continued outpouring of books and essays devoted to him, receded from readers in general? And is his reputation less secure than it once was? According to Frederick P. W. McDowell, the leading scholar of Forster criticism, "Forster will undoubtedly occupy a place somewhat less august in the annals of contemporary literature than he did in the years 1945 to 1970, but it is safe to say that he will never sink into the obscurity that overtook him, in the period 1930 to 1943, as an important novelist."¹³ But even this tempered estimate may seem too sanguine in the light of Wilson's and Bloom's remarks. (And they are not alone in their disparagements: several years ago, in response to a *Times Literary Supplement* questionnaire, a number of writers described Forster as the most overrated novelist of the century.) Nevertheless, McDowell is surely right. The virtues of at least the major novels have been established, and if Forster as a presence seems for now less lustrous and exciting than many of his contemporaries, it may well be because of the way in which he has been viewed. This is, to repeat, a matter not of the quality of Forster

criticism but of its scope or, better, of its grid. The best of that writing does perhaps constitute, as McDowell says, "a lump of pure gold,"¹⁴ but something more, it seems, is required to rescue Forster from the trough into which his self-created myth has plunged him. In sum, it may be said that Forster has been as much the victim as the beneficiary of the criticism dedicated to him; and it may be said with equal justice that his critics have in turn been the victims, the willing victims perhaps, of Forster as "figure": the elusive moralist with, as Trilling once remarked, a whim of iron.

Such an overview, however, risks, even courts, simplification; and as it is possible to exaggerate the singleness or singlemindedness of Forster, who, Furbank argues, "had a variety of literary personalities,"¹⁵ so it is possible to overstate the unanimity of his critics and to underplay the interest and importance of their family quarrels. For the fact is that if criticism of Forster rests on a base of common procedures and assumptions, it is by no means of a piece; and the problem is how best to represent its variety. One might, of course, seek out large configurations, dividing the criticism, as McDowell plausibly and persuasively does, into three periods: 1905–38, the time in which "review comment prevails"; 1938–57, the years of "the Forster revival" (initiated by Trilling's study) and of "a more authoritative and systematic appraisal of Forster's work"; and 1958–the present, years that account for over sixty per cent of the items listed in McDowell's bibliography, among them almost all of the full-length books.¹⁶ Or, alternatively, one might single out (as McDowell also does) major and representative statements on Forster, a short, chronological, and necessarily personal list which would include Woolf's "The Novels of E. M. Forster" (1927) and F. R. Leavis's "E. M. Forster" (1938), both seminal in arguing for a division in Forster between realistic and symbolic impulses; Trilling's *E. M. Forster* (1943) and Frederick C. Crews's *E. M. Forster: The Perils of Humanism* (1962), two studies centering on the nature and limitations of Forster's liberal humanism; James McConkey's *The Novels of E. M. Forster* (1957), an examination of Forster's fictional strategies in terms of the categories set forth in *Aspects of the Novel*; Wilfred Stone's *The Cave and the Mountain: A Study of E. M. Forster* (1966), in which Forster undergoes a full-scale, controversial psychological analysis and in which *A Passage to India* is elaborately and impressively examined as a novel whose theme "is that, for all our differences, we are in fact one"¹⁷ (a reading to be contrasted with Crews's and with Alan Wilde's in *Art and Order: A Study of E. M. Forster* [1964]); George H. Thomson's *The Fiction of E. M. Forster* (1967), a provocative attempt to answer, in ways that will become apparent shortly, the criticisms of writers like Leavis and Woolf; and, finally, John Colmer's *E. M. Forster: The Personal Voice* (1975) and Claude Summers's *E. M. Forster* (1983), which in their admirably lucid examinations of the whole of Forster's

career suggestively bring into play the evidence of the posthumous works.

The list is skimpy and inadequate: it does not, for example, mention notable essays or books by, among others, John Beer, Malcolm Bradbury, E. K. Brown, G. K. Das, K. W. Gransden, Michael Ragussis, Stephen Spender, or Austin Warren (for all of which, see McDowell's bibliography and bibliographical essays). Nor does it allude to most of the works printed below or to such invaluable resource books for students of Forster as McDowell's *Annotated Bibliography* (1976), Philip Gardner's *E. M. Forster: The Critical Heritage* (1973), S. P. Rosenbaum's *The Bloomsbury Group* (1975), P. N. Furbank's *E. M. Forster: A Life* (1977-78), or the splendid Abinger Edition, edited by the late Oliver Stallybrass, which has given us at last authoritative texts to work with. Still, it is long enough to suggest some of the major steps in the history of Forster criticism and to acknowledge the changes that have taken place in it over the course of the last several decades.

In any case, the meagerness of the sampling is intended as a comment not on the vitality of Forster criticism but on the inadequacy, for the purposes of this introduction, of an exclusively diachronic approach. Partly because that approach has been so well pursued by others already mentioned, partly because of reasons already set forth above, and partly because, as Gardner claims, "the understanding of Forster by his earlier contemporaries was no worse, if no better, than that demonstrated by his later,"¹⁸ it seems wiser and more fruitful to grasp that sprawling body of criticism topically. In other words, one must, as far as possible, imagine his critics—despite the historical and ideological constraints that necessarily condition their attitudes—as Forster imagines writers of different ages in *Aspects of the Novel*: all of them "at work together in a circular room."¹⁹ What is it they are discussing? Forster's liberal humanism, certainly; his homosexuality, very likely; no doubt, in the light of Furbank's biography, the relations between the man and the work; and of course, and as always, the proper interpretation of the fiction. Other topics too, naturally, but these will serve to suggest the characteristic and recurring issues that define a general topography and its boundaries.

To begin with Forster's humanism is not to put ideas before art but to acknowledge again the persuasiveness and influence of Trilling's notion of Forster as a figure: one of those, to quote further from his definition, "who live their visions as well as write them, who *are* what they write, whom we think of as standing for something as men because of what they have written in their books. They preside, as it were, over certain ideas and attitudes."²⁰ The description suits best, perhaps, the Forster who emerged in the 1930s and 1940s, "the antiheroic hero," as Christopher Isherwood fondly called him, whose voice spoke at once quietly and powerfully in the shadow of economic and political crises and, finally, of war. But it is no less true to assert that the ideas given

their most memorable expression in "What I Believe" (1939) shape Forster's public thinking and attitudes throughout his long career, as they shape the attitudes of his critics to him and his work. What is at issue is, first of all, a particular set of beliefs: in the irreducible centrality of the individual; in the importance, whatever their actual limits and failures, of personal relations; in the virtues of "tolerance, good temper and sympathy";²¹ in the value of diversity and differences; and, more generally, in the capacity of human beings for taking pleasure in their world. But Forster's humanism is also a *way* of perceiving and coming to terms with the world, one that involves, as we've already seen, a sense of its intrinsic complexity: that inextricable mixture of good-and-evil that calls forth in those able to recognize it a spirit of restlessness and inquiry, an openness to experience, and, above all, an unrelenting tentativeness in the face of the competing absolutes and faiths that always and everywhere loudly assert their exclusive possession of Truth.

It is easy enough to understand, even to anticipate, the objections of non- or antihumanists to Forster's beliefs,²² objections, primarily, to the unprogrammable nature of his political ideas and to his thoroughly undoctrinaire sense of the world's mystery. More to the point are the reactions by liberals themselves to what Trilling (in the essay reprinted here) speaks of as Forster's "refusal to be great" and his concomitant espousal of "the relaxed will," which put him "for all his long commitment to the doctrines of liberalism . . . at war with the liberal imagination." Praising his "moral realism," Trilling admits to an occasional irritation with Forster; and other critics, even sympathetic ones, have gone further, some, like Crews, detecting in Forster or his work "a certain shallowness that is inherent in his liberalism."²³ In any case, many of the critics in the pages that follow (see, especially, Widdowson and Parry) have felt the need to weigh the strengths of Forster's liberal humanism against its putative inadequacies when faced with the social, political, and metaphysical realities revealed in the major novels especially. Very likely, the last word has been said in the essay by Wilfred Stone, an eminently subtle and sinuous examination of "Forster's personal witness for softness," which urges all that can be said in opposition to his beliefs but sees them as finally constituting "a position toughly held and not weakly acted out."

Explicitly or implicitly, Stone's essay takes account of and answers a whole range of familiar objections: those of F. R. Leavis, and, still more, of his followers, which fault Forster for associating himself with and for "accepting, it seems, uncritically, the very inferior social-intellectual milieu [of Bloomsbury]";²⁴ those of critics like Samuel Hynes, for whom Forster's "liberalism was never much more than sentimental humanism";²⁵ and, finally and most effectively, those of commentators like Cynthia Ozick, who, in answer to her rhetorical question, "Does it devalue the large humanistic statement to know that its sources are narrowly personal?" resoundingly (and a bit smugly) replies "Yes."²⁶ The

narrowly personal sources are for Ozick, as for Hynes, to be located in Forster's homosexuality; and there is little question but that, along with his humanism, Forster's sexual preferences are the aspect of his life that has generated the most heat (more rarely, light) among his critics. Ought one to be surprised? Obviously not, given the persistence of exactly those societal attitudes that kept Forster from publishing his homosexual novel during his lifetime—attitudes that, as he sadly and acutely noted in 1960, had undergone no more than a “change from ignorance and terror to familiarity and contempt.”²⁷ And yet there is something odd about the reactions that followed the publication of *Maurice*, *The Life to Come*, and Furbank's biographical studies. For the fact is that Forster's homosexuality was an open secret in American academic circles at least as long ago as the 1950s, perhaps earlier; and if critics refrained from referring to it—or referred to it gingerly—their reasons had less to do with ignorance than with discretion. What emerged, then, after Forster's death was less the fact of his homosexuality (though no doubt some critics, along with the public, were taken by surprise) than its special configuration. In particular, that Forster, as Furbank says in the essay reprinted below, “found [sex] easier with people outside his own social class” and that “he valued sex for its power to release his own capacities for tenderness and devotion, but . . . never expected an *equal* sexual relation” helps enormously to explain the nature and urgency of the subsexual attractions in several of the novels, even as these facts and the additional one that “he achieved physical sex very late” (these and *not* the homosexuality itself) enable us better to comprehend the failure his books frequently display to connect passion imaginatively and convincingly with love.

The importance of Forster's homosexuality (and of its special patterns) to an understanding of his life and work is generally agreed upon. What that understanding is or should be is another matter. Critics like Hynes and Ozick, both of them reviewing *Maurice* unfavorably, conclude that “Forster may have disliked and resented his condition” and that he “thought homosexuality wrong: naturally wrong, with the sort of naturalness that he did not expect to date.”²⁸ In the light of such beliefs, Ozick's revaluation and deconsideration of Forster's humanism as a function of his sexuality is hardly unexpected, however wrong-headed and offensive her views inevitably appear to better-informed minds. Other critics, Judith Scherer Herz and Claude Summers among them, begin with the more plausible contention that, in Herz's words, “the heterosexual/homosexual distinction is quite artificial” and that “sexual energy has been a component of Forster's fiction from the start.” Both critics, in short, find in Forster's homosexuality areas of literary strength and in his work a heretofore insufficiently explored dimension; and it seems undeniable that henceforth no criticism can afford to overlook, indeed to explore fully, the impact of Forster's sexual behavior and fantasies on his fiction.

And yet, Furbank maintains firmly that "We must not expect, then, when reading Forster's letters, any more than from reading his biography, to trace the creator to his lair, or to find 'explanations' of his novels."²⁹ One understands the warning implicit in these words: the caution against a kind of biographical reductiveness. Most critics, however, like Stone "consult[ing] Forster's fiction and biography as different aspects of one record—as I believe in essentials they are," are reluctant to forego whatever illumination the life may be seen to shed on the work, particularly in a work so filled, as we are beginning to see and as Herz so persuasively argues, with double plots and energizing subtexts. It is possible, though, to agree that what critics are likely to look for in the future is not an explicit correlation between the life and the fiction (the psychological method) but, as the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty suggests, a style, "the system of equivalences that [the artist] makes for himself for the work which manifests the world he sees."³⁰

In another sense, then, Furbank is right; and although critics are unlikely to ignore the biographical record, it is in the writings that one must finally seek the inscription and manifestation of the life—as many have, of course, from the start. It has already been noted that several of the best early critics focus their remarks in terms of what Forster's friend Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson called his "double vision."³¹ "Here, then," Virginia Woolf remarks in the essay reprinted below, "is a difficult family of gifts to persuade to live in harmony together: satire and sympathy; fantasy and fact; poetry and a prim moral sense"; and she comments later in the same essay on "an ambiguity at the heart of Mr. Forster's novels." (Like Dickinson, Woolf felt that in *A Passage to India* "the double vision . . . was in process of becoming single.") Reviewing Forster criticism in 1966, Malcolm Bradbury commented: "The sense that Forster proceeds simultaneously in two areas of the novel not normally brought together—the areas of social observation and comedy, and the area of symbolic romance—has . . . been common enough among critics of Forster; and in most post-war criticism one or the other side of Forster has been stressed."³² What needs to be emphasized, however, is not the fact of Forster's foot-in-both-worlds stance but its consequences for the interpretation and evaluation of his achievement.

These consequences became fully apparent with the publication of George H. Thomson's *The Fiction of E. M. Forster*. Arguing against what he describes as the realist assumptions of critics such as Woolf, Leavis, Trilling, Crews, and Wilde, Thomson opens his book with the following credo: "Four things may be said about the fiction of E. M. Forster: first, that his works are romance rather than novel; second, that symbolism is central to his achievement in the romance form; third, that the principal source of his symbols is ecstatic experience; and fourth, that through the power of ecstatic perception his symbols achieve archetypal significance and mythic wholeness."³³ Clearly, to accept these

propositions is to view Forster's fiction in one way, while to reject them is to see it very differently indeed. Whether, for example, one chooses to regard such symbolic characters as Stephen Wonham in *The Longest Journey* or *Howards End's* Mrs. Wilcox as successful archetypal creations or as poorly soldered amalgams of conflicting intentions; whether one detects in much of Forster's symbolism integrity or strain; whether one finds in various of the plots the internal warfare of contradictory impulses or their successful resolution; and, finally, whether Forster's fiction in general does or does not appear to embody a vision of unity and wholeness—in all these cases the answer depends on the degree to which one is willing to credit Thomson's reading of Forster "as a visionary whose aim was to transmute his realistic material."³⁴

If Thomson was not the first to approach Forster as a writer of romance (see the essays by John Edward Hardy and Louise Dauner), it is also the case that his interpretation has not brought realist critics to their knees (see Peter Widdowson's persuasive oppositional reading, also included in this collection). And if, as has been repeatedly argued in this introduction, the assumptions of *both* realist and romance critics are in some fundamental sense the same—that is, if one group deplors the absence of a coherence, in characterization, in the manipulation of symbols, in structure, and in vision, the presence of which the other group applauds—nevertheless Thomson's argument has probably done more than any other to draw the lines that have so far defined the map of Forster criticism. For this reason, Thomson's distinction hovers over much of what follows in this collection, particularly in the second section, where his own study of the early stories as "romance moralities" confronts Woolf's overview of Forster's career and Trilling's alignment of him with the liberal imagination, and in the fourth, where a half-dozen critics examine the major novels. (It should be said here that despite the occasional eccentric judgment—most notably W. H. Auden's [in his foreword to the Abinger Edition of *Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson*] that Forster's somewhat limping and pedestrian biography of his friend was his best book—*Howards End* and *A Passage to India* are understood to represent the highpoint of Forster's achievement.)

Although almost all critics—Trilling is a notable exception—regard *A Passage to India* as the greatest of Forster's works, his major and rightful claim to a place in the history of twentieth-century fiction, it could plausibly be argued that for most readers *Howards End* presents itself as Forster's most immediately accessible and rewarding novel. Morally impassioned, tonally various, rich in its elaboration of characters and of the contexts that add dimension to their separate quests, the book best represents the individuality and range of Forster's voice and the fictional incarnation of Trilling's figure. At the same time, *Howards End* is, as McDowell rightly notes, "the most controversial of Forster's novels."³⁵ Critics have argued endlessly and passionately over the plausibility of Margaret Schlegel's marriage to Henry Wilcox, Henry's liaison