Forster's End: Identity, Connection and Redemption through English Identity in *Howard's End*

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Abstract

E.M. Forster's 1910 novel *Howards End* engages and challenges several mores of social behaviour in England - namely, the mixing of social classes, the fate of the 'fallen' woman, and the status of the foreigner. Through his story of the half-German, bohemian Schlegel sisters, their association with solidly British Wilcoxes and the inheritance of a property with a particular symbolic and emotional importance, Forster illustrates the epitaph that precedes the text of the novel - 'only connect'. The connection that the author advocates is national, humanistic and spiritual. An examination of the role of the Schlegel sisters and their actions reveals the fact that Forster urged social renewal through understanding and inclusiveness.

Forster's thematic aims intersect with the notion of an English and a British identity (sometimes called 'Britishism'). Britishism is a composite identity, encompassing England and its colonies. It is only selectively inclusive, however; it tends to exclude on the basis of race and religion, constructing a foreign 'other'. Britishism is, moreover, strongly associated with colonialism. The English identity, on the other hand, is local or regional, unconcerned with the spread of colonial power, and focused on the symbolic importance of land. In *Howards End* Forster implies that the English (and possibly the British) identity may be enhanced through the inclusion of formerly excluded elements. Margaret's inheritance of *Howards End* and its eventual passing to her nephew establishes the foreign, fallen Schlegels as 'spiritual heirs' of a piece of England, indicating incontrovertible belonging.

**Keywords:** English literature, Forster, Englishness, identity, foreigners.
British and English as Elements of Identity

Britishness as a well articulated notion emerged in the late 20th century but had much earlier antecedents, dating back to closer to the start of the colonial period and the amalgamation of England, Scotland and Wales (1707). The notion of Britishism as opposed to merely English identity is the stuff of colonialism, stemming from the era when 'Britannia ruled the waves' and God, purportedly, was an Englishman. To be English was a narrow, local and land-based identity, but to be British is potentially inclusive - inclusive, that is, of the other nations of the British Isles (Wales, Ireland and Scotland) as well as Britain's 'white' colonies, the loss of which, in the case of America, may have consolidated and strengthened the notion of Britishness through the implied external threat to it.

At the same time, of course, the term is also, by its very definition, exclusive. Britishness draws a line between the United Kingdom and continental Europe on the one hand, and the 'new world' on the other, interacting with both while remaining distinct (and some would say, aloof). The history of war with France, and the fear or a recurrence of such, may have encouraged Britain to distance and distinguish itself from 'the Continent'. Indeed, France came to be viewed as a 'natural enemy' of Britain. Distinctions in the area of religion also play a role. Indeed, as Colley points out, 'Britons defined themselves in terms of their common Protestantism as contrasted with the Catholicism of Continental Europe'. The perceived contrast was cultural and even moral as well as religious - indeed, the difference in religion may be viewed as a sort of symbol or shorthand for these broader divisions or differentiation. Catholics were, for the British, a 'hereditary enemy' because of what was perceived as their tendency to be 'superstitious, persecuting... arbitrary when powerful, starving literate and cringing when not'. They were, in short, 'outlandish', both literary and by connotation. The Catholic identity was considered to have complex and irredeemable influences on the moral character and the personalities of those who were bred and raised within it. (One might argue for the irony of this, given the few material

4 Colley, p. 321
6 Colley, p. 316
7 Colley, p. 319

http://www.ijhcs.com/index.php/ijhcs/index
differences in the practices of Roman Catholics and 'High' Anglicans. Perhaps the very admission of a superior power (the Pope) outside of one's country is, however, a material and symbolic difference that distinguishes England (and Britain) from the Continent.

Whereas 'Britishism' may be viewed at least in part as a tool and mode of transmission of colonial power, being English, or 'Englishism', to coin a term, seems more rooted in the local or regional. It is, perhaps, linked to England's rural roots, where a sense of national identity has connected people generationally and through the inheritance of land for many generations. English identity carries with it its own prejudices and tendency toward exclusion, as is perhaps the case in any traditional and intact society; however, its purpose is not primarily colonial, but, rather, the consolidation of local and traditional land. Despite these differences, however, the English identity is an essential element of Britishism. In several of his novels, E.M. Forster shows a tendency to portray meetings between British and continental European characters in such a way that highlights differences in character and disposition. His tone in portraying these encounters is mildly satirical, with the satire directed predominantly but not exclusively at the British or English. Forster is aware of the British tendency to perceive in themselves a cultural superiority, and through his narrative voice and description it is clear that he does not agree with the notion that to be British is to be superior. Scenes such as Reverend Eager's description of Florentine artistic masterpieces in A Room with a View (as well as Mr. Emerson's humorous rejoinders) show a lack of understanding of the art on the part of the English - ignorant tourists addicted to their 'Baedeker' tourist guides. Yet those who remain on the Continent as long term residents are chided even more strongly by the author - they are unfailingly ridiculous (think of Cecil Vyse's pronouncement that he is an 'Inglese Italianato ... un diablo incarnato' when in fact, a more formal, staid, and irredeemably English character would be hard to find.)

'Of the dreadful sort' - the Importance of the Foreigner

The persistence of the encounters between British and continental characters in Forster's novels are not, however, wholly trivial or present for entirely for humorous effect. Rather, they are expression of a plea of sorts - a need for greater mixing between nationalities, a growth of understanding, sympathy and mutual learning - for connection, as implied by the famous epitaph at the beginning of Howards End. The British, Forster is implying, need the new blood of the Continent and beyond, its external influence, in order to rejuvenate their own collective identity. In isolation, that identity grows staid, chauvinistic, and degenerate. Moreover, it is not enough to leave England and to physically travel abroad, carrying Britishness within oneself - rather, one must be open to the transformation that incidents of novel content can bring to the individual.

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In *A Room with a View*, the importance of the Continent is described in quite simple terms. Lucy Honeychurch must venture into the streets of Italy alone and unprotected in order to make her essential, elemental contact with a young man from England, whom she never would have met (such is the implication) in their native country. She is altered by that encounter, which comes to fruition back in England. Meanwhile, Cecil Vyse remains stolidly unchanged despite spending ample time abroad. Cosmopolitanism, in Forster, may appear to be the object of spoof, but it could also be interpreted that it is only a superficial and showy form of cosmopolitanism that the author critiques. Allowing oneself to be changed by one's shifting surroundings is infinitely more difficult and less common, but it is also, to Forster, seemingly essential.

In *Howard's End*, Forster tackles a more difficult and ambivalent relationship between England and the continent through his principal characters, Margaret and Helen Schlegel. As we learn from the very start, the Schlegel sisters, though raised in England and indistinguishable from the British through appearance or speech, are half German. This background distinguishes them in multiple subtle ways. They are, at a glance, more passionate (and compassionate) than their fully English counterparts; they (or, at any rate, Margaret) have a liminal consciousness, able to see the limitations of both English and German identity that others are blind to; and they retain a somewhat bohemian outlook and differing moral and behavioural standards in comparison to their English counterparts. Indeed, it is striking to note how many subtle characteristics are ascribed to these characters seemingly on account of their half-German background, while, at the same time, the author mocks and thus seemingly discounts nationalistic prejudice.

'Of course I regard you Schlegels as English... English to the backbone,' states Margaret and Helen's aunt, Mrs. Munt, lest it appear that she is including them in a negative judgment of the Germans as 'too thorough'. Shortly after, however, the narrator inserts his own note on the national character of the Schlegels: 'A word on their origins. They were not 'English to the backbone' as their aunt had piously asserted. But, in the other hand, they were not Germans of the dreadful sort.' The statement, obviously, is tongue in cheek; through the phrase 'of the dreadful sort', the author invites the reader to examine his or her own views - do we regard cultural groups to be collectively of 'dreadful sort'? At the same time, the phrasing invites - indeed, almost insists upon - an instant collusion with chauvinistic cultural exclusion. When any race of people is parodied, through our very recognition of the parody and our response to it, we become implicated in stereotyping. Any instinctive understanding of who those 'dreadful sort of Germans' may be forces the acknowledgement that we may harbour such views ourselves.

In this case, of course, the 'dreadful' sort of Germans would be those who are very firmly entrenched in their own national and nationalistic identity. Helen and Margaret's father, settling in England to the dismay of his own family, was not that sort. The English antipathy for the Continent, as described above, is expressed through the English view of the Schlegels, often

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10 Forster, p. 30
expressed in the narrator's voice and with the seeming assumption that the reader will comply with it - and the underlying motivation that the reader will come to question it. For example, Margaret and Helen's upbringing is described as somewhat unconventional, and the 'blame' for that unconventionality is clearly allocated in the following: 'They saw too many people at Wickham Place - unshaven musicians, an actress even, German cousins (one knows what foreigners are).'

Through the humorous listing of people and the parenthetical comment, the tone of this assessment is clearly satirical - again, if we agree with it, or have an instinctive understanding of the letter or content of the statement as an assessment of questionable upbringing, we are forced to simultaneously laugh at ourselves for having such views. In the same way, when Margaret's conduct (her having sent the wrong flowers to a funeral) is explained on account of her background - 'Oh I forget she isn't English' cried Evie. 'That would explain a lot.' - We naturally criticize Evie for her narrow-mindedness, but are quite likely reminded of our own complicity in these or similar assessments of national character, stereotypically derived.

By engaging and critiquing the prejudice against the Schegels, Forster is forcing the reader to examine the limitations of such prejudices, internally and externally. This is consistent with many of the light, humorous depictions of national differences and prejudices in A Room with a View, published just two years earlier. Nevertheless, I believe the contrast between the two and the particular innovations that are part of Howards End warrant close examination as part of a profound emergent message. While it may be true that both novels contain critiques of a narrow English identity, and urge immersion into other countries for improved insight into what is right in front of one at home, Howards End urges a reexamination of Britishism as well as Englishism - that is, of the colonizing, composite aspect of the British/English culture. Moreover, through the character of the two Schlegel sisters, their commonalities, and their differences from one another, Forster builds a model of what is perhaps an ideal liminality and mechanism of connection. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Foster argues for the fact that liminality and the dispelling of prejudices can provide much needed renewal of what are fundamentally local, English (rather than British) concerns, problems and divisions, such as that between rich and poor, and men and women. As well as being local, of course, such concerns are also universal - and this, too - this ultimate level of connection - appears to be implicated in Forster's objective. The social concerns that he evokes in Howards End are, in fact, sweeping and (for 1910) very topical, potentially even subversive. The subtly hybrid character of Margaret Schlegel, in particular, holds the key to the resolution of fault lines and deep divisions in English society.

Forster's choice to make his protagonists half German was hardly accidental, of course. It can well be argued that the choice of Germany as an 'alternate' locale and source of identity allows for insights that could not be afforded - or, at any rate, would have been vastly altered - had the sisters been half Italian, or half French, for example. Germany and England are portrayed as cultural and colonial counterparts based on certain commonalities, while at the same time, prejudice against the Colonial identity can also easily be portrayed with reference to Germaness. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was well known that Germany had

\[11\] Forster, p. 16
expansionist ambitions - as, of course, Britain had been manifesting for many years. Margaret, having the benefit of belonging to both cultures but neither entirely, has the insight to label the folly of the inflated collective egos of both cultures at the young age of thirteen, where, as the narrator points out, many others would not recognize such commonality at any point in their lives. Margaret remarks 'Either God does not know his own mind about England and Germany, or else these do not know the mind of God' and is deemed 'hateful' for the unwelcome insight, although, as the narrator also asserts, her brain is 'pliant and strong'.

Clearly, dual identity dispels the ingrained prejudices of both societies, making Margaret mentally stronger than those around her. For English readers, in the meantime, the passage demonstrates that they are not more righteous than the 'dreadful' Germans whom they no doubt criticize for their expansionist tendencies. Connection through similarity is built between the two nations through this portrayal, thus showing, perhaps, that Britain is not all that far removed from the Continent after all.

**Class Warfare**

Within the novel as a whole, observations about British and German character take a back seat to more local concerns. However, the implication is clearly that these issues and divisions within English society would be intractable without some sort of external or at least liminal intervention again is embodied in the Schlegels, specifically in their interactions with Leonard Bast.

Bast represents a particular segment of the lower or working classes, and by his very presence in their lives he highlights the protective affluence of both the Schlegels and the Wilcoxes. Their intercourse is fraught with moral ambivalence, with the Schlegel sisters initially determined to help Bast and his wife, but subsequently so enmeshed in their class identity that the cannot truly have sympathy for him, and, arguably, end up doing him and his wife considerable disservice. Indeed, class identity seems far more influential than national identity with regard to the interaction between the Schlegels, Wilcoxes and Basts. Margaret, at any rate, adopts the pragmatic view that nothing can be done for people who, like the Basts, are 'no good'; the interests of their own family and class must be upheld. The initial impulse of one class to help another is doomed to failure - at least, this is true on the surface. Beneath that surface narrative composed of expressed attitudes, however, Forster embeds the seeds of a different story, and gives the reader some explicit clues for its excavation.

Leonard Bast is not simply a representative of the working class; presumably, as such, he would not be as tragic a figure as he is in fact revealed to be. He is a member of the working class with passions and aspirations far above his class - namely, intellectual and artistic passions which his socioeconomic status cannot support. What is most interesting, perhaps, in the initial descriptions of Leonard Bast is the author's refusal to make him into a hero. Bast is described as inferior to most - presumably most British - in terms of courtesy and intelligence; he is

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12 Forster, p. 32
13 Forster, p. 255
‘impoverished’ in both mind and body.\textsuperscript{14} Ultimately, it is an inner infirmity - undiagnosed heart disease - that kills him, although he is also struck by the flat of an ‘old German sword' belonging to the Schlegels and crushed by a bookcase.\textsuperscript{15} The triple means of his death could hardly be more symbolic. His friendship with the Schlegel sisters and his sexual encounter with Helen, made possible by their ‘foreign’ licentiousness or tendency toward bohemianism, plays a role in Bast's downfall. His pre-existing obsession with literature and the arts is further implicated. At root, however, is an intrinsic weakness, the compromised heart that likely would not have continued to beat for long even in the absence of such unfortunate circumstances. Bast is doomed from the start, not so much because he is poor (for he is not, after all, destitute at the outset), but because he aspires to be more than poor, and reaches above his class. Here the Schlegel sisters are clearly implicated in his downfall; had they not pursued and interest in Bast and thereby brought him into contact with the Wilcoxes, Leonard Bast and his wife might have fared better. Thus, when one looks at the trajectory and outcome of the story, it appears that Forster is arguing against a mixing of social classes, and doling out narrative ‘punishments' for transgressions.

Underneath the surface, of course, nothing could be further from the truth. The Schlegel/Bast narrative has a shadow side that ultimately overpowers the aforementioned conventional wisdom regarding class divisions. Margaret states: ‘The poor cannot always reach those whom they want to love, and they can hardly ever escape from those they love no longer. We rich can.'\textsuperscript{16} This statement (which her aunt greets with suspicion, as it sounds ‘more like socialism') expresses the status quo and a consciousness of the practical aspects of class division. The ability to reach or escape others is certainly a leitmotif in this novel, as well as the earlier \textit{A Room with a View}; characters and plot are continuously propelled by attempts to avoid awkward encounters and therefore true connection and love. In keeping with Forster's epitaph ‘only connect’, however, these attempts are, in turn, thwarted by fate. Leonard Bast, moreover, connects, across wide social disparities. Despite Margaret’s pronouncement, Leonard is able to reach across the social boundaries to come into contact with the Schlegel sisters and all that they represent to him. Moreover, because he impregnates Helen, Bast’s progeny will do the seemingly impossible - infiltrate the upper classes and have access to the comfortable and culturally rich life that Bast himself so helplessly craved. In a brief discussion of social Darwinism, Margaret observes that ‘in some mystical way the Mr. Basts of the future will benefit because the Mr. Brits of today are in pain.'\textsuperscript{17} The notion of the benefit to future generations is a strong one, and perhaps a means to understanding the otherwise enigmatic narrative element of Helen’s pregnancy by Leonard Bast.

\textsuperscript{14} Forster, p. 49
\textsuperscript{15} Forster, p. 348
\textsuperscript{16} Forster, p. 55
\textsuperscript{17} Forster, p. 204

\url{http://www.ijhcs.com/index.php/ijhcs/index}
Rethinking the Fallen Woman

Forster's treatment of Helen's pregnancy, and all of its connotations and outcomes, is perhaps the most ideologically important and certainly the most radical aspect of Howards End. The author plays upon existing tropes only to discredit and transform them, representing a powerful repudiation of the conventional norms of his day. And unwanted pregnancy, for example, would normally still, in 1910, lead to social stigmatization of a young unmarried woman. A pregnancy resulting from a social mismatch, where there is no possibility of things being remedied through a hasty marriage, was worse still. One needs only to think of Thomas Hardy's Tess of the D'Urbervilles to recall a familiar example of such. Typically, a young woman is 'ruined' by her encounter with a man above her in power and social class. Very often, it results (directly or indirectly) in the death of the young woman, for whom society can no longer hold a place. Significant social transgressions, in literature, are often 'punished' through symbolic or actual death. Hardy, it has been argued, was revolutionary in his depiction of Tess, as the young woman's loss of virginity does not equate with a loss of virtue. Nevertheless, for Hardy and certainly for the readers of his day, it was unthinkable for Tess to simply rejoin society.

On an obvious level, Forster offers the inverse of this story. In his version, the woman, rather than the man, is of the higher social class; Leonard Bast pays for the transgression just as Hardy's Tess did, less than two decades earlier. However, one must not ignore the fact that there is an important material difference between the death of a man and that of a woman in such circumstances - namely, the survival of the unborn child. In stories where the fallen woman is removed from the scene through death, the social ambiguity of the mixed-class child is avoided. In Howard's End, it is embraced. Moreover, when one considers the importance of the eponymous house (which will be discussed subsequently), the transformative power of Helen's pregnancy becomes all the more apparent. Helen and her situation, as we shall see, are concurrent with the Schlegels' gaining Howards End and thereby securing a seat in England, in the most elemental and incontrovertible way possible - through ownership of hereditary land.

Helen's pregnancy also brings about a transformation in Margaret, established from the start as clear thinking and strong minded above and beyond others in her social sphere. Margaret, as mentioned earlier, seems to represent for Forster the change that British society needs in order to become or remain vital. In the preceding analysis, an important element was omitted. Thus far in the discussion of the importance of the half-German Schlegel sisters, the influence of Margaret and Helen has been conflated, as justified by the close connection and common background of the two. To a degree, this is accurate, but there is also a complementary divergence between the two. In short, Helen, younger and more impulsive, acts more freely than Margaret would;

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conversely, Margaret, more conventional than her sister, comes into closer contact and sympathy with the British upper classes than her sister would have done. Again, Forster employs a common enough trope in an entirely novel way. The story of the sensible and the impulsive sister is familiar (think of Jane Austen's Sense and Sensibility); here, however, the purpose is not for the latter to grow up and learn from the former, but rather to express a unique symbiosis between the two. For Helen's pregnancy, her vitality and her bold views seem to awaken Margaret from a sort of stupor.

Margaret Schlegel is always and foremost only half-German. That is to say, she belongs, at least with half of her being, to the British upper classes, and through her association with the Wilcoxes she begins to live primarily within that side of her identity. With her engagement and marriage to Henry, his concerns and views threaten to become her own. Thus, she is offended by the disreputability of the Bast's and Helen's inappropriate advocacy for them. She is in danger of becoming entrenched in the narrow-minded and exclusive values of the British upper classes. It is, perhaps, a misinterpretation of Forster's admonishment, 'only connect'; through connection with the Wilcox's and adoption of their stable social positioning, Margaret becomes less able to connect with those outside of her class.

Once her own sister becomes the victim of discriminatory conventional views, however, Margaret's intrinsic sense of justice is awakened. She becomes Helen's champion, and as such, achieves an instant sympathy for Helen's own more radical views. Moreover, she develops one her own, equating Henry Wilcox's transgression with Jacky Bast ten years previous with Helen's similar indiscretion with Leonard Bast. In doing so, she challenges centuries-worth of patriarchal views which established a double standard for the sexual behaviour of men and women. One might argue that such double standards still exist today. More than a century ago, when Forster wrote Howards End, the idea that a woman's extramarital affair could be no worse than a man's was almost unthinkable. Though the Victoria era had technically ended, women were not full social participants, and Victorian moral standards persisted in Britain until the end of World War One.

Margaret lives as a member of the British upper classes, stolidly maintaining their high standards of behaviour, and is perfectly passable as such a persona. Any aspersions cast on her foreign identity are ridiculed within the narrative. At the same time, however, she is still a liminal figure, possessing views that are far outside of those of British upper class society. These are, as Forster strongly indicates, views that are necessary for the society's transformation. Helen's actions, and her resulting pregnancy, are catalysts for Margaret to remember and become who she truly is. Margaret's championing of Helen brings about the happy outcome of the story, on both a narrative and a philosophical level. Broad connections are strengthened, fulfilling Forster's 'only connect' edict.

It should be noted that Helen herself does not act or seem to view herself as a 'fallen woman' in the Victorian tradition. She is not ashamed of her condition or of how it came about. Moreover, and perhaps most remarkably, she does not claim to have been in love with Leonard
Bast. She seems quite prepared to raise the child without a father. Her sangfroid in this matter is not unprecedented with regard to her character; for example, earlier, she is remarkably unflustered by the thought of living opposite Paul Wilcox despite their former ill-fated romantic liaison. It is strongly indicated - for example, through Margaret's and her aunt's reaction to the situation - that dismay and distress would have been the expected reaction on the part of a young woman. On the other hand, while consistent for her character, these elements (in particular, her attitude about her pregnancy) make her a remarkable literary figure, not just for 1910 but for several decades after that. For a primarily British readership, Helen's half-'foreign' status may have provided a sort of explanation for her extraordinary attitudes and behaviour. Helen herself states, eloquently, 'I have done something the English will never pardon. It would not be right for them to pardon it'.\(^{19}\) She separates her own moral standards from those of the English, and thus the author encourages the narrator to do likewise. As one who does not wholly belong, she may be freer to hold transgressive views than a 'real' British girl would be; or, it is possible that the reading public may not judge her, or her creator, as harshly for those behaviours and views, considering them part of the enigma of the foreigner. In 1891, Thomas Hardy scandalized the English readership for refusing to equate virtue with virginity; his character Tess, though, as previously discussed, narratively 'punished' for her affair and pregnancy, remains pure of heart.\(^{20}\) Values may have progressed between 1891 and 1910, but it is unlikely that they would have shifted enough for Forster to avoid readers' ire. Rather, it is likely that Helen Schlegel's foreign status is an acceptable excuse for her aberrant behaviour. In much the same way, in the 1970s sitcom *Fawlty Towers*, the British proprietors of a hotel excused any anomaly or impropriety in the behaviour of their foreign employee with the simple soothing phrase 'It's all right - he's from Barcelona!'

Of course, Helen's intention of removing herself from English society - she states plainly, after her pregnancy is known, 'I cannot fit in with England as I know it' - may play a similar role to Tess's death. In both cases, English society cannot tolerate troubling by a fallen woman. How remarkable, then, that she ends up permitted to remain.

*Ending up at Howards End*

The house known as Howards End has a mystique cultivated carefully throughout the novel. Its symbolic role in the narrative can hardly be overstated.\(^{21}\) It is, as one critic describes it, a house that is 'outside time', embedded in national landscapes and functioning as sort of a 'metonymy of the landscape'.\(^{22}\) That is, Howards End is powerfully symbolic, an element of hereditary -

\(^{19}\) Forster, p. 311
\(^{20}\) Prior, 2013
hereditarily *English* - property. In contrast with London, where homes are built and torn down according to the whims of capitalism, Howards End is understood to be part of that old, infinitely more authentic England. It is a converted farm, therefore evoking an agrarian (perhaps even feudal) past. Countryside and landscape are markers for national and cultural identity in both England and Scotland, so, presumably, owning Howards End transmits to the owner a piece of England itself, and thereby of English identity.  

The original Mrs. Wilcox's feelings about her house make clear its spiritual and symbolic status. It is a 'holy of holies' - a 'spirit' for which she seeks a 'spiritual heir'. Like the connection to the land experienced by many indigenous peoples, Mrs. Wilcox's very vitality appears connected to that of Howards End. Being parted from one's house, according to Mrs. Wilcox, is 'worse than dying' - she asserts that 'it would have killed me' had Howards End been pulled down. Ownership of Howards End, given its numinous status, necessarily entails a measure of mysticism; the house is not a mere commodity, and those who treat it as such cannot truly own it. Perhaps no less importantly, transmission of the house and property is *almost* matrilineal, passed through a female line. It is Mrs. Wilcox's 'own property', and, if justice were served, it would have passed immediately to Margaret, her heir in 'spirit' if not in birth. As it happens, Henry Wilcox interferes in the transmission, and he is the one who passes ownership of the house to Margaret, but the poetic justice of the action makes it very apparent that Henry is merely a vehicle in the service of his late wife and the rightful allocation of the property.

The Schlegel sisters share Mrs. Wilcox's effortless affinity with the house. Their carpet mysteriously fits perfectly; Helen, in what she intends to be her last night in England, wishes to sleep there, among familiar possessions. And as the final chapter charmingly reveals, Helen remains at Howards End, has her baby there, and watches over the growing of garden and hay amid an atmosphere of peace, joy and permanence. With Margaret's ownership of the house guaranteed, and Margaret's support of Helen absolute, Helen herself gains a foothold and a right of residency in the England that she (realistically) imagined would spurn her. In a dozen or so pages, her previous statement ('I cannot fit in with England as I know it') is drastically subverted.

The parting image of Helen Schlegel and her baby joyfully overlooking the hay fields of the Howards End property is well worth unpacking in greater detail. First, the fact that hay is growing - as opposed to, say, roses or lilies - reveals that Howards End, too, has been transformed in a matter of months. Many references are made throughout the novel of the fact that Howards End used to be a farm, and now it appears it is regaining that status. No longer a superfluous, empty and contested house for an upper class family unconnected with the land, it is now truly part of the landscape, heritage and traditional production of England. One may assume that being farmed constitutes a sort of regeneration for Howards End - as, very likely, does the presence of children. Second, Helen's baby - the illegitimate offspring of a foreigner and a

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23 Beckhofer, 2013
24 Forster, p.92, 105
25 Forster, p. 89

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member of the seemingly weakened and degenerate lower classes - was presumably born at Howards End, and according to Mrs. Wilcox's statement, this means that he has a moral right to die there as well. In practical terms, it indeed seems very likely that the ownership of the house will pass to Helen's baby; Margaret declares herself happy to have no children, and intends that the house be left to her nephew after her death (364). In this way, perhaps, the offspring of the disenfranchised Leonard Bast, ruined by society, will come into his own. Perhaps more importantly with regard to the novel's moral subtext, traditional England, as represented by Howards End, will be reborn through the introduction of these previously excluded elements - the outlandish licentiousness and independence of Helen, the poetic spirit and love of nature embodied in Leonard Bast, and, of course, Margaret's loyalty, compassion and reason. All of these are endorsed by the author as they become included within an expansive version of what it is to be English, and to belong to the English land and landscape. With the acquisition of Howards End, it might also be surmised that the Schlegel sisters become truly English, in that they own and are attached to a piece of England. Until then, despite their long residency, their home, as proven by its demise, has been conditional. Settling at Howards End, in contrast, promises permanence and a sense of deep and longstanding generational belonging. Sins against social mores, not limited to Helen's pregnancy but including, also, her excessive social compassion and the various gaffes that have revealed both sisters to be not truly 'English to the backbone' are unequivocally forgiven and accepted by the narrative 'reward' of gaining Howards End.

**Conclusion - What of the 'Wilcox peril'?**

Perhaps, at its transcendent core, *Howards End* is the story of Ruth Wilcox, her house, her untimely death, and the passing of her beloved property to her 'spiritual heir', Margaret. In reality, of course, the story is infested with other Wilcoxes - numerous, often ridiculous, slow of understanding, and chauvinistic. Doll's (2010) interpretation of *Howards End* points out Forster's denigration of the collective Wilcoxes as a central aspect of the novel. The Wilcoxes are colonialists in their outlook, and capitalists by disposition; they are certainly British, but perhaps only incidentally English. They lack the sensitivity to detect the mysticism of a traditional English property such as Howards End, and therefore have no moral right to it, while asserting a legal right. The 'great Wilcox peril' is presented as the 'nearly inexorable force of the future' - with more and more British manifesting the interests and disposition of the Wilcoxes, aspects of English identity are in jeopardy. 26 It is precisely this threat that Forster addresses and corrects in narrative, through Margaret's inheritance of Howards End and its seeming return to farm status.

The Wilcoxes are thus thwarted, but they are not deposed. Indeed, in the hands of the author, the Wilcoxes are treated with remarkable gentleness. Henry Wilcox, guilty of bigotry, perfidy, hypocrisy, and pompousness, is taken in hand by Margaret and nursed to health at Howards End, where he will cohabit with his illegitimate nephew and heir of the property. Henry

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is not yet sufficiently spiritually recovered to take joy in the landscape, but he undergoes a significant change of heart. On learning of Helen's pregnancy, Henry Wilcox states 'I cannot treat her as if nothing has happened. I should be false to my position in society if I did'. 27 Concern for his position precludes compassion for Helen and contributes to her anticipated exclusion from English/British society. Indeed, he will not tolerate Helen's staying a single night in the then empty Howards End. From that point, however, he undergoes a rapid re-education and is, by the end of the novel, recuperating spiritually at Howards End, and even Helen states that she rather likes him.

Even if such a thing were possible, it is never Forster's intention to vanquish the Wilcoxes and all that they stand for. Indeed, both Ruth and Margaret become - are - Wilcoxes themselves. Women's social status, in Forster, is not transmitted by marriage; the passing on of Howards End through a female line and Helen's thriving husbandless amply demonstrate that fact. Therefore, symbolically, Margaret is not rescued or legitimized or given a place through her marriage to Henry Wilcox. It would be far more accurate to say that Margaret marries Henry Wilcox in order to save him, both psychologically and morally, and moreover succeeds in doing so.

Forster's epitaph 'only connect', a statement deliberately truncated in order to highlight the essential element, contains no conditions. As such, it is the antithesis of social opposition and exclusion. Connected, even the most corrupt or degenerate member of society may be rehabilitated and included within a collective and pluralistic community. Forster may indeed be critical of the Wilcoxes' worldview, but he is willing to include them in a community, properly oriented. Such humanistic inclusiveness, encompassing English identity, would be an ideal of Britishness, albeit seldom achieved.

27 Forster, p. 325

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