

E. M. Forster's Epigraph and the Construction of Modernity: Connection and Concentration in Forster's Novels

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Abstract

This paper aims to reexamine E. M. Forster's (1879-1970) epigraph "Only Connect" with a new lens. Conventionally, Forster's epigraph has been construed within the framework of humanist criticism, emphasizing the modern notion of "personal relations." However, this paper contends that Forster's epigraph can be interpreted as a means of delineating modernity. Through his own exploration of relational theories, Forster offers a novel perspective on understanding the dynamics of modern societal structures, including those related to class, gender, and race. By reexamining Forster's conception of relationality, this study endeavors to enrich the field of Modernist studies. Furthermore, by asserting that Forster's epigraph suggests connection as a potent social force, this paper aims to stimulate constructive discourse within Modernist scholarship

Keywords: E. M. Forster, modernity, concentration, relationality, connection.

Introduction

In *Transcending Modernity with Relational Thinking*, Pierpaolo Donati argues for "modern society [that] encounters a social and cultural morphogenesis that leads to beyond modernity" (Donati 2021, 10). As a scholar in the study of the "aftermodern," Donati posits that the concept of a "relational society" offers a postmodern solution to the challenges posed by Western modernity. He critiques the foundation of Modernity on the principle of "discontinuity," which reduces the complex tapestry of societal development into a singular, linear progression. Therefore, he suggests that the postmodern society must reconstruct its relationality to effectively address and overcome "the dissolution of values and social life" (2021, 12). Donati asserts that contemporary social issues, such as the political discord between the left and right, as well as the New Cold War, can be ameliorated by restoring the relationality that has been neglected in modernity.

The critical question that arises is whether the characterization of modernity as solely a period of discontinuity is accurate and the "aftermodern" as conceptualized by Donati truly represents a departure from modernity. It is conceivable that the discourse surrounding Donati's "aftermodern" may not be novel, as the themes of social relations, discontinuities, and dichotomies have been explored by modernist

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authors in the early twentieth century. Relationality has been one of the keywords in modernism studies. Many modernist writers, such as E. M. Forster (1879-1970) and D. H. Lawrence (1885-1930), focused on the issue of personal relationships and constructed their own versions differently. For example, while D. H. Lawrence conceived relationships between different sexes as a way to construct the new world and era, Forster viewed personal relationships as a diagnosis of civilization. Here, one can capture the different ideas about modernity between Lawrence and Forster. If the modern is inseparable from the “newness” of the future for Lawrence, Forster rather focuses on “now.” In this light, as written in Mulk Raj Anand’s commemorating essay on Forster, despite his deep admiration for Lawrence, Forster disliked Lawrence’s “so many pages of ecstatic prose” (Anand 1964, 47), which conceal real and material aspects of modern life. For Forster, love represents another facet of reality, not an elusive ideal.

In *Howards End* (1910) Forster shows his conception of relationality with his epigraph, “Only Connect.” Forster’s powerful epigraph has been quoted myriad times, and many critics have focused on his “humanist” viewpoints on British modernity. In his book titled *E. M. Forster*, Lionel Trilling claims that Forster “speaks of himself as a humanist and traces his descent to Erasmus and Montaigne” (Trilling 1965, 19). Since he defined Forster’s novels as a pioneer of modern humanist criticism, many of critics highlighted how Forster represents personal relationships between different individuals. For example, P. B. Armstrong argues that Forster’s epigraph is based on the question, “can the Schlegel women get help from the prosaic Wilcox men while helping them reform?” (Armstrong 1974, 183) For Armstrong, Forster’s goal is grounded in a change of personal characters, Henry Wilcox’s indifference to sympathy. Armstrong’s claim can be true, insofar as this “reform” implies social transformation at the same time. However, including Armstrong, humanist critics have overlooked the societal impact of “only connect” in Forster’s novels. Likewise, in “Transformation from Social Unity to a Quest for the Self,” while emphasizing Forster’s legacy on humanist criticism, T. Z. Gulcu writes that “While Forster reflects his sensitivity to humankind by means of his humanistic approach, he has also a realistic approach concerning the disharmonies and clashes among the individuals, societies, and countries with different lifestyles” (Gulcu 2020, 62). In his theorization of the Forsterian connection, Gulcu argues that humanistic approach and what he calls “realistic,” or social approach, are divided. In his theorization, Gulcu’s analysis of Forster is located at the level of individuality; though he argues for Forster’s effort to shed light on British society, he overlooks Forster’s effort to theorize how modern society is constructed.

In this context, this paper examines Forster’s theorization of his epigraph. While acknowledging the importance of the conventional interpretation of Forster’s interest in relationships, the paper argues that relationality plays a role in the theorization of Forsterian modern society. If modern subjects are frequently exemplified by the disconnection between different individuals, Forster, by proposing relationality as a counterforce to the modern solipsistic self, attempts to draw a new map of modernity. For him, the world is constructed by polarized forces that simultaneously build and dismantle relationships. This is the juncture at which Forster differentiates his perspective from that of other modernist peers who also focused on relationality. Unlike Djuna Barnes (1936-1982) or Jean Rhys (1890-1979), Forster sought to illuminate the ambivalence of modern relationships that construct and

deconstruct modern society repeatedly and concurrently.

In his short essay, Forster describes his experience of visiting a mosque in India, writing that he was "either in solitude or under due supervision" (1964, 274). He was connected to the other, but this connection reminds him of the insurmountable disconnection of different individuals. As maintained by Shun Yin Kiang, Forster's works reveal his attempt to "escape hegemonic epistemologies of sameness and differences" (2016, 124) by portraying double-layered forms of relationality. In this context, the paper attempts to shed light on an ambivalent meaning of Forster's epigraph by reading Forster's two novels, *Howards End* and *A Passage to India* (1924). In section two, this paper examines how critics have interpreted Forster's epigraph, "Only Connect," maintaining that "Only Connect" is Forster's own attempt to define modernity. Forster's epigraph is interpreted as his desire to build a bridge between different individuals and classes, but these concepts are not sufficient to fully examine the relationality of modern society. For Forster, modernity is constructed by the tension between connection and concentration; thus, the condition of modernity is not different from the conflict between relationship and non-relationship. In sections three and four, by examining *Howards End* and *A Passage to India* respectively, this essay will focus on how Forster recreates England and India as heterogeneous entities. Considering that "Only Connect" includes both desires for sameness and otherness simultaneously, the epigraph is characterized as a self-differentiation. Through the heterogeneity of relationality, this paper aims to explain the ambiguity of the Forsterian connection, which constitutes a part of modernity.

1. Forsterian connection and its ambiguity

In "Forster, Intimacy, and Islamic Space," Amardeep Singh claims that *A Passage to India* was co-authored by Forster and his friend Ross Masood, given that the novel reflects the "indirect" (2007, 44) relationship between them. Singh's term, "indirect," should be conceived in the context of literature. As Tariq Rahman points out, "Forster is urged to write a novel on India" (1991, 79), given Masood's letter on 20 December 1910; by writing that "my great wish is to get you to write a book on India," Masood expressed his desire for the representation of non-Westernized India to Forster. One year later, Masood again urged his friend to write about Oriental emotions that do not "make [India's] suffering acute." In this light, it is possible to assume that Forster's friendship with him is not only personal but mitigated by literature.

This peculiar type of relationality was also discovered in Forster's lecture at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1927. In the third lecture titled "People," Forster suggests the type of modern relationality while explaining the characters of the modern novel.

"What we call intimacy is only a makeshift; perfect knowledge is an illusion. But in the novel we can know people perfectly, and, apart from the general pleasure of reading, we can find here a compensation for their dimness in life. In this direction fiction is truer than history, because it goes beyond the evidence, and each of us knows from his own experience that there is something beyond the evidence, and even if the novelists has not got it correctly, well—he has tried." (Forster 1955, 63).

If friendship is fundamentally a “makeshift” in reality, and if one never fully comprehends the other, then this relationship should be completed by the writer. The novelist’s imagination creates more real reality than daily reality, because the perfect personal understanding of a human being is possible only through writing fictional relationships. Writing the novel not only represents life but prompts “people whose secret lives are invisible” (1955, 64) to see the impossible reality. If so, intimacy is more imaginary than imagination, insofar as it is a fictional construction of literature. If “there is something beyond the evidence,” it is not a stable reality but the inherent fictionality within the relationship itself.

At this point, it seems that Forster argues for the possibility of a complete relationship in the world of the novel. However, as already pointed out by numerous critics, his writing is always infused with the inevitable ruptures in relationships. For instance, every space in *Howards End* is not only “a bonding space” (Morary 2011, 135), but a space of conflict between the Schlegel sisters and the world. In other words, Forster’s novels do not fully allow his characters and readers to see what “[knowing] people perfectly” is. Rather, as Samuel Hynes rightly claims, the denouement of *Howards End* depicts “neither the inner life nor the outer life, nor any connection of the two, seems to have paid off” (1985, xii). The incomplete and unstable birth of a family in *Howards End* only reveals the precariousness of connection rather than solidarity between the English middle classes. The reality constructed by his writing is always unstable, barely showing an optimistic outlook for the future. The death of Leonard Bast foreshadows the ongoing class struggle in England; the narrator of *A Passage to India* unequivocally states that Fielding and Aziz cannot be friends as long as they remain in British India.

The gap between Forster’s lectures and his narrative arises not from self-contradiction but from critics’ interpretations of Forster’s epigraph. In the mainstream of English criticism, Forster has been a representative writer of English humanism, especially because of the idea of “personal relations.” Since Lionel Trilling’s monumental critique of *Howards End*, English critics have interpreted Forster’s epigraph as his interest in personal relations within the British class system. When Paul Peppis writes about Forster’s desire to “[connect] English class factions” (Peppis 2007, 55), for example, the connection has been construed as a force for fostering relationships between different classes. When David Medalie also claims that Forster is preoccupied with the construction of the “cult of personal relations” (2007, 41) in early twentieth century England, Forster becomes a humanist writer, who mainly aims at the construction of a benign rapport between different individuals. In this tradition, Forster’s concept of connection is seen as an energy that prioritizes interpersonal relationality and intimacy.

Humanist criticism does not fully capture the matrix of relationality portrayed in his other novels, nevertheless. At this juncture, it is essential to consider the differences between G. E. Moore and Forster, particularly if ‘personal relations’ are indeed central to Forster’s theory of relationality. It is well-known that the concept of the Bloomsbury Group’s “personal relations” is influenced by Moore. By highlighting aesthetic enjoyment in mundane life rather than academic processes, Moore’s *Principia Ethica* emphasizes the importance of love and relationships, which are not subsets of art but “[characterize] the undeveloped heart of a certain kind of English man or woman” (Rosenbaum 2012, 30). Critics have

regarded Forster as a follower of Moore within the Bloomsbury Group, a view supported by Forster's commitment to personal relations, particularly among English middle-class citizens.

Notwithstanding, Forster's distinction from Moore becomes evident through his writing. If Forster believes that personal relations in everyday life are always indirect and impossible, Moore's idea cannot fully explain Forsterian relationality, which must be construed as the triangular structure between people and language. Forster's representation does not fully imitate reality. The Forsterian narrative does not reproduce perfect connection but "assumes the far more tentative, literally open-ended form" (Corne 2014, 27) of his epigraph. Whereas Moore believes that the "truth was now to be discovered in the correspondence of inner awareness and outer reality" (Rosenbaum 2012, 223), Forster uses the difference between them to discover the truth. Helen Schlegel's sympathy for Leonard in *Howards End* coincides with his tragic fate, and Adela's desire for transcultural friendship with Aziz in *A Passage to India* is simultaneously colored by British imperialism. If inner and outer reality's correspondence was the condition of ethical contemplation for Moore, for Forster their differences were an impulse of his creativity. Thus, the difference ironically lies at the heart of connection. The quest for connection invariably confronts the otherness of the other, and Forster's characters find themselves not in unity but in their relentless approach to the other.

In this light, "personal relations" are not sufficient to explain what constitutes Forsterian relationality. If Forster seeks to connect different classes, then this connection represents a social force, which attempts to incorporate the differences within the English middle class into one same horizon. Furthermore, as exemplified in *A Passage to India*, Forster's question is not only personal but transcultural and racial. Adela's Western viewpoints, influenced by Orientalism, clash with the complexities of India; Fielding and Aziz's friendship is frustrated by India's unstable political situation. Unsurprisingly, the Forsterian connection is not confined to the "personal." The desire to connect extends beyond the divisions of English social classes, gender, and the national divide between India and England. The primary role of personal relations is to expand beyond the distinctions of class, race, and sexuality.

If the connection is a social force that connects different elements within a community, the will to connect is more accurately seen as the construction of the modern subject. In this light, the epigraph of *Howards End* is inseparable from the question about the definition of modernity, since its definition requires an examination of the dialectic between connection and disconnection in British modern society. As we will see in the next section, the will to connect rather serves as a force of cartography; for Forster, the map of the modern is drawn by the dialectic between homogeneity and heterogeneity, connection and disconnection, or the will to "connect" and the will to, what he calls, "concentrate" (Forster 1985, 147).

2. Connect and Concentrate

As Medalie points out, Forster has been regarded as an "awkward straddler of traditions" (2002, 2), particularly between modernism and Victorianism. Not only his style but the content of his fiction is considered Victorian. Rosenbaum, in *Victorian Bloomsbury* highlights Forster as a significant proponent

of Victorian ideas in the Bloomsbury Group. Even though Forster was critical of Victorian Hellenism, as he shows in *Maurice*, he was also critical of the modernization of England in the way that he espouses the rural value of Englishness. Thus, as maintained by Elizabeth Langland, even though Forster's fictions have modernist characteristics, which "[represent] consciousness immanent in the universe" (2007, 101), his novels are instead "important documents of the transition into modernism" (2007, 103). Thus, Forster's place in the literary canon is often viewed as bridging Victorianism and modernism.

What makes Forster Victorian is relatively clear, but the aspects of Forster's work that characterize him as modern remain elusive. Rosenbaum argues that Forster's eccentric position in the Bloomsbury Group stems from his preoccupation with "the love relationships that interested him most" (1994, 224). At this point, Rosenbaum appears to distinguish Forster's focus on relationality from the modern ideas of the Bloomsbury Group. However, if connection and relationality are inseparable from his attempt to construct heterogeneous modernism, what Rosenbaum refers to as "love relationships" are rather what makes Forster modern. Relationality is a central issue in the construction of modernism, and Forster is recognized as a significant modernist within literary circles.

In *Howards End*, relationality is polarized by the two different families, the Schlegels and Wilcoxes. Henry Wilcox has "no pulsation of humanity" (Forster 1985, 85), refusing any possibility of relationships with others. He justifies the capitalistic order of rich and poor, so the class system is not a strange thing in his world. Rather, class is his worldview that sees the modern world; he admits "there are rich and poor" (122). In this light, the marriage between Margaret Schlegel and Henry Wilcox indicates the birth of the new family that transcends the English class system. It points to the possibility of "important change" (123) in his cold mind, which means the possibility of the merge of different classes.

In *Howards End*, relational dynamics are sharply contrasted through the experiences of two distinct families: the Schlegels and the Wilcoxes. Henry Wilcox, a character devoid of human empathy, adamantly rejects any possibility of meaningful connections with others. His staunch defense of the capitalist hierarchy, where wealth and poverty coexist, reflects his unwavering worldview. To him, the class system is not an anomaly; it is the lens through which he perceives the modern world. He openly acknowledges, "there are rich and poor" (122). Thus, the marriage between Margaret Schlegel and Henry Wilcox signifies the emergence of a new family—one that transcends the rigid English class structure. This union hints at the potential for "important change" (123) within Henry's seemingly detached mind, suggesting the possibility of bridging disparate social classes.

One of the significant characteristics of Forster's novels is a dichotomy between what he terms "muddle" and civilization. The muddle, portrayed as a force against a will to establish a solid social structure, is also found in the representation of British society. When this concept of 'the muddle' is applied to Forster's depiction of his own country, it represents not merely a lack of civilization, but a conflict between two opposing forces, which leads to significant societal challenges in modern England

She need trouble him with no gift of her own. She would only point out the salvation that was latent in his own soul, and in the soul of every man. Only connect! That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion,

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and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer. Only connect and the beast and the monk, robbed of the isolation that is life to either, will die. (Forster 1985, 147)

Once—on another occasion—she scolded him about it. He was puzzled, but replied with a laugh: “My motto is Concentrate. I’ve no intention of frittering away my strength on that sort of thing.” “It isn’t frittering away the strength,” she protested. “It’s enlarging the space in which you may be strong.” He answered: “You’re a clever little woman, but my motto’s Concentrate.” And this morning he concentrated with a vengeance. (Forster 1985, 147)

The passage is evidence that *Howards End* transcends the simplistic narrative of a class battle. What dominates the narrative is the will to connect that Margaret embodies, which entails her efforts to forge relationships within the diverse middle class. For Margaret, connection is a vital force that completes human existence. Connecting “the prose and the passion” unifies the different statuses of human beings by linking “half monks” and “half beasts” (1985, 146) within the human mind. Thus, the connection indicates a force that traverses every line of sexual, national, and class demarcations. One must invite the other in order to be a unified human, constructing a network between different individuals in the middle class.

Thus, the concept of ‘personal relations’ culminates in the construction of a unified family, which includes all three families in the novel. Although Forster underscores the precariousness of this unification by highlighting Helen’s fatherless baby, the novel successfully locates different families on the same horizon. By merging the Schlegel and Wilcox families into one, Margaret’s determination to connect becomes a force for embracing England’s differences, despite obstacles like the social class system. As a space of connection, *Howards End* eradicates social barriers between Helen and Margaret through the heart of the middle class, which is represented as “fragments of [Ruth Wilcox]’s mind” (1985, 248). If the novel “ends on connections that are at best dissonant and partial” (Hynes 1985, xi), then Margaret’s will to connect is a force that constructs the relationships among incommensurable things without nullification of their differences, locating them within a single horizon.

In this light, if “the Victorian era was heavily invested in the idea of the perfectibility of the family through the scrutiny of women and children” (Vallone 2000, 217), what Forster does in the novel is to suggest a new model of family construction; it reflects the shift from the Victorian to the modern family by decentralizing the dominant power within the family. By challenging the single power that rules the family, “Only Connect” democratizes the Wilcox family. “Only Connect” serves as a counterpoint to the Victorian patriarchal model. In constant collision with Henry Wilcox’s indifference, Margaret’s sympathetic connection seeks to undermine patriarchal authority.

If Margaret represents the will to connect, to the contrary, Henry Wilcox’s will to “concentrate,” which directs himself to his inner solipsistic life, exemplifies the opposite energy to connection. “My motto is Concentrate. I’ve no intention of frittering away my strength on that sort of things,” he says, because sympathy for Leonard Bast does not have any meaning for his life and his relationship with

Margaret. As Greg Chase argues, “the negative consequences of Enlightenment rationality” (2020, 834) are represented by the lack of love in the Wilcox family’s mind. Thus, the will to concentrate serves as another social force that attempts to solidify the English community. If connection tries to disrupt social barriers between different sexes and classes, Henry’s concentration attempts to protect the order that is already established. Thus, *Howards End* is a space where these two different social forces collide in the name of personality. In fact, the denouement of *Howards End* is never portrayed as the birth of an ideal family. Helen’s baby without a father; Margaret and Henry’s unstable marriage; and the death of Leonard Bast are signifiers that modern British society is, and will continue to be, infused with potential conflicts. In this light, concentration is, like the connection, also a force that constructs the modern British middle class. The end of the novel rather marks the ongoing and permanent collision between concentration and connection in the construction of modernity.

As the denouement of *Howards End* portrays, Forster believed that Oneness is fundamentally impossible in modern society. The world is constructed by polarized forces, so its precariousness is inevitable. In this light, Forster’s connection should be also understood differently, as a force that should balance with its opposite extreme, concentration. As Laura Marcus rightly points out, Forsterian connection “represents both a continuation and a break” (Marcus 2021, 165). “Only connect” is not merely a guideline for personal relationships; it is a lens through which to view the structure of early twentieth-century British society. Thus, *Howards End* is a battlefield where the two forces are relentlessly conflicting, and it creates what Forster calls the “undeveloped heart” (1961, 13). The will to concentrate and the will to connect constantly collide in English society despite Henry and Margaret’s personal love.

3. Heterogeneity

Forster’s worldview, encompassing the conflict between connection and concentration, permeates his novels, often extending beyond England. For example, in *A Room with a View* (1908), two years before the publication of *Howards End*, Forster portrayed the love relationship between Lucy Honeychurch and George Emerson. By rejecting Cecil Vyse as an “ideal bachelor” (Forster 1990, 99), Lucy chooses Emerson’s sympathetic love of connection rather than Cecil’s solipsism. A significant characteristic of the novel is its Italian setting, contrasting with the English backdrop typical of Forster’s work. Critics have argued that Forster’s literary use of exotic culture, including India and Italy, is his desire to “[offer] a fresh voice of authority that challenges the restrictive, misguided norms and values of the home country” (Roszak 2014, 168), but the rupture of the narrative in *A Room with a View* rather indicates a different extreme other than connection. For example, Cecil’s statement, “there are certain irremovable barriers between myself and them” (Forster 1990, 113) points to the barrier of gender and class that dominates England and Italy at the same time. Forster was also cautious of romanticization of cultures other than England; “People talk of the mysterious East, but the West is also mysterious” (Forster 1961, 8).

Similarly, in *A Passage to India*, Forster attempts to recreate India as a space where the two forces collide. Forster’s aim to construct a heterogeneous community in his novels suggests that modernity itself

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emerges from the constant struggle between the forces of 'only connect' and concentration. At this point, Forster's portrayal of modern society's heterogeneity highlights the liminal space between sameness and difference. For example, Aziz and Mrs. Moore's first encounter in a mosque indicates that "only connect" and concentrate serve to construct an unstable space. "Madam, this is a mosque, you have no right here at all; you should have taken off your shoes" (Forster 1989, 17), Aziz says, since he believes that as an English woman, Mrs. Moore does not have any idea about Muslim culture. Soon, however, as their conversation progresses, Aziz "was excited partly by his wrongs, but much more by the knowledge that someone sympathized with [him]" (21). Mrs. Moore's respectful attitude towards Aziz allows him to perceive her willingness to connect, and the mosque becomes a space where connection and concentration are crossed. In *A Passage to India*, Forster creates India as a heterogeneous space where the English "amateur orchestra" and "Hindu drumming" (17) resonate at the same time.

In *A Passage to India*, as in *Howards End* and *A Room with a View*, Forster persistently questions the class system's impact on relationality. The conversation between two missionaries at the beginning of the novel implies the fundamental dilemma concerning the extent of relationality. If everyone can enter "Father's house" then "may there not be a mansion for the monkeys[?]" (Forster 1989, 37) While old Mr. Graysford answers 'no,' the young missionary Mr. Sorley counters with 'yes (38). The novel reveals that a countervailing force always challenges the desire for relationships. Thus, young Mr. Sorley must reluctantly accept that the desire for connection is inevitably thwarted. "We must exclude someone from our gathering, or we shall be left with nothing" (38).

In this light, Forster's India grapples with the dilemma of impossible friendships. The main characters of the novel, Aziz and Fielding, are eager to be friends, but India's heterogeneity itself makes building their friendship challenging. While Aziz has "the fire of good fellowships" (Forster 1989, 60) and Fielding espouses cosmopolitanism represented as "a globe of men" (65), the political situation in Chandrapore frustrates their intimacy by forcing them to separate. Thus, Mrs. Moore observes that, akin to *Howards End*, India is replete with 'muddles' (73). In contrast to Aziz and Fielding's desire for friendship, the other side of India is dominated by forces of concentration. These forces drive a wedge between Fielding and Aziz..

"If I don't make you go, Ahmed will, Karim will, if it's fifty five-hundred years we shall get rid of you, yes, we shall drive every blasted Englishman into the sea, and then"—he rode against him furiously—"and then," he concluded, half kissing him, "you and I shall be friends." (Forster 1989, 361)

"Why can't we be friends now?" said the other, holding him affectionately. "It's what I want. It's what you want." But the horses didn't want it—they swerved apart; the earth didn't want it, sending up rocks through which riders must pass single file; the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace, the birds, the carrion, the Guest House, that came into view as they issued from the gap and saw Mau beneath: they didn't want it, they said in their hundred voices, "No, not yet," and the sky said, "No, not there." (Forster 1989, 362)

The text of *A Passage to India* specifically highlights the concept of impossible friendships, encapsulated in the phrases “not yet” and “not there.” Namely, what frustrates their friendship is *current* India, which is dominated by British imperialism. For Aziz, insofar as India was under British imperialists, he could not be Fielding’s friend; he shall “[drive] every blasted Englishman into the sea” in order for them to “be friends” (1989, 361). For Fielding, British imperialism represents an ever-present superstructure; he says, “the British Empire really can’t be abolished” (1989, 360) because the collapse of imperialism leads to another mechanism of oppression. Therefore, their friendship remains unattainable as long as they are part of India under British rule. India, under British rule, acts as a third entity that impedes the potential for transnational friendship.

However, the specificity of the text’s own answer, “not yet” and “not there,” paradoxically points to alternative potential for friendship, implying the possibility of another form of India. In essence, Fielding and Aziz could be friends in an India free from British colonialism—‘not there’ in the imperial context. Forster’s language does not absolutely rule out friendships but implies the ineradicable relationality between Aziz and Fielding. The simultaneous presence of possible and impossible relationships signifies the potential for change and transformation. Relationality can be established across different races and beliefs, provided the colonial context of India is transformed.

The hope for the future permeates the novel, especially in Forster’s reconstruction of India. Harold Bloom maintains that “what matters most in *A Passage to India* is India, and not any Indians nor any English” (1987, 2). For Bloom, Forster is a “religious” artist who contemplates, “How are the divine and the human linked?” (1987, 6). If Bloom regards India, as a distinct religious space, resists Western and Christian *signification*, his interpretation might offer an answer to Fielding’s (or the novel’s) main question, “Why can’t we be friends now?” India is a “muddle” that nullifies Western *signification*, which reduces every word into an echo of nothingness, “boum” (Forster 1989, 119). India is “the eternal jungle” where no animals have “any sense of an interior” (1989, 34). India does not offer any space for indirect relationships, since it nullifies the Western relationality by insisting on fundamental disconnection.

In this light, the Indian muddle not only signifies the conflict between individuals in colonialism, but a collision between greater forces that is beyond individuals. The muddle is “one of [India’s] comments on the orderly hopes of humanity” (Forster 1987, 234). As the narrative of the novel progresses, individual conflicts in the colonial context are expanded to a greater scale. Thus, the narrator finally states that “English seems to resemble their predecessors’ who also entered the country with intent to refashion it, but were in the end worked into its pattern and covered with its dust” (234). If friendships seem impossible on an individual level, India will eventually nullify the Western *signification* and reveal the hidden possibility of friendships.

For Forster, India is a multilayered entity that contains the incessant dialectic between the self and other. While Bloom views India as *a* totality, for Mrs. Moore India is a protean entity, “protean entity that continually fosters varying relationships between ‘I’ and the other. If India is the muddle, it is not only because Western knowledge cannot grasp India but because India itself is too heterogeneous. In fact, the novel’s narrative does not clearly distinguish India’s incomprehensiveness from Mrs. Moore’s

relationships, insofar as her experience is fundamentally based on her situatedness in Indian others. India astonishes her, for its incomprehensible knowledge is religious as well as relational in that it incorporates "the dissolution . . . of the separateness of the self and the other" (Ally 2019, 570).

While writing about his second visit to India in his essay "India Again" (1964) Forster reveals his hope that English, as a common language, could unify India, for he believes that it would prompt the unification of the country. At this point, Forster's desire is typically reflective of a Western perspective in the way that he wants to introduce Western order into the Indian muddle. Just like Adella Quested in *A Passage to India* says, Forster might feel that "there will have to be something universal in this country" (Forster 1964, 160). Nevertheless, Forster's orientalist viewpoint is challenged by his own admission, when he also concludes that comprehending "the real India" is impossible (1964, 114). At this point, India is portrayed not as a totality, but as a modern entity that defies representation outside of a European context. He envisioned the unification of India, but his hope was frustrated by the conflict of myriad social forces. One cannot truly understand what India is, because India is always changing by its own ruptures, regardless of how the totalization of Western *signification* tries to seal them. "In this regard, Forster aligns more with Aziz than with Adela, who argues that "nothing embraces the whole of India" (1989,160). Therefore, Forster's conclusion, "India cannot be one" (1964, 119), only indicates India's self-incommensurability; India is different from itself, changing and becoming by its own heterogeneity.

In this light, India shares similarities with England represented in *Howards End* since both seek to reconcile the impulses to connect and to concentrate. If the mosque, which reveals the possibility of friendship between Aziz and Mrs. Moore, serves to open the possibility of transnational relationships, the Marabar Caves' nullification of the will to connect (especially of Adela) signifies the presence of an opposite force. At this point, as "both Being and non-Being" (Monk 2004,105), India is reconceptualized through the interplay of personal desires for connection and the principles of disconnection. It is a space that creates differences by its heterogeneous forces, the construction of unstable stability in modern society.

Conclusion

S. P. Rosenbaum reads Forster's life as his preoccupation with "the love relationships that interested him most" (1994, 224) and separates him from his peers who engaged in experimental modernism. However, *Howards End* reveals that Forster sought to analyze British modern society by developing his own theory of relationality. "Only Connect" is not only a repetition of G. E. Moore's philosophy but a novel endeavor to chart the contours of modernity. Personal relations are also social relations, as both are inseparable in modern life.

Forster's concept of modernity perpetually exists in a state of tension, akin to an enduring battlefield between the opposing forces of connection and concentration. The rupture—an inevitable condition within modernity—arises due to the fundamental impossibility of achieving complete Oneness in the presence of otherness. Notably, the portrayal of connection and concentration remains value-neutral; they are depicted as distinct forces actively shaping society. As these forces continually collide, they hint at a

dynamic and ever-evolving model. In *Howards End*, Forster envisions a new English society marked by the ascent of democratic voices. He eloquently states, "England still waits for the supreme moment of her literature—for the great poet who shall voice her; better still, for the thousands of little poets whose voices shall permeate our common discourse" (Forster 1985, 211). Amidst the constant tension of modern England, these myriad voices emerge—a paradoxical blend of fragility and richness—representing the English middle class.

Similarly, in *A Passage to India*, Forster hints at the possibility of a new world—one where Fielding and Aziz can forge a genuine friendship. The instability of India paradoxically signals the emergence of "hundred voices" (Forster 1989, 362), introducing the potential for connections that remain elusive in the current Indian context. Fielding and Aziz's friendship hinges on these voices finding resonance in the evolving landscape, the new world they will create in constant tension. Thus, Forster's epigraph calls for expansion; it mirrors his portrayal of an ever-changing modern society.

نقش إ. إم. فورستر وبناء الحداثة: الاتصال والتركيز في روايات فورستر

ويل لي

طالب دكتوراه، قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، جامعة ستوني بروك، الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية

الملخص

هدف هذا الورق البحثي إلى إعادة تقييم النقش الذي قدمه إي. إم. فورستر (1879-1970) في عبارته "أوصل فقط"، من خلال عدسة جديدة. وقد استُوضحَ نقش فورستر تقليدياً ضمن إطار النقد الإنساني، مع التركيز على المفهوم الحديث للعلاقات الشخصية. ومع ذلك، يعدّ هذا الورق البحثي محاولة لتفسير نقش فورستر كوسيلة لتحديد الحداثة. من خلال استكشاف النظريات العلاقية، إن يقدم فورستر منظوراً جديداً لفهم ديناميات الهياكل الاجتماعية الحديثة، بما في ذلك تلك المتعلقة بالطبقة والجنس والعرق. ومن خلال إعادة النظر في مفهوم فورستر للعلاقات، يسعى هذا البحث إلى إثراء مجال الدراسات الحداثيّة، وتأكيد أن نقش فورستر يقترح الاتصال كقوة اجتماعيّة فعّالة، وتحفيز الحوار البناء ضمن المجال الأكاديمي لدراسات الحداثة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: إ. إم. فورستر، الحداثة، التركيز، العلاقات، الاتصال.

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