The virtues of distance in E. M. Forster's Where Angels Fear to Tread.

James Benner

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THE VIRTUES OF DISTANCE
IN
E. M. FORSTER'S
WHERE ANGELS FEAR TO TREAD
by
James Benner

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ABSTRACT

E. M. Forster's first novel, Where Angels Fear to Tread, demands our attention because its rhetorical process qualifies the meanings and esthetic effects we sense as we read. A particular moment partakes of contextual meaning. Forster's position in relation to his characters, the narrator, and his readers constantly shifts. The elusive voice we hear in all of Forster's writing sounds here in his first fiction.

Because the novel has an apparently dialectical structure, pitting Sawston against Monteriano, most critics have read too simply three particular elements in it. Melodramatic confrontations, visual tableaus, and narrative intrusions are taken as points of resolution in the dialectic. Synthesis, instead, takes place in the process of voice that establishes Forster's variable distance from the novel's elements at all times.

Most critical simplifications about the novel can be qualified. Gino Carella, for example, stands not so much for life as for death. He shares Mrs. Herriton's mechanistic nature extensively. Lilia is a foolish romantic who dies giving birth in the land of her illusions. Caroline Abbott saves Philip from physical death not because she is a goddess of love but because she aches for the touch of Gino Carella. Philip Herriton may only observe
life, but action is no unmitigated good. The narrator stands apart and above at moments, but he too participates in the essential drama of perspective this novel embodies.

Everything is tied to a search for meaning, but meaning proves ultimately to be locked in the private consciousness. Connection, understanding, communication, love never take place because these characters see not reality but self-reflection. The characters are not alone; the narrator and the reader participate in the need for a way to stop the constant flux of experience, to make meaning.

Forster weaves shocks casually with a rhythm of language that reverberates beyond language. He dramatizes, but not with superiority, the search for something just beyond our grasp. Because his voice, even when it is heard, is always in process, he eludes definition -- except as a novelist who can dramatize what we cannot sense but know, or surely believe, is real.

For Forster, ethics and esthetics, life and art, never separate. Social reality and artistic reality coexist in our reality, where nothing is the truth.
INTRODUCTION

And to see round it he was standing at an immense distance. (WAFT, p. 183)

E. M. Forster's Where Angels Fear to Tread (WAFT) is a small book and a large book; it is limited and expansive. It embodies Forster's ethical and esthetic ideals. Sentimental and cynical, it has the rigid but intricate structure of fine sculpture and the fluid but imposing structure of experience. Forster insists that fiction create life's exuberant shape. He also allows himself a fluidity of point-of-view. And yet, upon careful reading, the novel has a hard center. The hard part, the solidity, comes of the very fluidity. Critics have long commented on Forster's ambivalence, on a stance constantly shifting. In WAFT, he makes tremendous demands on his readers because the need for sensitivity is constant. The novel affirms and denies its themes and form. The synthesis of such an antithetical and paradoxical product occurs in a process of voice. The voice is Forster's, and it speaks loudly and silently. Distance is attained at all times, even when we think Forster whispers in our ear a blatant truth.
Forster never forgets in this novel the virtues of distance. His position constantly shifts in relation to his characters, narrator, and readers. His reality appears to be solid and yet is always in motion. For example, one of the accepted generalizations about Forster asserts that he believed in individualism and personal relations. Critics smugly compliment Forster for his humane view and imply how dated that makes him. But from the first novel on, these two certainties are at odds. The claims of the individual constantly do battle with the need for intimacy between individuals. Forster never loses sight of the irony inherent in living by even his most cherished ideals. He tests, as well, his esthetic ideals. He dares to put nothing in words and paradoxically says everything. The antitheses of content and form never stop when one deals carefully with Forster's work.

WAFT has been somewhat ignored because it is a young man's book, published when Forster was twenty-six; it is slight in length and apparently in theme; it is the first novel by the author of Howards End and A Passage to India. Critics usually tread these so-called shallow depths in their hurry to reach the rapids of those two later and admittedly significant novels. Some critics even call WAFT a masterpiece and then go on to the other works. But critics of WAFT and of Forster in general often fail to
approach carefully. They end up with contradictions where Forster dramatizes ambivalences.

Significant critical work has established Forster's social and ethical standards, his reliance on dialectical structures, and his ambiguity of theme or technique. Everyone admits that Forster uses surprise or shock, melodrama, "eternal moments," and narrative intrusions. Nearly everyone asserts that Forster tries to fuse social comedy and cosmic vision, that he is what John Colmer calls him, "a delighted ironist and disappointed visionary."¹ Malcolm Bradbury rightly concludes that the key critical problem in Forster comes to determining if this split between comedy and poetry creates "difficulties of tone . . . a damaging variety of intentions."² The difficulties and damage may in fact be caused by the critical habit of trying to nail down a writer's view and style. There seems to be a need to find some point, some unity. Elsewhere Bradbury suggests, however, a fuller possibility. Though Forster's visions suggest order, they increasingly connect with "an anarchy that they must always comprehend."


Never fully redemptive, these visions do battle with the world of time, where relativism reigns and "no one philosophy or cosmology accounts for the world order. . . . This, with its suggestion that in seeing life whole one may see nothing except multiplicity, is the obverse of the unitary vision. . . ."  

Bradbury also provides a guideline for reading Forster and explains why WAFT needs reconsideration:

His observation of his materials, and his way of making his structures, usually involve two tones that come into perplexing relationship. There is the instinct towards 'poetry,' which goes with the view of art as a symbolist unity; and there is the comedy and the irony, the belittling aspect of his tone, which brings in the problems and difficulties of the contingent world. Because of this it is often possible simultaneously to interpret his work positively and negatively, depending on the kind of critical attentiveness one gives. 

Bradbury's adverbs give him away; Forster insists on good-and-evil, positive-and-negative. There are not really antitheses; there is always synthesis. It comes about in hearing Forster's voice as we read. In discussing A Passage to India, John Russel praises Forster's

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4 Bradbury, "Two Passages . . .," p. 131.
style of antithesis as "an index of moral clarity."

What he says further about Forster's style in that novel can be applied to WAFT:

It represents a voice that vigilantly seeks out alternatives and limits, and that will not fail to put the reader in mind of shades of differences. It offers an eternally rebalancing process. As it envisions a quality on one side, it seeks and expects to find some counterpart on the other; . . . .

To read Forster and especially WAFT accurately is to be aware of this constant process. H. H. Waggoner calls Forster's novels "elaborate tissues of interwoven contradictory, mutually modifying perspectives." And Peter Burra tells us that Forster's "point of view is constantly shifting -- each side is alternately presented for sympathy, first impressions are contradicted, confirmed, contradicted again, so that a close attention and memory are required to add up the final sum." Forster challenges

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6 Russell, p. 102.
his readers and critics because this constant shifting of point of view takes place from a position both intimate and removed. Alan Wilde discusses how Forster's narrators get the reader's confidence only to destroy that involvement without any apparent hitch.

The result is that we are constantly jostled out of our comfortable sympathies and asked to stand back and view the scene with the narrator's complicitous detachment. Forster expands and shrinks the aesthetic distance in a tantalizing movement of involvement and disengagement, of love and scorn. It becomes apparent to a close reader of all the novels that controlling this artistic device is a mind extraordinarily aware, even afraid, of the mysteries of self-forgetfulness. A moment's involvement is met by a cold awakening.9

So, in other words, Forster maintains distance at all times because the process of perspective never stops.

James McConkey says:

Forster may shift his attention from character to character, but he does so by viewing them all from a remove: the focus that he employs requires the maintenance of an established distance from the characters and their world. That focus is the basis of all his irony; it is central to his 'double vision'; and without it, of course, we could never hear the unique accents of the Forsterian voice.10

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McConkey calls this quality "mediation as voice,"\textsuperscript{11} by which he means that Forster's voice unifies all the warring elements in his fictions. This theory would seem acceptable until we question where Forster stands in relation to his narrator and his readers. If we define the ironic method as one that juxtaposes the ludicrous and the pathetic on the same page,\textsuperscript{12} we discover what the term means in Forster. Martial Rose says Forster's "ironic temper senses exquisitely and simultaneously human grandeur and human absurdity."\textsuperscript{13} The failure of Forster criticism to date is one of missing the intricacy of Forster's rhetoric. Too many critics read his narrator as his own voice and assume that readers are thus privy to Forster's view. Instead, Forster sides with everyone and no one.

Critics have clearly established the dialectics of WAFT: Sawston vs. Monteriano, prose vs. poetry, intellect vs. passion, observation vs. action, death vs. life.

\textsuperscript{11}McConkey, p. 5.


Setting, plot, structure, and characterization seem tied to a rigid standard of oppositions. Yet at least a few others can be raised: product vs. process, form vs. fluidity, sentimentality vs. cynicism, romanticism vs. naturalism, pity vs. irony. These are hardly unusual categories, but in WAFT Forster establishes and destroys them with such casualness that far too many critics have oversimplified the novel's themes and form. They are especially ready to see the dialectical structures resolved in three noticeable qualities of the novel: the melodrama, the eternal moments or tableaus, and the narrative intrusions. All the struggle comes down to deciding if, in fact, these "significant" elements of the novel really dramatize or only assert Forster's themes. But Forster never forgets, as Waggoner comments, that all art is assertion. Waggoner lists three common Forsterian devices: analytical asides during scenes or summaries of action, comments on characters, and an inveterate irony.\(^{14}\) Wilde has called Forster's irony a state of mind, not a technique.\(^{15}\) Unfortunately, he and most others define

\(^{14}\)Waggoner, p. 82.

\(^{15}\)Wilde, p. 12.
irony in too limited a sense. They bridle at the moments in WAFT when they think Forster has done things too easily or, in other words, has lost his sense of distance. When they think Forster slips into mysticism or vision or aphorism, they accuse him of a failure of irony or realism. In fact, as McDowell says,  

16 Forster is not a strict realist -- at least not as these critics seem to define that term.

We ought to read novels with some sense of critical criteria, but we should also read them as they are written. We should examine them with as much care as we take paring our fingernails. It seems inappropriate to disparage WAFT because it does not conform to some critical complacencies on irony. We are unlike Harriet Herrioton in that we enjoy modern plays wherein no one is in the right, but we seem less able to apply such thematic ambivalence to matters of form. Irony comes in many colors and shadings between. It is awareness that life equals irony at all times to some degree. Statement, action, reaction suffuse each other in a lattice of darks and lights, waverings of gray. While a generalization or assertion, in life or great fiction, seems limiting and inadequate, we do, in fact, reach moments when we are

compelled to generalize, to put into some shape the constant flux. We are artists in our own inchoate way, even when we take photographs, write letters, or make grocery lists.

All this preliminary comment seems necessary when discussing WAFT because the novel has that effect of shifting from process to product and back again. Forster's realism insists that his pattern belie pattern; when he is apparently least ironic -- in the dialectical structure, the tableaus, the narrative intrusions -- he actually presents an ironic view that paradoxically, simultaneously asserts form and formlessness. Forster's brand of irony challenges the simpler version of irony.

Clearly, this argument attempts the new-critical task of accounting for everything in the novel. To defend the "lapses" is to prove their formal and thematic validity, to prove them organic. The intentional fallacy lurks in shadows. Still, too many critics of WAFT define irony in such simple terms that they miss the rich quality of it in Forster. It is not mere tautology to assert that irony can be the subject of irony. Perhaps too many critics commit a fallacy of intimacy. They assume they are always in cahoots with the writer in knowing surely more than the characters, maybe more than the narrator, and sometimes more than most readers. Instead distance may be achieved when we think we are closest to Forster,
when we think we know how he sees his characters, or when we think he has lost perspective on them. What McConkey calls Forster's "irritating elusiveness" may indicate only critical limitations.

Frederick Crews says that Forster wants to create ironic meaning.

The significant moments are usually ones that confound our surface expectations and those of the comically wrong-headed characters. The effects we feel from any particular moment in a novel set us on a search for esthetic goals. But in our search for esthetic causes, we must not forget our expectations, for these often, if not always, govern the effects we sense. Hence, we will best determine how well a writer's particular effects cohere with his esthetic goals only by a constant awareness of our own critical criteria.

Forster demands re-reading in light of initial effects. We must be aware of what Bradbury calls Forster's "habit of ambiguity" when we most want certainty. In

17McConkey, p. 63.


WAFT Forster struggles with everything and nothing. *A Passage to India* has such immensities more clearly at issue. Still, as Elizabeth Bowen says, the author of WAFT has as much control as the author of *A Passage to India*. WAFT stands and struggles in its own terms. Because it clearly tries to satisfy both the sentimental and the cynic, it possesses "a peculiar ambiguity." It asserts stasis and motion, product and process, order and chaos. Life is a matter of structure and non-structure; hence, for Forster, fiction must do battle in these terms. Neither prose nor passion comes off as "the way" in WAFT. And to make the novel's form fit such ambiguity, Forster must write it in a way that dramatizes ambivalence -- especially in its effects on the reader. When we are disturbed by the schematic shape, the sudden deaths, the melodrama, the tableaus, or the narrative intrusions, we are reacting appropriately. These "flaws" attest to our limits, not Forster's. He tries to appeal to sentimental, poetic, romantic and cynical, prosaic, naturalistic readers. He takes a chance of appealing to everyone and no one. WAFT has the

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surface pattern of a typical comedy of manners and the deep rhythm of a novel of ideas. Forster is neither a romantic nor a naturalist; he knows that intimations of immortality and mortality flicker constantly before our eyes.

While we bask in the glow of a perfect form for an experience, whether we freeze a moment in tableau or epigram, something waits in the dark ahead to fly in our eyes. Forster's overview is intricate. He allows us to gush sentimentally and sneer cynically because he knows we see life as the eternal moment and as passing moments. Whether we enjoy or detest the "lapses" of distance, we miss the complexity. We assume Forster asserts his view when he asserts all views and no views. Where we fear to tread is on such an ambivalent, shifting landscape. Forster daringly expects to please and disturb the sentimentalism and cynicism in us. He tries, in fact, to create his readers, as Henry James does, in making ethical and esthetic demands on them. We must go back to see how, when we're most sure we've got the moment -- sentimentally or cynically -- we ought to be most careful. Realistically, it is a moment, the moment, both, and neither. So Forster is an ironist of a very special kind. His effects please our contradictory impulses. We hate sentimentality but wallow in it now and then; we
hate cynicism but use it now and then. We wish for something beyond but constantly confront some thing.

Essentially then, we must account for the often contradictory critical response to WAFT, especially on the issue of the tableaus and intrusions as these elements cohabit with acquired thematic and formal certainties. We will shake a few of these certainties in our examination because even when Forster clearly dramatizes the danger of living by certainties, a certainty waits in that darkness, only to be succeeded by a qualification.

If we re-examine the dialectical, melodramatic structure in terms of setting, plot, characterization, and narrative exposition or description, we can establish a constant, implicit conflict of point of view. And in this ever-shifting reality, those more explicit conflicts of viewpoint, the tableaus and intrusions, take on more complex and ambivalent meaning. Whether we sentimentally accept or cynically deny the tableaus and intrusions as straight, we oversimplify. When we think Forster uses a tableau to distance himself from a character, he does much more. When we think Forster uses an explicit intrusion to state his view, he does more again. The novel has a dialectical structure, but the complexity inherent in the apparently straightforward tableaus and intrusions
will ramify in terms of how complex that structure really is.

In all the complexity exists in this conflict of narrative point of view. It involves surely the characters but even the narrator. That voice comments explicitly on events and characters, separates itself from the characters during their tableaus, and implicitly instructs us how to view things during passages of exposition and description. But that voices' major error is taking, quite simply, a superior stance. Forster's voice is more ambivalent. It hears an acquired superiority and backs off from it. It silently creates a dialectical, melodramatic pattern and then weaves an ambiguous, tentative rhythm through it.22 To put things simply, Forster dares to be his narrator and then to challenge that voice. Here is the distance, the esthetic detachment. The distance is always maintained, though its measure constantly shifts. This process of voice fuses WAFT, but demands sensitivity. Though we waver towards and from connection, we are always connected -- not in superiority, understanding, scorn or pity, empathy, brotherhood or tolerance. But always to everything and nothing.

22Bowen, p. 4.
Chapter 1: Critical Limitations

Forster eludes many critics because his fiction brings ethical and social issues to the stage but his voice never quite resolves them. Lionel Trilling can be praised for making us aware of Forster's "moral realism," but his emphasis on thematic matters precludes close analysis of stylistic ones. He does say that Forster's fiction gives one the sense of the limits of liberal humanism in the face of paradox. And he calls Forster's apparently relaxed, even at times conversational, informal, or colloquial, style in dealing with such irreconcilable mysteries an awareness and acceptance of human limitations. But too many critics have turned "casualness" into "weakness," a failure of ethical and esthetic imagination. These critics attack Forster as elusive because they believe he does not resolve things -- the way they expect. Hence they see such elements as the dialectical, melodramatic structure, the tableaus, and the intrusions as in fact evidence of Forster's imaginative weakness. They sense

the presence of his personality, whether they think he oversimplifies or leaves as contradictory some conflict.² Too many critics accept the notion that Forster is trapped between the Victorian and the modern novel. The notion rests, of course, on how we read narrative voice -- the Victorians are all too intimate and the moderns are all so distanced. But this neat dialectic will not do when dealing with Forster. Rose Macaulay, in her pioneering appreciation of Forster, detects a style highly pressurized by thought and meaning beyond language.³ H. J. Oliver knows that Forster is omniscient, ironic, epigrammatical, conversational, and satirical, but he also knows that Forster senses the ultimate falsity of all literary statement, even the ironic one.⁴ Hence, Forster constantly, line by line and within lines, shifts position. And yet, his prose has a hardness and clarity of statement.

P. N. Furbank addresses the apparent contradiction between the presence and absence of Forster's personality:

In his novels he is in a sense more Victorian than the Victorians in that he is always conversing with the reader, buttonholing him, telling him what to think. The difference is, he is better at it than they. Or rather that, whilst they did it only some of the time, he is doing it all the time: it is always the one voice, though endlessly modified, and we notice no hiatus or change of gear in passing from light witticism to compelling eloquence. (my emphasis.)

So, this eloquent and witty voice fuses the fiction in a constant, subtle shift of angle or position. The shift, however subtle, may in fact be immense; Furbank says that "at one moment we are tête-à-tête with his characters, and the next moment viewing them from the ends of the universe." This image applies especially well if we include Forster's narrator and even himself as characters in the drama. John Beer says any illumination in Forster comes about "by way of continuing process"; that is, Forster's recognition and withholding of certainty can be termed a "negative affirmation." This wonderfully paradoxical term can itself be turned on its head, for "affirmative negation" no less aptly describes Forster's

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6 Furbank, p. 166.

fiction at its best -- in *A Passage to India*, or, I would assert, in WAFT.

So, few critics question the presence or the quality of Forster's voice. We must re-examine the quality; we must call into doubt the automatic equivalence drawn between the narrator and Forster. John Sayre Martin, in praising Forster for his humanistic, inquiring, none-too-solemn voice, sees in its struggle for individual integrity in the modern world "a fiction for our time." But a certain condescension sneaks in, and this view is too wide-spread. Forster is important, but oh, so provincial:

He was no innovator. In his readiness to comment upon his characters and to philosophize about the human condition, he is more akin to Victorian novelists like Dickens and Thackeray than to that aloof impersonal artist extolled by Stephen Dedalus. A highly personal writer, Forster projects himself into his fiction, and though his views and values may be sometimes hard to pin down, his personality marks everything he writes.  

Martin, of course, fails to recall that significant critical work has been done on the irony in Joyce's portrait of Dedalus. He is not Joyce's mouthpiece, but Martin seems ironically trapped. How is it any better

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9 Martin, p. 164-165.
for a character rather than a narrator to be a spokesman for the author? Isn't the ideal somewhere beyond any statement -- whether by character or narrator? Alan Wilde makes a similar error. He assumes that the early fiction -- including WAFT -- arose when Forster could rely on "the normative certainties of satire." He claims that as Forster learned of life's inherent and unresolvable complexities and thus needed to escape or transcend them, the irony gave way to an irony. Wilde incorrectly assumes too easily that Forster did not sense the abyss of solipsistic irony when he wrote WAFT. That novel clearly dramatizes Forster's awareness of the irreconcilable in fiction and life. The physical and metaphysical never stop doing battle -- at least until death. Is it so unlikely that the author who heard the nothing in the caves could speak silently? Samuel Beckett has made the desire for silence the prime motive for talking in his work. Forster may be anything but dated once we examine the intricacy with which he dramatizes his vision.

George H. Thomson comes close to opening out WAFT in this way. In his study of Forster, he emphasizes the

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mythic element that attempts to fulfill the need "to convey the paradox of man's unchanging yet evolving nature." He discusses the centrality of eternal moments in Forster as evidence of this mythical impulse -- moments where one senses connection, meaning beyond explanation. And, in WAFT, Thomson sees the narrator at the center of this mythic process, as the "ultimate man of order" in "the world he tells into creation." He suggests that the narrator is an archetype, "a source through which we experience a subsuming mythic order."11 If the eternal moments seem to originate with certain characters, they are really caused by the narrator. And since he induces these moments, he is transformed or transfigured by them.

Still, as we examine Thomson's analysis further, we discover its contradiction and thus its limits. He outlines three principles of narration in Forster's work up until A Passage to India and says all three are qualified by the narrator's intervention:

One, description and information often turn into commentary and judgment. Two, the perspective offered by the inner life of a character very often changes to that of Forster's, or

the two perspectives become inextricably blended. Three, though one of the several characters whose inner life offers a perspective on events emerges as dominant, his point of view does not dominate the narrative as a whole.12

Thomson does a fine job of further outlining WAFT's melodramatic structure and main events. Lilia's hasty marriage to Gino, her attempt to flee Monteriano, and her sudden death in childbirth take up the first half of the novel. Then the night at the opera, the kidnapping of the baby, the carriage accident and baby's death, Gino's torturing of Philip, and Caroline's rescuing entrance complete the major melodramatic pattern. Thomson then defends the novel this way:

The odd assortment of characters and exceptional incidents are credible because the story is furnished with a narrator whose tone is consistently serious and, when satire is in order, biting. This mature and almost somber nature of the storyteller is especially obvious in the presentation of setting and in some of the description and commentary.13

Further, Thomson asserts that the ability to be both the "presiding genius and detached observer gives a very distinct character to the personality of Forster the narrator." Here's where Thomson's approach falters: he sees Forster's personality as "strikingly present in the

13Thomson, p. 115.
form of a narrator" at the center of the fiction, more or less as omniscient author expanding outward to include everything in a formal unity. ¹⁴ In discussing Forster as part of narrative tradition, Thomson says:

Unlike Forster, many twentieth-century novelists have ceased to stand openly at the center. But the circle implies a center; and there, flamelike or invisible or with the emptiness of negative capability, the narrator-creator remains a presence, a voice still dominant in a dialogue that is at the heart of all experience with fiction. ¹⁵

Thomson, however, fails to allow for any dialogue between narrator and creator, for those works in which an acquired voice becomes as much the object of irony as any one of the characters. In distinguishing nicely between drama and fiction, Thomson fails to heed his own parenthesis:

Where drama displays an action, narrative tells a story embracing action. Fiction not only offers but imposes a narrative point of view over and above the action, and a novelist cannot finally evade this imposition of his medium. By the fact of his being observer and storyteller (or the manipulator of the storyteller) he is apart from and, accordingly, transcends the action. ¹⁶

Thomson must allow only for dramatized narrators like Conrad's Marlow in that parenthetical remark. We instead

¹⁴ Thomson, pp. 119, 120.
¹⁵ Thomson, p. 97.
¹⁶ Thomson, p. 97.
must take Thomson's process further. He has created a gap because he doesn't see Forster as removed from the melodrama, the commentary in exposition and description, the tableaus, or the direct narrative intrusions.

John Sayre Martin, besides insisting on Forster's habit of making obtrusive comments or moral generalizations, asserts that Forster will qualify an opinion with "perhaps" or "a form of rhetorical ventriloquism in which he suddenly projects a view, apparently his, upon one or more of his characters."\(^{17}\) In his further analysis of WAFT, he overstates the dialectic, calling the clear-cut alternatives built on implausibilities "patently melodramatic."\(^{18}\) And while he discusses some complexities regarding the opposition between Sawston and Monteriano and assigns responsibility in an ironically intricate pattern, he falters on how to read key scenes and characters. He probably falls in with Wilfred Stone's view that WAFT "hovers indecisively between comedy and prophecy."\(^{19}\) Stone believes that "comedy and prophecy do not go well together, and when both appear in the same book each undercuts the other."\(^{20}\) This is perhaps the

\(^{17}\) Martin, p. 2.

\(^{18}\) Martin, p. 13


\(^{20}\) Stone, p. 182.
most woefully limiting statement on fiction and on WAFT. The assumption appears to be shared by Oliver, who, though aware of Forster's sensitivity to the assertiveness of all art, accuses the author of relying on assertion, especially in "his method of editorial intrusion."21

Norman Kelvin perhaps best exemplifies the contradictory habit of critics on Forster. In general he says:

Forster's intelligence seems constantly to be winning, without strenuous wrestling, the true perception that lies somewhere between a worn-out idea degenerated into a piety and its too simple refutation or antithesis. His themes are expressed in apposite aphorisms. But instead of remaining static, these aphorisms are points of departure, or promptings along the way, for the energetic drive of the plot toward some full disclosure of what happens when events and ideas impinge upon character.22

But in discussing WAFT, Kelvin gets caught up in the assumption that the novel follows in the romance genre, and that any awareness of the sentimentality or cynicism behind Romance in this novel is unintended by Forster.23 Kelvin should heed his own advice on reading novels as "a search for connections, a constant review of the position of details in relation to each other, and an

21 Oliver, p. 30.


23 Kelvin, p. 56.
ultimate effort to discern, retrospectively, the total form."\textsuperscript{24}

Robert Langbaum, who comes closer to understanding Forster's method than most critics, sees WAFT as a masterpiece of the comedy of manners genre because its characters (and narrator) must function without a clear set of social or ethical norms. He sees an effort to fuse manners and mysticism:

The lack of valid standards leads to a complex irony that criticizes not only English middle-class values, but the alternatives as well, and the very characters who seek the alternatives. The lack of standards leads also to concern with a mystical reality behind the shifting social surface. Hence the romantic emphasis on nature and imaginative apprehension, that assorts so oddly with the witty notation of manners. Hence Forster's attempt to combine comedy with prophecy or vision.\textsuperscript{25}

He says specifically that WAFT "brings comedy up against its limits in the hopelessness of the modern condition, but never itself advances into prophecy or the poetical."\textsuperscript{26}

Here again, though Langbaum comes close, he seems stuck with the idea that comedy and prophecy are clearly at odds. Forster clearly understands that such dialectics do

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24} Kelvin, p. 151.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Langbaum, p. 132.
\end{itemize}
not exist, at least not at the most profound levels of human experience. Many critics fall into this error; they see Forster's modification of the dialectic in WAFT, but can't quite sense actual coexistence. The most common habit is to defend Forster's periodic lapses into editorial as allowable, given his novelistic heritage or the overall complexity of WAFT. He is, they assert, still Victorian but aware of Italy's limitations. We must, however, go back to our knowledge of how closely connected Forster wanted fiction and experience to be. The marvelous achievement of WAFT is its blend of esthetic shape and felt life.

Frederick P. W. McDowell notes that WAFT is widely esteemed and "becomes more incisive on each reading." He maintains that Forster and his characters "simultaneously face toward the actual and the ineffable." Still the fusion of social reality and transcendental value is never quite achieved. And yet, Forster's attempt at such a fusion is more successful because everything occurs under such artistic control. Of his authorial intrusions, McDowell says:

As Forster regulates tone in observations of this kind, he is able to present matters of portent

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with detached, ironic perspective, and to suggest, through oblique means, intuitions more profound than he could through unmodulated comment. The irony and understatement, the pointed observation and the restrained expression, combine to make the ideas functional rather than intrusive. The aphorisms actually move the novel forward and elucidate character, incident, and value; and they are at least partly organic to the novel's life and structure.\textsuperscript{28} (my emphasis)

Again, how close McDowell comes until he says "partly organic"! Earlier in his discussion of Forster, McDowell makes some comments on life that can, in fact, because of the close interplay of life and fiction in Forster, be applied to a close analysis of \textit{WAFT}:

\begin{quote}
Life is not only irrational and unpredictable, but it resists our attempts to define it with precision. It is replete with ambiguities, the ramifications of which are difficult to trace with sureness. In fact, one measure of an individual's insight and understanding is just this knowledge of the contradictions underlying the simplest statements.\textsuperscript{29}
\end{quote}

Those who have failed miserably or slightly to appreciate the subtlety of \textit{WAFT} have done so because they have forgotten how closely the novel fits McDowell's definition of life. The difference, of course, is that Forster creates the sense of life in the very stuff of his fiction; he does not define life, he sees it and shows it to readers, who, even as they read, are not allowed to forget it.

\textsuperscript{28}McDowell, p. 138.

\textsuperscript{29}McDowell, p. 38.
Chapter 2: Critical Qualifications and Mrs. Herriton

H. J. Oliver's work on WAFT characterizes the critical habit of contradiction rather than synthesis. As noted before, he tells us that Forster knows that something ceases to be true once stated and then attacks Forster for relying on editorial intrusions in the early novels. He defines Forster's conflict in WAFT as between those who believe in personal relations and those who don't. He sees the surprises, shocks, coincidences of the novel as asserted, not dramatically established. Still, he warns readers that the novel has such a delicate irony "that perhaps the only danger is that some readers will miss the irony and think the novelist takes his characters as seriously as they take themselves." Indeed, he detects the narrative stance that relies on casual juxtapositions to undercut any hint of solemnity. Oliver finds flaws or simplicities by forgetting the very qualities for which he praises Forster. If we expand that last point, take it as a central device, the

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others are all qualified. We will follow this pattern. As we maintain awareness of the casual shifting, the basic conflicts, the surprises, and the solemn characters will take on less simplistic outlines.

Lionel Trilling says:

Forster's novels proceed in two ways -- by means of complex and detailed plots which produce a long series of small or great shocks, and by means of the author's pronouncements, for the novels are 'wise,' they never hesitate to formulate and comment.  

More specifically, Trilling outlines WAFT; it "begins in a comedy of manners, goes on to fierceness and melodrama, and ends in an enlightened despair." 3 Some critics like Martin and Wilde assume that the novel's melodrama indicates its limitations. Martin accuses the novel of being "laced with implausibilities," 4 and Wilde sees melodrama as congenial to Forster's belief in and reliance on "great moments." 5 These critics fail to examine how Forster uses melodrama in WAFT. They see the

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3 Trilling, p. 59.
clearly divided sides, most simply as Sawston vs. Monteriano, and the major confrontations, Lilia vs. Gino, Philip vs. Gino, Mrs. Herriton and Harriet vs. Gino, as the essential elements in the novel's theme. Melodrama heightens a dramatic issue to a point of clear-cut confrontation. Most critics of WAFT think that Forster presents such conflicts, along with the tableaus and intrusions, as points where resolution can be found. In fact, the more closely the conflicts, tableaus, and intrusions are examined the more clearly does irresolution appear.

Any number of critics see the dessicated British brought down by the primitive/vibrant Italians. Burra calls it a clash of "conventional and natural morality." Sawston represents deadness and order, Monteriano, life and chaos. Some even assert that Italian humbug is preferred to English. And Frederick Crews, reliable because he sees the comedy in Forster, misleads a little by

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assuring us that Monteriano "administers comic justice" to the English egoists, Lilia, Harriet, Caroline, and Philip. 9 Virginia Woolf condescends by calling the clash of convention vs. nature too simple but charming. 10 Wilde again sees the clash as essentially between a principle of action or life in Gino and one of observation or art in Philip. 11

Still, there are those who sense Forster's equivocation. John Colmer, in noting the pattern of approach and retreat/action and stoppage, sees the novel's symmetrical conflict but admits that Italy, as Lilia discovers, has its own provincialism. 12 Beer calls it Sawston obtuseness vs. Monteriano life, "but not without qualification." 13 And H. A. Smith detects that while


Forster is attracted to the instinctive and natural, he qualifies that response in characterizing Gino as capable of cruelty.\textsuperscript{14} Even Martin, not particularly reliable, senses Forster's double vision; Sawston is repressive but orderly, Monteriano is free but cruel.\textsuperscript{15}

In order to work out from this critical tangle, we will use two more generalizations. Rose defines the novel's symmetry by detecting the rail journeys that begin and end the novel and the two deaths that occur, one in each half. He does have problems with the torture scene in Chapter nine because he thinks its violence is too intense in an otherwise light novel. And he quarrels with the transition to Chapter ten, calling it "uneasy."\textsuperscript{16} Glen Cavaliero, however, alerts us to the "almost insolently casual" opening scene, wherein Forster seems to confide in his readers, conceal his art, and think of his readers as equals sharing certain values.\textsuperscript{17} Those who


\textsuperscript{15}Martin, p. 7.


fail to see the qualifications in the conflict, understand the uses of melodrama and shock, or leave themselves essentially disjointed, have failed to pay close attention to the casual but ongoing rhetorical process in the novel. In this blend of shock and casualness rests the novel's strange power. Forster expects his readers eventually to deal with what seems out of order better than Mrs. Herriton does when she hears of Lilia's marriage. Indeed, Forster insists that life and literature follow and do not follow certain patterns.

Forster has often been accused of handling deaths poorly in his novels. Few readers forget the shock of Mrs. Wilcox's death in *Howards End*. It simply opens a chapter just after we've gotten to know her. Many critics claim that Forster uses death as a convenience. They see too much of the "puppet-master," or they see no method at all. Even Lionel Trilling, who defends the casualness of death in Forster on grounds that death is always a crass surprise and thus gives value to life, fails to see method in Lilia's death in WAFT. He calls it "sudden and unmotivated." There are three deaths in

18 Karl and Magalaner, p. 123.
20 Oliver, p. 16.
21 Trilling, p. 63.
WAFT, all in one family: Charles, Lilia, and (by extension) the baby. H. H. Waggoner sees the effect of suddenness caused by the casual or understated announcement of death. Two things are going on here. Forster manages to create a rhythm that shocks and yet does hold esthetic shape. What seems like shock or surprise has, as Peter Burra indicates, been subtly prepared for and shows up as less "shocking" only on a second reading. Burra refers to the leitmotif method, H. K. Brown refers to Forster's term "rhythm," and James McConkey defines the technique as "repetitions with variations" that make "suggestions beyond the literal." Beer suggests an even easier pattern: surprises are usually preceded by a "quieting of tensions."

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23 Burra, p. 24.


In a larger context, the three deaths in WAFT indicate a pattern of increasing victimization. Charles exists for no more than a paragraph in the novel. He chooses Lilia "because she was pretty" (p. 8). But the narrator quickly summarizes how Mrs. Herriton exerted her influence -- first unsuccessfully to stop the match, then to control the daughter-in-law, and finally to raise the baby, Irma, properly. But no sooner does she win that "curious duel" than we read, "Charles died, and the struggle recommenced" (p. 9). In two short words, Forster shifts from frantic action to the sudden cessation of action. Mrs. Herriton wins a duel and loses her son. Her influence is deadly. She reaches across the continent in the person of Harriet and kills the child born to Lilia and Gino. There is a sudden collision of carriages, and Philip finds the dead child after a search in the mud and the dark, described in a way that echoes Gino's search for him during the torture scene of the next chapter. Miss Abbott brings light here as she does in the torture scene when she saves Philip. Philip calls for silence and

Then he listened, and heard nothing but the rain and the panting horses, and Harriet,

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who was somewhere chuckling to herself in the dark. (p. 165)

So many threads reach to and away from this terrifying moment. We should not forget that it is Caroline's carriage that collides with the one bearing the baby, Harriet, and Philip. A frantic, active escape is suddenly halted, and, as with Charles, in death. It echoes journeys taken by Lilia, Caroline, Harriet, and Philip that end in death. Indeed, this passage climaxes the rhythm of death and draws us back, all the way back, to the first paragraph of the novel.

They were all at Charing Cross to see Lilia off -- Philip, Harriet, Irma, Mrs. Herriton herself. Even Mrs. Theobald, squired by Mr. Kingcroft, had braved the journey from Yorkshire to bid her only daughter goodbye. Miss Abbott was likewise attended by numerous relatives, and the sight of so many people talking at once and saying such different things caused Lilia to break into ungovernable peals of laughter. (p. 3)

Death, laughter, silence, and talk thread together here. Of course, that last sentence shifts from apparently a general viewpoint to a focus on Lilia. It indicates her high spirits and enthusiasm, traits that will serve her poorly when the only absent figure, Gino, enters her view. Still, this image of everyone seeing Lilia and Caroline off amid chaos and vibrancy indicates a major theme. "So many people talking at once and saying such different things" heralds the communication theme in the novel. And this vision of the failures to communicate
or connect should inspire laughter. Still, that later
darker "chuckling" of Harriet's indicates the conse-
quences of the failure to understand or connect. Lilia
is last seen "laughing helplessly" as she is "carried out
into the fog" (p. 6). Laughter in obscurity becomes a
motif -- laughter at the mysterious and absurd. Laughter
of Lilia's high-spirited kind will not suffice in the
alien culture of Italy. She dies in this passage at the
end of Chapter four:

As for Lilia, some one said to her, "It's a
beautiful boy!" But she had died in giving
birth to him. (p. 68)

Again, in the very description of events rhythms and
themes vibrate. The "As for" casually follows Gino's
tearful face (thus linking him with his own son's death
later) and announces Lilia's death. Still, someone does
speak to her, someone tries to connect with the dead
Lilia to announce a new life. This fusion of death-and-
life, of course, functions in that last sentence and then
in the very next one, beginning Chapter five:

At the time of Lilia's death Philip Herriton
was just twenty-four years of age -- indeed the
news reached Sawston on his birthday. (p. 68)

Not only does this arrangement force death and life to-
gether, but it also introduces Philip, who will confront
life for the first time as a result of Lilia's death and
giving birth. He will nearly die himself in that con-
frontation.
We should perhaps throw in one more complication at this point. Charles, Lilia, and the baby -- such a list would seem to indicate merely increasing victimization. Charles helps his mother, we are told, in controlling Lilia. Lilia foolishly chooses Gino as a result of a romantic tableau. The baby merely exists and then dies. Alan Wilde and Bonnie Finkelstein are in agreement, seeing the baby's death as a victory for the deadly forces of Sawston.\footnote{Wilde, Art and Order, p. 20. Bonnie B. Finkelstein, Forster's Women: Eternal Differences, (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1975), p. 32.} This oversimplification results from the too-easy assumption that Italy-Monteriano-Gino represent life. Actually, Gino inflicts his desire for continuance, thus denying it for Lilia and ironically for his own son. The web tangles.

What should become apparent, in even this quick outline of one rhythm, is that Forster has contrived WAFT so as to confound any schematic approach. Shock is felt but not unmotivated. Charles dies for participating in the mechanism of his mother's version of love. Lilia dies as a result of the stifling life of Monteriano and Italian wifehood. The baby dies for being the absurd object of mechanical and natural obsession. The
victimization increases as the victim becomes less able to control the situation. Still, those who do control things become ironically victims of their own devices.

The controlling forces in this novel are Mrs. Herriton and Gino. That casualness and subtle irony in the opening scene referred to by Cavaliero exists in the first line. "Mrs. Herriton, herself" clearly nudges us to consider how highly this personage holds herself. She condescends enough to be present at this public event. She, with the help of her other son, Philip, has arranged for Lilia's travels to Italy. Mrs. Herriton has effectively sentenced the high-spirited girl to death. She is a formidable enemy. Few critics misunderstand the evil of conventional views embodied in her. She's deceptive and diplomatic. She is more dangerous, therefore, than her enthusiastically Protestant daughter, Harriet. Harriet, to some critics, at least believes in something; she's driven by emotion.²⁸ Mrs. Herriton mechanically responds to any threat to the provincial harmony of her Sawston life. Still, we cannot forget that she alone realizes the error in Lilia's engagement. She rushes through Philip's library to try to figure out from books the location or cause for the crisis and feels frustrated because she feels none of "the hidden charms of Bae-

²⁸Cavaliero, p. 68.
deker" (p. 17). Her resort to printed informations and maps and her failure to sense anything from them indicates her mechanical nature, her lack of imagination. But the narrator tells us she senses something:

If Mrs. Herriton had no imagination, she had intuition, a more useful quality, and the picture she made to herself of Lilia's fiancé did not prove altogether wrong. (p. 19)

Mrs. Herriton understands evil; she connects accurately with Gino. She pictures him. She does a better job of seeing him than does either Lilia or the critics. The passage ramifies beyond itself and within itself. Such intrusions, a number of which more troublesome ones will be discussed in a later chapter, are often overlooked. Either that or they are assumed to depict Forster's esthetic limitations -- he tells us how to see a character or situation instead of dramatizing it. But what, in fact, has the narrator told us? Mrs. Herriton's awareness of the social and cultural disparity between Lilia and Gino is only suggested. Her practical intuition senses the mercenary in that Italian son of a dentist. In perhaps one of the quietest and bitterest ironies of the novel, her awareness of the gap between the betrothed originates in her ability to connect with the machination of the charming Gino. Those who are so suffused with apprehensions of beauty and imagination never quite see things so clearly. As we will see later, Philip and
Caroline never understand the reality of the situation. They may be more appealing figures, but they are no more perceptive than Mrs. Herriton. Forster only suggests what it takes the whole novel to dramatize here. He qualifies the information further in an example of that "negative affirmation" referred to earlier. Her "picture" (a word aptly chosen in a novel full of visual tableaus that serve to define characters for each other and for us) of Gino "did not prove altogether wrong." As he tells us something, he qualifies the message. Rather than say positively what she knew -- perhaps "proved largely correct" -- the narrator negates the predicate and qualifies the complement, itself a contradiction. For, we have just seen that Mrs. Herriton is essentially right about Gino.

Finally we can pull back somewhat more. Forster by no means admires the mechanistic Mrs. Herriton. He deflates her amply in that "herself" of the opening sentence, in her treatment of Mr. Kingcroft and Philip, and in the final image of Chapter one. When Lilia's old flame has managed to look silly arriving too late with the footwarmer at the London station, Mrs. Herriton bestows her blessings:

"But you did your best," said Mrs. Herriton. "And I think it simply noble of you to have brought Mrs. Theobald all the way here on such a day as this." Then, rather hastily,
she shook hands, and left him to take Mrs. Theobald all the way back. (p. 6)

Of course, Mrs. Herriton cares nothing for Lilia's mother or Mr. Kingcroft. The narrator tells us how to hear this dialogue in that repetitious "all the way back." Mrs. Herriton has no intention of extending her contact with Mrs. Theobald or encouraging Kingcroft. She performs polite perfunctories and then cuts outsiders off. Later, we read this passage, indicating the limits of her tolerance for Philip's enthusiasm for Italy:

> Mrs. Herriton did not believe in romance nor in transfiguration, nor in parallels from history, nor in anything else that may disturb domestic life. She adroitly changed the subject before Philip got excited. (p. 8)

We are told that thus the Sawston life settles into a quiet pattern. We shift to quick exposition of the past, wherein we learn of the duel with Mrs. Theobald over Irma and with Lilia over Mr. Kingcroft. When Lilia wants to go with Irma to care for her ailing mother, "It required all of Mrs. Herriton's kindness to prevent her" (p. 9). Lilia's inexact relation with Kingcroft ends as a result of Mrs. Herriton's letter and "without even the pressure of a rescue-party" (p. 9). For a time Lilia seems to accept the Herriton control, but a bicycle accident near the church one Sunday evening and a continuing correspondence with Kingcroft create the need to get Lilia out of Sawston. Kingcroft, by the way, sends
presents to Irma, thus prefiguring Gino's letters and postcards to her later that embarrass the Herritons again. Philip not only thinks of the Italian excursion, but also responds to the bicycle incident appropriately:

If she had not been a relative, it would have been entertaining. But even Philip, who in theory loved outraging English conventions, rose to the occasion, and gave her a talking which she remembered to her dying day. (p 10)

Indeed, the treatment she receives at the hands of the Herriton family drives Lilia to her fatal error in choosing Gino. Later when Philip arrives to rescue her from what he thinks is an impending marriage, she finally explodes:

"For once in my life I'll thank you to leave me alone. I'll thank your mother too. For twelve years you've trained and tortured me, and I'll stand it no more. Do you think I'm a fool? Do you think I never felt? But, thank goodness, I can stand up against the world now, for I've found Gino, and this time I marry for love!" (pp. 35-36)

Things happen much faster than Philip or his family ever expect. Indeed, as she speaks Lilia is already married. Philip's mission is absurdly belated, his sense of heroism and high courage absurdly misapplied. This fatuous activity reflects his mother's behavior in the first chapter. She agrees to Italy but will hear none of its praises. She works on Irma and stifles the sibling skirmishes between Harriet and Philip -- keeping each of them under her control. But as she sows her orderly
garden, she receives news of Lilia's engagement, shockingly at second hand from Mrs. Theobald. That affront disturbs and distracts her most of all. She is not at the center of the action. She doesn't see the sparrows who "hopped nearer and began to eye the peas" (p. 15). Indeed, the next few pages trace her frantic search through the library and her plans for Philip's rescue mission. She must deal with a domestic upheaval close at hand involving the kitchen range, the cook, and the housemaid. She charges Philip with his mission, threatens Caroline Abbott, and strikes off an insulting letter to Mrs. Theobald. Then she suddenly, in the chapter's last paragraph, remembers those uncovered peas. "It upset her more than anything . . ." (p. 20). She tries to salvage them, even in the dark. "The sparrows had taken every one. But countless fragments of the letter [from Mrs. Theobald] remained, disfiguring the tidy ground" (p. 20).

Mrs. Herriton's practicality, useful as it may be in detecting a central truth about Lilia's fiancé, has a mechanical and absurd ineffectiveness to it. She rakes about in the dirt and the dark for what is already gone. Not only do those fragments of paper suggest the failure of communications, but also, that image of this mechanical mother links with Philip's search for the already dead child in Chapter eight, and Gino's eerie search for his dead
son and demonic torture of Philip in the dark in Chapter
nine. This rhythm of searching for what is already lost
binds much of the novel together. Though in Mrs. Herri-
ton's case it functions largely as ironic deflation --
and thereby qualifies the narrator's claim that her intui-
tion is "more useful" -- in Lilia, Caroline, and Philip's
cases it dramatizes a more complex theme.

For these three characters have that less practical
quality of imagination; they rush in where "angels and
other practical people" (p. 112) fear to tread. We must
define that rather cryptic conjunction by examining next
how these three impractical people deal with the object
of their varied imaginative apprehensions -- Gino Carella.
Gino is no simple force of life, and as we examine his
drama with these three British characters, the dialecti-
cal conflicts, the tableaus, and narrative intrusions
take on a complexity usually overlooked by critics of
WAFT.

We should see now a certain number of threads. The
casualness with which shock and irony are introduced must
alert us to oversimplified reactions. We should be less
prepared to assert that we know what's going on -- either
in plot or character. In fact, Mrs. Herriton's behavior
in chapter one dramatizes the reader's condition in read-
ing this novel. She is intuitive and mechanical, impos-
ing and ineffective. The sudden events that upset her
calm view and her ludicrous attempt to restore order at
the end of the chapter mirror our participation in the
drama of this novel. Her failure to understand or hu-
manly connect perpetuates death and evil. She must be
seen looking in her garden for something already gone.

In a metaphoric way, we search for meaning too, as
we read this novel, but if we expect to find it according
to a set pattern, we will be sorely disappointed. The
shocks -- even to our esthetic senses in those narrative
pronouncements -- are full of ironic dimensions. Perhaps
we can think this way as we proceed: the sudden events,
tableaus, and intrusions are thematic and formal shocks.
That is, shocks of recognition take place all the time
for the characters and for us. Expectations ethical and
esthetic are the target of an ironic voice that speaks
at some level beyond the literal at all times. Oliver
knows what he says when he detects Forster's awareness
of the falsity of any statement once made. Perception,
understanding, connection may stop in words at some point,
however complex, for these characters, this narrator,
and us. But for Forster, as for Henry James, relations
never stop; in literature or in life, truth is a shift-
ing, ironic multiplicity. He defends his own habit of
shifting perspective in *Aspects of the Novel*:

A novelist can shift his view-point if it
comes off. . . . Indeed this power to expand
and contract perception (of which the shifting view-point is a symptom), this right to intermittent knowledge:- I find it one of the great advantages of the novel-form, and it has a parallel in our perception of life. We are stupider at some times than others; we can enter into people's minds occasionally but not always... and this intermittence lends in the long run variety and colour to the experiences we receive. 29

The only time we should censure novelists for moving freely within and without their characters is "if we catch them at it at the time"30 (my emphasis). Critics who bristle at what they take to be Forster's intrusions think they have caught him out. Forster only allows us to think we know how to read the melodrama, the tableaus, and the intrusions.

Lionel Trilling, again, offers a way to see this quality. He senses that readers will believe that Forster's clear moral purposes are somehow absolutes. He says:

The comic manner, however, will not tolerate absolutes. It stands on the barricade and casts doubt on both sides. The fierce plots move forward to grand simplicities but the comic manner confuses the issues, forcing upon us the difficulties and complications of the moral fact. The plot suggests eternal division, the manner reconciliation; the plot speaks of clear certainties, the manner resolutely insists that nothing can be quite so simple.31

30 Forster, p. 81
31 Trilling, p. 12.
What Trilling calls manner, we can call voice. Forster provides the links between voice, music, rhythm, and fiction in *Aspects of the Novel*. Voice, Forster says, "is the aspect of the novelist's work which asks to be read out loud, which appeals not to the eye, like most prose, but to the ear."\(^{32}\) He defines the function of rhythm in fiction: "not to be there all the time like a pattern, but by its lovely waxing and waning to fill us with surprise and freshness and hope."\(^{33}\) He asks: "Is there any effect in novels comparable to the effect of the Fifth Symphony as a whole, where, when the orchestra stops, we hear something that has never actually been played?"\(^{34}\) He answers his own question by asserting what in fact his own voice in his own fiction does:

Music, though it does not employ human beings, though it is governed by intricate laws, nevertheless does offer in its final expression a type of beauty which fiction might achieve in its own way. Expansion. That is the idea the novelist must cling to. Not completion. Not rounding off but opening out.\(^{35}\)

\(^{32}\)Forster, p. 39.  
\(^{33}\)Forster, p. 167.  
\(^{34}\)Forster, p. 168.  
\(^{35}\)Forster, p. 169.
It is that something heard but never played or said Forster wants as his final effect. He achieves the effect in WAFT by the constant and casual shifting of point of view. Though at times a melodramatic shock or scene, tableau, or narrative intrusion stops the action, it is always really part of the ongoing rhythmical and rhetorical process. What seems most resolute is qualified; qualification becomes resolution. Suggestion and often silence become statement. We may be like the characters in WAFT if we expect to find in words only meaning and not suggestion, only statement and not silence. What may be already gone, just beyond our grasp, is the sound of Forster's voice, never quite heard but surely felt.
Chapter 3: Gino, Lilia, and Tableaus

Gino Carella's drama with Lilia, Caroline, and Philip brings the three major narrative techniques of WAFT sharply to our attention. Until we have a clear picture of Gino, WAFT remains a simple novel. Alan Wilde, emphasizing the art-vs.-life motif in the novel, comes out in favor of Italy and Gino:

Lilia, Caroline, and Philip discover with varying degrees of success how to connect in Italy, for there where the truth lies closer to the surface of things men can reach across the abyss of loneliness and allow their fingers to touch.1

Wilde defines melodrama as a technique that highlights events suddenly, disregards cause-effect relationships, and "provides a structural counterpart to what may be called Forster's philosophy of the great moment."2 He brings, thus, melodrama and tableaus together in this approach:

If life is, as Forster seems generally to feel, essentially dull and, for most people at most times, meaningless, then it can derive

2Wilde, p. 16.
significance only when some sudden burst of color illumines its gray surface. . . . So awakened, Forster's heroes think back upon the past, on into the future, trying as they do so to communicate to the drabness of ordinary life some of the glory that inheres in these great and infrequent moments. The anti-heroes have their eyes turned inward and see nothing at all.  

If we allow the narrative intrusions to be part of this pattern, then the novel's "great moments" become our focus. And yet, the previous chapter should indicate that Forster does not see life as a grayness variously colored with moments of truth. Instead, characters and poor readers take such moments as the truth; Forster does more. By suggesting that these moments partake of the perpetual grayness, he manages a more paradoxical and life-like esthetic effect. There is truth or understanding and there isn't. There is product and process, stasis and motion, art and life simultaneously. The suggestion goes on in what Forster writes or says and in what he doesn't. Absence becomes presence -- as those characters, heroes and anti-heroes, who search for what is not there know.

In light of the three Britishers, Gino does come off with vibrancy and life. Wilde defends him because he acts upon what he feels; Colmer calls him a "touchstone

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3Wilde, p. 16.
of spontaneity and truth; and Langbaum, while admitting the murkiness of Gino's motives, affirms that he is somehow right, somehow beyond moral categories. Rose Macaulay even suggests that Forster loves Gino. Oliver, instead, says Gino's portrait is impartial. Kelvin and McConkey join forces with Wilde in seeing Gino as somehow romantically brutal but honest and a life force; his presence embodies the theme of continuance or immortality -- especially in his dedication to his son. Some critics, like Cavaliero and McDowell, take a more ambivalent stance. These two use the word "demon" in describing Gino, and they sense both an elemental or spontaneous force along with certain conventions, rules, proprieties.

4 Wilde, p. 20.


Wilde, p. 18.

Yet neither sees the significance of this presence of conventional attitude in what McDowell admits is a character showing Forster's awareness of latent irrationality. Only Lionel Trilling understand that the characters are taken in by Gino, but Forster is not. Gino Carella is really not much more than Mrs. Herriton with muscles. They have more in common than anyone sees. Mrs. Herriton knows him as she knows herself; she knows what one is capable of doing to protect one's view of order.

Martial Rose tells us that, in fact, Lilia sentimentalizes Gino, Philip condescends to him, Harriet never sees him. Rose is closer but needs qualification. We should add Mrs. Herriton, who does see Gino pretty clearly, though she deals ineffectually with him. Caroline Abbott, as we will see later, lusts after Gino in a most comically Platonic fashion. She fails to deal adequately with him, and in her major confrontation with him over the baby, the whole parent-and-continuance theme is heavily qualified. Harriet, sometimes linked with Gino because

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9McDowell, p. 39.
she acts upon her beliefs in kidnapping Gino's son, clearly functions as a soldier in the mechanics of Mrs. Herriton's army. She acts as that older woman might have acted, given back the enthusiasm of youth and solid ideals. But her never seeing Gino clearly has less importance because of her role as Mrs. Herriton's representative in Italy. Philip, Mrs. Herriton's other representative against Gino, not only condescends but falls prey to the charming Italian. Finally, Lilia sentimentalizes and condescends as well.

She clearly, as Trilling says, is more miserable in Monteriano than she ever was in Sawston. As evidenced by that speech of hers to Philip, quoted earlier, she knows Sawston's oppression, but chooses Monteriano's instead. She participates more than McDowell suggests by calling her a flat character upon whom Italy has no effect. Indeed, her assertion to Philip that she will marry for love shows what has happened to her. Her high-spirited laughter at the end of the first paragraph echoes in Gino's first appearance after the disastrous dinner

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12 Trilling, p. 62.
14 McDowell, p. 48.
scene in Chapter two. Not only does Gino try absurdly to impress Philip, but he also portrays his version of the life-force in stopping up the fish bowl behind his head.

Our first vision of Gino:

That scion of the Italian nobility, Signor Carella, sat opposite. Behind him loomed a bowl of goldfish, who swam round and round, gaping at the guests. (p. 30)

Are these goldfish any less an ironic deflation than those sparrows who hopped near Mrs. Herriton's pea garden? The suggestion of halo or crown or aureole further demotes Gino. He is dirty of hair and hand and cuff; his checked suit, minus handkerchief, doesn't even fit. The face has an Italian charm that Philip has sensed before, but the narrator also informs us that Lilia and Gino cannot converse; neither understands the other's language. Gino proudly quotes the opening of Dante's *Inferno* and conceitedly grins when Lilia mentions his skill at pallone. Then Gino flings a bothersome cat away from the table, away from "pieces of the quivering purple beef they were trying to swallow" (p. 32). The cat threatens the fish in the bowl, and Gino, after chasing her off, stops up the bowl:

"But may not the fish die?" said Miss Abbott.
"They have no air."
"Fish live on water, not on air," he replied in a knowing voice, and sat down. Apparently he was at his ease again, for he took to spitting on the floor. (p. 32)
This arrogant stupidity characterizes his treatment of Lilia in their marriage; he knows what she lives on and manages to kill her in childbirth. After Philip's confrontation with Lilia over what he thinks is an impending marriage, Gino comes into the room to face "Fra Filippo." Philip, thinking he's in control, holds silent for a moment. But when he looks up, he sees "Gino convulsed with silent laughter" (p. 37). Philip offers a bribe; Gino considers it but then announces that Philip is too late. Gino reacts to Philip's "Why?" in a way that echoes throughout the novel:

"Because --" His voice broke. Philip watched his face, -- a face without refinement perhaps, but not without expression, -- watched it quiver and re-form and dissolve from emotion into emotion. There was avarice at one moment, and insolence, and politeness, and stupidity, and cunning -- and let us hope that sometimes there was love. But gradually one emotion dominated, the most unexpected of all; for his chest began to heave and his eyes to wink and his mouth to twitch, and suddenly he stood erect and roared forth his whole being in one tremendous laugh. (p. 38)

Gino's force may be vibrant, but it is hardly an unmitigated good. His fluid face threatens because of the force of his being. This suggests that the narrator can only hope there is love or connection outside the self in Gino. That is, the narrator imposes a possibility that Gino's behavior only hints at -- in this scene and throughout the rest of the novel. He barrels out of the
room after toppling Philip over. This gesture of a forceful laughing beast turns dark, as does the meaning of Lilia's laughter in the first paragraph, in Chapter Nine when Gino tortures Philip. Chapter two ends on Philip's and Caroline's escape from Italy, but then the terror, largely untouched by critics of WAFT, of Lilia and Gino's marriage begins.

For two chapters we discover what love means to Gino Carella, and how limited our narrator's hopes are. This hope of the narrator's, interjected as it is, has the same effect as the "more useful" in describing Mrs. Herriton's perception of Gino. In each case something valuable is asserted, proves true to some extent, but is sorely qualified by the end of the novel. We also discover that indeed Philip is too late; the chance for Lilia to escape is already gone. And while we enjoy Philip's comeuppance at this moment, by the end of Chapter four when Lilia dies giving birth, our superiority is again qualified. We think we know how to react to a moment in this novel, but the one moment, no matter how vivid or satisfying, is only part of the multiple reality of this novel.

Lilia marries as a result of a vision, not real understanding or knowledge; she equates passion with
love. After describing ironically the house Lilia and Gino take, a description full of generalization, speculation, and insight, the narrator explains Lilia's tableau this way:

It was in this house that the brief and inevitable tragedy of Lilia's married life took place. She made Gino buy it for her, because it was there she had first seen him sitting on the mud wall that faced the Volterra gate. She remembered how the evening sun had struck his hair, and how he had smiled down at her, and being both sentimental and unrefined, was determined to have the man and the place together. (p. 41)

This tableau cast a shadow over all the others in the novel, and few critics fully appreciate the complex nature of them as a result of misreading this one.

J. B. Beer identifies the tableaus as means of slowing the narrative and suggesting significance; Wilde sees them as opportunities for reflection and change. Belgion and Martin assert that those who respond imaginatively

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Finkelstein, p. 12.


17 Beer, p. 72.
enjoy a sort of secular salvation.  

Colmer claims that the tableaus reveal "ultimate reality," stay in the memory, and are not vulnerable to cynicism or disenchantment. Thomson believes that Forster stands squarely with his characters during their ecstatic visions and that in the Italian novels such visions are more the narrator's than any one character's. None of these critics sees the complexity in Forster's use of such tableaus in WAFT. Thomson does admit that the sense of totality can be in either ecstasy or desolation. Smith gets closer by saying that these infrequent moments of "seeing it whole" are disturbing because "it" equals meaningfulness. McConkey tells us that the


19Colmer, p. 57.

20Thomson, pp. 40, 121.

21Thomson, p. 93.

visionary moments are so transitory that characters sense their limits, feel dissociation from reality, more intensely. But Beer comes closest when he reminds us that even as one gazes sentimentally, metaphorically, at the stars, he must realize

... that the specks of light at which he is looking come from dead worlds revolving through space... He may enjoy that moment's life as much as he likes, but the overwhelming fact in the universe is the fact of death. 24

Any moment when one feels a suffusion of totality, he must realize that no matter how fulfilling, the moment is only a reminder of time. A product or tableau is only a moment in a process. If we return now to that description of the house, the site of Lilia's tableau, Forster's sense of this duality is clear.

Some critics see the disorganization and tumble of the place as hits of its openness and life-enhancing value. Beer calls the house a "labyrinth of decay with some life at its heart." 26 But a closer reading reveals the place as jumbled and deceptive. A door that seems to indicate the first floor "really leads into the attic!" (p. 40). The house "slides for two storeys down the

23McConkey, pp. 27-28, 4.
24Beer, p. 28.
25Karl and Magalaner, p. 106.
26Beer, p. 67.
hill behind" (p. 40). This following passage clearly indicates that the house itself hardly enhances life:

The ground floor and the upper floor of that battered house are alike deserted, and the inmates keep to the central portion, just as in a dying body all liferetires to the heart. There is a door at the top of the first flight of stairs, and if the visitor is admitted he will find a welcome which is not necessarily cold. (p.40)

The metaphor is of a dying body; life indeed takes place at the central portion -- neither on the ground floor or hell nor on the upper floor or heaven. But what takes place really is life's retirement -- dying is life. The inmates keep to the central portion or life because they are, as a body, dying. Then, further indications of the way narrative voice qualifies appear in that last sentence; the visitor may or may not be admitted and, even if he is, will receive a welcome "not necessarily cold."

Again absences are asserted; the complement to the verb to be is a negative. This is the house where Lilia and Gino suffer their marriage. As Kelvin comments, that marriage of disconnection embodies the gaps between Italy and England.27 When we remember that the disastrous union is inspired by Lilia's tableau, a tableau both positive as a response to Sawston oppression and negative because of the resulting further response, the

27 Kelvin, pp. 43-44.
novel's dialectical conflict, surely the tableaus, and
the narrative intrusions (both explicit comment and
implicit descriptions or exposition) all fuse into the
complex effects of WAFT. Moments of connection and dis-
connection interweave.

The marriage falters for a number of reasons:
Gino's family, Italian customs and conventions, and
Lilia's money. After an initial crisis involving the
occupation of their house by Gino's family, Lilia and
Gino settle into a conflict. Gino realizes how rich
Lilia is and shamefully remembers his regret over losing
Philip's offer of a thousand lire. "It would have been
a short-sighted bargain" (p. 43). Lilia thinks she runs
things:

She always treated him as a boy, which he was,
and as a fool, which he was not, thinking
herself so immeasurably superior to him that
she neglected opportunity after opportunity
of establishing her rule. (p. 43)

She believes her money and his passion will keep him
under control. But they clash over her having guests in
and taking walks by herself. Gino doesn't understand
his English wife; she doesn't know that "life is very
pleasant in Italy if you are a man" (p. 47). Gino's
friend Spiridione Tesi visits, and Italian brotherhood
takes the form of drinking vermouth at the square and con-
sidering ways of establishing Gino's rule over Lilia.
She is not what Tesi calls "simpatico":

"The person who understands us at first sight, who never irritates us, who never bores, to whom we can pour forth every thought and wish, not only in speech but in silence --." (p. 51)

Tesi visits disastrously with Lilia, for Gino, feeling embarrassed having to include his wife in his pleasure, declares that no more people will visit. Tesi calls him wise for protecting so "precious a possession" (p. 55). Gino's control is subtle but real; Chapter four begins:

The advance of regret can be so gradual that it is impossible to say "yesterday I was happy, today I am not." At no one moment did Lilia realize that her marriage was a failure; yet during the summer and autumn she became as unhappy as it was possible for her nature to be. She had no unkind treatment, and few unkind words, from her husband. He simply left her alone. (p. 55)

Italy and Gino sap Lilia's self-confidence; her house and Monteriano become "strange." She begins to think of Sawston as she considers the equally strange countryside she would see if she were to disobey Gino. Everything expands out away from her, "chalk-white farms," "slopes of olives and vineyards" and "more little towns outlined against the cloudless sky." She exclaims, "I don't call this country, . . . Why, it's not as wild as Sawston Park!" (p.56). And the narrator tells us that Italy's version of pattern or control is perhaps stronger and surely older than England's:

And, indeed, there was scarcely a touch of wildness in it -- some of those slopes had
been under cultivation for two thousand years. (p.56)

Her isolation leads to reflection; she joins the Catholic Church so that her eternal position will not be as obscure as her temporal or social one is. She feels no touch with those back in Sawston. Her control ebbs when she discovers the sense of being completely stifled by Gino and Italy. She confronts him, once over money and later over an accidentally discovered infidelity. He nearly attacks her in the first scene and in the second, reacts this way:

Then, alas! the absurdity of his own position grew upon him, and he laughed -- as he would have laughed at the same situation on the stage. (p. 64)

She has tried to escape, failed, and cannot even anger him anymore; theirs becomes the marriage of disconnection:

He was particularly kind to her when he hardly ever saw her, and she accepted his kindness without resentment, even with gratitude, so docile had she become. She did not hate him, even as she had never loved him . . . . (p. 61)

The narrator clarifies the impulse behind Lilia's marrying Gino. She told Philip that she had married for love, but she marries because she wants to escape Sawston and thinks Gino on the wall is the way. Not accidentally, Italian cultivation links with Mrs. Herriton's pea garden. Gino's near-brutality towards Lilia ends in that demonic laugh. We will recall that laugh when we examine
the opera scene; it is described as the same response Gino would make to a similar stage situation. Critics who come up with the easy Gino-equals-life/Philip-equals-art ratio forget Gino's inability here to deal adequately with real pain. Forster does want life and art to coalesce but not at the expense of genuine feeling and genuine distance. Gino becomes kind to her by his absence; another gap or distance becomes reality. Gino, as much as any character in this novel, sees only himself; his order will dominate; his kindness is as self-serving as Mrs. Herriton's. He has no ability to see outside, no perspective on himself as he affects others. He laughs because he knows he hasn't been so good at infidelity as Italian husbands manage it. He laughs because he knows he still manages his wife. He never sees his double standard. The narrator fantasizes that had Lilia been stronger with him, "he might possibly -- though not probably -- have been made a better husband as well as a better man. . . . But had Lilia been different she might not have married him" (p. 60). Even supposition is qualified here; the reality is their disastrous marriage.

Lilia, realizing this thinks she might get away; she pursues something already lost. We might laugh at the absurd gesture. Her attempted escape, wildly chasing after an ever-diminishing carriage, is described in ways that echo Caroline's wild appearance to Philip in Chapter two and the fatal accident in Chapter eight. She tries to
cut it off but is too late, and it kicks up so much dust that Lilia faints. She wakes covered and invaded by dust on the road. She mirrors her son's death. After the inconclusive and unsatisfying scene with Gino over his infidelity, she tries to communicate with Sawston for help. She writes to Irma and Mr. Kingcroft, but her letters never make it out of Monteriano. She surrenders, falls ill, eventually becomes pregnant, and dies. The social ideas of the North and South have clashed, and the South has won. Gino controls her because he understands only how an Italian marriage must be managed. Gino and Mrs. Herriton are linked twice, explicitly. In describing Lilia:

She was not obedient, but she was cowardly, and in the most gentle way, which Mrs. Herriton might have envied, Gino made her do what he wanted. (p. 57)

And after the confrontation over Gino's infidelity, misery follows because Gino cannot see the gap:

His wife was a very ordinary woman, and why should her ideas differ from his own? No one realized that more than personalities were engaged; that the struggle was national; that generations of ancestors, good, bad, or indifferent, forbade the Latin man to be chivalrous to the northern woman, the northern woman to forgive the Latin man. All this might have been foreseen: Mrs. Herriton foresaw it from the first. (p. 65)

Gino functions no less mechanically than Mrs. Herriton. They are parents, and they are deadly. They have forms, especially marriage, that extend and inhibit life.
Few critics have looked closely at the blend of irony in this marriage -- the ludicrous and pathetic co-exist. For some reason, they fail to hear multiple tones in the description of Lilia's final days and Gino's obsession with fatherhood:

He could talk and think of nothing else. His one desire was to become the father of a man like himself, and it held him with a grip he only partially understood, for it was the first great desire, the first great passion of his life. Falling in love was a mere physical triviality . . . beside this divine hope of immortality: 'I continue.' He gave candles to Santa Deodata, for he was always religious at a crisis, and sometimes he went to her himself and prayed the crude uncouth demands of the simple. Impetuously he summoned all his relatives back to bear him company in his time of need, and Lilia saw strange faces flitting past her in the darkened room. (p. 67)

Lilia's pregnancy coexists with her illness; the self-obsession in Gino blinds him to her suffering. Critics and perhaps the narrator (in that "divine hope of immortality") forget that Gino's desire for eternity is self-reflective, even narcissistic. His religious zeal is ludicrous and pathetic. Santa Deodata allowed her mother to die rather than give in to the devil's temptations. Divine hopes for life-everafter sit poorly with life here and now. Gino's relatives close in around Lilia in her time of need for Gino's sake. They form something of a frame for these two chapters -- having been part of its early crisis and now being part of its
end in death. Italy, Sawston, and Gino, turned into strange, nightmarish visions--faces as multiple and fluid as Gino's in the earlier bribery scene, haunt Lilia at her dying.

However natural Gino appears, his obsession threatens life as much as that of the mechanical Mrs. Herriton. The natural function of having children, seen by simpler minds as life-enhancing, becomes a mechanical imposition upon the ludicrous and pathetic Lilia. She hardly reaches across the abyss of loneliness. She is responsible, of course, but she is also a victim -- a victim of her need to act freely even as that freedom manifests itself in trying to impose British social forms on Italy. Here is that blend of meanings this novel possesses. Forms, conventions, manners give one a sense of purpose, even freedom; they seem natural to the characters whether North or South. Yet they separate these characters. Gino is really no more capable of independent action: he responds mechanically and never really sees his wife. He sees the world no less than Mrs. Herriton as a reflection of his conventions and himself. All behavior reverts to his image. His tableau during the marriage becomes that self-reflection -- a son. The tableau becomes a reality, and the reality is death -- for Lilia immediately and for the baby eventually. Gino's is a charming and brutal reality
-- as are the tableaus: charming initially and brutal ultimately.

Caroline and Philip discover the charm and brutality of Italy, and they too discover the reality of distance. The conflicts, tableaus, and intrusions significantly expand in relation to these two characters. They have more self-perspective than either Mrs. Herriton or Gino, but they are still trapped in perceptions that dramatize the distance between persons. And we will discover that in examining them, the narrator suggests momentary possibilities for connection even in the face of the ongoing reality of disconnection.
Chapter 4: Caroline - Passionate and Parental Love

Caroline Abbott and Philip Herriton are tied to the world of common-sense and the world of vision, of disconnection and connection.¹ Their struggle with Gino almost creates the one true bond in the novel. They appear very closely linked. Their responses are imaginative; they see more clearly than anyone else in the novel. Or so we would like to think. Because these two appear to learn and have the most to learn with, their ultimate disconnection presses in the novel's themes. Theirs is the final scene and final sentence of the novel, and as the closing, it reflects all the motifs of suddenness and casualness, escape and journey, product and process. Philip discovers something, and so does the reader. Caroline appears resigned, but hardly fulfilled. She is more open to life, progresses more quickly than Philip.² But she is full of contradictions; she wants and fears

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freedom\textsuperscript{3}; she is active, rebellious, sexual and passive, conventional, asexual.\textsuperscript{4} She goes to Italy twice -- once in rebellion and the second time with moral purpose.\textsuperscript{5} She tells Philip that she feels responsible for Lilia's disastrous marriage and thus for Lilia's death.\textsuperscript{6} Eventually, the baby becomes her ostensible motive for return. Yet, in light of her final revelations to Philip, all her behavior is qualified.\textsuperscript{7} She lusts for and idealizes Gino; she encourages Lilia because she cannot participate in life.\textsuperscript{8} As John Colmer says, Caroline has an eternal moment but not life or fulfillment.\textsuperscript{9}

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\textsuperscript{6}Finkelstein, p. 13.


\textsuperscript{8}Stone, p. 168.

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In a sense, a four-way conflict goes on, emphasizing the momentary against the ongoing, shock and casualness, connection and disconnection. Caroline and Philip join forces to some extent against Gino and Italy, but their confederacy separates them. And in examining this gap between Caroline and Philip, we discover the gaps between Philip and the narrator, and ultimately between the narrator and Forster. These conflicts address that central effect -- the attempt to fuse vision with reality, prophecy with comedy; Forster's central irony is in dramatizing that attempt, not simply in laughing at it. In Caroline and Philip especially, he creates characters who draw us close and yet stay distant.

Four significant scenes and a number of other dialogues between Caroline and Philip establish this pattern of approach and retreat. The basic conflict of vision and reality, tableaus, and narrative intrusions weave through the pattern and need careful consideration if we're to understand the process of voice this novel embodies.

In something of a critical cliche, we can begin with that ending. Trilling's phrase "enlightened despair" for the ending of WAFT seems apt. He sees the novel "petering out in sad discourse."

Others suggest that

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10 Trilling, p. 75.
through this last scene, Caroline and Philip at least know what they've missed. Wilde sees the triumph of knowledge in the scene as muted by the apparent failure of Caroline and Philip to connect. He, along with Langbaum, Trilling, and Finkelstein, knows that there can be no sudden resolutions or conversions because of increased awareness. Yet what the scene clearly dramatizes is the characters' need to resolve something. They have gone through a number of discussions, the opera scene, the washing of Gino's baby, its kidnapping and death, and Philip's torture and near-death. Each feels closer to the other as a result of their Italian adventures. But the final train ride shows how far apart they are.

The scene frames the novel, ending on a train as it began on a train. There is a sort of cycle in this return to Sawston. There is an invalid present, Harriet, to balance Mrs. Kingcroft. There is death in the background. Caroline and Philip return to the old life; they are in motion, moving into a tunnel with only their wavering private visions and memories of Monteriano to sustain them.

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11 Karl and Magalaner, p. 109.


The chapter seems to hinge on Philip's sense that perhaps "the greatest of things" is possible. He believes the South, its brutality and its beauty, has brought them together. Then Caroline reveals her essential physical passion for Gino. That revelation not only qualifies her previous scenes involving Gino and Philip, but it also shocks Philip into a number of perceptions. The scene builds comically with Caroline's feeling the temptation to speak the truth and admitting her loneliness. "Their faces were crimson, as if the same thought was surging through them both" (p. 180). This description ironically links and separates them; Caroline feels embarrassed at the power of passion, and Philip feels the glow of desire. They are crimson for the same and different reasons. She breaks down and admits that she loves Gino, even sobbing out his name three times and echoing two earlier scenes where she repeats the word "dead." She assaults Philip with being "dead-dead-dead" because he only sees life, never participates. And she repeats, "Your son is dead" three times to Gino in the later rescue of Philip. The intricate irony here involves the "dying-is-life" theme. She had attacked Philip for not engaging himself, saying his cynical laughter and clear vision were not enough. She now tells him of her lust for Gino in the hope he will mock her. With equal irony, he encourages Gino, as the Italian searches the darkened room for his now-dead
son, to be unhappy and to break down. Gino turns on him and nearly kills him in order to vent his passionate grief. As with any scene in this novel, these tie-ins qualify the scene itself.

After Philip mistakes Caroline's meaning in the word "love," and the train which had seemed to move them closer seems to move them apart, she explains how physical and complete the obsession is. Philip responds in character; he is essentially passionless and thinks of her instead of himself. But he errs twice; he should think of his and her real self -- not be exalted or exalt. For indeed, the worshiper shares some glory with what he perceives as divine. And he shares its unreality. He makes a cynical comment and then thinks mythically:

He smiled bitterly at the thought of them together. Here was the cruel antique malice of the gods, such as they once sent forth against Pasiphae. Centuries of aspiration and culture -- and the world could not escape it. (p. 182)

Pasiphae, wife of Minos, climbs inside a wooden cow designed by Dedalus in order to facilitate the satisfaction of her passion for a bull sent by Poseidon. She bears the Minotaur, for whom Dedalus then constructs the labyrinth. Caroline in a sense uses Lilia as Pasiphae uses that wooden cow. The ludicriosity of such fabrication and usage cannot be overlooked. A marvelous exchange follows Philip's thought of Pasiphae:
"I was going to say -- whatever have you
got in common?"
"Nothing except the times we have seen
each other." Again her face was crimson. He
turned his own face away. (p. 182)

He repeats the gesture he makes back in Chapter nine when
Caroline has saved him and holds Gino in her arms, strokes
him lightly, doing no more than "even a goddess can"

And it seemed fitting too, that she should
bend her head and touch his forehead with
her lips.

Philip looked away, as he sometimes
looked away from the great pictures where
visible forms suddenly became inadequate for
the things they have shown to us. (p. 173)

In this earlier scene, as in the final one, a conversion
is asserted. Caroline explains in the final scene that her
passion goes back to the scene involving Gino and the
washing of his son. She mentions the opera scene as well.
She calls the passion "a wreath of smoke" (p. 183). Philip
says that she clearly thought of him when she dared to
face Gino, knowing how strong her desire was. He has
this perception:

For the thing was even greater than she
imagined. Nobody but himself would ever see
round it now. And to see round it he was
standing at an immense distance. He could
even be glad that she had once held the be-
loved in her arms. (p. 183)

Far too many critics read his distance as the narrator's
or Forster's. They attack Forster for having Philip
venerate her. Wilde identifies the shift as Philip's slip back into esthetics and away from life. But Philip is still the object of irony. Caroline delivers a whole speech trying to bring him back from the lofty heights: "'Get over supposing I'm refined. That's what puzzles you. Get over that'"(p. 183). Juxtaposition, however, dramatizes just how far apart they are, for the very next sentence reads: "As he spoke she seemed to be transfigured, and to have indeed no part with refinement or unrefinement any longer" (p. 183) (my emphasis). Philip has not even heard Caroline; he hears and sees only what he needs to. That pronoun refers to Philip's speech given before Caroline's disclaimer; it is as if her speech weren't there -- another absence made present. He doesn't see her except, as explicitly stated, in terms of "the fair myth of Endymion" (p. 184). Endymion begs Zeus for immortality after beguiling dreams inspired by Selene's (goddess of the moon) kiss. Caroline explains that Gino thought of her as a goddess all along and that thus she was saved from any fatal surrender of her virginity.

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Caroline hardly realizes that she has lost Philip too, for he too is her worshiper now and sees no need to tell her. He only thanks her "for everything" (p. 184). Caroline looks "at him with great friendliness, for he had made her life endurable" (p. 184).

They are each caught in their visions of Gino and each other. Caroline never knows how Philip feels towards her -- either when he thinks he loves her or when he turns her into a goddess.\textsuperscript{16} Philip never knows how Caroline really feels at all -- she is above all that! He doesn't hear himself say "common" or her reply -- that nothing unites her and Gino "except the times" they see each other. He turns his face there because the temporal and visual reality is too common. He turns from the earlier tableau of Gino in her arms because the visible form is inadequate to what it shows him. In other words, ironically "the things" that tableau shows Philip are inadequate to his vision of the Endymion myth. He is converted rather by his own fabrication, not by any thing real. For when he sees Gino in Caroline's arms, he is totally unaware of her desire for the Italian. He has been tortured, even brought near death. His arm is broken. When he thanks her for "everything" at the end and she looks at him

\textsuperscript{16}Kelvin, pp. 47-48.
thinking of her now endurable life, they are each caught in a sense of resolution. The narrator (and here Forster speaks too -- by diction and arrangement) lets the reader know otherwise:

At that moment, the train entered the San Gothard tunnel. They hurried back to the carriage to close the windows lest the smuts should get into Harriet's eyes. (p. 184)

Colmer has recognized that this deflates the expansiveness of Philip's perceptions. It makes us trust Forster because his visions are part of reality. Cavaliero, in error, sees the final sentence as a "flippant evasion" of Philip's final solemn vision. Yet neither of these critics deals with the complexities here. Caroline and Philip are united -- in motion and attempting to shut out what the darkness holds. Those smuts are the shocks ahead, shocks to Harriet's vision specifically, but metaphorically the shocks or surprises of a mysterious dark reality. The smuts join the fleas, fish, and sparrows of earlier moments that mock the efforts of people to order reality. The shutting of windows reminds us of Gino's stopping up the fish bowl. 'From their lofty visions,

17 Colmer, p. 64.

Philip and Caroline must take care of things; mundane reality breaks in "at that moment." They are in a process that seems to have discrete products -- or moments -- or tableaus -- or resolved conflicts -- or epigrammatical intrusions that seem to shape reality.

If indeed, this disconnection of Caroline and Philip surprises us, we have missed the earlier indications of their gap. In their first trip to London in Chapter five, they seem to agree that Sawston stifles the real self. But we're told that Caroline senses an even more immeasurable distance between them after the talk. She senses that her life at Sawston will be only endurable because it is not where Gino or what he means to her is. She knows she cannot tell Philip and senses, in fact, that he might not understand anyway. Later in Chapter eight, after their seeing the tower in Monteriano as a symbol of the place, seeing the opera, and seeing their various tableaus of Gino's baby, they talk in Santa Deodata church. She has tried to inspire him to action; he has answered in

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19 McDowell, p. 48.
Martin, p. 22.
Colmer, pp. 59-61.
very Jamesian terms of seeing life as a spectacle. She wishes something would happen to him, and he replies:

"But why?" he asked, smiling. "Prove to me why I don't do as I am."

She also smiled, very gravely. She could not prove it. No argument existed. Their discourse, splendid as it had been, resulted in nothing, and their respective opinions and policies were exactly the same when they left the church as when they had entered it. (p. 151)

Discourse results in nothing everywhere in this novel, except perhaps the ongoing realization of gaps between characters. Just before the carriage accident that kills Gino's son, Philip watches Caroline's carriage drive away, sure that he understands her and that the worst is over. Physical and psychological distances fuse here. Within a few pages, after Harriet does act (doing ironically enough something Caroline off-handedly suggests to Philip), physical distance is closed when the carriages collide. Clearly, as the final scene shows, nothing so simple as connection after trauma occurs for Caroline and Philip. The ending dramatizes Philip's problems; we are more with his consciousness as we build up to the shock of Caroline's revealed passion. But that revelation strongly qualifies her earlier responses.

She rushes away with Philip at the end of Chapter two. She feels suffused with what she calls a "sinful" happiness after the wild night at the opera:
Had she ever been so happy before? Yes, once before, and here, a night in March, the night Gino and Lilia had told her of their love -- the night whose evil she had come now to undo.

She gave a sudden cry of shame. "This time -- the same place -- the same thing --" and she began to beat down her happiness, knowing it to be sinful. (p. 124)

Caroline should not be glad that Gino deifies her, \(^{20}\) for it is her ability to live rebelliously through their passion that brings on Lilia's suffering. The emphasis on time, place, and thing reminds us of the reality of her strangely vicarious desire. Simultaneously she senses union and disunion; "the same thing" is passion, passion satisfied through Lilia, thus idealized with distance, and passion imagined through the magic of the opera in Monteriano. Here again, Forster enforces his fusion of art and life. Gino laughs at his absurd position when Lilia confronts him with his infidelity -- as if it were a scene from the stage. Now, that place of visual forms and tableaus, the theatre, has pushed Caroline closer to life -- even as she pushes back. So the art form -- using visuals, conflicts, forms of language -- opera joins us to life and keeps us from it. \(^{21}\) The setting is described

\(^{20}\)Colmer, p. 55.

\(^{21}\)Martin, p. 17.
in all its extravagant, grotesque, romantic glory, the scene is full of wild activity -- on stage and in the audience.22 Wilde goes too far in calling it an example of Italy's vulgar but honest feeling.23 Later, honest, exuberant emotion separates -- for Gino in anger nearly kills Philip, never aware of his part in the "real" of his child by an English wife, except in its real death. Clearly Philip's sense of fuller connection is qualified, and Caroline's happiness, which she tries to stifle anyway, hardly contributes to real happiness for herself or others.

Caroline proceeds to Gino's house the day after the opera. Her realizations abound during this justifiably famous scene in the novel. Still, too many critics take it all too seriously, or they accuse Forster of doing so.24 The scene clearly shifts and shocks Caroline, who believes she will fight evil. Upstairs in the deserted central quarters of this dying body, everything is covered with a layer"of heavy white dust, which was only blown off one moment to thicken on another" (p. 126). Death and time are part of this place. The reality of dust and

22 Kelvin, p. 49. Trilling, p. 68.
23 Wilde, p. 18.
24 Martin, pp. 18-19.
death lifts at a moment only to settle and thicken on another. This clearly echoes the pattern in this novel of eternal moments -- melodramatic climaxes, tableaus, intrusions -- that clear off reality but never escape it. When Gino arrives, he does not know Caroline watches him from across a landing. Caroline senses something; she thinks, "It is alarming not to be seen" (p. 127). The irony here reverberates later, as she listens to his singing, hears him speak, feels the smoke ring (from his cigar) circle round her, and sees him in the "vista of the landing and the two open doors" (p. 128). This view makes "him both remote and significant, like an actor on the stage, intimate and unapproachable at the same time" (p. 128). She screams after a few moments -- the breath from the pit envelops her:

There he was, wanting to know what had frightened her, how she had got here, why she had never spoken. (p. 129)

Gino feels some fright too: "For it is a serious thing to have been watched. We all radiate something curiously intimate when we believe ourselves to be alone" (p. 129). Then she sees the baby. The passage is usually read as Caroline's conversion, where she senses complexity and goes over to Gino's side.25 The passage itself, however,

25 Colmer, p. 60.
Martin, pp. 18-19.
Karl and Magalaner, p. 107.
and the whole scene is a part of the ongoing process. 
The conflict of England and Italy, tableaus, and narrative intrusions come together.

Caroline has thought about the child in many ways:

But, like most unmarried people, she had only thought of it as a word -- just as the healthy man only thinks of the word death, not of death itself. The real thing, lying asleep on a dirty rug, disconcerted her. (p. 130)

The baby and death are fused here as realities beyond language -- what this novel tries to dramatize. She calls the baby "a glorious, unquestionable fact," "the machine on which she and Mrs. Herriton and Philip and Harriet had for the last month been exercising their various ideals" (p. 130). She resolves to dictate nothing about its up-bringing and "to exert no more influence than there may be in a kiss or in the vaguest of the heartfelt prayers" (p. 130). But the process is not so easy; she cannot entirely rid herself of Sawston scruples.26 In fact, the irony is multiple; for as the baby becomes more real, that is, naked and male, Caroline moves closer to the fact and then runs off in embarrassment. There is irony in this following qualification:

But she had practiced self-discipline, and her thoughts and actions were not yet to correspond. To recover her self-esteem she tried to imagine that she was in her district, and to behave accordingly. (p. 130)

26Martin, p. 18.
What this seems to mean is that she will fuse her thoughts and actions at some point. Actually the self-discipline and esteem exert final control. She ultimately behaves as if she were in Sawston. While she may momentarily function naturally when she helps to bathe the child, she actually idealizes the moment (and her passion) and moves off to stay at a distance. Ironically, this distance allows her to remain passive long enough for the baby to die. In a later dialogue, she lectures Philip about being morally scrupulous at every moment: "There's never any knowing -- (how am I to put it?) -- which of our actions, which of our idlenesses won't have things hanging on it for ever" (p. 153). So her thoughts and actions do correspond later -- in keeping reality at a distance.

Lilia, Mrs. Herriton, and Philip do the same thing. Caroline sees Gino posing on the loggia, and she argues with him over his treatment of Lilia and his impending marriage. 27 Gino charms her with his testimony of how close he is to his son. He contradicts his claim that his own family would separate the thoughts between father and son -- for he allows Caroline to do the washing, and he insists on getting married for quite practical reasons --

someone else must talk and sing and comfort the poor child. Gino, too, can keep mundane reality at a distance -- by having a woman do the necessary things. He does not, of course, expect Harriet to kidnap his son; what each character in this novel perceives as the necessary thing to do ultimately leads to death or separation.

Caroline senses "strange refinements" in the cruel and vicious Gino:

> The horrible truth, that wicked people are capable of love, stood naked before her, and her moral being was abashed. It was her duty to rescue the baby, to save it from contagion, and she still meant to do her duty. But the comfortable sense of virtue left her. She was in the presence of something greater than right and wrong. (pp. 136-137)

Her conventional definitions of right and wrong provide a comfortable sense of virtue. The "something greater" goes beyond such conventional certainties, but the passage in no way asserts that what lies beyond escapes the limits of self or the evil consequences of those limitations.

Two apparently contradictory passages follow which involve tableaus and intrusions by the narrator. We see Gino posing with his foot upon his son, filled with the desire "that his son should be like him, and should have sons like him, to people the earth" (p. 137). The narrator asserts that this strongest desire, stronger than love or "the desire for personal immortality" (p. 137),
is comprehended by only exceptional people. Though Miss Abbott is good and though women in Forster more often comprehend this eternal link of physical and spiritual life, she thinks Gino's gesture of pointing between his son and himself and saying "father-son" is a mere "piece of nursery prattle" and smiles "mechanically" (p. 137). A few moments later, when Gino disrobes the child and holds out the "little kicking image of bronze" to her, Caroline pulls back:

She would not touch the child.
"I must go at once," she cried; for the tears -- the wrong tears -- were hurrying to her eyes. (p. 139)

Gino asserts:

"Ah, but how beautiful he is! And he is mine, mine forever. Even if he hates me he will be mine. He cannot help it; he is made out of me; I am his father." (p. 139)

Caroline sees Gino's devotion and gives up her mission. 28 The harmony of the moment makes her aware of Gino's rights and her own passions. 29 But she does not surrender her Sawston scruples; she cannot act; she must spiritualize the reality -- move beyond the impulses of the self. 30

28 McConkey, p. 22.
Karl and Magalaner, p. 107.

29 Rose, p. 45.

30 Martin, p. 18
Kelvin, p. 50.
Stone, p. 173.
Stone calls the moment a "half-comic tableau," where this novel as if on impulse turns from seriousness. No matter how exalted it becomes, the baby and Gino and Caroline (and her desire) are facts. They are individual selves that cannot fuse except very briefly and never ultimately. Leavis, Trilling, and Richards in their ways assert that this scene and the following passage surely represent Gino and the theme of continuance. Cavaliero faults the characters and especially Forster for allowing such a revelation to become idolatry for the characters, a means of martyring the self and too readily accepting defeat. Martin asserts that Forster tries to endow the scene with too much significance, especially by intruding to make Gino noble in his sense of paternity and immortality.

In light of what we know about the gaps between reality and vision, between selves that create private,
impenetrable realities, and the qualifications imposed on any one moment by its context in the whole novel, the following passage, usually read as merely the narrator and Forster, needs attention. Immediately after Gino's personal assertion of paternity:

It was too late to go. She could not tell why, but it was too late. She turned away her head when Gino lifted his son to his lips. This was something too remote from the prettiness of the nursery. The man was majestic; he was a part of Nature; in no ordinary love scene could he ever be so great. (p. 139)

Something has slipped away; Caroline senses that what she came to see is no longer a reality. Something is now absent. It is not only her sense of duty, but also her sense of reality. She turns her eyes away as Philip will in Chapter nine when visible forms are inadequate to private vision. The very physicality of the naked son and the desired father makes nursery prattle unreal. The last sentence sounds like a narrator but adheres more to Caroline. The narrator has two words to say -- this is "no ordinary" love scene. Caroline has moved beyond the commonplace for a moment, but she is inspired by her physical passion for Gino. Simultaneously she lusts for and exalts Gino. Now, of course, "love" moves into another realm. Caroline is too late in achieving her desire, physical union with Gino; the baby's presence reminds her that someone else has already been with him. The baby
reminds Caroline of its parents, of paternal and parental love. The rest of this moment seems, in fact, to draw out from Caroline's perspective and into the narrator's:

For a wonderful physical tie binds the parents to the children; and -- by some sad, strange irony -- it does not bind us children to our parents. For if it did, if we could answer their love not with gratitude but with equal love, life would lose much of its pathos and much of its squalor, and we might be wonderfully happy. Gino passionately embracing, Miss Abbott reverently averting her eyes -- both of them had parents whom they did not love so very much. (p. 139)

This passage disturbs many readers because it sounds like Forster's voice. Oliver defends it as seeing a particular moment in light of universal truths. That defense comes from Forster's comments in Aspects of the Novel:

To take your reader into your confidence about the universe is a different thing. It is not dangerous for a novelist to draw back from his characters . . . and to generalize about the conditions under which he thinks life is carried on. It is confidences about individual people that do harm, and beckon the reader away from the people to an examination of the novelist's mind.

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Indeed, as Thomson suggests, the comment here on parental love indicates a greater perspective than any of the characters have. This passage, however, sounds much like others where supposition is asserted and then qualified by not only a present reality but a contextual reality. Forster allows a voice to speak momentarily, to suggest hope, to indicate greater vision. This flash of unity is real enough -- even for the narrator. It is the periodic and necessary reality to stop the process, to shape it into something solid. But we must not miss the grayness, the dust floating in the atmosphere that we only momentarily shut out when we so solidify the process. And asserting that Forster speaks here is part of our impulse to catch hold of something that ever slips away.

The tie is "physical" between parents and children, by no means merely transcendent. It moves only from parent to child. But parents in this novel hardly love their children. Parental love is perverted in the mechanical nature of Mrs. Herriton and the natural mechanism of Gino. Parental love leads to death. The asserted universal connection is merely a result of the momentary

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visual one. The passage ends with each character caught up not only in private visions but also in reality -- they do not love their parents as their parents love them. A reality is again asserted in the negative. The embrace and averted eyes echo Philip's response to his rescue from death in Chapter nine. J. B. Beer comes close in detecting that this tableau only prepares for the baby's death and Philip's rescue. In other words, it is a contextual reality, part of a process. The unity asserted is denied by the realities around it, and the disunity admitted to in the face of hope -- hope for love -- resides in the power of the private consciousness to separate us from each other and from reality. Besides, even if children returned love, not gratitude, for love, the narrator says only "we might be wonderfully happy."

While we read this passage, no doubt we believe we hear Forster and understand. We may even sense asserted resolutions. But this moment of vision is just that -- an asserted resolution, not Forster's but the narrator's. Parents may indeed see the embodiment of love in their child, but that is an idealization. The baby in Gino and Lilia's marriage embodies resignation and illness for

Lilia and egoistic immortality for Gino. There is something of the suggestion of entropy -- we must not blind ourselves to the imagined sex scene between Lilia and Gino that results in the conception of the boy. For the act of love was performed by an ill and beaten woman with a brutal and beautiful man. The physical, mechanical, reductive quality of that act guarantees not love but death, not connection but disconnection. Children do not return love for love because what, in fact, parents extend may be only gratitude. The child provides the physical version of their private refusal of reality, of personal death. The child seems to deny death, and in that seeming is trapped in the cycle of death. The child becomes a private world too, as it senses the use it is put to by the likes of Mrs. Herriton and Gino. Even our visionary Caroline and Philip are caught in their separate visions. Children do not return their parents' love because it does not exist. An absence of love is lamented because of the asserted presence of parental love. The lament is absurd because it asserts as present and real nothing visible in this novel.

As we move into the final chapter, we will focus on Philip -- for his relation to his mother, Gino, Lilia, Harriet, Caroline, and the narrator brings even more clearly into focus this eternal gap between asserted
truths and ongoing reality. Forster provides a transition by having Mrs. Herriton deliver the following speech in Chapter five as the family discusses how to deal with Lilia's death and the baby. They are wondering what to tell Irma, the child now without parents:

"And it is important, most important, that she should not receive a shock. All a child's life depends on the ideal it has of its parents. Destroy that and everything goes -- morals, behaviour, everything. Absolute trust in some one else is the essence of education. That is why I have been so careful about talking of poor Lilia before her." (p. 70)

Mrs. Herriton hardly hears her own contradictions; she wants to educate Irma but behaves in ways that hardly inspire trust. Irma should receive a shock anyway, for the first chapter and this fifth one clearly indicate that any attempt to avoid the disruptions of one's vision of an ordered reality is doomed. Such vision is an ideal or illusion; disillusion is a painful and necessary reality. It guarantees not happiness but greater clarity of vision. After all, disillusion by definition is reality -- for illusions are unreal. And yet we cling to them, we need them. In Philip Herriton, Forster focuses on the loss of the ideal held about parents. And on the loss of ideals generally. But, the novel in no way denies that such idealizations go on -- almost as if when disillusion sets in, something in the private consciousness replaces
the older illusion with new ones. The process of need, of need for something not really there, never stops. In Philip's characterization, Forster dramatizes its grandeur and folly.
Chapter 5: Philip, the Narrator, and Solid Echoes

What Philip Herriton, seen as Forster's self-portrait, does or says and where the narrator stands in relation to him need careful attention.

Besides the "immense distance" passage, another sentence could function as epigraph for this study. During that last comic dialogue when Caroline and Philip speak at such cross-purposes, Caroline suggests that they should stay in touch by writing. It is no accident that Philip responds as he does, close as he is to the narrator, the book's central theme, and the novelist:

"You will write?" he cried, with a flush of pleasure. At times his hopes seemed so solid. (p. 179)

This pattern of momentary visions solidifying goes on with him, the narrator, and the reader. During such times, hopes seem solid or real; during such times, critics often accuse Forster of a loss of perspective or distance. Wilfred Stone suggests that Philip's ability to experience these moments ties in with the overall effect of the novel and thus strains the comic surface.¹

In creating Philip, Forster has seen a duality as a unity, "multiplicity in a unity."² Stone closes his study with this comment on Forster the novelist:

That is why, though he is a prophet who has seen the shadow, he is at the same time -- or in the next moment -- a prophet who can laugh.³

Unfortunately, Stone does not think the prophetic and comic work well together in WAFT; his conclusions about Philip indicate that he knows how to read this novel, read the narrator in relation to Philip and Forster, but not make the full connections:

Philip, having no center, prevents our laughing at his prophetic stances by being so quick to laugh at himself; yet at the same time he lets us know that this laughter is his truth. He cannot be both impressive and truthful . . . . By this ambivalence he at last acquires something we can recognize as a character, a character that continually tears itself down as it builds itself up.⁴

Ambivalence or strain occurs for Stone in such passages as this one from the final, again actually inconclusive, dialogue of Caroline and Philip. He is left alone a moment when Caroline goes to check on the invalid Harriet:

²Stone, p. 389.
³Stone, p. 389.
⁴Stone, p. 182.

All the excitement was over -- the inquest, Harriet's short illness, his own visit to the surgeon. He was convalescent, both in body and spirit, but convalescence brought no joy. In the looking-glass at the end of the corridor he saw his face haggard, and his shoulders pulled forward by the weight of the sling. Life was greater than he had supposed, but it was even less complete. He had seen the need for strenuous work and for righteousness. And now he saw what a very little way those things would go. (p. 177)

This sounds like some sort of revelation for Philip, but the scene goes on to show that he still wants a complete picture of life; he thinks Caroline, first as wife then as goddess, will complete the picture of himself and life seen in that mirror at the end of a corridor. The distance between Philip and his reflection suggests serious qualification to this apparent resolution. He does not really believe that excitement is over or that all the wonderful things have happened. He does not understand or accept Caroline's "'All the wonderful things are over. . . . That is just where it is'" (p. 179). What are already lost, the things, are reality; absence and presence interweave. Of course, Caroline believes that her memory of Gino, with Philip's help, will make life endurable; so the word "wonderful" takes on ironic meaning. "Wonderful things" are realities seen by those whose hopes have seemed solid -- that adjective qualifies the reality. Neither Caroline nor Philip sees things, and Forster by his fluid voice suggests silently that we never do either. When these conflicts, tableaus,
or intrusions sound like something we can grasp the meaning of, Forster subtly slips just outside our reach.

Stone says more about Philip and in doing so brings back that image of Gino's fluid face (during the bribery scene) and suggests Forster's relation to his fiction:

There is something horrible, as well as amusing, about this continual suicide and rebirth, this laughing at one's own spiritual funeral. His plight is an existential absurdity, since his frustration is so fundamental: it is not that he cannot find the right woman or the right man, it is that he cannot find himself. He wanders in his inner labyrinth piecing together the clues that will interpret what he sees in the mirror. We may say that the persona is comic while the person is not, but in the long run we have trouble telling the masks from the man.5

Philip's plight is the narrator's at times, and ours too. The novel is a mirror wherein we see clues that we hope will interpret what we see there. This reflexive irony comes most clearly in Philip's behavior in the novel, but we ought to remember that the narrator is looking at the mirror/novel, even as we are. Philip's inability to see clearly is caused by his never really moving out of the self-reflective frame of reference.

Philip makes numerous errors about Italy because it is part of his romantic vision. But the distinction is not simply between life (Monteriano) and art (Sawston). So, critics like Wilde who accuse Philip of always

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5Stone, p. 182-183.
remaining at a distance, seeing life as an artwork, are usually oversimplifying. Philip's esthetic view not only keeps him from life; reality keeps slipping by as well. McConkey says Philip realizes his guilt in all that goes on after the baby's death and gains the ability to love; he accuses Philip of having the vision that separates him from life, even after his apparent conversions. Philip's complacence isn't even beaten by his near-physical death in Chapter nine. McDowell, however, says that Philip learns of Italy's "dynamic synthesis," that life can be melodramatic, lurid, exaggerated, and unpredictable. Nothing can teach him how to respond; these critical assertions indicate that learning takes place and that somehow Philip moves out of private visions. He may be, as Martin suggests, wiser but he is

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8 McConkey, pp. 62-63.

surely alone at the end. The drama of the final scene emphasizes the isolated nature of consciousness. Some critics think that Philip's vision of Caroline at the end indicates Forster's vision. In fact, many critics read Caroline's apotheosis in her rescue of Philip in Chapter nine also as Forster's view. These two moments are conversions for Philip that Forster condones. Kelvin accuses Forster of being unable to fuse romance and sexuality because Philip is so limited. But Kelvin, in another example of the critical habit of contradiction, also detects that Caroline's revelations in the final scene cast retrospective meaning on that rescue. He doesn't take it beyond qualifying Caroline's behavior. It surely qualifies what Philip saw. Philip never sees that the tableau in that scene ironically partakes of truth and falsehood. For the beguiling dreams inspired


12 McDowell, p. 45
Karl and Magalaner, p. 108.


14 Kelvin, p. 53.
by the goddess's presence spur on the hope for immortality. But between that rescue and the last line, the "goddess" admits her humanity. Philip doesn't hear her, and he holds on to his seeming solid hope. No idealizations are allowed to go unqualified in this novel, but their reality as part of the characters within the novel is never denied.

Philip thinks in terms of art when he finds Gino, Caroline, and the baby etched as what is "to all intents and purposes, the Virgin and Child, with Donor" (p. 141). He is happy "to find things in such cheerful trim" (p. 141). The opera, an art form, inspires him (as it does Caroline) with a new sense of life. But Trilling has hit on something in defending the wild comedy and response of Caroline and Philip by seeing the opera scene as balancing the torture-and-rescue scene. Far too many critics see the engagement of that night at the opera as unmitigated connection. Forster never forgets how Gino cannot see life in Lilia's suffering but only in his own. Caroline cannot see her passion

15 Beer, p. 74.
16 Stone, p. 173.
17 Trilling, p. 68.

except as a memory of vicarious physical union. Philip feels accepted for himself in being pulled into the opera box and has just been rescued from a slow, painful death in Chapter nine. Trilling also mentions an earlier, smaller conversion. In Chapter six, Caroline tells him that Gino regrets his initial rudeness and suddenly Philip's resolve weakens, his mission seems even more ludicrous. When Caroline recalls that Gino never mentions the baby in her initial, accidental interview, Philip again hardly hears her:

What did the baby matter when the world was suddenly right way up? Philip smiled, and was shocked at himself for smiling, and smiled again. For romance had come back to Italy . . . .

This admirable change in Philip proceeds from nothing admirable, and may therefore provoke the gibes of the cynical. But angels and other practical people will accept it reverently, and write it down as good. (pp. 111-112)

The irony here is multi-faceted. What Forster never says is that Philip's romance, that "spurious sentiment," resides in his egoistic vision. When he manages a "little influx" of virtue, everything will become "not beastly but amusing." He has achieved that influx because he feels a self that is at the center of someone else's self. He is wrong about Gino; Gino is only

19 Trilling, p. 68.
charmingly contradictory. He embodies evil's banality because he can be so contradictory. Philip, on his second trip to Monteriano with Harriet, asserts that he is capable of this influx of virtue:

For there was enchantment, he was sure of that; solid enchantment, which lay behind the porters and the screaming and the dust. . . . He could see it, though his head ached and his skin was twitching, though he was here as a puppet, and though his sister knew how he was here. There was nothing pleasant in that journey to Monteriano station. But nothing -- not even the discomfort -- was commonplace.  (p. 96)

Philip is transported by Italy even now; he, not Forster, is sure of solid enchantment. Romance returns only with the sudden influx of self. Angels and practical people fear to tread in the ambivalence of this novel; they will solidify the change, call it conversion, call it good. Philip is indeed at the mercy of his mother; 20 like Santa Deodata, he renders himself passive for a divine ideal. 21 In fact, his mother dies, too -- at least as

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21 McConkey, p. 101
McDowell, p. 44.
Karl and Magalaner, p. 111.
Finkelstein, p. 18.
Cavaliero, p. 65.
an ideal of love for him. He reacts initially as she
does to Caroline's interest in the baby during Chapter
five, but he also senses her control:

Her ability frightened him. All his life
he had been her puppet. She let him worship
Italy, and reform Sawston -- just as she had
let Harriet be Low Church. She had let him
talk as much as he liked. But when she wanted
a thing she always got it . . .

And though she was frightening him, she
did not inspire him with reverence. Her life,
he saw, was without meaning. To what purpose
was her diplomacy, her insincerity, her con-
tinued repression of vigour? . . . Did they even
bring happiness to herself? Harriet with her
gloomy peevish creed, Lilia with her clutches
after pleasure, were after all more divine than
this well-ordered, active, useless machine.
(pp. 86-87)

Ironically, she ought to die as an ideal; her meaningless
life may be the reality his romantic consciousness
cannot accept. He, after all, fails to see that Gino
partakes of a well-ordered, active, useless natural me-
chanism. He calls Lilia and Harriet "divine" because
they have ideals, live by such meanings. What he fails
to see in them all, including Caroline and himself, is
that the happiness or meaning so valuable to him resides
entirely in the closed system of the private, isolated
consciousness.

The narrator is a practical man; he writes down as
good Philip's change, thereby forgetting that the same
sort of egoistic romance once raised his ire. Far back
in the beginning of the novel, the narrator has fun with
Philip when he is confronted with "a dentist in Monteriano. A dentist in fairyland" (p. 26). Philip fears that Romance might die -- but that fear is syntactically linked and introduced by this clause: "He was anxious for himself" (p. 26). And the narrator knows how to call this one:

Romance only dies with life. No pair of pincers will ever pull it out of us. But there is a spurious sentiment which cannot resist the unexpected and the incongruous and the grotesque. A touch will loosen it, and the sooner it goes from us the better. It was going from Philip now, and therefore he gave the cry of pain. (pp. 26-27)

Indeed physical reality will loosen the spurious, self-reflective version of romance. But another touch of the multi-faceted reality of Gino Caralla and the same sentiment returns. Ironically enough, the narrator asserts that there is real Romance or vision. Such is only asserted, because, in fact, it dies with life. We know of its existence, according to this voice, by its absence.

Early on, when Philip looks at himself in the mirror, he says, "'It is a weak face. I shall never carve a place for myself in the world'" (p. 68). The narrator tells us: "But as the years went on he became either less self-conscious or more self-satisfied" (p. 68). Philip needs to stop the fluid face in the mirror in some place carved in the world. Whether he has become
less self-conscious or more self-satisfied, he fails to see the trap of self. He finds he can function with a sense of beauty and humor. Laughter, he believes and reads, shows mental health. But Gino, "the betrayer of his life's ideal," leaves him disillusioned. He moves farther off, his laughter both necessary and meaningless. Colmer suggests that Philip's detachment results from cynicism, but that of the novelist differs:

The author's irony, on the other hand, is not cynical, but salutary and necessary. It represents the free play of the rational mind on all the materials of experience. It is the expression of a mind attached to no fixed system of values, open to many forms of experience. At every turn and corner irony corrects and keeps in check imaginative excesses or flights of fancy. It neither denies nor disavows the truths of the imagination, but it preserves the author from sentimentality, if not wholly from a secular religiosity.  

Neither the intrusion on Romance nor the next one quoted comes from the novelist, however. Indeed, as we read this novel, such intrusions by themselves tempt us to assert meaning. But the flights of fancy are not restricted to the dramatized characters.

Philip also loses some of his trust in his sense of beauty after a short time:

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22 Colmer, p. 63.
McConkey, p. 22.

23 Trilling, p. 61.
Nothing had happened either in Sawston or within himself. He had shocked half-a-dozen people, squabbled with his sister, and bickered with his mother. He concluded that nothing could happen, not knowing that human love and love of truth sometimes conquer where love of beauty fails. (p. 69)

The narrator, again, asserts, momentarily, something that happens only "sometimes," and yet, in this novel never happens because neither condition -- human love or love of truth -- exists. If we define "love" as something that establishes or is connection, this novel dramatizes how unreal such a word is. The narrator needs words to nudge us to his vision; but he searches for something that is not there. If we read such a passage too simply, we too attach ourselves to something non-existent. This sort of statement sounds like what Harriet is mocked for in the first chapter. She answers Philip's encomium on Italy:

"Every one to his taste!" said Harriet, who always delivered a platitude as if it was an epigram. (p. 12)

The narrator clearly has poor Harriet here, but his superiority at this and many other moments in the novel is sorely qualified in these intrusions. "Love of truth" and "human love" are not dramatized as realities in this novel; the private self stands ever as a barrier to connection. High points of apparent connection are only imagined -- they are real for the private consciousness but not outside of it. Outside of it is the
perpetual process. Outside such platitudes as the narrator utters at Philip's expense, Forster's voice exists as vividly as what is heard after the Fifth Symphony is played.

Doris Eder summarizes the works of Martin, Cavaliero, and Colmer on *A Passage to India*, noting Forster's forceful, substantive use of nothingness, "where the word is repeated with variations until absence becomes palpable as presence." Eder comments on the nothingness attached to India:

This is like the negativity or blankness presented so masterfully in Wallace Stevens' "The Snow Man": Forster compels us to contemplate "Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is." As Martin says, Forster appears to have reached the devastating conclusion that "all value is ultimately subjective ('Every one to his taste!'), and under the eye of eternity, equally meaningless. Man yearns for some transcendent confirmation of the values that he himself imposes upon his experience, but like Narcissus all he receives are echoes of his desires." Yearning receives no ratification or response or, if so, not yet and not here. (my parentheses)

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The reader participates in the same search during the rhetorical process of WAFT. Characters, the narrator, and readers receive echoes of their own hopes. But Forster's echoes are in the silent rhythms running through the conflicts, the tableaus, and the intrusions -- echoes that qualify any given moment by the ongoing process of voice. Distance is achieved because the echoes come from close up and far away; that is, Forster's voice is heard and unheard because it never stops shifting position relative to the characters, the narrator, and the reader.
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VITA

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