

José A. Lemos de Souza, 2021.
Sobre o Espaço em Howards End: a Reescrita
do romance de E.M. Forster no cinema.
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The publication of *A Passage to India*, by Edward Morgan Forster (1879–1970), may have been a noisy event in the English literary scene of the 1920s – and this was most likely due to the historical context in which it came to light, a few years after the massacre perpetrated by the British on April 19, 1919, in Amritsar, in the province of Punjab, India. The massacre was still in the collective memory when an established writer delivered a scathing critique of British imperialism, a critique that has since been taken seriously. However, it is in the 1910 edition of *Howards End* that we have Forster in great form. When published, it was considered the book of the year. Forster himself was aware of the value of the work – as he wrote in his *Commonplace Book* in 1958:

Howards End my best novel and approaching a good novel. Very elaborate and all pervading plot that is seldom tiresome or forced, range of characters, social sense, wit, wisdom, colour. (Forster 1988, 203)

The “only connect” of his *Howards End* – which echoes in *Maurice*, published posthumously in 1971 – is the solution to the most pernicious aspect of the contemporary industrialized world: against its leveling character, which degrades man, turning him into an obscure individual in amidst the amorphous mass, Forster exalts the relationships – such as Margaret’s with Mr. Wilcox, Maurice with Clive – that can rescue man, take out of the sameness. “Live in fragments no longer” (Forster 2011, 195). It is through these relationships that the atom-man, or mass-man, can overcome this leveling and find something beyond. As he said in a May 1943 letter to the Chinese journalist and translator Hsiao Ch’ien (1911–1999): “*Maurice* works out in a particular direction: the thesis of the importance of personal relationships generally laid down in *Howards End*” (Beuaman 1993, 231). Or as he wrote elsewhere: “People and books reinforced

one another, intelligence joined hands with affection, speculation became a passion, and discussion was made profound by love" (Forster 1962, 35).

There are at least two translations in Brazil for each of his books. However, it is worth noting that Forster is not a well-known author in the country, except perhaps for his *Aspects of Novel* — whose first Brazilian translation appeared in 1969¹ — which is read and discussed in some university courses. The fact that he is not well known does not mean that there is no interest in him and his work. His short story collections, *The Celestial Omnibus* and "The Machine Stops" were translated a few years ago.² In addition, there are researchers who are dedicated to studying his work and his thought, and this is what we would like to highlight: this interest has resulted in some works that have been published, such as the book by José A. Lemos de Souza, Professor at the University of Maranhão, *Sobre o Espaço em Howards End: a Reescrita do romance de E.M. Forster no cinema* [On Space in Howards End: On Space in Howards End: The Rewriting of E. M. Forster's Novel in Film],³ published in 2021.

Although they are not neglected, Lemos de Souza is not particularly interested in the aforementioned aspects of *Howards End*, but in presenting a study on the way space/environment is worked not only in the novel itself but also in the way it was translated into cinematographic language in the 1992 film directed by James Ivory and which featured Vanessa Redgrave, Emma Thompson, and Anthony Hopkins in memorable performances.

The plot of the novel revolves around a country house, Howards End, which belonged to Ruth Wilcox, Henry Wilcox's wife. Encounters, disagreements, love relationships, friendship, and disappointment mark the lives of the two families, the Wilcoxes and the Schlegels. Forster establishes a contrast between them in order to criticize certain aspects of society and the time in which the story takes place. While the Schlegels represent liberal and idealistic thoughts, the Wilcoxes would be the reflection of the English bourgeoisie, uneducated, pragmatic. The limitations of spirit and imagination (in some characters) figure not as a problem related to the English character, but as a consequence of the pressures of work in contemporary society.. These pressures are present in the Wilcox family, repre-

1 Forster, E. M. 1969. *Aspectos do Romance*. Porto Alegre: Globo.

2 Forster, E. M. 2018. *A Máquina Para*. São Paulo: Itaú Cultural & Iluminuras, Forster, E. M. 2019. *O Ômnibus Celeste e outros contos*. Porto Alegre: Class.

3 Lemos de Souza, José A. 2021. *Sobre o Espaço em Howards End: a Reescrita do romance de E.M. Forster no cinema*. São Paulo: Pimenta Cultural, 2021.

sentatives of the “business mind”, of the “inner darkness in high places that comes with a commercial age” (Forster 2011, 190, 347). Forster, however, sees this “darkness” with optimism; unlike Bennett or Wells, he displays a faith and confidence that the enlightenment or self-affirmation achieved by individuals in his earlier fiction can be extended to contemporary society as a whole; the Wilcoxes can be rescued through the personal relationships that Margaret Schlegel considers to be a supreme value (Stevenson 2007, 210) – “are the real life” (Forster 2011, 28). Life can be rebalanced by the interconnection of Wilcox and Schlegel values. “Only Connect! That was the whole of her sermon” – of Margaret.

Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted,
and human love will seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer.
Only connect, and the beast and the monk, robbed of the isolation
that is life to either, will die. (Forster 2011, 195)

By the end of the novel, with Margaret and Henry Wilcox marrying and settling in Howards End with Helen and their son, much of this connection seems to be achieved; the commercial and industrial forces that threatened English life were contained for a moment – successfully (Stevenson 2007, 210).

To analyze the film, Lemos de Souza draws heavily on André Lefevere’s (1945–1996) idea that appears in his *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, that the transposition of a literary work affects the interpretation of a text and contributes to projecting the image of writers and their works – a notion that is corroborated by the fact that the Brazilian translation of *Howards End* appeared just after the book was adapted for the cinema.

The tendency that emerged in British cinema (overshadowed by Hollywood and even by German and Italian cinema) in the mid-1980s to evoke its past can be understood as a reaction to the fact that Britain had lost its status as a former world Power – it was precisely in the midst of an unprecedented crisis that Margaret Thatcher came to power in 1979. This focus on rescuing the past and affirming national identity also appeared at a time when the United Kingdom’s entry into the European Union generated debates and suspicions about its effects.

In the book, as the author reminds us, London appears to be a space dominated by the effects of modernization whose consequence is the fragmentation of the relationships between individuals, who distance themselves from each

other and are separated by their social conditions. The London where Leonard Bast lives is a dark place, which becomes clear when he walks home, very different from the one in which the Schlegels and the Wilcoxes live. The semi-rural space of *Howards End*, on the other hand, works as a contrast, as that place of integration, in which people get closer and create bond. In fact, the country house serves as a refuge for the intense process of transformation and fragmentation experienced by the City, however, it also serves as a space in which changes take place: it is there where a new family nucleus is formed after death of Leonard Bast and the arrest of Charles Wilcox, which leads Henry to reconsider and allow Helen and her son to live with the family.

As the author says, in Forster's novel, space serves as a symbolic resource to discuss issues of gender, social class, and sociocultural transformations taking place in British society at the beginning of the 20th century, while in the film, space becomes a fundamental element for the aesthetics of this period (or heritage) genre. The image, and its manipulation through working with the camera, the arrangement of shots, perspective, focusing, cutting, editing, all these are important and proper procedures in the formatting of a film. Allied to this are the sets, costumes and other details that enrich the image — in *Howards End* the exuberant images of locations and costumes appear in the spaces in which the Wilcox and Schlegels lifestyles are displayed. This exuberance also serves to reinforce the image of the past at a time when England was adapting to its new condition — since evoking the past is the purpose of this genre. In short, for the author, while the book discusses the transformations that were taking place at the beginning of the 20th century, the film makes some adjustments aiming at the audience that will watch it, thus meeting a demand at the time in which it was produced.

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