

Reviews

David Medalie, 2002. *E. M. Forster's Modernism* (Houndmills: Palgrave)

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The monograph discusses Forster's narratives regarding their involvement with philosophical, socio-political, and historical concepts. In each of the five chapters of his book David Medalie applies this method of verifying a contemporaneous complex of themes in the diverse fictional and nonfictional texts by E. M. Forster, which he considers synchronically.

The first chapter, "Liberal-Humanism", analyses Forster's works from the angle of this *weltanschauung* widespread among contemporaneous intellectuals. Considering liberalism and humanism in their connection to modernism, the novels *Howards End* and *A Passage to India* prove especially relevant, but Forster's collected stories and a fragment of *Arctic Summer* are also included in the critical investigation.

Medalie establishes from the beginning that modernism in Forster has been chronically undervalued (2). While disappointment with modernism has frequently been voiced in early-20th-century socio-philosophical discussions – Masterman, *The Condition of England*, and Hobhouse receive special attention – Forster's novels reveal modernism as a crisis mainly caused by the omnipresent loss. Urbanisation, continual motion, powerlessness towards modernity, and a general fear of the loss of control characterise the situation at the beginning of the 20th century, which is also reflected in *Howards End*. The political debate promoted by New Liberals about social mobility resonates there as well, but while absolute moral truths which humanism supports can become dangerous (e.g. in Helen Schlegel), the precariousness of aspiring classes possibly leads to devolution (Leonard Bast). In *A Passage to India*, imperialism and the failure of liberalism to avert problems arising from it take centre stage.

Whereas the novel satirises folly in *Anglo-Indians*, it demonstrates that 'good administration' is imperative (38–39); however, the rightfulness of colonialism is not questioned anywhere. Characters in the two novels show that a loss or failure of Liberal Humanism, which at the time supported the benevolent superiority of Europeans, is becoming imaginable.

Gradually, Forster's fictions display a decreasing trust in Liberal Humanism, since even the concept of the individual person and a continuous developing self, an axiom of humanism, is shown as undergoing a crisis, thereby exhibiting Forster's modernism. Medalie also demonstrates how the traditional humanist notions of the great importance of highbrow culture, as stated by John Ruskin and Matthew Arnold (45–46), are reflected in Forster's writing. *Howards End*, however, shows the failure of cultural democratisation as postulated by Arnold. Modern humanism cannot be incorporated in fiction until *Maurice*, unpublished before 1970. Medalie quotes from Edwin Muir (1926) that theirs is an age of transition. An in-between state between an order that is lost and a new one not yet born also characterises the state implied in Forster's writing during the decades with emerging modernism in England (70).

"Romantic Realism" in Forster's novels and stories is the focus of the second chapter. Medalie states that the Edwardian was, generally speaking, an "unadventurous reader" (64) who favoured romanticism and realism in narratives, because s/he was familiar with this hybridity and rejected crude naturalism as it was found in French and American fiction. That the traditional "strands" of romanticism and realism in narrative fiction become increasingly untenable in Forster's works is regarded by Medalie as one of the signs of the author's modernism. The emphatic revelation of the invisible or hidden, repeatedly expressed as a character's "eternal moment(s)" in life—a romantic desire (and title of a short story)—emerges as the counterdistinctive element in his fiction. In the early novels and tales the motif of 'escape' from the accustomed life/world recurs. Even though the pattern of romance is still visible in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *A Room with a View*, a closure with marriage as expedient is definitely rejected in *The Longest Journey*, shown in the fate of its protagonist Rickie Elliot. This novel proves especially unromantic (77), albeit not yet displaying modernist narrative techniques. Conventions turn out to be oppressive, regarding both life and narrative. Medalie defines *The Longest Journey* as a homosexual novel (81–82), whereas it has frequently been described as repudiating philosophical idealism ("The cow is there!").

Medalie's discussion of romanticism appears to me restrictive—the implication of the romantic in Forster is reduced to the observed incidence of romance and the longed-for “eternal moment”, which, I contend, excludes disparate facets of English Romanticism. Subsequently, the critic puts symbolism centre stage when dealing with *Howards End* and especially *A Passage to India*, which, he claims, is Forster's least realistic and most modernist narrative (97). The latter novel proves that an escape from modernity, which implies a suspension of the characters' present social and political conditions, has become impossible. Realist conventions are left behind and the self-reflexivity of language and the literary genre enhanced. In my opinion this statement demonstrates again how close modernist and postmodern narrative tenets have already come.

Chapter 3, “The Debate about Form”, implicitly claims again that Forster is far more ‘progressive’ than scholars have seen apt to admit. Medalie first discusses the author's most important theoretical work *Aspects of the Novel*, which for several generations proved very persuasive and popular among students of literature. “[W]ritten by an influential critic who is, nonetheless, deeply suspicious of the practice of criticism itself” (106) and therefore inclined to irony, *Aspects* contains non-traditional stances which diverge from the conventions of realistic narration. Medalie considers Forster's poetics of prose narrative mainly against the background of Percy Lubbock's, H. G. Wells's and Edwin Muir's (in order of significance for Medalie's discussion), yet Henry James is also briefly included. Since Forster never conceives of disruptions in literary tradition as significant in themselves, but always as to be seen “in the context of ‘their associated ideas’” (99), it is obvious that the declining trust in “iconic truth” (100) entails narratological consequences. They also involve changes of form, despite criticism's frequent evaluation of *Aspects* as supportive of Wells's defence of realistic narrative conventions. Forster's appraisal of ‘narrativisation as/is fictionalisation’ proves his definite departure from realism, which postulated a correlation of fictional representation with an objectively perceived experiential reality (cf. 102). He also differs from Lubbock's stringent attitude towards point-of-view and defends a shifting narrative perspective (110–11).

Medalie deems it equally necessary to distinguish Forster's theoretical positions regarding the novel from the Bloomsbury premises, as laid down by Roger Fry and Clive Bell. The concern of these theorists with form as the essence of art would eclipse other aspects, above all fictional narratives'

representational purpose and, of course, any moral judgment, because art as such is valued as ethically of the highest importance (Bell, quoted by Medalie, 114). Forster does not conform to such purist definitions. Also, in contrast to the Bloomsbury art theorists, he presents reader response in *Aspects* as “fluid, subjective, unpredictable” (116). Among the art forms, Forster sees fiction as the closest to music, as both can only be received diachronically—a predilection which is thematically and stylistically corroborated by his novels and short stories. This also explains the importance he ascribes to rhythm, which has an ordering function as a formal device, yet promotes impressionistic results, by which the formalist lines are blurred (128). Symbolism proves especially strong in *A Passage to India* and is, like the rhythmical patterns, discussed at length.

Medalie compares the modernism of Forster’s fictions especially to Virginia Woolf’s, pointing out rhythms and cyclical movements as well as symbolism. In *A Passage to India* the multiplicity of voices and impressions results in an inclusiveness which can harbour even irreconcilable plurality and blur the borderlines of form (151). The threat of being deprived of “the solace and delights of form” (152) provokes, according to Medalie, a thematic return to the familiar, namely European cultural superiority, suggesting that what is culturally remote must be monstrous, extraordinary and scaring. The fact that at its end the novel can be called “both sorrowful and culturally defensive” (153) means paying tribute to the protagonist’s assertion of “form and occidental aesthetics”. Form, strictly applied, is exclusive and becomes authoritarian (157); total inclusiveness, on the contrary, gives up form entirely and creates chaos, as the description of the Hindu festival shows. The critic draws a parallel between the British Empire’s political inclusiveness of spatially disparate parts of the earth and the narrative’s inclusion of diverse, contrastive voices, cultures or ethnicities. The novel moves into “the interstitial space” (158) between the old and the new. From the former, the order of realism, the narrative cannot truly depart—the new modernist one cannot yet be grasped. A severance from the traditionally accustomed ‘truths’ is deferred, while the dawn of new conceptualisations still appears enigmatic. In my opinion, *The Longest Journey* may be evaluated similarly. There it is the appreciation of social configurations that reveals the condition of England as an in-between state. In defining Forster’s modernism, narratological as well as thematic aspects are considered as cooperating in the writer’s attempt to accomplish a transition from ‘old’ to ‘new’.

The chapter which discusses the different manuscript versions of *A Passage to India* presents Forster's attitudes before World War I, when he started to write the novel, and several years after its end, when the work was resumed and finally, in 1924, completed. The hope of democratic reforms of the British Raj in the spirit of reason and humanism had not been fulfilled, British cultural chauvinism (161) was found persistent and the national pride of the politicised class of Indians perceived as growing at ever greater speed. These were the developments which had an impact on Forster's continuation of the book. As a result, the sections "Mosque" and partly "Caves" in *A Passage to India* refer to impressions of the writer's first visit to India in 1912/13. The end of "Caves" and the whole of "Temple" show the influence of events that were contemporaneous to the author's work from 1922 to early 1924, subsequent to Forster's second visit to India. The overall theme of Imperialism, which had emerged in *Howards End*, becomes central here and is dealt with under diverging political perspectives. The novel evolves from incipient modernism to full modernist self-consciousness, questioning its own purpose and finding fault with its own achievement (164). Medalie compares the wording of the different manuscripts of *A Passage to India* and precisely documents the changes in a number of textual passages. As a consequence of socio-political changes in India and signs of disintegration of the British Empire, Forster revised especially the characters in his novel and reconceptualised the experiences of Mrs Moore and of Adela during the excursion to the Marabar (175-176). The result is a substitution of concreteness and presence by mysteriousness and absence; in the final version 'what happened in the Cave?' remains a largely unresolved question. "[T]he manuscript revisions in almost each case bring the novel closer towards those unsatiated truths of which modernism was made" (182).

In conclusion, the final chapter interrogates 'modernism' and its self-image. Interestingly, Medalie refers to scholars who define the modernists' inclination to polemicise as a sign of self-assertion and defensiveness in a period of special uncertainty (184). A particular sign of their vulnerability is the severe criticism writers in this era express for one another, in the present case especially Woolf for Forster. Medalie quotes her comments as displaying an antipathy towards Forster's work, which the critic considers astonishing and unjustified. "Woolf's criticisms of Forster's work provide a very obvious example of [...] modernism misreading itself, or failing to recognise a version of itself" (188). Moreover, she paved the way for critics who denied Forster's modernism because in their

opinion his turning away from the conventions of fictional realism was not radical enough. By quoting from Forster's own criticism of other writers Medalie concedes that the author preserved "a sceptical attitude towards modern taste ... and a recognition that there is always the co-existence of forward and backward movements" (189). He wishes to ascribe to Forster's "version of modernism" the "uncomfortable confluence of the old and the new" (191). Medalie therefore supports the call for a broader redefinition and a replacement of "modernism" by "modernisms", which was uttered before. To expand the views on modernism and to evince the multiplicity of components – liberal humanism, romanticism, and the different strands of form – in Forster's works is conclusively once more identified by Medalie as the aim of his study. He admits a liminality in Forster's brand of modernism, which is accounted for by his "sense of dual allegiances" (194) resulting from the context in which his work developed. Forster is not a modernist iconoclast, yet his own criticism of iconoclastic modernists is milder and more temperate than vice versa.

Krzysztof Fordoński, 2005.
The Shaping of the Double Vision.
The Symbolic Systems of the Italian Novels
of Edward Morgan Forster
(Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Publication Group)

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At first sight the book by Krzysztof Fordoński is yet another publication on the well-known works of E. M. Forster. Its title ostensibly allocates it among the rich array of texts devoted to Forster and his literary oeuvre. However, at closer scrutiny, it turns out that Fordoński's monograph differs at least in one respect. While other studies on the topic of symbolism in the works