

Friendship's Inheritance: Posthumous Legacies and Relational Possibilities in Forster's *The Longest Journey* and *Howards End*

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Abstract: Mainstream discourses have long positioned friendship as a lesser relational network than that of the traditional patriarchal family, relegating friendship to an inferior bond in the same move that holds the married couple to be the nexus of domestic and social life. E. M. Forster's *The Longest Journey* and *Howards End* serve as early-twentieth-century apologiae for recognition of nonnormative kinships through their explorations of inheritance between friends. Each novel ends with an optimistic vision of friends creating, curating, and caring for the posthumous legacy of a loved one. Key sites of analysis are Rickie Elliot's vision of a "friendship office" and the posthumous curation of his stories in *The Longest Journey*, and Ruth Wilcox's bequest of her family home to Margaret Schlegel in *Howards End*. Taken together, they expose tensions between legal protections and the encroachment of relational possibilities by institutional codification. Forster thus prefigures contemporary concerns about the privileges accrued by the married couple: from queer cultural anxieties emerging out of the AIDS crisis and the gay marriage movement, to advocacy for friends to be granted the same rights as the legally recognized couple—a movement gaining mainstream traction since COVID-19's exacerbation of the care crisis. This paper ties its textual analyses to Michel Foucault's philosophy of friendship and references to queer studies and disability studies to argue that Forster imagines and advocates for alternative social models in *The Longest Journey* and *Howards End*. Ultimately, the novels offer optimistic narratives of posthumous legacies carried and cared for by the bonds



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of friendship, thereby problematizing the normative idea that a posthumous legacy is fundamentally situated within sexual reproduction and bio-heredity.

Keywords: friendship; inheritance; legacy; kinship; E. M. Forster; Michel Foucault; death care; disability; queer; homosocial; posthumous

After Forster's death in 1970, Christopher Isherwood conferred with John Lehmann about what to do with the typescript of Forster's *Maurice*. The scene, recounted at length at the start of Wendy Moffat's biography (2010), is one example of Forster orchestrating the conditions for his posthumous legacy—one to be honoured and preserved by his network of friends. Such a dynamic recalls two moments in the author's novels: the scene between Isherwood and Lehmann strikes a chord with the conference between Stephen and Herbert over publishing Rickie's stories in *The Longest Journey*, while Forster's leaving his friends in charge of his unpublished queer fiction resonates with Ruth's bequeathal of her family home to Margaret in *Howards End*.

Both these novels hinge on the theme of heredity and are entangled with the normative family structures of marriage and procreation, yet they centre on homosocial friendships. P. N. Furbank notes that "the central preoccupation of [Forster's] life, it was plain to see, was friendship" (1979, 2:295); while in a critical analysis of Forster's ethics as portrayed in his will, Daniel Monk argues that the will "demonstrates the legal space [wills] offer for the public recognition of friendship" (2020, 67). By analyzing the creation and curation of posthumous legacies in *The Longest Journey* and *Howards End*, I contend that Forster's novels offer groundworks for how to conceive of friendships today. By centralizing friendship, both novels rebuff the social hierarchy that prioritizes normative family units. A focus on friendship suggests that other forms of belonging are equally—or sometimes, perhaps, more—nurturing than the standard cluster of father, mother, and child. Theorists across social science disciplines have explored the patriarchal family as the foundation of society, and so Forster's novels help us reflect not only on how the social is constituted but also on how it may be formed differently. The following argument stages a critique of the utopian vision of a "friendship office" presented by the protagonist of *The Longest Journey*, Rickie Elliot, with stopovers to consider Rickie's attitude towards Stephen Wonham, and Stewart Ansell's towards Rickie. I then turn to how *Howards End*

marks a difference between proprietary ownership and spiritual caretakership in Ruth Wilcox's ethos toward the family home. While focused on close literary analysis, this essay furthermore connects Forster's and Michel Foucault's philosophies of friendship, and brings references to queer studies, disability studies, and contemporary concerns over death care to bear on its discussions. By conjoining these discourses, the paper interpolates how the novels can inform future possibilities for friendship.

Rickie's Ideals

The Longest Journey follows Rickie through his time as an undergraduate at Cambridge, his spiritual disintegration while working at the Sawston School under the thumbs of his wife Agnes and brother-in-law Herbert Pembroke, to his tentative and ultimately unrealized redemption after aligning himself with his illegitimate half-brother, Stephen. In probably the most famous scene from *The Longest Journey*—the meadow scene, which has been analysed at length for its homoeroticism—Rickie muses to his Cambridge friend Stewart on an idealized “friendship office”:

“I wish we were labelled,” said Rickie. He wished that all the confidence and mutual knowledge that is born in such a place as Cambridge could be organized. [... He] wished there was a society, a kind of friendship office, where the marriage of true minds could be registered. (Forster 2006, 64)

Friendship is the predominant theme of the novel, as evidenced by the titular reference to Shelley's poem “Epipsychidion,” as well as references to David and Jonathan and Shakespeare's Sonnet 116. In his influential contribution to queer studies, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, David M. Halperin does not explore Rickie's friendship with Stewart in any detail, but he uses Rickie's friendship-office speech to begin his chapter on the formal structuring of male homosocial relationships in antiquity. Halperin “registers his appreciation for Forster's account” (Haggerty 2014, 156) when he writes that

Forster has accurately understood what he calls [...] “the irony of friendship” [...]. Friendship is the anomalous relation: it exists

outside the more thoroughly codified social networks formed by kinship and sexual ties [...]. It is therefore more free-floating, more in need of "labeling" (as Forster puts it)—more in need, that is, of social and ideological definition. (Halperin 1990, 75)

My central questions here are: *is it*, though? Is friendship truly "in need" of social and ideological definition? And does Forster truly endorse this position? Judith Scherer Herz notes that "labeling or registering requires exclusivity, the normal, the compulsory" (2008, 606). The faultiness of Rickie's decision to hitch himself exclusively to Agnes is well understood, but the issue of his desire for a labelled friendship has not received due attention. Although a friendship office could hypothetically register multiple friends, it would still create its own exclusivity in the demarcation between the registered and the unregistered friend. And given Forster's depiction of the "incurably idealistic" Rickie (Page 1987, 69), readers should be suspicious of attributing the desire for "labelling" to the novel or Forster himself, rather than the character.

The Longest Journey is consistently critical, in fact often mocking, of Rickie's idealism. He is obsessed with categorizing people and situations in black and white terms—as good or bad, or one thing or another. For example, Rickie switches from the conviction that Agnes and her first fiancé Gerald Dawes (who suddenly dies, paving the way for Rickie and Agnes's failed marriage) "did not love each other," to glorifying their relationship within a few paragraphs (Forster 2006, 39–40). Rickie's memory of his dead parents is polarized, with his deep dislike of his father countered by his reverence for his mother—and this tracks onto how he vilifies Stephen when he believes him to be his father's son, and subsequently valorizes Stephen when he is revealed to be Rickie's *mother's* son.

Rickie's idealism hollows out the individual, reducing the other's complexity and holding them to an unrealistic standard. His greatest failing, which culminates the wry tragedy of the novel, is in how he treats Stephen through this tinted worldview. In the final chapters, we see Rickie slotting Stephen into the mould of a brother and then a hero, which goes against Stephen's own cry to be recognized and treated simply "as a man," "not as this or that's son," because "to look friends between the eyes is" his idea of good manners (Forster 2006, 257; 254; 255). Rickie does occasionally adopt Stephen's ethos (see 267), but the lesson never holds: Rickie makes Stephen promise to go sober (265–6), and when Stephen returns to drink, Rickie's heroic ideal smashes. Rickie's own

act of heroism at the end of the novel, when he saves Stephen from the oncoming train, is the one moment where, in Forster's words, "he did a man's duty" (Forster 2006, 282)—not a brother's duty, but the duty of one man to another. Figuratively, Rickie in this brief moment looks Stephen dead "between the eyes" as an equal, detached from symbolic or familial obligations.

But still, when the train fatally crushes him at the knees, Rickie has not learned to overcome his vacillation between extremes. His dying words to his cynical aunt, Mrs. Failing, are: "You have been right" (Forster 2006, 282). The line is somewhat enigmatic and allows for multiple interpretations (what has she been right about? Stephen? her own philosophic outlook?¹), but the novel presents Rickie as resigned to the wrong worldview. When Rickie's idealistic "visions meet the irresistible pressure of the truth they shatter at once, with painful and destructive results" (Page 1987, 59). This shattering functions not as Rickie overcoming his penchant for idealization, but as a retrenchment of the principle upon which it lies: the impulse to categorize people in simplistic terms. Given that Forster critiques Rickie's idealism throughout the novel, readers should be wary of accepting Rickie's ideal of a friendship office without scrutiny.

Disability and (De)valuation

When speaking of friendship in *The Longest Journey*, one ought not to forget Stewart. There is another moment in the meadow scene which remains under-discussed: namely, when Stewart grabs hold of Rickie's ankle.² When considered in the light of disability studies, this moment and its parallel to a prior scene illustrate how Rickie's choice to marry Agnes keeps him within the confines of an idealistic view of the body couched in ableism—a submission to normative valuations of the body that Stewart's intimate act counters. Rickie has felt a self-deprecating uneasiness in his physical embodiment since childhood due to his clubfoot,³ which is exacerbated by his disability being a congenital

1 Richard Martin offers one interpretation: "to say that Mrs Failing was right implies accepting the superiority of artificiality over the natural, the rejection of the intellect, and the acceptance of the position 'people are not important at all'" (1974, 274).

2 Robert K. Martin offers one reading of Stewart and Rickie's tussle in his analysis of latent homosexuality in the novel (1997, 263).

3 E.g., "'Shall I ever have a friend?' he demanded at the age of twelve. 'I don't see how. They walk too fast'" (Forster 2006, 24).

condition inherited from his neglectful father.⁴ Forster scholarship has traditionally read Rickie's clubfoot as symbolic of a latent homosexuality. As Jay Timothy Dolmage notes in *Disability Rhetoric*, "disability is often used rhetorically as a flexible form of stigma to be freely applied to any unknown, threatening, or devalued group" (2014, 4). However, such readings perpetuate both an insensitivity to conceding the corporeality of the disabled body and a disregard for the disabled reader's potential to self-identify with a character.⁵ Consequently, critics have overlooked the way Stewart's and Agnes's responses to Rickie's disability functionally pit them as character foils.

Immediately following Rickie's friendship-office speech, he rises to keep an appointment with Agnes. Stewart interrupts this leave-taking by grabbing Rickie's ankle, because "it pleased him that morning to be with his friend" (Forster 2006, 65). This moment is contrasted by the scene in Chapter 1 when Agnes is waiting in Rickie's rooms at Cambridge. While alone, she is revolted by Rickie's differently sized shoes; she removes them, and when the bed-maker brings a pair back into the room for a rain-soaked Herbert, the sight of them makes "her almost feel faint" (9; 11-12). Agnes's disgust at simply a sign of Rickie's corporeality hints that even in the first blush of Agnes and Rickie's romance, even without the looming memory of Gerald, their relationship would always fail because of Agnes's contempt for Rickie's physical form.

Conversely, Stewart displays a casual comfort with Rickie's disabled body. While Agnes is physically repulsed by even the sight of Rickie's shoes, Stewart explicitly holds onto Rickie's ankle (albeit we do not know which) to keep Rickie beside him. Whereas Agnes "frowned when she heard [Rickie's] uneven tread upon the stairs," Stewart "with his ear on the ground listened to Rickie's departing steps" (12; 65). In the middle of these two chapters, Agnes does exhibit her own reverence for the foot: after Gerald's death, "she kissed the footprint" he left in the house—a last sign of his animated existence (53). Feet, then, are symbolically tied to intimacy in the novel. The footprint or the tread of the foot walking away are equally signs of loss attached to the wish for a loved one to return. Stewart's act of listening indicates an intimate attachment toward the particularity of Rickie's uneven gait.

4 Rickie's self-abusive ableism is also apparent in the horror at his short-lived daughter inheriting his clubfoot (Forster 2006, 184).

5 For a cripping reading of *The Longest Journey*, see Andree 2018.

Stewart recognizes and loves his friend not in spite of Rickie's disability, or in some pitying way because of his disability, but as the disabled Rickie he simply happens to be. This contrasts with Rickie's own conditional love for Stephen. When discussing Stephen's broken promise of sobriety, George E. Haggerty contends that Rickie fails to understand "what love entails. He loves Stephen, but he is afraid to accept him for who he is and instead keeps trying to change him" (2014, 164). Stewart, on the other hand, sees Rickie as a complete person and remains indifferent to—but not ignorant of—his disabled embodiment. On this level, he loves him for who he is in a destabilization of an ableist idealism of the body; but Rickie does not recognize this.

Against Registration

The need for labelling is Rickie's greatest fault. He categorizes others and himself through idealistic conventions, and this stringent categorization is what determines the tragedy of his personal relationships. Stephen offers an alternative in his creed of "here am I and there are you" (Forster 2006, 244), which advocates for a recognition of the other on a plane of equivalency. Rickie fails to adopt this attitude towards the other, instead investing in labels that do not bend to the variability and complexity of human relations, but simplify and systematize them. Michel Foucault contends that the free-floating and formless nature of friendship is the site of its very power to contest political institutions that seek to codify and categorize individuals en masse. In light of his theory of biopower, Foucault claims that

if you ask people to reproduce the marriage bond for their personal relationship to be recognized, the progress made is slight. [...] Society and the institutions which frame it have limited the possibility of relationships because a rich relational world would be very complex to manage. (Foucault 1997, 158)

Rickie's ideal of a friendship office that registers "the marriage of true minds" surrenders friendship to the same institutional control that romantic relationships submit to in the legal procedure of marriage—something that has been critiqued at length in queer activist and academic debates over gay marriage. The instinct to classify and categorize is very human, but we should be wary

of uncritically succumbing to this impulse. Comparatively, in his own life, Forster shirked the label "homosexual" for its imbrication in psychopathology—a choice to disavow the limiting proscription of an identity that comes with the baggage of a discrete definition.⁶ And *The Longest Journey* elsewhere criticizes the institutional management of populations through its depiction of Herbert's treatment of the Sawston School day-boys. Late in the novel, Rickie reflects: "'Organize', 'Systematize' [...]. He reviewed the watchwords of the last two years, and found that they ignored personal contest, personal truces, personal love" (Forster 2006, 270). To define friendship in absolute terms is to limit its potentiality, and to condition it through the terms of registration suggests the enclosure of a relationship into a category policed by the legal system.

Instead of advocating for new relational enclosures, *The Longest Journey* stages its hopeful, if not happy, ending in the middle of a relational network formed around the now-dead Rickie. The final chapter focalizes the curation of Rickie's stories for posthumous publication by Stephen and Herbert—who, as Rickie's half-brother and brother-in-law, are still technically part of the heteronormative family structure, but attenuate its core definition. According to Stephen's own ethos, by looking Rickie "between the eyes," Rickie is not only his half-brother, but also a friend. Stewart is peripheral to this scene; however, Forster has elsewhere established him as instrumental to the creation of Rickie's literary legacy: he and Stephen were the ones to shake up Rickie's complacency with the argument that he "must write [...] because to write [...] is you" (Forster 2006, 276). As such, Stephen, Stewart, and Herbert form an unusual and rather unlikely kinship around the dead Rickie through the publication of his novel and short stories. Versus Forster's active intent to leave a legacy behind him, Rickie's posthumous future is borne on the initiative of others. Yet the two men, fictional and historical, align in their ends through the common metaphor of artists "giving birth" to their creations.⁷ As childless men, Rickie and Forster are without the traditional source of an unquestioned legacy through procreation—but as writers, the art usurps the child in how we conceive of their legacies. Rickie's stories are how he lives on through the generations, and so, Rickie has a lasting legacy in the world through his art, which Forster counterposes in the concluding chapter with the daughter that will survive Stephen's death.

6 See Moffat 2010, 70–71

7 See, e.g., Haggerty 2014.

Although Stewart remains at a remove from Herbert and Stephen's pecuniary argument in this chapter, Robert K. Martin claims that "the parental scene at the end of *The Longest Journey* unites Stephen with Ansell and Stephen's child" (1997, 260). Haggerty and Norman Page both note the ambiguity of Stewart's position in this moment, with Stephen simply saying to his wife, "Stewart's in the house" (Forster 2006, 288). They suggest that he may be visiting the Wonhams, or may even live with them now (Haggerty 2014, 165; Page 1987, 70). Either way, Rickie has also brought these two men together into their own friendship. Rickie's memory not only survives through his stories, then, but in the alliances formed at his heels.

Ruth's Bequest

How one influences life after death and how friends safeguard a posthumous legacy are also key preoccupations for Forster in *Howards End*. The novel centres on the Schlegel sisters, Margaret and Helen (who represent liberal intellectualism), and their relationships with the Wilcoxes (staunch and pragmatic capitalists) and the lower-middle-class Leonard Bast. Leonard's tenuous friendship with the Schlegels must regrettably be set aside here, which further displaces a concerted discussion of class relations within and between the two novels. Forster was deeply invested in forging connections across class divisions, shown in both his fictional and personal writings. In reading *Howards End* and *The Longest Journey* as "sister" novels, the thematic intersection of class and inheritance appears forcefully in their parallel endings, which are notably split along a line of gender. *The Longest Journey*, which prioritizes male homosocial relations, ends on Stephen's daughter as a pseudo-pastoral figurehead for the next generation. *Howards End*, although more interested overall in cross-gender relations, is underpinned by Margaret's relationships with her sister and Ruth Wilcox; yet it ends with Helen's son as the future inheritor of the house. Leonard's bastard child, then, becomes one of two children whom Forster sets up as symbolic inheritors of England. However, this juxtaposition, with its interwoven concerns of class and gender, is beyond the scope of the current article.

The plot at stake here is instead Margaret's relationship with Ruth Wilcox – the one member of the Wilcox clan who slips, ethereally, from their cold and conventional rationalism. Ruth creates the conditions of her legacy by bequeathing her family home to Margaret, despite this bequest's interruption by the patriarchal family and the tenets of legality. Ruth intends to pass down the responsibilities of caretaker, not for an inanimate building as "property," but for

a living home. Helen sums this up when she and her sister reunite at Howards End by saying that the Wilcoxes "may take the title-deeds and the door-keys, but for this one night we are at home" (Forster 2000, 257). However, the short note forwarded from the nursing home which relates Ruth's bequest is deemed irrelevant by the Wilcoxes because there is no legal imperative to honour it (83). The novel hinges on this interrupted inheritance, as Margaret eventually marries Ruth's widower, and so the house comes to her after all.

The Wilcoxes collect properties in the capitalistic mode of "assets"; at one point, Helen enumerates their properties to a total of eight (Forster 2000, 145). Other than Ruth herself, none of the Wilcoxes have any sentimental attachment to Howards End. Her husband Henry holds onto it with vague conjectures that one of his sons might use it one day, even as he acknowledges that this is unlikely. He lets the house, then reduces it to a storage facility for the Schlegels' furniture. A capitalist imperative for ownership also manifests in the Wilcoxes' worklife: the men are employed by the Imperial and West African Rubber Company, after all. Their investment in colonialism is not vociferously decried in the novel, but Forster is not without censorious comment: "the Imperialist is not what he thinks or seems. He is a destroyer" (Forster 2000, 276).

More could be said from a postcolonial lens, but at the very least, the Wilcox position on property is not the one endorsed by the novel. Instead, *Howards End* is shaded in an agnostic spirituality attached to explicit and implicit anthropomorphizations of homes. In conversation with Henry, Margaret claims: "Houses are alive. No?"; and Forster refers to the titular house's heartbeat, houses "dying," and suggests that Howards End gains a new life once full of the Schlegels' furniture (Forster 2000, 132; 172; 219; 251). In the early days of their intimacy, Margaret observes that Ruth, "though a loving wife and mother, had only one passion in life—her house" (Forster 2000, 73). Indeed, Forster depicts Howards End as more essential to her personality than her three children.

Ruth recognizes a sympathy between her and Margaret when it comes to notions of home and belonging, seeing the loss of the Schlegels' family home at Wickham Place as a tragedy "worse than dying" (Forster 2000, 71) and subsequently seeking to compensate this loss. Notably, Ruth tells her new friend about the folklore surrounding the house but never shared these stories with her husband (Forster 2000, 61; 162). Henry can only conceive of things in terms of legal imperatives and the norms of blood inheritance. But Ruth's bequest functions not within a sterile legal system of property transference, but instead

as a spiritual passing-on of home and caretakership. Indeed, the house's interim caretaker, Miss Avery, might have had a proprietary claim to the house herself had she married Ruth's brother, Tom Howard. Yet her ongoing preservation of the property appears linked to her lifelong friendship with Ruth. Recognizing a rightful heiress in Margaret, Miss Avery eases the transition for the Schlegels' inheritance of the house by furnishing it with their belongings. Robert K. Martin refers to Ruth's bequest "as a central expression of the contrast [...] between codified law and spiritual law" that typifies Forster's writing (1997, 266). This spiritual "law" is beyond Henry's practical and hegemonic worldview and so, as per his nature, he ignores Ruth's last request.

Henry and his children's perspectives on ownership and inheritance align with a common-sense rationality contingent on societal norms. Ruth and Margaret's friendship troubles this self-assured yet arbitrary rationality, and so must be quashed by the patriarch—only for the novel to affirm Ruth's choice and the women's friendship by the end. Ruth and Margaret's friendship may appear odd, and it is certainly a short-lived one for Ruth to commit such an act to honour their intimacy. Garrett Stewart, in his paper on Forster's "epistemology of dying," contends that "death in Forster is usually checked off with indifference or acrid dispatch in the voice of a third-person narrator," but that Ruth's death scene has "disappeared altogether," which he refers to as a violent elision (Stewart 1979, 105; 117). This lacuna of Ruth's death and time in the nursing home is where Jo Ann Moran Cruz stages her reading of a "motivation of revenge" behind Ruth's bequest (Moran Cruz 2015, 405). She argues that the Wilcoxes' delegation of her deathbed care to the institutional management of a nursing home provokes a "profound protest against Wilcox family values" (Moran Cruz 2015, 405). Although Moran Cruz avers that Ruth and Margaret's friendship "was never very deep" (Moran Cruz 2015, 407), her article illuminates an unnarrated space inhabited by a deepening bond that we, as readers, are not privy to.

Moran Cruz draws specific attention to the fact that Margaret repeatedly visited Ruth in the nursing home. These visits, which remain inaccessible to the reader, would surely be the closest moments between the two friends given both the chronological progression of their relationship and the intimacy of attending a dying person's final days. Moran Cruz emphasizes that Forster's imbrication in Victorian and Edwardian mores would have made the changing norms on death care concerning to him. In the Edwardian period, "family solidarity around the dying person was the ideal," yet the Wilcoxes instead opt "for the

impersonal, more removed, perhaps less costly, and certainly more mechanical solution of a nursing home" (Moran Cruz 2015, 409; 412). Forster would be critical of upper- and middle-class families relying on nursing homes for death care, since "in 1910 institutional care for the elderly and the ill was uncommon and intended mostly for servants and poor working women" (Moran Cruz 2015, 410). Margaret's repeated visits to the nursing home attest to her taking on a mantle of carer, one which the Wilcoxes primarily delegate to institutional authority.

Nevertheless, in the passages of the novel narrated to us, Margaret and Ruth repeatedly stumble in their interactions. Although the awkwardness is one-sided, Margaret apologizes after the luncheon party between her friends and Ruth because she senses that her middle-aged friend does not "blend" with her thoroughly modern peers (Forster 2000, 63–7). Moreover, Forster depicts a clumsy dance of decorum after the Wilcoxes move in across the street from Wickham Place (Forster 2000, 55–7). And yet, this series of faux pas is what first precipitates their friendship. Catherine Lanone notes that "Edwardian interaction demanded a complex choreography of gradual calls, first leaving a card, then paying a short call, before someone could be invited to tea, not to mention lunch or dinner" (Lanone 2019, 404n4). The escalating series of missteps in Chapter 8 lead to a betrayal of these conventions: Lanone observes that Margaret breaks with propriety when, embarrassed by her rudeness in the letter intended to end their acquaintance, she rushes from the breakfast table to call on Ruth—as does Ruth by admitting her at that hour of the day (Lanone 2019, 406).

These fissures in communication, the moves the women make to overstep them, and the social conventions they leave in their wake align with the formlessness of friendship as related by Foucault. When discussing intergenerational friendships, he muses that the two friends:

face each other without terms or convenient words, with nothing to assure them about the meaning of the movement that carries them toward each other. They have to invent, from A to Z, a relationship that is still formless, *which is* friendship. (Foucault 1997, 136; emphasis added)

Foucault notably begins by situating his claim within the specificity of an intergenerational friendship, but ends by zooming out into a generality: friendship *is* the formless relation, even if intergenerational friendships more emphatically

demonstrate this point because more “translation” is necessary. In sum, Ruth and Margaret’s friendship grows naturally from the relational nexus of two people, for which social norms and prescriptions cannot account.

The mutual starting point for this language is, undoubtedly, a love for the home as a place of belonging. Ruth, too, initiates a break with the norms of polite, Edwardian society in her abrupt invitation to Margaret to spend the night at Howards End. Benjamin Bateman, mobilizing *Howards End* to theorize the “queer invitation,” contends that “a surprise invitation to an unvisited locale challenges [Margaret] to engage Ruth on terms disarticulated from normative relations” (Bateman 2011, 184). Ruth has sidestepped the “complex choreography” of a slowly developing acquaintanceship in her enthusiasm to share with her new friend that which is nearest to her heart. Margaret at first refuses the invitation, deferring it to the indeterminacy of “some other day” (Forster 2000, 71); but changing her mind, she again makes a mad dash towards Ruth to catch her at the train station. Bateman claims a reciprocity between the two women through this “invitation whose enunciation neither can exclusively own, both because neither knows where it will lead and because, having revived the invitation, Margaret blurs the line between inviter and invitee” (Bateman 2011, 185). The invitation to Howards End, just as Ruth’s bequeathal of Howards End to Margaret, is interrupted by the appearance of social convention in the form of the Wilcox family (Bateman 2011, 185–6). Nevertheless, something has passed between the women that unites them. The very next chapter begins after Ruth’s funeral is over. And so, while her trip with Margaret to Howards End remains forever unrealized, the depth of the connection formed by the invitation reverberates in the aforementioned lacuna between chapters. We hear the echo of its aftershocks in Forster’s brief observances, like the Wilcoxes’ objection to the chrysanthemums left on Ruth’s grave, or how Margaret “had seen so much of them in the final week” (Forster 2000, 88).

Friendships, Tomorrow

Family abolitionist Sophie Lewis contends that “personhood was not always created” through the privileged domain of the nuclear family, “which means we could, if we wanted to, create it *otherwise*” (Lewis 2022, 2). In *The Longest Journey* and *Howards End*, Forster suggests possible ways to move toward this new positionality through the nurturing and recognition of friend relations. Rickie proposes

a “friendship office” as one possibility, even as the novel questions the desirability of this hypothetical legal apparatus. *The Longest Journey* additionally offers more promising potentials through the models of Stephen’s creed of “here am I and there are you,” Stewart’s representation of love that accepts the whole of a person as they are, and the creation of a posthumous legacy for Rickie by the men in his life. *Howards End* critiques the normatively entrenched trajectory of familial inheritance by keeping Margaret and Ruth’s unconventional friendship at the heart of the novel. As related by Foucault, the formless relation of friendship disrupts power structures in its evasion of norms. And while critiques of the family are nothing new,⁸ they have been gaining new ground in mainstream discourses. Lewis observes that the COVID-19 pandemic brought the care crisis to the forefront of news cycles, causing many publication venues to be more receptive to critiques of the nuclear family (Lewis 2022, 72). In a 2020 article for *The Atlantic*, Rhaina Cohen interviews various friends whose stories disrupt the norm of the monogamous romantic couple as “the planet around which all other relationships should orbit” (Cohen 2020). Cohen, like Lewis, emphasizes friendship as an avenue for addressing the care crisis, as well as a way to combat the loneliness epidemic— suggestions reminiscent of the significance of Forster’s allusive acknowledgement that Margaret was present for Ruth’s dying days.

The issue of the friend’s position at the scene of death also recalls the long-standing debate over gay marriage versus the queer refusal to submit to legal norms.⁹ While friendships (queer or not) and the gay couple are not interchangeable, the latter’s move towards legal legitimacy provides an instructive touchstone for considering what future for friendships we want to create. Robyn Wiegman points out that the queer criticism of gay marriage around the 2000s often overlooked the strong impetus for seeking marriage rights that arose from the casualties of the AIDS crisis (Wiegman 2012, 339–40n38). Foucault submits that, versus relationships that are “protected forms of family life, [...] the variations which are not protected are [...] often much richer, more interesting and creative,” but therefore critically “much more fragile and vulnerable” (Foucault 1997, 172). After loved ones were refused visitation rights in hospitals, property claims ignored by the state, and blood family turned queer partners and friends

8 For instance, Lewis traces a history of family abolitionism in communist, feminist, and Gay Liberation political movements (2022, 33–74).

9 See, e.g., Butler 2004; Ferguson 2019; Freeman 2010.

away from funerals, there were clear justifications for appeals to the state system for recognition of relationships that fell outside its purview of legitimacy.

When taken as a model for how to protect nonnormative relationships from state devaluation and nonrecognition, this suggestive history concedes ground to Rickie's vision of a friendship office as desirable. We live in governed societies, and so access to rights, for better or worse, comes through appeals to state legitimacy. Yet perhaps there is some middle ground between access to legal protections for friends becoming commonplace, and the exclusivity of definitive labels for friendship. Summarizing philosopher Elizabeth Brake, Cohen forwards that "if, for example, the law extended bereavement or family leave to friends, Brake believes we'd have different social expectations around mourning" (Cohen 2020).

To eschew the legal system in its entirety in thinking of friendship has real-world consequences. Nevertheless, I remain critical of Rickie's friendship office. And, instructively, Monk points towards Forster's own navigation of this dilemma in his will. He argues that, "by presenting a life lived outside of both the romantic and political ideal of the conjugal couple, Forster's will can be read as questioning a type of marriage" (Monk 2020, 75). Building on this estimation, then, Forster's will threads the line between a necessary deference to a legal system and a political stance that refuses a conventional hierarchy of relations—a hierarchy prioritizing the nuclear family or the normatively recognized couple, whether married or "a type of" married. Let's not simplify our "rich relational worlds," as Rickie seems to have the irrepressible urge to do. Instead, readers may learn from the examples of Stephen, Stewart, and even Herbert's curation of Rickie's literary legacy, and the bequest that rests on the unconventional friendship between Ruth and Margaret, which the Wilcoxes seek, and fail, to render inconsequential. The odd combination of men brought together to oversee a childless author's posthumous publication and the intergenerational friendship wherein spiritual sympathy trumps normative logics of blood are sites of interpersonal transformation that can be the seeds of a social reformation. The formlessness of friendship means that its contours arise from the individuals it links together, without the codes of overdetermined social roles like father, mother, daughter, son. Indeed, "only connect," the epigraph to *Howards End*, is Forster's imperative to foster interpersonal ties that challenge and surpass established relational categories. If hegemonic ideals of the family unit must be deconstructed in order to think the social world differently, then friendship unearths a field from which to work towards political change.

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