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The Economy of Recognition in *Howards End*

Kim Shirkhani

In recent years, interest in E. M. Forster has revived among scholars working in postcolonial and race studies, with new attention being paid to anti-imperialist and pro-Eastern strains in his writings; and also among those working in gender and queer theory, who have developed a body of interpretation of his posthumously published novel *Maurice*.[1] But there has not been a similar reconstruction of Forster among scholars interested in class, generally thought to be Forster's most embarrassing blind spot. This blindness is perfectly illustrated, critics claim, by the narrator's dismissive pronouncement in *Howards End*—"We are not concerned with the very poor. They are unthinkable" (36)—and by what most consider the novel's condescending treatment of the lower-middle-class character Leonard Bast.[2] It is ironic, given the narrator's scolding of Helen Schlegel for deeming Leonard "not a man, but a cause" (246), that Forster himself is widely scolded for doing the same thing.

Leonard has conventionally been viewed as a flat and unsympathetic character, a sacrifice to a larger argument Forster is trying to make about the state of high culture in modern English society. "Bast is anxious and envious among the rentier intelligentsia," writes Jonathan Rose, "and his attempts to acquire culture are hopeless. Forster frankly stamps him 'inferior to most rich people' " (402).[3] The same kind of treatment of Leonard is at stake in a complementary reading of the whole Bast subplot as foremost an expression of liberal guilt. For Henry Turner, Leonard and his wife, Jacky, are "mere symbols," "figures for surplus and the human cost of capitalism" (339) that allow Forster to work through his guilt over living off the fruits of a system he finds unjust and dehumanizing, yet without which he would not have had the means to become a writer. Others claim that it is the characters Margaret and Helen Schlegel who are using

Leonard to assuage their guilt and that Forster is trying to critique *their* guilt-driven interference with Leonard's life. What no critic questions is the idea that Leonard has been degraded by virtue of the political interest taken in him, by being looked on as a "cause"—whether by Forster, in portraying the clerk as a victim of the class system, or by the Schlegels, in presuming to help him improve himself.

These criticisms voice one side of a current debate that Nancy Fraser has identified as being between recognition and redistribution—between, on the one hand, a respect for difference, whether in the multiculturalist sense of located identity or in the poststructuralist sense of singularity and otherness, and, on the other, an abstract sense of justice and advocacy of socioeconomic equality.[4] The two principles seem to be at cross-purposes, Fraser observes, in that recognition involves positively valuing difference, whereas redistribution equates economic difference with deprivation and, accordingly, aims at eliminating this particular difference (42). Wai Chee Dimock is troubled by the very concept of economic justice, by its implication that instances of human suffering can be measured, compared, compensated for. In *Residues of Justice*, whose argument dovetails with that of her introduction (coauthored with Michael Gilmore) to *Rethinking Class,* Dimock explains:

> The search for justice . . . is very much an exercise in abstraction, and perhaps an exercise in reduction as well, stripping away apparent differences to reveal an underlying order, an order intelligible, in the long run, perhaps only in quantitative terms. (2)

Dimock points out what most people distant from power might instinctively affirm, that justice is a problematic idea, one whose self-contradictions are constantly on display in its practical applications. But her concerns are primarily epistemological, specifically directed at the problem of cognitive violence wrought by the categorizing act. Accordingly, she ends up not critiquing but rather celebrating the limits of justice, positively valuing the fact that it cannot live up to its self-presentation as total and instead leaves "residues," things that fall outside its terms and thus remain unaccounted for. Her view issues, in narrative terms, in a mode of representation we might call noninterventionist, one that does not reduce the subject to being merely a "transcript" of his or her "material conditions" but instead keeps a certain distance, endowing the subject with the "density and dignity of the unknown, untypified, unspoken for" (93).

While Dimock rightly illuminates the potential symbolic violence of economic thinking, to dismiss material considerations entirely in critically approaching *Howards End* would be to ignore one of the novel's most important insights: modes of and possibilities for thought are contingent on and situated in material conditions. When Margaret Schlegel comments "all our thoughts are the thoughts of six-hundred pounders" and "independent thoughts are in nine cases out of ten the result of independent means" (100), Forster is asking us not only to notice how money conditions one's inner life but also to contemplate the effects of calling attention to this fact. While these observations might seem generally reductive, actually they are differentially so; they are more reductive of those with independent means—for instance, Margaret herself—in that they undercut the accomplishment of those who, by means of expensive training, end up displaying the kind of knowledge that is socially recognized as valuable. And, to the same extent, they offer a defense of those whose less expensively trained thoughts do not, on the evidence, enjoy the same kind of social value. To one in the latter position, a critical disregard of material conditions can feel like a threatening erasure of something she *wants* to be accounted for—a negative constituent of her identity, whose effects are often insecure living conditions and exclusion from socially desirable occupations, effects that are implicitly understood by society as expressions of lesser inherent merit.[5]

Thus, while attention to deprivation can have a humiliating effect on the dispossessed, it might also allow them to distance themselves from their material difficulties, to take such difficulties less personally. It is as an expansion, not a circumscription, of interpretive options that Zygmunt Bauman frames projects such as Pierre Bourdieu's, aimed at "allowing those who suffer to discover the possibility of relating their sufferings to social causes" (*Liquid Modernity* 215). Whereas Dimock celebrates a basic inaccessibility of human feeling to theoretical understanding, Bauman and Bourdieu suggest that to regard feelings of suffering as incommensurable—as singular, unquantifiable, inaccessible to theoretical understanding—leads to glossing over the difference between conditions that are inevitable and those that are political. We must not forget the distinction between human mortality and infant mortality, in short, lest we become complicit in what Bauman calls the "denial of the human-made, non-inevitable, contingent and alterable nature of social order" (*Liquid Modernity* 215).

Informed as it is by similar debates over "Mr. Basts" taking place at the turn of the century, *Howards End* anticipates its contemporary critics. As the Wilcoxes and the Schlegels debate with each other whether Leonard should be left alone to "look after his own affairs" (116) (the Wilcox view) or warrants intervention as a representative of a large-scale social problem (the Schlegel view), the novel asks: Is it more important to respect Leonard or to alleviate, by critiquing, his predicament? Does critiquing his predicament alleviate it or simply add insult to injury? Is the critique itself the injury? Can one respect Leonard *without* critiquing his predicament? Recognition or redistribution? Although in his portrayal of the penurious, culture-struck clerk, Forster might not solve these problems attendant on social theory, he does affirm the poverty of not doing theory at all. Although he is attuned to the appeal of the "unknown, untypified, unspoken for"—these are in fact the positive qualities of the eponymous house's genius loci, Mrs. Wilcox, and of the surrounding countryside—he is still sensible of the danger that making a virtue out of leaving things unknown might authorize forms of disregard that are not, and are not meant to be, gentle. It is not Mrs. Wilcox who admonishes Margaret that Leonard has a "life of his own" that she knows "nothing about," or who doubts whether it is Margaret's place "to conclude it is an unsuccessful life" (116). It is Mr. Wilcox, the new imperialist businessman, articulating his classical liberal economic principle of laissez-faire.

Michael Levenson has drawn our attention to the significance in the novel of a distinction between old and new liberalism. Old liberalism, which branches out of Adam Smith's political economy, Levenson characterizes as "essentially a negative activity, devoted to the removal of constraints, sure in the belief that once individuals were allowed to develop freely, an 'ethical harmony' would ensue" (303). The new liberalism, expounded at the turn of the twentieth century by such figures as L. T. Hobhouse and J. A. Hobson, was interventionist, dedicated to social reform, collectivism, the regulation of business, and wealth redistribution through taxation. But, as Levenson notes, whereas Forster's idea of personal relationships links him to the older liberalism—he "chooses private before public, friend before country" (304)[6]—Forster's economic views line up more closely with the new. While the "doctrine of *laissez-faire* is the only one that seems to work in the world of the spirit," Forster writes in his 1946 essay "The Challenge of Our Time," it "will not work in the material world. It has led to the black market and the capitalist jungle. We

must have planning and ration-books and controls, or millions of people will have nowhere to live and nothing to eat" (56). So we are returned to Henry Wilcox's principles and the question of how to make sense of his respect for Leonard's privacy, his seeming defense of Leonard's otherness.

In fact, what Henry is articulating is an early species of negative recognition, an approach that Bauman has described as developing in the historical phase he calls "liquid modernity." The keynote of this deterritorializing phase is increasing disengagement of those in power from the lives of those not in power, as physical proximity and interference become less necessary (become, in fact, impediments) to accumulating and maintaining capital. Henry's free-trade politics, his involvement in global business, and his inaccessibility to what he calls the "ordinary plain man" (116); Leonard's location in the class structure as an unskilled (so-called), white-collar, fatefully temporary worker; and the novel's thematic concerns with rising suburbs and ceaseless flux—all can be understood as anticipating liquid modernity. In this "liquid" situation, recognition (a respect for difference and respectful distance) can no longer be viewed as the straightforward victory that it was when capital was committed to particular workforces in particular locations.[7] When Henry tells Margaret that she ought not to presume to "know" Leonard, he is effectively telling her not to contemplate—but especially not to talk about—Leonard's insecurity and his state of perpetual worry, or the ways in which this situation might be connected to or even support Henry's own situation of relative security and freedom.

Forster's descriptions of Leonard are, one must admit, at times unflattering. But in illuminating Leonard's shortcomings, the novel is seeking both to challenge the logic by which social or economic failure is reflexively moralized into personal failure (rather than being related to material disadvantages or the standards by which society happens to judge) and to critique the system by which such moralization in turn legitimates and thus helps to reproduce that failure. Leonard's struggles also make vivid to the reader how subtle and painful this cycle can be, for not only is his physical being precarious, beset as he is by malnourishment and latent disease, but also he is kept from what he most desires in life—to write books, immerse himself in literature, and converse with people adept at such activities. Neither is Leonard portrayed as incapable of comprehending his situation, as Rose implies he is. Rather, in his brushes with the

rich and cultured he gains an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the forces at work against him. Of course, the novel must strike a fragile balance here. For the more successful Leonard's character is, the more idealist the novel becomes, in the sense of contradicting its own vision of culture as founded on wealth. And the more appealing and sympathetic Leonard is, the less convinced the reader might be of the urgency of the problems the novel identifies, and the closer Forster comes to romanticizing poverty.

Leonard as a "cause"

One may as well begin with the most notorious passage: "We are not concerned with the very poor. They are unthinkable, and only to be approached by the statistician or the poet" (36). Claude Summers voices the critical consensus when he calls these comments a "statement that not only limits the scope of the book but also acknowledges the limitations of the liberal ethos that governs it" (115). Elizabeth Langland, although admitting some degree of irony, views the passage as exemplifying Forster's "comments on the underprivileged [that] seem to attempt sarcasm but end up sounding defensive" (254). It is difficult to find a critic who interprets the statement as purely ironic, despite its being followed by a retraction of sorts: "This story deals with gentlefolk, or with those who are obliged to pretend that they are gentlefolk" (36). Another equivocation quickly follows—"The boy . . . knew that he was poor, and would admit it: he would have died sooner than confess any inferiority to the rich. This may be splendid of him"—and then, most controversially, comes a catalogue of Leonard's flaws:

> But he was inferior to most rich people, there is not the least doubt of it. He was not as courteous as the average rich man, nor as intelligent, nor as healthy, nor as lovable. His mind and his body had been alike underfed, because he was poor, and because he was modern they were always craving better food. (36–37)

An early Marxist critic of the novel, D. S. Savage, sounded the note that most critics since have echoed[8] when he interpreted this passage as simply class bigotry on Forster's part: "Because he does not enjoy the financial advantages of the Schlegels, Leonard Bast's aspirations towards culture are made to appear pathetic in their hopelessness" (59). For Savage, *Howards*

End suggests that "culture and the good life depend upon economic security." And the apparent elitism in the narrator's description of Leonard appears to be reinforced by Margaret's initial dismissal of Leonard: "She knew this type very well—the vague aspirations, the mental dishonesty, the familiarity with the outsides of books" (92).

But this evidence is complicated—not only in that Margaret cannot be easily equated with Forster (in fact, the narration is far from consistently focalized by Margaret), but also in that the statement that culture depends on economic security cannot be considered prejudicial toward the poor unless culture is being held up as an unmitigated or inherent good, as it is not in *Howards End*. Instead, the novel critiques high culture not only for its increasing irrelevance in a brutal, Wilcoxian world of "telegrams and anger" (82) but also for the ways in which it is a game of power, exclusion, and affiliation. Even Margaret is made to realize the latter, as when she apologizes to Mrs. Wilcox for having seemed to forget the older woman's presence at a lunch party where she was busy "zigzagging with her friends over Thought and Art" (62). Ashamed, she says, "We lead the lives of gibbering monkeys. Mrs. Wilcox—really—We have something quiet and stable at the bottom. We really have." That Margaret herself is critical of this game makes her noting Leonard's blunders all the more ambiguous in the moral economy of the novel.

Most of Margaret's criticisms of Leonard are actually criticisms of his situation, of the way his aspirations are impeded by his distance from power and the kinds of knowledge that power reproduces. Thus she articulates a position similar to Forster's in "The Challenge of Our Time": while believing in an inner, subjective realm that must be protected from political intervention, she at the same time sees a connection between this inner realm and societal conditions, and advocates intervention when it comes to the latter. Although a general antipathy in contemporary, post-Foucauldian criticism toward the idea of social intervention has led to great emphasis on the misguidedness of the Schlegels' approach, Forster is asking us to pay attention to its difference from a more sinister alternative, which is represented by Henry. This is the economic laissez-faire of the older, Adam Smith liberalism supplemented by late nineteenth-century Spenserian social Darwinism. Henry expresses this position directly, as an argument, and indirectly as well, as a habit of mind, the tendency to focus narrowly on the isolated case. Forster makes it clear that for Henry a tight focus is strategic, whether consciously or unconsciously: seeing

the world in bits allows him not to contemplate the remote effects of his investments.

Indeed, despite Henry's practical links to new imperial expansionism, his style of thought is ad hoc and particularist. Henry thinks small, cogitates "item by item" (78), in fragments that never cohere into a big or clear picture. As the narrator tells us, "Henry had implied his business rather than described it, and the formlessness and vagueness that one associates with Africa itself had brooded over the main sources of his wealth" (155). Forster's reader would likely have recognized in Henry what Hobson, in his widely read book *Imperialism,* had pointed to as a "peculiarly British" idiom: a "genius of inconsistency," an "inhibition of the faculty of comparison" (210). Hobson had argued that this habit—this customary failure on the part of the English to think about their actions in the world with a sense of "causes and consequences"—was among the key "moral and sentimental factors" enabling imperialism. Forster would later call this tendency "self-muddling," similarly associating it with a will to dominate and tracing it to the culture of the elite English public schools.[9] It is clearly present in the representation of Wilcoxism: the "manner of the committee room," "not mak[ing] the mistake of handling human affairs in the bulk, but dispos[ing] of them item by item, sharply" (78), being "incapable of grouping the past" (204). Henry's fragments seem to be held together by some notion of an invisible hand, the natural market force by which, in Smith's theory, society is supposed to be improved when—and only when—individuals pursue their own economic self-interest. But Helen frames this approach in the terms of negative recognition, grouping Henry with men who

> cut down the salaries of their clerks, and stunt the independence of all who may menace their comfort, but yet they believe that somehow good—and it is always that sloppy "somehow"—will be the outcome, and that in some mystical way the Mr. Basts of the future will benefit because the Mr. Basts of today are in pain. (152)

Forster frequently calls attention to Henry's particularism. When the Schlegel sisters seek Henry's advice on behalf of Leonard, they do so in a language suited to his inclinations. Margaret approaches Henry by saying, "I'll just put our special case to Mr. Wilcox," and Helen adds, "Yes, do. He'll be more lenient to a special case" (105). Later, when Margaret

appeals to Henry to offer Leonard a job, she is sure to remind him, "he's rather a special case" (182). Margaret and Helen use this language self-consciously, given that their habitual mode is to categorize and generalize about social reality, to draw out connections with political implications. The Schlegel-Wilcox difference culminates in the scene in which Henry, exposed as having once had an affair with Leonard's wife, tries to punish Helen for having had an affair with Leonard. Provoked by Henry's audacity in claiming "The two cases are different," Margaret calls him "criminally muddled" and tries to force him to connect the two parts of his double standard: "say to yourself," she demands, "'What Helen has done, I've done'" (244). Thus, although appeals to justice by way of comparisons can be a form of violence to the notion of difference, this example shows such an appeal used to expose, and thus undercut, the rhetorical abuse of "difference" as a mask for discrimination based on hierarchy.

Also importantly, although the Schlegels insist on bringing general conditions to bear on the particular case, they do not attempt to sum up the particular case, the individual subject, by reference to general conditions. Their interest in distributive justice does not blind them to the richness and diversity of experience. Rather it helps them to resist the force that social gradations can exert on the imagination, a force that guides people to regard those with resources as inherently more interesting—"richer," more complex—than those without. This plays out on the everyday level in their refusal to observe expected hierarchical distinctions in addressing others. Against the hierarchy of seniority, Helen, on asking a neighboring farming family's child his name, directly tells him her own. "That was Helen all over," says the narrator, "the Wilcoxes, too, would ask a child its name, but they never told their names in return" (237). This principle becomes a point of contention between Margaret and Henry. When, in one particular conversation, she has made a series of clever observations ending with the question "Houses are alive. No?" he dismisses her musings and then asks critically, "Didn't you talk rather like that to your office boy?" by which he means Leonard:

> "Did I?—I mean I did, more or less. I talk the same way to every one—or try to."
>
> "Yes, I know. And how much do you suppose that he understood of it?"
>
> "That's his lookout. I don't believe in suiting my conversation to my company." (123)

While one might, like Douglass Thomson, interpret Margaret's "democratic . . . conviction to 'talk the same to everyone—or try to'" as a "consistency [that] robs experience of diversity" (125), here it has more meaning as a violation of class homogamy, as Bourdieu might say, a protest against one of the key markers of her class's social distance from Leonard's class. And yet Margaret's equalizing conversational policy represents a refusal to equalize in another, limited sense: she seeks to treat everyone in the same way as a refusal to treat everyone of a particular (lower) class in the same (snubbing or indifferent) way.

Because Margaret's taking Leonard's part most often assumes the form of clarifying the material conditions he faces, it is easy to mistake her gestures for the kind of economic reductivism that Dimock warns against. But the novel is more worried about precisely the opposite problem, the vicious circle by which systematically ignoring the effects of material conditions on one's life chances leads to the moralization of poverty, which in turn reinforces official indifference toward poverty on the grounds that it is deserved.[10] Because Henry does not connect material causes and effects in contemplating the social order, he cannot understand behavior except as an expression of a hazy moral quality he calls character. It is to this quality, or its lack, that he ascribes Leonard's suspiciousness when the Schlegels quiz him about his job, maintaining "we should never have had that outburst if he was a gentleman" (115). To this Margaret agrees, but with an essential difference: she explains Leonard's conduct not in terms of a difference in reaction but a difference in the ability to *hide* that reaction—that is, to the undeniable fact of Leonard's lack of training in social subterfuge. "I admit it willingly," she responds, "A gentleman would have kept his suspicions to himself." By this response she seeks to remove matters of social behavior from the moral realm while further insinuating that the behavior in question is a sign not of virtue but of artfulness—that is, a social strategy.

Margaret's anti-idealist views are most overtly on display when she scandalizes her discussion club peers by claiming that "independent thoughts are in nine cases out of ten the result of independent means" and that, therefore, it will do no good to approach the problem of "Mr. Basts" through moral appeals. "Money's [what is] educational," she tells them, "It's far more educational than the things it buys. . . . Don't dole them out poetry-books and railway-tickets like babies" (100). She roils the morally minded group by suggesting that poverty is a matter of Mr. Bast's

resources, not "his ideals" (101), and that, if anything, the latter depends on the former. When they object, asking, "what it would profit Mr. Bast if he gained the whole world and lost his own soul?" she responds, "Nothing, but he would not gain his soul until he had gained a little of the world."

The difficulty that Margaret, and the novel as a whole, faces is a difficulty for class analysis in general, that of maintaining a distinction between the effects of critical description and the effects of the system being described. While it is true that one can humiliate by identifying oppression, to assert that such identification is by definition humiliating is to disable social critique, to shame potential critics in advance by equating condemnation of the class system with condemnation of the people who get the worst of that system. John Carey, for example, accuses *Howards End* of disparaging working people in describing the Basts' food as unappetizing and unnourishing.[11] But Carey's critique is problematic, for it presupposes, first, that real-life Basts are essentially, inevitably connected with cheap, canned food, and, second, that if the food repulses the reader, this response should necessarily redound negatively upon the Basts, rather than the system by which *someone* must eat this food, the system that creates the position the Basts occupy.

It is the food—not its eaters—that *Howards End* is condemning, not least because it is inadequate, as Leonard has to "convince his stomach that it was having a nourishing meal" (43). But the novel also demonstrates the ease with which this type of critique can be misunderstood or misrepresented, by way of Henry's response to Margaret when she tries to commiserate with Leonard's situation:

> "Your mistake is this, and it is a very common mistake. This young bounder has a life of his own. What right have you to conclude it is an unsuccessful life? . . . You know nothing about him. He probably has his own joys and interests—wife, children, snug little home. That's where we practical fellows"—he smiled—"are more tolerant than you intellectuals. We live and let live, and assume that things are jogging on fairly well elsewhere, and that the ordinary plain man may be trusted to look after his own affairs." (116)

Henry thus redescribes Margaret's critique of Leonard's structural disadvantages as a critique of Leonard himself, a move allied with his refusal on a rhetorical level to reduce people to their economic circumstances

even as he invests in a system whereby people's life choices are reduced by these very circumstances. While contemporary readers might see Henry's gesture, in isolation, as an admirable refusal to interfere, we would do best to keep in mind that he can "let live" because he knows that the sheer force of capital, if let alone, will always give an advantage to those who have it over those who do not. His words uncannily anticipate Bauman's description of negative recognition, a "posture of indifference and detachment" that says of the dispossessed, "let them be, and bear the consequences of what they are" ("Great War" 144). On a simpler level, Henry's logic implies a questionable double standard, that what is good for clerks ("a snug little home") is a different matter from what is good for wealthy investors ("the Wilcoxes collect houses as [a child] collects tadpoles," says Helen, and she counts seven in their possession [134]).

This problematic casts new light on the passage that introduces Leonard. When Leonard is described as "inferior to most rich people," this looks less like the narrator's own judgment and more like one focalized by the standards of the society Leonard wishes to enter—and therefore an ironic judgment on the judgment of others. And we might perceive the narrator's overall tone—it "may be splendid" of Leonard not to admit inferiority—not as serious but as satirical. Indeed, while the narrator on one level wants to lay out the facts of Leonard's dilemma, he also wants to undercut normative interpretations of these facts. So he adopts the tone of one who would judge Leonard sincerely, then undermines his assessments by an upsurge of manner—the qualifiers, the intensifiers, the protesting-too-much negation of claiming "not the least doubt" of Leonard's inferiority. While it is only in recent years that critics have complicated the idea that Forster's narrator in *Howards End* is more or less straightforward, the satirical elements and ambiguities of this passage signal that Forster is up to some irony. It seems in fact that he is being intentionally provocative—mocking both those who would interpret Leonard's inability to meet the standards of society as a sign of his inferiority and also those (perhaps the same people) who would, as Glen Cavaliero puts it, "sentimentalize poverty as such" (113) and thus implicitly advocate for its preservation.

This complexity of the narrator's stance perfectly recapitulates the complexity of Forster's challenge to the reader in portraying Leonard as he does. While carefully recognizing the clerk and his social and intellectual aspirations, Forster does not fail to emphasize the consequences of his lack of resources. These consist not only in his immediate situation

but also, and perhaps more importantly, in his difficulty in cultivating the personal qualities that could help him escape from it, qualities such as good health and certain manners, ways of speaking, and styles of dress. The novel addresses the contradictions in liberal capitalist society, which depends on the idea of individual mobility, by looking at the material underpinnings of that putative mobility. If the kinds of personal traits that qualify one for opportunities in society are more a matter of subtle, early-acquired habits than of skills that can be consciously pursued and honed, then they represent not equal opportunity but rather self-reproducing lack and oppression. When, instead, Henry describes Leonard as either "jogging on fairly well" or as failing for obscure reasons, he suggests that the clerk's fate is merely a matter of chance and character and discounts the notion that there might be structural forces at work.

Like Margaret's recognition of Leonard's artlessness, Forster's claim that it takes generations to acquire an aura of cultural self-possession is an acknowledgment that high culture reproduces power differentially—that it insures that learning by rote, as Leonard must try to do in his scanty free time, simply does not confer the same advantages as does learning by what Bourdieu calls "insensible familiarization within the family circle" (3), as the Schlegels have done. Bourdieu's point about such family-circle training is of course not that it is superior but that it tends to prevail, because the cultural field is structured in such a way as to reward it, to support the reproduction of culture among those whose predecessors already have it. He does not claim that no single Leonard Bast can learn or luck his way into the dominant group, just that Leonard Basts as a group are at a considerable disadvantage.

Leonard as a "man"

The dramatization of Leonard's failures enriches his character, both by making his coming as far as he has seem all the more remarkable and by emphasizing his appreciation of things that other characters are seen smugly to take for granted. The Schlegels do this, as they also unwittingly reinforce class barriers by a kind of highbrow antiacademicism, a tendency among the cultured and well educated to elevate authentic experience over book learning. This dynamic is played out when the Schlegels confront Leonard's jarring (because overly intense) expressions of desire for knowledge. After Leonard's adventurous nightlong walk into the coun-

tryside, the sisters are impressed by the bold originality of his action but keep beating back his explanation of it in terms of the books that inspired it. In effect they allow Leonard to *be* nature or part of the landscape, but not to interpret it. Helen even affects a Cockney accent in trying to coax Leonard back to earth when he digresses from his adventure with a literary reference: "Yes, but the wood," she insists, "This 'ere wood. How did you get out of it?" (95).

Forster seems to realize Leonard's dilemma here, to realize that someone like Margaret can throw her books out only because she has internalized what they have to offer, whereas Leonard has not. Then, too, Forster has so staged things that without Leonard's strenuous striving, he never would have met the Schlegels, to whose influence he owes the possibly enriching experience of second-guessing the value of culture. Similarly, when the Schlegels quiz Leonard about the company he works for, the narrator comments directly that not knowing or adopting a light touch about knowing is a luxury afforded only to those who do not have to get their living by filling a slot in the system:

> He was tempted to say that he knew nothing about the thing at all. But a commercial training was too strong for him. . . . In his circle to be wrong was fatal. The Miss Schlegels did not mind being wrong. They were genuinely glad that they had been misinformed. (111)

But of course the truth is that he indeed knows nothing about the thing at all, and by design. When he is asked to describe the health of the firm for which he works—in insurance, ironically—he is said to have "no idea," to understand "his own corner of the machine, but nothing beyond it" (110):

> To him, as to the British public, the Porphyrion was the Porphyrion of the advertisement—a giant, in the classical style, but draped sufficiently. . . . A large sum of money was inscribed below, and you drew your own conclusions. (110)

That the god is cloaked implies that the firm's opacity is essential to its power:

> A giant was of an impulsive morality—one knew that much. He would pay for Mrs. Munt's hearthrug with ostentatious haste, a

> large claim he would repudiate quietly, and fight court by court. But his true fighting weight, his antecedents, his amours with other members of the commercial Pantheon—all these were as uncertain to ordinary mortals as were the escapades of Zeus. While the gods are powerful, we learn little about them. It is only in the days of their decadence that a strong light beats into heaven.

The narrator feigns an ordinary mortal's ignorance of the Porphyrion's nature, but the ironic insinuation that "impulsive morality" really means consistent self-interestedness betrays a more penetrating view of the correlation between institutional inscrutability and power. When he is out of work, Leonard sees Henry as a version of the giant: "Mr. Wilcox was king of this world, the superman, with his own morality, whose head remained in the clouds" (189). Whereas from the panoptical institutional position Henry occupies, he can see—or, again, elect not to see—Leonard, the institution seriously impedes Leonard's ability to return the gaze.

Given the forces arrayed to keep Leonard and his likes at a distance from knowledge, his grasp on how his experiences might express a social logic appears all the more remarkable. Even as he optimistically expends large effort and his scant resources to make it to the afternoon concert where he meets the Schlegels, he is all the time signaling his awareness that to learn the social dialect of his new friends "would take one years," if it were possible at all. He asks himself: "With an hour at lunch and a few shattered hours in the evening, how was it possible to catch up with leisured women, who had been reading steadily from childhood?" (32). Leonard's Bourdieuian perspective on his problems illustrates his own acuity and also undercuts the ability of the cultured and well educated to congratulate themselves on being the way they are. He sees what are often taken to be ineffable talents as, instead, early-acquired skills, and, in generalizing beyond his own case, he also clarifies the scope of the problem, suggesting that even if he can succeed as a special case, by being taken up as the Schlegels' protégé, there would remain an entire class of others who desire yet never have such an opportunity. By thus making clear the odds against Leonard, Forster opens the way for his least accomplishment to appear nearly heroic.

The narrator elaborates on Leonard's analysis: "His brain might be full of names, he might have even heard of Monet and Debussy; the trouble

was that he could not string them together into a sentence, he could not make them 'tell' " (32). And it is here he introduces the important motif—"he could not quite forget about his stolen umbrella":

> Yes, the umbrella was the real trouble. Behind Monet and Debussy the umbrella persisted, with the steady beat of a drum. "I suppose my umbrella will be all right," he was thinking. "I don't really mind about it. I will think about music instead. I suppose my umbrella will be all right."

The contrast between Leonard's captivity to necessity and the Schlegels' freedom is then cruelly underscored when, having followed Margaret back to Wickham Place, Leonard finds that the sisters are so flush with umbrellas that Helen has no idea which one of them does not belong there.

Leonard plods on through the story, faced at every turn with the choice between culture and food, reading and sleeping, spending the time or spending the money:

> Earlier in the afternoon, he had worried about seats. Ought he to have paid as much as two shillings? Earlier still he had wondered, "Shall I try to do without a programme?" There had always been something to worry him ever since he could remember, always something that distracted him in the pursuit of beauty. (32)

After the concert Leonard opts to walk a mile instead of spending a penny on the tram, and when he passes through an "immense tunnel" under the train line, a "sharp pain that darted through his head until he was conscious of the exact form of his eye sockets" (38) vividly figures the grind of his routine and his acute consciousness of himself as a body—subject not only to vital necessities but also to the side effects (the "roar of the trains") of machinery built to serve people other than the likes of him. And his odyssey is not over. He passes an acquaintance and is forced to feign familiarity with a news item to hide the fact he has not bought a Sunday paper. When finally he reaches his cellar apartment, he feigns cheerfulness for the sake of Jacky until he realizes that he is alone and can relax with his volume of Ruskin. Leonard's drudgery vividly dramatizes the significance of Margaret's insistence that the problem of social inequity is not a matter of singular instances of hardship to be answered by isolated acts of charity, but a matter of a daily grind.

Again, the novel does not assert the impossibility, on an individual basis, of escape from conditions such as Leonard's, for of course there is always good luck. And the vast differences between characters of the same class, such as Leonard and his relatives, hint that there is room for self-invention. Neither does the novel posit aesthetic taste as a matter of transhistorical value or make it seem impossible that Leonard, as he is, could have something to offer as an aspiring writer. Said to be trying to "form his style on Ruskin" (40), Leonard translates in a way that seems a quasi-modernist improvement on some lines of Ruskin's that many would now look on as stilted. After a first draft in which he mechanically replaces the words with personally applicable synonyms—"Let us consider a little each of these characters in succession, and first (for of the absence of ventilation enough has been said already), what is very peculiar to this flat—its obscurity"—Leonard is said to realize that "the modifications would not do" and settles on the austere "My flat is dark as well as stuffy" (40).

A conspicuous similarity—a kind of stripping away to a lean, simple style—between Leonard's writing here and the clearly appealing way in which he describes the dawn after his night walk through the woods suggests that Forster favors the style Leonard achieves. In the earlier scene, after he has finished his night-walk story and Helen has asked, "But was the dawn wonderful?" the narrator says:

> With unforgettable sincerity he replied, "No." The word flew again like a pebble from the sling. Down toppled all that had seemed ignoble or literary in his talk, down toppled tiresome R. L. S. and the "love of the earth" and his silk top-hat. In the presence of these women Leonard had arrived, and he spoke with a flow, an exultation, that he had seldom known. "The dawn was only grey, it was nothing to mention." (95)

Meanwhile, Ruskin's style is made to seem out of touch, a smug

> voice in the gondola roll[ing] on, piping melodiously of Effort and Self-Sacrifice, full of high purpose, full of beauty, full even of sympathy and the love of men, yet somehow eluding all that was actual and insistent in Leonard's life. For it was the voice of one who had never been dirty or hungry, and had not guessed successfully what dirt and hunger are. (40)

Thus, while it is fair to point out the narrator's unflattering descriptions of Leonard, the novel does not deny him the potential to "one day push his head out of the grey waters and see the universe" (40).

The sum of these elements is a far more complex Leonard than is typically recognized. Anne Wright is one of the few critics to note the "active sympathy with which the novel has engaged in the details of his life" (57) and to suggest that "whether or not Forster saw Leonard as peripheral, the text moves him closer and closer to the centre" (57–58). His final few speeches are fluent accounts of unequal opportunity and wasted potential: "I don't trouble after books as I used. I can imagine that with regular work we should settle down again. It stops one thinking. . . . Oh I did talk a lot of nonsense once, but there's nothing like a bailiff in the house to drive it out of you" (188). Thus Leonard is not only drawn as worthy of better, but also given to articulate a clear-sighted awareness of the forces that prevent him from having it, an awareness of his experience as it fits into a larger socioeconomic logic.

The Mr. Basts of the future

Although, as Helen implies, Henry introduces the idea of future Mr. Basts as a way to brush off her criticisms, to defer hard questions into an ever-receding future, he ends up raising an issue key to the novel's critique of laissez-faire approaches to social questions. While Henry claims that socioeconomic outcomes should be left to market forces that are themselves "let be," the representation of Leonard's experiences prompts the reader to feel otherwise. For the story of Leonard is not a story of the "destruction wrought by Margaret's well-intentioned efforts at mediation," as Paul Armstrong has suggested (322).[12] Leonard's dilemma does not stem from the Schlegels' intervention. It stems from his having no prospects and, accordingly, having to entrust his future either to chance or to the personal goodwill of those with more power.

In focusing on the conflict between a global businessman and a member of the emerging "unskilled" white-collar class, Forster anticipates a model of relations that would become increasingly significant in the age Bauman calls liquid. While Leonard wants the attention of Henry—wants, that is, economic security, in order *not* to have to think of money and so be free to think about more interesting things—Henry accurately senses that such relationships represent a burden, a potential drag on his own

economic freedom. So it is wisest for him to respect Leonard's difference and his privacy, to leave the clerk to his own devices. It is significant in this light that Forster portrays Leonard's own efforts to guard his privacy as motivated not by a sense of dignity but by a sense of shame about the real conditions of his life. As G. L. Anderson notes, by the early twentieth century, clerks had fallen on hard times, though this was not widely known either by the public or by the various London aid societies, being "deliberately concealed . . . from a society in which there was little sympathy for those unable to maintain their social position and economic independence and much stigma attached to poverty" (120). While affirming the clerk's reasons for denying his proximity to the "abyss" in an environment where personal appearance can serve as a form of symbolic capital, Forster emphasizes the drawbacks of this denial, foremost of which is its part in enabling a culture of negative recognition.

If *Howards End* does not deny that someone in Leonard's situation may enjoy a rich inner life despite his material constraints, neither does it ignore that doing so is a world easier when one is not subject to such constraints. Margaret's comment that the "poor cannot always reach those whom they want to love, and they can hardly ever escape from those whom they love no longer" (49) points toward the relentless truth that material limitations can, by delimiting experience and mobility, constrain one's inner life. Such statements can irritate, in that they raise problems that cannot be solved without a cost; hence the fervency of Henry's efforts to quell them. Although in some sense Henry succeeds, given that Margaret appears to turn on Leonard by the end of the novel, this success has been misunderstood by critics who claim that it betrays Forster's own views or the novel's hyprocrisy. Indeed, the neatness of novel's ending—the offing of Leonard as deus ex machina—is usually imputed to Forster's unwillingness or inability ultimately to deal with the critique he has set in motion.

Instead, we can read the ending as the novel's final provocation. After Leonard has been killed by the concerted forces of Wilcoxism, culture, and deprivation (that is, Charles Wilcox wielding a sword, an old bookcase, and poor health), the newly married Margaret Wilcox tries to rationalize his death by reverting to the language of the special case. When Helen threatens to spoil this sense of complacency by voicing discomfort with the difference between Leonard's fate and their own, Margaret first dismisses her concern, referring mystically to "eternal differences,

planted by God in a single family, so that there may always be colour; sorrow perhaps, but colour in the daily grey," and then counsels Helen to "forget him" (267). Although this moment is often read as Margaret's reckoning with her error in seeking to forge connections—reckoning, as Armstrong puts it, with the reality that the true "social bond in such a world is not solidarity or synthesis but the reciprocity of mutual respect for differences" (323)—her particular way of expressing herself should put the reader on alert. For in her enlisting of difference to rationalize what has been depicted throughout the novel as the fruit of injustice, Margaret sounds like no one so much as her new husband. Her conclusion that Leonard's "adventure," while perhaps not good enough for the sisters, was good enough for Leonard, echoes similar assurances made by Henry throughout the novel. And because all along the novel has demonstrated that we should regard distributive justice not as opposed to, but rather as an essential part of, recognition, Margaret's ultimate view that one has to choose—either "colour in the daily grey" or an adventure for Leonard as good as the one enjoyed by the Schlegels—remains unconvincing.

In his nonfictional writings, Forster often expressed his view that there is something blunt and disrespectful in relating individuals to their roles in larger systems. At the same time, he was aware of the conservative uses of *not* contemplating the lives of others, of overparticularizing, of refusing to compare lots and reckon with the connections between them. *Howards End* illuminates such connections, both emotional and economic, in order to rebut snapshot distortions that depict one's fate as inscrutable and unpredictable, an expression of chance and "character."[13] Up against this rich texture, it is Margaret's "Not for us, but for him" that strikes one as flat and unsympathetic, expressing a complacency that the novel as a whole challenges, a complacency with a hierarchy of human value whereby only those at the bottom must pay the price for a diversity of human experience.

Howards End helps us to see that advocacy for redistribution does not preclude advocacy for recognition, that minimizing certain kinds of difference does not entail derogating the notion of difference itself. It suggests that the form of recognition that is "leaving things unknown" is not always salutary, to the extent that it can authorize a disregard for both recognition and redistribution by rendering all kinds of oppression invisible. And finally, *Howards End* asks us to pay attention to the values and prejudices that underlie our reactions to portrayals of social failure.

Specifically, it asks us to use these reactions, our sense that portrayals of failure are necessarily degrading to those who fail, in order to question whatever we happen to take for granted as inherently valuable—whether graceful manners or Culture itself. In this, the novel offers itself as a model of sorts for developing new, more subtle theories of class, theories that themselves (as Dimock and Gilmore's book suggests) promise to be increasingly intertwined with questions of narrative.

Notes

1. Among the papers on offer at the 2004, 2005, and 2007 Modernist Studies Association conferences, for example, five focused on Forster's experiences in Egypt or India, and three explored same-sex desire in *Maurice.*

2. See for example Elizabeth Langland, Lyn Pykett, and Henry S. Turner.

3. Rose notes that by around 1880, a new kind of character had emerged, the "thoughtful," self-educated worker. He does not, however, place Leonard Bast in this category but rather sees him as an example of the more typical lower-class figure, who might have "keen sensibilities, a depressing sense of degradation, and a feeling of shame," but whose thoughts on his situation "would scarce fail to partake of the poverty of his circumstances" (398).

4. Fraser distinguishes recognition claims in the realm of mainstream multiculturalism from those in the realm of deconstruction, the former focusing on "surface reallocations of respect to existing identities of existing groups" and the latter on "deep restructuring of relations of recognition" (27). But the two groups join hands in their suspicion of "normative, programmatic, 'totalizing' thinking" (4) and their rejection of the idea that the primary form of domination is economic (17).

5. As Pierre Bourdieu's work shows, such critique also has the advantage of disrupting the relentless cycle whereby resources underwrite merit, which, as long as it can be interpreted as desert, draws yet more resources.

6. Levenson's reference is to Forster's 1938 essay "What I Believe."

7. On these points see also Amanda Anderson and S. P. Mohanty.

8. In addition to Pykett and Turner, see Daniel Born and David Medalie (especially page 179).

9. He writes:

> When an Englishman has been led into a course of wrong action, he has nearly always begun by muddling himself. A public-school educa-

> tion does not make for mental clearness, and he possesses to a very high degree the power of confusing his own mind. ("Notes" 11)

10. That economic failure is the result of natural inequality is, in fact, the view of Peter Bauer, whom Amartya Sen has called the most influential of contemporary conservative development economists. Hobson, in 1909, identified the view as a "widely prevalent fallacy to which the personal vanity of lucky or successful men gives vogue" and "one of the new tactics of defence adopted by the possessing classes" ("Higher Tactics" 184).

11. Carey writes: "We saw that E. M. Forster's Leonard Bast eats tinned food, a practice that is meant to tell us something significant about Leonard, and not to his advantage" (21).

12. Other examples of this argument include that of Pat C. Hoy, for whom Leonard's fate illustrates the "tragic failure of well-intentioned intellectual schemes" (222), and that of Douglass Thomson, who claims that Margaret's interference with Leonard sets off a kind of chain reaction, serving as a "catalyst" to Helen's interference and thus to the tragedy (133n7).

13. The narrator is careful to absolve Leonard of naive belief in

> that "bit of luck" by which all successes and failures are explained. "If only I had a bit of luck, the whole thing would come straight. . . . He's got a most magnificent place down at Streatham and a 20 h.-p. Fiat, but then, mind you, he's had luck." . . . Leonard was superior to these people. (40)

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