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E.M. FORSTER: CRITIC AND CREATOR

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines E.M. Forster's criticism and novels in the light of his own literary interests.

As a critic Forster discussed and analysed writers not only in Aspects of the Novel (the title given to the series of Clark lectures Forster gave at Cambridge in 1927) but in essays collected in Abinger Harvest and Two Cheers for Democracy, and also in a series of regular weekly book reviews for the Listener and the Daily News over a forty year period. The aspects fundamental to good and satisfying literature Forster defined as plot, people, fantasy and prophecy, pattern and rhythm. But Forster, as an individual, reacted to much more in the works he examined beyond his lectures. He was much attracted by and sympathetic towards literary experimentation, social analysis, wit and humour, moral integrity and a general human curiosity that could be defined as "spirit of place." His antipathies were intellectual superiority, artistic deliberation and arrogance, aesthetic rigidity and mannerisms and what he called a "temperate heart."

These same interests and antipathies govern both the style and content of his novels. As a creator Forster uses, not necessarily consciously, the aspects of novel creation that he discusses in Aspects of the Novel. His interest is still people and place; his social analysis is witty and perceptive; his message is for connection and commitment and moral integrity; and his plots balance the truth of the individual to be himself against the demands of a socially conformist society. Generally he combines plot, characterization and message by a skillful balancing of technique and content. When he is less successful as a novelist it is usually because the "prophet" and his message have dominated at the expense of the plot. Forster's own use of pattern and rhythm, however, do not fail, and the subtle exploitation of the interior connection of shape in his novels adds both to the reader's pleasure and to the conviction of the novels as a whole.

Forster's interest in people, his humanism, his prophecy and his technical ability combine to produce a very individual critic and novelist.

Notes on the Editions Used

In the text that follows, I have used the following editions of Forster's works:

Aspects of the Novel. 1927; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963.

Howards End. 1910; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975.

The Longest Journey. 1907; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978.

A Passage to India. 1924; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975.

A Room with a View. 1908; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978.

Where Angels Fear to Tread. 1905; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978.

References:

In the first section, 'Critic', quotations taken from Aspects of the Novel are referred to by page number only.

In the second section, 'Creator', the title is abbreviated AN, followed by the page reference; page numbers alone refer to the novel under discussion.

In the footnotes to each section, Abinger Harvest and Two Cheers for Democracy are abbreviated to AH and TCD.