E. M. Forster and the Motor Car

Andrew Thacker University of Ulster

In a revealing recent essay on writing, Englishness and the cultural resonances of different forms of modern transport, John Lucas has drawn attention to how E. M. Forster's *Howards End* (1910) employs the motor car as a 'symbol of intrusive, unsettling power' which disrupts the 'sentimental ruralism' Lucas detects in the novel.[1] In this essay I want to dwell some more upon the role of the motor car in Forster's novel, specifically arguing that the historical emergence of the automobile needs to be located in more detail in order to understand its significance in *Howards End*. The motor car is not just a vehicle for symbolic meanings, as Lucas shows, but also has a powerful influence upon the narrative form of the novel itself. Forster's novel, I suggest, is concerned with attempting to understand a variety of new spaces and spatial experiences, attendant upon modernity, and the theme of the speeding motion of the motor car offers a significant image for comprehending the connections between these new geographies of modernity. By focussing upon the motor car's role in *Howards End* we can begin to place the novel within a spatial history of modernity, showing how this combines with a set of textual spaces where Forster's idiosyncratic modernism can best be appreciated.

Lucas's judgement of the novel's 'sentimental ruralism' establishes the novel within a set of orthodox readings of Forster and modernism that some recent critics have sought to revise. Forster is often portrayed as a writer at odds with the incipient modernism of contemporaries such as Joyce or Woolf. In this vein of critical interpretation Forster is said, as Langland notes, 'to have recourse to a nineteenth-century liberal humanism in

resolving his novels', a strategy that drastically distances him from the mainstream of literary modernism.[2] However, critics such as Jameson, Langland, Meisel, and May have all sought to challenge this view of Forster, claiming of *Howards End* for example, as Meisel does, that the novel 'seeks to catalogue and question the chief ideological assumptions that govern modernist speech' and that it is a 'meditation on modernism at large'.[3] It is within this spirit of a requestioning of received notions of literary modernism, and Forster's place within that history, that I wish to analyse the geographies of modernity within *Howards End*. In this way we open up a Forster whose encounter with the multiple spaces of modernity shows his work to be not pre-modernist, or nearly-modernist, or even anti-modernist, but rather engaged in producing a different **attitude** towards modernity to that exemplified in writers such as Woolf or Joyce.[4] Primarily this different attitude manifests itself in Forster's attention to material and metaphorical spaces in his novel and, as I show, this is most keenly perceived in *Howards End* in the image of the motor car.

'Only connect' stated Forster famously in *Howards End*. But what exactly is to be connected, and more significantly, what is the manner and form of the connections that are represented in Forster's engagement with modernity? The metaphor of connection – of linking the various binary terms such as the prose and the passion, the spiritual and the material that the novel entertains – is related to finding connections between a range of *topoi* and geographies. Forster's novel surveys spaces such as that of the city of London, being busily reconstructed due to rebuilding work and turning Wickham Place, the first home of the Schlegels, into a set of flats. Connected to the city is the 'creeping red rust' of the suburbs inhabited by Leonard Bast and his lower-middle class clerkly compatriots, ensconced in the south and east of the city at a safe distance from the west end inhabited by the Schlegel and Wilcox families. Forster is careful to spell out the social and class nuances of different regions of Edwardian London. Leonard, for instance, is first impressed by the Schlegels only after seeing their card with its West End postcode.[5] The suburbs also intrude upon the country retreat of the Wilcoxes, the eponymous Howards End, and at several key points in the novel Forster eulogises the southern English landscape, particularly at Swanage. The English landscape, however, is part of a novelistic meditation upon the spaces of national identity, the Englishness of the Wilcoxes being juxtaposed against the Germanic Schlegels in a number of places. Another key setting is Oniton, a place on the English/Welsh border which again provides Forster with an opportunity to discuss the national characteristics of certain geographies as well as render in material form the notion of the border that must be crossed if any connection between two places or peoples is to be formed. It is no surprise, for example, that the key plot revelation – of Henry's affair with Jacky Bast – occurs at Oniton, stressing how a certain social class barrier is crossed. These national spaces are also juxtaposed

against repeated references to 'cosmopolitanism', Forster's synonym for modernity itself, where the flux and change of the contemporary world produces inhabitants of a cosmopolitan hue rather than citizens who belong in any specific place.

For Forster the city of modernity perceived in London in 1910 represents the development of a 'nomadic civilisation' (256) or a 'civilisation of luggage', and it is one of the most significant features of this novel that it attempts to make connection with this sense of the movements of modernity. It attempts this connection by trying to find a way to represent these changes, the sense of modernity where, as Marx and Marshall Berman have reminded us, 'all that is solid melts into air'.[6] Forster's novel is obsessed with the notion of the nomadic basis of modernist identities, even though his attitude towards them is defiantly not one of simple celebration, as in certain forms of postmodernist thought.[7] Flux, also, is a key term in *Howards End*: 'I hate this continual flux of London', comments Margaret Schlegel, for it is 'an epitome of us at our worst – eternal formlessness' (184). Forster's struggle is to find a way to represent this key set of experiences, to discover a form to contain the fluxus of modern life, and to uncover a way to connect the modern writer to this central current of contemporary life.

Connection, then, is not merely a trope for fulfilling human relationships in the novel. We should take it at times in a brutal and literal fashion: this is a novel about making connections between different forms of space, and about the experience of moving between these spaces in the process of making connections. This is seen most clearly in the treatment of transport, particularly that of the motor car and the changes it introduced into the experience of space. Throughout the novel the motoring exploits of the Wilcox family function as a profound symbol of technological modernization and its attendant experience of modernity as 'nomadic'. Forster's novel depicts a world where the invention of the internal combustion engine at the end of the previous century resulted in far-reaching changes in the human experience of basic categories of time and space. As one historian of the motor car concludes: 'the motorization revolution … is one of the major hallmarks of modernity, transforming social life [and] the economic system'.[8] In 1910, the year *Howards End* was published, Henry Ford set up his first European car plant in Manchester.[9]

Motoring in Britain in the period before the First World War signified to the Edwardians a deep ambivalence over the course of the disturbances wrought by modernity.[10] At one level the expansion onto the roads represented a kind of individual freedom (for the few wealthy enough to afford cars) previously little known to those accustomed to travel by carriage or train. One guide to motoring in 1914 praised the fact that the motor travel avoided the restrictions to personal liberty of 'the 'time-table' journey' of the railway.[11] Another supporter wrote in 1909 that 'the day of the complete triumph of the motor is at hand' and that in comparison to travel by horse

'the distance traversed [by car] is unlimited'.[12] Here the personal freedoms proffered by motoring are clearly linked to modifications in the perception of space and time, with distant locations now being made much more speedily available. Motoring also represented speed and power, qualities redolent of modernity and change itself, seen in the following description of a first car journey from a writer in 1908: 'Most marvellous of all perhaps were the grand obedience which this instrument gave him (...) the new power it placed at his disposal, the new sensations which it begot, and the new situations which it created and opened out for him'.[13]

Such celebrations presage, in a prosaic fashion, the famous praise for the car found in the Italian avant-garde movement of Futurism. Marinetti, founder of Futurism, visited London first in 1910, and his proselytising for the movement made a great impact upon English artistic groupings.[14] Their founding manifesto of 1909, composed by Marinetti, contains a lengthy description of racing a car through city streets, only to end up crashing into a ditch to avoid hitting two cyclists, hapless symbols of archaic forms of life standing in the way of the modern automobile. The manifesto continues by endorsing one of the main features signalling the modernity of the automobile, its speed: 'We affirm that the world's magnificence has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed. ... We want to hymn the man at the wheel, who hurls the lance of his spirit across the Earth, along the circle of its orbit'.[15] Speed here is closely linked to a geographical sense of the car's vauntless possibilities in criss-crossing the globe, a point found repeatedly in contemporary accounts of motoring.

This awareness of spatial conquest by the car is associated with two other prominent geographical discourses in this period, tourism and imperialism. R. P. Hearne noted that 'the joy of the motorist was as that of a conqueror' and announced with satisfaction that 'the heart of Africa has been penetrated' by the car.[16] Edith Wharton, in *A Motor-Flight Through France* of 1908, celebrated how the 'motor-car has restored the romance of travel'.[17] Berriman's 1914 introduction to the art of motoring includes a number of 'key-maps' of drives around London and elsewhere and devotes a chapter to 'Touring' in which he argues that: 'The motorist, unlike the tourist by rail, finds the best part of his holiday in the journey itself. The best of scenery is never so realistic or picturesque when seen through the framed glass of a railway carriage window as it is from the seat of an open touring car'.[18] This sense of the tourist gaze indicates an important element of modernity also found in *Howards End*'s emphasis upon a 'nomadic civilisation' for, as a later commentator suggests, the motor car brought with it an increased sense of 'through traffic'.[19] People now increasingly passed through places, perhaps glancing briefly at the sights, but not entering into any more permanent relationship with these towns or villages than that of the speeding voyeur. It is this fresh experience of space that Margaret Schlegel rails against towards the conclusion of *Howards End* when she views the growth of suburbs around

London, themselves partly caused by the new access to the city offered by the car : 'This craze for motion has only set in during the last hundred years. It may be followed by a civilization that won't be a movement, because it will rest on the earth' (329).

Margaret's criticism is perhaps more refined than that of other contemporaries, but it does share an unease with the consequences, both social and psychic, of the growth in car ownership. Between 1905 and 1910 car and commercial vehicles ownership increased from around 32,000 to a phenomenal 143,000, putting Britain far ahead of all other countries in the world, except for the U.S., in the number of vehicles upon the roads.[20] This period saw the motor car the subject of a fierce set of debates about the disruptions it threatened to established patterns of life, fears that form the backdrop to Forster's negative image of the car and provide a contrast to those that eulogised the automobile. Here again we see that the focus is often upon the changes in social space represented by the car. If for some the motor car was the 'herald of modernity', for others motoring and motorists were a menace, 'cads on casters' as *Punch* termed them in 1896,[21] drawing attention to the wealth required to own and maintain a car. Car ownership fed Edwardian anxieties about the changing composition of the English class structure in the period, threatening old alliances and unsettling many liberal middle-class commentators.[22]

Forster's criticism of the car consists of two, interconnected, elements. First, it is directed at the financial privilege associated with car-ownership, with the clear identification of the car with the financial magnates, the Wilcoxes, emphasising this association. This view was also found in the prominent social commentator, C. F. G. Masterman, whose *The Condition of England* (1909) was read and drawn upon by Forster. Masterman is very critical of the ostentatious 'waste' of Edwardian wealth, seeing the motor car as one such emblem: 'The action of a section of the motoring classes ... in their annexation of the highways and their indifference to the common traditions, stands almost alone as an example of wealth's intolerable arrogances'.[23] The Automobile Association in 1904 suggested that the average cost of a car was £300, with a yearly expenditure of around £500.[24] In *Howards End* we learn that Margaret Schlegel's yearly income from investments is £600 (72), a figure that puts her comfortably above Leonard Bast, but much below the car-owning Wilcoxes.

Secondly, Forster's portrayal of the 'throbbing, stinking car' (36) stems from his perception that the car is part of a 'new civilization' (10, preface) that he found antipathetic at worst, bewildering at best. In this sense Forster's attitude recalls that of another eminent Edwardian, Kenneth Grahame, who uses the motor-car as an image that disrupts the golden world of *Wind in the Willows* (1908). Behind the wheel, Toad becomes 'the terror, the traffic-queller, before whom all must give way or be smitten into nothingness and everlasting night'.[25] Throughout the Edwardian period the 'terror' of the

car signified in material form the very movements of modernity itself. One dimension of the anxiety attached to these changes is apparent in the discourses around the accidents, the speed and the dust of the motor-car.

Reckless driving caused a number of infamous accidents, such as that of the death of a child caused in 1905 by the son of Alfred Harmsworth the publisher.[26] In *Howards End* there are two significant car accidents, both used to symbolise forthcoming human tragedies. Immediately before the death of Mrs Wilcox in chapter XI Evie and Henry Wilcox cut short their motoring holiday in Yorkshire due to a 'motor smash' (96) with a horse and cart. Later, when Margaret travels to Oniton for Evie's wedding the car in which she is travelling runs over and kills a cat. Despite Margaret's protestations to stop in order to talk to the cat's owner, Charles refuses to stop the car and Margaret jumps out of the moving car, cutting her hand (212). At a simple level Margaret's behaviour displays her faith in intuitive human emotions against the coolly rational Wilcoxes. Margaret feels that although 'she had disgraced herself' (213) the girl whose cat had died had 'lived more deeply' than the Wilcoxes and others in the car: 'she felt their whole journey from London had been unreal. They had no part with the earth and its emotions. They were dust, and a stink, and cosmopolitan chatter' (213). The accident thus indicates what is lost in the espousal of the values symbolised by the car; but it also anticipates the coming revelation at Oniton of Henry's affair with Jacky Bast which leads, indirectly, to Helen's tragic affair with Leonard.[27] The alienation Margaret feels from the motor drive is also an estrangement from the 'cosmopolitan', a shadowy figure in the novel that indicates, yet again, a lack of rooted connection to place and a sense of movement across geographical zones.

The speed of cars, and the fact that the low-speed limits were regularly broken also caused concern for the Edwardians. In 1896 the Red Flag Act repealed the British speed limit of 2 mph and set a new limit of 12 mph.[28] The speed limit was increased again in 1904 to 20 mph, with local councils able to impose a 10 mph limit if they wished.[29] This new speed limit was widely ignored, since cars could already manage speeds of over 120 mph by 1908,[30] and the police in certain counties of England pursued speeders by setting numerous traps for them. In *Howards End* Mrs Wilcox refers to the police traps, 'nearly as bad as in Surrey'(94), being one reason for her husband cutting short his touring holiday; she also feels aggrieved that her husband and their 'careful chauffeur' should be 'treated like road-hogs' (94). Margaret pointedly disagrees with Mrs Wilcox in this description of Henry: 'He was exceeding the speed limit, I conclude. He must expect to suffer with the lower animals' (94). Speeding thus carried with it a sense of improper behaviour, as indicated by a remark in *The Times* for 1903 that road hogs came 'from a class which possess money in excess of brains or culture'.[31]

If for the Futurists the speed of the car signified the rush of modernity itself, others, such as Masterman warned of the future danger when 'life has

become 'speeded-up' to the motor-car level'.[32] Concern at what correspondence in *The Times* called the 'Motor Tyranny' led the government in 1905 to institute a Royal Commission on motoring, with the Prime Minister, Balfour, telling the cabinet:

> public attention has of late been much drawn to the subject of motor cars. Numerous accidents have occurred with which these vehicles have been concerned, and the danger and annoyance caused by them have given rise to great complaint.[33]

Ironically, Balfour himself was one of those prominent car-owners known to have broken the 20 mph speed limit.

The final worry attached to motor cars was the deterioration of the roads, and the increase in dust, due to the increased volume of traffic. The issue of dusty roads became a constant source of annoyance to those who disliked the car, and Forster's first description of a car journey is quick to utilise this contemporary phobia. Charles Wilcox drives Mrs Munt from the station at Hilton to the house at *Howards End*, blowing dust into her eyes, as cars at these time were not likely to have windscreens. He then stops at a village shop:

> he [Charles] turned round in his seat, and contemplated the cloud of dust that they had raised in their passage through the village. It was settling again, but not all into the road from which he had taken it. Some of it had percolated through the open windows, some had whitened the roses and gooseberries of the wayside gardens, while a certain proportion had entered the lungs of the villagers. 'I wonder when they'll learn wisdom and tar the roads,' was his comment. (33)[34]

Charles's disregard for anything other than road quality looks forward to the association of the Wilcox family with modernity and the idea of movement, whether literally as here, or metaphorically, as in Margaret's view that 'Henry was always moving and causing others to move, until the ends of the earth met' (323). Forster's attention to the dusty debris ignored by the Wilcox's rush to traverse space is very similar to one testimony on the distressful effects of motoring presented to the Royal Commission in 1906:

> All the plants under glass were spoiled, all the flowers were spoiled, all the strawberries and grapes were spoiled, and our health was injured. I had an inflamed throat all summer, and my eyes were very troublesome. ... I had to get new typewriters ... in 1902 and I had to change them again this year, they got so gritty.[35]

Aside from the harmful effect upon the body it is interesting to note that this discourse around dust is part of an ongoing spatial conflict between the car

as an emblem of the city, and the rural countryside that is being 'spoiled' by the malignity of modern machinery. As Plowden notes, the 'conflict between motorists and others was partly an urban/rural one' with motorists being 'criticized for endangering relationships between the gentry and the peasantry'.[36] This city versus country opposition echoes throughout *Howards End* and indicates how Forster's ambivalent view of the car is bound up with a variety of other representational spaces in his narrative.

The first description of Ruth Wilcox plays upon her embodiment of the pastoral values of place that are opposed to the zip of the speeding motor-car that has just brought Mrs Munt to Howards End: 'She seemed to belong not to the young people and their motor, but to the house, and to the tree that overshadowed it. One knew that she worshipped the past' (36).[37] Forster's descriptions of Mrs Wilcox continually associate her with a sense of fixed, rooted rural values that are at threat from the modernity of the motor car. We are told later that '[c]lever talk' alarmed Mrs Wilcox for 'it was the social counterpart of a motor-car, all jerks, and she was a wisp of hay, a flower' (84). When we first see Ruth Wilcox she carries a wisp of hay, an emblem that looks forward to the final cutting of the field at the end of the novel and re-emphasises her identification with the pastoral. Her husband, Henry, by contrast suffers from hay-fever as do all the male members of the Wilcox family (268). Forster's use of the motor-car as a symbol of modernity is here clearly linked with a strongly gendered discourse, whereby women represent fixity and stability of rural places and the domestic home, with the Wilcox men representing the city, the car and modernity itself.[38] The male preserve of the smoking-room at the Wilcox's Ducie St house, for example, is associated with the motor-car by their shared upholstery: the men 'smoked in chairs of maroon leather. It was as if a motor-car had spawned' (167).[39]

At the novel's close Helen, commenting upon the 'creeping' 'red rust' of suburbia encroaching upon Howards End, notes that 'London is only part of something else, I'm afraid. Life's going to be melted down, all over the world.' (329) The city and the car exemplify this melting modernity, with the male Wilcoxes also representing this dissolving existence. Early in the novel Helen is fascinated by the 'energy' (37) of the Wilcoxes and throughout the novel they are aligned with what David Harvey terms the experience of 'time-space compression' during periods of capitalist expansion.[40] The Wilcoxes, deeply conservative in political terms, are clearly linked to the forces of technical and commercial modernization that – like the energies of the car – are reshaping material spaces. Without people like the Wilcoxes, says Margaret, 'There would be no trains, no ships to carry us literary people about in, no fields even.' (177) The Wilcoxes, we learn later, have no part 'in any place' (246) but 'They keep a place going' (268). Indeed Henry's association with movement is such that Margaret, exasperated at his inability to settle in the house at Oniton Grange complains: 'Don't you believe in having a permanent home, Henry?' (255). But if the Schlegels have the cultural

insight to reflect upon social space, it is the Wilcoxes who economically produce these spaces.[41]

As Edward Said and Fredric Jameson have noted, Henry Wilcox's work for the Imperial and West African Rubber Company connects the novel to the production of imperial spaces abroad.[42] It is worth stressing, however, how this connection between the metropolis and imperial domains draws upon another kind of movement across space. In Henry's office Margaret views a map of Africa, 'on which the whole continent appeared, looking like a whale marked out for blubber' (196). The rubber industry expanded greatly towards the end of the nineteenth century, with imports from British colonies forming the majority of such trade.[43] The explorers Stanley and Livingstone had both indicated to the rubber industry (which had previously relied upon Amazon rubber) the importance of developing the trade in central Africa.[44] One of the main uses for these imports of rubber was for the pneumatic tyre to equip bicycles and motor cars. The rubber wheels of the Wilcox's motor cars were first invented in 1888 by John Dunlop and bring together the spaces of imperialism and the metropolis with its 'craze for motion'. The Edwardians' need for such materials was even noted in Parliament in 1910: 'The progress of electrical science, of motoring, and even of sports, has caused an enormous advance in rubber'.[45] Henry's work in the rubber industry shows how the text combines different spaces, and that the textual transit in the novel between city and country echoes this wider geographical movement of imperialist trade, one which enables the Wilcoxes quite literally to travel by car from London to Howards End. My point here, then, is not just to stress a particular historical experience of various spaces represented in the novel, but to argue that such an experience of modernist geographies profoundly enters into the narrative shape and style of Forster's text.

One example of this intrusion of social space into textual space is the journey which occurs in chapter 23, when the newly engaged Henry and Margaret are driven from his London office to visit Howards End. The incident is structured around spatial disorientation versus the fixity of place; it also contains, as a kind of ghostly haunting, occluded images of the imperial spaces underpinning the journey. The drive itself, 'a form of felicity detested by Margaret' (198), is not a success; Henry advises Margaret to look at the scenery from the car, but when she does so the landscape 'heaved and merged like porridge' (199). The tourist gaze upon the countryside from the car, much praised by motor enthusiasts, is negated by the narrator's comment that 'Hertfordshire is scarcely intended for motorists' due to the fact that its 'delicate structure particularly needs the attentive eye' (198). The speed of the car thus thwarts this drive with a view, and Forster is quick to link the countryside that is here missed, or which sinks into 'porridge', with a sense of national space: 'Hertfordshire is England at its quietest … it is England meditative' (198). Here we see, yet again, the idea of connection across

different spaces: from Henry's city office, with its imperial business, we move through London suburbs and across an essentially English pastoral space.

However, Forster's point here is not just to show the connectedness of different spaces, but rather concerns the psychic consequences of spatial disturbance brought about by travel. The journey makes Margaret believe that she has 'lost all sense of space' (199), only to regain it when she walks, for the first time, through the inner space of Howards End: 'she recaptured the sense of space which the motor had tried to rob from her' (201).[46] The chapter concludes with Margaret, prompted by the inner sanctum of the house, meditating upon this 'sense of space' in a way that connects different locations. Interestingly, the interiorised narrative here replicates the sense of movement between different spaces that the motor car had offered. Moving through the spaces of modernity can only be achieved, Forster seems to suggest, from a position of fixity; but the crucial fact about Margaret's geographical imagining is the way that connections seem not to settle into a fixed or mapped position. First, she contrasts the size of London with that of Howards End, commenting that 'ten square miles are not ten times as wonderful as one square mile' and that 'the phantom of bigness, which London encourages, was laid for ever when she paced from the hall at Howards End to its kitchen' (201).[47] She then recalls some words of Helen's upon her proposed marriage to Henry: 'You will have to lose something' (201). This comment was made while Helen was 'scrutinizing half Wessex from the ridge of the Purbeck downs' (201) in an earlier chapter which discusses the Englishness of this particular landscape. Margaret, surveying the internal space of Howards End rather than rolling English hills, now disagrees, for 'she would double her kingdom by opening the door that concealed the stairs' (202). What happens here is that personal emotions are conveyed through spatial metaphors that draw upon the significance of actual material spaces – the 'kingdom' of the English nation is transferred into the domestic 'kingdom' that Margaret might possess at Howards End. Margaret's fear of losing her sense of space is also transformed here: she will not lose anything but, in the manner of the imperialist, will gain more space. However, this is not material space but a psychic space represented in her 'kingdom' of the house. The inner life of the spirit and the external life of the material world are one of the key binaries the novel addresses; my point here – one which has not been sufficiently noticed before – is that the opposition owes much to the geographical imagination of the text, and that material spaces, those external to the text, form a key part in the transformation of the metaphorical inner space of the novel itself. As Homi Bhabha comments, à propos Henry James: 'The recesses of the domestic space become the sites for history's most intricate invasions. In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and … the private and public become part of each other'.[48] Reading the novel with this kind of spatial emphasis reveals quite clearly the specific form of Forster's version of modernism.

It is significant that Forster continues this series of transforming spatial metaphors, connecting this gendered space of kingdom back now to the imperial spaces suggested by Henry's work in London:

> Now she thought of the map of Africa; of empires; of her father; of the two supreme nations, streams of whose life warmed her blood, but, mingling, had cooled her brain. She paced back into the hall, and as she did so the house reverberated. (202)

Here Forster, collapsing his narrator into that of Margaret, tries to indicate the connectedness of different spaces, but I think that the dominant sense of this passage – itself as close as Forster comes to a stream of consciousness narration – is ultimately a confused one: for what are the connections between a house, English hills, the two nations of England and Germany, a map of Africa, and the gendering of these spaces? Margaret's 'sense of space' only reveals a cooled brain, a rather odd image indicating an inability to fit together these places in a significant fashion. The narrator is clearly aware that important relations exist between these diverse spaces, but is unable to quite decide what they are, or how they are to be connected. One option might have been for the novelist to suggest that the real connections between such locations can only exist in motion, in provisional though pertinent sets of relations between country, city, empire and house, but that strategy would yield too much to the nomadic claims of the motor car. Forster craves a sense of connection that is rooted in fixed symbols and images; but the thrust of his narrative and the modernity it encounters stresses the process of connection, of the movement through the modern, rather than the representation of space in a finished reified form.

Another way to put this point would be to say that here we see that Forster's novel keeps brushing up against a modernity it can, at times, fully represent, but which it cannot truly – because it does not want to – understand or embrace. Margaret's empty encounter with space here recalls a comment of Buzard in his analysis of Forster's Italian travel novels, *A Room With A View* and *Where Angels Fear To Tread.* Discussing how English characters in these novels are always looking for an 'authentic' experience of Italian otherness, only to somehow miss that which is truly 'Italian', Buzard comments: 'Forster's characters repeatedly enact a failed encounter with the 'real' which they believe themselves to have met'.[49] Some of this perception is also evident in *Howards End*. Margaret's failure here lies in her encounter with the house at Howards End; she believes that this house is the 'real' space from which other spaces can be grasped, but this view is, ultimately, a retreat from connecting diverse spaces together because it is a place of fixity and not flux, an emblem of an enclave from modernity and not a vantage point from which to survey it.

This problematic encounter with a sense of space is repeated in the next

chapter when Margaret stays at Howards End. Henry has to travel to London by car early the next day, and this reminder of the metropolis takes Margaret on a disorientating mental voyage once again: 'Once more she lost the sense of space; once more trees, houses, people, animals, hills, merged and heaved into one dirtiness, and she was at Wickham Place' (204). Margaret's psychic space is here overwhelmed by that of the motor car, and the elliptical narrative here – it takes some attention for the reader to realise 'she was at Wickham Place' only in a metaphorical sense – is yet another instance of Forster's encounter with modernity and a move towards a modernist style where metaphorical and material spaces merge and overlap.

The next paragraph has Margaret repeat her engagement with space:

> Her evening was pleasant. The sense of flux which had haunted her all the year disappeared for a time. She forgot the luggage and the motor-cars, and the hurrying men who know so much and connect so little. She recaptured the sense of space, which is the basis of earthly beauty, and, starting from Howards End, she attempted to realize England. She failed – visions do not come when we try, though they may come through trying. (204)

The moment appears, initially, as an attempt to make sense of national spaces, to convert the abstractions of space into the known realities of place by the process of 'connection'. The 'flux' of the car is replaced by the fixities of place, once again the house. Interestingly, the exercise fails, although Margaret is filled with 'an unexpected love of the island … connecting on this side with the joys of the flesh, on that with the inconceivable'. This strange set of emotions 'had certainly come through the house and old Miss Avery. Through them: the notion of 'through' persisted: her mind trembled towards a conclusion which only the unwise have put into words.' (205). Miss Avery is the housekeeper who, on the previous evening, had disturbed Margaret in the house and, tellingly, had mistaken her for Ruth Wilcox. Characteristically, Forster refuses to spell out the precise significance of this incident; but it seems clear it involves trying to make sense of the spaces of modernity and, furthermore, of trying to understand the idea of moving 'through' them by new forms of transport such as the motor car. It is also a fine textual example of the pressure of 'time-space compression': 'through' here also seems to signify a movement through the years, through the past owners of the house itself.

Flux 'haunts' Margaret, and it is this agitated quality which she is unable to 'realize'. Connections, for Margaret, cannot be made between places that refuse, even temporarily, to stay still. More than this we might say that Margaret's failure here stems from the very nature of **connect** as a word: for it is a verb, a term of action, more allied to the process of flux associated with motors and modernity. In a sense, it is the very experience of modernity that Forster is representing here; an experience not of specific **places** (Howards

End, London, England) but of the processes of spatial production, marked here by the mere concepts of 'flux' and 'through' to which the novelist can gesture, but which he cannot literally represent. As Jameson comments on Forster, it is in these sorts of moments where we can discern the 'modernist style' of the novel, where 'an appearance of meaning is pressed into the service of the notation of a physical perception.'[50] Significantly, in the original manuscripts for the novel the word 'realize' was originally 'visualise', emphasising a form of tourist gaze rather than a cognitive connection.[51] Perception of the house and then England can only be rendered meaningful by the puzzling concepts of 'through', 'realize' or 'connection'. The use of such open signifiers represents Forster's attitude towards modernity, one that is trying to articulate a different form of modernist understanding, beyond the fixed binaries represented in the novel by the Wilcoxes and the Schlegels.

The motor car, then, is an ambivalent symbol in *Howards End*, for although Forster is consistent in his censure of it for encouraging the 'craze for motion' of a nomadic modern life, it is this very quality of moving 'through', as in the through traffic brought by the motor car, that becomes important when Forster's characters try to 'realise' and understand the contemporary world. It is as if the car represents a sense of flux that disrupts an older sense of space, and which pushes the novel, perhaps against its author's wishes, towards a more fully developed modernist narrative. Looking back, later in his life, Forster commented mournfully upon the motif of movement in his work: 'Howards End is a hunt for a home. India is a Passage for Indians as well as English. No resting-place.'[52] In a text like *Howards End* we see an interplay between flux and form, the hunt and the home, with Forster unsuccessfully wishing to use literary and cultural form as a bulwark against the disorientations of modernity. Forster's strategy fails because modernity as flux always seems to burst through the containing strategies of literary form. The motor car, then, becomes the symbol of narrative connection that ultimately disrupts any attempt at a settled structure of balanced binaries in the novel.

By connecting Forster's literary discourse to some historical discourses surrounding motoring I have tried to show how the text is best understood in the context of a spatial history of the experience of modernity. I have drawn attention to the multiple senses of material space that Forster's novel represents – rooms, houses, cities, suburbs, and nations – and I have linked these social spaces with psychic space, most notably shown in Margaret's problematic encounter with 'flux'. The motor car seems also to represent quite directly a 'struggle over geography' that involved conflict over the new spaces of modernity, such as the relation between city, suburb and countryside.[53] Another key set of spaces that the novel explores is that of the links between the flux of the metropolitan motor car and the economic flows of imperial trade. Forster makes an explicit linkage of the motor car and the figure of 'the Imperial … ever in motion. … he prepares the way for

cosmopolitanism' (pp. 314–15). Reading the novel in this spatial, or literary geographical fashion, produces a considerably more interesting novel than an interpretation that only stresses Forster's failure to accomodate the more familiar modernist techniques in the novel, such as corrosive irony or a stream of consciousness narration.

I finish with one final image of the battle between flux and form in Forster's novel. Musing upon the opposition between a life devoted to a world of the spirit and one concerned with material gain, Margaret recalls, and dismisses, Aunt Juley's claim that the truth of life lies halfway between these two ideas: 'No; truth, being alive, was not halfway between anything. It was only to be found by continuous excursion into either realm, and, though proportion is the final secret, to espouse it at the outset is to ensure sterility' (pp. 195–96). This gives the lie to those readings of the novel that focus solely upon the neat structuring features of the narrative. The spatial imagination of the motor car is the key to an interpretation that finds a different, and on-going, attitude towards modernity in the novel. The modernism of *Howards End*, I would suggest, lies within its 'continuous excursion' rather than its sense of 'proportion' which remains, in this text at least, a secret whose hidden spaces it is our function as readers to discover and connect.

Notes

1 John Lucas, 'Discovering England: The View from the Train', *Literature and History*, 6:2 (1997), p. 38.

2 Elizabeth Langland, 'Gesturing Towards an Open Space: Gender, Form and Language in *Howards End*' in Jeremy Tambling (ed.), *E. M. Forster: New Casebook* (Basingstoke, 1995), p. 81.

3 Perry Meisel, *The Myth of the Modern: A Study in British Literature and Criticism after 1850* (New Haven and London, 1987), p. 169; Fredric Jameson, *Modernism and Imperialism*, (Derry: Field Day Pamphlet, 1988) and Brian May, *The Modernist as Pragmatist: E. M. Forster and the Fate of Liberalism* (Columbia and London, 1997). From a slightly different perspective, Richard Sennett interprets *Howards End* as a key text for what it reveals about early twentieth-century attitudes in western Europe to the city and modernity; see Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization* (London, 1994).

4 I am using the term 'attitude towards modernity' in the way suggested by Michel Foucault in his essay, 'What is Enlightenment?', in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (London, 1984), p. 39.

5 E. M. Forster, *Howards End* (1910), (Harmondsworth, 1983); all further references to this will be in the main text.

6 See Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, (London, 1983).

7 The politics of the nomad have, in the work of Deleuze and Guattari, become a fashionable way to try to comprehend our present situation of post-modernity and, in particular, a sense of the fluid rather than the fixed basis of post-modern identities and subjectivities. Yet again we find that the texts of modernism seem to have encountered these issues in a previous age, albeit in different contexts. For an

overview and critique of tropes of travel and the nomad in recent theory see Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham, NC and London, 1996), ch. 2.

8 Richard Overy, 'Heralds of Modernity: Cars and Planes from Invention to Necessity', in M. Teich and Roy Porter (eds), *Fin de Siècle and its Legacy* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 54. The most thorough recent survey of the impact of the motor car is found in Sean O'Connell, *The Car in British Society: Class, Gender and Motoring 1896–1939* (Manchester, 1998).

9 John Stevenson, *British Social History 1914–45*, (Harmondsworth, 1984), p. 27.

10 Stephen Kern traces this ambivalence in relation to the speed of the car in *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), ch. 5.

11 Algernon E. Berriman, *Motoring: An Introduction to the Car and the Art of Driving it* (London, 1914), p. 32.

12 C. W. Brown, *ABC of Motoring* (London, 1909), pp. 7, 8.

13 R. P. Hearne, *Motoring* (London, 1908), p. 6.

14 See Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (Basingstoke, 1995), pp. 172–73 and Giovanni Cianci, 'Futurism and the English Avant-Garde: The Early Pound between Imagism and Vorticism', *Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, 1 (1981), pp. 3–39.

15 F. Marinetti, 'The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism' in Umbro Apollonio (ed.), *Futurist Manifestos*, (London, 1973), p. 21.

16 Hearne, *Motoring*, pp. 6, 5.

17 Edith Wharton, *A Motor Flight Through France* (1908), (London, 1995), p. 17.

18 Berriman, *Motoring: An Introduction*, p. 30. This point is also made by Wharton.

19 William Plowden, *The Motor Car and Politics in Britain*, (Harmondsworth, 1973), p. 15.

20 Plowden, *Motor Car and Politics*, p. 65.

21 Cited in Peter Roberts, *The Motoring Edwardians*, (London, 1978), p. 46.

22 For discussion of this issue see the essays in Robert Colls and Philip Dodd, *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880–1920* (London, 1986) as well as José Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: Britain 1870–1914* (Harmondsworth, 1994).

23 C. F. G. Masterman, *The Condition of England* (London, 1909), p. 65.

24 Plowden, *Motor Car and Politics*, p. 23.

25 This point is made in Overy, 'Heralds of Modernity', p. 73.

26 See Plowden, *Motor Car and Politics*, p. 5; for figures on accidents see Kern, *Culture of Time and Space*, p. 113.

27 It might also be said that, as Wright notes, Leonard's death is also partly caused by the motor car, as he is overtaken by Charles in his car when walking from Hilton to Howards End; see Anne Wright, *Literature of Crisis 1910–22*, (London, 1984), p. 31.

28 Plowden, *Motor Car and Politics*, p. 4.

29 Plowden, pp. 42–3.

30 See Hearne, *Motoring*, p. 5.

31 Cited in Plowden, *Motor Car and Politics*, p. 27.

32 Masterman, *Condition of England*, p. 23.

33 Cited in Plowden, *Motor Car and Politics*, p. 58.

34 Ironically, it was only in 1910 that roads were first tarred; see Plowden, *Motor Car and Politics*, p. 85.

35 Cited in Plowden, *Motor Car and Politics*, p. 60.

36 Plowden, *Motor Car and Politics*, pp. 23–4.
37 Kern notes how the phenomenon of speed associated with the car produced a reactive nostalgia for the perceived slowness of the past; see Kern, *Culture of Time and Space*, pp. 129–30.
38 Trilling, discussing how the novel represents the conflict between the sexes, notes that the car is 'the totem of the Wilcox males'; see Lionel Trilling, *E. M. Forster: A Study* (London, 1969), p. 109.
39 A point suggested by Wright, *Literature of Crisis 1910–22*, p. 31.
40 David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 20–22.
41 We learn, for example, that Henry has shares in Teddington Lock, a project designed to control the flow of the Thames to assist trade.
42 See Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London, 1994), p. 77; and Jameson, *Modernism and Imperialism*. I am using production here in the sense that Lefebvre does: all space is the result of human activity, and bears the marks of this productive activity; see Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford, 1991), pp. 84–85.
43 William Woodruff, *The Rise of the British Rubber Industry During the Nineteenth Century*, (Liverpool, 1958), p. 38.
44 Woodruff, p. 39.
45 Bernard Porter, *The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism 1850–1983*, 2nd. ed., (London, 1984), p. 222.
46 This fear of a loss of space also occurs in Forster's early short story, 'The Machine Stops'; see Forster, *Collected Short Stories* (Harmondsworth, 1954), p. 125.
47 Also see *Howards End*, p. 43, for a discussion of the 'bigness' of imperialism: city and empire are linked here because both expand over space.
48 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York, 1994), p. 9. Bhabha is discussing *Portrait of a Lady*.
49 James Buzard, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature and the Ways to 'Culture' 1800–1918*, (Oxford, 1993), p. 314. It is interesting to note that although Charles Wilcox honeymoons in Italy, what 'he enjoys most is a motor tour in England' (p. 81).
50 Jameson, *Modernism and Imperialism*, p. 15.
51 Forster, *The Manuscripts of Howards End*, ed. Oliver Stallybrass (London, 1973), Abinger Edition, vol. 4a, p. 208.
52 Forster, 'A View without a Room' (1958); appendix to *A Room with a View* (Harmondsworth, 1978), p. 232.
53 The phrase, 'struggle over geography', is taken from Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 6.

Address for Correspondence

Andrew Thacker, Department of English, University of Ulster at Jordanstown, Newtonabbey BT37 0QB, e-mail: aj.thacker@ulst.ac.uk