

LIBERAL HUMANISM OF E.M.FORSTER WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO A ROOM WITH A VIEW

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ABSTRACT

At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, many novelists continued to practice the act of novel writing based on their predecessors. But two novelists stood apart and these two novelists included George Moore and Henry James; both aliens to England. They held different perceptions about the role of the novelist and fiction in public. "The novelist, must preliminarily decide through whose eyes the proposed narration may, most profitably, be viewed" and he must rigorously exclude himself as public commentator or chorus. The only point of view is that of the author", observed Henry James in his Art of fiction Henry James', this perception of the novelist had its influence on a few novelists which included E M Forster, the liberal humanist. This had influenced James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, Virginia Woolf whose works had the appreciation of E M Forster who belonged to the fag end of the Edwardian era.

KEYWORDS: Perception, fiction, novelist, narration, influence, liberal humanism

INTRODUCTION

In Forster's Aspects of the Novel, he expounds the Jamesian theory only to reject or minimize it. It is dangerous; he thinks for the writer to take the reader into the novelists' confidence about the universe is a different thing. It is not dangerous for a novelist to draw back from his characters, as Hardy and Conrad do and to generalize about the conditions under which he thinks life is carried on'. To him, the novelist must, out of elementary artistic decency, foresee. As the characters develop, the author interprets, concomitantly, their states of sensibility; he must keep his dramatic or factual surprises until they reach and take on or off the guard, his persons. If the novelist be a man of wisdom as well as mimetic power his imaginative self can assuredly, only with loss are spared from the dramatis personae. He should move among his characters though certainly not as a man among dolls; he is to be cast as the most deeply seeing member of a company.

This implies that E M Forster declines to restrict the novelists' liberties. The richness of the novel, for him, lies in the range of levels: The story, the characters- then inner life, the plot, the fantasy and so on. A novel must be more a memoir and is history; it is based on evidence and it is the function of the novelist wishes, their inner vision as well as their outer life can be exposed. If on the other hand, the inner life becomes all, then the novel turns into a psychological treatise and the persons decompose into their continent moods and intermittences. The function of a novel, to Forster is that of a persuasive equilibrium; it must balance the claims of the existence and the essence of personalities and ideas. To him, values are more important than the facts and the real values are friendship, intellectual exploration, insight and imagination, the values of inner life.

With this perception of the role of the novelist and the function of a novel, Forster, did not seem to have written his novels though. However, it can be said that most of them are written

as ethical rather metaphysical arguments. But they exhibit the same dogmatically imposed form, which can be found in three of his novels, namely *Howards End*, *A Passage to India* and *A Room with a View*. E M Forster's novels are at best triumphs of a personal attitude expressed in a special tone of voice.

E M Forster has been a great spokesman of the liberal tradition, agnostic, anti-imperialistic, anti-authoritarian concerned with social justice. 'My motto, is Lord. I disbelieve, Help thou my unbelief'. Fundamental to his public attitude has been his faith in the holiness of the hearts, experiences as a young man at Cambridge with its emphasis on personal relations, rational discourse and disinterestedness.

Forster is fundamentally, a tragic humanist for whom man is justified by his self awareness and by the fruits of his imagination, by the arts especially by music. He is the advocate of balance of the whole man, but man is rarely balanced and few can be said to be whole. The criticism of lack of balance, of lack of wholeness is the impulse behind his first four novel- *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, *The Longest Journey*, *A Room with a View* and *Howards End*. In all these novels he analyses the undeveloped heart.

As he has said in his *Howards End*, Only Connect is the motto. Only connect the passion and the prose as the motto of the novel. In the *Howards End*, there is an attempt at reconciliation. It is a novel about the state of England. E m Forster was 'a novelist who wanted Bring out the enjoyment. If classics are advertised as something dolorous and astringent no one will sample them. But if the cultured person like the late Roger Fry, is obviously having a good time, those who come across him will be tempted to, share it and to find out how. But in his own works there was no humour- a source of enjoyment. What were the lacunae- the lack of humour. However that Forster was a consistent moralist, an intellectual cannot be denied. He always addresses himself primarily and almost exclusively to those who share his assumption. He is one of the few modern English writers whose work reveals the process of assimilation and growth of a genuine sensibility by which we mean something different from style or technique or learning. It is as rare among poets as among novelists for determination and a certain amount of verbal skill often suffice for the production of reputable verse. It is not a manner, though Forster wrote much that is only mannered. It is a quality of interest, sympathy and judgement which no more to be achieved by the activity of the will than the idyllic effect of the Hardy's prose and poetry. To acknowledge this genuine, experiencing centre in all Forster's work is as important as making up once mind about the variable quality of the writing in each of his books. Because of this principle of life and growth, he remained consistently responsive to new people, new books and new lands.

With all these virtues Forster appears to be a fine representative humanist and liberal. The special value of his novels is that they enable us to dispense with labels and slogans so that we may examine human relationships and motives more inwardly and completely in terms of presented experience. Forster himself like every great novelist was both craftsmen and creator. He has warned us that much of what seems technical cleverness was not consciously contrived and his writing of a novel was itself a process of discovery. Virginia Woolf, dividing novelists into preachers and teachers on the one hand and pure artists on the other recognized Forster as a person with a strong impulse to belong to both camps at once. He possessed many of the instincts and aptitudes of the pure artists- an exquisite prose style, a power of creating characters in a few strokes which live in an atmosphere of their own; he is

at the same time highly conscious of a message: For all his long commitment to the doctrines of liberalism, Forster is at war with the liberal imagination. Behind the style, characters and a message there is a vision which he is determined that we shall see.

Forster had a discontent for the middle-class manners which deepened into a recognition of the difficulty of all good relationship especially without the mediation of a common religious tradition and vocabulary. His clergymen were all facets of Sawston worldiness and self importance.

He never attempted to describe religious vocation from the inside partly because the inside of many other writers of his time Forster too doubled the value of fashionable literary Christianity. "But the satire against the Reverend Mr. Eagar and Reverend Mr. Beebe in A Room with a View would be still more effective if we could be clearer about their rationalist Mr. Emerson with the face of a saint who understood" Observes Klingo Pulos.

The fact that the gout stricken Mr. Emerson takes refuge instinctively in the rectory study, its walls lined with black bound theology is surely meant to carry meaning, though to Lucy it seemed dreadful that the old man should crawl into such a sanctum when he was unhappy and be dependent on the bounty of the clergyman also the use of the words like agnostic, liberal, septic, anti-clericalist suggest an attitude that is unlike Forster's.

In his treatment of personal relations the bent of interest manifests itself in the manner and the accent of his pre-occupation with sincerity. His pre-occupation with emotional vitality, with the problem of living truly and freshly from a centre leads him outside the limits of consciousness. The intention is obvious in his way of bringing in association, love and sudden death in A Room with a View (chapter-4). Pre-eminently a novelist of civilized personal relations, he has it the same time a radical dis-satisfaction with civilization of personal intercourse that he knows.

The responsibility of the novelists in the nineteenth century was to offer his readers a story; apart from that and within the bounds of Victorian tales he might provide what extras he would he might preach the new ethics, expound the nature of things, prophecy the future actions of his characters or the future of human characters. He was also free to pass in and out of their minds exerting the omniscience of his own vision. At the end of the century when almost all novelists continued the same practice, Henry James and George Moore who were alien to England didn't do so. They instead busied themselves in devising an art of fiction. James found a break through his chief dogma the point of view technique. The novelist, they felt must preliminarily designed through whose eyes the proposed narration made profitably be viewed or he may decide to use a series of instruments in turn. They also felt (particularly James) that the author must rigorously exclude himself as public, commendation or chorus. This perception of a novel and a novelist commanded the respect of subsequent novelists of James times and his influence upon them became impressive. Consciousness of form, marked the work of authors like James Joyce, Woolf, Hemingway and others. Hemingway removed the dialogue from the novel.

Mrs. Virginia Woolf deleted almost all that defined the stream of consciousness. E M Forster who had full and appreciative acquaintance with the work of Joyce and Mrs. Woolf and who had Jane Austen, Samuel Butler, Dostovski expounds the Jamesarian theory in his Aspects of the novel only to reject it or to minimize it. It is dangerous he thinks for the writer to take the reader into his confidence about his characters but to take the reader into the writer's

confidence about the universe is a different thing. It is not dangerous for a novelist to drawback from his characters and to generalize about the conditions under which he thinks life is carried on. He further observes in Aspects that to be sure the novelist must not anticipate, publicly that future end of his characters which he must, out of elementary artistic decency, foresee. As the characters develop the author interprets, concomitantly, their states of sensibility; he must keep his dramatic or factual surprises until they reach and take on or off their guard, his persons. But it can impair no proper aesthetic faith that the novelist should articulate such observations and insights upon humanity at large as a conduct of his personae may suggest if the novelist be a man of wisdom as well as mimetic power. Literary traditions are complex things and necessary to sketch in the outlines of one and indicate a few of its landmarks, is a liable to do injustice to its richness and variety. But in this case the line of development which must surely have had a profound influence both upon the pattern of values to be found in the novels and on the method used to deploy it- is a very familiar one and it is only Forster's association with it which seems to have been insufficiently acknowledged. His strategy in all his novels is basically a sample one and may be summed in the best confrontation. He presents a society which has naturalism, Philistinism some of the more inhibiting forms of Puritanism and by a binding complacency engendered by a confident sense of its own entrenchment. In all his novels, the Swastan attitudes survive happily enough in all places and do not budge even when transplanted to a remote place. In the world of Forsterian novels, the spokesman all use essentially the same language but this language is sharply challenged in all novels. In doing so, what occurs is an opposition to Swastan. There are two voices that oppose the Sawston attitude. The two voices are similar in that they are both on the side of life- of a clearer, richer and deeper perception of human personality and human relations than Sawston. Forster invokes these two voices and implores the virtues and limitations of each, through out the novels. Sometimes Forster is upholding Nature and instinct as the ideal. But his attitude is equivocal. It is time that there is a Dionysian element more or less strong, in all the novels. For instances it is there in the whole portrayal of Stephen in the bathing scene in A Room with a View where the silent pool in the woods near Forster's village of Abinger in Sarrey becomes a sacred lake.

In A Room with a View as in the words of Lionell Trilling, Forster leads us to make the typical liberal discovery that Ms. Bartlett, the poor relation who thinks she is acting from duty, is really acting from a kind of malice. She has been trying to recruit the unawakened heroine into the 'Armies of the benighted who follow neither the hot nor the brain. But Forster does not stop here for when the heroine at last fulfils her destiny, deserts Ms. Bartelett and marries the man she had unconsciously loved. She comes to perceive that in some yet more hidden way Ms. Bartlett had really desired the union. And we have been prepared for this demonstration of the something still further behind the apparent by the action of the pleasant and enlightened clergyman, Mr. Beebe who has ceased to be the angel of light and a set himself against the betrothal".

Forster's people both the men and women are gentle and wise. In A Room with a View we have a modified possessive lover in Lucy Honeychurch. The men are either like the athletic young heroes whose physical beauty and strength are the spiritual grace. These men are of two different categories- the ones who are defeated and corrupt and those who are triumphant and bring salvation. George Emerson of A Room with a View is the young man who is

endowed with a brain and sensibility and he equipped with an English conscience, The hearts or the brains are the conscience of these young man are nourished by their physical. They have the gift of love and as old as Emerson says

“Love is of the body- not the body but of the body”.

A Room with a View, the title of this book might stand for title of all his work. He reveals in minute and exact detail the room and its contents; the patterned paper on the walls, the sofas and antimacassars, the elaborate, grotesque, or stuffy artifice of conventional construction and beyond he shows the ‘view’: outside man’s handiwork judging sometimes condemning, always disturbing, the contented occupants of the artificial arena. Dawn flares through the blinds, the sunset cast haunting shadows on the carpets and cushions, outside is the sound of tempest or the challenging silence of the night; the conflict amongst all his characters set in the moment where two entities meet, which is always a moment of supreme choice, arises just from the fact that although their natural and accepted habit approves of the orderly comfort of the ‘room’, there is within all of them some wild or exultant element which responds to the high calling of the view.

Forster’s application of Aspects of Novel in his book A Room with a View clearly shows that how best Forster tried to make clear the limitations of the cultured middle class. He achieves it perfectly. He makes his characters reveal themselves with complete naturalness and self condemnation. Yet they all show their virtues as well as their follies.

Thus A Room with a View is one of the cleverest and entertaining novels. The story too is interesting and real. In all his novels, the established middle class order is faced with a crisis, a premonition of insufficiency under the guise of that crisis, Mr. Forster is reflecting his own in each of his recurrent sets of characters. He introduces a young heroine, a woman with dormant possibilities are brought into play by the central ‘shock’ of whose nature and extent they become only gradually aware. The author shows this aspect in Mr. Emerson and son George. The concept of double vision is in accordance with Forster’s rendering of the ‘view’ in A Room with a View. (that is the fulfillment of heart’s desires and Pagon thirst). Frustration and fulfillment of physical life seem to be the two aspects of Mr. Forster’s double vision in the Italian romances. The central issue is in Forster’s words, “the holiness of the heart’s desire” and Lucy, the heroine of the novel has to face it squarely. It is the Emersonian philosophy of passion, that passion is sacred and true and that it is in man’s inmost need which he should recognize and respond to positively. Physical reality, passion and love are the central core of A Room with a View and the characters and the situation in the novel revolve around their junction. Forster has flawlessly copied this important aspect ‘Plot’ in his Aspects of Novel as one of the Clark’s lectures. Forster’s fictional manner is Victorian, that he is visibly the child of English middle class liberalism, a liberalism that has an evident historical location in the heyday of the advanced, but wealthy, intellectual bourgeoisie. Forster has derived much from the Victorian intellectual tradition, particularly from such reforming phases of it as the Clapham Sect, with which his own family was linked. He derived much from the romantic debate which continued through the nineteenth century and into the twentieth.

Only the fag end of that Victorian liberalism, remained in which his humanism was rooted; and he was anxious that this much at least of a vital tradition survive in the difficult days ahead. The humanism which Forster defended with 1930’s and the 1940’s had its origins in

many strands of eighteenth and nineteenth century culture. He was an eclectic deriving his ideas from various sources; he admits in *Aspects of the Novel* his eclecticism. The novelists of Victorian period had the greater power to fuse the social purpose and dramatic imagination; and also as a humanitarian force. Forster is no exception to be placed in the queue of the other novelists like Jane Austen, Hardy, Richardson and few others.

A Room with the View is not a failure. There are certain weaknesses to be noted. As Miss Macaulay puts it, "a curious spinsterish inadequacy in the immediate presentation of love and old Emerson though not a disaster, leads one to question the substantiality of the wisdom that he seems intended to represent". E m Forster's works show peculiar distinction among Edwardian novelists which can also be justified. The critic who deals so damagingly with Meredith in *Aspects of the Novel* is potentially there in the genuineness of the element in Forster's early novels that sets them apart by themselves in the period of Arnold Bennett, Wells and Galsworthy. Though he had been credited with that distinction, one has to admit that in comparison with that distinction, one has to admit that in comparison with the major contemporary practitioners, he appears very differently. There are the two to whom he owes much- Henry James and Meredith. Forster's art has to be recognized as only too unmistakably minor. Forster's setting up of plot characters are something wonderful with realism. Then we recognize, in its complex ironic pattern and its really startling psychological insight, the art of a master whose depiction of human behavior is not marginal and whose knowledge of passion is profound.

The personal distinction of style might give Mr. Forster an advantage over Mr.L.H.Myers. The comparative reference to Mr.L.H.Myers suggests a return to the question of Mr. Forster's representative significance. When one has recognized the interest and values his work has representing liberal culture in the early years of the twentieth century, there is perhaps a temptation to see the weaknesses too simply as representative. That the culture has of its very nature grave weaknesses too simply as representative. That the culture has of its very nature grave weakness Mr. Forster's works itself constitutes an explicit recognition. But it seems worthwhile insisting at this point on the measure in which Mr. Forster's weaknesses are personal ones, qualifying the gifts that have earned him a lasting place in English Literature. He seems then, for one so perceptive and sensitive extraordinarily lacking in force or robustness, of intelligence; it is perhaps a general lack of vitality. The deficiencies of the novels must be correlated with the weakness so apparent in his critical and journalistic writings- *Aspects of the Novel*, *Abinger Harvest* -----the weakness that makes them representative in so disconcerting a way. They are disconcerting because they exhibit a lively critical mind accepting, it seems, uncritically the very inferior social- intellectual milieu in which it has developed.

Forster continually explored life's dichotomies and their reconciliation within the larger framework of the sensibility. A realization of the complexities and gradations in experience was a principal revelation for him in Cambridge. There a "magic fusion" of opposing but complimentary entities took place for him no less than for Dickens. Body and spirit, reason and emotion, work and play, architecture and scenery, laughter and seriousness, life and art -- -- these pairs which are every where contrasted were there fused into one. People and books reinforced one another , intelligence joined hands with affection, speculation became a passion and discussion was made profound by love. Writing of Dickens twenty years later,

Forster asserted that Greek literature, which Forster came to know well at Cambridge, most cogently unifies our perceptions, beauty and depth, wisdom and wit, gaiety and insight, speculation and ecstasy, carnality and spirit.

Ultimately, the essence of life eludes definition; and its circumstances are often unpredictable, since it is in some degree haphazard and chaotic, it cannot devolve in purely ordered patterns. In Forster's world, as Hyatt Waggoner says, often do not know enough to control natural, let alone moral evil, even if, as we have seen, Forster conceives the humanists responsibility to be that of utilizing reason to secure the greatest degree of internal and external order. Even before Freud became popular Forster had been aware of the latent irrationalities of human nature --- the casual street murder of one Florentine by another in *A Room with a View*.

Life is not only irrational and unpredictable but it resists our attempts to define it with precision. It is replete with ambiguities, the ramifications of which are difficult to trace with sureness. Forster's consciousness of the presence of evil forces in human nature and in society informs the confessional 'what I believe'.

We can believe still in the residual goodness of human nature; we can with respect to human possibilities, still "shelter a flickering flame". Forster concludes that earthly life is not a failure but a tragedy principally because it is difficult to translate private decencies into public ones.

"History develops and art stands still is a crude motto"

Says Forster. Now we examine how far Forster has proved the statement. He might have felt that history and art put together with the principles of tradition each generation has presented the picture of life. He feels that the generation changes beyond thousands of years can be accepted but not within three to four hundred years. There cannot be remarkable changes. *A Room with a View* is a good example. Lucy chooses a person who expresses his feelings in such a way she need not have to be inquisitive to know what his personality is! The clear view of the room she gets from George's heart. Whereas Cecil's she could not get any idea except hypocritical attitude or the ignorance of his own personality. He failed to understand that what exactly the people want from others and how best one can satisfy the others. Now the question arises as to whether we can see the changes in the life style in modern society. Almost all matters of life and the conflict still prevail in day-to-day life though 'the emancipation of women' is the main topic of the lectures all over the world; but still anticipating a change Forster has created a character Lucy who according to the novel has already achieved the liberation (of her choice).

The people including Forster, have set themselves to define the difference between the real life which we live and the life which the arts present to us. That such a difference exists is in itself is sufficient indication of how advanced we are. Various processes have led to the existence of these conditions and the most important is the artist's practice of 'selection'. "Most of life" says Mr. Forster, for example, "is so dull that there is nothing to be said about it." Mrs. Virginia Woolf seems to suggest that the whole of life is so significant that not one fleeting impression should be missed; the fact remains that the real life is chaotic and formless, and the artist is faced with the problem of confining his impressions of that life into a space which is infinitely smaller than itself and at least one of the dimensions removed).

“Forster deals with illusion and reality but his characters are not measured, primarily against a commonly accepted social norm; they are judged, rather by the ideal standards of the “Beloved Republic”. Forster’s “good” characters are transparent, in that they can see into themselves and others and usually have some insight into “the unseen” as well while his bad characters are opaque; but Lucy Honeychurch, move rather uncertainly from opacity to transparency. (when George Emerson kisses Lucy Honeychurch, first in violation of all standards of conventional respectability and later in violation of all standards of conventional honor.

From the beginning of the story of the spiritual adventure of George Emerson Lucy Honeychurch, the chief protagonists have some advantage denied to their contemporaries; weak places (as it were) in the wrappings of convention, which may wear thin through the influence of the circumstance and leave them exposed to naked reality. George –from start to finish a rather shadowy, indefinite figure – is the son of a father who has refused to accept the recognized standards, just because they are the standards which are recognized. His revolt, indeed is as much on the surface as the standards themselves: it is not a revolt from the depth; and his protest of emancipation come in the end to exhibit themselves as ridiculous and as tedious as the normal praises of imprisonment. But he has been teaching his son. ‘He has the merit’, is the explanation of the clergy man of saying exactly what he means.

And Lucy though springing from and encompasses by convention has radiant youth on her side and music with a reaction also intensifying in bitterness against her cousin and companion Miss. Bartlett, a spinster too obviously dedicated to the worship of false gods. In her playing, passion was there but it could not be easily labeled: it slipped between love and hatred and jealousy; and all the furniture of the pictorial style. And she was tragical only in the sense that she was great, for she loved to play on the side of victory and she is not unmoved also by the general spirit of revolt and vague disturbance which has come to one who ‘reigned in many an early Victorian castle and was queen of much Early Victorian song.’

The conclusion, however, is not easily arrived at, for Lucy with all her charm and intelligence, belongs to that not inconsiderable tribe of people who habitually misinterpret their genuine instincts. Periods of rebellion alternate with periods of abject slavery. To make matters worse, she relies, at a critical period in her development on the judgement of her cousin, who is an excruciatingly conscientious prude. The gradual emancipation of Lucy from Charlotte’s influence and that of other representatives of narrow minded conventionality is illustrated with subtlety and humour and it is much to the credit of Mr. Forster that while enlisting the sympathies of his readers on the side of Lucy in her struggles towards self-assertion, he by no means fails to render justice to those who thwart and resist her.

Excellent also the portrait of Cecil Vyse, the blameless cultured young man who was perfectly at his ease with books and pictures, but incapable of reading the hearts of men and women. With a touch of fantastic humour, more surprising than convincing, Mr. Forster discovers in Cecil an element of nobility, in the hour of his defeat; while Mr. Beebe, the witty tolerant and conciliatory clergyman, develops a vein of inhumanity at the close for which we are not sufficiently prepared.

Mr. Forster's novel lends itself readily to quotation, but we must content ourselves with only a few extracts. Thus Mrs. Honeychurch's crudely practical point of view is happily illustrated by her explanation of her son's hostility to his prospective brother-in-law.

There are no heroic people in this novel, but Mr. Forster has the happy knack of making stupid people interesting and iresome people amusing. And he has a gift for dialogue which should stand him in excellent stead if he ever turns his attention to the stage.

CONCLUSION:

By way of conclusion, it can be said that in *A Room with a View* that was planned as a comic work in 1903, Forster celebrates the victory of love and truth over muddle and also its a philosophical novel that provides an unorthodox twist to the traditional comedy of manners. All these are done in a pastoral setting where an English man on holiday can find their hearts' desire aided by Italians who are the shepherds and nymphs of pastoral masquerading as guides and other attendants upon tourists.

In Italy of *A Room with a View*, national differences are no longer of the first importance. Italy acts as a catalyst for George Emerson and Lucy giving them the simple opportunity finding each other from the distant poles of their upbringing.

The message in *A Room with a View* is to throw away your etiquette books and listen to your heart and what is suggested is that passion should believe itself irresistible which means belief in the natural, the spontaneous, the unashamed, the body as the tenement of spirit, as opposed to the inhibitions of false culture and the respectable superstitions.

Yes, *A Room with a View* fulfils all the aspects that a novel should have – the story, the people, the plot, fantasy, prophecy, pattern and rhythm.

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