"A World Hollowed Out"

An Exploration of the Spatial Imaginings in the Novels of Virginia Woolf and E.M. Forster

by

Amy Mittelman

"A World Hollowed Out"

An Exploration of the Spatial Imaginings in the Novels of Virginia Woolf and E.M. Forster

by

Amy Mittelman

A thesis presented for the B.A. degree

with Honors in

The Department of English

University of Michigan

Spring 2008

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Scotti for making the honors program into an experience that truly guided each of us through the thesis process, and yes, even made it fun. Thanks to my thesis core who kept me laughing throughout the process, even when I wanted to cry.

To my friends who listened to constant ramblings about my new, other friends, Virginia and Morgan, thank you for being so accommodating—I promise they don't have to come out with us ever again.

A very special thank you to John, without whom I could never have completed this process. His critical but supportive eye, his intellectual guidance, and his continued enthusiasm for my project allowed me to explore my writing in ways that have been instructive and, maybe every once in a while, really exciting.

Last but not least, I have to thank my parents, who constantly told me that I was brilliant, capable, and cool. You may have been lying, but I love you for it.

Abstract

Bloomsbury has long been synonymous with a movement that progressively revolutionized thinking about literature, politics, and art. The name recalls liberal notions of gendered spaces, avant-garde art exhibitions, and innovative ideas about the politics of economy and war. But, at its most basic, Bloomsbury is a group centered around the importance of space, an entity that forms the base on which many of their ideologies are established.

This thesis will attempt to establish the importance of space not only for the formation of the Bloomsbury Group itself, but also for the synthesis of the literature they produced; it explores the spatial manifestations within Bloomsbury history and Bloomsbury literature, more specifically within the novels of Virginia Woolf and E.M. Forster.

The first chapter will examine space in Virginia Woolf's first novel, *The Voyage Out*. Woolf makes us believe that there is a link between the increase of space and an increase of freedom—until she complicates the correlation by reminding the reader of the consequences of venturing too far from the conventions of English society.

The second chapter, discussing *The Longest Journey*, follows a similar outline, but allows Forster to translate Woolf's decidedly female experience into a male manifestation that occurs solely within the domestic landscape of the English countryside.

The third chapter will focus again on Woolf, analyzing the spaces of her last novel, *Between the Acts*. Again, there is a sense that the reader is lulled into a complacent understanding of the novel as encompassing a simple dichotomy between interior and exterior space, only to realize that in the pre-war imaginings of Woolf, space is ultimately deconstructed beyond the point of dualities.

The final chapter will explore the spaces in Forster's *A Passage to India*. In this last novel, there is a considerable effort to faithfully render the spaces of India as they really are. This endeavor illuminates the indescribable space at the novel's center, and the notion that Indian spaces cannot be realistically drawn by an Englishman.

CONTENTS

Short Titles

TVO: Woolf, Virginia. *The Voyage Out*. New York: Modern Library, 2001.

TLJ: Forster, E.M.. *The Longest Journey*. New York: Penguin Books, 2006.

BTA: Woolf, Virginia. *Between the Acts*. New York: Harcourt Inc., 1970.

PTI: Forster, E.M.. *A Passage to India*. New York: Harcourt Inc., 1984.

Figures

Introduction

"There is mystery in the word," Clive Bell wrote in 1956, "and money too."[1] And so begins Bell's cagey questioning of the perceived existence of the Bloomsbury Group. Although Bell finally does acknowledge a Bloomsbury presence in the early twentieth century, it is in strange terms for a member . He admits that he has been "stigmatized as 'Bloomsbury'...and the epithet has been applied freely to most of those who are, or were—for many are dead—my intimate friends."[2] Bell's decision to use words like "stigmatize" and "epithet" is interesting considering he believes Bloomsbury to be simply a group of friends "who saw a great deal of each other."[3] In his decision to brand Bloomsbury as a stigma and an epithet, Bell is highlighting the various negative connotations that Bloomsbury has had to endure for almost the entire half-century since its inception. Perhaps because of the persistent typecasting, the group felt it necessary to create their own spaces in which to thrive: highly personalized spaces in which they could create, debate, and thrive, Bloomsbury cultural centers in which the members were safe from outside speculation or judgment. Throughout Bloomsbury's history, one can see the significance of space in the group's evolution into a cultural phenomenon.

At its most basic, Bloomsbury is a group that was named after the area in London where the members most frequently met; the group, literally, is centered around a particular space more than it is centered around any particular group of people. The beginnings of "Old Bloomsbury," or the pre-World War I core, are rooted in the drawing room of the Stephen children; the evolution of the later group is concentrated around the Sussex home of Vanessa and Clive Bell,

---

[1] Clive Bell, "," in *A Bloomsbury Group Reader,* ed. S.P. Rosenbaum, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.

Charleston. Before anything else, Bloomsbury is a group to whom space is essential for freedom of thought and discussion. The drawing room in Gordon Square (located in the group's eponymous area of London) represented a move away from parental authority and societal constraints; in that drawing room, the men of Cambridge conversed freely with the Stephen women, creating an atmosphere of conversational autonomy—an essential component in the development of the dynamic group. As Virginia Woolf recalls the move to the Bloomsbury area of London in her 1922 "Old Bloomsbury" essay that she presented to the memoir club, the new house in Gordon Square "was the most beautiful, the most exciting, the most romantic place in the world."[4] She noted that what was most "exhilarating was the extraordinary increase of space," calling our attention to the definitively spatial conception of the Bloomsbury Group.[5] It is interesting that along with Woolf's emphasis on the increase of space, there is a sense that the spaces of the Gordon Square house allowed the Stephen children to be more liberated, in both lifestyle and thinking; the "light and air…were a revelation" in the new spaces of their home, a comment that could be meant literally in the physical sense of the house, or metaphorically in the sense that the group was afforded much more freedom in their new residence.[6] It is because of those legendary Thursday conversations that took place in the drawing room of the Gordon Square house, that the group is known as Bloomsbury at all—at its core, the group is focused entirely on space.

Because space was such an important entity in the foundations of the group, it only makes sense that space would continue to factor largely in the ability of the group to sustain and flourish. At the outset of World War I, the group, following Vanessa Bell's acquisition of

---

[4] Virginia Woolf, "Old Bloomsbury," in *The Bloomsbury Group*, ed. By S.P. Rosenbaum, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975).
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.

Charleston Farmhouse, relocated to the country to live out the war in Sussex. The farmhouse in Sussex presented a base for the conscientious objectors of Bloomsbury, providing a center for living that allowed the continuation of their artistic, literary, and non-violent existences. What is particularly interesting about Charleston is the developmental aspect to the art contained throughout the house. Because of the circumstances of the acquisition, and the nature of the political obligations of the members of the house, initial artistic development was somewhat rushed; what is now known as Charleston is really a gradual assemblage of artistic endeavors and impulses; Christopher Reed argues in his book, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, that "this was Bloomsbury's vision of Charleston at its best: an embodiment of modernism conceived as an escape from conventional imperatives of canny consumption in favor of intuitive, spontaneous pleasures enjoyed as ends in themselves."[7] Not only is the artwork throughout Charleston indicative of the Bloomsbury modernist aesthetic, but it also represents the group's ability to completely inhabit a space, mark the walls, tapestries, furniture, and floors with their own unique ideas and work. Charleston represents Bloomsbury embodied in a particular place, with individualized spaces—a visual image that is emblematic of the importance that space holds for the Bloomsbury Group.

It is worthwhile to examine the evolution of Bloomsbury's domestic spaces as a way of understanding their core philosophies and motivations. In Reed's introduction to his *Bloomsbury Rooms*, he asserts that the Bloomsbury Group's "members' alienation from the culture into which they were born, an alienation they often described as a sense of exclusion from a suitable form of domesticity" was a driving force of including the concept of domesticity into so much of their work.[8] Nowhere can these domestic and spatial focuses be seen more clearly than in the novels of the group, especially those of Virginia Woolf and E.M. Forster. Forster and Woolf

---

[7] Christopher Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms: Modernism, Subculture, and Domesticity*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 191.

[8] Ibid., 6.

create political spaces in their work, physical spaces such as houses, ships, or hotels, in order to convey ideas of the more figuratively spatial ideals that they hold, ideas about national and socio-political change, ideas of citizenship and belonging, an individual's space within the structure of English society, and notions of gendered space. Throughout their novels, Woolf and Forster attempt to reconcile the purely physical spaces and places of landscape and the interior with the figurative spaces of their ideological philosophies. By linking the physical and figurative, Woolf and Forster are emphasizing the importance of space, as it applies to the Bloomsbury Group and the realities of their time. Space becomes a vehicle through which the authors can demonstrate various ideas and problems both within the textual plots of the novel and within the broader context of language and politics.

It is clear that space was crucial in the formation of the group; it represented a means to a freedom of discussion, creation, and thought. In the following chapters, I will examine how the fact that Bloomsbury authors were particularly sensitive to the issues of how space inflects and shapes thought, is manifested in their fiction. The first chapter will focus on Virginia Woolf's first novel, *The Voyage Out*, and follow Rachel, the protagonist, on her journey through the South American wilderness. In this first novel, Woolf creates a dichotomy between the suffocating space of the English drawing room and the liberating spaces of the South American jungle, leading the reader to believe that there is a simple correlation between an increase of natural space and personal freedoms. This correlation is slowly dismantled as Woolf gradually reveals the consequences of straying too far out of the drawing-room norms—it becomes clear that convention, revealed by the English spatial descriptions in the novel, eventually conquers.

The second chapter examines a similar spatial dynamic, but instead focusing solely on the domestic landscapes of the English countryside. The second chapter focuses on E.M. Forster's

novel, *The Longest Journey*, and the main character, Rickie's quest to find happiness, free from constraint. Forster, like Woolf, convinces the reader that there are simple connections between a domestic interior and feeling trapped, and a connection between the open air of the countryside and feelings of free will. These connections, too, are dismantled when the reader realizes that Rickie is always chained by some sort of responsibility, whether it be marital or brotherly, no matter his spatial surroundings.

The third chapter represents a shift away from the individual focus that dominates the first two, instead tackling the broader themes of violence and war. The third novel discussed is Virginia Woolf's last novel, *Between the Acts,* which is a spatial examination of the realities of domestic spaces in a country on the brink of war. Again, Woolf lulls the reader into a complacent acceptance of a simple dichotomy, this time between interior and exterior spaces, asserting that interior spaces are "safe" from the impending hazards of war and exterior spaces are susceptible to attack. By the end of the novel, it is clear that this dichotomy cannot be held as immutable or universal; Woolf deconstructs the spaces within the novel to demonstrate the extreme vulnerability that war imposes on all spaces.

The fourth chapter is also representative of a stylistic and contextual development, but in the oeuvre of Forster. This last chapter explores Forster's later novel, *A Passage to India*, and examines how Forster attempts to describe the spaces of India. In this last book, there is a real focus on trying to be true to the spaces of India, demonstrated by the characters' consuming desire to experience the real India, and Forster's quest to faithfully illustrate the "real" Indian landscape. What is striking about this last novel is that for how focused both the author and his characters are on being able to understand and see the "real" India, at the heart of the novel lies space that defies attempts to describe it in any known language.

Woolf and Forster think through the problems of being a modern human being in spatial terms, and their novels are products of Bloomsbury in that they think of space as reflective of human imagination, a commodity that cannot and should not be taken for granted. Space becomes significant in these novels in such a way that reveals a number of pertinent and pervasive issues.

Fig. 1

46 Gordon Square

(courtesy of infobritain.co.uk)

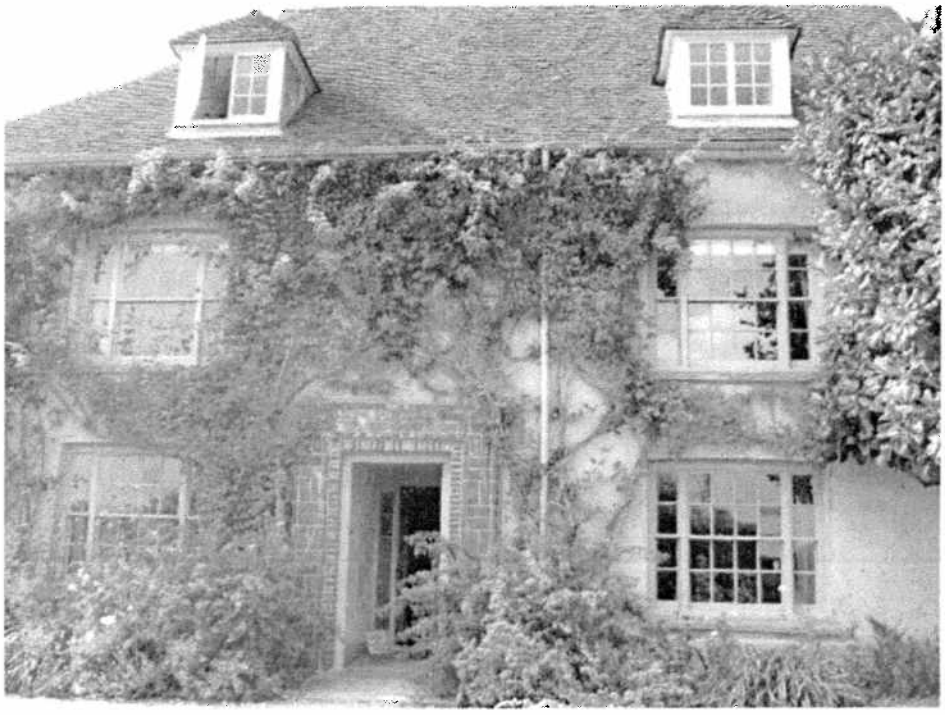

Fig. 2

Charleston Exterior

(courtesy of 24hourmuseum.org.uk)

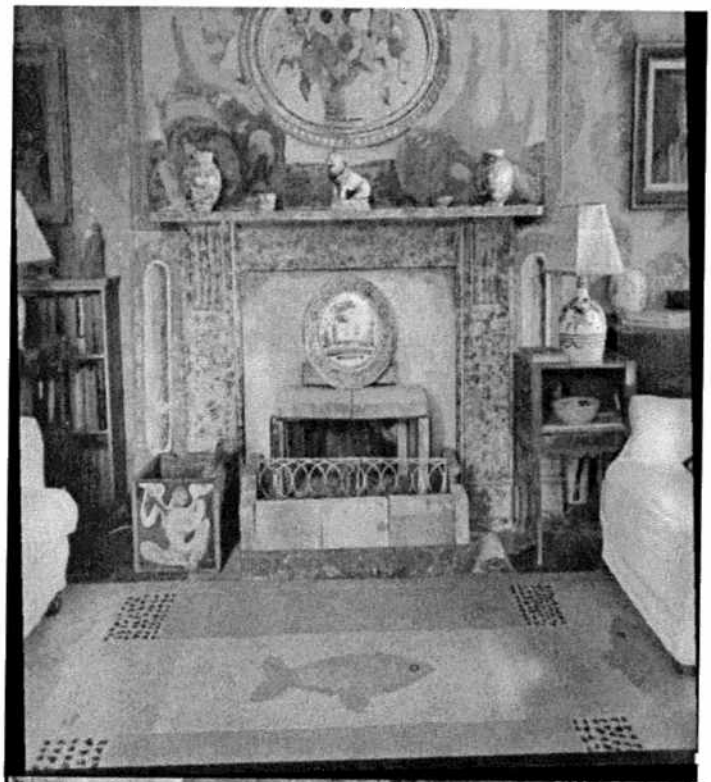

Fig. 3

Charleston Garden Room

(courtesy of *Charleston: A Bloomsbury House and Garden*)

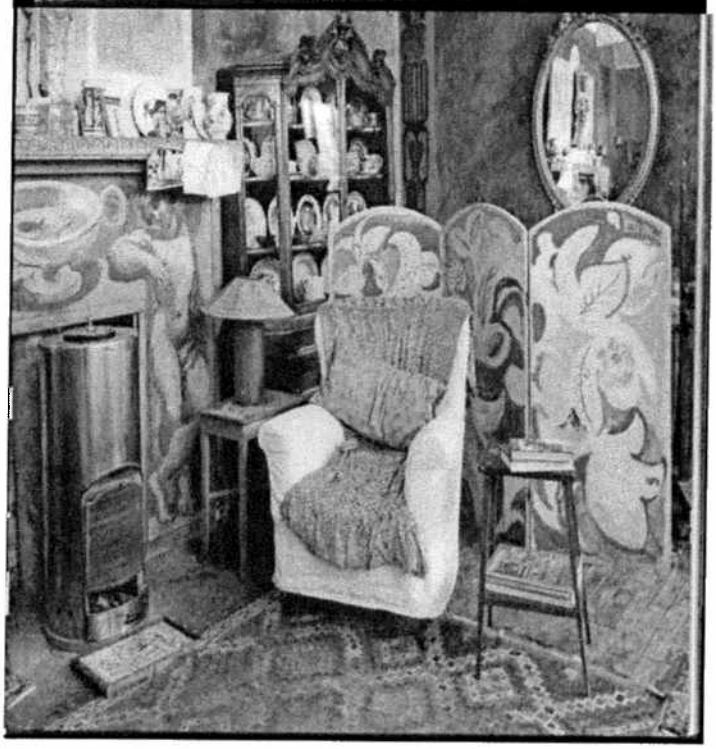

Fig. 4

Charleston Art Studio

(courtesy of *Charleston: A Bloomsbury House and Garden*)

Chapter 1: *The Voyage Out*
Danger and the Drawing Room

In one of Virginia's pieces, entitled "Old Bloomsbury," that she presented to the Memoir Club, she explores the beginnings of the Bloomsbury Group as seen through her Hyde Park Gate home. Woolf specifically discusses her move from her parents' home in Hyde Park Gate to her and her sister's new home in Gordon Square; she explains that what excited her most was the exhilaration from the "extraordinary increase of space. At Hyde Park Gate one had only a bedroom in which to read or see one's friends. Here Vanessa and I each had a sitting room; there was the large double drawing room; and a study on the ground floor."[9] That Woolf equates this increase of space with an increase of freedom provides a convenient framing through which one can understand the thematic progression of her first novel, *The Voyage Out*. Just as Woolf associated the increase of space at Gordon Square with the ability to "experiment and reform," large open spaces described throughout the novel represent arenas in which to experiment and play with the boundaries and strictures of British society. [10] Indeed, throughout the novel, there is a palpable dichotomy between the freedom and boundaries, ability to act according to spontaneity versus acting according to convention. As Woolf moves through the spaces of the journey of the Ambroses and Rachel, it is clear that in the distinctly English spaces, it is impossible to act according to one's own volition, which stands in sharp contrast to the liberty created and experienced in those spaces outside of English influence; and though it seems as if Woolf creates a clear dichotomy between freedom and convention, it becomes evident, as the reader moves through the spaces of the novel, that the duality is not as simple as it initially

---

[9] Virginia Woolf, *Moments of being*, (New York: Harcourt Inc., 1985), 163.
[10] Ibid.

seems. Though at first glance, the wild spaces of the jungle convey a freedom that cannot exist within the drawing-room culture of English society, the freedom of uncharted spaces can also suggest a danger and an unknown that threatens.

In order to understand certain aspects of Rachel and her personality, it is necessary to look back to spaces in which she has grown up. The reader is first introduced to Rachel's life in Richmond, the house where she grew up with her aunts. As she mentally surveys the drawing room, she remembers, "green plush chairs stood against the wall; there was a heavy carved book-case, with glass doors, and a general impression of faded sofa covers, large spaces of pale green, and baskets with pieces of wool-work dropping out of them."[11] Woolf is explicit in her descriptions, candidly conveying that the room had no "definite character," a description that suggests the reason for Rachel's development into an ingénue who has definite deficiencies in understanding her peers—without any character in the space in which she developed, Rachel has trouble developing any character herself (*TVO* 219). One gets the sense that Rachel has been held back by such a space, getting caught up in the stuffy, suffocating feeling of the interior. The "heavy carved" bookcase conveys the oppressive air created by the overall decorating scheme, supplemented by the "faded sofa covers" and the baskets with "wool-work dropping out of them." The feeling created by Woolf's description of the drawing room is one of age; one almost feels as if the old-qualities of the room are a bit suffocating for any lively and young spirit. After being raised in a drawing room in which objects are "heavy" and "faded," it is no wonder that the wide expanses of the sea and the unusual decorations of the ship interior convey feelings of freedom and independence.

---

[11] Virginia Woolf, The Voyage Out, (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 219. Hereafter cited in the text as *TVO*.

In the first section of the novel, that which focuses on the spaces of the ship, *Euphrosyne*, the reader is introduced to the sea-bound domestic space as Rachel leads her aunt on a tour, stopping in what can be taken as the sea equivalent of an English drawing room. The narrator asserts that the room "had nothing of the shut stationary character of a room on shore. A table was rooted in the middle, and seats were stuck to the sides" (*TVO* 13). The contrast of the observation that the room seemed not to be "stationary" with the descriptions of the nailed down furniture reveals an irony that Woolf clearly intended to highlight. Although the physical reality of the room might be rooted to the floor, there is obviously a freedom associated with being out at sea that is inherently about the space outside rather than the space within. As the narrator continues to describe the room, the reader learns that it is dominated by various works of art that illustrate the uniquely aquatic nature of the ship's domestic interiors:

> Happily the tropical suns had bleached the tapestries to a faded blue-green colour, and the mirror with its frame of shells, the work of the steward's love, when the time hung heavy in the southern seas, was quaint rather than ugly. Twisted shells with red lips like unicorn's horns ornamented the mantelpiece, which was draped by a pall of purple plush from which depended a certain number of balls. (*TVO* 13)

One gets the distinct impression that the interior of the drawing room is decorated to convey feelings of the marine exterior; the "faded blue-green colour" of the tapestries mirrors the ocean outside, and it is significant to note that the color is a result of "happy" bleaching on the part of the tropical suns. There is a lightness that emanates throughout, as much a result of the light that streams through the windows, as for the tropical color-scheme that paints the room. The mirror framed in shells is indicative of the natural décor of the ocean, and it seems as though the narrator suggests that its kitschy charm would not be so charming on land. There is a sense that

interior spaces, beginning with descriptions of this drawing room, have different rules at sea, that there is a greater freedom to move beyond the decorating conventions of English society. And as great a sense of freedom as there exists in the ship's interior, there exists an even greater sense of freedom as experienced in the midst of the open sea.

Woolf's descriptions of the natural spaces that surround the ship while on its journey south implies that the link that Woolf associates between an increase of space and an increase of freedom in her personal life, carries over into her fiction as well. As the ship gradually makes its way out to sea,

> all the smoke and the houses had disappeared, and the ship was out in a wide space of sea very fresh and clear though pale in the early light …They were free of roads, free of mankind, and the same exhilaration at their freedom ran through them all … the air was wonderfully salt and brisk. (*TVO* 22)

It seems as though the further out to sea the group gets, the more liberated they seem to feel; Woolf illustrates the scene in such a way as to convey to the reader the extreme liberation that must have been felt by the passengers of the *Euphrosyne.* Without the smoke of civilization to punctuate the vista, the travelers are surrounded by the blue of the ocean, leaving them with a "fresh" sensation that can only be felt out at sea. As one of the land-based entities of which the passengers have been freed, the image of "the road" is representative of the path that has been carved by others, a path followed not because it is right, but because it is there. At sea, the path is waiting to be created by the individual, allowing a freedom that simply cannot be manifested in the terrain of any terrestrial entity.

As Woolf continues to situate the ship spatially, and explore the resulting implications for her characters and plot, the reader begins to understand more clearly the freedom felt as result of

the few outside influences that are present at sea. As with the young Virginia's belief that the increase of space in her drawing and sitting rooms led to the freedom of action and freedom from the constraints of English society, the further away the ship travels, the more clearly it is felt that freedom from land also means a freedom from its customs as well. Out at sea, the passengers feel completely free from the voices that try to influence and direct their actions and lives; out at sea, "it became plain that the people of England were completely mute. The disease attacked other parts of the earth; Europe shrank, Asia shrank, Africa and America shrank, until it seemed doubtful whether the ship would ever run against any of those wrinkled little rocks again" (*TVO* 27). Indeed, Woolf persistently emphasizes the fact that free from land, the ship is also free from the pressures that exist concurrently with it. The word "mute" in this description is a fairly strong one; in conveying the silence of the surrounding terrain while the ship is at sea, it also seems to shout loudly about the cacophony of pressuring voices that exist while the characters are not at sea. In the various spaces conveyed by Woolf, it is understood that the open sea, in its domestic and natural spaces, is associated with freedom from society's voice, influence, and seemingly firm grip that is asserted through land.

And yet, despite the association that Woolf seems to create between the increase of space and an increase of freedom, she makes it clear that the correlation is not so simple. For all the descriptions of liberating space, there still exists the fact that English society and its implications can never truly be left at shore. Though the passengers are seemingly free from the influences that bind them, the English drawing room culture—and its vices—follow the group on-board. As Rachel and Richard Dalloway, a preying older Member of Parliament sailing partway on the ship, discuss politics and life, "the ship lurched. Rachel fell slightly forward. Richard took her in his arms and kissed her" (*TVO* 74). There is a sense that though the group is far asea, they can

never really escape the normalities that accompany the drawing-room culture of English society; the same rules that apply to preying men on land seem to also apply on board. The encounter between Richard and Rachel serves to remind the reader that English influences are not completely absent, an idea that is also manifested in the descriptions of the English spaces of the hotel and villa in South America.

In contrast to the descriptions of seascapes, the descriptions of the hotel and villa, when the group finally arrives in South America, are distinctively English spaces that reflect the domestic standard throughout English society, and also seem to reflect the action in the novel itself. In one of the few depictions of the interior of the villa, the makeshift drawing room appears at dusk, "large and empty at all times, now appeared larger and emptier than usual… There were no pictures on the walls… Of the books fallen on the bare floor and heaped upon the large table, it was only possible in this light to trace the outline" (*TVO* 95). The emptiness of the rooms is indicative of its disuse. More often than not throughout the novel Helen and Rachel are seen at or around the hotel, taking comfort in the regular ritual practices of English society and the other patrons partaking in such activities. The lack of decorations suggests a level of neglect that does not necessitate familiar adornments to make the interior comfortable; this same absence of need is reflected in the bare floor, the tenants not even bothering to furnish the room with the basic comforts of a rug. That the descriptions of the villa are scant, indicates that it is somewhat more removed from English society because of Helen and Rachel's lack of interest in its interior; their need to be involved in English rituals is satisfied within the space of the hotel, rendering the villa an almost shell of English life.

Descriptions of the hotel illustrate much more vividly the spatial manifestations of English culture; the hotel is the space in which Helen and Rachel often find themselves

interacting with the other vacationers and participating in distinctive English rituals such as the taking of tea. It is clear from Woolf's descriptions of the interior of the hotel that it is supposed to embody the décor of a displaced English society, representative of the conventions and constraints present in various social practices. Woolf is demonstrating that the English, when geographically displaced, work to set up a facsimile of their home space, to try and comfort themselves. One of the first visions of the hotel that the reader sees is when Helen and Rachel peek into the windows before they are truly involved with those staying in the rooms. As they peer into the lighted window, they see "the largest room in the hotel, which was supplied with four windows, and was called the Lounge, although it was really a hall. Hung with armour and native embroideries, furnished with divans and screens, with shut off convenient corners, the room was less formal than the others, and was evidently the haunt of youth" (*TVO* 101). The image of the armour hanging on the wall is representative of the English influence throughout the hotel; it is as if the armour is guarding the traditions and conventions of the English, and ensuring that those social practices continue as intended. The native embroidery conveys a much softer influence, seemingly only present in order to represent the native culture that surrounds the supplanted British: a decorating touch meant to lend an authenticity to the room, that fails in its intent when placed next to the hardness of the armour. The "divans and screens" convey the mainly social aspect of the room, and the "shut off convenient corners" imply the inherent conversational aspect of social gatherings; overall, one gets the distinct feeling that the design of the interior is intended to put people at ease, make them comfortable, and convey a sense of familiarity that allows for easy conversation and relaxed after-dinner talk.

An illustration of the same room after a night of lively conversation emphasizes even more the deliberate hand with which this "Lounge" was decorated, and the sense of convention

and routine that it encourages. After returning to the hotel after dark, Terence is met with the empty Lounge, fraught with evidence of previous occupations: "There were the chairs turning in towards each other where people had sat talking, and the empty glasses on little tables, and the newspapers scattered on the floor. As he shut the door he felt as if he were enclosed in a square box, and instantly shriveled up" (*TVO* 192). The influences of convention are present throughout the room, though the actual actors have gone; in giving the reader small details such as the "chairs turned in towards each other," and the "empty glasses," and the scattered newspapers, the reader almost feels as if she walked in just after everyone else had left, as though the wind created by the people walking out of the room still blows the newspaper pages. Interesting, too, is Terence's impressions of being "enclosed in a square box" and feeling as though he "instantly shriveled up." The images of previous social interactions seem to be suffocating for Terence, as if the rituals and routines of his compatriots cause feelings of overbearing claustrophobia.

Very much in contrast to the overwhelming sense of the English domestic, the images of the jungle are depictions of wild, unharnessed freedom; it is in the jungle section that the reader sees the most marked contrast between the constrictive spaces of the domestic as compared with the liberating scenes of the wild jungle. It is clear through Woolf's portrayal of the South American wilderness that the space that exists outside the bounds of English normality conveys a similar sense of unrestrained free will. Rachel and Terence separate from the group in order to explore the intricacies of the jungle firsthand, and "as they moved on the country grew wilder and wilder. The trees and the undergrowth seemed to be strangling each other near the ground in a multitudinous wrestle; while here and there a splendid tree towered high above the swarm" (*TVO* 278). The repetition of the word "wilder" only serves to emphasize the increasing distance the two are gaining from their highly domesticated existence at the hotel, and arguably even on

the boat on the river. It is clear that the struggling trees and undergrowth that seem to be "strangling each other" are the conflicting feelings that the two are attempting to reconcile: the desire to keep within the bounds of conventional courtship and yet truly express their feelings in a way that might not be appropriate according to certain English standards. Eventually, the image with which Woolf leaves the reader is one of "splendid trees towering high above," indicating that for Rachel and Terence, their feelings have simply become too bold to remain hidden. It is shortly after this scene that the two lovers confess their true feelings for one another and decide to become engaged—a liberated engagement that would allow the freedom of both parties, a remnant, perhaps, of the liberated feelings the two felt in the jungle. It is important, however, to notice the violence that is also present within the passage by the use of the word "strangling," the first of several impressions that the jungle is threatening as well as liberating. There seems to be a danger in the wilderness as well, an idea that manifests itself elsewhere in jungles descriptions, and comes back to haunt Rachel in the final scenes of the novel.

Another passage that explores the spaces of the jungle comes shortly thereafter, indicating yet again that in the wilderness of South America there exists a freedom that could not possibly survive within the bounds of English society. Through the descriptions of the jungle spaces, Woolf is illustrating the story of her two lovers, who wander into the maze of forest to find privacy. As the two move further into the trees, the actions of the natural spaces around them preempt the movements of the humans within:

> The path narrowed and turned; it was hedged in by dense creepers which knotted tree to tree, and burst here and there into star-shaped crimson blossoms…The atmosphere was close and the air came at them in languid puffs of scent. The vast green light was broken here and there by a round of pure yellow sunlight which fell through some gap in the

> immense umbrella of green above, and in these yellow spaces crimson and black butterflies were circling and settling. (*TVO* 282)

Several elements in the passage above mirror the future actions of the innocently touring couple. For example, the initial "knotting" of the trees is indicative of the increasing intimacy of Rachel and Terence's relationship; throughout the novel the two have gradually found ways to open up to one another and in the jungle, they finally have the freedom from societal constraints in order become so close that their futures, like the trees above, seem to be inescapably intertwined. The "star-shaped crimson blossoms" echo Rachel's gradual movement from a bashful, awkward youth, to a blossoming young woman, ready and able to participate in a true relationship with another. Woolf highlights the heat of the jungle and the slowness it inspires when she designates the atmosphere as "close" and the air "languid"—one can almost feel the weight of the jungle air, as if the two lovers transferred their languorous and dreamy state onto their environment. The yellow spaces are almost like spotlights, serving to highlight this final image at the end of the two butterflies, evocative of Rachel and Terence, "circling and settling," a dance that looks much like the dance of courtship. But yet again, as with the initial passage describing the jungle scene, there are elements of danger, intimating the menace that lurks in spaces that are too large and too far from the familiar rooms of English culture. The two lovers are "hedged in by dense creepers," in image that suggests a somewhat scary vision of the jungle landscape. And that the air is "close" indicates their languorous state, yes, but could also induce a sense of panic, a sense that one has totally strayed from familiar imagery and is now feeling the weight of that decision.

There is a real hopefulness when Rachel and Terence are in the jungle, a desire to be truly unique in their engagement, completely liberated from outside pressure and free to do as they wish. Woolf's descriptions of the natural landscape that the two encounter on their expedition

add to the illusion of freedom, conveying a wildness that suggests the influences of the jungle may indeed prevail over the tight conventions of English society. The moment the pair return to the hotel, however, their conversations are immediately punctuated with visions of English landscape, ultimately putting an end to the fantasy of autonomy, and exerting the influence of marital conventions on their relationship. As Rachel and Terence begin to learn of one another's home life, Rachel reflects on the English countryside:

> the flat land rolling away to the sea, and the woods and the long straight roads, where one can walk for miles without seeing anyone, and the great church towers and the curious houses clustered in the valleys, and the birds, and the dusk, and the rain beating against the windows. (*TVO* 313)

There is a breathlessness to this vision of England, a sense that Rachel, in her thinking, is propelled by a force outside of her body; her thoughts rush through several iconic images of England, racing towards an invisible finish line. The idea that the flat land rolls away to the sea mirrors this breathlessness, implying that perhaps the land doesn't have a choice, that its position and circumstances are such that it must roll inevitably towards the sea—a metaphor that becomes poignant when thought of in terms of Rachel's own inevitable trajectory towards the "sea" of convention. After she returns from the jungle, Rachel becomes mired in the social practices of a young woman engaged, becoming chained to her responsibilities as a female.[24] The woods mentioned, very much unlike the woods of the South American jungle, convey, as they line the "long straight roads," a sense of fencing in, of guiding one along so as to make sure one does not stray.

---

[24] When Terence and Rachel return from the jungle, the reader finds the two in the drawing room of the hotel discussing the responsibilities of being newly engaged. The euphoric couple quickly slips back into their prescribed gender roles, however, and Rachel soon becomes entirely responsible for correspondences and other mundane tasks so that Terence can focus on the real and more important task of writing his novel; Terence's professional success becomes more important than Rachel's personal freedom. (*TVO* 308-310)

The freedom that exists within the accounts of the jungle landscape stands in deep contrast to those images of the South American landscape that surrounds the hotel upon the travelers return to the settlement. Shortly after the group returns from their jungle expedition and settles back into their normal routines, it is discovered that Rachel contracted an illness sometime during her journey. The illness serves to remind the reader of the consequences of straying too far from the familiar practices of English culture. Woolf's descriptions of the storm that ensues shortly after Rachel's death offer the reader some reasons that Rachel could not survive:

> All that evening the clouds gathered, until they closed entirely over the blue of the sky. They seemed to narrow the space between earth and heaven, so that there was no room for the air to move in freely; and the waves, too, lay flat, and yet rigid, as if they were restrained. The leaves on the bushes and trees in the garden hung closely together, and the feeling of pressure and restraint was increased by the short chirping sounds which came from birds and insects. (*TVO* 381)

Thinly veiled in this description of the developing storm is the notion that Rachel's youth and hopefulness were at once clouded and almost suffocated by the encroaching conventions of English society that threatened her and Terence's plan for a liberated marriage. That there is "no room for the air to move in freely" obviously suggests that the young couple's ability to breathe, metaphorically within the system of gender constraints and English societal customs, and Rachel's ability to breathe literally, are quashed in order to prevent a successful engagement and marriage. The normally free-flowing waves of the ocean, characteristic for their loose movement and easy course, are pictured in this scene to be "rigid" and unmoving, characteristic of the strictures of societal norms. The "pressure and restraint" felt by the bushes and trees is also felt by Terence and Rachel as they quietly assume their respective duties within the bounds of their

relationship, but also within the bounds of what is expected of each other. It is clear that Woolf, in ultimately killing Rachel, does not believe that the pull of liberation and the pull of convention can be reconciled successfully. Convention ultimately conquers, although Rachel dies happily, knowing that had she lived, she would not have been able to live as she liked.

Throughout *The Voyage Out*, it is clear that space plays a pivotal role in understanding the underlying themes and motivations of the novel. Indeed space seems to be an important entity throughout Bloomsbury personal history and fiction. The reader follows Rachel through the various spaces of the novel, spaces that reveal the textual and meta-textual problems of the book. Textually, Rachel seems to be torn between the stuffiness of English society and the freedom of the jungle. Woolf eventually reveals that the dichotomy is not as simple as first seems and reveals the jungle to be a dangerous space as well; the deconstruction of the simply delineated dichotomy reveals the meta-textual problem that Woolf is trying to work through, namely, how to survive within the system of conventional English drawing-room society. Her conclusion is not entirely optimistic, and we find the same attitude manifested in Forster's *The Longest Journey*. Rickie travels on a parallel journey to Rachel's, although in this novel set within the domestic space of England. The trajectory through models of convention and freedom are similar, and the reader finds that Forster is similarly disenchanted by opportunities to circumvent the culture of convention.

Chapter 2: *The Longest Journey*
The Shackles of Freedom

The idea that space is significant in Forster's *The Longest Journey* has been briefly touched on in Forster criticism, but never fully explored. In Mike Edwards' study of Forster's fiction, *Analyzing E.M. Forster's Novels*, he mentions that "Places carry meaning: in these locations and the contrast between them Forster expresses thematic ideas about Rickie and his situation."[26] Although it is helpful to point out that space is significant in *The Longest Journey*, the statement does no more than note that the novel is separated into three distinct sections, each exploring different themes through their spatial foundations. But if ever there was an explicit directive from the author, it is that gem which comes from Forster himself, when he describes Rickie to be someone who is

> extremely sensitive to the inside of a house, holding it an organism that expressed the thoughts, conscious and subconscious of its inmates. He was equally sensitive to places. He would compare Cambridge with Sawston, and either with a third type of existence, to which, for want of a better name, he gave the name 'Wiltshire.' [27]

Forster is suggesting that there is more to the places and the spaces of which he writes than merely "meaning" and "thematic ideas." He asserts that these spaces are "organisms," arguably giving them power to behave as such: to not only exist, but also to actively influence and speak in some way. Forster is asking the reader to reexamine descriptions of space and place, and to look at and understand those descriptions as passages that are more than just scene-setting. That

---

[26] Mike Edwards, *E.M. Forster's Novel,s (*New York: Palgrave, 2002,)42.

[27] E.M. Forster, *The Longest Journey*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 154. Hereafter cited in the text as *TLJ*.

Forster is attributing this "sensitivity" to spaces and places to Rickie implies that the idea that space and place holds a sacred spot in the imagination of both the main character and the author. In this passage, Forster is identifying for the reader what really matters in the Rickie's journey: more than the friends and acquaintances, it is the spaces with which Rickie associates that truly help Rickie to develop and grow, and in some way suggest who he is at each point in time.

Although the novel begins with the section entitled "Cambridge," there are visions of Rickie's youth, as demonstrated by descriptions of his childhood home. This glimpse into the foundations of Rickie's boyhood self provide the reader with very important details, all of which can be gleaned through a close examination of the descriptions of suburban space. The narrator describes Rickie's beginning as someone who has, in the suburbs, "opened his eyes to filmy heavens, and taken his first walk on asphalt. He had seen civilization as a row of semi-detached houses and society as a state in which men do not know the men who live next door" (*TLJ* 22). That Rickie is looking up into the "filmy heavens" illustrates, literally, that the sky and air of the suburbs during this time was filled with the smog and smoke produced by industry in the neighboring cities. The gray film that physically clouded over Rickie's home can also be interpreted to have cast a shadow over Rickie's development and ability to see clearly metaphorically. That Rickie takes his first steps on asphalt indicates that the grayness of the sky is mirrored by the grayness of the earth in his neighborhood, that nothing truly escapes the encroaching grime of suburban life. The asphalt also implies a hardness that does not allow for any sort of movement; there does not seem to be any "give." Rickie's club foot, and the physical handicaps that are the consequences, obviously could not have been received well in an environment in which conformity, and a steadfast dedication to it, were the norm. Growing up in an environment in which "semi-detached houses" dominated the scene, Rickie clearly did not

have much opportunity to see beyond his isolated existence. It is also significant that Forster uses the phrase "semi-detached" to describe the real-estate reality. "Semi-detached" connotes a number of different images, among them the idea that the houses are not truly separate and that they cannot really stand alone to breathe, a vision that recalls Forster's classification of the house as an "organism." One gets the definite idea that Rickie feels suffocated in his suburban existence, as though he can never truly stand alone, always tethered to those around him. And yet, in this vision of gray and endlessly constrained and constricted houses, Forster adds that "men do not know the men who live next door." Despite living in houses that share common walls, despite being imprisoned by the same gray skies and asphalt, despite being physically connected by their homes, those who lived in Rickie's suburb are utterly and totally alone. The isolation felt by Rickie is incredibly palpable, and the space of his childhood conveys his extreme unhappiness.

The reader must then look to the domestic spaces, in addition to the public ones, in order to fully understand Rickie's foundations. Probably the most interesting spatial exploration in the small section on Rickie's life before Cambridge is when Forster, almost off-handedly, remarks that, "Though beautiful without and within, Mrs. Elliot had not the gift of making her home beautiful" (*TLJ* 22). In light of his assertion that a house "expressed the thoughts, conscious and subconscious of its inmates," one must look deeper into this inability of Mrs. Elliot's and how it seems to affect Rickie for the remainder of his journey. Throughout the novel, Rickie elevates his mother to a position of archetypal greatness; he consistently espouses the many points of her greatness and never fails to set her up as the epitome of goodness. But if one must look at this novel through the descriptions of space, it is clear that there exists a disjunct between Rickie's memories of his mother and the actualities of his time with her. It is very important that there is

such a divide between Rickie's vision of his mother as "beautiful" and the reality that her home could never be so. The example given by the narrator of Mrs. Elliot's offending interior design is of a "carpet that clashed with the dining room" (*TLJ*22). The word "clashed" implies a deep-rooted discordance between Mrs. Elliot and her environment, an impression that something just did not fit right. In addition to perhaps describing that Mrs. Elliot was stuck wishing for the life that could have been with her lover and her "normal" boy, the mention of the clashing of the carpet is just as significant considering the room in which it occurs. The dining room is arguably the room in the house where nourishment is provided; that there existed some sort of problem in the dining room suggests that there were problems of discordance in Rickie's development and nourishment as well. And while the reader's fears are somewhat assuaged as she learns of Rickie's life in Cambridge, there is always the lingering feeling that this early exposure to dissonance in his youth will haunt him for the rest of his adult life.

Although the reader is afforded this small snapshot of life before Cambridge for Rickie, it comes within the first section of the novel entitled, "Cambridge." It makes sense that Forster would open the novel with this section because it is not until Cambridge that Rickie can more fully explore who he is as a person. This idea is exemplified when the narrator personifies the influence of Cambridge, asserting that "Cambridge…had taken and soothed him, and warmed him, and had laughed at him a little, saying that he must not be so tragic yet awhile, for his boyhood had been but a dusty corridor that led to the spacious halls of youth" (*TLJ* 5-6). The metaphor of the widening corridor allows the reader to visualize Rickie's movement to a more open existence in university in familiar and spatial terms. The "dust" in the corridor recalls the gray "film" that seemed to wash over Rickie's childhood, and the "widening" halls indicate Rickie's liberation from the constrictive connectivity of his "semi-detached" life in the suburbs.

This metaphor also resonates with the idea of the house as an "organism" that Forster details in his description discussed earlier. This metaphor allows the reader a gentle transition into the more chaotic spaces of Cambridge, and it allows one to understand a small part of the differences between childhood and youth by placing them in spatial terms.

The sole interior view of the space of Rickie's rooms in Cambridge is created by Agnes Pembroke's observations as she stands alone in Rickie's rooms during her visit to the university. Though paintings are not spatial in the same sense that walls or ceilings are, the spatial impact or voice of paintings is no less significant. The choice of painting subject can imply just as much about the inhabitant as descriptions of color scheme or furniture arrangement. And as Agnes wanders around the room, she notes the various paintings for the reader, commenting:

> The pictures were not attractive, nor did they attract her—school groups, Watts' "Sir Percival", a dog running after a rabbit, a man running after a maid, a cheap brown Madonna in a cheap green frame—in short, a collection where one mediocrity was generally cancelled by another. .. Rickie's mother, looking rather sweet, was standing on the mantelpiece. Some more pictures had just arrived from the framers and were leaning with their faces to the wall, but she did not bother to turn them round. (*TLJ* 9)

The first string of paintings is fairly innocuous; the subjects do not really describe remarkable scenes, but rather a variety of rightly proclaimed "mediocre" examples of art, with the requisite Madonna to demonstrate some sort of religious acknowledgement. The one named painting, however, is significant for what it depicts and the stories that it suggests. The painting of "Sir Percival" by George Frederic Watts is an ethereal portrait of one of King Arthur's knights, pictured with his horse in a forest scene, as shown in Figure 5. The muted tones and slightly hazy light are dream-like and project an almost mythological glow to the portrait. The Sir Percival that

the painting refers to is famous for his involvement in the search for the Holy Grail. Sir Percival's story reads almost uncannily like Rickie's own, lending an even greater significance to its mention in the description of the room.[34] The photograph of his mother is important for a number of reasons, but primarily because it directly precedes the mention of the haphazard arrangement of yet un-hanged paintings. Even when memorialized in a photo, Mrs. Elliot cannot seem to oversee a cohesive and beautiful interior. The jumble of different painted subjects indicate that though Rickie has had an increase of space in his university years, indicating a certain amount of freedom and growth, he remains, as of yet, to truly figure out his voice, his person.

A visual contrast to the slightly disorganized gallery in Rickie's rooms, the descriptions of the dell outside of Rickie's college grounds provide the reader with Rickie's moments of clarity in which Rickie understands a little bit about who he is, or at least about who he would like to be. The reader is introduced to the dell at the beginning of Chapter Two :

> A little this side of Madingley, to the left of the road, there is a secluded dell, paved with grass and planted with fir trees...But when Rickie was up, it chanced to be the brief season of its romance, a season as brief for a chalk-pit as a man—its divine interval between the bareness of boyhood and the stuffiness of age. (*TLJ* 18)

The initial description of the dell provides a nice contrast for what the reader saw earlier in Rickie's suburban youth; by using words like "paved," Forster is highlighting the differences between the gray asphalt of Rickie's first physical steps and the lush green grass of Rickie's first steps towards broadening his mind. Also important is the coincidence that the dell's development in bloom or season corresponds directly with Rickie's; just as the dell is in between "bareness"

---

[34] Raised by his mother, Sir Percival grew up largely without male influence or camaraderie until he happened upon a group of knights in the forest and longed to be a part of their brotherhood. After joining the brotherhood, Percival set out on the quest for the Holy Grail—not unlike Rickie's eternal quest for happiness.

and "stuffiness," so too is Rickie. The reader has already experienced Rickie in the barren, lonely existence of his boyhood, and the "stuffiness" is a foreshadowing of what is to come. The dell, a scene of romance, became a secluded Eden for Rickie, evidenced by the narrator's remark that, "If the dell was to bear any inscription, he would have liked it to be 'This way to Heaven', painted on a signpost by the highroad" (*TLJ* 18). After the suffocation and loneliness felt by Rickie in his boyhood, the freedom and brotherhood found in Cambridge is completely liberating. It is fitting that Rickie should grant the dell the inscription of heaven, because for Rickie, it is; it is an outdoor embodiment of romance, a place where Rickie and his friends gather to discuss, philosophize, and just think—the quintessence of university. As seen in the first chapter, there seems to be an association with freedom and an increase of space, and more specifically freedom with the unconfined space of the open air.

Because there is such a strong association between the open air and the freedom that it affords, it is all the more striking that the "Sawston" section is notable more for its descriptions of domestic space than for its attention to the English landscape. The reader is introduced to the school early in the section through Rickie's appraisal of the school: "The school, a bland Gothic building, now showed as a fortress of learning, whose outworks were the boarding-houses" (*TLJ* 155). It is interesting that under Rickie's gaze the architecture of the building is "bland," indicating a lack of personality. Also important is the fact that the building is referred to as a "fortress," a structure remarkable as much for its ability to keep people out as it is for its propensity for keeping people in. It is clear in these first moments of Rickie's appraising the school that he is not truly comfortable in his position as assistant headmaster; rather, he does not yet feel comfortable with his own person, and as such feels uneasy accepting a position in which he must influence others. As the reader moves with Rickie through the inside of what is to

become his school, one follows his gaze to the "large saffron drawing-room, full of cosy corners and dumpy chairs; here the parents would be received" (*TLJ* 155). One cannot help but feel a bit of edge in Rickie's description of this initial room. The image of "cosy corners" when juxtaposed with "dumpy chairs" leads one to believe that Rickie is not entirely convinced of the success of this particular interior; in addition, and perhaps this is simply this reader's modern attitudes, but the color saffron seems to be not the most neutral of colors in which to set meetings with parents, but rather a fairly jarring color. Rickie's description of the rooms of the school are tinged with a sense of discomfort edging on disapproval; it is as if his discomfort with the decoration and layout of the rooms mirror his hesitation to accept this new position as his profession.

The reader then moves with Rickie into the hall, where there is "a framed certificate praising the drains, the bust of Hermes, and a carved teak monkey holding out a salver" (*TLJ* 154). The reader gets the sense that, as with Rickie's rooms in Cambridge, there is an element of the décor being contrived to fit with a perception of how the rooms should be decorated versus how Rickie, or the inhabitant, would like them to be decorated. The difference between the two environments, however, is that in Rickie's rooms in university, the reader has the distinct impression that Rickie's choices, though if a bit contrived, were genuine—his paintings were haphazard because he was attempting to determine his preferences. The hall at Sawston, on the other hand, seems a carefully engineered layout in order to impress various ideas and philosophies that are hoped to become synonymous with the school. The "framed certificate praising the drains" is hanged in order to show the meticulous care with which the Pembrokes, and now Rickie, care for the boys at Sawston House; one cannot help but find the certificate a bit silly when placed directly next to a bust of Hermes, intended to demonstrate the dedication to learning and philosophy, to high-minded thinking. When placed side-by-side, the two objects

highlight the feeling of show, that there is a perceived way of presenting a worthy school, and the Pembrokes are going by the rules.

Rickie continues to notice the extreme sense of artificiality in the interior decorating decisions made throughout. As he explores his new lodgings, he cannot help but notice that:

> throughout he recognized a certain decision of arrangement. Nothing in the house was accidental, or there merely for its own sake. He contrasted it with his room at Cambridge, which had been a jumble of things that he loved dearly and of things that he did not love at all. (*TLJ* 154)

The distinction between Cambridge and Sawston is important to examine in this passage; as discussed earlier, the decidedly random assortment of decoration present in Cambridge represented Rickie attempting to understand the reality of his person—his attempt to sort through all of the different facets of his personality in order to find one that fit. In Sawston, the definite lack of confusion, a consistency that can be taken to be positive, is the indication that Rickie has moved into a place that he does not fully understand, nor to which he entirely relates. The fact that objects in Sawston were "not accidental, or there merely for its own sake" is mirroring Rickie's current position with regard to Agnes. Agnes' domineering brother, Herbert, makes Rickie and Agnes' marriage conditional upon Rickie finding a lucrative enough profession to support Agnes, preventing Rickie from fulfilling his dream of becoming a full-time writer, and forcing him into taking a position as assistant headmaster at Herbert's school. Rickie's distance from his own professional decisions is mirrored in his distance from the decoration of his rooms at the school—the "decision of arrangement" dominates any chance for self-discovery. As Forster is describing Sawston, he allows another narrative comment, much like that which was discussed in the beginning of this section; while introducing Sawston to the reader in the

previous section,[41] Forster intimates that a house "sometimes … speak[s] more clearly than the people who live in it" (*TLJ* 33). If one were to apply that statement to previous discussions of Sawston, one would gather that no one involved in decorating that house had a clear sense of self, rather each was trying to decorate according to some perceived sense of how a boarding house should be adorned, trying to conform to an unwritten standard and norm. But for how focused the Sawston chapter is on interior spaces, perhaps the result of Rickie's focus on building his own domestic haven, the final chapter, "Wiltshire," barely mentions the domestic at all, instead focusing on the sweeping vision of landscape provided by the narrator.

As with the metaphor that Forster created for Rickie's journey to Cambridge, he again makes metaphorical Rickie's journey into the unknown consequences of Wiltshire. Rather than putting this juncture in terms of interior space, however, Forster allows the reader to transition through the vernacular of the English landscape. He tells the reader that Rickie

> had journeyed—as on rare occasions a man must—till he stood behind right and wrong. One the banks of the gray torrent of life, love is the only flower. A little way up the stream and a little way down had Rickie glanced, and he knew that she whom he loved had risen from the dead, and might rise again. (*TLJ* 250)

At this moment, Rickie needs to decide whether to remain in his monotonous life with Agnes and the Pembrokes, or instead choose to move to the country to be closer to his mother's other child, his half-brother. Cambridge widened the "dusty corridor" for Rickie, allowing him to see the more "spacious halls of youth" that his learning was to provide. In moving the narrative to Wiltshire, Forster is emphasizing the rapidity by which life moves, by referring to life as a "torrent." At once this word signals quickness, but also a certain violence, and the fact that this

---

[41] Sawston first appears in the text in the Cambridge section when Rickie goes to visit the Pembrokes over holiday break

torrent is gray signals that if one does not move quickly enough, the gray tedium embodied in suburban life can all but swallow one whole. At the same time, Forster seems hopeful, for Rickie and for life in general, by describing love as "the only flower." This illustration allows for a burst of color onto the otherwise grayscale landscape of life; love is the redeeming factor, and it is the motivation—to memorialize his mother's love—for Rickie's moving to Wiltshire, to find true love in the arms of his mother's memory.

Once Rickie has been fully introduced to the landscape of Wiltshire, Forster moves away from the metaphorical and maps the visions of the countryside for the reader. Punctuating the text are long passages of the beautiful vistas of this particular area, highlighting various converging natural entities. In one such passage Rickie notices the connectivity of the landscape, how everything seems to be intertwined in incontrovertible ways:

> He saw how all the water converges at Salisbury; how Salisbury lies in a shallow basin, just at the change of the soil. He saw to the nsorth the Plain, and the stream of the Cad flowing down from it, with a tributary that broke out suddenly, as the chalk streams do…He saw Old Sarum, and hints of the Avon valley, and the land above Stonehenge. …Here is the heart of our island…The fibres of England unite in Wiltshire, and did we condescend to worship her, here we should erect our national shrine. (*TLJ* 126)

It is as though each individual body cannot survive without the surrounding landscape, the converging water, the village, the valleys, and the woods are all inter-connected. In Rickie's journey towards happiness, this landscape is demonstrating exactly what he is searching for: to be a vital link in someone else's life, to be completely connected to a family, a brotherhood. Rickie moves to Wiltshire in hopes of fulfilling his desires to find a true connection to someone

else. The descriptions of landscape indicate that Wiltshire embodies the interconnectivity that Rickie desires to find, what he believes to be the most important part of his life's journey.

The most stunning spatial contrast that Forster provides is that between the gray unhappiness of Rickie's suburban youth and the colorful expanse of Rickie's hopeful future in the country. Recall one of the first introductions to Rickie's childhood in which the narrator described the loneliness of those semi-detached houses, claiming that "men do not know the men who live next door" (*TLJ* 22). The distance between neighbors seems ironic, given that their very residences are connected, while their personalities are not. Much later, as Rickie surveys the Wiltshire landscape before him, he meditates on the converging cataracts, ruminating that,

> through them [cataracts] the road descends into an unobtrusive country where, nevertheless, the power of the earth grows stronger. Streams do divide. Distances do still exist. It is easier to know the men in your valley than those who live in the next, across a waste of down. It is easier to know men well. The country is not paradise, and can show the vices that grieve a good man everywhere. But there is room in it, and leisure. (TLJ 270)

Unlike in the suburbs, men know each other in the country merely because they live in the same valley, a much larger stretch of land to traverse than a semi-detached house. In addition, a few key words stand out in one's first reading of the above passage, namely that the country is "unobtrusive." It is clear that, for Rickie, physical space allows psychological space as well, the actual spaciousness permitting one to live freely, without the encroaching expectations of others. It is also interesting that in this passage, unlike anywhere else in this discussion, it is the earth, rather than the domestic, that becomes the organism; in previous passages it has been homes and schools that have the power to comfort, encourage, interact, and in this last section, it is clear that

nature is the dominant organism, soothing, supporting, and giving life. Rickie understands that the freedom of the country cannot necessarily create a perfect environment, and indeed by accepting his brother's drinking problem, understands that this freedom can lead someone awry. But more important than the perceived perfection is the increase in space and increase in personal freedom. Rickie moves to the country in order to cast off the coat of convention he was forced to wear; in the land he finds the freedom and fresh air to live as he is, imperfect but happy.

And yet, just as in *The Voyage Out*, the protagonist dies at the end of the novel, unable to truly fulfill his desire to live out the free life he had envisioned. It is clear that like Woolf, Forster is noting that though the open spaces of natural landscapes may convey the illusions of a more liberated existence, one can never truly escape the reach of convention. Rickie tries to run away from his life with Agnes, but finds that he could never survive as a man alone in the countryside—he is killed by his desire to cast off the chains of convention. Important to note too, that his downfall is precipitated by his obligation to his brother. While trying to save his brother, Rickie "wearily did a man's duty," and pushed his brother off the tracks, leaving his own body vulnerable to the destruction of the train (*TLJ* 282). In attempting to escape his duties to his wife, Rickie becomes bound by his obligation to his brother—he never is truly liberated.

By looking at the spatial descriptions that Forster creates, it is clear that space and place have significant roles in understanding the text and the themes of *The Longest Journey*. Throughout the novel spatial descriptions and thematic developments coincide to suggest an importance to the way that Forster is conveying his ideas. It has long been known that *The Longest Journey* was Forster's favorite of his own novels because it, in his own words, represented "that junction of mind with heart where the creative impulse sparks. Thoughts and

emotions collided if they did not always co-operate" (*TLJ* xxi). This novel represents a true effort to express Forster's innermost philosophies and it is clear, from his own assertions and his narrative interjections in the text, that space is an important entity in the life of an individual. As seen with Woolf earlier, space and freedom are often linked for members of the Bloomsbury Group—an increase in space correlating with an increase of personal freedom. But also, as in the first chapter, the correlation between open space and freedom is not as simple as it at first seems. Rickie's belief that moving to the open spaces of the countryside will free him from the chains of marital constraint is disproved when it is realized that Rickie remains bound, but in this case, bound to the fate of his half-brother. The "freedom" of the countryside is short-lived, and merely develops into another type of enslavement. Rickie ultimately cannot survive in the story of the novel because, like Rachel, remaining entrenched in the system of convention would kill him eventually anyway: the only way to maintain his happiness is to remove him from the living world before his unhappiness becomes too dire. Though the dichotomy between the domestic and the natural is not as simple as it seems, the contrast still manifests itself throughout the novel. There are similar comparisons in Woolf's last novel *Between the Acts*. Woolf takes Forster's contrast of the inside and outside space and truly emphasizes the differences that can exist between the two, especially during war time.

Fig.5
"Sir Percival"
by George Frederic Watts
(courtesy of artmagik.com)

Chapter Three: *Between the Acts*
Space under Deconstruction

Unlike her first novel and indeed unlike Forster's as well, Woolf's final novel uses space in an entirely different way. Partly because of the different circumstances in which she was writing, partly because her own writing style had evolved, Woolf places a very distinctive significance on space in her last piece of fiction. Rather than seeming to mirror the action of the plot, or to reflect the development of the characters, space indicates a situation beyond any one of the individual conditions of particular characters; space in *Between the Acts* is indicative of a time and an era, or the time immediately preceding war. As Woolf writes in her diary, during the time that she was creating this last novel, "Further, the war—our waiting while the knives sharpen for the operation—has taken away the outer wall of security. No echo comes back. I have no surroundings."[46] While constructing this novel, Woolf's spaces are constantly threatened by the impending war; she feels immediately vulnerable at the idea of the violence that was slowly becoming inevitable. As a result, the spaces described in this last novel are fraught with images of the consequences of war, fraught with the dichotomies of inside and outside space, dichotomies that are slowly broken down throughout the course of the novel. As with the first two novels discussed, what seems like a simple oppositional dichotomy slowly is revealed to be much more complicated. Because the threat of war loomed ever-closer, both in the novel and in Woolf's reality, the spaces that once felt safe suddenly take on a dimension of uncertainty and the distinct sense of vulnerability.

---

[46] Anne Olivier Bell, ed., *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Vol. 5. (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1984), 299.

One of the first views that the reader gets of the space in *Between the Acts*, is a distant description of the central house in the text, Pointz Hall. The narrator frames the house within the context of a typical conversation that occur between casual observers of the main house. Observed from afar,

> Pointz Hall was seen in the light of an early summer morning to be a middle-sized house. It did not rank among the houses that are mentioned in guide books. It was too homely. But this whitish house with the grey roof, and the wing thrown out at right angles, lying unfortunately low on the meadow with a fringe of trees on the bank above it so that smoke curled up to the nests of the rooks, was a desirable house to live in. [47]

Woolf's depiction of Pointz Hall is remarkable for its mediocrity; that it's a "middle-sized house" and is not even notable enough even to be mentioned in guide books, suggests that Pointz Hall is visually average. Even the color scheme of the house is decidedly bland, the white and gray fading into one's memory. The location of the house as well seems definitively commonplace, even "unfortunate" in the words of the narrator, as a result of its sitting so low on the meadow. And yet, the narrator asserts that it "was a desirable house to live in," perhaps even because of all of those different attributes. In war time all of the average qualities of Pointz Hall can be seen as reassuring and safe; a middle-sized house is certainly less of a target than a large one, especially when it is neutrally toned and low-sitting on the land. One almost gets the sense that the house is hiding within the surrounding landscape, keeping its inhabitants safe from the impending destruction of war.

At the same time, although the placement of the house may seem advantageous when preparing for war, the deliberate location of the house in the hollow is representative of the ever-

---

[47] Virginia Woolf, Between *the Acts*, (New York: Harcourt Inc., 1970), 6-7. Hereafter cited in the text as *BTA*.

relevant struggle between man and nature that seems especially poignant in wartime. In war there is a sense that man is perpetually in combat with nature, destroying it with bombs and gunfire. This idea is illustrated in the dissonance between man and nature with regard to the placement of the house; the narrator asserts that, "It was a pity that the man who had built Pointz Hall had pitched the house in a hollow, when beyond the flower garden and the vegetables there was this stretch of high ground. Nature had provided a site for a house; man had built his house in a hollow" (*BTA* 10). There seems to be a sense that man simply did not understand the directions that nature had given him, that in blindly asserting his will, he missed an opportunity for a truly successful creation. This idea also leads back to the struggle between humanity and nature in times of war; there always seems to be this feeling that man is in some sense defying nature by creating machines, whether it be guns, bombs, or some other unnatural mechanism for violence, to destroy human life. The same applies for this description of space on the part of Woolf; she is using the space of the house and the conflict it creates as a result of its location in order to convey certain ideas that are the consequences of her time. Unlike the previous novels discussed, *Between the Acts* figures space in a way that is much more significant when thought of in the generally applicable, rather than the individually important. Whereas space is important in thinking of the journeys of Rachel and Rickie and their personal struggles against the gender constructions that threaten their personal happiness and freedoms, space represents a much more universal problem in Woolf's last novel; the spaces are indicative of the impending war and cycles of violence, issues that apply to the entire population rather than a few select individuals.

The interior of the house is introduced through the front hall, establishing for the reader the historical and personal importance of the domestic space. The house is described as belonging to the Olivers who have only owned the house for a mere "a hundred and twenty

years" (*BTA* 7). The space is represented as having a history that predates the occupation by the current family, a fact that becomes important as the reader is further exposed to the idiosyncrasies of the Oliver house. Attempting to create a meaningful history for the family and the house, the narrator leads the reader "up the principle staircase...[to] a portrait...and ancestress of sorts" (*BTA* 7). This image of a grand staircase leading up to a commanding matriarch immortalized in a portrait implies a rich and important past. Most importantly, the reader is told that "the butler had been a soldier...and, under a glass case there was a watch that had stopped a bullet on the field of Waterloo" (*BTA* 7). The Oliver lineage is proven to be not only worthy of the house that predates their occupancy, but also worthy of the honor and respect that accompanies those who can be proven to be contributors to England's noble military history. Just as the front hall can indicate a sense of family history as seen parallel to national history, an interior can also reflect the feelings and circumstances of an individual, mirroring in its interior the realities of the inhabitants.

As the reader moves through the house and into the dining room, the narrative descriptions of the room seem to convey more than just the physical realities of the interior, in addition intimating the personal realities of the characters as well.

> The room was empty. Empty, Empty, Empty; silent, silent, silent. The room was a shell, singing of what was before time was; a vase stood in the heart of the house, alabaster, smooth, cold, holding the still, distilled essence of emptiness, silence. (*BTA* 36-7)

Woolf conveys the room's emptiness through the language that she uses to describe the vacant space. Her reiteration of the words "empty" and "silent" creates the illusion of an echo; the reader can almost hear the words bouncing off the walls of the room. The repetition of the "s"

sound also instills the feeling of silence and emptiness in the reader—as if the echo continued but petered out until only the "s" of "silent" remained. Woolf's description of the dining room as a place this sterile and cold, communicates the emptiness at once felt by most of the occupants of the house. Because the dining room should, according to convention, be a room that is warm and filled with people and food, the lack is especially striking. The reader truly feels the isolation of each individual within the house, suggested by the empty, cold room. Although the cold, empty space of the dining room presents a picture of a lonely, isolated reality for the characters, there still seems to be a comfort in the repetition of sounds and images. The dining room becomes a comforting interior that illustrates an unpleasant, but predictable existence, far more favorable than the uncertainty that comes with war.

Woolf's descriptions of the Barn convey a different sort of comfort to the reader, intimating its staidness through descriptions of its foundations and appearance. The Barn, the focus of so much of the novel for its various purposes as a shelter and a refreshment hall, has an almost majestic history to it that lends it grandness and a mythic presence in the novel. As the narrator moves through the various spaces of the Oliver home, finally arriving at the Barn, the reader learns that it

> was a great building in the farmyard. It was as old as the church, and built of the same stone, but it had no steeple. It was raised on cones of grey stone at the corners to protect it from rats and damp...The roof was weathered red-orange; and inside it was a hollow hall, sun-shafted, brown, smelling of corn, dark when the doors were shut, but splendidly illuminated when the doors at the end stood open. (*BTA* 26)

It seems significant that the materials used to construct the Barn were the same as those used for the church; in a way, the shared history of the two buildings connects the two in such a way that

there is a transference of spirituality to the space of the Barn. It is also worth noting that Woolf capitalizes "Barn," choosing to impart an importance not only to the name, but also to the space itself; there is a reason why it is the only spatial entity that is capitalized: because it represents a safe place that could not really be manifested in any other space of the novel. One gets the sense that the "cones of grey stone" that protect the building from rats and damp, must also protect the occupants of the Barn from other hazards as well. The "red-orange" of the roof stands in colorful contrast to the "white and grey" of the main house, indicating a space that perhaps, when tempered with its more subdued "brown" hall, represents a bridge between the inside and out, a space that attempts to provide a bridge between the danger of open air and shelter of the enclosed space. This idea of the Barn being the bridge structure is also mirrored in its ability to be "dark" and also "splendidly illuminated." There is solace in the darkness that the Barn provides, almost as if it contains natural black-out windows, ready and capable of protecting the occupants inside from the dangers that surround.

The exterior spaces, in contrast to the interior, are representative of the discomforting unknown and potentially unsafe. The pivotal question that lies at the center of the novel, "will it be wet or fine?" is evocative of so much more than merely the weather. During World War II, outside space was vulnerable space, vulnerable to bombs, to invasion, to death. By phrasing the question in such terms as "wet" and "fine," Woolf is suggesting much more than merely rain or sunshine; one can imagine that "wet" suggests bullets and bombs as much as raindrops, "fine" indicating sunshine as well as peace and the state of things being safe for the moment. Telling, too, is the potential shelter of the barn should the weather become ill-suited to being outdoors; the dichotomy between exposure and shelter indicates a problem that was fresh in Woolf's pre-war reality. The threat of war and its consequences manifested itself in the dilemma of

appropriate shelters to provide adequate safety. This dichotomy of peace versus war is perhaps most expressively illustrated when the narration describes the scene of backstage, with clothes and props strewn across the grass, the mess of the pageant everywhere. It is almost as if the narrator desires to simplify the scene to its most basic colors and impressions rather than detailed images. The reader glimpses the "pools of red and purple in the shade; flashes of silver in the sun" (*BTA* 62). If any image is emblematic of the hazards of war, it is this montage of colors and impressions. The proverbial "war-zone" of the backstage area implies blood, guns, and the real dangers that accompany a real war-zone. A seemingly innocuous scene of a backstage becomes a battlefield, echoing the sentiment that Woolf writes in her diary—a feeling of being exposed and incredibly susceptible. Suddenly, because of the threat of war, colors, images take on different meaning: a pool of red is no longer a discarded shirt or cloth, but a pool of blood; a flash of silver is no longer a harmless prop, but the flash of a gun.

A similar instance of seemingly innocent space turning sinister is when Woolf describes a wall, connected to the house, but unfinished. Though the structure endures probably because

"funds were lacking; the plan was abandoned, and the wall remained, nothing but a wall," the image of the lone wall as if a part of something gone is almost chilling in its symbolism (*BTA* 52). The wall becomes representative not of an unfinished past, but rather an uncertain future; although the addition to the main house was never finished, the lone wall seems an ominous image of the war to come. It recalls pictures of bombed buildings, structures partly survived, and hollow spaces that war creates. Like the rumpled clothes in the backstage area, the lone wall takes on new meaning when thought of in light of the impending violence; the image becomes ominous and worrying, reminding the audience, and the reader, that even interior space is not completely sacred or safe from the perils of combat. This same idea is manifested in an image of

the Oliver home, observed by the audience at twilight, near the end of the pageant: "And the audience turning saw the flaming windows, each daubed with golden sun; and murmured: 'Home, gentlemen; sweet…' yet delayed a moment" (*BTA* 197). Although the "flaming windows" are merely reflections of the setting sun in the glass surfaces of the house, Woolf's vocabulary contains an entirely auxiliary set of meanings when considered in light of her fear of war. The fact that the phrase, "Home, sweet, home" cannot be completed implies an uncertain future, a fear of the instability associated with combat.

By moving from the idea that the interior is associated with safety to demonstrating the notion that no space is sacred, not even those that are supposed to provide shelter, Woolf essentially demonstrates the idea that rules change when peace is unattainable. Supposedly safe spaces are set aglow with "flames," casualties are presented in one's own backyard, and homes can vanish in an instant. The last scene of the novel is probably the most complicated description of space that Woolf narrates; this last scene represents the climax of the novel, when the spatial deconstruction of the imagery and the deconstruction of the prose travel a simultaneous trajectory.

> Isa let her sewing drop. The great hooded chairs had become enormous. And Giles too. And Isa too against the window. The window was all sky without colour. The house had lost its shelter. It was night before roads were made, or houses. It was the night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high place among rocks…Then the curtain rose. They spoke. (*BTA* 219)

The "great hooded chairs" becoming enormous, along with the figures of Giles and Isa indicates a distortion of space that is mirrored not only in the imagery that Woolf uses, but also in her construction of the paragraph as well. As the figures in the scene push the boundaries of

"normal" space and dimensions, the sentences also mirror this slow movement towards distortion. There is a sense that the space is slowly deconstructing, indicated initially perhaps, by the statement that the "window was all sky without color." In this fragment the boundaries between interior and exterior space are blurred, the interior structure of the window becoming the exterior entity of the sky. Suddenly, the reader is not sure of the boundaries of the room, the window fading into the sky signaling a dissipation of boundaries; or perhaps, because it is evening, and because this novel was written during a time of air raids and black out shades, the "window was all sky without color" could signal the drawing of the blackout shades, creating an artificial night for the inhabitants of the house.[49] In either case, the blurring of the space is indicative of an unraveling of sorts, that continues in the paragraph when Woolf states that the "house had lost its shelter." After this last statement it seems as if the initial theory regarding the window, that it almost fades into the sky, is the correct one. Woolf is reiterating her point that though interior spaces might feel secure, nothing is sacred, and even the space around a person can simply fall away. And yet, just as the reader begins to be convinced that Woolf is fusing inside and out, allowing windows to fade and walls to drop, she writes "then the curtain rose," throwing the reader's comprehension of the scene into questionable light once again. A curtain implies some sort of interior in order to be hung, let alone taken up. Woolf's deconstructed structure and mismatched images provide a blurring of spaces and a level of discomfort that is intentional; because the reader becomes so confused as to the true boundaries of the spaces, she is forced to feel the uncertainty that is latent in a nation on the brink of war.

Woolf's attention to space as it conveys images of the consequences of war resonates with Forster's vision of India in his *A Passage to India*. Forster uses space to contrast the critical

[49] Woolf was writing the novel in the summer of 1939, and though England had not officially declared war, war was all but certainly in the future. Because of the temporal proximity to involvement in the war, Woolf is no doubt recalling symbols of war and wartime from her experiences during World War I.

English spatial expectations with the beauty and freedom implicit in Indian landscape. Like *Between the Acts*, *A Passage to India* represents a later work of Forster's, and as such, reflects, as in Woolf, a stylistic growth, and a development of the way space figures within the novel.

Chapter 4: *A Passage to India*
Drawing a Blank

Forster, like Woolf, uses space in this second novel, *A Passage to India*, in order to convey ideas about large-scale issues, in this case about colonialism and spirituality. By examining Forster's description of space, the reader begins to understand the implications of colonialism by realizing that much of the space throughout, both created and natural, is seen in a distinctly English way; that India has become a collection of decidedly English spatial snapshots, speaks volumes about the themes in the novel, most often overlooked for the more concentrated political themes implicit in dialogue and character interaction. And though *A Passage to India* is perhaps Forster's most well-known novel, attracting a variety of different criticism, no critic truly examines the spaces in the novel, choosing to focus rather on the socio-political implications in the novel.[50]. In her essay "What Happened in the Cave-- Reflections on *A Passage to India,*" Louise Dauner comes tantalizingly close to focusing on the spaces of the novel in a meaningful way, recognizing that certain key moments and their spatial counterparts reveal volumes about their importance in the novel. Her discussion on the space of the caves falls just short, however, when she moves the focus further away from the reality of the spaces itself, and more towards the psychology of what happens in the caves. More than political or racial differences, this novel is about spatial differences as manifested in Indian space and its significance to English understanding; it is about the implications of the English interpretation of

[50] An interesting discussion of Forster's decidedly English take on Indian society and politics can be found in the critical anthology edited by J.K. Das and John Beer entitled *E.M. Forster: A Human Exploration*. Especially interesting is Nirad Chaudhuri's essay, "A Passage to and from India."

Indian space and also about how descriptions of various spaces imply certain ideas and themes throughout the novel.

Forster's hopes for this novel, far from providing a factually accurate portrayal of politics in Imperial India, can be explored through an examination of the Walt Whitman poem from which Forster took his title.[51] One stanza in particular seems to illustrate Forster's intent to deliver a novel that discusses, in his own words, "the search of the human race for a more lasting home, about the universe as embodied in the Indian earth and the Indian sky...philosophic and poetic."[52] The poem navigates the mythical terrain of beautiful India, espousing soul-searching and adventure when in the throes of her inspiring landscape. The relevant stanza occurs fairly early in Whitman's topographical homage to India, and begins with his entreaty to the readers to see "God's purpose from the first!/The earth to be spann'd, connected by net-work/The people to become brothers and sisters."[53] Whitman is preaching for diversity, for acceptance, and for a cross-cultural understanding that spans continents, race, and genders; he is calling for unity at the basically spatial level. He calls for "the lands to be welded together...for thy sake, O soul," pleading with the reader to traverse the seas of hatred and misunderstanding for the benefit of his

---

[51] Relevant stanzas:
Passage to India!
Lo, soul! seest thou not God's purpose from the first?
The earth to be spann'd, connected by net-work,
The people to become brothers and sisters,
The races, neighbors, to marry and be given in marriage,
The oceans to be cross'd, the distant brought near,
The lands to be welded together.

(A worship new, I sing; You captains, voyagers, explorers, yours!
You engineers! you architects, machinists, your!
You, not for trade or transportation only,
But in God's name, and for thy sake, O soul.)

[52] E.M. Forster, *The Hills of Devi* , (London, Edward Arnold, 1983), 298. The Hills of Devi provides a nice overview of Forster's general motivations for writing the novel, along with a fairly compelling accompaniment of his Indian journals from before, during and after his writing of A Passage to India.

[53] Walt Whitman, "A Passage to India (2008)," http://www.bartleby.com/142/183.html.

or her soul and spirit.[54] One must consider that by naming his novel after this particular Walt Whitman poem, Forster is saying that the true purpose of the novel is to move past politics, past racial differences, and past basic social miscommunication in order to see that on a basic level, we are all humans, and for that reason alone, we are "brothers and sisters." Whitman's words, indicative of the American transcendental inclination towards peace in spirit and physicality near the end of the nineteenth century, possess the sort of truth that Forster, in part, seeks to reveal in his journey into the Anglo-Indian relations in Chandrapore. The main point that can be taken from the poetic inspiration, however, is that Whitman's poem focuses on the spaces of India, the truth of which Forster is trying to scrupulously record in his novel.[55] In fact, not only does Forster focus on illustrating the "real" India, but also the characters within the novel are consumed with the desire to see the "real" Indian landscape, custom, culture, etc. The focus on the "real" spaces of India becomes all-consuming. And yet, at the novel's center are images of the caves, spaces that seem to resist description, defy the abilities of language to recreate an image.

Because space is such an essential part of understanding the novel, it is only logical that Forster arranges his novel into three different sections, Mosque, Caves, and Temple, each being focused on a central space in the Indian landscape of his fictional setting. The section entitled "Mosque" attempts to explore the implications of the spiritual journey of an outsider, such as Mrs. Moore or Ms. Quested, as they try to experience the "real India." The second section, and arguably the most important in the novel, "Caves," uses the dark caverns of the Marabar Hills to detail the complications of Imperialism and the disjunction that exists between two ethnically,

---

[54] Ibid.

[55] Forster is so focused on recording the "real" India that he stops writing the novel half way through and finds it necessary to revisit the space of India because the "gap between India remembered and India experienced was too wide" (*The Hills of Devi, 99*).

socially, and religiously different peoples. The Caves section also represents the instance in the novel where language fails to faithfully describe the space. The reader finds that words are insufficient to convey the spatial reality—a striking contrast to the intents of the characters to fully grasp the landscape. The last section, "Temple," describes the eventual understanding and acceptance that India and England, both physically and figuratively, are too far removed to ever be brought together into a cohesive bond.

Forster's first section, entitled "Mosque," introduces the reader to the physical and cultural landscape of Chandrapore, and indeed frames it in a way that the common visitor can comprehend: a traveler's glimpse into the "real" India. The novel opens with a panoramic view of the Indian landscape, a mapping that details the longevity of the landscape and the power of the elements. In describing Chandrapore, Forster explicates the reality of the town, describing that, "Houses do fall, people are drowned and left rotting, but the general outline of the town persists, swelling here, shrinking there, like some low but indestructible form of life."[56] This passage is indicative of the legacy of the land, and the idea that civilization is transient while the landscape is static; the town remains through generations of rule and civilian activity. The description of the town as an "indestructible form of life" suggests a resiliency that will persist through imperialism and other forms of cultural suppression; regardless of man's influence, destruction, and suppression, nature's ability to be reborn and survive human mistakes allows it to prevail. It is clear that Forster's faith in the power of the land, ultimately guides his belief in the transcendent landscape.

And as the immortal aspects of Chandrapore illustrate a pattern of nature trumping human influence (and in the case of Imperialism, human error), descriptions in this first section

---

[56] E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India*, (New York: Harcourt Inc., 1984), 4. Hereafter cited in the text as *PTI*.

of the sky and of the mosque that Aziz attends, allow readers to understand the natural influence on spiritual enlightenment that is pervasive in the religious experiences of Indians of varying faiths. A description of the power of the sky illuminates this idea of nature's dominance, "when the sky chooses, glory can rain into the Chandrapore bazaars or a benediction pass from horizon to horizon. The sky can do this because it is so strong and so enormous" (*PTI* 5). There is a religious association with the local landscape, a feeling that the environment has a hand in one's divine self-discovery. That the sky can inspire "glory" or a trans-terrain prayer implies not only the inherent spirituality of the environment, but also the influence and impact that natural space has on personal well-being and an internal sense of mystical coherence.

Also pervasive throughout the novel are descriptions of interior spaces, and it is these interior descriptions that more obviously reveal the distinctly English view with which the spatial aspects of the novel are being conveyed. As the reader follows Mrs. Moore into the Mosque, to get the "real" Indian experience, and observe her interaction with Aziz, we are allowed into the mind of the doctor as we witness his disgust, thinking about the appearance of his home: "Aziz thought of his bungalow with horror. It was a detestable shanty near a low bazaar. There was practically only one room in it, and that infested with small black flies" (*PTI* 73). Although a native Indian might perhaps think that their housing is "detestable," one must also explore the idea that the space is being described by Forster, a native Englishman, not an Indian accustomed to the Indian reality. That there are "small black flies" is probably indicative of the natural surroundings of the house more than any indication of filth or dirt; and that the bungalow consists of only one room might not necessarily be shameful if there is only one person living there—Aziz lives alone. The description of the room seems extremely judgmental, but perhaps only because it is being appraised with English eyes. Of course a one room shanty close to a

noisy bazaar is going to seem "detestable" to an Englishman more accustomed to large houses in the country surrounded by rolling hills.

And while the first section encompasses descriptions of Indian landscape and attempts to chronicle the interiors of the "real" India, the second section is dominated by descriptions of the Marabar Caves, conveying the confusion that is at the heart of the novel. Though critics have recently moved farther away from the reality of the actions that occurred in the cave and closer to the allegorical meanings that can be gleaned from a close examination of the "Caves" section, most have shied away from looking at the implications of the space in favor of interpreting the various reactions to the experience of the caves by various characters. But more important than the truthfulness of Miss Quested's accusations, and even than the reactions to the caves, however, are the actual descriptions of the caves and what those images provide in the quest to understand the consequences of Imperialism and cross-cultural confusion. The section entitled "Caves" opens with an illustration of India; a cinematic panorama of the countryside that then focuses in on the dominant feature of the Chandrapore backdrop: the Marabar Caves. As the labyrinth of caves is described, the reader discovers that, "having seen one such cave, having seen two, having seen three, four, fourteen, twenty-four, the visitor returns to Chandrapore uncertain whether he has had an interesting experience or a dull one or any experience at all" (*PTI* 137). It is important to keep in mind that in this discussion of the caves, the perspective is from that of the visitor, not a native. It is the visitor to India who does not know how to understand the "experience" of touring the caves; there is no tangible sense of value for the visitor, nothing learned from the encounter with the natural marvel. That distinction is important in order to reinforce that no matter how "authentic" their trip might have been, Mrs. Moore and Adela can never truly understand the "real India" as they so longed to see it. This inability to

fully understand the experience, or lack thereof, of visiting the caves illustrates the cultural confusion that lies at the heart of the novel. This passage is also significant for what is lacking in its spatial considerations; the narrator cannot really impart an image of the caves that can be visualized. That the visitor is "uncertain" implies that there is some element to the landscape of the caves that cannot fully be illustrated through language—at the heart of the novel lies a spatial anomaly, an entity that evades narration.

Emblematic of the larger problem of miscommunication between the transitory Briton and the native Indian, descriptions of the caves illuminate how the descriptions of the space of the Indian landscape are allegories of larger humanistic problems. In a telling description of the caves, the narrator observes, "they are dark caves. Even when they open towards the sun, very little light penetrates down the entrance tunnel into the circular chamber. There is little to see, and no eye to see it, until the visitor arrives for his five minutes, and strikes a match" (*PTI* 137). Literally, the caves are extremely dark and almost entirely incapable of being illuminated; literally, too, when the visitor attempts to make sense of the shadows, he is able to see for the five minutes in which he strikes the match, though a match to be sure sheds only a small circle of light. The metaphorical implications of this imagery are almost too obvious to be considered, but the inclusion of such descriptions is an intentional comment by Forster on the limited scope through which the visitor to India can actually see and understand. There is also a sense of futility that is ascribed to the visiting of the caves by the unknowing tourist; though the match with throw its light onto the surrounding caves, "there is little to see," signifying that there may be an important difference between the actual value of the caves and the perceived value of the caves assumed by most non-natives—a reality that is indicative of the vast cultural distance between the casual interloper and the individual to whom the land actually belongs. Implicit in

this description of the caves is the idea that the visitor is trying to understand and relate to the native culture by "lighting the match." There is a sense that the visitor cannot see and is attempting to rectify his cultural blindness—he is trying to see beyond the confusion of difference.

And as the reader moves away from the Marabar Caves, a moment of disappointment foreshadows the eventual recognition that the enlightenment for the British may never transpire: as the sun was rising, "at the supreme moment, when night should have died and day lived, nothing occurred" (*PTI* 151). The last section of the novel, "Temple," deals with the awareness that the two cultures will never be able to truly cooperate, as long as their interactions are inspired by the injustices of imperialism. The irreconcilable differences between the two cultures are best highlighted in the last section in which the narrator is observing the, "Hindus, Hindus only, mild-featured men, mostly villagers...the toiling ryot, whom some call the real India" partaking in a religious ceremony in their local temple (*PTI* 318). The worshippers were doing "not one thing which the non-Hindu would feel dramatically correct," and yet, they were in a "tender, happy state unknown to an English crowd" (*PTI* 318-319). At the most basic human level of religion and faith, the two cultures are fated to belong to two distinct paths towards enlightenment. It is clear in this last section that the two cultures can never truly understand the motivations or realities of the other, and that despite the desire of the English to see and be a part of the "real" India, they can never truly relate to those whom they are intent on civilizing.

From the moment that Adela accuses Aziz of foul play, it is clear to the reader that the two cultures can never really be reconciled as long as there exists the idea that one culture is in some way better than or dominant over another. From the hopeful naming of the novel, it is clear that Forster believes that the English and Indian can, in fact, be friends, but from the prose it is

equally clear that friendship cannot survive under the injustices of colonialism. As Forster wrote in his Indian journal, "Looking back on that first visit of mine to India, I realize that mixed up with the pleasure and fun was much pain. The sense of racial tension, of incompatibility never left me."[64] In the hierarchical world of colonial India, each race is incapable of relating to the other's experiences. In the end, the iconic last passage of the novel illustrates that the world is not yet ready for the friendship between Indians and English: "the earth didn't want it...and the sky said, 'No, not there'" (*PTI* 362). Even in describing the "incompatibility" of the races, there is a focus on the land being the divine deciding factor in the process; it is the earth and the sky that object, at this time, to the unification of the people.

At the close of the novel, after the conflict and confusion, the reader is left with the distinct vision that though the two races cannot be friends yet, there is hope for the future; it is when England rewrites the purposes of her stay in India that the two can attempt friendship. After all, Forster reminds the reader, "India is the country, fields, fields, then hills, jungle, hills, and more fields...How can the mind take hold of such a country? Generations of invaders have tried, but they remain in exile...She [India] is not a promise, only an appeal" (*PTI* 150). At her basic level, India's beauty, spirituality, and inspiration lie in her landscape.

In this last novel, Forster attempts to faithfully recreate the imagery and landscape of India through descriptions of nature and a few interior Indian spaces. What is revealed in the process is Forster's inescapably English view that necessarily colors the portrait that he creates with a sense of cultural misunderstanding, a sense that certain images cannot be recreated by the visitor's eye. Important, too, is Forster's inability to truly transcribe the visual images of the caves into understandably visual language—the caves remain a mystery that the novel can never

---

[64] E.M. Forster, *The Hills of Devi and Other Indian Writings*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1983), 297.

fully resolve. It is clear that spaces are at the center of this novel; Forster anchors his narrative around images of landscape and interior in order to impart his philosophies on Indian spaces, politics, and spirituality, lending a visuality to the text that is essential in understanding its essence.

Conclusion

There is a distinctly spatial quality to the work of the Bloomsbury Group authors, a tendency that is partly a result of the spatial foundations of the group, and perhaps partly a result of the time in which the members lived. Forster, while giving a lecture on Woolf after her death, asserts that "she belonged to an age which distinguished sharply between the impermanency of man and the durability of his monuments."[67] Forster is situating Woolf within the context of her time, and also highlighting the importance that space holds in the historical continuum; spaces endure long after man, and must, as a result, tell the stories long after he is gone. The idea that space is represented as embodying the legacies and implications of a time is pervasive throughout the literature of Forster and Woolf, and provides a lens through which broader themes and ideologies can be understood.

Throughout the novels discussed, spaces are vehicles through which Woolf and Forster explore themes of gender conventions and constraints, the implications of war and violence, and the failure of Imperialism to encourage humanistic unity and peace. Space represents a means by which larger issues can be explored, and yet smaller issues still highlighted. Latent in the visual descriptions of the natural landscape or interior spaces are implications of figuratively spatial ideas, spanning several different ideological disciplines. What we learn from Forster and Woolf is that spatial dichotomies or dualities are rarely what they seem, revealing, instead, underlying problems both textually and meta-textually.

---

[67] E.M. Forster, "Virginia Woolf," in *The Bloomsbury Group*, ed. By S.P. Rosenbaum, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975).

Included below are pictures of Woolf and Forster in their own personal spaces, contextualizing for the reader the realities of their creating environments. Forster's rooms in Cambridge provide much of the inspiration for his novel *The Longest Journey*, and one can imagine Rickie sitting in similar, if somewhat less tastefully decorated, rooms in King's College, Cambridge. Additionally, the Woolf photo not only showcases Bloomsbury art (the fabric design on the chair is the epitome of Bloomsbury textiles), but also allows the reader a glimpse—if a somewhat small glimpse—into the domestic space that supported Woolf during her creation of her last novel, *Between the Acts*. Spaces reveal a multitude about their inhabitants and the philosophies of the inhabitants, a point that Forster emphasizes in his fiction and that is well to remember.

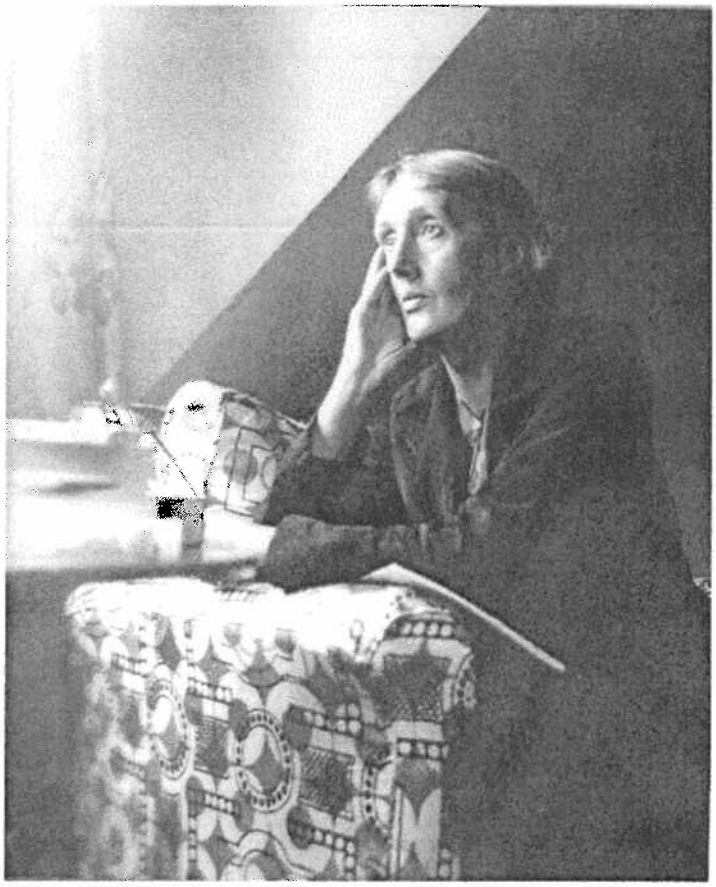

Fig. 6

Virginia Woolf at home in Monk's House

(courtesy of virginiawoolfsociety.co.uk)

Fig. 7

E.M. Forster in his King's College Rooms

(courtesy of archives.li.man.ac.uk)

Works Consulted

Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969.

Bakshi, Parminder Kaur. *Distant Desire*. New York: Peter Lang, 1996.

Banfield, Ann. *The Phantom Table*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Bedient, Calvin. *Architects of the Self*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972.

Beer, J.B.. *The Achievement of E.M. Forster*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1968.

Bell, Anne Olivier, ed. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*. Vol. 5. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1984.

Bell, Quentin. *Charleston: A Bloomsbury House and Garden*. London: Frances Lincoln Limited, 2004.

Bradshaw, Tony, ed. *A Bloomsbury Canvas: Reflections on the Bloomsbury Group*. Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2001.

Colley, Ann C. *The Search for Synthesis in Literature and Art: The Paradox of Space*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1990.

Das, G.K.. *E.M. Forster's India*. New York: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1977.

Das, G.K. and John Beer, eds. *E.M. Forster: A Human Exploration*. New York: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1979.

Dowling, David. *Bloomsbury Aesthetics and the Novels of Forster and Woolf*. London: Macmillan, 1985.

Edwards, Mike. *E.M. Forster: The Novels*. New York: Palgrave, 2002.

Forster, E.M.. *A Passage to India*. New York: Harcourt Inc., 1984.

Forster, E.M.. *The Hills of Devi and Other Indian Writings*. London: Edward Arnold, 1983.

Forster, EM.. *The Longest Journey*. New York: Penguin Books, 2006.

Frank, A. O. *The Philosophy of Virginia Woolf*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2001.

Froula, Christine. *Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury avant-garde*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.

Fry, Roger. *Vision and Design*. New York: Brentano's, 1924.

Guiguet, Jean. *Virginia Woolf and Her Works*. London, Hogarth Press, 1965.

Hussey, Mark, ed. *Virginia Woolf and War*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991.

London, Bette. *The Appropriated Voice*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1990.

MacKay, Marina. *Modernism and World War II*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Martin, Robert K. and George Piggford. *Queer Forster*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Naylor, Gillian, ed. *Bloomsbury: its Artists, Authors, and Designers*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1990.

Reed, Christopher. *Bloomsbury Rooms: Modernism, Subculture, and Domesticity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.

Rosenbaum, S.P., ed. *A Bloomsbury Group Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993.

Rosenbaum, S.P., ed. *The Bloomsbury Group*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975.

Shahane, VA.. *Perspectives on E.M. Forster's* A Passage to India. New York: Barnes and Nobel, Inc., 1968.

Shone, Richard. *The Art of Bloomsbury*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.

Stape, J.H., ed. *E.M. Forster Interviews and Recollections*. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1993.

Whitman, Walt. "A Passage to India." 11 January 2008. http://www.bartleby.com/142/183.html.

Woolf, Virginia. *Between the Acts*. New York: Harcourt Inc., 1970.

Woolf, Virginia. *Moments of Being*. New York: Harcourt Inc., 1985.

Woolf, Virginia. *The Voyage Out*. New York: Modern Library, 2001.