

RITA: *An' like the worst thing is that y 'know the people who are supposed to represent the people on our estate,*

*y 'know, The Sun an' the Unions an' liv. what are they tellin 'people to do? They just tell them to go out an get more money, don't they? The Unions tell 'em to go out an'get more money an' ITV an' the papers tell them what to spend it on so the disease is always covered up.*

FRANK: *Why didn 't you take a course in politics?*

RITA: *Politics? Go way, I hate politics. I'm just telling y 'about round our way...It's like drug addicts isn't it? 7'hey hate it when one of them tries to break away. It makes me stronger coming here. That's what Denny's*

*frightened of*

FRANK: *"Only conned"*

RITA. *Oh, not frig~in' Forster again.*

FRANK: *"Only connect". You see what you've been doing?*

*EDUCATING RITA, Willy Russell. 1980*

**Howards End** is the third of E M Forster's works to be adapted for the screen by Ruth Praver Jhabvala, directed by James Ivory and produced by Ismail Merchant as a product now come to be known as a MerchantIvory film. Despite their long careers in contemporary movie-making, their collective name is to a great degree now associated with the era in which **Room with a View**, **Maurice** and **Howards End** are all set. Is **Howards End** then at all relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

There is in the works of Forster an apparent nostalgia at the passing of the dominant upper classes of 19th century England. This is at once at variance with his contemporaries - especially D H Lawrence. Such nostalgia for a simpler, elegant pre-war world is a criticism levelled also at "period movie" makers. Yet Forster gives the liberal literate world he represents - especially in **Howards End** - a frustration with its own impotence, and a linked desire to discover the vital things in life. **Howards End** has both a life in time; a story and characters, and a life in values, as Forster was keen to say; it has a "message".

### Some context - The adversarial tradition

*"I've often thought about it, Helen. It is one of the most interesting things in the world. The truth is that there is a great outer life that you and I have never touched - a life in which telegrams and anger count. Personal relations, that we think supreme, are not supreme -there...But here's my difficulty. This outer life, though obviously horrid, often seems the real one - there's grit in it. It does breed character. Do personal relations lead to sloppiness in the end?"*

*"Oh, Meg, that's what I felt, only not so clearly, when the Wilcoxes were so competent, and seemed to have their hands on all the ropes." 'Don't you feel it now?"*

*"I remember Paul at breakfast," said Helen quietly. "I shall never forget him. He had nothing to fall back upon. I know that personal relations are the real life, for ever and ever."*

*"Amen!"*

*HOWARDS END, E M FORSTER 1910*

Since the industrial revolution, it is said, Britain has had an adversarial culture; a cultural tradition, especially a literary one, which has been at pains to criticise the processes of industrialisation and the production of wealth. The Romantic poets were at it, and so was George Orwell a century later. Judging by the dearth of graduates willing to enter industry in the 1990's, it might seem that there is still a cultural antipathy to wealth-production.

In groups, try arranging the following occupations in descending order, according to your perception of how fulfilling you feel they are considered to be: Doctor, Industrial engineer, Lawyer, Painter, Civil engineer, Advertising executive, Writer, TV journalist, Factory manager.

What are your feelings about working in industry?

Have you any idea how they were formed? Your parents? Friends? Television?

In children's stories and children's television, what occupations do the heroes hold? Try listing some.

Can you think of any instances in books you have read where the entrepreneur or the industrialist has been portrayed as the villain, or where cities and industrialisation is presented in a negative light?

If you have seen any of these films, can you explain who or what is presented as the "villain": **Danny, Brazil, Women in Love, Roger and Me, The Fisher King, Wall Street, Local Hero, Batteries Not Included, The French Lieutenant's Woman.**

Below are set of extracts from what might loosely be termed our “adversarial tradition”.

Read them and note carefully the attitudes to businessmen, to industry and to the “cultured elite”.

What do they tell us about Britain?

*I All men, taken singly, are more or less selfish; and taken in bodies they are intensely so. The British merchant is no exception to this rule: the mercantile classes illustrate it strikingly. These classes certainly think too exclusively of making money: they are too oblivious of every national consideration but that of extending England's (i.e., their own) commerce. Chivalrous feeling, disinterestedness, pride in honour, is too dead in their hearts. A land ruled by them alone would too often make ignominious submission - not at all from the motives Christ teaches, but rather from those Mammon instils.*

*Many of them are extremely narrow and cold-hearted, have no good feeling for any class but their own, are distant - even hostile to all others; call them useless; seem to question their right to exist; seem to grudge them the very air they breathe, and to think the circumstance of their eating, drinking and living in decent houses, quite unjustifiable. They do not know what others do in the way of helping, pleasing or teaching their race; they will not trouble themselves to inquire; whoever is not in trade is accused of eating the bread of idleness, of passing a useless existence.*

SHIRLEY, CHARLOTTE BRONTE 1849

*II This is history. One England blots out another. The mines had made the halls wealthy. Now they were blotting them out, as they had already blotted out the cottages. The industrial England blots out the agricultural England. One meaning blots out another. The new England blots out the old England. And the continuity is not organic, but mechanical.*

LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER, D H LAWRENCE 1928 (BANNED)

*III His parents had always assumed that he would become a professional man of one sort or another: his two elder brothers were barristers. But to Anthony, with a baby and a large wife and another baby on the way, there did not seem to be enough time to train for a profession. He did not think he would get a good enough degree to enter the Civil Service; anyway, he did not much want to be a civil servant. So what was left? It must be said that it never crossed Anthony Keating's mind that he might get a job in industry. Rebel he was, but not to such a degree: so deeply conditioned are some sections of the British nation that certain ideas are deeply inaccessible to them. Despite the fact that major companies were at that time appealing urgently for graduates in any field, despite the fact that the national press was full of seductive offers, the college notice boards plastered with them, Anthony Keating, child of the professional middle classes, reared in an anachronism as an anachronism, did*

*not even see the offers: he walked past them daily, turned over pages daily, with as much indifference as if they had been written in Turkish or Hungarian. He thought himself superior to that kind of thing: that kind of advertisement was aimed at bores and sloggers, not at men of vision like Anthony Keating. For, despite the pregnant Babs, and then the crying babies, Anthony himself, at this stage, thought that there was something not very nice about money.*

*THE ICE AGE, MARGARET DRABBLE 1977*

IV ... one of the main reasons for Britain 's failure to keep pace with competing economies is that, for more than a century, our elite culture has been anti -entrepreneurial anti-industrial and, in a professional sense, anti-productive - esteeming the tasteful consumption of wealth, but disparaging its creation and creators. In that culture, talking and writing have consistently ranked higher than making or selling: knowledge without obvious utility higher than knowledge with it. Hence the paradox of an industrial society rich in Nobel prize winners, but starved of technological innovation; rich in talented civil servants but starved of trained managers; rich in theorists of the business cycle, but starved of thrusting businessmen. And hence, of course, the creeping de-industrialisation which now threatens to turn the relative economic decline of the last 100 years into absolute decline.

*DAVID MARQUA ND, 1981*

Which extract most closely resembles the attitude of Forster to Henry and Charles Wilcox?

Which extract resembles most closely the attitudes and interests of the Schlegels and their coterie of friends?

How is the aesthetic, intellectual group of friends represented in the film?

Which sister identifies most closely with this group?

Do you notice anything more that could be applied to the Schlegels and the Wilcoxes?

How do these extracts help to explain the attitudes of the characters in **Howards End**?

In what ways are these issues important at our end of the 20th century?

### ***The Changing World***

*It was not the woman's fault, nor even love's fault, nor the fault of sex. The fault lay there, out there, in those evil electric lights and diabolical rattlings of engines. There, in the world of the mechanical greedy, greedy mechanism and mechanised greed, sparkling with lights and gushing hot metal and roaring with traffic, there lay the vast evil thing, ready to destroy whatever did not conform. Soon it would destroy the wood, and the bluebells would spring no more. All vulnerable things must perish under the rolling and running iron.*

*LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER, D H LAWRENCE 1928 (BANNED)*

The physical settings of **Howards End** place it firmly in the adversarial tradition. "In the streets of the city she noted for the first time the architecture of hurry...Month by month things were stepping livelier, but to what good? London is presented as moving towards a dystopia where "Men seldom moved their bodies: all unrest was concentrated in the soul" (**The Machine Stops**, E M Forster). The pace of the spreading disease hums behind **Howards End**; Wickham Place is demolished for the construction of flats, London is gripped by property specialisation that leads the Wilcoxes to Ducie Street, that creates the box flat where Leonard and Jacky sleep, that transforms Hilton from a staging post of the north Road to a London dormitory satellite. Apparently different stories, different worlds, not all connected, and all framed for a modern audience within an awareness of imminent collapse - the First World War.

List the scenes in the film which illustrate the "constant flux" of London. How, and in what scenes is the countryside portrayed? How is the contrast underlined in filmic terms?

### ***Only Connect***

*'Only connect Such is the epigraph of a novel much concerned with the relationships, and the possibilities of reconciliation, between certain pairs of opposites: the prose and the passion, the seen and the unseen, the practical mind and the intellectual, the outer life and the inner'*

*Introduction to Howards End, Oliver Stallybrass*

As one starting point for discussion on the film itself, try making a chart with two columns. There are various systems of "opposites" in the novel, which have in some instances further illustration in the film. The contrasts include such physical differences as styles of dress, behaviour and character and could include also contrasting reactions to like situations. Your "opposites" might include Life in the country/Life in the city, Howards End/the flat opposite Wickham Place, businessmen/"aesthetes", Schlegels/Wilcoxes.

There are many more. For each example, try to explain what scenes or moments could be taken as illustrations.

Why has Forster set up the contrast between the Schlegels and the Wilcoxes? What are the issues the contrast brings into focus?

The Schlegels seem to represent the humane liberal culture, the fine civilisation of cultivated personal intercourse to which EM Forster belongs; they are the people for whom and in whom English literature exists.

What are their modern day equivalents? What might be their modern cultural pursuits?

The Wilcoxes seem to represent those who have built the Empire and industrial society.

*"If the Wilcoxes hadn't worked and died in England for thousands of years, you and I couldn't sit here without having our throats cut'.*

Yet the Wilcoxes have barely a single redeeming feature save their success.

*"One could open the heart to his sort without discovering its secrets to them, for they wanted everything down in black and white, and black and white was exactly what they were left with".*

One of the apparent perversities of the novel and the film, is that Margaret Schlegel ends up marrying Henry Wilcox. In Margaret we see all the sense of inadequacy of the culture she stand for - its lack of relation to the forces shaping the world and its practical impotence:

*"More and more do I refuse to draw my income and sneer at those who guarantee it."*

Its weaknesses, dependent as it is on the economic security that it cannot provide and affects to despise, are embodied in the quixotic Helen, who, acting always on her *"cultural standards"* brings nothing but disaster on herself and the objects of her concern (the Basts mainly). Margaret entrusts to Love the binding force that had

*"once been exercised... by trees and meadows and mountains".*

List some of the "connections" Forster is keen for us to make. What advantages does film have as a medium to express these connections? What advantages does the novel have in expressing the same ideas? Are we able to make further "connections" knowing both the book and the film?

### **Life in time.. .Life in values**

*Daily life, whatever it may be really, is practically composed of two lives - the life in time and the life in values - and our conduct reveals a double allegiance. "I only saw her for five minutes but it was worth it." There you have both allegiances in a simple sentence and what the story does is to narrate the life in time. And what the entire novel does - if it is a good novel - is to include the life by values as well.*

#### **A.SPECTS OF THE NOVEL, E M FORSTER 1927**

Discuss this theory. Is it the way you go about "judging" a novel?

Do you think this theory also holds true for film?

One way to look at the novel and film **Howards End** is by a system of representation and metaphor which you could create crudely with another two column chart. On the left write down some elements of the film's "life in time" (The Wych-Elm, The Death of Leonard, Mrs Wilcox, Helen and Leonard's son, Charles' motor-car etc. There are many more). On the right try to fill in the functions that these elements of the story hold in terms of the "life by values"? What importance or value can you attach to them? what might they "mean"?

You may recall some conversations from the film on the nature of meaning in art and life. How these issues are explored may become clearer when you have completed the chart.

#### **'The idea of death - Connecting it all together**

*"We are all in a mist - I know, but I can help you this far - men like the Wilcoxes are deeper in the mist than any. Sane, sound Englishmen! Building up Empires, levelling all the world into what they call common sense. But mention Death to them and they 're offended, because Death's really Imperial, and He cries out against them for ever."*

*"I am as afraid of Death as anyone.*

*"But not the idea of Death."*

*"But what is the difference?"*

*"Infinite difference", said Helen, more gravely than before.*

*Leonard looked at her wondering, and had the sense of great things sweeping out of the shrouded night. But he could not receive them, because his heart was full of the little things. As the lost umbrella had spoilt the concert at the Queen's hall, so the lost situation was obscuring the diviner harmonies now. Death, Life and Materialism were fine words, but would Mr Wilcox take him on as a clerk? Talk as one would, Mr Wilcox was king of this world, the superman, with his own morality, whose head remained in*

*the clouds.*

*"I must be stupid", he said apologetically.*

*While to Helen the paradox became clearer and clearer. "Death destroys a man; the idea of Death saves him."*

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*"I'll show up the wretchedness that lies under this luxury, this talk of impersonal forces" cries Helen and certainly the film **Howards End** achieves this as cogently as the book. The individual in society is shown his personal responsibility (to connect) *"It was spoken not only to her husband, but to thousands of men like him. it had to be uttered once in a lifetime, to adjust the lopsidedness of the world"*.*

*"Every institution, every vested interest", Forster writes in **Aspects of the Novel**, "is against such individual inquiry and response; organised religion, the State, the family in its economic aspect."*

Does Forster achieve any correction on the "lopsidedness" of the world?

Does the film?

Who has most to learn from the connections of **Howards End**, the "Wilcoxes" of this world or the "Schlegels"?

Are the issues (of personal responsibility, the origins of worth in personal relations or material gain, the impotence of art) more or less important in the 1990s than 1910?

*"Only connect! That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer. Only connect and the beast and the monk, robbed of isolation that is life to either, will die."*

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### **Questions and Essays**

- 1 What are the beast and the monk? How are they represented in **Howards End**?
  
- 2 Is Helen Schlegel more important to the argument or the action of the film?
  
- 3 What differences are drawn between Margaret and Helen Schlegel (Emma Thompson and Helena Bonham-Carter)?
  
- 4 **Howards End** is a direct attack on the mercantile class. Discuss.
  
- 5 What might be the “meaning” of the conclusion of the novel and film?
  
- 6 “*We are not concerned with the very poor*”. Discuss the character of Leonard Bast. How is he seen to change through the course of the novel, and as portrayed by Sam West? What is his importance in both novel and film?

### ***'Bibliography and further reading***

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