

# Creating the Moment of Crystallization: Sudden Death in E.M.Forster's *The Longest Journey*

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## Introduction

In *Aspects of the Novel* Forster distinguishes story and plot as follows: “‘The king died and then the queen died’ is a story. ‘The king died, and then the queen died of grief’ is a plot” (87). Although at first glance this passage may be simply regarded as an arbitrarily chosen example to demonstrate narrative forms, in fact it concisely betrays the novelist’s handling of death. Whether in story or plot, in Forster’s novels, death is included to offer momentum and/or closure. There are plenty of examples to endorse this reading of his work. In *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, the dispute over the baby breaks out when Lilia Herriton dies in childbirth and does not subside until the baby in question dies. The romance of Lucy Honeychurch and George Emerson in *A Room with a View* begins when they witness a murder in Italy. Rickie Elliot, the protagonist of *The Longest Journey*, gradually deteriorates after Gerald Daws’s sudden death, and he himself meets his end at the end of the novel. Death can thus be said to be one of the most recurrent and prominent phenomena in Forster’s novels.

Critics have reached a consensus that what is above all remarkable in the novelist’s use of death is its abruptness. Lionel Trilling draws our attention to “the lack of ‘reason’ and ‘motivation’ which invariably marks his deaths” (56) and attempts to explain this distinctive feature, saying that death in Forster gives a peculiar emphasis to the Hardian coincidences of real life. It represents, Trilling argues, how life is not only a matter of logic and motivation but of chance (56–57).<sup>1</sup> Other critics basically agree with this view of Trilling. John Beer sees a locus of daily life in Forsterian sudden death: it “enters the novel with the jarring quality that it has in real life . . . There is a moment of unreality which we then recognize to be in point of fact a moment of reality—but the reality of everyday life, not of art” (*Achievement* 12). According to Frederick Crews, death in Forster contributes to a deliberate atmosphere of instability, recoiling from the specious certainties of life: it is “a reassurance that man’s ability to degrade the universe by humanizing it is limited . . . [it is] homage to the truly unknowable” (165–66).

What is problematic in all these interpretations is that since they stick to death’s momentary intrusion too firmly, they more or less exclude it from the author’s artistic world and ignore its function within the wider concerns that occupy a novel. Death may indeed suggest the contingency of outside reality or gesticulate to an unintelligible order, but it cannot be a thing that simply comes from the exterior and draws back to it, leaving no trace behind. Since this point has been insufficiently acknowledged in the critical literature on Forster, death in his art is, despite its apparent conspicuousness, only briefly referred to here and there and scarcely developed into an independent issue.<sup>2</sup>

How, then, does death work for Forster apart from the moment it attacks a victim? The importance of this inquiry becomes clear if we look into the death of the Italian baby in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*. The narrator first reports only the facts, from the overturning of the carriage to the discovery of the dead child, but after a while he gives his opinions on the accident:

Round the Italian baby who had died in the mud there centred deep passions and high hopes . . . Now the baby had gone, but there remained this vast apparatus of pride and pity and love. For the dead, who seem to take away so much, really take with them nothing that is ours. The passion they have aroused lives after them, easy to transmute or to transfer, but well-nigh impossible to destroy. (146)

Death is said to be an epicenter of whirling emotion, and actually in this novel the baby's misfortune provokes the emotional explosions of all the main characters. Harriet breaks down; Philip scuffles with Gino; at last even Caroline pours out her love for Gino. And this turmoil and frenzy bestows salvation on the hero in the end. It is also worth noticing that similar sentiments appear in the description of love in *A Room with a View*. Mr Emerson preaches to Lucy: "You can transmute love, ignore it, muddle it, but you can never pull it out of you" (223). If we compare this sermon with the last sentence of the quotation above, the apparent analogy can be recognized. The passion death invokes is akin to love, in that it is inextinguishable and stays almost eternally.

If death is a fount of strong passion in the fictions of an author who extols the sanctity of private emotions, it should not be easily reduced to an unmotivated extraneous factor but its lasting effect should be more deliberately examined. In this essay I focus on *The Longest Journey*, the novel in which sudden death is most frequently and crudely employed. By scrutinizing each death's influence on the course of this story, I hope to show the intricate connection between the representation of death and the author's artistic longings and thus to demonstrate the crucial role death plays in Forster's creative activity.

## I

In his own introduction to *The Longest Journey*, Forster declares that it is the novel he is "most glad to have written" since he gets nearer than elsewhere towards what lies in his mind in it (lxvi). As Calora M. Kaplan points out, however, the novel is generally thought to have some serious defects: "the author's ambivalence toward his protagonist, the contrivance of the plot, the heavy-handed symbolism, and the gratuitous 'sacrificial' death of the main character" (52). Indeed death rushes into the story so often and suddenly that it seems to be "gratuitous." Moreover, the predominance of deceased characters is also striking: Mr and Mrs Elliot, Robert, and Mr Failing have all perished before the story begins. Unmotivated as these deaths might appear to be, in a work the author considers to have got closest to his fundamental ideas, this seemingly awkward and strange use of death and the dead actors can presumably give us some new clues to the novel's other (flawed) aspects.

We come across the first death scene of the novel while tracing how Rickie Elliot falls in

love with Agnes Pembroke. On Christmas vacation Rickie visits the Pembrokes in Sawston and, there he has a revelatory emotional experience: he sees Gerald, Agnes's athletic fiancé, passionately embrace and kiss her. Rickie is so deeply moved at the sight of the lovers that his imagination exultantly drifts from one fictional spectacle to other, merging into a torrent of orchestral music. Shortly after that, Gerald is killed in a football match. As Garrett Stewart comments, Gerald's death in the arms of his beloved without any promise of their abiding love is "the form of a traditional dying without the ordinary content" (182). Though in this scene the narrator's subjective remarks are entirely omitted, the sterile conversation of the two effectively betrays that their relationship is none other than an earthly bond. The unsure consolation of Agnes with the idea of a life in heaven and the eternal union of lovers—Christian notions not necessarily clear to herself—is sharply contrasted with the dying Gerald's oddly honest replies. He ruins her attempts at transcendental comfort by saying that he has nothing valuable but his flesh. On the verge of parting for ever, neither of them can throw a bridge across the divide between them, as Gerald's repeated phrase, "I can't see you" (51–52), epitomizes.

Miserable as Gerald's departure is, once the moment of death has passed, Rickie's imagination readily sets out to romanticize it. What is crucial for him is not the barrenness of their last talk but whether Agnes shows proper grief for the tragedy. He runs up to her, while she still sees the incident as an unreal dream, and insists that she should mind it because now "the greatest thing is over" (54).<sup>3</sup> Hearing this, Agnes collapses and provides Rickie with a sight which is probably more erotic than the celestial embrace itself: she bends down and kisses the footprints of Gerald "till their marks gave way to the marks of her lips" (53–54).<sup>4</sup> Through this confrontation with love and death, Rickie imagines that he has acknowledged the reality of the great world outside Cambridge. Safe again in his college room, he picks up a fragment of the fantasy he wrote before and finds it hopelessly unpractical. But, as a matter of fact, he has merely transformed outside reality until it combines with what has so far intoxicated him, as he converted the embrace into a symphony before. We read that "Rickie deflected his enthusiasms. Hitherto they had played on gods and heroes, on the infinite and the impossible, on virtue and beauty and strength. Now, with a steadier radiance, they transfigured a man who was dead and a woman who was still alive" (60). He is no more inclined to accept the bare facts of the outside world than before, and forges the whole experience into a supreme tragedy of love and death, until Gerald and Agnes are imagined ascending to the divine throne. Yet the image of Gerald gradually fades away and Rickie's excitement comes to converge on the living Agnes alone. With a strong sense of sin, he falls in love with her and a marriage takes place.

Rickie's concept of matrimony is remarkable in that he himself never wishes to attain the perfection he saw in Gerald and Agnes. He adores his wife as a woman perpetually united to her dead lover and "it does not seem terrible to come second" (168). Therefore, that Gerald is no longer inscribed in her heart severely disillusioned him. Agnes has never put on the earrings Gerald bought for her as a memorial to their engagement, nor even mentioned his name since they got married. It is here that the hero's peculiar devotion to the dead is uncovered: he has consecrated the memory of his mother, believing that she had acquired special glory in the course of her unhappy marriage with cruel and snobbish Mr Elliot. When he tries to share this sentiment with Agnes, only to fail, he deplores: "perhaps it was this aversion to acknowledge the

dead, whose images alone have immortality, that made her own image somewhat transient" (168).

This authorization of the dead goes to the roots of Rickie's view of life and his desire in it. Having faced the stark reality of the two sudden deaths of his mother and Gerald, he loses his placid outlook on life, but the memory of the dead assures him of life's meaning. Because of the very absence of the object, Rickie can freely organize the picture of dead people until it appears to be the sole sacrosanct figures aloof from the relentless Nature in which he believes "we are all of us bubbles on an extremely rough sea" (57). Thinking about the dead and writing fantastical stories thus become comparable activities for Rickie: both offer comfortable refuge to his imagination, which cannot flourish in reality, and seeks an absolute in the fictional world of gods and heroes, or, in the settled image of the past crowded with the deceased.

The other reason for Rickie's leaning to the dead can be sought in his sexual predicament. Quoting the Freudian theory of homosexuality, Rae H. Stoll points out that largely as a result of his father's indifference Rickie fails in outgrowing his infantile attachment to his mother and, out of fear for being unfaithful to her, has acquired a homosexual tendency (36-39). Besides, according to Trilling, Rickie's overjoyed reaction to the embrace of Gerald and Agnes could be his admiration of Gerald's manliness and his marrying Agnes is an attempt to identify himself with the brutal Gerald's virility (78). Bearing these points in mind, it can be said that Rickie's idolization of the dead Gerald functions as an antidote against his difficulties: his latent disgust for his wife's living sexuality is neutralized by remembering that her body and heart are primarily sacred to someone else. His loyalty to his mother is thus shielded and he becomes free from a sense of guilt. To sum up, Rickie's worship of the dead has a dual effect on his fear of the "realities" of Nature and his hidden sexual inclination.

Rickie's life obsessed with the dead past becomes most explicit when he discovers his true relation with Stephen Wonham. Before he gets married, Rickie visits his aunt Mrs Failing in Wiltshire. At the center of Cadbury Rings Mrs Failing maliciously tells Rickie the fact that Stephen is his half-brother. Rickie swoons: "He was gazing at the past . . . Turn where he would, it encircled him. It took visible form: it was this double entrenchment of the Rings . . . he was going to faint among the dead" (130). Rickie has twice built his life on the phantoms of dead people. First, revering his dead mother, he has averted his eyes from his obscure childhood; then he has disregarded the actualities of Nature and his sexuality by worshipping his wife through the image of her ex-fiancé. For Rickie, the only way to get out of this double siege of the past is to properly admit Stephen as his brother. However, although Rickie realizes that Stephen is a living symbol that stands for "some eternal principle" (136), Agnes twice prevents him from telling Stephen the truth. Rickie thus misses a unique chance to confront the reality of the present and enters "the cloud of unreality" (176), his married life in Sawston.

## II

When Rickie bids farewell to Sawston, we come to know that not only Rickie but the novel itself sets its emotional center in the past. At the beginning of the "Wiltshire" part, the real fount of Mrs Elliot's glory is unveiled. Some twenty years ago she eloped with a farmer named

Robert, who is almost a mythical presence, “a symbol of regeneration and of the birth of life from life” (232) like the manure he studies eagerly. He has pressed Mrs Elliot to run away with him to Stockholm, yet there he drowns at sea. His death, though as sudden as Gerald’s, is described exclusively through the eyes of Mrs Elliot, and exalted to a heroic end in which the dying one avoids the helping hands of his beloved for fear of involving her.

While this episode is related, the regulating power of social convention is not totally dismissed. Mr Failing reproves his wife for blindly praising the lovers’ passion:

They have sinned against society, and you do not diminish the misery by proving that society is bad or foolish. It is the saddest truth I have yet perceived that the Beloved public . . . of which Swinburne speaks . . . will not be brought about by love alone. It will approach with no flourish of trumpets, and have no declaration of independence. Self-sacrifice and—worse still—self-mutilation are the things that sometimes help it most . . . (238)

Here the opposition of man’s natural desire and the restrictions of society are clearly presented. The sacrifice of Robert has therefore been the only way to transfix the splendour of the couple before it would be undermined by the miseries society would inflict on their forbidden union. The author has mutilated Robert to protect their love from any degradation and, by doing so, elevated their short elopement to an eternal moment, “Forster’s main way of creating a bridge between the phenomenal world and spiritual reality” (Colmer 55).

This love affair nevertheless reveals a quandary John Colmer thinks intrinsic to the Forsterian eternal moment. He suggests that the novelist assimilates the occasion of high Romanticism into the world of domestic comedy, but not without some incongruity and the impression that joy always lives in the past. Accordingly, Colmer says, “the emphasis placed on the past creates a sadness, an emptiness, a withdrawal of living energies from the present” (37).<sup>5</sup> Unlike the Italian novels, which end with attained Love or Beauty, the case of Robert and Mrs Elliot shows how the fever of rapturous affair may gradually subside. As Mr Failing foresees that life does not continue to be heroic for long, Mrs Elliot realizes her terrible mistake after she has gone back to her husband. She thought that it was simply a question of beating time, but there is no such possibility: “Life, more important, grew more bitter. She minded her husband more, not less” (239). When Mr Elliot dies, her fate is connected not to her dead lover but to her husband with whom she has shared the larger part of life: “the end came for her as well, before she could remember the grave in the alien north and the dust that would never return to the dear fields that had given it” (240). The sequential deaths of Mr and Mrs Elliot recorded on their tombstone may be the most bitter irony on life’s pitiable side.<sup>6</sup> The “saddest truth” Mr Failing perceives is not only the deceitfulness of society but the severe reality of life: it offers illustrious moments of passion but can also dry up even the strongest, unless we quit life when such a miraculous instant is obtained.<sup>7</sup>

Thus Forster goes further to assure the possibility of fulfilled love. The tragedy of Robert and Mrs Elliot is compared to that of Gerald and Agnes and we learn that, while Agnes loves once and once only, Mrs Elliot has found that “she could still love people passionately; she still

drew strength from the heroic past" (239) when she gives birth to Stephen. Even after his death, Robert's symbolic regenerative power has revived vivid emotion through his child. And the boy Stephen, who incarnates the spirit of the seventeen days during which his parents were madly in love, eventually sustains their blood through his own progeny. It seems that Forster singles out this current of procreation as the most solid way to preserve his vision of rewarded love.

The subject of reproduction first comes to the fore while Agnes is expecting a baby. Ever since their marriage Rickie has been involved in the duties of Sawston School, which has emasculated his delicate sensibilities. His wife never appears so real as she was in the arms of Gerald; and now he sees that they have only pretended to care for each other. But he presumes that the birth of a child, a marvel of Nature still unknown to him, will brighten his meager life. Unfortunately the baby is born with the hereditary lame leg of the Elliots and dies in a week. In deep sorrow Rickie remembers Stephen, still imagining he is a son of his hateful father: "that Stephen was bad inherently he never doubted for a moment. And he would have children: he, not Rickie, would contribute to the stream; he, through his remote posterity, might be mingled with the unknown sea" (192). Under Rickie's obsessional aspiration to join the stream runs his abhorrence of the vile reproductive energy of his father. Mr Elliot has bequeathed his lameness not only to his son but even to Rickie's daughter, and has taken her life. Rickie wrongly believes that while he fails to maintain the blood of his mother, his father will continue on earth through his illegitimate son, Stephen.

The advent of this reproduction theme logically upsets the novel's equilibrium. As the title taken from Shelley suggests, *The Longest Journey* pursues the spiritual bonds of men, which are incompatible with marriage; it can be seen in the friendship of Cambridge pupils Rickie and Ansell, and later in the union of the half-brothers. The other lasting issue in the novel is the resurrection of Mrs Elliot. Hitherto her image has been introduced as Rickie's source of fancy and, his deep attachment to her and his yearning for male bonds have not been contradictory with his latent homosexual tendency as a link. But in "Wiltshire" Mrs Elliot is, with the revelation of her mythical romance, elevated to be a goddess of undefiled Love and fecundity; and maintaining her radiance becomes an aim equally shared by the hero and the author. The problem is that once the topic of regeneration is adopted to immortalize her, the plot of male friendship is inevitably enervated.

This adversity is given subtle expressions earlier in Ansell's letter when he writes to dissuade Rickie from marriage:

[M]en and women desire different things. Man wants to love mankind; woman wants to love one man. When she has him her work is over. She is the emissary of Nature, and Nature's bidding has been fulfilled. But man does not care a damn for Nature—or at least only a very little damn. He cares for a hundred things besides . . . and demands not only a wife and children, but also friends, and work, and spiritual freedom. (81)

Ansell repels women and, ultimately, the potency of Nature with "a damn", but clumsily adds "at least only a very little damn." Later in the British Museum this philosopher in embryo is informed of Agnes's pregnancy in front of the Cnidian Demeter, the goddess of agriculture and

marriage, and acknowledges that there is power he cannot cope with, nor, as yet understand.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, as the story goes on to the final part, the plot of male bonding comes to be more intimately interwoven with the vision of immortal Mrs Elliot. At the end of the "Sawston" section, Ansell demolishes his friend's colourless life by disclosing the secret of Stephen's birth. Given a renewed chance to resurrect his mother outside his flawed marriage, Rickie goes into rapture. He makes a decision to leave Agnes, hearing his mother's voice in the words of Stephen. This escape revitalizes his imagination: he lives with his half-brother at the Ansell's and regains his habit of writing and reading. At the same time, he strives to revive his mother in Stephen by molding him into a hero suitable for the grave mission. Rickie's recovery of the male bond and his yearning for his beloved mother develop hand in hand in this period.

### III

It is the hero's last journey that finally undoes this node of conflicting plots. Earlier, when Rickie comes to know the true origin of Stephen, he unconsciously makes a self-sacrificial resolution. He remembers the mysterious dream he had after his daughter's death. At first he saw the triumphant faces of his father, his aunt, and Stephen, but presently his mother appeared and said, "Never mind—come away—let them die out—let them die out" (193). Now Rickie answers the call: he himself should perish to extirpate the ill-fated lineage of the Elliots. He mutters to himself with a smile, "Let me die out. She will continue" (251). The conversion of the pronoun from "them" into "me" marks a momentous transition of the story. It is not Rickie, whose procreative power is fatally denied, but Stephen who will sustain their mother's tribe by begetting a child. Rickie's imagination is thus destined to be replaced by Stephen's virility.

Shortly before the railway accident kills Rickie, a symbolic scene predicts the brothers' fate. On the way to Mrs Failing's house, they go through the fertile soil of Wiltshire and come across a ford. There they play with a burning paper flower:

"Now gently with me," said Stephen, and they laid it flower-like on the stream. Gravel and tremulous weeds leapt into sight, and then the flower sailed into deep water, and up leapt the two arches of a bridge . . . Then it vanished for Rickie; but Stephen, who knelt in the water, declared that it was still afloat, far through the arch, burning as if it would burn forever. (273)

This scene is especially rich in metaphorical implications. If the sparkling flame is an emblem of existence, the stream is man's life continuing generation after generation. When Stephen asserts he can still see the fire, Rickie has already lost sight of it. Both his life and his ability to bequeath his blood on the flow are now approaching a moment of extinction. Connecting this scene with Stephen's awakening to his affection for Wiltshire, Alan Wilde further points out that, while for Rickie the stream has always been turbid water on which the perishable bubbles of life float, for Stephen it is lit by a mystic fire and assures him that he will participate in its history through his strong attachment to the earth (42).

In fact this intense scene not only adumbrates Rickie's imminent death but also completes

the union of the half-brothers. The stream and the flower are mentioned before when Rickie thinks that his mother's romance in the past will purify his life through the emergence of Stephen: "On the banks of the gray torrent of life, love is the only flower. A little way up the stream a little way down had Rickie glanced, and he knew that she whom he loved had risen from the dead, and might rise again" (250-51). The flower is the fruitful union of Mrs Elliot and Robert, which shines against Rickie's unsuccessful matrimony. And when the brothers burn it by the shallow, their alliance is also accomplished through the mercy love of Mrs Elliot, which overleaps the grave.

The scene just before they find the stream makes this implication more recognizable. Although the story closes with marriage and procreation, here the narrator does not refrain from suggesting that the brother's linkage of blood is firmer than ordinary marriage. As they proceed in the countryside, Stephen abruptly begins to talk about his future wedlock and declares that he won't share all his thoughts with his wife because one's thoughts cannot fully belong to a single person. His words echo Ansell's statement in his letter, but Stephen acknowledges the irresistible power of Nature that Ansell detests. He says, "it's something rather outside that makes one marry, if you follow me: not exactly oneself . . . We want to marry, and yet—I can't explain" (272). They run across the water and his lecture on marriage breaks into the announcement, "this is our stream" (272). Then the narrator steps forward to support his opinion:

Romantic love is greater than this. There are men and women—we know it from history—who have been born into the world for each other, and for no one else, who have accomplished the longest journey locked in each other's arms. But romantic love is also the code of modern morals, and, for this reason, popular. Eternal union, eternal ownership—these are tempting bait for the average man. He spurns them, will not confess his mistake, and—perhaps to cover it—cries "dirty cynic" at such a man as Stephen. (272)

He notably expresses his fundamental distrust of marriage and insists that it is a social system to register the love of men and women and to give it a semblance of eternity. The possibility of true love is not denied, yet he restricts it to a few selected people. Meanwhile Rickie broods over his own domestic life and Stephen's in the future, wondering how much truth might lie in the antithesis of Ansell. Neither the narrator nor Rickie offers a definite answer to the question, but it is then that Stephen calls from the water and we move to the scene in which the radiant flower, a symbol of the brothers' comradeship, flows on as if it would shine forever.

This is the final union of people which is stabilized by death in this novel. Though the author ultimately ousts Rickie, he does not bid farewell to his previous use of romanticized death. On the evening they reach Cadover, Stephen breaks his promise and gets blind drunk. Rickie is driven to despair at the sight of his hero's fall, but he dutifully tries to save Stephen from the approaching train and he himself is run over. After the chilly brief description of his end, Forster arranges for salvation in the last chapter. Stephen is now married, but his wife's presence is nothing but an overheard voice. For all her opposition, Stephen leaves her behind

and goes out with his infant to sleep outside. In the twilight he lies on the earth and acutely feels that he has joined in the marvelous flow of life. Stephen believes that Rickie made it possible for him: "The spirit fled, in agony and loneliness, never to know that it bequeathed him salvation" (289).

The novel closes with the obvious revival of Mrs Elliot: Stephen kisses his daughter with the name of their mother. Excluding Stephen's wife, here the Trinity of Mrs Elliot and her two sons is established; this is endorsed by the two pictures in Stephen's house. The one is a faded photograph of Stockholm, a memorial place for Robert and Mrs Elliot. The other is of the Demeter of Cnidus. Even that the goddess has the transfigured feature of Rickie is implied by their apparently similar pose. The goddess's shattered knees inevitably recalls Rickie's fatal accident: "The train went over his knees" (282). Rickie succeeds in retaining his mother's line through saving Stephen's life at the cost of his own. With the protagonist's literal "self-mutilation," the story thus manages both the preservation of the line of inheritance and the verification of the brothers' spiritual linkage.

#### IV

This ending, however, also depends on other sacrifice: the key role Ansell has played comes to decline in "Wiltshire" and he appears almost only in other characters' thoughts or words. Indeed he leads Rickie, who is at first severely shocked by his mother's extramarital affair, on a journey to "a place where only once thing matters—that the Beloved should rise from the dead" (249) and keeps him alive until Stephen revisits Sawston. But it is the attempt to revive Mrs Elliot that eventually ruins Rickie, and we cannot find any evidence that Ansell warns Rickie against his second bankruptcy of soul. On the contrary, Rickie delightedly tells Mrs Failing that Ansell and his brother forcefully encourage him in his new life.<sup>9</sup> Can't Ansell save his friend from fatal disaster? Does he commit a fault in guiding Rickie? As Forster says in *Aspects of the Novel*, his plot actually retaliates against his characters and consigns them to a sort of "deadness" in the end (93-94). In "Wiltshire," the plot of Nature and reproduction prevails over both Rickie's aesthetic imagination and Ansell's intellect cultivated in the university library. As a result, the characters are mutilated (Rickie), or rather crippled (Ansell).<sup>10</sup> Stephen, who alone remains uninjured, vaguely repeats a question from his privileged status: "By whose authority?" (289).

The rivalry of plot and character is a problem which always distresses Forster. In his opinion, "in the novel, all human happiness and misery does not take the form of action, it seeks means of expression other than through the plot, it must not be rigidly canalized" (*Aspects* 93). In *The Longest Journey* this antagonism is most distinguishable around the death scene. Sudden death is repetitively introduced to transfix the flash of passion; but as Rickie fails in immortalizing Gerald, in the face of a real life Robert's drowning cannot bestow permanent glow upon the legend of Mrs Elliot. The elevated emotion of the characters cannot be canalized and incessantly wanes after a moment of crystallization. Rickie's demise alone holds some eternal value not only because it preserves his mother's lineage but because it stands at the close of the novel and therefore is exempt from the plight of Forsterian eternal moment.

Probably the author was aware of this flaw inherent in his treatment of death. Chapter twenty-eight, the shortest chapter inserted between "Sawston" and "Wiltshire," is entirely devoted to the narrator's soliloquy. In it he rejects the incorruptible "coinage" of a soul with God's image, for even if it is free from the peril of spiritual bankruptcies, we would lose life's vivid texture in believing it. He affirms a humanistic way of living based on the image of one's beloved, but at the same time he notices its dangerous aspects and warns that it is not unfaltering: "The face, however beloved, was mortal, and as liable as the soul herself to err," and he adds, "We do but shift responsibility by making a standard of the dead" (227). As Rickie's tragedy shows, the icon of a dead person is not reliable as a guidepost in life because it is, after all, the romanticist's refuge from undisguised reality.

Lastly we should remember that death is still a vital force for Forster in this novel, as the glory of Mrs Elliot is the indispensable genesis of Rickie's creative urge. In the last chapter we are informed from the conversation of Stephen and Herbert that Rickie's posthumous stories sell well. Besides the short stories the editor had turned down, Rickie wrote a long story while he lived with his brother. Rickie's imagination destroys his life, but it is necessary for him as an artist; here is another twist in the logic of the novel. Similarly, Forster employs the two sudden deaths of Robert and Rickie, whose virtues are supported by another dead character—Mrs Elliot, as a guardian of Love and fertility—and fulfills his ideal of the unsullied union of people, even if it is confronted with life's reality and then can be followed by disillusion. For he is, like his aesthetic protagonist, essentially a romantic "with outstretched hands, yearning for the unattainable" (213).

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> In fact Trilling brings up another reason here: death is a useful device for the contrivance of plot, since it alters the course of plot like the move of a piece in chess game (57). However, he does not offer concrete examples to explain the change.

<sup>2</sup> An exceptionally close study is found in Garrett Stewart's *Death Sentence*. Stewart too points out the want of cause in Forster's conduct of death and, invoking Forster's own definition of story and plot, insists: "More than any novelist before him in English, Forster reduces death to the stuff of story rather than of plot, a bare fact in the drift of a fiction" (187). But he adds that Forsterian death still does not entirely break off its relation with plot because of its "organizing power" (194). However, as Stewart's interest largely lies in the linguistic usage of "death sentences," he tends to take notice of death's work at only one level and, consequently, his study scarcely unfolds death's—if there is any such influence—"organizing" effect upon the overall development of Forster's plot.

<sup>3</sup> Similar phrases appear three times at the end of *Where Angels Fear to Tread*. Caroline twice says to Philip, "All the wonderful things are over" (157). Philip gives up telling his love to Caroline, for "all the wonderful things had happened" (160). As Wilfred Stone points out, Caroline, Philip, and Rickie resemble one another in that their experience of love is vicarious and voyeuristic (168). Since Rickie has physically and spiritually no aptitude for firsthand love, with Gerald's disappearance the greatest experience is actually over for him.

<sup>4</sup> This scene is typical of Rickie's aesthetic view of love. While he deflected his eyes from the real embrace of the lovers, this time he looks straight at Agnes, whose object of passion no longer exists. This can be related to Rickie's peculiar form of desire, which I will discuss later.

<sup>5</sup> Colmer seems to go too far when he ascribes the defects of the Forsterian eternal moment to the author's sexuality, saying that "for someone who was forced by convention to celebrate heterosexual love when his chief insight lay elsewhere, the idea of the eternal moment was especially attractive. It is easier to render the past symbolic moment than the passionate present" (37). Indeed, in *The Longest Journey*, the only heterosexual happy union is set in the past and this can be regarded as the author's scheme to elude his own sexual predicament. But it should not be overlooked that the good things seized by the eternal moment are not restricted to the love of men and women but often range over joys such as the better understanding of reality, or the intuitive knowledge of the whole world. The difficulties of the eternal moment should rather be attributed to a general difficulty in achieving such invaluable occasions in the present.

<sup>6</sup> But the representation of Mrs Elliot's death shares several features with those of Mrs Wilcox's in *Howards End* and Mrs Moore's in *A Passage to India*. All three die quite abruptly owing to an obscure cause and their deaths take place totally off-stage. Garrett Stewart's comment on Mrs Wilcox's funeral and the lack of her death scene reveals the significant connotation in such descriptions: the actual death is not so momentous because there the author's intention works to convey "the seamlessness of her continuing effect on others" (196). Certainly these women embody the ideals each novel worships and their influence remains unchanged or becomes even stronger after they quit the secular world.

<sup>7</sup> This recognition is overtly expressed in one of Forster's early short stories, "The Road from Colonus" (1904). It is a tragic story of an elderly hero, who is not allowed to die properly at the place where he discovers "all the world and life" (*Selected Stories* 82) and stays alive as a grumbling old man.

<sup>8</sup> For the mythical function of Demeter as a symbolic figure of fertility in this novel, see Crews 135-37.

<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the last glimpse we have of Ansell is far from his previous vigour. He sees Rickie off at the station with his sisters and innocently waits for the train to back out of the station and then return. Stephen, who suddenly gets on the train, flings a piece of soap at Ansell's forehead. The scene is full of mischievous youth and there is not the slightest hint that the send-off will turn out to be the last meeting of the Cambridge friends.

<sup>10</sup> However, at the end of the story Ansell's presence in Stephen's house is suggested: Stephen says to his wife, "Stewart's in the house" (288). Lois Cucullu comments on this fact that "the text beckons to the reconciliation of intellectual with yeoman farmer captured in its epitaph "Fratribus" that forms the subtext of the novel" (46).

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