"The Bridge Party was not a success": Comedy of Manners in E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*

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I

The reader would scarcely raise an objection to the notion that, when compared to the short stories that are inclined to be contemplative or visionary, E.M. Forster's early novels give the reader an underlying atmosphere of the genre of comedy. For example, Forster employs these means for his narrative: a "playful", often ironic voice of the narrator, allegorical names for his main characters, the frequent use of domestic conversation, social circumstances that are convenient settings for communication such as tea parties or boarding houses, and a simple but strong plot: "Will the prospect of marriage be fulfilled?" and "who will be the appropriate inheritor?". In fact, Forster himself often states in interviews, that a world with some upper middle-class families is the basis of his creation of the modern "comedy of manners", overtly paying homage to Jane Austen whose ingenious character making Forster praises in his *Aspects of the Novel*. There are, naturally, subtly different aspects in quality of each of Forster's early novels as comedy. Yet, when the reader chooses any one of them — *Where Angels Fear to Tread, The Longest Journey, A Room with A View, or Howards End* — , whatever the main interest the novel offers may be, he/she will inescapably be caught up in a web of "manners" that Forster intuitively grasps as a literary representation of Life, and it is the very aspect that renders Forster's novels readable and elusive at the same time.

The term "manners" has an ambivalent nature. As it deals with the outer, trivial phenomena occuring in a society, it is inseparable from the exterior appearance of its culture, which might be regarded as superficiality; yet in the sense that it captures the generally unstated atmosphere of an age, it may be a help in the study of human nature. At the risk of being criticized for its superficiality or the lack of grand purpose in the field of "serious" matters, the "comedy of manners" chooses to concentrate on seemingly trivial incidents, and to occupy the area of the contemporary life of the author. The "manners" indicate not only the bright aspcet of a culture which are easily controlled by the public media, but a more shadowy aspect of people's behaviour in a culture. The term embraces every social posture people make: the way they cast glances over strangers or friends; the way they express gratitude or disappointment; the way they react in praise or in disgust. The "comedy of manners" can function as a modest but inexorable recorder of the "silent voice" of a culture. To manage to define what is hard to define, Lionel Trilling contrives a playful expression to describe these fine features of culture[1] :

> ...What I understand by manners, then, is a culture's hum and buzz of implication,(...) It is that part of a culture which is made up of half-uttered or unuttered or unutterable expressions of value. They are hinted at by small actions, sometimes by tone, gesture, emphasis, or rhythm, sometimes by the words that are used with a special frequency or a special meaning.(...) they make the part of a culture which is not art, or religion, or morals, or politics, and yet it relates to all these highly formulated departments of culture.

I esteem this concept of manners highly as a central concern which is found throughout Forster's novels. In a sense, this is what the novel can do, and what no other form of writings can encapsulate or represent so well. Though each one of Forster's early novels has a slightly different colour from the others, the elements in them

are closely interconnected on this common basis of the "comedy of manners", and they prepare for the birth of his last novel and his masterpiece, *A Passage to India*.

Though there are elements in the novel that are incompatible with the notion of comedy, I wish to argue that there is a continuity between the early novels and the last novel. The continuity can be sensed in Forster's use of the "comedy of manners", which tries to direct our attention to the delicate meanings of social behaviour with patience and irony. The timely issue of the termination of the British reign in India, and the delicate insight into the psychology of both the ruler and the ruled make the novel appear to be a seriously meditative novel, and appear somehow to be out - of - date one, as Forster himself admits in the prefatory note to the Everyman Edition(1957): "The India in *A Passage to India* no longer exists either politically or socially. Change had begun even at the time the book was published(1924) and during the following quarter of a century it accelerated enormously.(...) Assuredly the novel dates"[2]. Yet the close examination will reveal that the novel also sustains the justified position in the realm of Forster's unique comedies. Though a contextual controversy prevails over this novel which deals with the political difficulties in the British India, it is possible to place the novel in the genealogy of the comedy of humours, and that of the "comedy of manners". At the time of the publication when the Empire was in a delicate state, it is no wonder that those who failed to regard the novel as a fiction got furious with the seemingly exaggerated characters of the Anglo-Indian, especially the government officials such as Ronny Heaslop the City Magistrate, or Mr Turton the Collector. Despite the bitterness it might impose on the reader, the novel survives till today; the reason of the survival must be the fact that joy and bitterness in reading it are constantly based upon the acute observation of "manners" — hum and buzz of implication, as Trilling ingeniously states — which retrieves the text from the perplexing flux of ideology or principles that might have reduced fertile ambiguity in the novel.

It will be useful to skim through the plot of *A Passage to India* and to become familiar with those insinuating names applied to the major characters, before discussing the details of the novel.

Voyaging out to marry Ronny Heaslop, a young City Magistrate of Chandrapore, Adela Quested, an English woman full of fair-mindedness and curiosity, arrives to join the Anglo-Indian society, being chaperoned by Ronny's mother Mrs Moore. Tainted with uneasiness towards her marriage, Adela causes a subtle but irrevocable change among the Anglo-Indian society, increasing perplexity and distrust between both the English and Indians.

The change leads to a catastrophe in an emblematic city of the British India; Dr.Aziz, a young Indian doctor who has sympathized with the English is accused of the attempted rape of Adela. His English friend Fielding, who is a liberal-minded schoolmaster of the college, desperately struggles against the hostility of the Anglo-Indian colleagues to save Aziz. The process bears the appearance of a tragi-comedy, where a succession of errors, misunderstandings and "bad manners" have finally accumulated up to such a point that the impalpable evils reveal themselves. Repressed emotions break free and everyone's fate is thrown into a disorder, which stirs them socially, ethically and spiritually.

In the climax of the trial, Adela's charge is suddenly withdrawn and the court declares the complete innocence of Aziz, yet nothing will be the same again. Mrs Moore dies without being involved in the process of the trial; Ronny relentlessly breaks the engagement to save his career; Adela, being deserted by the Anglo-Indian society, returns to England in despair. Also the friendship between Aziz and Fielding is corroded by the cultural discord, and cannot ever be regained.

To demonstrate crucial elements to construct a social comedy in the style of "comedy of manners", I am going to focus upon such devices in the narrative as: Forster's composition of characters, especially in relation to their names and types. Forster again employs the categorization used throughout his early novels, and the use of the allegorical names for the major characters is noticeable, in particular the suggestive surname of the

heroine, "Adela Quested". Social conversation flourishes in various levels and modes of society, reflecting trivial postures of people that make the fictional world alive. The question of an interpolating narrator should continually be raised to clarify how the author manipulates the function of "point of view" in relation to his use of irony. Along with the examination, I shall try to distinguish the continuity and discontinuity between Forster's early novels and the last novel in question, *A Passage to India.*

II

I shall begin with a most controversial character, Aziz, who holds a complex structure as a result of its ambivalent nature. Mostly, he is created from Forster's intimate knowledge nurtured by personal relations with his long-time friend Syed Ross Masood, to whom the novel itself is dedicated, and the Maharaja whom Forster used to serve as a secretary with great respect to his character, and their similarities that coincide with the features of Aziz can be found in the Indian journal *The Hill of Devi*, and other essays on the Indian friends Forster has left on the occasion of their memorial services[3] . I observe, however, that there is more to the composition of Aziz's character that serves as a component to activate the proceedings of the social comedy.

Aziz, a young and lively Indian doctor, is the first character the reader meets as the story begins. The name "Aziz" is favourably accepted by Mrs Moore as "'What a charming name!'"[4] , for it is said to have a meaning of "my precious" or "pretty one", and this trivial fact responds to another symbolical episode that Mrs Moore addresses the small Indian wasp as "'Pretty dear'"(p.50). Yet the reader would soon realize in reading that his personal name is never given to us; the fact strongly implies Aziz's symbolical importance which foregrounds him from a category of realistic figures, to which he has conventionally been considered to belong.

We can recognize some instances when Aziz's name is mentioned in the conversations by Anglo-Indians. It is very suggestive that its audial aspect is undoubtedly emphasized through the novel, especially when it is compared with "the unpronouceable name"(p.61) of the Indian lady whom Adela, innocently but wrongly, believes that she has built an emotional alliance with. When asked first by Adela, Fielding replies, "'I know all about him. I don't know him,'" which means that he knows Aziz only by name(p.60), and by this description Fielding's qualification for friendship with Aziz is contrasted to that of Mrs Moore, who is capable of being friends with Aziz without attaining the knowledge of his name. Then the narrator lets the reader hear the conversation occured between Fielding and Aziz:

> 'You know me by sight, then?'
> 'Of course, of course. You know me?'
> 'I know you very well by name.'
> 'I have been here such a short time, and always in the bazaar. No wonder you have never seen me, and I wonder you know my name. I say, Mr Fielding?'
> 'Yes?'
> 'Guess what I look like before you come out. That will be a kind of game.'
> 'You're five feet nine inches high,' said Fielding, surmising this much through the ground glasses of the bedroom door. (p.75)

This conversation, which reinforces the crucial effect of the comedy that exploits mutual misunderstanding between major characters, contains a comic perspective in a deeper sense, which is revealed by the analysis of what lies under their explicit statements. It can be gathered from Aziz's curious excuses, that Aziz tries to distract Fielding from the idea that knowing someone only by name is considered as impolite. What is comic is that Aziz's embarrassment originates in his total goodwill trying not to make Fielding feel guilty, while Fielding has no sense of guilt about "knowing someone by name". This discord springs from the fact that Aziz, at this phase of the novel, still puts his priority in "seeing", and it is ironic that "Professor" Fielding, who is responsible for educating Indians in direction towards a "civilized" and "modernized" society, does not seem

to take the matter of "seeing" as seriously as Aziz does, while Aziz's enthusiasm in "seeing" can be explained as the result of the westernizing education which has made him "Dr.Aziz". When Aziz challenges Fielding not to "see" but "imagine" what he looks like, Fielding dodges the challenge by "surmising" through the glass, which can be interpreted as an ethical bypass. The problematic connection between the ideological aspect of "seeing" and the westernizing education proves to be vital for the structure of the novel.

Next time Aziz's name asserts itself is during the interval between the disastrous picnic and the depressing trial. After consulting Mrs Moore, who is no more charitable nor considerate to the young couple, Adela gains a hint of truth from her former chaperone's indifferent yet prophetic words, and puts Aziz's name on her lip:

> Adela had stopped crying. An extraordinary expression was on her face, half relief, half horror. She repeated, 'Aziz, Aziz.'
> They all avoided mentioning that name. It had become synonymous with the Power of Evil. He was 'the prisoner', 'person in question', 'the defense', and the sound of it now rang out like the first note of a new symphony.
> 'Aziz...have I made a mistake?'
> 'You're over-tired,' he cried, not much surprised.
> 'Ronny, he's innocent; I made an awful mistake.' (p.189)

In this scene, Aziz's name is working independently as a kind of magical incantation of truth, as if it urges Adela to see the whole matter "as (it) is", which coincides with the pronunciation of his name: "as-is".

The allegorical function held by Aziz, then, becomes literally visible when Adela finally confronts him in the court. In a subsequent scene to the highly farcical episode, in which Anglo-Indians arrogantly make their way onto the platform taking no heed of the judge, Adela's sight is renewed by the height of her position:

> There he[Aziz] sat — strong, neat little Indian with very black hair, and pliant hands. She[Adela] viewed him without special emotion. Since they last met, she had elevated him into a principle of evil, but now he seemed to be what he had always been — a slight acquaintance. He was negligible, devoid of significance, dry like a bone, and though he was 'guilty' no atmosphere of sin around him. 'I suppose he *is* guilty. Can I possibly have made a mistake?' (p.203)

It is possible to argue then, that Aziz, with his suggestive name, is planned to be the tool of the author's irony to fulfil Adela's long-sustained desire: the desire to "see" the real India, which Adela herself comes to condemn as "her silly attempt". The fulfilment is achieved by the impressively disappointing gap of perception between the imagined figure of "a principle of evil", some Lucifer with inhuman beauty, and the "negligible" appearance of real Aziz. Again he functions to represent himself as "as (he) is", bringing along a representation of India "as (it) is", in order to reflect the comic process of self-knowledge undergone by Adela Quested, another allegorical figure of European education to which logic and honesty are ascribed with the sceptical attitude of the narrator.

III

It may not be so irrelevant to claim then, that *A Passage to India* is partly a comedy of manners which is founded upon the comic misunderstandings and cintradictions that the European-style education has transfered and imposed upon the British India, since education is a strong drive for people's social conduct either in a favourable manner or in an offensive manner. Two major English characters are introduced: one is a product of Western education, Adela Quested, and the other is a producer of Westernizing education, Cyril Fielding. Adela appears first in the novel with her inevitable line, "'I want to see the *real* India,'" which renders her impression as that of a "flat character". She is introduced by the narrator as "queer, cautious girl"(p.42), "Miss Quested, who always said exactly what was in her mind"(p.43), and "the logic girl". The

reader is informed of her features decidedly through Fielding's consciousness: when Adela complains of the lack of politeness in her countrymen, the narrator explains that "Fielding resented it too, but did not say so to the girl, for he found something theoretical in her outburst"(p.60). The detached, slightly cynical attitude of the narrator towards the heroine cannot be missed in these descriptions, and the absurdity in her desire of seeing the *real* India is most adroitly expressed in the conversations among the Anglo-Indian, as I display the example next.

The author makes the opening scene of the third chapter function as an introductory scene of characters, depicting every kind of people in the Club by a typical speech. This is also an important scene under the strain between the newcomers and the veterans, both going through an initiation to the new phase of the Anglo-Indian society. Adela meant to make a cultural breakthrough in the stiff attitudes of her compatriots by the remark "I want to see the real India", but she fails in the end because her perception of "*real* India" remains theoretical, and moreover, it is so ambiguous a word that its acceptance varies depending on various intentions of hearer. Concerning this issue, the following quotation will provide the reader with some suggestions:

> Ronny was in high spirits. The request [for seeing the *real* India] struck him as comic, and he called out to another passer-by: 'Fielding! How's one to see real India?'
> 'Try seeing Indians,' the man answered and vanished.
> 'Who was that?'
> 'Our schoolmaster — Government College.'
> 'As if one could avoid seeing them,' sighed Mrs Lesley.
> 'I've avoided,' said Miss Quested. 'Excepting my own servant, I've scarcely spoken to an Indian since landing.'
> 'Oh, lucky you.'
> 'But I want to see them.'
> She became the centre of an amused group of ladies. One said: 'Wanting to see Indians! How new that sounds!' Another: 'Natives! Why, fancy!' A third, more serious, said: 'Let me explain. Natives don't respect one any the more after meeting one, you see.' (p.44)

This farcical scene full of brisk conversations shows us Forster's skill in composing the social comedy which emerges from the acute observation of manners; yet some crucial points are implicitly offered here in the people's posturings. First there is a motif of "seeing": of course Adela starts firing the question, and Ronny, who considers himself to be an expert on "the real India" through his profession, takes it as comic entertainment. The man who answers Ronny's question is Fielding, who represents the Western conscience of liberalism and humanism; yet the latent uneasiness in him can already be sensed in a way he appears in the first scene: he (too) lightly advises to try "seeing" Indians, and then "vanished". The reader are to realize gradually, that what Fielding says always sounds sensible, but the way he says it always forms a singular contrast to his words. Fielding's self-contradictory nature unavoidably causes a subtle sense of doubt in the reader towards him as to whether he is Forster's proper protagonist. Then we hear an Anglo-Indian wife retort against Fielding's comment, without taking a hint of irony in her own words. In Adela's reply, we can see that she makes a distinction in treatment between "[her] own servant" and "an Indian", which consequently indicates a difference of meaning between "speaking" and "seeing". For her, speaking is not included in the interaction with India, while seeing is a genuine form of understanding the "other".

Indeed, "speaking to" is likely to be interpreted as an imperative conduct in the British India, as Mrs Turton addresses the words of welcome at the Bridge Party. Mrs Turton is undoubtedly described as a flat character, and she is a convenient tool for the author to conjure up a typical imperialist in the more domestic form, whereas it might be harder to make comic scenes with male imperialists, without loosing a light touch of the "comedy of manners". Mrs Turton is a hard-bitten member of Forster's type-category of "flat character", and some of her phrases ironically strike us as

memorable because of their brevity and directness. For example, in the scene of the Bridge Party in question, which is originally meant, by her husband the Collector, to make a "bridge" over the abyss between the East and the West, the narrator describes her comic behaviour concisely:

> 'The great point to remember is that no one who's here matters; those who matter don't come. Isn't that so, Mrs Turton?'
> 'Absolutely true,' said the great lady, leaning back. She was "saving herself up" as she called it — not for anything that would happen that afternoon or even that week, but for some vague future occasion when a high official might come along and tax her social strength. Most of her public appearances were marked by this air of reserve. (p.54)

By answering Ronny's flattering remark carelessly, she is adroitly taken by the narrator to admit that she is also one of those "who don't matter". The incongruous words "this air of reserve" to describe Mrs Turton's arrogance are the most broad expression of the narrator's criticism towards her. it is typical of her, then, to give a speech of welcome to the Indian guests in the imperative mood: she has learned Urdu, but "only to speak to her servants, so she knew none of the politer forms, and of the verbs only in the imperative mood"(p.56). The inability to use the foreign language properly is a convenient device for the cross-cultural comedy. The situation is more comic when she gets upset to hear certain Indian woman utter a few words in English — "'Eastbourne, Piccadily, High Park Corner'" (p.56) — as if she finds some animal able to speak English:

> 'She knows Paris also,' called one of the onlookers.
> 'The pass Paris on the way, no doubt,' said Mrs Turton, as if she was describing the movements of migratory birds. Her manner had grown more distant since she had discovered that some of the group was westernized, and might apply her own standards to her. (p.57)

This is the critical moment when Mrs Turton is caught up in the code of behaviour she herself is up to. She realizes that from now on she may be judged as she does to others of the same social status, and the perception destroys her illusion of solid authority. As the novel proceeds, she seems to be obsessed with the desire to regain the unstable authority, as if she were to take revenge on those who threatened her; her obsession can be detected in her claims such as : "'...a show of force will do no harm; it's ridiculous to pretend they don't hate us, do give up the farce'"(p.198), or "'...and remember it afterwards, you men. You're weak, weak, weak'"(p.200).

It can be said, in a sense, that Mrs Turton's strongly comic composition partly comes from her disturbing yet persuasive role of the boy in the fable who cried in public that the king was naked. Of course her particular silliness is its base, but the author makes her function to show up the absurd aspects of imperialism or colonialism in the enlarged picture; her futious contempt and cruelty towards Indians are a convenient safety valve for the ambivalent existence of the Anglo-Indian society. The "men"'s efforts to tame Mrs Turton's hostility, therefore, symbolize the imperialist tactic to sooth the conscience of the ruling people in India, and the panic and anger in her final appearance in the court scene embodies the crisis of the society which has long deceived itself as though it has not been deeply involved in the problematic situation. When the release of Aziz is about to be declared, Mrs Turton bursts out: "'He shall not,' shouted Mrs Turton against the gathering tumult. 'Call the other witness; we're none of us safe — ' Ronny tried to check her, and she gave him an irritable blow, then screamed insults at Adela"(p.210). This farcical scene provides us with Forster's typical skill to make a vivid picture of social comedy out of seemingly tragic materials; moreover, it also shows us how Forster makes a flat character to serve to activate the process of comedy without letting the character easily subside to a mere "stereotyped" character. Mrs Turton here is perfectly comic, yet she also appears to be ominous and even prophetic in saying that "we're none of us safe" when we consider in

retrospect that the great political change in the British India was just around the corner.

IV

Ronny Heaslop is another character with the "undeveloped heart" who behaves in a manner that is exactly imperative. In the following scene, they are returning from the dinner at the Club, arguing about Ronny's attitudes towards Indians:

> 'Why not ask the pleaders to the Club?' Miss Quested persisted.
> 'Not allowed.' He was pleasant and patient, and evidently understood why she did not understand. He implied that he had once been as she, though not for long. Going to the veranda, he called firmly to the moon. His sais answered, and without lowering his head he ordered his trap to be brought round. (p.46)

In contrast to Mrs Moore who is truly charmed to see the moon in India that gives her "[a] sudden sense of unity, of kinship with the heavenly bodies"(p.46), it is obvious that Ronny, who is the first to catch sight of the moon, has no interest in it. Therefore, it is highly ironic to see Ronny stride towards the veranda and "call[s] firmly to the moon," which means that he, with his usual arrogance, "speaks to " his servant without even "looking" in his direction. Though in a different context, P. N. Furbank also refers to the scene in the introduction to Everyman's Library Edition and says that there is "a savage flick of satire" in it [5]. The narrator chooses to catch Ronny again in a similar conduct towards servants. After having solved the awkward problem concerning Adela's decision to marry him, his robustness revives, and he silences Mrs Moore who asserts that the car accident they had must be caused by "a ghost," by declaring that it was "'another evidence of the native's incapability'":

> '...but I must get on with my work. Krishna!' Krishna was the peon who should have brought the files from his office. He had not turned up, and a terrific row ensued. Ronny stormed, shouted, howled, and only the experienced observer could tell that he was not angry, did not much want the files, and only made a row because it was the custom. Servants, quite understanding, ran slowly in circles, carrying hurricane lamps. Krishna the earth, Krishna the stars replied, until the Englishman was appeased by their echoes, fined the absent peon eight annas, and sat down to his arrears in the next room. (p.101)

It is needless to say that "Krishna" is the name of a Hindu God whose attribute is love, and this farcical scene must be an allusion to the previous scene where the Indian professor Godbole sings the religious song in front of Fielding's guests. Here the narrator describes Ronny as a superior God who is appeased by the multiplied Krishna's replies, but the narrator's ironic tone is obvious in his use of the "mock-heroic" style of the description, or in the omniscient viewpoint which is deliberately used to explain such unworthy behaviour of Ronny. The irony deepens when we remember what Godbole says; though a milkmaiden repeats her prayers "Come to me" endlessly, Krishna "refuses to come" and "neglects to come"(p.87). The reader may notice a cross - gender caricature of Ronny, who places himself in the position of the milkmaiden: considering the context, the description can be interpreted as a comic brief of the proposal in that he, not only apparently asking for Krishna's interest in him, appeals for Adela's affection, and his wish is meanwhile satisfied. Yet the narrator's detached comment "only(...)because it was custom" undermines the sincerity of Ronny's attachment to Adela, and the reader may well come to suspect that his aim might be Adela's "consent" to become a proper "Anglo-Indian" wife, not "love", which suits his career out here in the British India. Through the comic gap of conduct in the display of "the Englishman" who is "appeased by their echoes," and then "s[i]ts down(...)get on with [his] work," we might see the type who shares ethical attitudes with Henry Wilcox in *Howards End* , who deals with his insincere love affair in the same way he treats some routine business. These episodes explain economically the essential difference between Mrs

Moore and her son Ronny; even his given name "Ronny" (always mentioned in this abbreviated form) impresses us with its mediocrity and its contrast to the suggestive surname of his mother, "Moore".

V

To much extent it is true that Mrs Moore can be regarded as the developed figure of Mrs Wilcox in *Howards End* , as many critics have a consensus on the issue. In my view, however, the author creates some features in Mrs Moore that are definitely different from Mrs Wilcox, and I am going to discuss the similarities and the differences in turn, in relation to their roles in the structure of social comedy.

It is relatively easy to point out the similarities among them; they both enjoy love of superstition in the domestic life, and share mysterious insight into the human nature, and also fail to raise their sons into men of tolerance or imaginative sympathy towards different standards of life. There is a pattern of association which gives the evidence of such capability to sympathize with the "other" in these "elementary" characters: Mrs Wilcox and "the pig's teeth stuck into the trunk" which would be believed to cure the toothache (*Howards End* , p.82); Mrs Moore and the "wasp" to which she addresses as "'Pretty dear'"(*A Passage to India*, p.50), which has often been read as a symbolic example of the communication between the components of different cultures, as it connects Mrs Moore and Godbole through Hinduism towards the ending of the novel.

The bases of Mrs Moore's composition can be found in *Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson*, a biography written by Forster[6] ; they are supposed to be Dickinson himself in part, and Mrs Webb and Mrs Moor who were "two great women friends" with whom Dickinson used to have religious arguments. In this biography of his former tutor at Cambridge who accompanied him in his first visit to India, Forster quotes a letter from Dickinson to Mrs Moor (G.L.D., p.140), and as Penelope Pether points out, it suggests a possible source of the wasp motif, though it is not clear when Forster became aware of the letter's existence ("*A Passage to India:* A Passage to Patria?", in *E.M.Forster: New Casebooks*, p.199, 210). Dickinson's description of Mrs Webb also suggests the link of characteristics between himself, Mrs Webb, Mrs Moor, and "Mrs Moore":

> But all this[illness] leaves her as it were unsullied, uncomplaining, the most beautiful soul perhaps I have known or shall know, except it may be my sister Janet and Mrs Moor.
> She has also a strong and sincere mind, which prevents her swallowing any humbug. She is a member of the Church of England and the widow of a parson. But what she believes I do not know, nor I think does she. But she has 'faith', in the sense of courage, love, and hope. Those are the last three qualities that abide when all things go, and when we can but wait our passage to annihilation or whatever else there may be. (G.L.D., p.57)

This description surely demonstrates a model of Mrs Moore, but it seems to be too abstract to develop into a character in the social comedy. More concrete bases of her can be seen in Forster's description of his friend's mother in *The Hill of Devi*. When Malcolm Darling was appointed by the Government of India to be a tutor and gardian of the Maharajah whom Forster was to serve later, their relationship began doubtfully; the young Maharajah was so sensitive and suspicious and the new tutor had no idea how to handle him, when a saviour appears:

> Fortunately Malcolm's mother arrived, and she did much to ease the situation. Warm of heart and simple of spirit. Mrs Darling soon became friends with the charming Oriental. He drove her out of an evening in his tum-tum. At first he thought she had been set to spy on him, so he tried to trap her. Having imparted some trifling secrets, he said, "You will not tell anyone about this, will you?" She replied, "No, but I may tell my son, mayn't I?" If she had merely said "no," he would have continued to mistrust her. As it was he knew that she was "frank". Their drives rapidly became intimate. (p.21)

Here is obviously an echo of Mrs Moore's frank and sincere manner to talk with Aziz even in their first encounter, and Forster's surviving interest in the delicate details of cross-cultural communication is also visible. It can be suggested that through Mrs Darling, Mrs Moore and the Maharajah are connected, as is observed in the episode of the "ghost" which attacked the car. In his "letters of 1921" included in *The Hill of Devi,* Forster cites an episode which he considers as one of the incidents that reveals the "supernormal faculties" of the Maharajah. An engineer of the Electoric Company and his wife incidentally mention an experience they had; motoring away from Dewas, just as they crossed the river, some animal or other dashed out of the ravine and attacked their car so badly that it swerved and nearly hit the parapet of the bridge. Then the Maharajah intervenes, guessing at the appearances of the animal which is almost acurate to their surprise, and gravely confesses that it must be the ghost of a man he ran over at the spot(p.53). This episode is carried in the novel *A Passage to India*, with a slight change in setting; yet the coincidence, that Mrs Moore murmurs "A ghost!" with an unexplained shiver on hearing about the similar car accident Adela and Ronny encountered, suggests another link which connects Mrs Moore and the "supernormal", that leads consequently to the similarity between Mrs Wilcox and Mrs Moore.

There are aspects in Mrs Moore, however, that we cannot find in Mrs Wilcox. Of course it partly comes from the difference in the extent to which each character commits herself to the plot of the narrative. In Mrs Wilcox's case, it is possible for her to remain a genuine type of the supernatural insight and to have a spiritual influence on the other characters despite her inactiveness, mainly because she disappears at the first quarter of the novel by the seemingly sudden death. For Mrs Moore the situation becomes more complex; though she also dies from illness in the end, she gets involved in the plot far more tightly than Mrs Wilcox, and consequently she cannot but become more humanized with faults and worldly anxiety.

Her spiritual decline towards nihilism has been frequently read as the most symptomatic phenomenon of the defeated Christianity, or the European rationalism. It is a complicated issue that goes beyond the realm of social comedy or comedy of manners which we are dealing with, and here, I would like only to point out the features of Mrs Moore that render her a comic figure, along with the author's subtle handling.

The first impressive word that betrays Mrs Moore's latent critical mind towards the people around her is seen in the following part of the conversation which is already cited in the section I discuss Adela, who insists on "seeing the real India". When Mrs Callendar cruelly comments that "'the kindest thing one can do to a native is to let him die,'" Mrs Moore asks, "'How if he went to heaven?'" with a gentle "but crooked smile"(P.44), which shows her cynical wit that allows her to enjoy secretly other people's absurd behaviour. Mrs Wilcox, the woman of the "goddess" type who lacks the intellectual superiority, would never have made such a satirical remark, and it typically implies the author's intention to assign Mrs Moore the role of a reserved but shrewd observer of the human nature. This also reminds us of Forster's sense of irony itself; Leonard Woolf reports that Forster was nicknamed "Taupe" (or mole) by Lytton Strachey, due to his usual shyness and the unexpected sharpness in his insight which was rarely demonstrated in public. In the rest of the novel, up to the critical phase of the Cave affair, she is constantly represented as a sympathetic soul and a champion of the Christian goodwill, and with her subtle posture of sincerity she succeeds in becoming friends with "the charming Oriental", as Mrs Darling did in the Maharajah's court.

Yet the reader must face the disturbing change in her personality, when Adela comes to her for help: Mrs Moore fails, not only to give the appropriate advice, but also to take any interest in Adela's agony which might be understood only by a woman, since it is concerned with female sexuality. It is strangely persuasive when the narrator reveals Ronny's inner voice, disguising an impartial attitude: "He had never felt east with her. She was by no means the dear old lady outsiders supposed, and India had brought her into the open"(p.188). Taking the preceding scrutiny into Mrs Moore's secret severity towards people into account, we should reluctantly admit that Ronny displays for once the intuitive

comprehension, which he inherits from his differently composed mother. He keeps directing our attention to Mrs Moore's exterior features. For example, the description such as "Puffy, red, and curiously severe, Mrs Moore was revealed upon a sofa" gives us the sense of coarseness which has never been ascribed to her, and especially the term "red" is readily associated with the way she once describes Ronny: "...she saw the mouth moving so complacently and competently beneath the little red nose"(p.63). The choice of term, then, again seems to support Ronny's claim that "But you'll find her — irritable. We are an irritable family," and this resemblance between the "holy mother" and the "narrow-minded son", which does not exist between Mrs Wilcox and her son Charles, might strike the reader as darkly comic.

The true reason for Mrs Moore's breakdown remains ambiguous: it may be the "echo" in the caves that pushes her to the extremes of nihilism as the narrator apparently insists, but the narrator's interpolating comment, "(vision or nightmare?) (p.135)," is already added to Mrs Moore's increasing apathy towards the relations between the individuals before she goes into the caves. If we notice a pattern of Mrs Moore's unstable stream of thoughts, it can be observed that the breakdown is quietly prepared through the narrative; the rise of Mrs Moore's ironic or nihilistic aspects seems to coincide with the moments when she thinks of her children. For example, when Adela speaks ill of Mrs McBryde who leaves her husband during the Hot Weather, Mrs Moore checks her by saying: "It is the children who are the first consideration. Until they are grown-up, and married off. When that happens one has again the right to live for one self" (p.134); immediately after the speech she feels that "too much fuss has been made over marriage"(p.135). Then at the caves, sending off Adela and Aziz to the exploration, Mrs Moore begins writing a letter to her children in England, addressing "Dear Stella, Dear Ralph", but stops soon, wondering about the discouraging experience in the cave, only to realize "that she didn't want to write to her children, didn't want to communicate with anyone, not even with God"(p.146). Finally, in the previous scene when Adela and Ronny ask for her incorporation, Mrs Moore says with odd calmness: "'I am not good, no bad.(...) A bad old woman, bad, bad, detestable. I used to be good with the children growing up"(p.191). It may be that Mrs Moore's breakdown results from the long repressed feelings of a "mother" who is socially responsible for raising children "respectably" in the society. It is very suggestive that Ronny retorts her reproach by claiming that "'I'm just servant of the Government; it's the profession you wanted me to choose and that's that"(p.63).

Therefore Mrs Moore becomes comic not in herself, but in the gap of perception between hers and the people's; especially between her lack of interest in others, which must be a rebbound of the self-devotion throughout her life, Adela's too innocent confidence in Mrs Moore's consist being: "He[Ronny] seemed warning her against approaching disappointment, but she took no notice. Her friendship with Mrs Moore was so deep and real that she felt sure it would last, whatever else happened"(p.186). The travesty of her name "Mrs Moore", "Esmiss Esmoor...," thus creates the most ironic picture that embodies the world where nothing is correctly named, nor is name-able in the first place. The name "Moore" is strongly suggestive in that, it is close to "more" in spelling, and is also close to "maw", the threatening image that swallows things up like the ominous echoes in the Marabar Caves do.

Being constructed fundamentally as the "elementary character", however, Mrs Moore manages to regain the holiness after her death, through Godbole's mystic meditations which place Mrs Moore and the wasp in the Krishna's circle of love. This is the point in which the similarity between Mrs Wilcox and Mrs Moore is restored: both of them are given complementary figures in the structure of the novel. To Mrs Wilcox, there is prophetic Miss Avery, who can perceive the late Mrs Wilcox's semblance in Margaret — "'I took you for Ruth Wilcox.(...) You had her way of walking'(*Howards End* , p.202)" — , and with her decisive conduct makes the house in question, "Howards End", into the Schlegel sisters' home: "'Miss Avery is extraordinary,' said Margaret (...), 'She loved Mrs Wilcox, and would rather furnish her house with

our things than think of it empty'"(p.289). In the last novel, Professor Godbole, the old Hindu teacher is the complementary figure of Mrs Moore. They resemble very much in that both of them take no no action against social wrongs, and offer Aziz literally no aid at the time of the crisis; yet they both remain in Aziz's life or in his memories with deeply affectionate feelings. I wish to argue that, the author composes them as complementary, so that one individual character may not enjoy exclusively the moral or ethical privilege that repudiates acceptance by the reader as comic.

Godbole's character is described obviously comic, almost as a caricature of Hindu India. Yet it is also observed that he functions not only as a member of the social comedy, but also as a bearer of an important motif in the novel; the motif of the "failure to be there" when needed. This aspect of him seems to introduce different element into the novel, which urges the transformation of comedy from the "comedy of manners" to something less laughable towards the end.

VI

Now I am going to examine Adela's qualities in the social comedy, focusing especially on her problematic desire of "seeing the *real* India".

Compared with the act of "speaking (to)" as I have discussed Mrs Turton and Ronny in that respect, the act of "seeing" or "watching", so far, is expressed relatively with favourable connotations; yet the matter of "seeing" is not so simple. Returning to the previous passage cited, Adela utters her wish "to see the *real* India" hardly before she becomes an object of others' "seeing" eyes: "'I want to see them.' She became the centre of an amused group of ladies...". It is one of Forster's recurring concerns that, "seeing" needs a certain standpoint and it naturally cannot escape being embedded in a social or cultural frame. Adela's desire "to see" the genuine nature of things without being involved in the view is, actually, the sight of the Omniscient; yet she keeps pursuing after it with all the earnest sincerity, finally putting herself at the deadly risk: an attempted rape by a "nice" sort of the Indian.

The author's intention to make her a comic figure is broadly stated in the impartial, often dry tone of the narrator who refers to Adela's "education", or her excessive by - products of education. Fielding once tells Aziz rather carelessly that, "'Oh, I don't know her, but she struck me as one of the more pathetic products of Western education. She depresses me,'" and continues that "'[s]he goes on and on as if she's at a lecture — trying ever so hard to understand India and life, and occasionally taking notes'"(p.120). Hearing this, the reader may naturally wonder why Adela's surname is "Quest" but "Quested", the passive form of the verb which has a meaning: "a long search, or a continuing attempt to finf something". It is to her credit that Mrs Turton remarks on the new young lady, "'Miss Quested, wgat a name!"(p.45), since Adela's inquiring nature and her insolent desire of "seeing the real India" seems highly irrelevent to her curious name.

This mystery seems to be gradually resolved in the disquieting process of the trial after the Cave affair, as we follow the transformation of Adela's perception of self. In the beginning of the novel, she is apparently seeking to fill a position in the British India as the subject who asks questions and see things only superficially with her immature rationalism, yet she is urged to undergo a compulsive yet essential change into the object. In the climactic part of the novel which describes the cross-cultural trial scene, she is once more scared of "being examined in public" as she recoils from confessing a painfully personal embarrassment that it is herself who might have triggered the delicately sexual thoughts in Aziz by asking how many wives he had(p.208).

Yet she tries with the utmost concentration, in her psychoanalytic reflection, to trace her every step of the expedition on that fatal day; it is as if she is wishing to spot her exact position in the world that turns out to be a space of an epiphany, which is an indispensable moment to the social comedy that is fabricated uopn various kinds of "mix-up"(p.47). The description of the moment Adela gains the final vision vividly shows the reader the answer to the question of her curious name. Meanwhile she is being questioned by the Superintendent McBryde:

> She[Adela] was silent. The court, the place of question, awaited her reply. But she could not give it until Aziz entered the place of answer.
> 'The prisoner followed you, didn't he?' he repeated in a monotonous tones that they both used; (...)
> 'May I have half a minute before I reply to that, Mr McBryde?'
>
> 'Certainly.'
> Her vision was of several caves. She saw herself in one, and she was also outside it, watching its entrance, for Aziz to pass in. She failed to locate him. (p.209)

The discovery that Aziz has never entered "the place of answer" symbolizes her failure to "locate" him, that is , to make him an object of her desire of "seeing"; instead she comes to realize that the object which has been "quested" is nothing other than herself. What appears to be a psychological dissociation of self can be interpreted, then, as the achievement of double vision which enables her to "see" and to "be seen" simultaneously, so that the posture of "seeing" may not be a form of ruling the "other" who is otherwise "seen" one-sidedly. By the acquisition of this modified manner, Adela's vision is finally "exalted to a culmination of human love" as Forster claims in *Howards End* (p.188), and thus she is located in the geneology of Forster's protagonists who are destined to exercise the author's motto, "Only connect...".

The curious name, "Adela Quested", then, can be associated with a figure who is "addled", which means "confused", and who is "quested": at first she only appears to be one of the flat characters with a "muddled" mind, but she proves herself to be capabe of transfiguring into a round, integrate character with modesty. It is true that Adela's qualification as a component of the social comedy comes from her ineffective, often even harmful honesty. When having a conversation with Fielding after the trial which has ended up bursting into a maddening feast of the triumphant Indians, Adela, with her same old way of putting things in a surprisingly unaffected manner, modestly says that, "'I was brought up to be honest; the trouble is, it gets me nowhere'"(p.219). The maturation of character in Adela, however, is informed to the reader by another protagonist, Fielding, who also comes to attain a new light on his perceptions by "a newborn respect to her": according to Fielding's conscious, "[although] her hard schoolmistressy manner remained, she was no longer examining life, but being examined by it; she had boceme a real person"(p.223).

We are checked at the same time, however, that being in the responsible position for the Western-style education in the british India, Fielding cannot escape being accused of such over-literal features of Adela. To Fielding's unkind comments on Adela, Aziz answers that "'I think her so nice and sincere", but he, who is to swear towards the ending that he "had enough of showing Miss Quested native life"(p.267), still remains unaware that "[this] pose of 'seeing India' which had seduced him to Miss Quested at Chandrapore was only a form of ruling India; no sympathy lay behind it"(p.276). We should remember that Adela, who wants to "see", cannot but be the object of "seeing" by the Anglo-Indians, and it might lead to a suggestion that the question of "seeing" is not only a driving force of social comedy but also a highly troubling issue in *A Passage to India* , because even a goodwill-conduct of "seeing" India always renders the Orient an object of the colonialist or the imperialist sight. In this novel, Forster does not excuse Fielding, who is usually supposed to a fictional double of the author himself, from embracing the comic faults in its composition. A chief evidence for the author's criticism against these liberal English figures can be found in the early stage of Forster's creation.

VII

In his first novel *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, Forster already introduces a character who can be seen as the original model of Fielding who advises the heroine to see "Indians" rather than India to meet the *real* India: Philip Herriton, a young, complacent English of the upper middle-class, whose aesthetic love for Italy directs his sister-in-law into the "undesirable"

marriage with an Italian, and who comes to realize, through the subsequent panic, his inadequacy for understanding others. He even makes the similar comment to Fielding's on seeing the foreign country in th lighter situation:

> ...Philip, taking his place, flooded her[Lilia] with a final stream of advice and injunctions — where to stop, how to learn Italian, when to use mosquito-nets, what pictures to look at. 'Remember,' he concluded, 'that it is by going off the track that you get to know the country. See the little towns,(...) and don't, let me beg you, go with that awful tourist idea that Italy's only a museum of antiquities and art. Love and understand the Italians, for the people are more marvellous than the land.' (*Where Angels Fear to Tread,* p.1)

Philip's seemingly humanistic idea of seeing "the *real* Italy" through its inhabitants is marked to fail, because he does not understand that "going off the track..." is already prepared by that "awful tourist idea" [7], and that is partly a reason for the comic we feel towards him. Actually, it is the essential strategy of the tourist discourse that enables itself to expand interminably; that is, we are apt to be attracted to and understand only what we already are conditioned to do so, and the absence of the "real" is endlessly postponed in our limited perception. This post-modernistic notion of tourism should make the ominous echo which suggests Jean Baudrillard's argument that we are totally trapped in the world of reproduction culture, as Tambling points out in the notes to James Buzard's essay on Forster's tourist vision (*E.M.Forster: New Casebooks,* p.28), and it is a sure menace to the raison d'être of the individual that is Forster's highest priority. Forster seems to have been troubled by the question "how's one to see the real other?", and he repeatedly deals with the tragi-comic consequences of the attempts in the short stories such as "The Story of a Panic", "The Road from Colonus" and more directly in his another Italian novel, *A Room With a View*.

There is a crucial difference, however, as to the nature of "seeing" when it is placed in Italy, or in India. First, in Italy there are "pictures to look at" and Italy can at least be regarded as "a museum of antiquities and art", while no Anglo-Indians regards the Indian art with serious attention; Italy possesses art of high standard, while "[t]here's nothing in India but the weather" as Ronny quotes Mr McBryde, and Anglo- Indians put the old stale production of *Cousin Kate* on stage out here in India. In the early Italian novels we can laugh cozily at Philip or Lucy for their comic efforts to discover the every disappointment to Italy without consciencious scruples, because there is no strain of dominating power in the act of "seeing": they are literally "tourists." The situation is totally different in India, however, because the ill- balance of political power between the Indian and the Anglo- Indian. If we regard Philip as a victim of the comic in the novel, Fielding is a sinner of the comic who activates the whole trouble of "seeing" India, since it is precisely Fielding who suggests that the best way to see the *real* India is "seeing Indians," and further more, it is he who invites Adela Quested and Mrs Moore to tea to meet Aziz, who does not particularly care to meet them. In my view, Fielding who has escaped being criticized in major ctiricism for the sake of his sympathy for Aziz, is the real impulse of the infamous desire of "seeing the real India" of which Adela is unfairly often accused by Aziz, and by the critics.

The author's attitude seems severer towards Fielding than Adela, as a component of the social comedy, and the reason is probably what we have already discussed, that Fielding represents, as a schoolmaster of Chandrapore, the Western liberalism and humanism which is imported to India. His authority is already undermined by the subtly ironic tone of the narrator, who introduces Fielding briefly before the tea takes place at the college: "The world, he believed, is a globe of men who are trying to reach one another and can best do so by the help of goodwill plus culture and intelligence — a creed ill suited to Chandrapore, he had come out too late to loose it"(p.74). Later we hear him say to Aziz that "'I can't be sacked from my job, because my job's education. I believe in teaching people to be individuals, and to understand other individuals. It's the only thing I do believe in"(p.121);

but in this confession of "politically correct" belief, we sense a slight inauthenticity, just like we do in Mrs Moore's reluctant approval of Christianity, and it is reinforced in the subtle tecnique of the narrator who presents Fielding's words as the reported speeches. His respect for the individual sometimes seems to be confused with the solitary state of a bachelor, which is most typically expressed in his boast that "I travel light"(p.121) with a revealing conclusion: "Any man can travel light until he has a wife or children"; it unavoidably creates a distance between himself and Aziz. Though Fielding is not a tourist, he unconsciously avoids being rooted in the Indian society ("To slink through India unlabelled was his aim" p.166), And camouflages his unstable position with the criminally simple belief in "teaching to be individuals" which can do less good to Aziz than Mrs Moore does through her inactive sympathy.

This act of "seeing" Indians with a distance is the very pose of "ruling" India, which Aziz comes to realize in the final part of the novel names "Temple"; immediately after pondering on the pose of "seeing India", Aziz continues as he is watching a boat of the English party that he does not welcome so enthusiastically:

> ...he[Aziz] knew exactly what was going on in the boat as the party gazed at the steps down which the image would presently descend, and debated how near they might row without getting into trouble officially. (p.276)

This poignant opinion of Aziz towards his former English friend responds to the debasing change of mentality in Fielding, who comes to allow Ronny Heaslop to say that "'...also I'm relieved you feel able to come into line with the Oppressors of India to some extent"(p.277) in his letter. Fielding is surely one of Forster's protagonists and a round character, but he is obviously different from other ambiguous protagonists such as Rickie Elliot in *The Longest Journey*, or Margaret Schlegel in *Howards End*, in that he is not given a definite ground on which Forster puts his values: for Rickie, his ability to preceive a "symbolic moment" is a saving grace, and for Margaret the "pastoral England"; but Forster sees the limits in the Western education which is based upon the individualism, and it is reflected in his detached treatment of Fielding. It is typically described in the encounter of Fielding and Adela during the chaotic aftermass of the inter-racial trial; the narrator says thus:

> A friendliness, as of dwarfs shaking hands, was in the air. Both man and woman were at the height of their powers — sensible, honest, even subtle.(...) Yet they were dissatisfied. When they agreed, 'I want to go on living a bit,' or 'I don't believe in God,' the words were followed by a curious backwash, as though the universe has displaced itself to fill up a tiny void, or as though they had seen their own gestures from an immense height — dwarfs talking, shaking hands and assuring each other that they stood on the same footing of insight. (p.239)

It should be noticed that this is not a mere caricature of mean, self-complacent rationalism which is often ascribed to this description. Making personal relations the comic object, as the narrator does here, indicates a striking change in Forster's perspective of humanism which he has long sustained as his instinctive principle. The question of the limits of humanism has been argued as Forster's serious concern for the ethical corruption of the European civilization, for example, by Frederick Crews[8] ; yet it may also pass as the critical moment of transformation in the frame of the comedy Forster has so far emplyed. It shows that Forster's chief interest in writing novels shifts from the "manners" of people in the society, to the comic "position" of human beings in the arbitrary, sometimes hostile universe they live in; that is probably the reason why *A Passage to India* is getting less and less funny towards the ending in the ordinary sense of the social comedy. I cannot but feel pessimistic about this essential change in the comic qualities of the novel which will ambush the reader with a darker view of the world, since the analysis of characters and manners is no longer valid once the values or belief in individual relations are canceled —

"though people are important, the relations between them are not"(p.135).

Notes

This essay is a rewrite of a part of my MA thesis which was submitted to the University of Tokyo in December 1996.

(1) Lionel Trilling, "Manners, Morals, and the Novel," *The Liberal Imagination* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979) 194 - 195.

(2) E.M.Forster, *A Passage to India*, introd. by P.N.Furbank (London: Everyman's Library, 1942) Appendix i, 291.

(3) E.M.Forster, "Syed Ross Massod: Contributed to the Memorial Number of an Urdu Journal" [1937], *Two Cheers for Democracy* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1938) 292 - 294.

(4) E.M.Forster, *A Passage to India*, ed. by Oliver Stallybrass (London: Edward Arnold, 1924; Penguin Books, 1936; reset from the Abinger Edition, 1979) 48. Further page references are given after quotations in the text.

(5) P.N.Furbank, Introduction to *A Passage to India* (reprinted in Everyman's Library, 1942; Introduction, Bibliography and Cronology, David Campbell Publishers, 1991) xx.

(6) E.M.Forster, *Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1934) 118, 140.

(7) James Buzard, "Forster's trespass: Tourism and Cultural Politics", *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, literature, and the Ways to Culture, 1800 - 1918* (Oxford, 1993), cited in *E.M.Forster: New Casebooks* ed. by Jeremy Tambling (London: Macmillan Press, 1995) 14 - 29.

(8) Frederick C. Crews, "A Passage to India", *E.M.Forster: The Perils of Humanism* (Princeton, 1962).