CHAPTER III

WHERE ANGELS FEAR TO TREAD.

E.M. Forster's first published novel Where Angels Fear to Tread, like many of his stories and The Longest Journey, was inspired by the spirit of place. Originally titled "Gino", it contains Forster's themes that were developed in the other novels.

During his travels to Italy, he came across places that fired, as it were, his imagination and encouraged him to write.

"The story of a Panic "and "The Road From Colonus" are the stories which resulted from his foreign journeys. The little town of Monteriano in Where Angels Fear to Tread is based on a visit to a little town that he had visited with his mother. He writes to his friend Dent about it thus:

"The little town of Monteriano with its many towers, is based on the medieval town near Florence called San Gimignano". The novel was still called "Monteriano" in the manuscript. In order of conception it follows Forster's unpublished ms fragment to which no title was given but P.N. Furbank refers to it by its opening sentence "They are..."
Nottingham Lace], and A Room With a View. The contrast between Italy and England serves a more important structural function in this novel than in A Room with a View whose second part takes place in England.

Where Angels Fear to Tread is a novel of learning and growth like Samuel Butler's The Way of all Flesh and Henry James' The Ambassadors. According to Lionel Trilling, Forster's novel, like The Ambassadors, deals with the theme of the influence of foreign lands and people: "Its theme, like that of The Ambassadors, is the effect of a foreign country and a strange culture upon insular ideas and provincial personalities."

The journey motif is very important in this novel as it is also significant in Forster's stories and other novels. Journeys serve as means of education and self-search. Journey is a quest of culture and reality and through the encounters with the foreign lands and people the characters learn of their shortcomings. Most of the central characters travel to foreign countries or to places within England itself. Rickie Elliot's very life is conceived as a 'longest journey' and it takes him from Sawston to Cambridge and Wiltshire. Margaret Schlegel and her sister travel to Germany and then to the countryside of England, Mrs. Moore and Adela Quested go to India.
The central characters in Forster's stories also travel, for example Miss Ruby travels to Vorta, Mr. Lucas travels in Greece, the boy boards the celestial omnibus.

All these characters visit places where they encounter some new experiences or meet people. The new experience lies beyond their normal range of activity and expectation. The point that is raised in the stories and novels is whether these characters can assimilate the new experience and accommodate it to their world. They are pulled in contrary directions toward the new experiences that the journey brings and toward the world of familiar norms and values. J.S. Martin discussing the journey theme writes: "The exploratory character of Forster's fiction is thematically suggested through its pervasive emphasis on travel."

The central theme of the novel is based on the marriage of an English woman of a respectable family of Sawston with an Italian. One of Forster's relatives, Maimie, had married her music teacher, Aylward. This second marriage had created a great deal of hue and cry among the Thorntons. Perhaps Lucy's second marriage was suggested by this episode. D.H. Lawrence also writes about an English woman marrying an Italian below her station, in *The Lost Girl*. 
The marriage of Lilia Herriton with Gino while she was in Italy to acquire culture and perspective on life, evokes a great deal of opposition and leads to plans to rescue her. The 'rescue' theme also recurs in Forster's novels. It was first used in the incomplete fragment "They are Nottingham Lace", and subsequently in *A Room With a View, The Longest Journey* and in his short stories.

It is interesting to know that at one time the novel was to have been called "The Rescue". Forster drew up elaborate time table for the rescue party. In the published novel the rescue party is sent with mixed motives. The Herritons want to save their face in the Sawston society. John Colmer calls the novel 'a novel about being saved'

The novel is about the spiritual salvation of the characters like Philip and Caroline. Salvation means saving one's inner integrity and of achieving the wholeness of being. Philip Herriton, who is in love with the Baedeker Italy, the Italy of beautiful places and art galleries, is shocked to learn that Lilia has married a dentist's son. He had romantic love for Italy. He believes that "Italy really purifies and ennobles all who visit her. She is the school as well as the playground of the world" (*WAV*, p.9) Forster is very critical of the people who make the wrong use of culture. In *A Room With a View* Cecil Vyse uses his
knowledge of art and culture to bolster his superiority, and runs down people who are ignorant about the names of the great artists and cannot pronounce their names. Mr. Bons, in Forster's short story "The Celestial Omnibus" boasts of the expensive volumes on Shelley possessed by him. In *Howards End* Leonard Bast is ridiculed for his cultural snobbery. In P.N. Furbank's view the question of culture put to wrong end figures predominantly as one of the themes: "Culture put to the wrong end was a major preoccupation in all his early novels."6

Philip Herriton's romantic idea of Italy gets shattered because for him it is a place of Garibaldi and Dante. His Italian journey brings about in him a profound dislike for insular English values. He tends to tilt at the British conventions. He fails to observe the seamy side of the Italian life, nor is he capable of observing certain good points of the British life: Forster's point of view is broader than Philip's. It is only towards the close of the book that Philip acquires wisdom and the sweep of knowledge of the author. Philip Herriton is sent to Monteriano to prevent the marriage of Lilia and Gino. The plot of the novel develops on the basis of the "journeys" to Italy and their effects on the English. In John Colmer's view: "The main elements in the composition are thus the two visits and their consequences."7
Forster does not portray the contrast between the passionate and instinctive life of Monteriano and the snobbish, convention-ridden provinciality of Sawston as absolute sides of life. He views them ironically and is aware that simple good and evil do not exist, and that life is a mixture of both the elements. Yet, the preference is for the Italian way of life because it is based on truth and passion. Salvation of Philip and Caroline is ensured because both become aware of passion in life. The Bloomsburian concept of beauty and the admiration of beautiful objects is also represented by Philip who on his first visit registers the beauty of violents.

The themes of salvation and transfiguration play a very important part in the novel. Using religious terms like 'salvation', 'transfiguration' and 'conversion' Forster indicates the inner development of the characters who are granted 'eternal moments'. In the novels of Forster's contemporaries the use of the religious terms such as salvation, grace, conversion and transfiguration was quite common. Forster's characters come across the moments of vision and their lives are transfigured. They begin to understand the meaning and complexity of life better. Philip Herriton, who visits Monteriano to save British respectability and honour of his family, undergoes an agonising experience.
because of his romantic idealisation of Italy. The first visit opens his eyes to the fact that the Italians might also be cruel, avaricious and insolent. His first encounter with Gino is quite comic though an eye-opener. Lilia also comes to realise that the life in Italy was full of joy and happiness only for men and not for women. She fondly remembers the free and happy life of Sawston based on equality for men and women (WAFT, P.55).

Lilia is one of the few women in Forster's early novels who are not fond of music or art. The lack of such qualities makes her life miserable and lonely. She is a 'flat' character according to Forster's terminology. Miss Harriet is another example of a flat character with her intense dedication to her religion and mission. Lilia's married life is destroyed because of her false idea of possessing her husband. The love at first sight had transfigured Gino into a handsome and most desirable person. Gradually Gino begins to dominate her. He wants to show that he can "manage a wife" (WAFT, p.53)

In The Longest Journey also, the theme of managing one's wife or keep one's wife, is indicated. Much of Rickie's tragedy springs from his inability to keep Agnes in line. Stephen Wonham, on the other hand, knows how to keep his wife in line.
Philip's first visit to Monteriano proves unsuccessful. His education, through symbolic moments, is yet to take place. He still looks upon life as a spectacle. He feels amused by the intricate situation presented by Lilia's marriage and his mother's insistence upon breaking it. Forster's reference to Santa Deodata serves to compare the holy maiden's indifference to human love and human life with Philip's detached attitude towards life around him. The fall of her mother did not disturb the Saint's religious fanaticism. By ignoring her mother's suffering she assured her throne in paradise (WAPFT, p.88) James McConkey finds a comparison between the attitudes of Philip and the saint: "His supercilious detachment in the name of culture corresponds to the religious detachment of Santa Deodata."9

The death of Lilia leads to the plans to send another 'rescue' party and the comedy of Mrs. Herriton. The child is to be rescued because she wants to show that the Herritons are concerned with its proper development.

V.A. Sahane beautifully analyses the comic spirit of Forster at work as the author laughs at the motives of Mrs. Herriton related to the rescuing of the child.10 Mrs. Herriton wants to conceal the fact from her friends and relatives that a son was born to Lilia (p.63) when Miss Abbott lets it known that she wants to adopt the child in
order to make amends for her moral responsibility regarding the ill-fated marriage, Mrs. Herriton advises her to forget the child, 'The child should worry you less than it worries us. It belongs to another world" (p.75) when Miss Abbott insists upon going to Monteriano to take the possession of the child, Mrs. Herriton decides to adopt the son (p.76).

She sends Philip and Harriet to secure the child at any "price". V. A. Sahane points to the theme of money that one comes across in Forster's writing. The word 'price' is literally meant since it expounds Forster's mildly critical view of a money civilisation.11

Philip's second visit is more important in his realisation of life's complexity and richness. Forster's aim in the novel was to the improvement of Philip so that he may cast off his aestheticism and come to understand life better, "The object of the book is the improvement of Philip, and I did really want the improvement to be a surprise.12

In A Room With a View the crisis and resolution of the story requires the characters to assemble at the summer street. The characters contribute to the plot. In a similar way Philip, Caroline Abbott and Harriet visit Monteriano.
The crisis of the story is reached when each one of the rescue party tries to take the possession of the child. Philip becomes a puppet in the hands of his mother. He enjoys the whole drama in a detached manner. This indifference towards the child is responsible for the tragedy in the book. But two incidents take place during the second visit that have a profound effect on Philip. Philip's visits to Monteriano remind one of Strether's visit to Paris to rescue Chad from the influence of the city. Both Strether and Philip encounter reality on their visits and are influenced by the foreign lands. They learn the realities of life which were obscured by the insularity of their existence in their countries. The moments of reality follow the moments of vision experienced by Philip and Miss Abbott.

In the words of John Colmer:

The working out of the major theme in Where Angels Fear to Tread requires that Philip and Caroline should return to Italy and experience transfiguring visions. This must restore their faith in love and beauty; they must also restore their faith in Italy as the natural home of both; the real Italy, not the Italy of the Baedeker guide.

The moments of vision are offered to Philip and Caroline at the theatre and at Gino's house. Philip, Caroline and Harriet visit the theatre to enjoy an opera as Forster and his mother Lily had been to one in Florence. The response of the different people to the music is subtly described by Forster as he later does it
beautifully and symbolically in *Howards End*. The Italians were 'swaying in the melody like a corn in the wind' but Harriet who 'did not care for music, knew how to listen to it' (p.103) is annoyed by their shouts of joy. The 'hive of happy bees' is drunk with music but Caroline shouts at the Italians to keep order. The song is about 'madness and death' (p.107). Forster artfully drops the hint that after a few days the child of Gino will be killed by Harriet's madness. Forster's books abound in such clues and hints and leitmotif or what he himself calls "rhythms", in his book *Aspects of the Novel*. In the words of Peter Burra:

Mr. Forster has developed the art of clues and chains to an unusual extent .... They are generally so casually introduced that we hardly observe them, hence a full appreciation of his novels depends absolutely on a second tightness reading ..... whose purpose is to give tightness to the plot itself, ... which Forster rather curiously calls rhythm, but which might more aptly be termed leit-motif.\textsuperscript{14}

Caroline Abbott feels sorry for having enjoyed the opera because the influence of Sawston persists in her.

She gave a sudden cry of shame ....- and she began to beat down her happiness, knowing it to be sinful. She was here to fight against this place, to rescue a little soul who was as innocent as she was. She was here to champion morality and purity, and the holy life of an English home.\textsuperscript{15}

She is trying to beat back the gushing waters of reality.
The second moment of vision takes place towards the close of the book. Philip and Caroline visit Gino's house to persuade Gino to hand over the child to them. When Caroline reaches Gino's house, he was bathing his son very fondly. Gino thinks of his son and his children as peopling the earth. Forster comments: "It is the strongest desire that can come to a man stronger even than lover or the desire for personal immorality."16

Stephen Sonham in The Longest Journey, Leonard Bast in Howards End, George Emerson in A Room with a View, Dr. Aziz in A Passage to India all contribute to the continuity of life. The continuation of life from generation to generation is a very important theme in Forster's novels. I.A. Richards discussing the theme in Forster's books writes:

A special preoccupation, almost an obsession, with the continuation of life, from parent to child, with the quality of life in the sense of blood or race, with the preservation of certain strains ...17

Lionel Trilling also refers to the 'survival theme' in Forster.18

The sight of the passionate love of Gino bathing his son evokes strong feelings in Caroline. The naked baby makes her aware of the reality of life and sex. She had conspired with Philip to kidnap it, a living symbol of the union of
of Gino and Lilia. The sight stabilizes itself into Caroline's consciousness: "The real thing, lying asleep on a dirty rug, discontended her. It did not stand for a principle any longer. It was so much flesh and blood, so many inches and ounces of life - a glorious, unquestionable fact ... 19

Gino looks 'majestic' and as 'a part of Nature' (p.121). Caroline helps Gino in drying his son. Philip also comes to Gino's house and is impressed and moved by the sight of the child in the lap of Caroline. The sight of the living child and the strong passion for the son in Gino transfigures Caroline. She refuses to help Philip and Herriton in their plan to ask Gino to hand the child over to them. Caroline and Philip meet in a Church to decide the future line of action. In the chapel they see the paintings of the death and burial of a saint and of saint Deodata, who accomplish nothing 'In her death, as in life' (p.129), a premonition about the child's death and Philip's future life at Sawston.

On the day of departure for England, through the author's contrivance of events, Philip, Harriet and Caroline get separated. When Philip returns to the hotel he finds a book left by Harriet; He reads the lines on the page of the prayer-book "Blessed be the Lord my God who
teacheth my hands to war and my fingers to fight (p.136)

Harriet in her blind devotion to the plan, kidnaps the baby and drives towards the station. Philip is filled with fear and pity for the child that was lying motionless in Harriet's lap.

Philip looked away, wondering at times himself. It was as if they were travelling with the whole world's sorrow, as if all mystery, all the persistency of woe were gathered in a single fount.

It was a prophetic moment in the novel. The incident strongly recalls the scene from The Brothers Karamazov that the author quotes as an illustration of prophecy in Aspects of the Novel (pp.135-36). In 'prophesy' the writer 'reaches back' to a region of pity or love. The character, rising above his ordinary life, melts with the universe. The human love, pity or any other feeling, is raised to such a power that '...their normal receptacles no longer contain them.' In this case Philip's pity for the child is such that he cannot contain it because 'they were travelling with the whole world's sorrow.' The death of the child in the accident shakes Philip out of his complacency. He is filled with a sense of guilt and makes for Gino's house to break the news. His plea to Gino to 'mind' the tragic loss reminds one of Rickie's plea to Agnes to mind the tragedy of Gerald's death as something
real. Gino, blinded by his tragedy, tortures Philip. One of Forster's friends, Charles Sayle had suspected that Eustace and the waiter in 'The Story of a Panic' had sexual relations. Years later Forster comes to realise that there might be an element of homosexuality in the torture episode, in *Where Angels Fear To Tread.*

The death of the child leads to self-realisation in Philip. His indifference towards life is responsible for the tragedy. According to James McConkey the death of the child results in the birth of a chastened Philip who is forced to look at life not as a 'spectable' but as a real thing. Philip who is, like the characters of Jane Austen, is capable of development and growth. In Forster's words in *Aspects of the Novel*, he is a round character. Gino, who was affectionate and friendly at the theatre, becomes cruel when he is told about his son's death. Love and violence, affection and cruelty can exist in a human being. Forster's realism does not exclude violence from his stories. Gino, Philip and Caroline are 'young' characters, and Harriet and her mother are 'flat' characters, who are blind to the realities and complexity of life. They are 'goats' according to Forster's definition of those people who are unable to be affectionate and kind towards others.
The sight of Caroline embracing Gino after his torture of Philip and the death of Gino's child, is a great experience for Philip. Hitherto he was not aware of passion in life, like his creator. In the 'prophetic' scene, he sees unlimited pity and love in Caroline who rises above her ordinary life:

Her eyes were open, full of infinite pity and full of majesty, as if they discerned the boundaries of sorrow, and saw unimaginable tracts beyond. Such eyes he had seen in great pictures but never in a mortal. Her hands were folded round the sufferer, stroking him lightly, for even a goddess can do no more than that. .... Philip looked away, as he sometimes looked away from the great pictures where visible forms suddenly became inadequate for the things they have shown to us.22

Philip's Herriton experiences something beyond his normal range of experience. Forster in describing the incident which, according to the author's definition of 'prophecy' in Aspects of the Novel, 'reaches back' to pity and love transcending our own experience. Like a prophetic writer Forster has gone 'off' completely Philip undergoes a change which leads to more wisdom in him. Forster comments "Quietly, without hysterical prayers or banging of drums, he underwent conversion. He was saved" (WAFT, p.150) commenting on Caroline's experience and Philip's conversion, D.S. Savage writes:
Italy and the dramatic events which take place there have the effect of drawing out the nobility and passion of Miss Abbott's quiet nature, and it is through her that Philip, hitherto a man who has hovered distantly on the edge of existence, is drawn into life itself and given reality ... 23

Caroline earlier in the story, helps Lilia marry Gino so that Lilia may enjoy passion. Caroline, like Rickie, enjoys passion vicariously. Though she secretly loves Gino, she goes back to England. Like a 'voyeur' she idealises her love. Rickie too was carried away by the passionate embrace of Gerald and Agnes. He looks back on the embrace even after his marriage with Agnes. The voyeur is common in Forster's novels.

Where Angels Fear to Tread is a well-knit and aesthetically compact work of E.M. Forster. Its beautifully controlled plot has been admired by Virginia Woolf.

But at times the author identifies himself with Philip Herriton rather closely. This runs counter to his theory of fiction in Aspects of the Novel wherein he criticises Fielding and Thackeray for confiding in readers facts about what the characters think and feel about their life and actions in the novel.
...may the writer take the reader into his confidence about his characters? ... better not. It is dangerous. Intimacy is gained but at the expense of illusion and nobility. With all respect to Fielding and Thackeray it is devastating, it is bar-parlour chattiness, and nothing has been more harmful to the novels of the past.

Keeping in view the fact that it was the first novel by a young man of twenty-six, it has to be accepted that it was a fine attempt. The comic spirit, the psychological analysis of the motives and actions of the characters and the use of simple yet charming language enrich this novel. One also comes across the Forsterian rhythms for the first time in this novel. The rhythms of violets, of seasons and the tower in the middle of the town of Monteriano are used to suggest meanings which are beyond the verbal and mimetic levels of the plot. Forster endeavours to point to the unseen through such rhythms. It is true, the symbolism and reality, poetry and prose don't always cohere into the story.
REFERENCES:

5. ibid, p. 54
10. V. A. Sahane: E.M. Forster: A Reassessment (Delhi: Kitab Mahal, 1962) p. 64
11. ibid, p. 61

15. Where Angels Fear to Tread, p.108

16. ibid, p.119


19. Where Angels Fear to Tread, p.113

20. ibid, p.140


22. Where Angels Fear to Tread, P.150


24. E.M. Forster: Aspects of the Novel P.89