Appendix

Summary and Interpretation of E.M. Forster’s Novels
APPENDIX

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E.M. FORSTER’S NOVELS

For a better understanding of this study, the reader must have clear-cut ideas about Forster’s novels. Given below is a summary of the story and main events in each of these novels.¹

Where Angels Fear to Tread (1905)

Philip Herriton, a young barrister, lives with his mother and sister Harriet near London in respectable, Suburban Swaston. The novel opens with the departure of Philip’s widowed sister-in-law, Lilia, for a year’s travel in Italy, leaving her daughter Irma behind. Lilia is a rather vulgar, silly woman and a social embarrassment to the Herriton family. She has been sent abroad to improve her self in the sober company of Caroline Abbott, a local spinster, who is to act as chaperone although much younger. But these well made plans lead to disaster. Evidently encouraged by Caroline, Lilia becomes involved with Gino Carella, a local youth in the small Tuscan town of Monteriano. Philip is dispatched to avert the match by his mother but arrives too late. They are married. The marriage is not a success. Lilia becomes increasingly isolated and lonely in a strange culture. She cannot adjust to, and finally dies giving birth to Gino’s son.

Affairs in Swaston return to normal and the Herritons concentrate their efforts on bringing up Lilia’s daughter. However,

¹ In some parts of this summary, I have made use of Nigel Messenger (1991) “How to study an E.M. Forster Novel".
the situation totally changes when Irma learns of the existence of her Italian half brother. The Herritons are inclined to ignore his existence but Caroline, overcome with guilt, forces their hand by insisting the child be rescued and brought up in England.

A second rescue partly ensues but this only leads to further muddle and eventual tragedy. Caroline sees that Gino loves his son and changes her mind but Harriet, inflexible and determined, kidnap him, and the baby is subsequently killed in a carriage accident. Philip, who has been ineffectual throughout, returns to tell Gino the news. Full with grief, Gino tortures him and is only prevented from killing him by the timely arrival of Caroline.

The novel ends with Philip and Caroline returning to Swaston. By now Philip is in love with Caroline but she, thinking him detached from any strong emotion, confesses her love for Gino. Both have been strongly affected by their experiences but feel they have no alternative other than to return to the constraints and conventions of respectable English society.

A Room With A View (1908).

The story opens in Florence. On her ‘improving’ tour of Italy Lucy Honeychurch arrives at the Pension Bertolini, accompanied by her cousin Charlotte Bartlett, to discover that their rooms do not have a view. Overhearing their disappointment, another resident, Mr. Emerson, offers them the rooms of his son George and himself, and they accept. The following day Lucy meets the Emersons at the church of Santa Croce where she has been abandoned by an eccentric
Appendix

lady novelist, Miss lavish, who also lives at the pension. Events further co-operate to bring Lucy and the Emersons together when she witnesses a murder in the Piazza Signora next day. She faints and is supported by George who accompanies her home. Matters are brought to a crisis during an outgoing to Fiestole that includes the Emersons. The party is split up and Lucy, seeking the clergyman, finds George instead. He kisses her. Charlotte, who witnesses the kiss, acts the outraged chaperon and both ladies leave Florence at once.

The second half of the novel moves to Summer Street, a small village where Lucy lives with her mother and brother Freddy in the family home. Lucy becomes engaged to Cecil Vyse, a well connected London aesthete whom she met in Rome. He seeks to rescue Lucy from provincial society and sophisticate her for his artistic pleasure. Unaware of any past association between Lucy and George, he is responsible for the Emersons renting a house in the village.

Once again matters are brought to a crisis during a tennis party when George, excited by a literary rendition of his first kiss in one of Miss Lavish's novels, kisses Lucy for a second time. She breaks off her engagement to Cecil. Though it is clear to the reader that Lucy loves George, she seeks to repress her feelings and plans to travel abroad. By a lucky accident, she meets Mr. Emerson at Mr. Beebe's rectory. He divines her true feelings and gives her the courage to declare her love. The novel ends with the newly wed couple enjoying their honeymoon in the Pension Bertolini with a view over...
the river Arno, confident that Lucy's family will eventually forgive them.

The Longest Journey (1907)

The story opens in Rickie Elliot's under graduation room in Cambridge. While he day-dreams, Stuart Ansell and other friends debate the nature of reality. Their discussion is interrupted by Agnes Pembroke, invited with her brother Herbert for a visit. Ansell rudely ignores her, declaring later that she doesn't really exist. After the Pembrokes' departure, we come to learn that Rickie's childhood has been unhappy and lonely.

During the Christmas vocation, Rickie visits the Pembroke's at Swaston, a genteel town in the south of England. Herbert teaches at a minor public school there. Agnes is engaged to Gerald Dawes, an athletic bully from Rickie's own school days. Gerald dies suddenly after a football accident. Rickie returns to Cambridge and becomes engaged to Agnes when she visits him during his final term. Ansell is disgusted and warns Rickie against her.

The scene shifts to Cadover, the Wiltshire estate of Mrs. Failing, Rickie's aunt on his father's side. Rickie and Agnes, prior to their marriage, make a visit there which ends badly. Mrs. Failing has a boorish young retainer called Stephen Wonham who is neither sophisticated nor conventional. Mrs Failing tells Rickie that Stephen is his illegitimate half brother. Rickie faints, but is prevented from telling him of their relationship by Agnes. It is agreed that the affair be kept a secret and Stephen kept in ignorance.
In order to marry, Rickie gives up trying to write imaginative stories and begins work as a teacher at Swaston School. Herbert is now house master of Dunwood house and Agnes is to act as his housekeeper. Rickie soon becomes entangled in school politics. Matters are brought to a head by the arrival of Stephen seeking his brother. The Pembroke family try to buy him off but Ansell interferes telling Rickie that Stephen is his mother’s son, not his father’s as he had always supposed. Rickie collapses and shortly afterwards leaves Swaston with Stephen to begin a new life.

But Rickie’s life is doomed. On a visit to Cadover he becomes disillusioned with his brother’s drinking and dies saving him from an oncoming train. The novel ends sometime later with Stephan now married and a reformed character.

Howards End (1908).

The novel is about two middle class families, the Schlegels and the Wilcoxes. The intellectual Schlegel sisters, Margaret and Helen, lead a comfortable, cultured existence in London with their younger brother Tibby. While spending a holiday abroad, they meet a more conventional middle-class family, the Wilcoxes, this chance event is to have profound consequences for all their lives. The novel opens with a brief and disastrous flirtation between Helen and Paul, the youngest Wilcoxes son, when she visits the family home called Howards End. Initially Helen is infatuated with the decisive baselines energy of the Wilcoxes but then is repulsed by their timid conventionality. The affair breaks up amid much social confusion and
anger. Only Mrs. Wilcox keeps her serene temper, and despite some difficulties, she and Margaret develop a close friendship when they become temporary neighbors in London. Mrs. Wilcox hears that the Schlegels are soon to lose their London home, and when she dies suddenly it transpires that she wishes to leave Howards End, which is her own inheritance, to Margaret. Margaret has no knowledge of this and Mrs. Wilcox scribbled note is ignored as illegal by the rest of her resentful family.

Two years pass and then, once more a chance meeting brings the two families together. The sisters wish to help a struggling city clerk called Leonard Bast and when they happen to meet Henry Wilcox, the head of the family, they ask for his advice. Henry is drawn to Margaret, the more moderate of the sisters. On the pretext of helping her find a new home, he woos her and quickly proposes marriage, and Margaret accepts. Before her own marriage, however, Margaret must help Henry organize the wedding of his daughter, Evie.

The wedding brings some unwelcome revelations. Helen arrives at the end of the celebrations in great anger, with Leonard and his wife Jacky in tow. Leonard has lost his job through Henry’s bad advice and Helen demands immediate redress. It also becomes evident that Jacky has once been Henry’s mistress. Margaret does her best to protect Henry by sending the Basts a dismissive note. In consequence, Helen goes abroad without seeing her sister again. Margaret forgives Henry and they marry, but the problem of finding a
proper home remains unsolved as Henry no longer wishes to live at Oniton Grange.

Meanwhile, Helen continues to avoid her family and her behavior begins to look increasingly odd. Concerned about her state of mind, Margaret agrees reluctantly to Henry's plan of surprising her when she goes to Howards End to collect some books. To her alarm, she finds that Helen is pregnant. We learn that Helen had given herself briefly and impulsively to Leonard Bast who has been suffering guilt and remorse ever since.

Events move towards a final catastrophe when Leonard arrives at Howards End to see Margaret. There, he is assaulted by Charles, the eldest Wilcox son, and dies of heart failure. Charles is imprisoned for manslaughter and his father breaks down. Margaret takes him, along with Helen, to recover at Howards End. The novel ends with a family gathering some months later. Helen has given birth to a boy. Henry Wilcox gives Howards End to Margaret and Leonard's child will eventually inherit the house.

'A Passage to India (1924).

The setting is India at the time of the Raj Mrs. Moore and her prospective daughter-in-law, Adela Quested, are newly arrived in Chandrapore where Mrs. Moore's son, Ronny Heslop, has the post of City Magistrate. The purpose of the visit is to make the engagement official. Adela is an independent, serious minded girl who wants to see the "Real India". The English community obliges her by arranging a formal "Bridge party" where she can meet some of the
local Indians. This is not a success. Mrs. Moore has already struck up a warm friendship with a young Moslem doctor, Aziz, who she has met by chance in a mosque. Matters develop further when Cyril Fielding, the liberal principal of the local Government College, invites the two ladies to meet Aziz and professor Godbole, one of his Brahman colleagues, at a tea party. Unfortunately this, too, is a failure when Ronny’s arrival disturbs the atmosphere and the party breaks up in some disorder. Adela has decided that India has changed Ronny and she no longer wishes to marry him, but a mysterious car accident brings them closer together and they announce their engagement. Meanwhile, Aziz and Fielding have taken to each other and, by the end of the first section of the novel, have become close friends.

The second part of the novel revolves around the mysterious Marbar Caves, some twenty miles out of Chandrapore. Aziz has impulsively invited the English ladies to visit these local curiosities at Fielding’s tea party and feels compelled to go through with this scheme although no one is very enthusiastic. From the start, the expedition is dogged with misfortune: Fielding and Godbole are late and miss the train; Mrs. Moore is upset by the Caves and becomes unwell; Aziz and Adela continue to a high rock called the Kawa Dol with a single guide, but become separated and enter different caves. Aziz emerges from his to find that Adela has gone down the hill and returned to Chandrapore in a passing car. Fielding arrives late and the party returns home to discover that Aziz has been charged with...
attempted rape. Attitudes in the community polarize and harden. Fielding, confident of Aziz's innocence, resigns from the English club and throws in his lot with the Indians. Mrs. Moore is similarly certain that Aziz is not guilty but, ill and disillusioned, she decides to go home to England early and dies at sea. Finally, the matter is brought to trial where Adela becomes convinced that she has made a mistake and withdraws the charge. Much recrimination follows and Adela is shunned by the Anglo – India community. Fielding feels bound to support her and, in consequence, his friendship with Aziz suffers. This part of the novel ends with Adela and Fielding returning separately to England.

The narrative concludes, two years later, in the native state of Mau where Aziz has taken up a post as doctor to the Rajah. Fielding, back in India and promoted, has arrived in an official capacity to inspect the new school Aziz has no wish to meet him as he feels betrayed. Because of misunderstandings and resentments, he is convinced that Fielding has married Adela after persuading him to forgo the financial compensation from her that was his due. He discovers that this is untrue: Fielding has married Stella, Mrs. Moore's daughter by her second husband, but Aziz is not mollified until he falls under the spell of Ralph, Mrs. Moore's other son. Although different and eccentric, Ralph reminds Aziz of Mrs. Moore and the special relationship that they enjoyed. The novel ends with Aziz and Fielding enjoying one last ride together through the Mau
jungle, knowing that their friendship cannot be sustained in the complexities of modern India.

Maurice. (1913-14) (posthumously published (1971)).

Maurice Hall is the only son of a respectable Edwardian family. His home for most of the novel is middle class where he lives with his widowed mother and his two sisters. After public school and Cambridge, he seems destined for an unexceptional life as a stockbroker in the family firm. However, Maurice is a homosexual. Most of the novel explores his slow discovery of this fact, the effect that it has on his private life, and how, finally, it transforms his existence.

After briefly following Maurice through his school days, the substance of the novel examines his relationship with two contrasting lovers, Clive and Scudder. Maurice meets Clive Durham, a young squire, at Cambridge; they fall in love and have an intense lyrical, platonic relationship that lasts for three years. Then, quite suddenly, Clive experiences an emotional change and reverts to ‘normal sexual feeling’. He marries and takes up his role as pillar of the local community. Maurice is devastated. He seeks a cure for his condition without any success. Matters are brought to a crisis on a visit Maurice makes to Penge, Clive’s country house. He has a sexual liaison with Alec Scuder, a gamekeeper on the estate. Maurice persuades Alec not to emigrate and live with him outside respectable society. The novel ends with Maurice telling Clive of his new love before beginning his life as a social outlaw.