Where Liberals Fear to Tread: E. M. Forster’s Queer Internationalism and the Ethics of Care

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And this was the machine on which she and Mrs. Herriton and Philip and Harriet had for the last month been exercising their various ideas—had determined that in time it should move this way or that way, should accomplish this and not that.... Yet now that she saw this baby, lying asleep on a dirty rug, she had a great disposition not to dictate one of them, and to exert no more influence than there may be in a kiss or the vaguest of the heartfelt prayers.

E. M. Forster, Where Angels Fear to Tread

I hate the idea of causes, and if I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend I hope I should have the guts to betray my country.

E. M. Forster, “What I Believe”

Since the publication of his posthumous writings, it has become commonplace to think of E. M. Forster as a writer who depicted national difference, the pull of foreign parts, as a metaphor for queer sexual desire. Thus, according to Margaret Goscilo, Forster codes “foreignness ... to include the tabooed ‘Otherness’ of homosexuality, displacing onto nationality” themes that he tackled more directly in such posthumous works as Maurice (193). Yet, though the commingling of queer and internationalist accents in Forster’s oeuvre may seem plain, the observation leaves one to ponder the place of yet another notable strain—the iconoclastic liberalism first described in Lionel Trilling’s seminal study, E. M. Forster (1943). Indeed, since Trilling’s inaugural linkage between Forster and “The Liberal Imagination,” perhaps no novelist has been more consistently regarded as liberalism’s literary standard bearer: the “archetypal” liberal-humanist of Benita Parry’s description (“Politics” 136), and, for a range of recent critics, a precursor to contemporary liberal lights such as Richard Rorty and Jürgen Habermas.

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1 For a useful survey of Forster’s reputation as a liberal-humanist, see Davies’s “Introduction.” Forster’s alleged liberalism has been recast along Rortyan lines by Paul Armstrong, Born, and...
In this essay I describe the tensions between Forster as "queer internationalist" and as liberal—an exploration as productive, I hope, for the understanding of liberalism as for an understanding of Forster. Central to the reading I propose is the reorientation of Forster’s oeuvre to stress Where Angels Fear to Tread (1905). Although Trilling devoted ample space to Forster’s first-published novel, his designation of Howards End (1910) as “Forster’s masterpiece”—the novel that most fully develops “the themes and attitudes of the early books and throws back upon them a new and enhancing light” (Forster 114-15)—may help to explain the comparative inattention to Where Angels Fear to Tread in many readings of Forster as liberal. Likewise, while postcolonial scholars have understandably focused on A Passage to India (1924), few critics have read the “Southern” qualities attributed to Italy in the first-completed novel as anticipating the orientalist South Asia depicted in the last. Instead, Where Angels Fear to Tread is typically read alongside A Room with a View (1908), a comparatively sunny work, as well as short stories set in Italy such as “The Story of a Panic.” Nonetheless, as a border-crossing tragicomedy, Where Angels Fear to Tread might be seen to offer a disruptive counterpoint to A Room with a View, a contrast to Anglocentric novels such as The Longest Journey (1907) and Howards End, as well as an important antecedent for A Passage to India. Such an approach would redescribe what Trilling saw as Forster’s reinvigorating “war with the liberal imagination,” identifying the novelist as the exponent of a not-quite-liberal ethic of queer internationalism (Forster 13).

Although the queer internationalism explored in this essay is, first and foremost, a literary aesthetic, I am especially interested in its implications for contemporary political theory including post-Habermasian projects of communicative ethics which aim to reconstitute liberalism along feminist and transnational lines. Reading Forster from the vantage point of recent queer criticism as well as the feminist theory of Seyla Benhabib and Iris Marion Young, one May; I discuss the Habermasian elements of Armstrong’s reading below. It is worth emphasizing that Trilling cast Forster as one who challenged “the liberal imagination” from within (Forster 13). Subsequent criticism has thus tended to mute what Trilling saw as Forster’s agonistic if ultimately reviving relation to liberalism. Baucom, writing on A Passage to India, helpfully suggests that “not liberalism but friendship” provides a suitable way of characterizing what Forster offers in opposition to violence (117). Likewise, though Parry identifies Forster as “the archetypal practitioner” of the liberal-humanist novel, she reads A Passage to India as attesting to the ultimate failure of that paradigm (“Politics” 136).

For an interesting exception, see Bakshi and, briefly, Siegel 201. According to G. E. Moore, next to A Passage to India, “the most enjoyable of Forster’s novels was the first” (qtd. in Rosenbaum 196)—an unusual opinion. Although the relation between the European South and the imperial South is quite complicated, the present essay focuses mainly on Where Angels Fear to Tread in which the category of “the South” describes a European space of quasi-enchantment which facilitates desire for full-bodied international encounters, promoting the ethical enlivenment of British travelers. Following Perry Anderson, I use “internationalism” to describe an outlook “that tends to transcend the nation towards a wider community, of which nations continue to form the principal units” (6). Forster’s border-crossing imaginary is “international” rather than “cosmopolitan” because the transformative effects his novels describe require the concrete and embodied differences that nations are seen to constitute.

For stimulating readings of Forster and Italy, see Buzard and Siegel.
finds that his post-Trilling reputation as a "tolerant humanist ... whose forms look back to the nineteenth century" (Levine, "Tame" 87) understates the complexity of novels such as *Where Angels Fear to Tread*. Yet, quite apart from Trilling's influence, there is a difficulty in illuminating what is most powerful in such works. Although Forster's critique of Edwardian society is often astute, it lacks the depth and consistency of a full-fledged political analysis. Just as *A Passage to India* lacks "a consciousness of imperialism as capitalism's expansionist, conquering moment" (Parry, "Politics" 135), so *Where Angels Fear to Tread* never fully registers the broad geopolitical structures that bear on faulty middle-class characters such as Philip Herriton and Caroline Abbott. As a novelist of politics, Forster tends to evoke a contradictory liberal-humanism, but as a novelist of ethics, he is prescient and original. It is in this way that Forster's queer internationalist "war with the liberal imagination"—though deeply embedded in Edwardian contexts—bears not only on Trilling's era but also on the feminist and transnational projects of our own day.

A Philosophy without a View

A glimpse of what liberalism has come to mean for many critics can be found in Uday Singh Mehta's *Liberalism and Empire* (1999). As Mehta notes, liberal thought, which is ostensibly committed to liberty, equality, and human dignity, played a key role in justifying British imperialism. Discounting human emotion (as opposed to reason), the local and particular (as opposed to the general), and concrete experience (as opposed to abstract human nature), liberalism so conceived lacks the ability to encounter difference without lapsing into judgment, exclusion and, ultimately, the will to dominate. Liberalism, on this account, is so deeply teleological and unflinchingly totalistic that it reflexively relegates particularity to the undifferentiated status of that which merely precedes its own professed endpoint: "civilization."

Mehta's postcolonial critique intersects with a view of liberal modernity which feminists have propounded for decades. The liberalism of the Enlightenment, Benhabib has argued, inserted a rift between male and female domains, masculinizing a public world of civilization, and feminizing a private world of nurture and reproduction. Moral and political theorists since that time have adopted the standpoint of the generalized other (a universalized abstraction of the rational and rights-bearing individual) at the expense of the concrete other (a particularized understanding of the individual based on life history, personal views, and emotional constitution). Seen from this feminist vantage, the history of liberalism and empire is the story of how an ideology of incommensurable sexual difference, predicated on a capitalist division of labor, helped to produce what readers of Forster might call a philosophy without a view.

Readers of Trilling will recognize that the privileging of affect, locality, and experience is also part of the challenge Forster is seen to pose to the unimaginative liberalism of the 1940s. Thus, though Benhabib, Mehta, and Trilling respond to distinct historical contexts, all seem to agree that "in struggling to implement
"its active and positive ends," liberalism "unconsciously limits its view of the world to what it can deal with" (Trilling, Liberal 9). Following Trilling, each of these critics might regard Forster as a novelist who, in "warring" with the liberal imagination, seeks to correct its faulty perceptions. By foregrounding the embodied features of care—the "vital mess" noticed by Trilling (Forster 173)—Forster provides the affect and attention to difference so conspicuously lacking in masculinist ethics. But Forster's works, I will argue, ultimately flummox the reconfigured liberalism they are often taken to exemplify. His fiction helps to show how an ongoing revision of liberalism's Enlightenment ethics continues to rely, implicitly and explicitly, on undertheorized notions of care.

In its original articulation, in the feminist psychology of Carol Gilligan, the ethic of care described a marginalized feminine moral disposition, distinct from the dominant masculine perspective inscribed in the ethic of justice. Whereas "care" is a contextual ethics, situating morality in terms of concrete relationships, "justice" is allegedly universal, centering on the formulation of abstract rights and principles. Thus, as Joan C. Tronto has explained, care is an ethical "activity," rooted in "the daily experiences and moral problems of real people" ("Beyond" 648). The problem for feminists is how to retain such needful attention to concrete experience—not only gender but also race, class, sexuality and so on—while avoiding the essentialisms of a distinctly female morality.

Thus, while "care" has been discredited as the essential foundation of a feminist ethics, the term continues to stand for the embodied features that are abstracted and excluded by masculinist moral theorists, from Immanuel Kant and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, to Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls. Whereas Benhabib cautiously embraces a language of care that Young eschews, both feminists see "context and affiliation" as the twin correctives to two Enlightenment deficien-

5 The nineteenth-century civilizing mission on which Mehta's study bears was rooted in a laissez-faire liberalism that, for all its universalistic rhetoric, explicitly limited the rights of full citizenship to British men of a certain class. Benhabib's project is to illustrate the persistent distortions of gender in a variety of liberal theories including the communicative ethics of Jürgen Habermas which she seeks to revise. Liberalism of this neo-Kantian stripe does not, like its nineteenth-century precursors, produce explicit hierarchies of the civilized, but, rather, portrays itself as an impartial set of principles and procedures. Such liberal ethics purport to enshrine what Young has called "a transcendental 'view from nowhere' that carries the perspective, attributes, character, and interests of no particular subject" (Justice 100). Benhabib and Young have demonstrated how this supposedly impartial construction privileges dominant groups (see also W. Brown, ch. 6). Trilling, by contrast, is not interested in liberal modes of exclusion or privilege so much as in the normalizing effects of a broadly conceived twentieth-century collectivist liberalism as institutionalized in the bureaucratic state, with its technocratic determination to maximize good (and fend off communism) on behalf of a universal citizenry.

6 C.f. Tronto 663.

7 As Tronto argues, the essentialist tendency to present the ethic of care as "intrinsically female" ensures that it will be dismissed as "secondary and irrelevant to broader moral and political concerns" ("Beyond" 649, 655). Likewise, Gilligan attributes exclusively to gender characteristics that may also derive from class- and race-based social subordination; see also Moody-Adams.
cies: intolerance toward difference and emotional disavowal (Young, *Justice* 97). Moreover, in emphasizing "context" to speak to the embeddedness and embodiment of lived social relations, both specify what are, in actuality, two overlapping requirements: *epistemological adequacy* (the ability to perceive difference) and *normative response* (the responsibility to attend difference in an ethical way). Finally, both fully recognize the deficiency of any purely contextualist ethics: each seeks reconciliation between the ethical claims of particularity and what Benhabib describes as "the justificatory constraints" of overarching principles such as equality (188-89). It is this emphasis on universalizable norms which links these theorists to a "liberal" project of modernity, broadly defined.

Forster's works complement such feminist projects by promoting a broad-minded but sensitively particularizing view—an ethically attentive relation to otherness. Yet, though Forsterian view is epistemologically rich and normatively auspicious, it is a limited ethical warrant: the novels do not endorse the Benhabibian aim of seeking "to take the standpoint of the other" (168). Instead, in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, Forster's multi-faceted crossings—between Northern and Southern, male and female, Protestant and Catholic, heteronormative and queer, upper-class and déclassé—expose the troubling disjunctions between affective expressions of care (affiliation) and the ethical relations to which they only sometimes give rise (epistemological adequacy and normative response). As in *A Passage to India*, the emotive and sexual charge of difference ignites the experience of crossing borders, producing international encounters that are as volatile and unpredictable as they are ethically enlivening. Queer internationalism can thus test the mettle of any conception of ethics as both fully embodied and liberal.

A Well-Ordered Machine

Forster can exert such consummate pressure in part because he is acutely aware, as a "queer" novelist who seeks "to disrupt the economy of the normal" (Martin and Piggford 4), that care has historically been yoked to an instrumentalizing

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8 For Benhabib, care is part of the normative fabric for an "interactive universalism" that would acknowledge generalized as well as concrete standpoints (165; c.f. 153, 159). Although Young rejects "care" as a self-defeating reification, she calls for post-Enlightenment theorizations of "moral reasoning" which attend the "particularities of context and affiliation" (*Justice* 97).

9 Note that in designating as "liberal" the work of Young, a post-Habermasian feminist who draws on a wide variety of Marxist and poststructuralist thinkers, I deliberately move beyond a narrow definition in which liberalism stands either for a static legacy of the Enlightenment, or for neoliberalism—that is, the idealization of market forces which has become the dominant justification for deregulation and capitalist expansion since the late 1980s. One need go no further than the New Liberals of Forster's era to remember that self-identified liberals—as well as Marxists and poststructuralists—have offered worthwhile criticisms of atomized individualism, laissez-faire, "free" markets, and other neoliberal shibboleths. Discussing Forster in light of the left-leaning, social democratic tradition within liberalism, the "large tendency" of Trilling's description (*Liberal* 6), enables me to offer a more nuanced assessment of his relation to "liberalism" in the broadest possible sense of that term.
civilizing mission. With its scathing exposure of Herriton family values, Where Angels Fear to Tread reveals that, as the space of middle-class nurture, the domestic sphere is not only a mechanism for exclusion, but also, and simultaneously, a prolific site for the production of bourgeois-imperial norms. In the hands of Mrs. Herriton, a “well-ordered ... machine” (86), parenting is exercised as managerial control. Philip’s sister Harriet, a frigid xenophobe and fanatic Protestant, is so unmaternal that she is disgusted by the thought of bathing a baby. In one of the novel’s most powerful scenes, her inept attempt to dandle the child she has stolen leads her brother to “wince” in dismay (158). Philip himself is the docile tool of this matriarchal regime: although he knows that he is his mother’s “puppet” (85), he does not realize until too late that the “business” for which he has been dispatched to Italy concerns a vulnerable human life (138). As he eventually learns, in a world caught up in the storm of progress, even the best-intentioned nurture may be harnessed to instrumentalist ends, haunted by asymmetrical relations of power, or plagued by desires to eradicate difference.

Care, in this view, is the Edwardian foundation for turning middle-class children into tools of family aggrandizement, working-class Britons into aspirants toward bourgeois respectability, and non-Western people into colonized “children” requiring the tutelage of the civilized. Thus, the practice of district visiting, in which women like Caroline Abbott entered working-class homes to impart moral guidance, was thought to provide a more caring source of poor relief than the state (see Goodlad). Caroline’s domestic project found its global counterpart in the imperial civilizing mission: Britain’s geopolitical expansion was fueled by developmental hierarchies in which so-called backward peoples were figured as children—in need of care. It is no accident, then, that in Where Angels Fear to Tread, a child’s fate is at the center of a story about the impact of Italian mores on uptight Britons. When a misalliance between the Herritons’ widowed daughter-in-law, Lilia, and, Gino, a young Italian, ends with her death in childbirth, bourgeois pride compels the Herriton family to adopt the baby to spare it the presumed injury of an Italian upbringing. To their immense surprise, Gino loves his child and wants to parent him. The stage is set for a transformative “interview between the South pole and the North”—but one that culminates in tragedy (157).

10 To adopt a “queer self-understanding,” Warner has argued, is to know that one’s “stigmatization is connected with” deep cultural norms such as gender, the family, and the state (xiii). “Queer theory,” writes Dean, “is a theory ... of how identitarianism serves normalizing power by investing our subjective and social sense of ourselves in taxonomic hierarchies” (“Response”). In Where Angels Fear to Tread, British middle-class identity is represented as the primary mode of such normalizing identitarianism, investing subjects in the taxonomic hierarchies of the civilizing mission. See also Dellamora: “Forster’s critique of the heterosexual contract radically qualifies his investment in patrician liberal ideals of high culture, individual sensibility, and personal relationship” (“Textual” 163). For other readings that describe or illuminate a “queer” Forster see Aldrich 302-28; Bristow; Buckton 206-18; Caserio 305-07; Lane, “Forster”; Markley; Martin and Piggford; Rahman.

11 On the connections between domestic and colonial versions of the civilizing mission see, e.g., Thorne, Stoler, and Hall.
As Rita Felski has argued, the domestic sphere, though “often portrayed as a domain where natural and timeless emotions hold sway,” has been “radically implicated in patterns of modernization and processes of social change” (3). Forsterian matriarchs such as Mrs. Herriton and Mrs. Honeychurch are, in this sense, exemplary: ruling the roost in the interests of bourgeois national advancement. Yet, in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, it is not only the stalwart materfamilias who attests to ethical dysfunction, but also the younger, more congenial women with whom she is contrasted. Such unsparing censure points to Forster’s political blindspots as he faults women directly for their role in symbolizing and performing the ideological work of capitalist expansion. But in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, this misogynistic tendency is also, as we shall see, the sign of Forster’s ambivalent investment in Edwardian ideals of male friendship. The result is that there are two distinct anti-heteronormative narratives in the novel, and each one is tied to a young Englishwoman’s attempt to negotiate bourgeois norms. The first is a stalled narrative of male friendship involving Lilia Herriton—a fantasy of homosocial care which depends on women’s exclusion. The second is a more propitious narrative of queer kinship in which Caroline Abbott, the novel’s most sympathetic character, plays a central role.

“Democratic Affection”

In one of the best-known passages from *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, the narrator describes Italy as “a delightful place to live if you happen to be a man”:

> There one may enjoy ... that true Socialism which is based not on equality of income or character, but on the equality of manners. In the democracy of the caffè ... the brotherhood of man is a reality. But it is accomplished at the expense of the sisterhood of women. (46)

This picture of Italian society, which punctuates Gino and Lilia’s unhappy marriage, makes clear that Forster—notwithstanding his tendency to romanticize “the southern knack of friendship”—is alive to the ethical failings of the Italian masculinity he depicts (172). Indeed, critics who have argued that the Italians in the novel never treat people as “business items” (Beer 68) seem to have forgotten that Gino repeatedly turns marriage into an economic transaction, marrying Lilia for her money, and second, a well-off wife because “she is what [he] require[s]” for his son’s maintenance (Forster, *Where* 135). Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that Forster’s remarks on Italian misogyny, which haunt the relation between Gino and Philip, are part of his attempt to negotiate a British ideal of homosocial friendship which sought male utopia “at the direct expense of women” (Cole 29).

As critics such as Sarah Cole, Richard Dellamora, and Robert K. Martin have demonstrated, Forster’s works were in dialogue with an influential body of late-
Victorian and Edwardian homophile discourses. In the writings of John Addington Symonds and Edward Carpenter, friendship between men was upheld as a liberating alternative to the status quo. Symonds envisioned male friendship as a democratic and equalitarian relation: yet, as Martin has argued, the Platonic bonds described in his writings encouraged elitism and misogyny ("Edward Carpenter" 105). By contrast, Carpenter’s Whitmanesque poem, *Towards Democracy* (1883-1902), depicted “an ecstasy of loving male community” (Cole 26). Carpenter further developed this utopian vision in prose works such as *The Intermediate Sex* (1906), describing “Love” as a “binding and directing force” that could harmonize bonds of sex, nurture, brotherhood, and citizenship (114). In this way, his groundbreaking writings offered optimistic solutions to the dilemmas of an embodied ethics—a vision of social democracy in which desire and ethics, justice and care would be mutually sustaining.

Carpenter envisioned a future that would empower working-class men, women, and colonized people. But, in the here and now, he saw inequality as a “democratic” spark for mutually uplifting desire. Hence, though Carpenter saw himself as an earnest socialist, feminist advocate, and anti-racist, his writings are saturated with developmental tropes in which working-class men, women, “savages,” “barbarian races”—and ruling-class Englishmen—are likened to children. At the center of this utopian civilizing mission were the unique evolutionary qualities of “Uranians.” Their “double nature,” Carpenter believed, enabled them to “function as reconcilers and interpreters” (*Intermediate* 36). By envisioning full-bodied homosexuality as an innate moral competence—in effect, a built-in and fully liberalized ethics of care—Carpenter saw the “Uranian spirit” as prefiguring evolved social relations in which erotic, nurturing and civic affects would harmoniously commingle (107-09).

Of course, Forster could not share such optimism, because, as Gole has argued, he “refused to concede that the physical body can be controlled within a

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13 Note that the meanings attached to “democracy” and “democratic” in homophile discourses of friendship, as in Forster’s “democracy of the caffè,” emphasize caring relations between men of different classes, not formal rights or the achievement of substantive political equality.

14 In Love’s Coming-of-Age (1906), Carpenter laments that “the world” is dominated by an incompetent Anglo-Saxon male ruling-class, “fatuous” men “to whom it seems quite natural that our marriage and social institutions should lumber along over the bodies of women, as our commercial institutions grind over the bodies of the poor, and our ‘imperial’ enterprise over the bodies of barbarian races” (34-35). Carpenter describes women as “the more primitive, the more intuitive, [and] the more emotional” of the two sexes, “in a way... nearer the child herself, and nearer to the savage” (42-43). Yet ruling-class Englishmen are the victims of lopsided modern development which, though “advanced in mechanical and intellectual invention,” is “ungrown ... on its more human and affectional side” (31-32). The same man who masters “the world with his pluck, skill, [and] enterprise,” is “in matters of Love for the most part a child” (29). On the racialist developmental logic in which Carpenter’s evolutionary theory is implicated, see Somerville and Hoad. For a more in-depth discussion of Carpenter’s wide-ranging and often complex thought see Geoghegan, and, for worthwhile explorations of its queer potential, see Bredbeck and Buckton 161-204.

15 See also *Intermediate* 113-14.
transformative or idealizing narrative” (23). Nonetheless, Forster’s more tenuous effort to translate individual homoerotic feeling into “democratic” social practice combined a male friendship ideal like Symonds’ with an idealization of inequality like Carpenter’s. Thus, Carpenter’s description of a “true Democracy” that rests on the leveling powers of “Eros”—that “sentiment which easily passes the bounds of class and caste” (Intermediate 107)—recalls “that true Socialism” which, in Forster’s Italy, flourishes between men of different classes and nationalities. In this sense, Gino is a discernibly Carpenterian figure: the embodiment of an affective, even nurturing masculinity, and one through which the enticements of class difference are magnified by the supplementary eroticism of “Southernness.”

Yet, whereas Carpenter’s Uranian utopia intends to be gloriously inclusive, Forster’s explicitly does not. The novel’s depiction of Italy as a homosocial paradise—but one constituted by women’s exclusion—is thus a revealing sign of Forster’s ambivalence toward the friendship ideal. For through it, Philip and Gino’s budding intimacy is directly tied to Lilia’s failed rebellion against the Herriton regime. Galled by her mother-in-law’s tutelage, Forster’s wayward widow believes that marriage to an obscure Italian will enable her to wield Herritonian power on her own terms. Her effort to install a British social hierarchy on Southern soil, though doomed by ineptitude, seeks to replicate the Victorian pattern through which women’s social rituals consolidated the status of the genteel middle classes. As Nancy Armstrong and Elizabeth Langland have shown, bourgeois Englishwomen played a crucial role in depoliticizing and stratifying the public sphere: making social calls, visiting working-class homes in the manner of Caroline Abbott, and identifying the “principal people” as Lilia hopes to do with her “real English tea-parties” (Forster, Where 44). Such habits were part of the “portable imperial culture” that, as John Plotz has argued, underwrote a far-flung English expansion (309).

The “democracy of the caffè” thus concludes with a telling aside to the (presumptively male) reader. When in Italy, the narrator opines,

[Why should you not make friends with your neighbour at the theatre or in the train, when you know and he knows that feminine criticism and feminine insight and feminine prejudice will never come between you? Though you become as David and Jonathan, you need never enter his home, nor he yours. All your lives you will meet under the open air, the only roof-tree of the South, under which he will spit and swear, and you will drop your h’s, and nobody will think the worse of either. (Where 46)]

In this passage, Forster’s narrator suggests that “true Socialism” thrives in Italy because the female social project Lilia hopes to import does not—the project, that

16 In Young’s terms, Forster values “context and affiliation” (Justice 97) but emphasizes the tensions between them: affective relations do not reliably yield adequate perception of or respectful attention to otherness. Since the components of “care” are themselves so fraught, the quest for an embodied liberal ethics which blends particularizing attention with just standards becomes, from a Forsterian perspective, dubious and even counterproductive.
is, of policing class hierarchies under the sanction of "feminine" domestic authority. Hence, in Forster's imagined South, male community flourishes across lines of class and nationality because female institutions and the women who supervise them are deprived of social authority.

Lilia's hope of wielding the privileged authority of the British gentlewoman captures a social practice that feminist political theory does not always observe. In Justice and the Politics of Difference (1990), Young describes the domestic sphere as the space of particularity against which the illusion of universality is maintained: "The public realm of citizens achieves unity and universality only by defining the civil individual in opposition to the disorder of womanly nature, which embraces feeling, sexuality, birth and death, the attributes that concretely distinguish persons from one another" (110, emphasis added). By imagining the Italian public sphere as an "open air" space of relaxed homosociality, free from the ordering femininity that Italy is shown to repress, Forster's novel nearly reverses this formulation. In Young's analysis, "womanly nature" operates as an enclosure for particularity, authorizing an abstract liberal subject who is, in actuality, a privileged male. But for Forster, "feminine criticism" is an all-too-public engine of stratification, instrumentalizing the embodied features that Young seeks carefully to attend. Thus, whereas Young describes a domestic sphere in which difference is relegated to an excluded space, Forster portrays an assertive feminine regime whose hierarchization of difference thoroughly penetrates British life. The "democracy of the caffè" is thus a fantasy of escaping the female domestic order to create a zone of liberated male heterogeneity. It is a glimpse of masculine sociality and care that, in Carpenterian fashion, enables affect, eros, citizenship, and nurture to thrive.

Unsurprisingly, toward the end of the novel, the reader is recalled to the "democracy of the caffè" in the novel's most homoerotic (and arguably most misogynistic) scene. Gino and Philip meet in the open-air setting of the Caffè Garibaldi. As they cordially agree that not they, but "the ladies," are exercised about the baby's upbringing, Gino lays "a sympathetic hand on Philip's knee" just as Philip sees Harriet "watching them" (151). As the uptight spinster interrupts the affectionate male couple, it becomes momentarily possible to believe in the fantasy of a homosocial democracy; possible, in other words, to forget that Philip, an elitist aesthete, has all along supplied more than his share of "criticism" and "prejudice." The reader is asked to see how the man who once "shuddered all over" at the thought of dining with a dentist's son has become indifferent to spitting and swearing (26)—or, at any rate, sufficiently indifferent to distinguish his democratic affect from the unrelenting snobbery of his female relatives.17

17 In the novel's most misogynistic moment, Philip ceases, at last, to be a tourist and is enabled to "live ... more graciously" through the medium of Italian language, "the very phrases of which entice one to be happy and kind." This fantasy of a fully internationalized or even post-national male habitus is facilitated by invidious contrast to Harriet's hidebound Englishness: "It was horrible to think of the English of Harriet, whose every word would be as hard, as distinct, and as unfinished as a lump of coal" (152).
Writing in his journal in 1910, Forster contemplated a new novel that would depict the attraction between a man like himself and "an intelligent man of lower class" (qtd. in Heine xiv). "My motive," he declared, "should be democratic affection," yet—with far less certainty—he added, "and I am not sure whether that has any strength" (qtd. in Heine xiv). In thus attaching "democratic" motives to a bond of "affection," Forster clearly sought to describe an erotically charged but unconsummated friendship between men of different social standing—precisely the relation that develops between Philip and Gino in Where Angels Fear to Tread.¹⁸ Hence, when Forster wrote that he was not sure that "democratic affection" "has any strength" he was, in part, revisiting the homosocial South portrayed in his first published novel. Forster's uncertainty, with its foreshadowing of dwindling productivity in the years after 1910, thus illuminates the tensions that structure Where Angels Fear to Tread, a novel in which "democratic" relations between men, whether Northern or Southern, are ultimately unsustainable.

Nonetheless, if the homosocial South turns out to be an illusion, that is not only because the author was a sheepish misogynist and skeptical Carpenterian. It is also because he was an incisive novelist of care. The narrator's awareness that male friendship flourishes at women's expense presages the tragic violence to otherness which soon follows. In the end, Where Angels Fear to Tread foregrounds another and more auspicious anti-heteronormative narrative of international encounter. Although this queerer narrative is very much centered on the question of violence to otherness, it affords no significant part to misogyny.

Queer Forster

Critics attuned to Forster's homoeroticism have often portrayed a tentative liberal fiction characterized by failed synthesis between feminized aesthetes and heroic male foils.¹⁹ In June Perry Levine's account of this Forsterian dialectic, "the tame pursues the savage": Britain's "auntish" ruling-class males seek out the heroic qualities of their foreign and working-class social inferiors in a quest for "completion" and humanist tolerance (72). According to Joseph Bristow's nuanced variation on this theme, the novels aim to "synthesize" the effete aesthete and the brute athlete (67, 57). But since the figure of the "wilting aesthete" derives from Matthew Arnold's effeminate ideal of culture, Forster's homoerotic fusions are impeded by aestheticism's disabling relation to the feminine (61). As the desired connections between tame and savage are repeatedly undermined by female intermediaries, it is, Bristow argues, "as if [the] wished-for homoerotic coupling were itself structured by the assumptions of the dominant heterosexual ideology of the day" (67).

Yet, what Bristow thus reads as normative capitulation, Martin interprets as a process of queering. In novels such as Where Angels Fear to Tread and Howards End, he argues, a distinct mode of relationality, "the formation of a circle of

¹⁸ C.f. Lane, "Forster."

¹⁹ Forster himself provided support for the latter view when he explained that in Arctic Summer, an unfinished novel begun after Howards End, he could not see beyond "the antithesis between the civilized man" and his "heroic" counterpart (qtd. in Heine xi).
desire around a child,” symbolically displaces the antitheses that preoccupy many critics (“Umbrella” 257). Circular patterns involving children thus seek to articulate “alternative genealogies” to contest the heteronormative logic that privileges marriage over friendship, and biological and legal definitions of kinship over elective relations “based on affection or passion” (257, 265). Such fiction is queer both in rejecting binary stalemates, and in exploring modes of relationality and “begetting” for those who neither marry nor biologically reproduce (272). One of the most important effects of Martin’s reading is that, by directing attention away from the tame/savage antithesis, it enables a focus on feminized traits that are extraneous to that tension. Thus, whereas conventional “feminine” proclivities such as desire for and care of children are lacking in self-involved aesthetes such as Philip Herriton and Cecil Vyse, they are prominent in an “athletic” character such as Gino Carella.²⁰

In fact, in “The Feminine Note in Literature,” a lecture he delivered in 1910, Forster developed a notion of gender difference quite unlike that suggested by the tame/savage split and, at the same time, unlike the gender binary articulated in the “democracy of the café.” The key distinction between masculine and feminine writing, Forster’s lecture explains, concerns “ethical standards”: “Men have an unembodied ideal,” whereas women “embody their ideal in some human being.” Female authors such as George Eliot prescribe standards of “personal worthiness,” while male authors such as Joseph Conrad hew to “some shadowy ideal of conduct beyond the grave” (32-33). I must hasten to add that though Forster thus offers debatable literary assessments based on sexist clichés, his address was written not long after Howards End had been lauded as a novel written with “a feminine brilliance of perception” (Monkhouse 123).²¹ Through his reading of Carpenter, moreover, Forster knew that “Urnings” men could be described as “feminine soul[s]” enclosed in “male bod[ies]” (Intermediate 19).²² Hence, though Forster’s lecture straightforwardly aligns gender with anatomical sex, it is clear that the author of Howards End had various reasons for contrasting his own perceptions with the “unembodied” masculinism of Conrad or Rudyard Kipling.

²⁰ Forster may have chosen “Carella” as Gino’s surname because it is a diminutive of cara, which is both the feminine form of caro or “dear,” and the Spanish and Portuguese word for “face” and thus, according to the Dictionary of American Family Names, a possible “nickname for someone with a beautiful or otherwise distinctive face.” Carella may also suggest cognate Italian words such as cari, the plural of caro, which means either “loved ones” or “family members.” Whereas many recent critics have, like Bristow, tended to focus on Gino’s masculine traits, contemporaries noticed his parental affect. According to the Guardian’s 1905 review, Gino’s “half-womanly tenderness...towards his child” is suggestive of “a real Italian type” (qtd. in Gardner 49). Cucullu’s way of reading the male antitheses captures Gino’s “femininity” more successfully: she argues that Forster projects feminine emotional credentials onto “the bodies of Eastern men and native sons whose virility will liberate the inchoate desires of English gentlemen” (25).

²¹ C.f Peattie 160; Piggford, “Introduction” 9; and Leavis 35.

²² Carpenter is paraphrasing the views of K. H. Ulrichs. Forster would have been able to read Carpenter’s “The Intermediate Sex” when the essay was included in the 1906 edition of Love’s Coming-of-Age. On Carpenter’s influence, especially in A Room with a View, see Tony Brown.
Forster’s views on sex/gender thus exceed the tensions that dominate the male antitheses even as they complicate the bourgeois “femininity” derided in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*. His observations on the supposed relation between gender and ethics instead turn on a very different opposition between generalization and particularity. Thus, in a way that anticipates feminist critiques of liberalism, Forster’s lecture associates a disembodied, decontextualized, and allegedly universal standpoint with masculinity, while characterizing femininity in terms of the concrete differences that attend affective relations. As the gendered marker of an attention to embodiment and particularity, the “feminine note” becomes a potential ethical corrective to British viewlessness.

For all their conspicuous refinement and effemineness, Forster’s aesthetes lack precisely those aspects of so-called femininity which inform an embodied ethics. Thus, though Bristow rightly associates the Forsterian aesthete with Arnold’s ideal of culture, and rightly shows that such “feminine” views had been disparaged by later critics, it does not follow that Forster would have rested content with the Arnoldian ideal had there only been “brute strength” to spare (Bristow 57). To the contrary, Arnold’s idealism and universalism—his Platonic fixation on the “best that has been thought and said”—is, in Forster’s terms, a demonstrably masculinist cultural ideology. Likewise, Arnold’s famous dictum, “to see the object as in itself it really is” (“Function” 178), can be seen to legitimate the dispassionate posture that dooms Philip to “look on life as a spectacle” rather than to “enter it” (*Where* 178).

As against the limitations of such overweening male spectacularity, Forster portrays Caroline Abbott, a woman able to perceive that ethical decision-making is profoundly contextual—that it invariably emerges from “the muddle” (146). Thus, although Caroline has deeply internalized bourgeois norms, she is a consistently sympathetic character as well as the key female figure in either a reading like Bristow’s (in which she impedes male homosexuality) or like Martin’s (in which she completes the queer “circle of desire” around Gino’s child). Significantly, the focal point of Miss Abbott’s dreary life in the London suburbs is her “dull acts of charity” (82). Allusions to charity work occur at various charged moments, as when Philip is amused by the notion of Caroline’s urging Gino to give up his baby “in the spirit of a district visitor” (109). Caroline’s involvement in district visiting, with its deep ties to “feminine” disciplinarity and imperialism, has visibly molded her experience of care, predetermining her reflex to regard such relations from the standpoint of the civilizing mission.

Yet, Caroline’s encounter with Italy results in repeated lapses from her ingrained middle-class identification. In what is narrated as a vicarious “fling” (21), the upstanding Miss Abbott abets Lilia’s marriage to Gino. When the handsome, young Italian turns out to be an unfaithful husband, and the broken-down Lilia dies in childbirth, Caroline seeks to atone by retrieving the baby. Her return to Italy is ironically described as a deluded quixotism: “She was here to champion morality and purity, and the holy life of an English home” (122). In a crucial scene, Caroline’s missionary zeal is undone by her Italian encounter. As she braces herself for a principled “battle” with the “evil” South, she instead discovers Gino affectionately babbling to his infant son and surrounded by domestic
clutter (128)—“the vital mess ... that nourishes a life” (Trilling, Forster 173). Recognizing the baby as “so much flesh and blood,” not the disembodied object of Herritonian propriety, Caroline wavers. Though she tries “to imagine that she was in her district,” her impulse is to abandon the civilizer’s standpoint entirely—“to exert no more influence than there may be in a kiss” (128). As she and Gino bathe the child together, she yields to a hopeless, life-altering passion. Yet, in the end, she leaves Philip to decide between leaving the baby with a loving father “who will bring him up badly,” and bringing him to Britain, “where no one loves him, but where he will be brought up well” (147).

As Bristow’s thesis helps us to predict, the floundering aesthete vacillates: it is not Philip, but his fanatical sister Harriet who acts decisively by kidnapping the infant. The accidental death that follows is tragic but also a prelude to rapprochement between Philip and Gino. Their homoerotic bond, as Bristow remarks, requires the “love, nourishment, and intimacy” that Caroline figures (67). Yet it is important to remember that the Italian man, not the British woman, is the first to embody care in this aspect. Thus, the circle of desire that forms around Lilia’s infant is more resiliently anti-heteronormative than any couples-focused reading allows; for it is not only Philip, but also Caroline who is queered by her Italian experience. Both Northerners are drawn to Gino because of a physical and emotional spontaneity that they desire but cannot express. Both therefore realize that, as Mr. Emerson says in A Room with a View, “love is of the body” (189). Yet, “John Bull to the backbone,” each returns from Italy in this much darker novel to a life of almost certain sterility (Where 21). Whereas in A Room with a View, Italy is, as Goscilo remarks, “the midwife of selfhood” (204), in Where Angels Fear to Tread, the South plays a more disruptive role. For though the international encounter no more gives rise to a full-bodied homosexual love than to a happy Anglo-Italian marriage, it does disabuse Caroline and Philip of their bourgeois complacency, and, in so doing, renders them unable to couple and propagate Herriton family values. The novel leaves Caroline to return to her “district” (175) but makes clear, nonetheless, that her faith in the civilizing mission is irreparably shaken.

The Novel with a View

Thus, for all its limitations as political critique, Forster’s queer internationalist exploration of the ethics of care is exacting and powerful. As an expression of what Young calls “affiliation” (97), Forsterian care may entail a father’s passion for his infant son, a yielding to forgiveness for a violent wrong, a British man’s yearning for an Italian man’s affection—or, as he later wrote—a decision to betray one’s country rather than one’s friend (“What” 82). Such articulations of care, as Mr. Emerson says in Forster’s most Carpenterian novel, are “of the body” (Room 189); and yet, unlike Carpenter’s works, Where Angels Fear to Tread also suggests that a morality embedded in affective relations will often be narrow, undemocratic, reactionary, violent, sexist, or simply selfish. Although ethics are, for Forster, about the relation to otherness, and though no disaffected relation
can be ethical, his novel suggests that for care to be ethical it must also be informed by view.

Forsterian view thus represents the possibility for a broad-minded but particularizing attention to otherness: a glimpse of how embodied affect and enlarged perception may stimulate one another, sparking ethical revision. Although, historically speaking, view can be deeply implicated in imperial fantasies ("I am the monarch of all I survey") and delusions of universality (the transcendental "view from nowhere"), in Forster's novels view is never monological or abstract, but always situated and concrete. As depicted in the Italian novels, view stands for an openness to difference which is lacking not only in hardcore xenophobes (Mrs. Honeychurch, Harriet Herriton), but also in the self-proclaimed travelers who unwittingly reduce difference to objectified knowledge and fetishistic desire (Cecil Vyse, Philip Herriton). Thus, in Where Angels Fear to Tread, the "view from the Rocca" unsettles the standpoint of the tourist or civilizer, heightening Philip's sensitivity to Caroline and to Caroline's own heightened "consciousness of wider things" (110-11). Though one's view on this account is invariably perspectival, it is not purely visual; rather, as an embodied and lived situation—a view from somewhere—view is multi-sensory, dialogical, and performative. In thus signifying an attentive and deeply felt relation to otherness, an ethos in which context and affiliation are mutually sustaining, view represents Forster's most optimistic conception of the potential for a caring ethics.

Of course, view also refers to a literary technique: to that Forsterian narrative point of view that, as Trilling suggests, enacts a "double turn," simultaneously affirming and contesting norms in its "respect for two facts co-existing" (Forster 17). Thus, the novel-with-a-view not only portrays the ethically desirable stance of favored characters, but also actively promotes it through a narrative technique that is not so much omniscient as multi-perspectival. Although the Forsterian narrator puts several viewpoints into play, subjecting each to varying modes of irony and assessment, such irreducibly different perspectives cannot, finally, be synthesized, balanced, or reconciled. Forster's novels thus enable readers to understand and connect "worlds which are opaque to each other" (P. Armstrong, "Reading India" 375). In so doing, they express skepticism toward a key aspect of Benhabib's feminist ethics: the "reversibility of perspectives" which, she believes, is integral to cultivating a universalizable "moral point of view" (164). Instead, Forster's novels affirm the more modest ethical practice of "moral humility" described by Young ("Asymmetrical" 49). From such a stance, "one starts with the assumption that one cannot see things from the other person's perspective and waits to learn" (Young, "Asymmetrical" 49, emphasis added). In Forster's terms,
one cultivates one’s view by learning to listen and communicate “across distance” (168n).

Young’s description of moral humility precisely captures Caroline’s “abashed” response when, during her encounter with Gino and the baby, she abandons the civilizer’s standpoint and wishes “to exert no more influence than there may be in a kiss or in the vaguest of the heartfelt prayers” (134, 128). Yet, although Young thus helps to elucidate the kind of ethical relation that Forster’s novels valorize, there are powerful tensions in Where Angels Fear to Tread that neither she nor Benhabib fully explores. Caroline’s impulse to suspend judgment and withhold influence represents care in its most attentive aspect: “She was in the presence of something greater than right or wrong” (134). But Gino’s passion for his baby, though it awakens the ethical encounter, is itself quaintly narcissistic. Indeed, so far from grounding ethics, parental love exemplifies care in its most asymmetrical form: the “wonderful physical tie” that binds parents to children is, according to Forster, rarely reciprocated (136). Similarly, Caroline and Philip’s passion for Gino springs from their openness to his “strange refinements.” Yet, for all its affective power, their encounter with otherness neither erases the underlying perception of Gino as a “cruel, vicious fellow,” nor neutralizes their ingrained reflex to equate middle-class British morality with civilization (134).

As is so often the case in Forster’s fiction, the emotions that stir us the most are the most precarious—the least ethically reliable. One may valorize moral humility and openness to difference, cultivating one’s view by way of surpassing rigid standards of “right or wrong,” but, in the end, one’s perspective remains attached to, if not absolutely predicated on, those very standards. Precisely because of its ethical value, Forsterian view is all but impossible to sustain. Though one can and indeed should feel moved to recognize its normative power, such emotive and fully enlarged attention to otherness is not, and can never be, the stable foundation of a universal creed.

One finds a comparable sense of the limitations of view in A Passage to India, Forster’s most complex narrative of “Southern” encounter. As Paul B. Armstrong has argued, Forster’s last novel recognizes “the impossibility of reconciling different ways of seeing” (365). Armstrong goes on to argue that Forster is a “liberal ironist” in the mode of Richard Rorty. Thus, A Passage to India

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24 Central to Benhabib’s feminist theorization of communicative ethics is the cultivation of an “enlarged” mode of judgment predicated partly on the “reversibility of perspectives” or the “ability to take the standpoint of the other” (164, 168). According to Young such reversibility is impossible and the presumption of its possibility tends counterproductively “to collapse the difference between subjects” (“Asymmetrical” 58). Young’s notion of cultivating enlarged thought through a stance of moral humility thus more closely approximates Forster’s skeptical and limited affirmation of view.

25 As Rosenbaum notes, Santa Deodata, the patron saint of the Italian town where Gino resides, is an important symbol “in a novel that is as much about the relations of parents and children as about England and Italy”; the saint was “so holy” that “she would not help her mother after the devil had thrown her downstairs” (183). One might be tempted to say that, in Forsterian terms, the saint betrays her friend for her country.
invokes the ideal of non-reified, reciprocal knowledge of other people and cultures only to suggest that interpretation invariably requires distancing, objectifying prejudices. The novel insists that truth and justice can be determined unequivocally—Aziz is innocent, and India must be liberated from the yoke of British oppression—but its manipulation of point of view demonstrates the difficulty (perhaps impossibility) of attaining a lasting consensus about any matter or of discovering a final, uncontestable meaning to any state of affairs. (367)

Although Armstrong deftly dispels the cliché of a naive Forster, subject “to the fallacies of liberal humanism,” his reading projects a novelist who is entirely comfortable with the Rortyan split between the infinite contestability of norms, on the one hand, and, on the other, the imperative to uphold “a defensible faith in ideals of justice and community as necessary guides for social change” (Armstrong 365, 367). But this Rortyan commitment to abstract justice, no matter how tempered by postmodern skepticism, jars with Forster’s emphasis on concrete and embodied relationships.

Recounting his first visit to India in a 1959 lecture, Forster describes his “connection” to “that strange country” as “peculiar and personal.”

I didn’t go [to India] to govern it or to make money or to improve people. I went there to see a friend.... The tension between the Indians and the British was increasing.... The sense of racial tension, of incompatibility, never left me. It was not a tourist’s outing, and the impression it left was deep. (“Three” 296-97)

In this remarkable passage, Forster concisely rehearses the critical themes of his international fiction—the capitalist and imperialist aims of the civilizing mission, and the complicities of tourism. In opposing a purely personal motive ("to see a friend") to the instrumentalizing goals of bourgeois travel, the novelist illustrates his inclination toward an affiliative and contextual ethics. By contrast, Armstrong aligns Forster with an “unembodied ideal” that is largely alien to his writing (Forster, “Feminine” 33). Fielding’s refusal to succumb to Anglo-Indian prejudice in A Passage to India is thus said to “resolutely endorse” the Habermasian “ideal of justice based on consensus” (Armstrong 376)—this, despite the fact that Fielding’s resistance to prejudice springs from prior intimacy with Aziz; not the distant pursuit of a just consensus, but the felt demands of a caring relation. Thus, though Aziz “sometimes dreams” of “universal brotherhood,” he dreams of it feeling—as Habermas surely would not—that “as soon as it was put into prose it became untrue” (Passage 145). Forster, in this reading, is a postmodern ethicist who faces down skepticism, above all, by refusing to betray his friend.

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26 C.f. Rorty, Contingency.

27 One imagines that the imputation of a Rortyan Forster, ready to agree “with Habermas that positive norms are necessary to provide goals for social change” (381), would also give Trilling pause. For other Rortyan readings of Forster see May and Born. For a discussion of Rorty’s characteristically “casual” stance, which confirms my sense that Rorty’s sensibility is quite unlike Forster’s, see Anderson, Way, chapter 5; for a critique of Rorty’s tendency to romanticize the nation, a most un-Forsterian project, see Honig 115-22.
While Forster urges an ethos of moral humility and openness to difference, it is by no means clear that *A Passage to India* insists “unequivocally” that “India must be liberated from the yoke of British oppression” (Armstrong 367). The politics of decolonization haunt Fielding and Aziz, driving a wedge between them; but, from the vantage of the “peculiar and personal,” anti-imperialist manifestos are the “prose” of a different ethical register. As Christopher Lane has argued, “far from resolving political distance into personal connection,” Forster’s narratives of interracial desire culminate in “sexual indeterminacy and colonial ambivalence” (*Ruling* 146). Queer internationalism is predicated on an embodied pull toward otherness which is innocent of the intention to dominate, improve, or instrumentalize—indicative of what Trilling, in a phrase borrowed from *A Room With a View*, calls Forster’s “relaxed will” (*Trilling*, *Forster* 11; *Forster, Room* 123). But though “relaxed will” encourages openness to difference its very resistance to rigor makes it a wobbly foundation for radical politics.

There is a comparable indeterminacy in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*—one that shadows the queering effects of the circle of desire around Gino’s child, anticipating tragic violence. Although Caroline’s enlarged view has subdued the will-to-civilize, her reflexive presumption of British moral superiority remains surprisingly intact. At various points the novel suggests that a British middle-class upbringing entails superior education, better grooming, and a higher “standard” of conducting extra-marital affairs than Gino, as a representative Italian male, exhibits (64). These meager advantages are hardly extolled; indeed, their ethical and emotional costs are presented as all but devastating. Yet, the novel never seriously rejects the assumption that the baby’s upbringing will somehow go “well” in Britain and “badly” in Italy (147). Caroline’s ethnocentric attachment to British norms is allowed to stand, not because the norms are admirable, but because the attachment is real; its force so ingrained that it permeates the narrative. *Where Angels Fear to Tread* thus concludes with a limited affirmation of the ethical impact of a queering international encounter, which curbs the civilizing mission but does not dismantle it. Inhabiting the “view from the Rocca” has, to be sure, altered Forster’s erstwhile tourists irreparably but, having left the South it is clear, as Caroline says, that “all the wonderful things had happened” (180). Lest one understate the tragic seriousness of this concluding note of indeterminacy, it is crucial to remember that it is not only “wonderful things” that Caroline and Philip leave in their wake, but also a dead child.

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28 A more accurate suggestion might be that the novel makes clear that India’s liberation is inevitable, that Indians such as Aziz will resist the British yoke—though undoubtedly at the expense, at least temporarily, of the cross-racial and cross-cultural intimacies which it is the novel’s immediate concern to valorize. On Forster’s investments in imperialism, see, for example, Baucom; Lane, *Ruling*; I. Marx; Parry, “Politics” and “Materiality”; Said; and Suleri.

29 Forster’s early narrative of encounter with Italy thus prefigures the more vexed imperial encounter with India: in *A Passage to India*, “the advance into new and profoundly astonishing perceptions is accompanied by retreats into the confines of known sterilities” (Parry, “Politics” 138). It is during precisely such a retreat that Italy, often figured as the object of dubious British tutelage in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, is said in the later novel to exemplify a mode of “civilization that has escaped the muddle” (*Passage* 282).
Infinite Responsibility

As a comedy turned tragic, and a realist narrative turned surreal and allegorical, Where Angels Fear to Tread helps to elucidate unresolved problems in feminist efforts to theorize an embodied liberal ethics. As articulated by Benhabib, the post-Habermasian project of communicative ethics seeks to "acknowledge the centrality of justice as well as care in human lives," expanding the "moral domain" to attend embodied particularity "without giving up the justificatory constraints" of overarching principles (188-89). "Interactive universalism" is an ongoing project that "aims at developing moral attitudes and encouraging political transformations that can yield a point of view acceptable to all" (153). Yet, this still-developing universalism is invoked—as though it were a fait accompli—to place "justificatory constraints" on particular notions of the good.

Young’s feminist ethics are more rigorously attentive to the claims of difference, but she too seeks to reconstruct liberal norms: "some standard of equality is ultimately necessary for theorizing justice" ("Asymmetrical" 50). Young thus aligns her work with the ethics of Emmanuel Levinas which posit the existential priority of the encounter with otherness, enjoining infinite responsibility for the other’s care. As Young interprets it, Levinas’s constitutive ethical encounter enables subsequent appeal to measures of “comparability”—in effect, positing irreducible difference as the prior ground for equalitarian justice. Young’s creative appropriation of Levinas thus underwrites her efforts both to deconstruct and relegate equalitarian norms.

As a novelist for whom the encounter with otherness is primary, Forster is quite possibly Levinas’s most astute literary precursor. Whereas Young seeks to build a bridge from irreducible difference to asymmetrical reciprocity, reconstituting the liberal ideal of mutual recognition between equals, Forster casts doubt on any such normative project. Forster looks askance not only because, as a Levinasian might argue, notions of equality reduce difference to sameness, but also because the very hope of an equalitarian social order threatens to eradicate the compelling strangeness on which Forsterian encounters depend. Forster’s stress on the affective power of embodied encounter evokes Luce Irigaray’s notion of wonder, yet another influence for Young. Like Irigaray, Forster portrays wonder as “openness to the newness and mystery of the other person” (Young, “Asymmetrical” 56). Wonder is also precarious, since it invites the exoticizing and fetishizing of otherness, a pitfall to which Forster’s fiction is arguably

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30 See also Justice 106 and Inclusion 57-62.

31 Space does not permit me to provide a full discussion of Young’s creative appropriation of Levinas’s seminal reversal of ontology and ethics. For Levinas, a philosophical stress on ontology totalizes the other by positing him or her as a knowable phenomenon. By insisting on the priority of ethics, Levinas seeks instead to recognize that the other’s difference is irreducible, that one’s ethical relation to the other confers obligation, and that this encounter is constitutive of one’s moral being. For an elucidation of these ideas as they are articulated in Totality and Infinity and other works, see Critchley, “Introduction” and Ethics, and Ahmed.
Forsterian desire thrives on the heady mixture of nurturing and erotic affects, as when Caroline's Italian encounter combines the baby's "glorious, unquestionable fact" with proximity to his full-grown father, a "born artist's model" (Forster, Where 180; 128-29). But such potent affiliation does not, as it would for Young, culminate in calls for justice. Instead, Forster's tendency to romanticize "democratic" social relations blunts his sensitivity to inequality as a problem requiring a political response.

Of course, Forster is aware of these limits. In the novel's most surreal scene, Philip confronts the baby in an allegory of ethical failure. The shift from comic irony to something like magic realism is first signaled by Philip's recoil from "a ghastly creature"—the "poor idiot" whom Harriet has commissioned to deliver instructions to her brother (155). Unaware that she has resorted to kidnapping, Philip believes that Gino has relinquished his son in a final confrontation between "the South pole and the North" (157). As they descend toward the train station in a dark carriage, the stolen baby bundled in Harriet's "bony" embrace, Philip has a deep sense of foreboding:

*He had last seen the baby sprawling on the knees of Miss Abbott, shining and naked, with twenty miles of view behind him, and his father kneeling by his feet. And that remembrance, together with Harriet, and the darkness, and the poor idiot, and the silent rain, filled him with sorrow and with the expectation of sorrow to come.*

(157)

Striking a match to view the baby's face, Philip finds it "all wrong"—"puckered queerly," with soundless tears "well[ing] inexhaustibly from the little eyes" (157-59). Anxiously lighting another match, Philip sees the baby's face "that

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32 Puar's discussion articulates a comparable concern with respect to the fetishized "Third World" of today's queer tourists: "A culturally defined and driven homophobia does not, after all, deflect the lure of an exotic (queer) paradise; instead, it encourages a continuity of colonial constructions of tourism as a travel adventure into uncharted territory laden with the possibility of taboo sexual encounters, illicit seductions, and dangerous liaisons" (113). C. F. G. Masterman's review of Where Angels Fear to Tread, which describes Gino as possessing "something mysterious and terrible, congruous with the hot night and magic of the hills and valleys, and all the enchantment of a land where the intellect is paralysed by the emotions" (53-54), suggests the kind of quasi-Orientalist exoticization that Forster's novel could evoke.

33 Although Forster is not generally known as a magic realist, the moments in his fiction which have prompted other critics to describe a "mystical strain" (J. Levine 87) may be illuminated by provisional use of this term. The narrative innovations of magical realism respond to the fragmented histories and hybridized cultures of postcolonial experience. Forster's effort to resist the bogus ethics of the civilizing mission by means of international encounter may be seen to strive after comparable narrative breaks with realism. As Simpkins has argued, magical realism offers a defamiliarizing "supplement" "that may enhance, through its own theatricality, the force of an otherwise commonplace development, boosting its significative show in the process through a transcendent power" (145). Forster uses the "poor idiot," a figure whose embodied difference would be radically suppressed ("shut up") in a Northern culture (Where 155), to signal this defamiliarizing shift.

34 The baby's noiseless crying is foreshadowed earlier when Miss Abbott, concerned about Gino's rough but tender handling, exclaims, "Oh, do take care!" Gino replies, "It is nothing. If
trembled in the light of the trembling flame” (160). The crash of the overturning carriage follows immediately, killing the helpless being that has languished in their care. When we next see the baby, the “face was already chilly, but thanks to Philip it was no longer wet” (161). Philip has, at last, encountered otherness, recognizing his infinite responsibility for another’s suffering—only such ethical awakening has occurred too late.

Queer Internationalism

The author of Where Angels Fear to Tread whom I have attempted to elucidate is both more and less than a humanistic liberal. If he is, as critics have often noted, morally complex where other liberals are rigid, and “relaxed” where others are hortatory and sanctimonious, that is not because of any programmatic allegiance to liberal individualism. Neither is it because, as enthusiastic readers of Howards End might imagine, he is committed to seeking out dialectical solutions to political conflict. Rather, what is consistently distinctive in this author’s outlook is his unswerving attention to embodiment including the kinds of encounter, ethical and otherwise, to which embodied relations give rise.

Ironically, it is Forster’s reputation as a liberal, albeit an iconoclastic liberal, which tends to obscure the importance of his embodied standpoint. As many theorists have argued, the privileging of concrete and affective relations tends to engender illiberal effects, skewing one’s perspective “with a centripetal emotional intensity that threatens public interactions with communal suffocation” (White 109; c.f. Okin). One expects a morality embedded in particular relations and committed to their preservation to cling to tradition, resist change, or malign or exclude outsiders. Indeed, theorists such as Benhabib and Young seek out the introduction of universal norms precisely to offset such contextualist excesses. Here, then, is what makes Forsterian ethics so difficult to categorize. For though the novelist is too “relaxed,” personal, and anti-normative to count as a serious liberal—though his works are committed to a web of lived relations rather than a set of unembodied ideals—he is unlikely to be mistaken for a conservative or communitarian. The reason, however, is simple. Forster is not primarily an exponent of British liberalism or traditionalism because he is, first and foremost, a queer internationalist. The author of Where Angels Fear to Tread is a contextualist attracted to the frisson of difference—a relationalist who asserts the power of affective ties to disclose the world rather than either perfect or preserve it.

Once again, Rorty’s postmodern liberal pragmatism provides an ideal backdrop against which to illuminate Forster’s idiosyncrasies. Writing on the subject of internationalism, Rorty argues that “justice” (by which he means one’s ethical obligations to outsiders) can be conceived as an enlargement of one’s primary loyalties to one’s closest kin. “To behave morally,” Rorty alleges, “is to do what comes naturally in your dealings with parents and children, or your fellow clan members.” As families and clans have confederated into tribes and nations, the
scope of such “naturally” moral behavior has expanded in recognizably modern ways (“Justice” 47-48). Rorty thus seeks to collapse the conceptual difference between justice and care by recasting overarching principles as mere extensions of narrower loyalties to family and clan. By contrast, Forster denaturalizes precisely such loyalties: his novels contrast the heteronormative, nation-bound morality of the Herritons to the queer circles of desire that form, however fitfully, across boundaries of class, nation, and race. Indeed, for Forster, the “natural” morality of the British family is an instrumentalizing civilizing project, deeply implicated in class hierarchy and imperialism.

Whereas Rorty presumes that the sole ground for ethical relations is the possibility of seeing that others are “like us” (“Justice” 55), Forster makes the opposite perception the central insight of the queering international encounter. For him, what is ethically bracing in the notion of care is not to do with close ties to those “like us” but, rather, with epistemological revision: with the transfiguring view that an emotionally engaged attention to otherness can, at least momentarily, spark. True to his embodied ethics, Forster strives to preserve a fragile web of relationships, only the queer kinships he values (Gino, Caroline, Philip and the baby; the Schlegel sisters and their Bast child; Fielding and Aziz) are those “elective human relations based on affection or passion” which a heteronormative and propertarian society refuses to legitimate (Martin, “Umbrella” 265). Forster thus invites a Levinasian perception of infinite responsibility to otherness—an ethical conception that Rorty dismisses as a “stumbling-block” and “nuisance” (Achieving 97).

Of course, the so-called ethical turn in recent criticism has had a mixed reception. Certainly, the inadequacies of friendship as a strategy for overturning imperialism in A Passage to India make clear that individual commitments to otherness are unlikely to deliver just political conditions. Likewise, feminist proponents of “equality and non-domination” may find Forster’s investments in asymmetrical relations of care unhelpful or, as Young herself might propose, might view such investments as useful in articulating a “level of ethics and ontology” that is distinct from but supplementary to “the level of politics” at which justice is pursued (Inclusion 59). Thus, A Passage to India will continue to be read—rightly—as a text complicit with imperial power, and—also rightly—as one which contests imperialism by refusing to privilege “one kind of certainty,” leaving “gaps in representation for ‘otherness’ to show through” (Malik 224). Which one Forster chooses to emphasize at any given moment ought perhaps to depend—in a mode of reading that might itself be called Forsterian—on context.

What can such queer internationalism contribute to the more emphatically globalized and postcolonial contexts of today? Young’s work on cosmopolitan

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35 See, for example, Jameson, who favorably cites Badiou’s strong critique of ethics, including the writings of Levinas and Irigaray.

36 Thus, Young views Levinas’s account of the encounter as a supplement, expressed at the level of ethics, to a political “theory of communicative democracy” (Inclusion 59). This way of appropriating Levinas comports with the wider theoretical project in which Young participates: that of attempting to reconstruct universalism by privileging norms of reciprocity and respect that are, arguably, embedded within practices of communicative exchange.
democracy offers a useful starting point for reflection. As Young doubtless realized, her call for transnational “obligations of justice” is subject to the temporal paradoxes of an ongoing project (242). Recent U.S. aggression in the Middle East has made clearer than ever that the very notions of democracy which theorists invoke to equalize world politics can be appropriated on behalf of neo-imperial projects. It is worth noting, then, how little Rorty’s demotion of Western values—from universal truths to “local” concepts (“Justice” 50)—offers to restrain neo-imperialism. Rorty believes that it is simply natural for “loyal Westerner[s]” to wish other nations to adopt Western notions of justice; he therefore advises a “more frankly ethnocentric and less professedly universalist” strategy toward promoting Westernization (56). To be more persuasive, the West should present itself as having “an instructive story to tell” (57). Rorty thus abstracts his account from concrete geopolitics (the impression he conveys is that the West’s only interest in non-Western affairs stems from the “natural” desire to promote its own vision of justice). The effects of power are as irrelevant to his analysis as is the possibility that the Western “story” might itself gain something from the encounter with difference. Thus, though Young is the theorist who insists on shared standards of justice, it is the more relativistic Rorty who urges a liberalism without a view.

Nonetheless, one imagines that Forster would welcome Young’s recognition of a “densely interdependent world” more than her insistence that political institutions “lay down procedures” for “negotiating relationships” in a world so conceived (Inclusion 260). Forster seems not only to doubt the viability of such institutional edifices but also the perfectionist impulse that underlies them. Though he believes in the existence of an “aristocracy of the sensitive, the considerate, and the plucky... in all nations and classes,” he describes them as an “invincible” minority (“What” 87). Ethically and politically desirable though such prized attributes are, they are emphatically embodied; the effort to codify or institutionalize them is thus, for him, invariably misguided. It is in this way that Forster wars with the liberal imagination of Trilling’s era—and of our own.

But that is not to conclude that Forster’s works afford us nothing beyond an illustration of liberal humanism in conflict. On the contrary, as a queer internationalist, the author of Where Angels Fear to Tread may well be a most timely

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37 By contrast, Young suggests that “[s]elf-determining peoples” should ideally “govern themselves democratically. They cannot be said to be self-determining, however, if democracy, or particular interpretations of democracy, is imposed on them” (Inclusion 264).

38 It should be added, however, that Forster, who knew that “[t]olerance, good temper and sympathy” are not enough in a world “rent by religious and racial persecution” might well have applauded Young’s efforts to detach her project from the civilizing mission, and to inject moral humility into progressive politics by means of rigorous standards of inclusivity (Forster, “What” 81). Likewise, one wonders if Forster might have been persuaded by Amanda Anderson’s argument that a liberal commitment to procedures such as the rule of law need not be disembodied, disaffected, or lacking in ethos (Way, especially chapter 6).
novelist. Though it is true, as Parry avers, that the politics of anti-fascism and decolonization required a “language which [Forster] could not speak” (“Politics” 147) in our own world of simultaneously deepening interdependence and schism, the merits of a “relaxed will” cannot be dismissed. Thus, in her recent study of Islamist women’s movements in Egypt, Saba Mahmood urges critics to recognize the ways in which theories of political subjectivity that were crafted to resist normativization inadvertently limit what counts as agency or resistance to Western preconceptions. “Critique,” writes Mahmood, “is most powerful when it leaves open the possibility that we might also be remade in the process of engaging another’s worldview.... This requires that we occasionally turn the critical gaze upon ourselves, to leave open the possibility that we may be remade through an encounter with the other” (37). Mahmood thus captures the insight that animates queer internationalism. To inhabit the “view from the Rocca” is to open oneself to the world’s multifarious disclosures: to cultivate an ethos of ongoing epistemological revision and embodied encounter.

As such, queer internationalism is an ethical ideal in tension with the strong imperative to “change the world” which animates the politics of justice as they are variously articulated by liberals, Marxists, and social democrats (Marx, “Theses” 145). Prizing Forster’s compelling exposure of liberalism’s deficits, one need not forget the grievous inequalities that motivate Young’s search for measures of comparability. Clearly, critical theorists must think more seriously than ever about the tensions between the political aspiration toward justice and the felt responsibility to otherness. Whereas some commitments will warrant the renewed defense of equality, mobilizing the demand for change, others will require more open-ended and multi-perspectival understandings of what is right.

Given the variable impacts of a still globalizing capitalism, Forster’s strengths as a novelist of moral humility and queering encounter can no more provide a sufficient guide for today’s projects of justice than they did for the anti-imperialism of his own day. But in offering a richer, queerer exploration of care than feminist theory has yet to articulate, Forster’s fiction contributes a vital resource. So “two cheers” for queer internationalism, with the occasion to give three awaiting the formulation of a more careful politics—a project of ethico-political integration toward which Young’s works aspire. The world of the twenty-first century will often need to do a great deal more—but cannot afford to do less—than to cultivate a criticism with a view.

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