

Reading E.M. Forster through T.W. Adorno: Music in *A Room with a View* and *Howards End*

It will be generally admitted that Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is the most sublime noise that has ever penetrated into the ear of man. All sorts and conditions are satisfied by it. Whether you are like Mrs. Munt, and tap surreptitiously when the tunes come--of course, not so as to disturb the others--or like Helen, who can see heroes and shipwrecks in the music's flood; or like Margaret, who can only see the music; or like Tibby, who is profoundly versed in counterpoint, and holds the full score open upon his knee.¹

Forster's characters experience Beethoven in different ways; they have individual and distinct responses to it. Music's 'sublime' nature – calling up notions of transcendence and beauty – allows 'all sorts' to be 'satisfied' by it, yet the word 'noise' sits in curious contrast with the sublime, undercutting the notion of music as something transcendent to suggest that it is, ultimately, mere sound. This article analyses music in *A Room with A View* and *Howards End* to explore the presence of receding nineteenth- and emerging twentieth-century approaches to music. The different and contradictory ways music is presented can be understood as competing notions of what music is and means. This is related to a wider cultural shift occurring at the start of the twentieth century as composers and writers were, as Josh Epstein claims, 'digesting, not annihilating' their musical and artistic inheritance.² To date, scholarly work on Forster and music tries to resolve contradictions in the texts: biographical information is recruited to produce readings that are consistent with his documented musical preferences and political opinions. Using T.W. Adorno's writing on

Beethoven and Mahler, I analyse the different guises in which music appears in Forster's novels to show that music is a site of conflict. Residues of nineteenth-century aestheticism are contained in the depictions of 'sublime' music, while at other times music is shown to be a product of existing material conditions.

Adorno identifies a transition in forms of musical and artistic production in the early twentieth century: one that rejects the structural unity of nineteenth-century thought epitomised by Hegel and Beethoven, moving towards the articulation of a newly fragmented subjectivity produced by industrialisation and capitalism. For Adorno, Mahler's compositions exemplify the difficulties of composing at the turn of the twentieth century, and his music contains a paradox: the knowledge that 'the determining musical tradition of Europe' is 'losing its hold' and must be left behind, combined with a resistance to any 'purely mechanical' approach to music and a struggle to continue composing in a way that is 'musically meaningful'.³ Mahler thus marks an intermediate phase in European composition: whilst irrevocably indebted to classical traditions, Mahler's work recognises that a new aesthetic is required to articulate the contemporary experience of modernity. For Adorno, the uncertainty in the structure of Mahler's music is produced by a troubled relationship with musical traditions which is specific to his cultural and historical context.

In *Howards End* and *A Room with a View*, I argue that we find a similar (but not identical) transitional phase which is illuminated by reading the novels with Adorno's interpretation of Mahler. Building on the work of David Holbrook, who notices a connection between Forster's *A Passage to India* and Mahler in that they both display a 'yearning' for something else in the face of a philosophical crisis that Holbrook calls a 'collapse of meaning', I argue

that in the work of Forster and Mahler can be seen moving away from aesthetic traditions, but stopping short of a complete separation.⁴ The cultural production of Forster and Mahler exhibits a conflicted approach to the traditions they inherit, so that the wholeness and unity of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony – which features in chapter V of *Howards End* – is not present in Mahler's compositions, nor Forster's narrative. Instead, in Forster's novels there are inconsistencies in the way aesthetic traditions are referenced, and this uncertainty is reproduced in the existing body of criticism on Forster, which struggles to place his work definitively in modernist or Victorian canons. According to David Deutsch, 'Forster highlights the difficulties of hauling the grand aesthetic traditions of the nineteenth century into the twentieth,' and responds by creating a new aesthetic that is a 'synthesis' of music and literature.⁵ Deutsch's reading affiliates the text with discourses of synthesis and unity that he argues belong to the nineteenth century, while David Medalie, on the other hand, positions the text in the twentieth century by prioritising the moments of disjuncture in the novel to argue for Forster's 'reluctant modernism.'⁶ Michelle Fillion, too, agrees with 'Medalie's cautious attribution of modernist intent' to the conclusion of *Howards End*.⁷ These readings, I argue, do not acknowledge the conflictual presentation of nineteenth-century aesthetics in Forster's texts. This article reads Forster's novels as part of a transition in literature, removing the need to measure how far the texts adhere to the conventions of a later definition of modernism.

Contesting musical 'transcendence'

When Lucy plays the piano in *A Room with a View*, music creates a world apart: Lucy is described as having 'escaped' the 'commonplace', so that music appears to enable her to transcend her surroundings.⁸ Moments where music is presented as something with

transcendent qualities recalls the aestheticism of Walter Pater: in line with the aestheticism movement's convictions about the intrinsic value of art, Pater declared music to be especially valuable, famously declaring that '[a]ll art constantly aspires towards the condition of music'.⁹ For Pater, music achieves transcendence through its non-referentiality, while literature, architecture and painting are compromised by their necessary reference to material conditions. Aestheticism's proponents emphasised art's separation from materiality, claiming that art should be its own end, since artistic beauty offers its own form of knowledge that cannot be gained by rational or any other means.¹⁰ This ascetic character is also present in the novel: Cecil Vyse is commonly considered as a caricature of nineteenth-century aestheticism and decadence.¹¹ His aestheticism is embodied in his attitude towards Lucy, when he declares that 'In January he would rescue his Leonardo [Lucy] from this stupefying twaddle'.¹² By describing Lucy as a Leonardo da Vinci painting, Cecil gives her a high aesthetic and artistic value. Yet he also reduces her to an aesthetic object, so that Cecil embodies the criticisms of the movement as promoting a detachment from the reality of material conditions.¹³ Through characters such as Cecil Vyse, Forster's novels respond to some of the criticisms of aestheticism, and yet music is sometimes presented as having the qualities associated with it.

For Mr Beebe, Lucy's personal potential is visible through her musical skill, as though this is something that is innate to her, not dependent on the rest of her worldly character and existence. Mr Beebe wonders 'Does it seem reasonable that she should play so wonderfully, and live so quietly? I suspect that one day she will be wonderful in both'.¹⁴ The instinctive superiority she shows when playing music, he thinks, is something the rest of her personality will have to catch up with, or grow into. The purity of music is contrasted with

the disorder Lucy finds in daily life, as though it is something that creates a space apart from realities that are both chaotic and oversimplified at the same time:

It so happened that Lucy, who found daily life rather chaotic, entered a more solid world when she opened the piano. She was then no longer deferential or patronizing; no longer either a rebel or a slave. The kingdom of music is not the kingdom of this world; it will accept those whom breeding and intellect and culture have alike rejected. The commonplace person begins to play, and shoots into empyrean without effort, whilst we look up, marvelling how he has escaped us, and thinking how we could worship him and love him, would he but translate his visions into human words, and his experiences into human actions.¹⁵

Here music achieves transcendence through its separation from daily practicalities and human interactions. The space that it creates is superior – one to ‘look up’ into – and though it cannot be translated into words, it endows those who can reach it with special and enviable qualities. Music is (momentarily) portrayed as a democratic art form – something that will accept anyone, regardless of ‘breeding and intellect and culture’. It allows Lucy some escape from surroundings she finds repressive – yet music in *A Room with a View* does not only contain the positive qualities aesthetic thought reserves for it. Those with musical knowledge are part of elite communities in Forster’s novels, but musical attributes are shown to be dependent on social factors, which produces contradictions about what music and musical knowledge represents. In Forster’s narratives, music has the potential to be socially inclusive when it is enjoyed simultaneously by different social groups, but at other times it is complicit in maintaining social hierarchies. The novels show the experience of music and acquiring of musical knowledge to be deeply rooted in social convention, undermining the idea of its transcendence by revealing it to be irrevocably bound up with capital and class.

The impression of music as something that will 'will accept those whom breeding and intellect and culture have alike rejected' is destabilized when others encroach on Lucy's personal experience of playing the piano:

A few people lingered around to praise her playing, but, finding that she made no reply, dispersed to their rooms to write up their diaries or to sleep [...] she took no notice [...] Like every true performer, she was intoxicated by the mere feel of the notes: they were fingers caressing her own; and by touch, not by sound alone, did she come to her desire.¹⁶

On the one hand, music appears to remove Lucy from the real world – she is so engrossed that she doesn't reply to those who praise her. Yet the fact that Lucy 'took no notice' weakens the idea that she is so involved with the music that she is oblivious to others, suggesting that she chooses to ignore Mr Emerson, Miss Lavish and Miss Bartlett, rather than failing to hear them because she is so engrossed in a transcendent experience.

At one moment, music is constructed as a democratic and inclusive 'kingdom', while at another it is an antisocial pastime– one that is not for the benefit or pleasure of others but only for oneself. The text then doubles back on itself again, reconstructing musical enjoyment as inclusive rather than selfish, since Lucy is quite content to play in a classical concert that Mr Beebe attended. He recalls: 'It was one of those entertainments where the upper classes entertain the lower. The seats were filled with a respectful audience... Among the promised items were 'Miss Honeychurch. Piano. Beethoven'.¹⁷ Not less than a page from stating the inclusive nature of music, it is revealed that while all may have the pleasure of listening to music, only some may have the pleasure of being able to play it. The text plays

out a conflict between the idea of music as something democratic and transcendent, and something quite the opposite. Musicianship is the preserve of the upper classes because they have the financial freedom to buy instruments and take lessons. Music is thus not as inclusive as it might first appear. 'The kingdom of music is not the kingdom of this world', but the reality is that the ways one can experience music are irretrievably connected to one's material circumstances in life.¹⁸ In *Howards End*, it is difficult for Leonard Bast to buy a ticket to attend a classical music concert, so that even listening to music becomes the preserve of the privileged.

Eventually, we learn that Lucy's musical ability allows her to appear of a higher class, which further contradicts the idea of music as something inclusive. It is easy to make assumptions about Lucy's class for a large part of the novel, since her family is clearly wealthy. Miss Bartlett's 'travelling expenses were paid by Lucy's mother' meaning Lucy's family is affluent enough to finance holidays for her and a chaperone.¹⁹ But Lucy's family is not of the 'aristocracy' or of the landed gentry.²⁰ Lucy's living conditions are 'more splendid than her antecedents entitled her to' – her father was only a 'prosperous local solicitor' who 'built Windy Corner as a speculation at the time the district was opening up'.²¹ The good fortune of Lucy's family is intricately connected to the expansion of London out into the suburbs that was a feature of modernity: 'Other houses were built' as demand increased due to population growth, and they were 'filled by people who came, not from the district, but from London, and who mistook the Honeychurches for the remnants of an indigenous aristocracy'.²² It is thus an accident that Lucy's family is considered to be upper class. Her piano playing enables her to continue to 'pass' as someone from a higher class, when her heritage is in fact rather more modest. In this instance music is not something

democratising, but allows Lucy to maintain among others the superiority her family's wealth endows her with.

As well as enabling Lucy to 'pass' in the upper class, her musical talents also allow her to have a deeper understanding with (cultured) people from a different class, such as the Emersons. The mutual understanding of culture that Lucy and the Emersons share (books in Mr Emerson's and George's case, and music in Lucy's) creates a liberal-humanist community between them from which everyone else is excluded – particularly Cecil, whose narrow-mindedness causes Lucy to break off a financially advantageous marriage with him. The intimacy between Lucy and the Emersons is hard won, admittedly, because of Lucy's own reservations about mixing with people from a lower class. Yet her attraction to George is apparent throughout the novel and appears as a natural impulse that she struggles to resist, reinforcing the notion of a special connection between Lucy and the Emersons.

For all its liberal and democratic connotations, however, in Lucy's relationship with the Emersons one kind of currency is swapped for another: the value of money is replaced by the (to them at least) higher value of their shared cultural knowledge. This supposed mixing of classes that is the result of Lucy, George and Mr Emerson's greater understanding of the world because of their cultural capital, is flawed: firstly, because one elite community (the financially privileged) is substituted for another (the liberal cultural elite); and secondly, because Lucy is not really upper class at all.

Music, then, both creates inclusive communities independent of class, and at other times is exclusionary and cements class difference. Considering moments of cultural change and

their visibility in cultural production, Alan Sinfield writes: '[c]onflict occurs between opposed interest, either as a state of disequilibrium or as active struggle; it occurs along the structural fault lines produced by contradictions'.²³ Forster's narrative remains committed to the idea of music as a transcendent and democratic art form, but is also willing to recognise that social conventions are capable of making music and musical enjoyment the preserve of the few. Moments of contradiction in Forster's novel remain unresolved, acting as fault lines that reveal doubt in the authority of aesthetic traditions.

This conflicted rendering of aesthetic traditions is something that Adorno identifies in Mahler's compositions, particularly the last ten years of his career as a composer in the first decade of the twentieth century. 'Mahler's music', says Adorno, 'shakes the foundations of a self-assured aesthetic order [...] It knows moments of breakthrough, of collapse'.²⁴ The apparent breakthrough of Lucy's relationship with the Emersons offers only a fleeting moment of clarity and radicalism: the arrival at their mutual understanding reveals capital and culture to be complicit in the creation of (albeit different) exclusive communities. From here, the differences and respective values of culture and capital can be called into question; the financial and cultural institutions around which society is structured are destabilised.

Cultural capital and democratic potential

The social advantage Lucy gains through her piano playing can be described as 'cultural capital' – a term used by Pierre Bourdieu to refer to the material value that can be gained by possessing cultural knowledge. Bourdieu notices that the social mobility engendered by a good cultural knowledge is not incompatible with, or any more inclusive than existing rigid social hierarchies, despite being a vehicle for social mobility:

the controlled mobility of a limited category of individuals, carefully selected and modified by and for individual ascent, is not incompatible with the permanence of structures, and that it is even capable of contributing to social stability in the only way conceivable in societies based on democratic ideals and thereby may help to perpetuate the structure of class relations.²⁵

In the novel, there are moments when Lucy uses her cultural capital democratically: it allows her to exercise individual choice when choosing to marry George over Cecil. In this case, she uses the knowledge and understanding her cultural capital gives her to forge deeper connections with other people she considers worthy, rather than raise her own social position.

Yet it is Lucy's family's financial wealth that allows her to acquire this cultural capital by providing her with the materials and leisure time required to play the piano. Similarly in *Howards End*, acquiring cultural knowledge is shown to require a quantity of financial capital to begin with. Helen and Margaret Schlegel are young and unmarried but financially independent, with a love for art, music and literature. The sisters have both financial and cultural capital, and their circumstances in life are contrasted with the clerk Leonard Bast whom they meet by chance at a performance of Beethoven's Fifth. For Leonard they embody 'cleverness and culture' and Margaret 'filled him with awe' by conversing with ease on Beethoven, Brahms, Monet, Debussy and the difference between the art forms.

Oh, to acquire culture! Oh, to pronounce foreign names correctly! Oh, to be well informed, discoursing at ease on every subject that a lady started! But it would take one years. With an hour at lunch and a few shattered hours in the evening, how was it possible to catch up with leisured women, who had been reading steadily from childhood?²⁶

Leonard so reveres the sisters that he keeps the calling card, which Margaret gives him so that he can retrieve the umbrella that Helen inadvertently took, like a prized possession: 'it symbolized the life of culture, that Jacky' – his wife – 'should never spoil'.²⁷ The concert is a regular event for the Schlegel sisters – 'We hear the Fifth practically every time it's done,' says Margaret – but for Leonard it is a luxury.²⁸ His enjoyment of the music is marred by his financial worries: should he 'have paid as much as two shillings? [...] he had wondered, "Shall I try to do without a programme?" There had always been something to worry him ever since he could remember, always something that distracted him from the pursuit of beauty'.²⁹ The desire and pressure to keep up with the cultured classes combined with the financial strain of purchasing the ticket prevents him from enjoying the concert. The conventions of classical music reinforce class positions: when Leonard attempts to acquire cultural capital his financial capital suffers, so that the enjoyment of music through concert attendance remains the privilege of the wealthy.

The reinforcement of existing social hierarchies that happens in the novel is something Adorno's also finds in the form and structure of Beethoven's music. According to Adorno, Beethoven's functional harmony reflects nineteenth-century society, which is characterised by rigid social structures based on predetermined hierarchies of class, lineage and gender. In the 'classical symphony' Adorno finds 'the activity of the vigorous subject,' but goes on to note that '[a]ctivity is not, as ideology teaches, merely the purposive life of autonomous people, but also the vain commotion of their unfreedom' that characterises the 'late bourgeois phase'.³⁰ In Beethoven's symphonies the theme or motif can alter, but only within the rules and confines of functional harmony: it can modulate, be transposed, but it always does so in relation to its original form. This, Adorno says, is the truth about a society in

which there is the illusion of capacity for change, but the subject is always constrained within a definite structure – in music, a harmonic structure, in society a rigid social structure. Leonard can attend the concert, yet the circumstances under which he must do so means he cannot enjoy it, so that his attendance becomes a fruitless exercise in keeping up appearances motivated by social anxiety, reinforcing his lack of freedom to improve himself or his social position.

Yet the society that Adorno finds replicated in Beethoven's music is not the society of Forster's novel, so that classical music does not entirely reflect the subjectivity of *Howards End*.³¹ The maintenance of 'hierarchy', present in the symphony and 'common to both Kant and Beethoven,' is physically negated by the close proximity of people from different social classes when Leonard Bast sits next to Helen Schlegel, and they subsequently form a friendship.³² The symphony in Chapter V of the text functions to show the positive potential of music, as well as the restrictive impact of its formal conventions. The detailed description of the Schlegels' response to the music reveals the way the text emphasises the democratic as well as exclusionary potential of art: musical performance has the potential to be a democratic space because it brings people together from different social classes through a mutual appreciation of art.

Further, the non-referential nature of music intrinsically holds 'democratic' qualities because it allows each individual a unique and personal response. While Adorno sees in Beethoven's music the reproduction of the rigid nineteenth-century social formations, Forster's novel has the audience respond to and appreciate the music in very different ways. Helen constructs a narrative of 'heroes and shipwrecks', 'goblins' and 'Cupids'; Margaret 'can only see the

music'; while Tibby 'holds the full score open on his knee'.³³ Tibby's appreciation of the music appears purely technical rather than emotional, since he was 'profoundly versed in counterpoint', and Helen's imaginings, although creative, render the music programmatic.³⁴ Her story involves mythical creatures but is otherwise inherently worldly in its theme of conflict and domination – indeed, her narrative places Beethoven as a deity with the symphony his crusade of mastery over the fictional kingdom. Helen's narrative deals with good and bad, failure and success, yet it is only Helen who interprets it in this way. The text suggests that the democratic potential of the music lies in the freedom of each individual to respond differently to it. In the material circumstances of the concert, however, it is revealed that this freedom is incredibly limited, and some like Leonard struggle to have the opportunity to listen to the music in the first place. Despite music's democratic potential, the playing field is already extremely uneven. Although the novel shows that music is democratic to a degree, the conventions and the reality of being able to listen to it are not – echoing the same dilemma in *A Room with a View*.

Ambiguity in Forster and Mahler

The contradictions in the way Forster depicts nineteenth-century traditions, such as the numerous oppositions in the social situation of the Beethoven performance, mean that these traditions are no longer structurally whole: they are weakened by being placed in an environment that does not allow them to exist unproblematically. Through an analysis of different moments in Forster's novels, Deutsch intuitively recognises the questions raised by these texts' complex and at times contradictory representation of music, coming to the conclusion that 'this contradictory viewpoint suggests the need for a new aesthetic form'.

Yet he goes on to say:

[Forster] attempts to fulfil this need [...] through the structure of *Howards End* itself, in which he works to harness the energy of classical music to a fresher, more accessible form of fiction, and thereby broaden the innate aesthetic force of both. At the same time, he points to the socially transformative potential of subsequent modernist interart experiments through his creation of the modern symphonic novel.³⁵

This analysis attempts to see some definite, tangible thing that Forster took from music and translated into his novels. Recognising what he terms the 'contradictory viewpoint' regarding music's transcendent yet worldly nature, Deutsch argues that Forster answers this problem by creating a symphonic novel. Anne Foata and Andrea K. Weatherhead have also argued that Forster appropriates the structure of Beethoven's Fifth in *Howards End*, but this approach is reliant on trying to quantify the influence of Forster's musical interests in his novels.³⁶ These are attempts to unravel or solve the question of the text; Deutsch claims that Forster notices 'the need for a new aesthetic form' and creates it through the synthesis of music and literature. Not only does this attempt a perhaps questionable form of mastery in terms of understanding the aims of and problems the text supposedly addresses, it also finds in Forster's writing an assuredness and sense of completion that I argue is not present.

In *A Room with a View* and *Howards End* what we find can be illuminated, not by trying to reconcile the conflicts in the writing, find tangible innovations or advanced techniques, but by considering how Forster's writing relates to other examples of aesthetic production produced in comparable circumstances, namely Adorno's analysis of Mahler's compositions. For Adorno, Mahler 'disrupts the balance of tonal language'— his music contains 'deviations' from the traditions of functional harmony without breaking from them entirely.³⁷ *Howards End* can be read in a similar way: the traditions that maintain bourgeois

subjectivity and the appearance of societal harmony are still present but severely compromised. In chapter V the conventions surrounding classical music concerts are proven to support a rigid class structure and prevent social mobility. The epistemologies of wholeness and unity that classical music is intricately bound up with, in terms of both its form (as Adorno indicates) and the social conventions that maintain rigid social structures, are being acknowledged.

Forster's texts question the positivity of social progress, bringing to the forefront social inequalities and – despite their good intentions – the Schlegel sisters' complicity in them, so that like Mahler, *Howards End* 'enrages those who have made their peace with the world by reminding them of what they must exorcise'.³⁸ Helen identifies the lack of fairness in the class structure, questioning the legitimacy of Mr Wilcox's and her own elevated social position after they are responsible for Leonard's fall into unemployment. 'We—we, the upper classes—thought we would help him from the height of our superior knowledge', she says, 'and here's the result!'³⁹ Leonard, she says, is 'capable of better things' but is unable to progress in a society where, as Mr Wilcox confidently asserts, there 'will always be rich and poor'.⁴⁰ Despite the obvious problems with the class system, Mr Wilcox asserts 'you can't deny that, in spite of all, the tendency of civilization has on the whole been upward'.⁴¹ The novel, like Helen, seems to disagree with Mr Wilcox on this matter, since somewhat ignorant men like Mr Wilcox may achieve wealth and stability, whereas unfortunate yet deserving people like Leonard become destitute. There is the subtle suggestion running through the novel that the tendency of civilization is not, in fact, upward. In this respect, Forster's novels write 'against the world's course', to re-apply Adorno's phrase about Mahler.⁴²

Throughout *Howards End* literary traditions are referred to in a way that emphasizes the extent to which the novel is moving away from those traditions. To note another comparison with Adorno's analysis of Mahler, the novel 'dispense[s] with hope that meaning will be vouchsafed by the overriding logic of a dynamic structure'.⁴³ The structures of nineteenth century society are questioned along with the aestheticism that supported them, so that the structure of the marriage plot is no longer sufficient for that which Forster expresses. The Schlegel sisters, for example, invoke the Elinor and Marianne Dashwood from Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*.⁴⁴ Yet *Howards End* ends with only one (arguably unsatisfactory) marriage and the sudden appearance of Leonard and Helen's illegitimate child. While pre-marital sex is alluded to in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, main characters never become pregnant or have sexual relationships outside marriage.⁴⁵ Through reference to Austen's novel, it is apparent how different the ending of *Howards End* is: it both retains the marriage plot and the associated closure or resolution, and diverges from it, in Helen's case. In *Howards End*, meaning does not come from the inevitable marriage. These references to traditional plot devices create only the illusion of familiarity, and they reinforce the extent of the novel's difference to the works and techniques it refers to.

Adorno describes Mahler's 'musical concept as something evolving, pointing beyond itself'.⁴⁶ Similarly, the contradictory portrayals of music I have highlighted in this chapter do not, as it has been suggested, represent a new aesthetic tradition that answers the problems of effectively communicating modernity, but is the literature of something 'evolving, pointing beyond itself'. As a result, wholeness and unproblematic resolution is not something that is found in *Howards End*. The ending of the novel may see him yearning for a kind of wholeness, but it is somewhat unconvincing and problematic. In terms of the totality

of the work, it is neither radically divergent from traditions, nor does it accept the inevitability of resolutions, such as marriage, that sustain the status quo. The ending of *Howards End* shows just how lacking in convincing resolution – such as the definite totality one finds in Beethoven's Fifth symphony – this novel is.

Margaret's marriage is an imperfect resolution to the novel, and initially it causes conflict between the sisters, either because Helen is jealous that she will have to share her sister's affection, or because she does not think highly of Mr Wilcox. He is not Margaret's equal, and she learns to temper her opinions because Henry considers 'a strong grasp' of any situation 'unfeminine'.⁴⁷ As the novel progresses, the extent to which Margaret's marriage requires her to turn a blind eye to Mr Wilcox's failings – his 'intellectual confusion, his obtuseness to personal influence, his strong but furtive passions' – becomes apparent. In order that he, Margaret and Helen can live peacefully at Howards End the house at the end of the novel, Henry's strong personality is severely weakened by his son's imprisonment for the manslaughter of Leonard.⁴⁸ After this, 'Henry's fortress gave way [...] he shambled up to Margaret afterwards and asked her to do what she could with him'.⁴⁹ For the surface appearance of resolution, Henry Wilcox has to be transformed by circumstance into a frail old man.

In Forster's novel, we do not find the grand battles that Helen imagines in her narrative of Beethoven's Fifth, which is so close to Adorno's description of 'Beethoven grappling, for heaven knows what reason, with himself, and emerging victorious in the end'.⁵⁰ In *Howards End*, nobody emerges victorious. Margaret must overlook her husband's immorality, even

when it is revealed in the closing paragraphs that he failed to honour his wife's last wish that he give Margaret Howards End:

Margaret was silent. Something shook her life in its innermost recesses, and she shivered.

"I didn't do wrong did I?" he asked, bending down.

"You didn't, darling. Nothing has been done wrong."⁵¹

The artificiality of the peaceful domestic scene is immediately apparent in Margaret's chilled reaction to finding out Ruth Wilcox left her the house, while she must reply in a motherly way to Henry's child-like request for validation. Paul Wilcox is visibly annoyed that Helen's child has been left Howards End, meaning he will not inherit 'the whole establishment' (*HE* 242). Margaret's nephew is allowed to inherit Howards End and provides an heir for the Schlegel sisters, as well as the suggestion of some class merging and distribution of wealth. This is clearly problematic, however, since Leonard is killed off to facilitate this living arrangement and inheritance, while Jacky is conveniently forgotten.⁵² Even Helen's final excited cry about the good harvest is tainted: the rural location of the house is under threat from London's suburbs. '[H]umanity piled itself higher and higher on the precious soil of London' so that London's 'shallows washed more widely against the hills of Surrey and over the fields of Hertfordshire'.⁵³ The final scene is of an imperfect world where everyone has settled for the best they can hope for in such circumstances. These are problems to which Forster's novel has no answers.

All in all, the domestic scene just about hangs together, as the text seems to strive for connection rather than fragmentation. Yet almost everything about it is hollow and unconvincing. This has proved a problem for some scholars, with Michelle Fillion noting

that '[t]he question that has dogged critics is whether the fog of uncertainty hanging over the conclusion of *Howards End* was intentional on Forster's part or the result of a muddled nostalgia for a lost past'.⁵⁴ In Adorno's analysis of Mahler, we find many of the same points of contradiction. Yet Adorno feels no need to find resolution in Mahler's compositions – he celebrates the irresolution. The persistent contradictions in Forster's text, particularly his depiction of music, frustrate attempts to ascribe intentionality to the work as a whole. Adorno makes the following comment about Schoenberg's analysis of Mahler:

When Schoenberg remarked in his important study of Mahler that in the Ninth Symphony the composer's voice could not be heard directly, he put his finger on something that applies more or less to all his works and goes a long way towards explaining the unease and the sense of ambivalence he arouses.⁵⁵

This sense of unease is apparent in critics' response to *Howards End*, since the points of incongruity in the novel give the impression that Forster's voice cannot be heard directly, either. Those who discuss Mahler, Adorno says, have been confused by the ambivalence they find in his music, 'presuming to assign him to his appropriate niche in history'⁵⁶ in a way not unlike the extent of Forster's conformity to modernism has allegedly 'dogged critics'. Perhaps these oppositions I have identified are a considered rebellion against an increasingly administered society where, as Margaret thinks, '[e]verything seems just alike in these days'.⁵⁷ While this is possible, the application of intentionality does not make the oppositions any more or less significant. Adorno's analysis of Mahler is relevant to Forster's novels because he is content to see in the compositions something unresolved and troubling that comes from the social and economic changes he lived through. If the ending of *Howards End* is ambiguous, it can be illuminated by noticing the enduring opposition in Forster's novels and heeding Adorno's reading of Mahler as somebody who 'drew the consequences

from a development whose implications have only now become fully apparent.' If Mahler's music is the ambivalent sound of people who are 'no longer in command of any authentic experience of [...] meaning in their lives',⁵⁸ perhaps the conflict in *Howards End* should be accepted as the product of a time when, sometimes, 'Nothing had sense'.⁵⁹

What sets Forster's writing apart from 'high' modernism is that it is not content to embrace the fragment, but rather searches for connection and renewal. In Forster's texts we can see the struggle for connection in a time that, as Adorno describes it, sees the 'irreconcilability of the inward and outward' that 'can no longer be harmonized spiritually, as in the classical age':

The historical hour no longer allows it to see human destiny as reconcilable in the existing conditions with the institutional powers that force human beings, if they want to earn a living, into conditions in which they nowhere find themselves.⁶⁰

The conclusion of *Howards End* sees a physical retreat from the conditions of modernity. This constitutes a rebellion; a refusal to accept the inevitability of modern life. The oppositions in Forster's texts weaken the claims of nineteenth-century aestheticism: the conflicted rendering of musical traditions undermines them, anticipating their fragility in a new age, and Forster is unwilling or unable to either fully let go the myth of music's transcendence, or offer an alternative model. As Adorno finds with Mahler, 'truth for Mahler is the Other, which is not immanent yet arises from imminence'.⁶¹ Adorno's celebration of opposition in Mahler's music shows that Forster can also be read, not as a modernist, a reluctant modernist or someone with modernist intentions, but as a writer who meditates on the irreconcilability of the old and the new, so that the oppositions in the texts constitutes their form.

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- ¹ E.M. Forster, *Howards End*, ed. Paul B. Armstrong (London: W.W. Norton, 1998), 32.
- ² Josh Epstein, *Sublime Noise: Musical Culture and the Modernist Writer* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), xiii.
- ³ T.W. Adorno, *Quasi Una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (1963; London: Verso, 1998), 81.
- ⁴ David Holbrook, *The Novel and Authenticity* (London: Vision Press, 1987), 120, 123.
- ⁵ David Deutsch, "Reconnecting Music to *Howards End*: Forster's Aesthetics of Inclusion," *Literature Interpretation Theory*, 21 (2010), 165.
- ⁶ David Medalie, *E.M. Forster's Modernism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 1.
- ⁷ Michelle Fillion, *Difficult Rhythm: Music and the Word in E.M. Forster* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 92.
- ⁸ E.M. Forster, *A Room With a View* (1908; London: Penguin Classics, 2000), 50.
- ⁹ Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, ed. Donald L. Hill (1873; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 106.
- ¹⁰ Forster was sceptical about aestheticism, as his portrayal of Cecil Vyse shows, yet I argue that aestheticism's influence is still sometimes present in his novels since it was a prominent tradition that he inherited. I do not suggest that the presence of aestheticism in Forster's novels is necessarily predictable, or that it appears perfectly at times and imperfectly at others. There was, however, already some conflict in the aesthetic traditions Forster inherited: John Addington Symonds considered Pater's assertion that music is the measure of all art to be either a 'personal partiality' or an 'inconclusive, aesthetical hypothesis'. However, Symonds also states that 'beauty is the sensuous manifestation of the idea - [...] We have to abstain on the one hand from any theory which emphasizes the didactic function of art'. It is evident, therefore, that there was agreement among scholars in late nineteenth-century aesthetic writing that art should be primarily beautiful, rather than utilitarian or endowed with social or political messages. Is this broader tradition I consider Forster's work to be in dialogue with, and among which Forster is navigating his own position. See John Addington Symonds, *Essays Speculative and Suggestive* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1890), 367.
- ¹¹ Ruth Hoberman, *Museum Trouble: Edwardian Fiction and the Emergence of Modernism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 119-120; Ann Ronchetti, *Artist-Figure, Society, and Sexuality in Virginia Woolf's Novels* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 6.
- ¹² Forster, *A Room With A View*, 221.

¹³ A further example of Forster's uneasy relationship with aestheticism is available in the essay 'Art for Art's Sake', where Forster acknowledges the insufficiency of abstract art to communicate the 'conflicting claims' of daily life, arguing that nobody should spend their life 'entirely in the creation or appreciation of masterpieces'. E.M. Forster, 'Art for Art's Sake,' *Two Cheers for Democracy* (1951; Cambridge: Harcourt Brace, 1962), 88.

¹⁴ Forster, *A Room With a View*, 111).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 50-51.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 129.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 129.

²² *Ibid.*, 129.

²³ Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 116.

²⁴ Adorno, *Quasi Una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, 84.

²⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction," *Knowledge, Education and Cultural Change: Papers in the Sociology of Education*, ed. Richard K. Brown (London: Tavistock Publications Limited, 1973), 71.

²⁶ Forster, *Howards End*, 31.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 85.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

³⁰ T.W. Adorno, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy*, Ttrans. Edmund Jephcott (1960; London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 6.

³¹ Gavin Plumley has made a number of connections between Mahler and Forster, but these are not fully supported. He argues that Forster and Mahler both understood or had

experience of 'contemporary bourgeois neurosis' and that in *Howards End* this is framed as a Germanic trait through the Schlegel sisters, but no evidence for their neuroticism is given. Plumley also notices some departure from Beethoven in *Howards End*, but this too is not fully explained. Writing about Mahler's difficulty with the musical legacies of Beethoven, he claims it is 'In mockery of the Germanic worship of Beethoven's masterwork [that] E.M. Forster describes the piece as "the most sublime noise that has ever penetrated the ear of man"' -- yet this uncritically equates Forster and the narrator, and that the tone is mocking requires further explanation to be convincing, especially since Plumley also cites another description of Beethoven by the narrator as genuine in tone: 'gusts of splendour, the heroism, the youth, the magnificence of life and death, and the vast roarings of superhuman joy'. Gavin Plumley, 'Symphonies and Psychosis in Mahler's Vienna,' *Journeys into Madness: Mapping Mental Illness in the Austro-Hungarian Empire*, ed. Gemma Blackshaw and Sabine Wieber (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012), 49.

³² Adorno, *Quasi Una Fantasia*, 10.

³³ Forster, *Howards End*, 25.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

³⁵ Deutsch, "Reconnecting Music to *Howards End*," 165.

³⁷ Adorno, Mahler, 21, 22.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁹ Forster, *Howards End*, 138.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 138. Henry Wilcox's assertion here is a version of the assumption that Adorno and Horkheimer challenge in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: rather than seeing man's technological advances since the Enlightenment as pure progress, as Henry Wilcox does, Adorno and Horkheimer question the rationality of a society that considers increasing domination to be progress. As the Frankfurt School theorists put it at the start of their text: 'In the most general sense of progressive thought, the Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty. Yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant'. This comment by Henry Wilcox, combined with his unfavourable characterisation points towards the problematic relationship with notions of progress and modernity that I notice in these texts. See T.W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (1944; London: Verso, 1997), 1.

⁴² Adorno, *Mahler*, 5.

⁴³ Adorno, *Quasi Una Fantasia*, 87.

⁴⁴ Helen Schlegel, like Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*, is prettier, more romantic and more expressive than her elder sister, while Margaret shares Elinor Dashwood's more sensible and reserved personality. Forster also alludes to the Gothic literary traditions of Ann Radcliffe; when Margaret first visits Howards End the house, she hears 'the heart of the house, beating faintly at first, then loudly' before Miss Avery appears suddenly, invoking the gothic housekeeper. Margaret is reportedly 'afraid', and Miss Avery mistakes her for the deceased Mrs Wilcox. Forster, *Howards End*, 145. Austen satirized Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* in her own *Northanger Abbey* which also features a deceased former wife. See Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* (London: A. & R. Spottiswoode, 1833); Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (London: John Murray, 1817); Ann Radcliffe, *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794; London: Penguin, 2010).

⁴⁵ The cases I refer to are *Pride and Prejudice*, where Mr Wickham is coerced into marrying Lydia by Mr Darcy after he elopes with her, presumably because they have had a sexual relationship; and *Sense and Sensibility*, where Mr Willoughby has seduced a fifteen-year old girl whose guardian is Colonel Brandon.

⁴⁶ Adorno, *Mahler*, 5.

⁴⁷ Forster, *Howards End*, 172.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 237.

⁵⁰ Adorno, *Mahler*, 24.

⁵¹ Forster, *Howards End*, 242.

⁵² Leonard's death achieves two things at the end of the novel, one of which is Henry's breakdown due to Charles's imprisonment for manslaughter, after which Margaret and Henry are reconciled. It is possible that even Forster's liberal-humanism and desire for the mixing of classes could not countenance the realistic possibility of reconciliation between Helen, Henry and Leonard that would lead to them living together.

⁵³ Forster, *Howards End*, 5, 79.

⁵⁴ Fillion, *Difficult Rhythm*, 92.

⁵⁵ Adorno, *Quasi Una Fantasia*, 83.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁵⁷ Forster, *Howards End*, 141.

⁵⁸ Adorno, *Quasi Una Fantasia* 83.

⁵⁹ Forster, *Howards End*, 230.

⁶⁰ Adorno, *Mahler*, 16.

⁶¹ Adorno, *Mahler*, 14.