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In Search of a Rainbow : Forster and Lawrence

Erica Aso

I : Introduction

“The age of transition” is the phrase of Peter Keating in describing social and cultural climate in England before the World War I.⁽¹⁾ It was the time when people were not sure about their future after the death of Queen Victoria in 1901. During the Victorian Age, England had achieved remarkable progress in industry and territorial expansion in the world. Meanwhile within the country, as the old rural England was invaded by the new, industrial England, peaceful and quiet countryside was disappearing and being converted into industrial towns or suburbs of large cities. In 1909 C. F. G. Masterman, an M. P. on the radical wing of the Liberal Party, published a book *The Condition of England* in which he gave an analysis of his contemporary England that had been in the process of rapid disintegration into abyss.⁽²⁾ In other words, England at that time was beginning to exist in fragments, as realised about politics by Richard Remington in H. G. Wells’s *The New Machiavelli* (1911) : “The ideas go on—and no person or party succeeds in embodying them.”⁽³⁾ In these circumstances, “the condition of England” was no doubt one of the major concerns of English writers at that time. In this paper, the representation of pre-war England in E. M. Forster’s *Howards End* (1910) and D. H. Lawrence’s *The Rainbow* (1914) will be analysed, compared and contrasted. Both novelists

travelled abroad and wrote fiction set outside England. It is possibly because they were keenly conscious of the critical condition of their mother country that they wrote the novels of England before the war. To them, depiction of England proved to be not only a problem of the choice of the subject matter but a matter of representation. That is, their views of contemporary England are reflected in their attitudes towards realism, the representation of outer features of the world, that had been the major fictional mode in England until the beginning of the twentieth century. As a consequence, it is limitation of realism as well as of England that Forster and Lawrence must have realised through writing *Howards End* and *The Rainbow*.

II : *Howards End*

Forster's view of pre-war England expressed in *Howards End* resembles that of Masterman in *The Condition of England*. They know but do not want to accept that England is no longer a cohesive society, but that it is now separating itself into "divergent parts"—rural England, urban England and London and other large cities—because of rapid industrialisation and urbanisation.⁽⁴⁾ Feeling a warm nostalgia for the old rural England and having a strong antipathy against the new England, Masterman emphasises the importance of "love" for England's future near the end of his book :

[The] unquestioning love of the Earth and the children of it is perhaps the most helpful element for future progress.

In a century of doubts and scepticisms it may serve to bridge the gulf between the old and the new.⁽⁵⁾

The connection between the old and the new England based on the supremacy of the old by means of love. This romantic solution, with the symbol of "the rainbow bridge" (*HE*, 187), is what *Howards End* as

well as Masterman's book seem to aspire after. However, in fact, *Howards End* celebrates not the connection between the two England, but the victory of Howards End, the house and symbol of the old England. When the new England is gaining victory steadily and social realism as a fictional mode is going to become obsolete before the coming novels of modernism, the old England wins the battle owing to forceful realistic idealisation by the protagonist and the narrator. Therefore, *Howards End* is a refuge from Forster's contemporary social and literary world; in the end, it is the crisis, instead of the victory, of the old England that the novel expresses against its will.

The site of the battle between the old and the new England in the novel is Hilton, the station for Howards End. While the old England is represented by Howards End that belongs to the past and the Earth, and the new England is symbolised by London which is in a continuous flux, Hilton lies between them.

The station, like the scenery, . . . struck an indeterminate note. Into which country will it lead, England or Suburbia? It was new, it had island platforms and a subway, and the superficial comfort exacted by businessmen. But it held hints of local life, personal intercourse . . .⁽⁶⁾

The contrast of the old and the new England is, at the same time, the opposition of the two middle-class families—the Schlegels and the Wilcoxes. Although the protagonist Margaret Schlegel is eager for “the rainbow bridge” between the two England and families—old and new, culture and money, poetry and prose, it is she who celebrates the victory of the old England at the end of the novel.

London, the symbol of the new England, is viewed without sympathy by the narrator whose viewpoint is that of Margaret. The imminent expiry of the lease of her house Wickham Place opens

Margaret's eyes to her ignorance of the city she has lived in—the city full of “the architecture of hurry” and “the language of hurry on the mouths of its inhabitants” (*HE*, 116). Being just a huge ceaseless tide, London is not her reality; it is beyond her understanding and description :

Certainly London fascinates. One visualizes it as a tract of quivering gray, intelligent without purpose, and excitable without love; as a spirit that has altered before it can be chronicled; as a heart that certainly beats, but with no pulsation of humanity. It lies beyond everything.

All over the city, old houses and buildings are being demolished to put up the new ones and what governs the city is the sense of restlessness and instability. Without love and humanity, London is not Margaret's place to live in: “London thwarted her; in its atmosphere she could not concentrate. London only stimulates, it cannot sustain” (*HE*, 155). Living in London, Margaret does not face up to the city.

Although in a flux, the city has one dominant value which even Margaret cannot disown, that is, money. Wickham Place is to be pulled down by the decision of a millionaire “to erect Babylonian flats upon it” (*HE*, 117). The values held by the millionaires are those of the Wilcoxes. Their life is “a great outer life” in which personal relations that are supreme for Margaret and her sister Helen count nothing. The Wilcoxes to Helen's eyes, like London to Margaret's eyes, have nothing to fall back upon but “panic and emptiness” (*HE*, 40). However, although their values seem remote from those of the Schlegels, Margaret admits to Helen their dependence on the Wilcoxes, the conquerors who “keep England going” (*HE*, 268) : “If Wilcoxes hadn't worked and died in England for thousands of years, you [Helen] and I couldn't sit here without having our throats cut. There would be no

trains, no ships to carry us literary people about in, no fields even" (*HE*, 177). She knows that both they and the Wilcoxes stand on the "islands" of money. Most of the others are "down below the surface of the sea" (*HE*, 72), and Leonard Bast, a young man who lives on the edge of abyss of London to be sacrificed for the hegemony of the rich, is one of them. That is, although Margaret does not want to be a part of London, she admits sharing and supporting the conqueror's values that dominate the city.

When formless, unstable London is beyond realistic description of Margaret, there is the old and stable England that, escaping industrialisation and urbanisation, conforms to her ideal. The symbol of the old England is, of course, Howards End. The house occupies a central place in the novel as an old site with a *genius loci*, generating England's hope. When Margaret visits Howards End, she gains the sense of space and wholeness that she has been seeking: "She recaptured the sense of space, which is the basis of all earthly beauty, and, starting from Howards End, she attempted to realize England" (*HE*, 204). The sense of wholeness is also what the novel itself is after: "In these English farms, if anywhere, one might see life steadily and see it whole, group in one vision its transitoriness and its eternal youth, connect—connect without bitterness until all men are brothers" (*HE*, 264). The "whole" England is the old England; therefore, the connection proves to be unnecessary. To celebrate the supremacy of the old and "whole" England over the new, Howards End is made over from the Wilcoxes to the Schlegels.

Margaret's and the narrator's optimistic idealisation of the old England secures its victory, but at the same time, it emphasises strong uncertainty about its future against the novel's will. Contrasting with the abstract and even hostile description of London from Margaret's

viewpoint, the passage in Chapter XIX reveals the novel's forceful movement towards the idealisation of the rural England. The chapter begins : "If one wanted to show a foreigner England, perhaps the wisest course would be to take him to the final section of the Purbeck hills, and stand him on their summit, a few miles to the east of Corfe" (*HE*, 170). The old English scenery is and should be sacred, transcending time and space :

[T]he cliffs of Freshwater it [London] *shall* never touch, and the island *will* guard the Island's purity *till the end of time*. Seen from the west, the Wight is beautiful beyond all laws of beauty. It is as if a fragment of England floated forward to greet the foreigner—chalk of our chalk, turf of our turf, *epitome of what will follow*. (*HE*, 170-71, emphasis added)

Despite, or rather, because of the narrator's poetic language in an emotional tone and frequent use of future tense, the passage reveals the novel's anxiety about the disappearance of the old England. Moreover, at the end of the chapter, the same England is compared to "a ship of souls" (*HE*, 178), the symbol of death. Instead of celebrating the beauty of the rural England, the passage unconsciously betrays its deep concern for the encroachment of the new England upon the old.

Margaret, an heir of Howards End, knowing that the house is one of the "survivals", fancies their house as "the future as well as the past" (*HE*, 329). The future is in their lives at the house, which, after their time, Margaret's niece, Helen's daughter by Leonard Bast, will succeed. The child, having the father whose origin is in a farming countryside of the old England and the mother who holds the liberal humanistic values of the middle class, believes Margaret, will be a real heir of Howards End. When uneasiness about the invasion and dominance of the new

England is the undertone of the novel, the victory of the old England is achieved by force—by the idealisation of the rural England by Margaret and the narrator. In the end, there is not a rainbow bridge between the old and the new England, but what remains is Howard End, the exclusive old England.

Howards End, after all, is nothing other than the refuge from the new England. While the optimism and the reverence for the rural England prevails throughout the novel, Forster must have an acute sense of the insecurity of his values, and *Howards End* expresses this, not admitting it until the end, as Peter Widdowson points out.⁽⁷⁾ What is hinted without being embodied in the novel is the crisis of the old, rural England. Therefore, *Howards End* can be regarded as a survival of the novels of the old England: it is a novel of realism in which the poetic eyes are on the static rural England, but off the intruding reality of the new England.

III : *The Rainbow*

The Rainbow, published four years later than *Howards End*, is a most sustained attempt in fiction to explain how “the condition of England” comes to be what it is. As Peter Keating regards, in this family saga of the Brangwens, Ursula, the protagonist of the third generation, lives in “the time for even trying to make connections between phases of life is finished . . .”⁽⁸⁾ When we compare the representation of England of the first generation with that of the third, what is significant is not only the great change of English society but the change in Lawrence’s representation itself—the change can be regarded as that from the realistic to the expressionistic. What is clear in the end is the necessity to search for a new possibility outside realism and England. The rainbow seen by Ursula at the end of the novel is not

the vain symbol of the connection between the old and the new England in *Howards End*, but is an intimation of a totally different, outside world. Whereas *Howards End* expresses the limitation of England and realism against its will, *The Rainbow* uncovers it much more critically and sharply.

The England of the first generation of the Brangwens in the middle of the nineteenth century, is not entirely old, but is gradually invaded by the new England. The opening passage of the novel is a metaphorical poem of the old agricultural England before the invasion of industrialisation, and like Genesis, it seems to resist the intrusion of history. The Brangwens live not on money, but on close intercourse with the nature of the old England:

The Brangwens had lived for generations on the Marsh Farm, in the meadows where the Erewash twisted sluggishly through alder trees, separating Derbyshire from Nottinghamshire. Two miles away, a church-tower stood on a hill, the houses of the little country town climbing assiduously up to it. Whenever one of the Brangwens in the fields lifted his head from his work, he saw the church-tower at Ilkeston in the empty sky. So that as he turned again to the horizontal land, he was aware of something standing above him and beyond him in the distance.⁽⁹⁾

Although there is a growing town near the Marsh, the Brangwens are ignorant of "strained circumstances", living on their own rich land: "[H]eaven and earth was teeming around them, and how should this cease?" (*R*, 9) Even the women's longings for the outside world of cities and governments are satisfied by the existence of the "superior" people, like the vicar and Lord and Lady at the Hall. They have "their own Odyssey enacting itself, Penelope and Ulysses before them, and

Circe and the swine and the endless web" (*R*, 12). Thus the opening passage is a poem about the men and women who are content with the life of the peaceful old England.

However, the old England is not eternal, and the Brangwens cannot ignore the influence of the modern civilisation. In the second section of the first chapter, historical movement enters the novel: "About 1840, a canal was constructed across the meadows of the Marsh Farm, connecting the newly opened collieries of the Erewash Valley." Because of the trespass of the canal across their land, the Brangwens receive a fair sum of money, and another new colliery and the Midland Railway add to the invasion. As the town grows, the Brangwens become "almost tradesmen" (*R*, 13), producing supplies for the town people. However, the invasion is not so powerful as to destroy their organic community at the Marsh. They are "just on the safe side of civilisation" (*R*, 14). Thus the England of the first generation is old, isolated and complete, but at the same time, they are well aware of the existence of the new England very close to them, and the beginning of the disintegration of English society. In the course of time, almost sexual interrelation between the Brangwen men and nature is disapproved by the women and Tom, who aspire after a wider outside world of experience and civilisation. In this way, Lawrence is less idealistic than Forster in depicting the old England, neither celebrating the victory of the old England over the new, nor pursuing a peaceful marriage between the two. From the beginning of the novel, the old England is invaded by the new, which is an inevitable phase of history for Lawrence.

On the other hand, the England of the third generation is disintegrated, industrialised and urbanised, no longer keeping the organic community of the first generation.⁽¹⁰⁾ Wiggiston, the town of a

newly opened colliery, is the symbol of the new England. The outlook of the town is viewed by the visitor Ursula with distinct hostility :

In a year [after the seam of coal had been opened]
Wiggiston appeared, a great mass of pinkish rows of thin, unreal dwellings of five rooms each. The streets were like visions of pure ugliness : a grey-black, macadamised road, asphalt causeways, held in between a flat succession of wall, window and door, a new-brick channel that began nowhere and ended nowhere. Everything was amorphous, yet everything repeated itself endlessly.

Ursula accuses the ugly repetition and formlessness of the town's components. The town is there like "a skin-disease", with its inhabitants who are like "spectres" (*R*, 320), producing nothing but death and ugliness. Thus Wiggiston, the new England, is not seen by the insiders, but by the outsider Ursula.

Graham Holderness accuses Lawrence's representation of Wiggiston as the substitution of the colliery town for a "symbol" which negates community, however, it is here that Lawrence's attempt to depart from realistic description of England is seen. As Holderness criticises, Wiggiston is not a social reality but a record of Ursula's perceptions, a nightmare from which she can awake.⁽¹¹⁾ However, by resisting to depict the new England from the viewpoint of its insiders, and by expressing visionary and powerfully emotional states of Ursula's mind, Lawrence tries to depart from the realistic and objective representation as well as from England. It can be the distortion of objective features of outer world, however, by highlighting the experience of an individual who is afraid and critical of the industrial urban society, Lawrence is trying to represent the new England through the mind of his protagonist.

When we think about Lawrence's departure from realistic representation of England in *The Rainbow*, the ending passage of Chapter X should be examined, in which Ursula discloses her strong scepticism about the idea of the Resurrection. The passage is written in Ursula's first person, instead of the third person of the rest of the novel : "But why? Why shall I not rise with my body whole and perfect, shining with strong life? Why, when Mary says : Rabboni, shall I not take her in my arms and kiss her and hold her to my breast? . . ." (R, 62) The passage of the direct revelation of Ursula's emotional trouble, being a sudden deviation from the novel, implies the change in Lawrence's fictional mode. By expressing Ursula's personal vision, he begins to seek reality not outside, but inside his protagonist, in her psychology, rather than in objective representation. In this sense, *The Rainbow* is a transitional work of Lawrence, from the realistic to the expressionistic.

Ursula widens her horizon the furthest in the Brangwen family through the new England and feels the bitterness of disillusion with it. As a child of the age, she becomes a wage-earner in a town as a teacher and goes to college, only to be disappointed with commercial and mechanical education. Utilitarianism and colonialism in her lover Skrebensky also dismay her. Her contemporary English society is represented through her perceptions—expectation of new experiences and subsequent disappointment with them. In the end, Ursula can find nowhere to belong : all that she feels is deep hatred and despair for England. As for the future, she does not have a hope for her country, much less a wish to connect the old England of her grandparents and the new "ugly" England. What she is after is another, new world which is free from the old humanity :

She saw in the rainbow the earth's new architecture, the old, brittle corruption of houses and factories swept away,

the world built up in a living fabric of Truth, fitting to the over-arching heaven. (*R*, 459)

While the new England is negated, an alternative to it is not offered in the novel. A satisfactory future, if there is one, like the rainbow over her head, is far beyond her reach, but is worth pursuing at the cost of her belonging to England. She declares, "I do not belong to Beldover nor to Nottingham nor to England nor to this world, they none of them exist, I am trammelled and entangled in them, but they are all unreal" (*R*, 456). Ursula is not to have a child by Skrebensky, choosing to be an exile from her mother country. To her, when no retreat to the old England is possible, there is not a hope for the new England. Thus the new England is dismissed by Ursula who is after a rainbow. Consequently, *The Rainbow* tells of a possibility of a rainbow, outside England and realism.

IV : Conclusion

While a rainbow bridge is not seen in *Howards End*, Ursula sees a rainbow, but cannot reach it because she does not have a clear vision of the future of herself and England. *Howards End* is a novel about the crisis of the liberal humanism of the old England, and *The Rainbow* marks the end of it.

Forster, by pretending to be optimistic about the continuation of the old England, expresses, against his will, his deep concern for the serious condition of England. He sticks to the realistic representation of England from the viewpoint of Margaret who tries not to face her contemporary England. Hence London is just a flux, whereas *Howards End* is the concrete embodiment of the old stable England.

On the other hand, Lawrence does not entirely rely on realism in representing the new England, but tries to express an individual's

strong emotion about it. By representing the new England through psychology of his protagonist, Lawrence bids farewell to realism and England. As Frank Kermode indicates, Lawrence's writing about England in *The Rainbow* is characterised by apocalyptic thinking that a rebirth as a fresh start should follow a descent into hell.⁽¹²⁾ In expressing his belief, Lawrence does not hide his uncomfortable feeling about realism. As a twentieth century novelist who does not live in a cohesive society of the old England any more, he is beginning to regard realism as no longer the only fictional mode to represent the new England, which is in the process of rapid disintegration.

In 1915, Lawrence wrote to Forster, declaring against Forster's liberal humanistic "only connect" motto of *Howards End*: "You are bumping your nose on the end of the cul de sac".⁽¹³⁾ His criticism of the novel's exclusive middle-classness is, at the same time, the criticism of Forster's escape from the new England. When Forster avoids a direct conflict between individual and society by offering a hiding place to his protagonist, he does shirk confronting the limitation of England and of realistic representation. It is also true, however, that Lawrence does not give an alternative to the new England, but his main energy at the end of *The Rainbow* is spent on Ursula's personal liberation from the England, rather than on its fundamental change.⁽¹⁴⁾ He can only make a rainbow visible to Ursula, which Margaret cannot see in *Howards End*. Although differently, a quest for a rainbow outside England and realism must have been acknowledged by Forster and Lawrence as one of the most important themes of their novels thereafter, through writing *Howards End* and *The Rainbow*.

NOTES

- (1) Peter Keating, *The Haunted Study : A Social History of the English*

- Novel, 1875-1914* 1989 (London : Fontana, 1991), 1.
- (2) C. F. G. Masterman, *The Condition of England* (London : Methuen, 1909)
 - (3) H. G. Wells, *The New Machiavelli* (London : John Lane, 1911), 321.
 - (4) Masterman, 99.
 - (5) *Ibid.*, 256.
 - (6) E. M. Forster, *Howards End* 1910 (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1989), 30. All subsequent references to *Howards End* (*HE*) are to this edition and the page numbers are cited in parentheses in the text.
 - (7) Peter Widdowson, *E. M. Forster's "Howards End" : Fiction as History* (London : Chatto & Windus, 1977), 92.
 - (8) Keating, 328-9.
 - (9) D. H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow* ed. Mark Kinkad-Weekes (Cambridge : Cambridge UP, 1989), 9. All references to *The Rainbow* (*R*) are to this edition and the page numbers are cited in parentheses in the text.
 - (10) Influences of industrialisation and urbanisation is not so clearly visible in the England of the second generation, Anna and Will Brangwen, as in the England of Ursula and Skrebensky. Anna and Will do not go outside their village until later, keeping a large family.
 - (11) Graham Holderness, *D. H. Lawrence : History, Ideology and Fiction* (Dublin : Gill & Macmillan, 1982), 178. He also criticises Lawrence's creation of "the myth of Marsh Farm" as "the myth of pre-industrial society" which reflects little of the real society of the time.
 - (12) Frank Kermode, "D. H. Lawrence and the Apocalyptic Types", *Modern Essays* 1958 (London : Fontana, 1990), 153-81.
 - (13) D. H. Lawrence, *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence Vol II : June 1913-October 1916* eds. George J. Zytaruk and James T. Boulton (Cambridge : Cambridge UP, 1981), 275.
 - (14) Cf. Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society* 1958 (London : The Hogarth Press, 1993), 201.