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## The Correspondence of E. M. Forster and Forrest Reid: Content and Implications of a New Literary Archive

### Abstract:

This article examines the provenance and the implications of a new literary archive acquired by Queen's University Belfast and recently fully catalogued under the auspices of the British Academy. The state-of-the-art, fully annotated, online catalogue establishes the full chronology as well as the range of people, books and topics under discussion in an extraordinary set of 217 letters and postcards sent by E M Forster to the Irish writer Forrest Reid from England, Egypt and India during the years 1912-1946. This article examines the integrity of this new archive in relation to partial, flawed use of some early, poorly photocopied materials by Mary Lago and P N Furbank in the 1980s. A case is argued for a fuller literary and political scope for this important body of literary correspondence, especially in relationship to the origins of Forster's novels *Maurice* and *A Passage to India*, Forster's views on homosexuality and male friendship, and the impact of the Irish Home Rule Crisis of 1912-14 and the two World Wars on Forster's politics.

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## The Correspondence of E.M. Forster and Forrest Reid: Content and Implications of a New Literary Archive

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On 31<sup>st</sup> January 1912, E.M. Forster wrote to the Northern Irish novelist, Forrest Reid, praising the spirit of his third novel, *The Bracknells* (1911) and declaring: '[t]he book has moved me a good deal; it is what a friend ought to be but isn't; I suppose I am saying in a very round about and clumsy way that it is art' (QUB MS44/1/22/1).<sup>1</sup> In his reply, Reid reproduces Forster's tone of empathy and admiration as he elaborates upon the spiritual undercurrent of his own writing, a quality which he suggests is also present in Forster's *The Celestial Omnibus and Other Stories* (1911): 'the visible world is not everything, there are deeper and more hidden things touched on, and above all there is a sense of beauty, both of material beauty, & of spiritual beauty, without which, I confess, no book is of much interest to me.'<sup>2</sup> This frank but respectful exchange, and the recognition of shared literary aspirations, marks the beginning of an unbroken friendship that would continue until Reid's death in 1947.

Over the thirty-five years of their correspondence, Forster wrote 217 letters and cards to his Irish counterpart in Belfast which display, from an early stage in their acquaintance, an intimacy and mutual affection in the discussion of various literary and cultural works, personal situations and political crises. Of particular interest in the correspondence are the frequent passages in which Forster discusses the composition of his homoerotic novel *Maurice*, published posthumously in 1971, and the forthright exchange that ensues from Reid's response to the manuscript, in which Forster deals directly and at length with homosexual identity and social convention. Forster also writes to Reid while travelling in India (1912-13) describing his struggle to represent 'something beyond the field of action and behaviour' (QUB MS44/1/22/12), an early indication of *A Passage to India* (1924) that would provide Forster with international recognition and bear considerable

<sup>1</sup> See online catalogue, "MS44/1/22 Edward Morgan Forster (British novelist and essayist, 1879-1970," at <http://www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/InformationServices/TheLibrary/FileStore/Filetoupload.312679.en.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Reid's letter (undated) is published in Brian Taylor's *The Green Avenue* (62) and was included in the Forrest Reid Memorial Exhibition, held in Belfast in 1953.

influence on Anglophone modernist literature. Beyond the wide range of topics that relate directly to literary matters, the letters are instructive in depicting circumstances during various political crises. The period of Forster and Reid's correspondence spans two world wars and the third Home Rule Crisis in Ireland, all of which are shown to have an impact on the letters and their authors.

### Forrest Reid

Forrest Reid was 36 years old when he received Forster's first letter and, as the extract above suggests, had just published *The Bracknells*, which Forster was later to describe as 'the first of his mature works' ("Forrest Reid," *Abinger Harvest* 94). Reid was born at 20 Mount Charles, Belfast, on the 24<sup>th</sup> June 1875,<sup>3</sup> the youngest of six surviving children. Reid's father, Robert Reid (1825-1881), from a middle class Presbyterian family, left Ireland as a young man and established himself as a shipowner in Liverpool. However, as Forrest Reid describes in his autobiography, 'an attempt to run the blockade during the American War ended disastrously' (*Apostate* 9) and Robert Reid was forced to sell his house, furniture and art, and return to Belfast to take the less prosperous position as manager of Anderson's Felt Works. He died when Reid was only five years old. Reid's mother, his father's second wife, Frances Matilda Parr (d. 1901), an English aristocrat, was a descendent of Katherine Parr, the last wife of Henry VIII. In *Apostate*, Reid admits: 'it pleased me ... to find my own mother in a book' (40). However, the admiration that he felt for her notable ancestry failed to develop beyond affection into intimacy. Forrest Reid retrospectively blamed their stunted relations on his mother's seeming indifference: 'It was as if, deep down below the surface, something within me, reaching out tentatively, was met by a blank wall of insensibility' (*Apostate* 38), and instead found the affection and attention he craved from his childhood nurse, Emma Holmes, who lived with the Reids until Robert's death in 1881.

Reid attended school at the Royal Belfast Academical Institution from 1888 until 1891 when, unable to pursue his education at university owing to financial circumstances, he became an apprentice to the tea trade in Musgrave's of Belfast. While an apprentice, Reid wrote his first two novels *The Kingdom of Twilight* (1904) and *The Garden Gods* (1905), but he found the commercial life of Musgrave's 'a bore and a blind alley' that 'offered little chance of success, and no scope at all for such abilities and interests as I possessed' (*Private Road* 18). Following the death of his mother in 1901, Reid's situation changed. He inherited a small legacy that enabled him to abandon the tea-trade 'on a sudden impulse' (*Private Road* 31), in January 1905, and in October he joined Christ's College, Cambridge. In *Private Road* Reid describes his experiences in Cambridge in uninspiring terms, such as 'the Cambridge scheme' (52) and 'this Cambridge interlude' (54) that reveal the

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<sup>3</sup> Reid always gave his date of birth in reference books as 24<sup>th</sup> June 1876, and only when Knox Cunningham, a good friend of Reid's, obtained a copy of his original Certificate of Birth (possibly in preparation for the Memorial Exhibition and the unveiling of a memorial plaque at Reid's house in which Knox Cunningham was to play a significant role) was the issue finally resolved (see Burlingham 37 n1).

disappointing effect or lack of impact university was to have on his life 'partly because I went there too late and took my own world with me' (54). He returned to County Down, initially to live in Newcastle with his friend James Rutherford, the brother of a fellow apprentice in Musgrave's, and then Belfast, where he spent the rest of his life, punctuated by almost annual visits to friends in England, until his death in 1947.

### E. M. Forster

Edward Morgan Forster was born in 1879, the only child of an architect, Edward Morgan Llewellyn ('Eddie') Forster (1847-1880) and his wife, Alice Clara ('Lily') Wichelo (1855-1945). Eddie Forster died of tuberculosis when his son was only eighteen months old, leaving his widow enough money to provide a comfortable existence. When Eddie's aunt, Marianne Thornton, died in 1887, she left Forster £8,000 in trust, the interest of which was to pay for his education, while the remaining sum would be paid over to him on his 25<sup>th</sup> birthday. As Philip Furbank demonstrates, this money 'represented his "financial salvation," enabling him to travel and to write' (vol. I 24).

Following his schooling at Tonbridge, which he did not enjoy, Forster attended Cambridge (October 1897 to 1901), having secured a place, although not an award, in King's College by sitting a scholarship examination in 1896. While at Cambridge, Forster studied the classics and experienced his 'awakening' (Furbank, vol. I 55), largely due to the influence of his tutor, Nathaniel Wedd (Lecturer in Classics and Ancient History, 1864-1940). He also developed a number of relationships that were to bear significant influence over his life and writings, in particular his friendships with fellow undergraduate Hugh Owen Meredith (1878-1963) and the scholar Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson (1862-1932). After a fourth year in Cambridge, Forster left England to travel in Italy and Greece with his mother, Lily, returning to London in October 1902. By the time he wrote his first letter to Reid in 1912, Forster had published *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905), *The Longest Journey* (1907), *A Room with a View* (1908), *Howards End* (1910) and *The Celestial Omnibus and Other Stories* (1911). He was also living with Lily in Weybridge by 1912 and had developed a wide circle of literary friends, including members of the Bloomsbury group, particularly Leonard Woolf.

### Previous Accessibility, Cataloguing and Publication of the New Collection

For the first time, an archive of Forrest Reid's papers, including the 217 letters and cards from E.M. Forster, is available for consultation in the library of Queen's University Belfast. While the correspondence has been viewed and referenced selectively in the past by a very limited number of scholars, who were permitted access to the material by Reid's friend and literary executor, Northern Irish novelist Stephen Gilbert, published records claiming to represent the extent of the

collection are problematic and require amendment. Most notable among these publicly accessible records is Mary Lago's *Calendar of the Letters of E.M. Forster* (1985), a research tool that promises to provide '[w]ider information about the number of Forster's correspondents, the chronology of the various exchanges, and the present locations of the letters' (vii) than the *Selected Letters of E.M. Forster, Vols. I & II* could deliver. Although restricted to 'an incipit instead of a descriptive summary' (ix), Lago's catalogue is indeed a useful departure point for locating collections of Forster's letters, and covers considerable ground listing 739 recipients, 36 of whom are unidentified by Lago (197-9). However there are considerable limitations to her catalogue which drastically weaken its usefulness.

A careful comparison of Lago's listing with the original archival material indicates a problem that Lago highlights in her introduction to the *Calendar* where she admits that, owing to restrictions of resources and conditions determined by private owners, in certain circumstances only photocopies of correspondence were available to her for consultation (viii). Lago admits: 'Photocopies present hazards of their own' (viii), and provides a substantial list of misleading situations that may result from the duplication of materials, including 'superfluous bits of inking compound that masquerade as commas or quotation marks,' 'a scrambling of pages,' 'the crucial corner turned under' and 'unrevealed changes of ink' (viii). Perhaps more crucial for a listing, however, are the material restrictions and resulting inaccuracies that prevent the establishment of a correct chronological order. With full access to the originals, the correct details may often be ascertained by examining the postmark of an envelope or the reverse side of a postcard. Lago admits:

When letters are photocopied, the envelope or the verso of a postcard or air-letter may be neglected. This is not usually a problem when copies come from established archives or libraries, but if letters in private hands have changed owners it is not always easy to arrange for the postmarks to catch up with the letters. (viii)

Lago indicates in her calendar that she accessed photocopies of the letters from Forster to Reid, privately owned by Stephen Gilbert, rather than the originals (viii and 148) but suggests that Philip Furbank accessed the originals for Forster's authorised biography, *E. M. Forster: A Life, Volume One, 1879-1914* and *Volume Two, 1914-1970*. Furthermore Lago differentiates between her own research materials and the documents generated by Furbank, stating:

The evidence of my own searches, contained in file cards and in correspondence, will be deposited, together with photocopies I have collected, (where owners' regulations permit) in the Ellen Clark Bertrand Library at Bucknell University, Lewisburg, Pennsylvania. Photocopies in the collection of Forster's authorized biographer, P. N. Furbank, will be deposited at King's College, Cambridge. (viii)

Since photocopies of Forster's letters to Reid from 1912 to 1946 are held in King's College Cambridge (see King's catalogue for the Modern Archive "King's/PP/EMF/18/457") and Lago's *Calendar* contains numerous errors in transcription and documentation, it is evident that Lago was reliant upon Furbank's duplications and did not have access to the original Forster – Reid correspondence at any stage in the period of compiling her catalogue.

By working from photocopies, Lago inevitably made numerous errors in the listing, which range from minor inaccuracies in transcription to more serious problems in the chronological order of the correspondence. Indeed, of the 217 letters and cards from Forster to Reid in this collection, 210 appear to be listed in Lago's *Calendar*. However, on closer inspection the number is actually 209, as a four-paged letter is erroneously listed as one three-paged letter (R163) and one single-paged, incomplete letter (R164). In addition to omitting eight crucial letters,<sup>4</sup> Lago's *Calendar* contains numerous errors in recording the pagination, location and chronological order of the correspondence, once again indicating the limited and indirect access that the scholar had to the collection. In Lago's listing, eight letters are attributed to the wrong location, or the location is not provided, even though specific locations are clear from the letter heading, the postmark of postcards or internal evidence.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the pagination is recorded erroneously in providing the details of seven letters,<sup>6</sup> and seventeen are misplaced chronologically or misdated.<sup>7</sup> Two examples of misplaced letters may be cited to illustrate the problems that arise from working with restricted access to the correspondence. Firstly, a letter dated as the 25<sup>th</sup> August 1937 (R223) in Lago's *Calendar* should be attributed to the 25<sup>th</sup> March 1933. Not only does the author provide the date at the head of the letter, but the contents include Forster's discussion of the imminent birth of Robert and May Buckingham's only child who was born on the 21<sup>st</sup> April 1933 (see Furbank, vol. II 184). A more revealing error occurs towards the end of the calendar (R257, the last letter listed in Lago's record) where Lago attributes a letter of 16<sup>th</sup> October 1943 to the same day and month in 1947. This

<sup>4</sup> The following eight letters and cards are omitted from Lago's calendar (listed by date and QUB MS number): 08/02/1912 (QUB MS44/1/22/2), 11/02/1912 (QUB MS44/1/22/3), 15/03/1912 (QUB MS44/1/22/4), 25/03/1912 (QUB MS44/1/22/5), 21/02/1920 (QUB MS44/1/22/68), 17/03/1931 (QUB MS44/1/22/133) – but in *Selected Letters*, vol. II 102-4, 01/10/1945 (QUB MS44/1/22/215), 21/04/1946 (QUB MS44/1/22/216).

<sup>5</sup> In Lago's listing for the following eight letters and cards, the location is recorded erroneously (listed by date, QUB MS number and Lago's reference): 26/04/1913, QUB MS44/1/22/14, R57; 14/09/1913, QUB MS44/1/22/21, R64; 05/10/1913, QUB MS44/1/22/22, R65; 06/06/1926, QUB MS44/1/22/101, R143; 20/09/1928, QUB MS44/1/22/116, R156; 06/10/1931, QUB MS44/1/22/147, R189; 15/05/1936, QUB MS44/1/22/172, R214; 13/02/1940, QUB MS44/1/22/193, R235.

<sup>6</sup> In Lago's listing for the following seven letters and cards, the pagination is recorded erroneously (listed by date, QUB MS number and Lago's reference): 14/09/1913, QUB MS44/1/22/21, R64; 25/03/1915, QUB MS44/1/22/46, R89; 20/07/1926, QUB MS44/1/22/102, R144; 02/10/1928, QUB MS44/1/22/117, R159; 22/06/1929, QUB MS44/1/22/121, R163 & R164; 03/01/1937, QUB MS44/1/22/175, R216; 15/10/1940, QUB MS44/1/22/199, R241.

<sup>7</sup> In Lago's listing, the following seventeen letters and cards are misplaced chronologically (listed by date, QUB MS number and Lago's reference): May or June 1914, QUB MS44/1/22/32, R83; 24/10/1915 to 25/10/1915, QUB MS44/1/22/54, R109; March 1919, QUB MS44/1/22/64, R130; 10/03/1925 and 11/03/1925, QUB MS44/1/22/96, R138; 20/09/1928, QUB MS44/1/22/116, R156; Autumn 1930, QUB MS44/1/22/130, R177; 05/06/1931, QUB MS44/1/22/140, R170; 11/06/1931, QUB MS44/1/22/142, R169; 25/03/1933, QUB MS44/1/22/161, R223; 27/07/1933, QUB MS44/1/22/164, R209; 15/05/1936, QUB MS44/1/22/172, R214; early to mid summer 1936, QUB MS44/1/22/173, R215; November 1937, QUB MS44/1/22/185, R232; 13/09/1940, QUB MS44/1/22/197, R236; 16/10/1943, QUB MS44/1/22/209, R257; 29/12/1943, QUB MS44/1/22/210, R251; 14/04/1945, QUB MS44/1/22/214, R255.

mistake is evident on two counts. Firstly, Forster discusses his mother's health in this letter ('[m]y mother keeps fairly well for her age – 88'), although Lago places this letter after Lily Forster's death which occurred on 11<sup>th</sup> March 1945. However a second, more striking error is made by Lago in attributing this letter to such a late date in 1947. Forrest Reid, the recipient, had also passed away, having died more than ten months earlier on 4<sup>th</sup> January 1947.

Further errors that reveal the disadvantages of compiling a catalogue based on highly selective and poor quality duplications of archival material are related to Lago's record of location in the *Calendar*. Eight of the letters are attributed to an incorrect location, or the location is missing, although in many of these cases, it could be determined from internal evidence. For example, a letter dated to 6<sup>th</sup> June 1926 is listed by Lago (R143) as having no discernible location ('N.p.'). However, while Forster had not used headed paper for this letter, or included the address from which he wrote, the evidence of the final paragraph indicates 'am in Gloucestershire, among many small animals on a hill side' (see QUB MS44/1/22/101). Furthermore, for a letter dated to 6<sup>th</sup> October 1931, Lago records the location as Forster's home, West Hackhurst, Abinger Hammer, Dorking ('W.H.' in Lago's calendar, letter R189). However, the internal evidence once again contradicts Lago's information, as Forster states towards the beginning of his letter: 'I write from Plymouth, where I am helping my mother through a tiresome perhaps ruinous legacy which has descended on her' (see QUB MS44/1/22/147). Lago also fails to record the location when it is discernible from the postmark, highlighting some of the problems related to working from copies of original documents that she acknowledged in the introduction to the calendar, as discussed above. For example, a postcard from Forster is recorded by Lago as 'Postmark [unclear: late Aug.? 1928. N. p.]' (R156), although the postmark on the original may be dated to 20<sup>th</sup> September 1928 and located in Abinger Hammer, where Forster's home, West Hackhurst, was situated (see QUB MS44/1/22/116). Lago's error, presumably owing to the poor quality of the photocopy from which she was working, creates problems in placing Forster's postcard chronologically. The discrepancy between accessing original documents and working with photocopied versions is also evident in relation to a postcard which Forster records as 'Thursday' but which is clearly postmarked to the date of 15<sup>th</sup> May 1936 and the location of London (QUB MS44/1/22/172). However, Lago lists the postcard as 'Thursday [1936. N. p.]. A[P?]CS' (R214), indicating that the verso of the card had not been copied, preventing access to information on the form, location and date of Forster's postcard and causing the item to be misplaced in the chronological order of the correspondence.

Eleven of the 217 letters and cards from Forster to Reid have been published in the *Selected Letters of E.M. Forster*.<sup>8</sup> While seven of the eleven edited letters have been transcribed accurately,

<sup>8</sup> The following letters have been published in *Selected Letters of E. M. Forster, Vols. One and Two* (listed by date, QUB MS number and reference details in *SL*): 31/01/1912, QUB MS44/1/22/1, Vol. I 126-7; 19/06/1912, QUB MS44/1/22/8, Vol. I 136; 13/12/1912, QUB MS44/1/22/11, Vol. I 172-3; 02/02/1913, QUB MS44/1/22/12, Vol. I 187-8; 23/03/1913, QUB MS44/1/22/13, Vol. I 200; 05/10/1913, QUB MS44/1/22/22, Vol. I 207; 23/01/1915, QUB MS44/1/22/41, Vol. I 217-8; 10/01/1919, QUB

there are several errors in the reproductions of four letters – notably, three letters in Volume I, pages 136, 217-8 and 298-9, and a single letter in Volume II, pages 181-4. Furthermore, it is worth noting that a letter written by Forster to Reid on 17<sup>th</sup> March 1931 is published in full in the *Selected Letters* (vol. II 102-4), although it does not appear at all in the calendar. Evidently, it would not be possible to publish a collection of Forster's correspondence in its entirety, which Lago estimates to have exceeded 15,000 individual missives (see Lago's "Introduction," *Selected Letters*, Vol. I xvi). Nevertheless, familiarity with the extent of Forster's correspondence with Reid demonstrates that the eleven letters included in the edited collection are not the most interesting or representative of the collection. In attempting to understand the justification for omitting letters of high literary value from the published edition, consideration of the editorial procedure and criteria of selection is required. Lago discusses this selection procedure in the introduction to *Selected Letters*, where she states:

We have tried ... to choose letters for the numbered sequence according to quite specific criteria. In general, they should parallel the biographical outline, complementing and amplifying it. They should be representative of the various – and varied – circles of his friends and of the wide spectrum of his interests. They should reflect characteristic shifts of mood and the waxing and waning, or the enduring nature, of friendships. They should create for the reader a sense of the personal and the historical atmosphere in which Forster wrote his letters. ("Introduction" xvi)

The list continues as Lago suggests the selected letters should convey Forster's unique 'quality of wit and turn of phrase,' 'help to trace the progress of his works' and represent 'the intensity of [his] convictions' (*Selected Letters*, vol. I xvi). A handful of the letters included in Lago and Furbank's selection certainly meet these criteria. For example, the editors have chosen the letter in which Forster addresses Reid for the first time praising Reid's latest novel, *The Bracknells*, as cited in the opening paragraph of this article, and a letter in which Forster describes his anxiety at being 'dried up' as a writer (02/02/1913). Both letters certainly meet the requirements of Lago's list of qualities. However, the selection as a whole fails to represent adequately the extent or significance of the friendship between Forster and Reid as displayed openly in the correspondence and intimated by Furbank in his section of the "Introduction" to the *Selected Letters*. Furbank describes the range and remarkable variations on letters to differing recipients and states that the letters 'to Forrest Reid are long "literary" letters, such as he guessed Reid, who lived for writing and felt isolated, would find a support' (*Selected Letters*, vol. I xii). Furbank is right to stress the importance of the discussion of literature in the correspondence from Forster to Reid, since many of the letters provide detailed analyses of both writers' novels and draft manuscripts. However, his categorising statement



underplays the significance of their friendship, which was indeed founded upon literary similarities and admiration, but soon developed into mutual affection and covered a much broader range of topics, private, political and philosophical, than Furbank recognises. The range of discussions and the affection expressed openly by Forster for Reid on numerous occasions in the letters will be demonstrated and explored in the following section in reference to the literary and political scope of the correspondence and the strong friendship between Forster and Reid.

## The Literary and Political Scope of the Correspondence

### *Maurice* (1971):

From 23<sup>rd</sup> January until 31<sup>st</sup> March 1915, Forster's letters to Reid were dominated by the introduction and discussion of 'a novel which cannot be published' (23/01/1915, QUB MS44/1/22/42; *Selected Letters*, vol. I 139-40). Further references were frequently made to the manuscript and related subjects in the correspondence over the following decade until April 1926. Forster drafted the manuscript of *Maurice*, from 1913 to 1914, following a visit to Edward Carpenter, a writer and campaigner for homosexual rights (1844-1929), although it was not published until 1971, the year after Forster's death. The impression that Carpenter had on the novelist, who was thirty-four by the time the two met in 1913, is described retrospectively in the 'Terminal Note' to *Maurice* (219-24), which was composed in September 1960. Forster claims: 'Carpenter had a prestige which cannot be understood today' and admits '[f]or a short time he seemed to hold the key to every trouble. I approached him through Lowes Dickinson [scholar and friend of EMF, 1862-1932], and as one approaches a saviour' (219). Forster also stresses in this explanatory appendage the limited number of those who read his manuscript: '[t]he friends, men and women, to whom I showed it liked it. But they were carefully picked' (220). The caution exercised by Forster in showing the manuscript to friends is evident in his letter of 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1915 to Reid, cited above, as he suggests: 'You would, in some ways, sympathise with it, but I know that in other ways it might put a severe strain on our friendship, which terrifies me.' He elaborates on this anxiety suggesting: 'I should be very miserable indeed if your feelings towards me altered as the result of reading this book, even though I should think (as I do think) that they ought not to alter, for I have not written one word of which I am ashamed.' However, he justifies the 'grave risk' he is taking by wishing to be read and proving to Reid that he is 'not as sterile as I am obliged to pretend to the world.'

Lago and Furbank make a sound editorial decision by including in their published selection of correspondence Forster's revealing letter of 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1915 (QUB MS44/1/22/41; *Selected Letters*, vol. I 217-8), as cited above in the previous paragraph. However, there are thirteen other letters in the collection from Forster to Reid that also deal directly with *Maurice* (1971) and the highly

controversial subject of homosexual identity more generally.<sup>9</sup> For example, a letter dated to 13<sup>th</sup> March 1915 (QUB MS44/1/22/44) reveals the discussion that ensued from Reid's initial response to having read Forster's unpublished manuscript. The letter begins with Forster expressing relief that his friendship with Reid has not been threatened by his revelation, before embarking on a discussion of sociology, sex and creativity in relation to *Maurice*. Forster writes the following on homosexual relationships:

Male and Female created He not them. Ruling out undeveloped people like Clive [character from *Maurice*] – or your youth, whom you advised most rightly – one is left with 'perverts' (an absurd word, because it assumes they were given a choice, but let's use it). Are these 'perverts' good or bad like normal men, their disproportionate tendency to badness (which I admit), being due to the criminal blindness of Society? Or are they inherently bad? You answer, as I do, that they are the former, but you answer with reluctance. I want you to answer *vehemently!* The man in my book [Maurice] is, roughly speaking, good, but Society nearly destroys him, he nearly sinks through his life furtive and afraid, and burdened with a sense of sin. You say "if he had not met another man like him, what then?" What indeed? But blame Society not Maurice, and be thankful even in a novel when a man is left to lead the best life he is capable of leading!

Forster continues the discussion of homosexual identity and the injustice of socially-imposed definitions of morality with an examination of whether or not it is 'right that such a relation should include the physical,' and appears to draw a distinction between his own 'earthly desires' and Reid's 'world of the spirit.' Forster's explanatory, philosophical discussion is interesting in revealing the confidential nature of his friendship with Reid, which allows him to correspond on the topic of homosexuality at a time when it could result in civil and social persecution. However, it is also significant in understanding Forster's work, not because knowledge of an author's sexual identity is necessary in interpreting literature, but owing to the desire Forster had to write a novel that he knew would not be accepted by his contemporary society: 'it may get published some day, though scarcely in my lifetime or England's.' In the second half of the letter, Forster discusses such motivations for writing *Maurice*:

I wrote the book because it, or baser things, have for several years weighed on my mind: it was one of the causes of my sterility, and now that I have relieved myself I

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<sup>9</sup> The following thirteen letters (excluding the letter of 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1915, published in *SL*, Vol. I 217-8) deal directly with Forster's novel *Maurice* (1971) and homosexual identity more generally (listed by date, QUB MS number): 02/02/1915, QUB MS44/1/22/42; Undated (Feb. 1915), QUB MS44/1/22/43; 13/03/1915, QUB MS44/1/22/44; 17/03/1915, QUB MS44/1/22/45; 25/03/1915, QUB MS44/1/22/46; 31/03/1915, QUB MS44/1/22/47; 27/10/1915, QUB MS44/1/22/55; 25/01/1916, QUB MS44/1/22/57; 03/03/1920, QUB MS44/1/22/69; 17/02/1921, QUB MS44/1/22/79; 10/03/1925, QUB MS44/1/22/96; 29/03/1926, QUB MS44/1/22/99; 08/04/1926, QUB MS44/1/22/100.

hope to go on to publishable work. Though I waver, I want not renunciation and mist at the bottom of my heart, but wind and blue sky, and I think that the poor perverts, to whom I belong, should be given a fairer chance. Perhaps I should collapse at the first touch of persecution, but this sometimes seems a cause that's worth dying for – it's any how the only one that the little bundle of fragments that's I can serve. To give these people a chance – to see whether their Paradises are really nearer any Hell than Penal Servitude, whether their convictions of Sin are really more than burrs in the social fabric that the heart and brain, working together, can pluck out – that's why I wrote about Maurice and let him meet Alec – not saints or aesthetes either of them ... but just ordinary affectionate men.

It is difficult to determine whether the composition of *Maurice* helped Forster to recover the 'equipment'<sup>10</sup> he needed to write. In his biography of Forster, Furbank suggests this was not the case and that the writer quickly discovered that '[t]o have written an unpublishable novel ... was no help at all towards producing a publishable one' (vol. I 259). However, only two months after having written the optimistic letter quoted above where Forster described his hopes 'to go on to publishable work,' he reported, in another unpublished letter to Reid dated 17 May 1915, 'I am taking up that Indian novel again. I know what I want to do now, and even what I must have been wanting – which I didn't at the time. It will be quite different from the other books – no character development' (QUB MS44/1/22/48). Forster is referring to *A Passage to India*, a novel that gained him considerable international recognition as an important and influential modernist writer, following the book's publication in 1924, although the first seven chapters were drafted before the outbreak of World War One.

### **A Passage to India (1924):**

Critical opinion has always been somewhat divided in presenting various interpretations of Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924). While some critics, such as Lionel Trilling and Rose Macaulay, stress the social and political contexts of the novel, more recent critical perspectives have tended to focus on modernist qualities of symbolism, form and twentieth-century nihilism. However, this crude categorising can be misleading and unhelpful. In the second group of critical perspectives, opinion is far from univocal: while Wilfred Stone suggests that Forster's symbolism is founded on a vision of connection incorporating both the material and the spiritual, Frank Kermode argues that such apparent oneness cannot be interpreted as a realistic device, stating 'a novel not only fakes human relationships but also, working against muddle and chance, fakes an idea of order without which

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<sup>10</sup> In a letter to Robert Trevelyan dated 28 October 1905, Forster states: 'though "clever" I have a small and cloudy brain, and cannot clear it by talking or reading philosophy. In fact my equipment is frightfully limited, but so good in parts that I want to do with it what I can' (*Selected Letters*, vol. I 83-4).

those relationships could have no significance' (218). For John Beer and Malcolm Bradbury, such critical discrepancy reveals more about the multiple levels upon which Forster's novel is structured than simply incompatible academic disputes. Indeed in the introductions to their respective edited collections on *A Passage to India*, Beer suggests that Forster's novel, 'answering to Forster's own complexity of mind, is rich in interpretative possibilities' (vii), while Bradbury defines the novel as 'a technically self-conscious and sophisticated book' (21). Risky constructions of authorial intention or psychobiological analysis of the writer's state of mind should not determine interpretation of fiction. However, Forster's letters to Reid during the prolonged period of working on *A Passage to India*, from 1912-24, provide direct access and insight into a perspective that compliments and adjusts these varying critical readings of a key twentieth-century text and enables a more informed literary analysis.

As stated above in the section on *Maurice*, Forster wrote to Reid on 17<sup>th</sup> May 1915, declaring optimistically that he had returned to his draft of *A Passage to India* and that the work 'will be quite different from the other books – no character development' (QUB MS44/1/22/48). This revealing statement demonstrates the author's intentions to alter the focus of his final novel in a manner that captures what he described in a letter to Reid from 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1913 as 'something beyond the field of action and behaviour' (QUB MS44/1/22/12). In this letter, composed during the early stages of writing *A Passage to India*, Forster expands upon this literary aspiration through a description of the Indian landscape. He writes:

I want something beyond the field of action and behaviour; the waters of the river that rises from the middle of the earth to join the Ganges and the Jumna where they join. India is full of such wonders, but she can't give them to me. (QUB MS44/1/22/12; *Selected Letters*, vol. I 187-8)

While such passages may heighten our literary appreciation of Forster's novel as a whole, this excerpt is particularly relevant in determining the significance of the opening pages of *A Passage to India*. Although relatively short in length, the first chapter is a key introductory device for the text, presenting central ideas and contrasting imagery that partially determines the form of the novel as a modernist text. The most striking aspect of this introductory chapter is the distinct lack of characters, as Forster depicts omnisciently and ironically an Eastern landscape (Chandrapore, the Ganges, and the Marabar Hills and Caves), contrasts geological and human time and emphasises the endless expanse of sky and earth, which is punctured feebly by temporary human constructions. A similar narrative effect is strongly marshalled by Forster in the opening chapter of "Caves," the second major part of *A Passage to India*. This deliberate shift of focus, which is reminiscent of the "Time Passes" section of Virginia Woolf's seminal modernist text, *To the Lighthouse* (1927), demonstrates the fulfilment of Forster's intentions to capture something beyond the action of plot and representation of human manners and behaviour. His letters to Reid not only demonstrate such

literary aspirations, they also depict the early stages of resolving complexities of representation and how the metaphors he perceived in the Indian landscape might be forming in the author's imagination.

Furthermore, in an unpublished letter written on 15<sup>th</sup> May 1914, following a discussion of Joseph Conrad's *Chance* (1914), Forster agrees 'with [Reid] and Marlow that there is this tragic gap in human response' (QUB MS44/1/22/31). Forster establishes a link between this discussion and Reid's 'good' 'advice to me about my Indian book' (QUB MS44/1/22/31), once again demonstrating the desire to push the limits of his draft novel beyond the restrictions of conventional representation. Such insight may enhance our understanding of experimental passages, such as the closing paragraph of the fourth chapter of *A Passage to India*. This chapter opens with a description of the British imperial Collector, Mr Turton, issuing invitations to 'Indian gentlemen in the neighbourhood' (35) but develops, through a consideration of those who are excluded from the social gathering, into a rather pessimistic comment on the human condition attributed to the thoughts of 'old Mr Graysford and young Mr Sorley, the devoted missionaries': 'All invitations must proceed from heaven perhaps; perhaps it is futile for men to initiate their own unity, they do but widen the gulfs between them by the attempt' (37). This missionary limitation to the extent of human and divine hospitality leads to an ironic and critical representation of a catechetical dialogue between the two missionaries and an omniscient voice that persistently inquires whether or not animals ('wasps') and organic materials ('mud') will be excluded from heaven. The form and content of the final passage, therefore, in juxtaposition with the preceding descriptions, portray Forster's reading of exclusion and contradictory spiritual interpretations and seem to capture the 'tragic gap in human response' (QUB MS44/1/22/31) that he discusses with Reid in the letter cited above. While the connection between these texts must remain speculative, the letters provide insight into Forster's outlook as represented in the novel he was drafting at the time of corresponding and, therefore, are indispensable in attaining a full literary analysis. Indeed while these unpublished excerpts demonstrate Forster's literary intentions and aspirations during the initial stages of drafting his most experimental and influential novel, they also simultaneously demonstrate the confidence in which he held Reid, providing open and unrestrained accounts of his literary preoccupations and influences.

Other correspondences may be made between the letters and *A Passage to India* during the prolonged period of its composition, which may enhance an appreciation of influences and inspiration for characters. For example, in a letter that is not included in the *Selected Letters*, dated 17<sup>th</sup> February 1921, Forster writes to Reid describing his stay in Lyme Regis with the scholar and friend Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, depicting a sense of 'Godbolean' peace in the midst of global political turmoil. Forster writes:

I am with Lowes Dickinson who has forgotten the League of Nations, the Vienna University relief Fund, the Famine in China, the French in Syria, the depreciation of

the Mark, the lynching of negroes in America, the depopulation of the South Sea Islands, and the unrest in Ireland for a little, and sits in a little mandarin's cap translating Faust with satisfaction and rapidity. All is peace and pearly grayness, and the cat and the dog, both female, lie down to sleep in each other's arms or sit on the deserted parade and watch the gulls. (QUB MS44/1/22/79)

This peaceful depiction of momentary calm across the entire animal kingdom on display in Lyme Regis amidst political turmoil elsewhere in the world dramatises what Forster would demand three cheers for in his 1938 essay "What I Believe." In this manifesto of his political beliefs, Forster allows: two cheers for Democracy: one because it admits variety and two because it permits criticism. Two cheers are quite enough: there is no occasion to give three. Only Love the Beloved Republic deserves that. (67)

Forster's evocation of a very English and domestic scene of worldly harmony glimpsed on 17<sup>th</sup> February 1921 chimes intimately with his profound vision of "Infinite love" (*A Passage to India* 287) descending upon the festival of Shri Krishna's birth orchestrated by Professor Godbole in the opening chapter of the third and final section of Forster's 1924 novel. The scene set in Lyme Regis is reminiscent of Professor Godbole's religious insight in the thirty-third chapter of *A Passage to India* in which an all-pervasive sense of calm and beauty overwhelms and transcends earthly concerns. The chapter contains the following central revelation:

All sorrow was annihilated, not only for Indians, but for foreigners, birds, caves, railways, and the stars; all became joy, all laughter; there had never been disease nor doubt, misunderstanding, cruelty, fear... Not an orgy of the body; the tradition of that shrine forbade it. But the human spirit had tried by a desperate contortion to ravish the unknown, flinging down science and history in the struggle, yes, beauty herself. (287-8)

The connection is reinforced by the fact that Lowes Dickinson was Forster's travelling companion during his first trip to India in 1912- 1913. Furthermore, while on holiday with Lowes Dickinson in Lyme Regis in February 1921, Forster received a cable from India asking him to return and, as he told Reid in the letter cited above, 'be a Prime Minister or something' (QUB MS44/1/22/79). Forster did return to India, leaving England on 4<sup>th</sup> March 1921, and not returning until mid-January 1922. He completed the draft of his novel on his return, and it was published in June 1924 to general acclaim (see QUB MS44/1/22/87, QUB MS44/1/22/89 and QUB MS44/1/22/90).

### The Home Rule Bill and 'Irish Crisis':

While the correspondence between Forster and Reid deserves attention for the light it sheds upon literary matters relating to these authors and numerous other established and emerging twentieth-century playwrights, poets and novelists, the letters also provide considerable insight into

Forster's experience of political events and crises of the period. Evidently, taking into account the time spanned by Forster and Reid's friendship, namely 1912 until Reid's death in 1947, the two European wars dominate such historically contextual and social frameworks, and the final section of this article will examine Forster's expression of despair and frustration at the wars, and more specifically at Nazi policies of political and territorial expansion and domination. However, the correspondence also touches upon another early-twentieth-century political crisis that is frequently overlooked in juxtaposition with the World Wars, the debate surrounding the third Home Rule Bill in Ireland from 1912 to 1914.

The political situation in Ireland is initially mentioned in a letter dated to 15<sup>th</sup> March 1912, which is neither published in the *Selected Letters* nor listed in Lago's *Calendar*. Written less than a month after their first meeting in Belfast, Forster's fourth letter to Reid characteristically combines a serious note with a witty conclusion, stating: 'I suppose the distress is awful at Belfast: here I don't think it has begun yet. I have great hopes that we may be obliged to burn some of our furniture' (QUB MS44/1/22/4). The question of Home Rule was on Forster's mind following his visit to Belfast in February 1912 to see his Cambridge friend Professor Hugh O. Meredith, an economics scholar at Queen's University, during which he first met Reid. As Furbank suggests in Forster's biography: 'It was a moment of high drama in Ulster when Forster arrived, with talk of secession and civil war' (vol. I 213). Forster's trip coincided with Winston Churchill's visit to Belfast on 8<sup>th</sup> February, amid the threat of Unionist demonstrations and the fear of erupting violence and rioting in Belfast in opposition to proposals for Home Rule. A meeting had been organised at a local football ground, at which Churchill was to speak and that morning Forster went to the Central Hotel where he met his friend, Edward Marsh, Churchill's private secretary. Finally Churchill arrived, according to Furbank who cites Forster's diaries, 'looking "very pale like some underground vegetable," and, jostled by a booing throng, he brushed against Forster, who valiantly raised his cap' (vol. I 214). The political meeting in Belfast and related demonstrations passed off relatively peacefully. However, Forster returned from Ireland preoccupied by 'what he had learned there about the psychology of wars of religion' (Furbank, vol. I 214). Furthermore, his concern at the threat of violence is exposed at a later stage in the political crisis as he writes to Reid in early summer 1914 to ask for information about the situation in Belfast, including the safety of the Meredith children, whom he suggests would be more secure in England. The short note, hastily written on unheaded paper, is undated, but may be attributed to May or June 1914, following the passing of the Home Rule Bill on 25<sup>th</sup> May. The letter (QUB MS44/1/22/32) reads as follows:

Dear Reid,

Is there going to be a blaze? I suppose no body knows but we are trying to get information. The question being whether M<sup>rs</sup> Barger with her three babies shall go to Bangor on the 6<sup>th</sup> and remain there on and off till October; or whether she shall go

alone to fetch the three Meredith babies, and establish them in England. I don't expect you can answer it, but do kindly let me know to that effect.

E.M.F.

A second unpublished letter, dated 25<sup>th</sup> July 1914, alludes to the Home Rule Crisis in Ireland and Forster's continuing concern for the safety of the Meredith children. The second paragraph states: 'Having just returned from Scotland I can't hope to come to Ireland on pleasure, but if things get worse I may come over to fetch the Meredith children, in which case I shall see you and perhaps ask you to put me up' (QUB MS44/1/22/34). With the outbreak of World War One, Forster does not make the intended trip although he continues to feel concern for the Meredith children (see QUB MS44/1/22/35) in light of political unrest in Belfast.

### The World Wars:

As Furbank suggests in the opening paragraph of the second volume of Forster's biography:

The outbreak of the 1914-18 war found Forster in disarray, irritated and driven in upon himself. He was doubly disturbed – by the war itself, and by the inadequacy of his own response to it. He felt sure, indeed, that it was an unjust and unnecessary war, and so did his Cambridge and Bloomsbury friends. There was a general feeling on the part of the Bloomsbury group that it was not *their* war, and that all they had stood for, the new age of tolerance and enlightenment inaugurated in G.E. Moore's Cambridge, was about to be destroyed. (Vol. II 1)

Twelve of the 217 letters from Forster to Reid deal directly with World War One, although only one has been published in the *Selected Letters* (vol. I 298-9; QUB MS44/1/22/60). The eleven unpublished letters<sup>11</sup> range in content from direct discussions of the immediate effect of war on both the domestic and creative aspects of Forster's life, primarily in England and then while working for the Red Cross in Egypt, and indirect allusions to a sense of change and irreparable damage that corresponds with Furbank's statement cited above. All of the letters demonstrate what Forster himself describes to Reid as his own 'senseless brooding about the war' (QUB MS44/1/22/49), suggesting that the author took comfort from his friendship with Reid at this time of uncertainty and despair. Indeed, Furbank highlights such an influence, suggesting that Reid may have inspired Forster's intention to write a critical study of the work of Samuel Butler:

At the beginning of the war, Forster had decided that creation – that is to say fiction – was for the moment impossible for him. As a substitute, he resolved, in the autumn of

<sup>11</sup> The following eleven unpublished letters deal with the First World War (listed by date, QUB MS number): 01/10/1914, QUB MS44/1/22/35; 11/10/1914, QUB MS44/1/22/36; 29/10/1914, QUB MS44/1/22/38; 07/08/1915, QUB MS44/1/22/49; 15/10/1915, QUB MS44/1/22/52; 17/10/1915, QUB MS44/1/22/53; 24/10/1915 or 25/10/1915, QUB MS44/1/22/54; 27/10/1915, QUB MS44/1/22/55; 07/12/1915, QUB MS44/1/22/56; 25/01/1916, QUB MS44/1/22/57; 21/07/1916, QUB MS44/1/22/58.



1914, to write a critical book on Samuel Butler. (He was perhaps encouraged in this by Forrest Reid, who had recently published such a book on W.B. Yeats). (vol. II 3)

Forster does make enquiries regarding the terms that Reid secured with the publisher of his Yeats book in a letter dated 21<sup>st</sup> November 1914, expressing the desire 'to make what money I can' (QUB MS44/1/22/39) during this time of national emergency and international crisis. However, the following letter to Reid confirms that 'the book may be off after all' (QUB MS44/1/22/40).

Forster's inability to write fiction ('creation seems impossible' QUB MS44/1/22/39) during the war extends eventually to non-fiction, as he admits to Reid having felt compelled to turn down a request from the *International Journal of Ethics* to write an article: 'I wish I could & feel I ought, but it is impossible so long as I live at home' (QUB MS44/1/22/53) trapped in economically trying circumstances and removed from the "front line" of the war effort even ethically speaking. At the end of October 1915, Forster did leave England to work in Egypt as a 'Searcher' for the Red Cross, interviewing the wounded for information on missing soldiers. Three of Forster's letters to Reid from Egypt are headed by return addresses to the Red Cross's headquarters in Alexandria and detail not only his activities and routine as a 'Searcher' but also a perceived change in his attitudes towards creative composition, male friendship and the effects of the war.<sup>12</sup> In a letter dated 25<sup>th</sup> January 1916, Forster states:

In England I suffered much pain – out here comparatively little. I came to gain ease and must hope I really needed it and that the power to write – which brings the only *living happiness* I have ever known – may afterwards return. (QUB MS44/1/22/57)

Ethically speaking, Forster appears to have found the crucial opportunities, while living and working in wartime Egypt, to unpick what he calls 'a cocoon of frustrated desires' (QUB MS44/1/22/57) linked to his life in England as well as his concerns over the composition and potential reception of his draft novel *Maurice*. This handful of letters presents Forster speaking more frankly than ever before about male friendship, sexuality and the life of men in difficult circumstances removed from the home counties of England. Forster remained in Egypt until the end of January 1919.

Thirteen letters written by Forster to Reid, between 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1939 and 28<sup>th</sup> January 1944, deal directly with the Second World War, of which only one is published in the *Selected Letters*.<sup>13</sup> The published letter, dated 30<sup>th</sup> September 1940 (QUB MS44/1/22/198; *Selected Letters*, vol. II 181-4) may have been selected by the editors, Lago and Furbank, owing to its descriptions of Beethoven's Sonatas, to which Forster wrote an extensive commentary enclosed with the letter.

<sup>12</sup> The following three letters provide the Red Cross headquarters as Forster's return address (listed by date, QUB MS number): 07/12/1915, QUB MS44/1/22/56; 25/01/1916, QUB MS44/1/22/57; 21/07/1916, QUB MS44/1/22/58.

<sup>13</sup> The following twelve unpublished letters deal with the Second World War (listed by date, QUB MS number): 03/03/1939, QUB MS44/1/22/190; 05/09/1939, QUB MS44/1/22/191; 01/10/1939, QUB MS44/1/22/192; 13/02/1940, QUB MS44/1/22/193; 14/06/1940, QUB MS44/1/22/195; 21/06/1940, QUB MS44/1/22/196; 13/09/1940, QUB MS44/1/22/197; 08/02/1941, QUB MS44/1/22/201; 17/07/1941, QUB MS44/1/22/205; 31/01/1942, QUB MS44/1/22/206; 04/09/1942, QUB MS44/1/22/207; 28/01/1944, QUB MS44/1/22/211.

However, when the full collection of correspondence is considered, the letter does not seem an adequate representation of this period of Forster's life. While the letter is arguably revealing in its description of bomb damage in London, several other letters (see, for example, QUB MS44/1/22/201) provide more detailed and insightful accounts. Furthermore, while the published letter remains largely nostalgic, anecdotal and descriptive, relating a trip to Geneva with Charles Mauron, the French translator of *A Passage to India* and a close friend of Forster, many of the other twelve unpublished letters dealing with the impact of the war on domestic, cultural, political and artistic facets of Forster's life would compliment the one dwelling on Beethoven immeasurably. The content of these letters, furthermore, demonstrate that a revised edition of the *Selected Letters* is now required.

During the early stages of the political crisis in October 1939, Forster's tone remains apprehensively speculative, as he ruminates on the long-term implications of the war on culture and the role of art in society. He questions Reid in a manner that indicates his own lack of certainty:

Have you any clear ideas on the war? Would you fight if you could? Do you think the things we care for will ever come up again? I don't mean in the same form, like again reading Dante, but something parallel to reading Dante, where poetry and integrity will again have some scope? (QUB MS44/1/22/192)

However, as the situation deteriorates, Forster's tone is less questioning and more despairing. One contributing factor in this increasing pessimism is Forster's involvement in writing a pamphlet for the Ministry of Information, which he initially mentions in a letter dated to 14<sup>th</sup> June 1940 (QUB MS44/1/22/195). In the letter, Forster expresses relief at having finished the manuscript of the pamphlet stating:

I have at last finished my pamphlet and sent off the M.S. The preparation of it has taken it out of me rather, the material was so hideous and so depressing. What evil the Nazis do! It is unbelievable. They ruin our little worlds from pole to pole. They must have got to the south of France now, and destroyed the frail happiness of my beloved Charles & Marie Mauron, and they keep trying to take Stephen [Gilbert] from you. I go all weepy and feel I can bear nothing that is coming, but no doubt I can and shall. (QUB MS44/1/22/196)

Forster indicates his accomplishment of important propaganda work in the global war effort, but he is strongly drawn toward evoking the violence propagated by evil men upon 'our little worlds' – notably upon the potential loss of Forster's friends in France and Reid's friend at Dunkirk. In the following letter, which is not published in the *Selected Letters* and is misdated in Lago's *Calendar* (R236), Forster describes the books he is currently reading and juxtaposes such commentary with a sense of determination regarding the war and all it represents for him:

I don't intend, so long as I remain alive, to float helplessly on this tide of wickedness and rubbish. One can direct one's course a little still, and books and music help me. What doesn't help me though are all the lovely times I have had abroad. They come back to me too poignantly. And the circle narrows, I can't get as far as the sea now. It's doubtful whether I shall even get to London on Sunday (I have to broadcast there). "Mais vain se lamenter (même un peu vulgaire)" Charles Mauron remarks in almost the last letter I've got from him. (QUB MS/44/1/22/197)

This revealing passage indicates a number of preoccupations that were emerging in Forster's correspondence during the period of World War Two, namely the senselessness and futility of war, concern over friends abroad and an enduring faith in the existence and importance of beauty as expressed through art. The same letter demonstrates a determination to remain unchanged, as illustrated in a manner typical of Forster's correspondence, through a domestic sketch. Forster writes:

Things go on as usual here, my mother is very fine. All the time I write German bombers are forging overhead, but she has gone to bed quite calmly. The animals too go on as usual, a disturbed blackbird squawks in the moonlight, the cats frown at one another because each is sitting upon the other's kitchen chair. The truth is there are two worlds – the old one and this loathsome new one, and the old world has been overlain – not killed. (QUB MS44/1/22/197)

The sense of something valuable enduring is captured again in an unpublished letter dated to 4<sup>th</sup> September 1942 in which Forster writes: 'I see no end to this war, and if there is peace it will not resemble any previous peace. Yet I believe in the constancy and endurance of the human spirit, and in its power to love when it is given the chance to love' (QUB MS44/1/22/207).

Nevertheless, in spite of his underlying optimism regarding the human spirit and the importance of beauty, Forster maintains a tone of ambivalence regarding the context of the war. He states in a letter dated 31<sup>st</sup> January 1942, again unpublished:

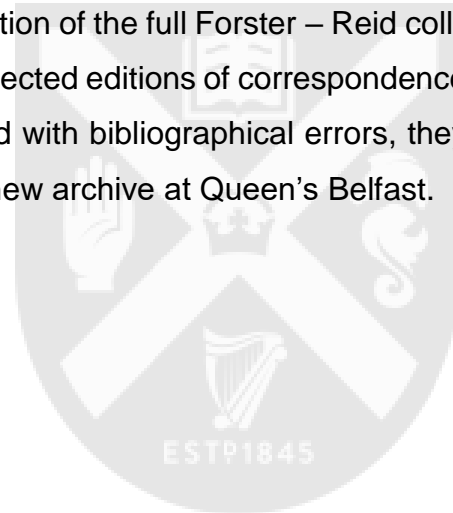
I am reading a great deal, partly as an escape from my thoughts, partly in order to know a little more about human endeavour and achievement while I still have the eyesight and the time. Our disastrous age will accomplish nothing, but that does not mean that all has been or will be vain. (QUB MS44/1/22/206)

Both this revealing letter and, more generally, the entire collection of correspondence from Forster to Reid during the period that spans the First and Second World Wars demonstrate how profoundly the author was affected by the increasing threat of aggressive political regimes and the consequential violence that ensued from such ideological conflict. Forster's constant awareness, or 'senseless brooding' (QUB MS44/1/22/49), about the war influenced how he perceived human happiness as painfully fragile and yet connected to an enduring core of beauty and spirit. The tension

between such co-existing anxiety and optimism permeates his entire oeuvre, influencing his depiction of characters and the barriers that necessarily exist between them or the overwhelming beauty and mystery of the Eastern landscape in *A Passage to India*, to name but a few. These letters, through the insight they provide into the author's reactions to world affairs and how they influenced his perception and depiction of more domestic concerns, represent a necessary component of literary research in the critical analysis of Forster's fiction and non-fiction.

### Conclusion:

The 217 letters from Forster to Reid, the vast majority of which remain unpublished and inefficiently catalogued, are significant not only in capturing the ambivalent state of mind of a key twentieth-century novelist but also in demonstrating the effect of various political crises on domestic, cultural and civic practices in Britain and Ireland during the period 1912 to 1946. For the first time, this sizeable archive of revealing correspondence is available at Queen's University Belfast for consultation by an international community of Forster experts, scholars and students. However, as this article has demonstrated, careful consideration of the full Forster – Reid collection calls for a re-examination of published research tools and selected editions of correspondence. Not only are such existing research devices out-dated and riddled with bibliographical errors, they fail to capture the extent and diversity of collections such as the new archive at Queen's Belfast.



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