

SOME FUSIONS AND DIFFUSIONS OF HORIZON IN A GADAMERIAN READING OF *A PASSAGE TO INDIA*

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Abstract

Since the early-nineteenth century several authors have explored the crises of imagination thought to be located within the tension between the classical, the romantic, the modern and the postmodern imaginaries.

This is the great enterprise of what Habermas has called 'postmetaphysical thinking', that has dominated the western eye for nearly two hundred years, with its ongoing interrogation of the Enlightenment and classical metaphysics. Postmetaphysical thinking is the guiding principle that informs the aesthetic ideology of the modernist novel. That genre explores a psychology of consciousness that has taken a linguistic turn, and in so doing the genre seeks to deconstruct the mythologically and metaphorically constructed 'realities' it believes to dominate the human imagination.

This genre shares much with theories of being articulated by the descendants of Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger and now Derrida. It is possible that Gadamerian hermeneutics, with its matrix of language-as-horizon, becomes a key to understanding those novels concerned to explore the way different hermeneutical modes interact. This proposition is neither radical or startling if we consider that the discourses of literature, philosophy and theology have always been related, and equally that both Gadamer and Forster think and write within the postmetaphysical ferment of their age.

I

THERE IS less critical attention currently being lavished upon E.M. Forster, and *A Passage to India* as a novel of ideas, than is presently being lavished (or rather projected) upon the works of authors such as George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Joseph Conrad and D. H. Lawrence, who are all now being re-interpreted through the grids of difference, dialogic polyphony, aporia and other deconstructive and poststructural enthusiasms. This is odd given that such theoretical enthusiasms—however lightly portrayed—are present in *A Passage to India* as part of Forster's literary purpose and design. Perhaps this critical lack is due to prejudices against the Bloomsbury aesthetic, prejudices

that fail to grasp that the ideology behind the Bloomsbury aesthetic is consonant with those movements in criticism and interpretation that want to appear more self-consciously serious.

The relative neglect of Forster is made up by the postcolonialists and the cultural critics, who—with prejudices of their own—accuse the author of inscribing imperialism, describing the Indian as 'other' and otherwise trying Forster for the eternal crime of being British. Edward Said is definite about this as he pronounces his sentence upon *A Passage to India* as 'evasive' and 'patronising':

Forster's India is so affectionately personal and so remorselessly metaphysical that his view of Indians as a nation contending for sovereignty with Britain is not politically very serious, or even respectful.¹

In Said's interpretive matrix 'metaphysics' is a dirty word that describes and inscribes a discredited western world view, and so the dead white author cannot win. Within postcolonialism (as an essentially metawestern discourse) Forster, and his novel, can only be misrepresented. Perhaps it is ironic that more sympathetic and insightful readings have come from contemporary India, and here I am thinking of the studies of Das (1977) and Ganguly (1990). Such a variety of global thought creates an interpretive tension and makes the reader wonder just who the postcolonialists are speaking for, apart from themselves as metawestern critics.

Forster tells us that his intention in writing the novel 'was not political, was not even sociological'.² He certainly never intended to describe and inscribe orientalism or describe Indians as 'other', even if some of his characters do. Here the author is much more subtle than Said gives him credit for. While it may appear on the surface that the novel is all about the political, social and cultural relationship between coloniser and colonised, Forster had something much more complex in mind, something both aesthetic and ideological, when he wrote it.

The author believed in art, even in art for art's sake, but his sense of art cannot be said to be divorced from ideology. He intended to create a work of symbolic art as a vehicle for conveying ideas that are essentially 'psychological' as that word came to be understood, through the grids of romanticism and modernism, by the early-twentieth century. This aesthetic ideology would not have understood itself as 'metaphysical', at least in the literary sense that the 'metaphysical' poets were metaphysical, or in the generically abusive or dismissive sense that Said uses the term. In fact, the moderns were against the 'metaphysical' precisely because of their sense of the 'psychological', and this gave them an aesthetic ideology with an identifiable pedigree in what Habermas calls postmetaphysical thinking. In this sense, whether or

not we want to place Forster in a genre and call him a Bloomsbury, or simply a modern, is irrelevant: his work was a development, an extension, of the spirit of his age.

This aesthetic ideology is postmetaphysical, and it continues the enterprise begun by the early modernists. It places character above plot and focuses upon the consciousness of a character, the psychology of a character, by exploring how a character understands self and world through the filter of imagination. As Peter Burra suggests:

'A proper mixture of characters', [Forster] tells us, is one of the most important ingredients of the novel. As a vehicle for conveying ideas everything depends upon that. It is the nature of the mixture that distinguishes Mr Forster's work; which is built invariably around the—generally violent—clash of opposites.³

This aesthetic ideology is not to be dismissed as 'metaphysics' in a narrow sense that does nothing more than describe and inscribe a 'classical' metaphysical paradigm. It is more profitably understood, if not as 'psychology', then perhaps as 'hermeneutics'. Forster's epigraph to *Howard's End*, 'only connect' is the informing principle in *A Passage to India*, and the novel, like all of Forster's novels, is concerned with the whys and hows of this inability of human beings to connect.

With an agnostic sense that is appropriate to postmetaphysical hermeneutics, questions of metaphysical truths are transformed and become questions about human psychology and human perception. These are not anti-theological interrogations, they are interrogations that conduct theology from the perspective of a different imaginative paradigm. As I read the novel, for Forster questions of transcendental signification are put to one side as the author explores the historical and cultural nature of his characters' horizons—their prejudices—and how these horizons interact by either clashing, or by attempting to fuse. So while 'hermeneutics' is another word that is probably tainted within the postcolonial vocabulary, critics such as Edward Said must allow that, even in a postcolonial world, different people perceive things differently. These differences are transmitted through history, by culture, and they are thought to be paradigmatic. Such a proposition is very simple and yet very complex at the same time, and Forster explores the proposition thoroughly, with a deceptively light touch that masks his seriousness as an author.

II

One of the more interesting and illuminating things about *A Passage to India* is just how closely it reflects the hermeneutical theory of Hans-Georg Gadamer. The novel can easily and profitably be read as a fictional account

of the scope, as well as the limit, of Gadamer's thought. It is doubtful that this was intentional, as Gadamer was only twenty-five when the novel was written, and Forster was probably not a disciple of hermeneutical theory.

However, intentions might be less important than influences, and both Forster and Gadamer were influenced by the spirit of their age. That spirit informs the humanities and the arts, and it continues the enterprise of interrogating the Enlightenment through philosophy, theology, literature, music and art. In creating fiction within this spirit, Forster wanted to convey intellectual ideas in aesthetic terms because, like Patrick White after him, he envied the artist and musician their ability to create fresh forms out of colour and sound. According to this modern aesthetic the language of myth and metaphor is a necessary, but an inadequate, medium in which to question the reality of what it expresses and mediates, what it creates and destroys as a mixture of revealing and concealing.

It is in this realm of language-as-horizon that Gadamer questions the Enlightenment's discrediting of prejudice, by developing a theory of interpretation in which prejudice is, in fact, a necessary and real basis on which human understanding is predicated and conducted. For him the Enlightenment 'desires to understand tradition correctly' which means 'reasonably and without prejudice' and the Enlightenment does this by subjecting tradition to the 'judgment seat of reason'.⁴ According to the Enlightenment there is no authority higher than reason, however, Gadamer acknowledges that written and oral traditions have an authority that cannot be verified by reason. Equally he suggests that not all prejudices are false simply because they are prejudices. Some prejudices are true.⁵

In fact, Gadamer suggests that movements which critique the Enlightenment actually develop and extend it. Movements that appear to interrogate the classical presumptions of the Age of Reason appear at the same time to accept the logic of the Age of Reason. This is especially true of romanticism, which describes 'the conquest of mythos by logos', and desires the 'restoration' of what logos is supposed to have obliterated. Gadamer sees this reversal as perpetuating rather than overcoming 'the abstract contrast between myth and reason'.⁶ The prejudice that imagines a pre-Enlightenment mythological wholeness—a prejudice at the very centre of a lot of postmetaphysical thinking—is just as dogmatic and abstract as the prejudice that imagines reason as the highest authority.⁷

However, in spite of this, Gadamer believes that the interrogation of prejudices is not a bad thing, because ultimately 'the romantic critique of the Enlightenment ends itself in enlightenment':⁸

... in that it evolves as a historical science and draws everything into the orbit of historicism. The basic discrediting of all prejudices, which unites the experiential

emphasis of the new natural sciences with the Enlightenment, becomes, in the historical Enlightenment, universal and radical.⁹

This is the starting point of an historical hermeneutics:

The overcoming of all prejudices, this global demand of enlightenment, will prove itself to be a prejudice, the removal of which opens the way to an appropriate understanding of our finitude, which dominates not only our humanity, but also our historical consciousness.¹⁰

For Gadamer, 'the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgements, constitute the historical reality of his being'.¹¹ I believe that questioning these imaginative 'realities' is what Forster's novels are all about.

Where his teacher Martin Heidegger uses the term *ontological* to designate the movement beyond 'closed ontic modes of seeing and acting' Gadamer uses the term *historical*.¹² This places being within history, not outside it, and makes Gadamer's hermeneutical inquiries postmetaphysical rather than metaphysical. Such a mode of discourse is very similar to the modernist habit of looking 'inwards' for meaning and value, within time and space, instead of 'outwards', beyond time and space. I think Forster attempts something similar in *A Passage to India*, where—apart from criticising the effect of classical metaphysics upon the western eye—he is not primarily concerned with making judgements for, or against, particular mythological, metaphorical or metaphysical systems. He is merely examining how the horizon of different characters, religions, and cultures are affected by the conditioning of their particular historical consciousness. This task is a sufficient and noble end in itself, and in achieving it the author fulfils the task of the intellectual and remains faithful to the aesthetic ideology of his literary tradition.

Gadamer believes that there is no human understanding without pre-understanding, no judgement without prejudgement (*die Vorentscheidung*) or prejudice (*das Vorurteil*). But the term 'prejudice', like the term 'propaganda', has negative connotations that Gadamer wants to overcome. Here 'prejudice' means simply that 'the inquirer is shaped by historical realities' and so 'hermeneutical understanding must begin with standpoints that are not fully conscious or chosen'.¹³ And as we have already noticed, some prejudices are true, others false, and so for Gadamer it is the 'undeniable task of critical reason' to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate preunderstandings or prejudgements. Understanding, and judgement, therefore become a process of dialogue and *legitimation*.¹⁴ The human subject dialogues with his or her horizon, in the hopes of opening it out, of distinguishing between true and false prejudgments. The fruits of this dialogue, if it occurs, will be the 'fusion of horizons' (*horizontverschmelzung*) which involves the horizon of the

individual opening out to his tradition, and to the horizon of other individuals and other historical traditions.¹⁵

This enterprise belongs to both romanticism and modernity as movements which are at once aesthetic and ideological, literary and philosophical. That forges a crucial link between authors such as Forster and thinkers such as Gadamer, even though for generations critics isolated the Bloomsbury Group in a distinctive genre apart from the novel of ideas. However, the artistic and intellectual worlds in which Forster and Gadamer both moved, and in which pretty well the entire nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries have moved, are very similar. Those worlds give a breadth and a coherence to the label 'postmetaphysical thinking'. Forster created within the ambience of his milieu, no more, no less.

III

A Passage to India is not primarily about the clash of east and west. It is primarily about the clashes of several more complex horizons.

These clashes cannot be understood as simply the west encountering the east, for if we read the novel closely we can see that Forster is just as critical of Islamic imperialism as he is of British imperialism. Both imperialisms are frail and fatal, just as they are cosmological and paradigmatic. Their logic is deduced from metaphysical systems that seek to impose an order upon chaos, reason upon unreason, meaning upon nonmeaning, understood as the triumph of light over darkness. However, Forster reminds us that the darkness is an aspect of the divine. His postmetaphysical sympathies are with the Hindus who can accept this truth, and so the by-now familiar interrogation of classical metaphysics can be seen to be the guiding principle of the novel.

Within anglo-India, clashes occur when the horizons of the classical, the romantic and the modern interact. In the novel not all the British are the same, which becomes obvious if the reader distinguishes between the civil servants of the British raj, and those characters who are not bound by that service: Cyril Fielding, Adela Quested, Mrs Moore, and—not insignificantly—Mrs Moore's other children, Ralph and Stella. The civil servants of Chandrapore, at the time of the novel—are seen as less liberal than the Viceroy who reigns over them—and they uphold the classical world view that underpins the Enlightenment. Adela and Fielding uphold the romantic and modern interrogations of that classical world view, and so they can gaze upon India with the prejudices of the broad-minded secular western liberal. Mrs Moore serves a trope for something more ancient than the classical, the romantic or the modern, a world-view that appears to be ageing and frail, but has given birth, not only to Ronnie the enlightened civil servant who represents Anglo-India, but also to Ralph and Stella, who represent an authentic Christian spirit in the twentieth century.

Within India itself, clashes of horizon occur when monotheists and polytheists interact. Understanding the novel hinges upon understanding the distinctions, not only between west and east, but between the Moslem and Hindu world-views. Much time and space in the novel is given to Aziz and to Islam, because according to the author's postmetaphysical logic they represent, as Christians do, the horizon of the revealed-in-language. Dialogue, however profitless, can occur between the Christian west and Moslem east simply because there is a language in which to conduct it. Conversely the absent-presence of Godbole and Hinduism in much of the novel is arguably explained by the inchoate nature of the pantheistic truth they both mediate. Forster's sympathies are with the Hindu, and it is within the Hindu horizon that the key to *horizontverschmelzung* is found: or at least as much fusion of horizons as is humanly possible. It is a fusion based upon recognition-in-silence.

Between the great world religions, clashes of horizon occur when Christians, Moslems and Hindus interact. But here I think it is necessary to make the same critical distinction that Forster made as author, for the religion of the Anglo-Indian civil service is represented in the novel more as emperor-worship, a thanksgiving for the Pax Britannica (as an imitation of the Pax Romana), than an authentic scriptural Christianity. Forster's postmetaphysical thinking does not make him anti-Christian or anti-theological, rather it makes him aware of a distinction between Christianity and classical metaphysics, and it gives him an acute sense of religious hypocrisy and human frailty. Mrs Moore, who apart from Ralph and Stella, is one of the novel's few 'authentic' Christian, eschews the religion of Anglo-India and recognises an affinity with Aziz as a fellow monotheist. But Aziz is only part of a larger reality of India that includes the Brahman Godbole, and the echo in the Marabar caves.

This creates the dynamic at the centre of the novel. Aziz takes Mrs Moore and Adela to the Marabar caves, professing to understand the caves, their meaning and their reality. In fact Aziz does not understand the caves and he cannot because, according to the logic of the novel, this privilege is reserved for Hindus. At the caves Mrs Moore is given a 'further revelation' in the 'oboum', and what the 'oboum' has to teach monotheists about the nature and structure of reality, the unconscious, and the integrity of evil, chaos and filth as aspects of humanity and of divinity. This revelation is not given to Aziz, as a fellow monotheist of Mrs Moore's. But then again, as a Moslem, he is not as confronted by the caves as Mrs Moore and Adela are when subject to the same 'oboum'. That is what distinguishes Aziz, and Islam, from both Godbole's Hinduism and Mrs Moore's Christianity. The same revelation of the 'oboum' is offered to Adela Quested at the caves, but she does not immediately accept its truth. She can only assimilate this truth gradually, as she is forced to make the painful journey out of the narrow romantic and modern solipsism of her secular liberal broad-mindedness.

So Forster does not focus exclusively upon the petty prejudices of Anglo-India, even if they do appear to dominate the novel. He is primarily concerned to describe and represent the horizons of other characters—Aziz, Godbole, Fielding, Adela Quested, Mrs Moore, and significantly, Ralph and Stella Moore. A close reading of these horizons, and an awareness of how they interact, is crucial to understanding *A Passage to India*.

IV

The author has given Dr Aziz the horizon of an orthodox Moslem and a Persian poet.¹⁶ The former is evident early in the novel, as Aziz sits in a mosque just before meeting Mrs Moore for the first time:

Here was Islam, his own country, more than a Faith, more than a battle-cry, more, much more ... Islam, an attitude towards life both exquisite and durable, where his body and his thoughts found their home (41).

Islam forms the world view, or the prejudice, of this Moslem protagonist. According to Ganguly, the reader can see through the 'prismatic transparency' of Aziz to the traditions of Islamic religion and Persian poetry in India. The author chose to portray this prism carefully, as it reflects one of the archetypal horizons in his novel.

According to the author's postmetaphysical logic, Islam—like Christianity—gives its adherents a transcendental, or metaphysical, horizon that focuses upon the ideal, perhaps at the expense of the 'real', whatever that is. Within the novel Aziz is both deep and shallow, perceptive and imperceptive, broad-minded and narrow-minded, in-touch and out-of-touch at the same time.

These are not only characteristics of all human beings. In the novel they are emblematic of what Forster is trying to show of the character of Islam through Aziz. Whether he was successful is open to debate. Some critics, including Indians, find Aziz a very real, authentic and sympathetic Indian character. Other critics, including Indians, find the character drawn to describe and inscribe an unreal, inauthentic and unsympathetic oriental stereotype. A close reading of the novel allows us to bypass these subjectivities and acknowledge that in the world of the book all characters are artefacts of words, not real people. What is certain is that Forster wanted Aziz to be both a likeable and charming human being,¹⁷ as well as a trope in a discourse about the clash of quite different paradigmatic horizons.

Ganguly argues that Aziz's 'loyalty to Islam',¹⁸ is the guiding principle to understanding his character. This loyalty is focused, not upon the reality of the polyphony and difference of India, but upon a poetic 'reverie to the

days of Aurangzeb when the Mughal Empire was at its height'.¹⁹ The important point here is that while the reality of contemporary India resists totalising discourses, Aziz's own horizon is dominated by a totalising discourse: the romantic, poetic, ideological and theological solipsism that imagines a national unity under Islam. His horizon traces the problems of India to the collapse of a totalising Mughal hegemony.

Ganguly suggests that Forster was very careful in his delineation of Aziz as a character in the fabric of the novel:

Aziz has thus fully evoked the legacy of Islam in India after the decline of the Mughal Empire. History bequeaths to the new generation of Indian Muslims a choice between Akbar's eclecticism and Aurangzeb's separatist orthodoxy. Adela's admiration for Akbar, because his new religion embraces the whole of India, seems to win the author's sympathy but Aziz is not in favour of it. He favours Aurangzeb more: his dictum is 'You keep your religion, I mine. That is the best. Nothing embraces the whole of India ...' Adela's answer to Aziz's assertion is significant: like Forster himself she is concerned to break down the barriers which come in the way of unity of mankind in India: 'Oh, do you feel that, Dr Aziz' she says thoughtfully. 'I hope you're not right. There will have to be something universal in this country—I don't say religion, for I'm not religious, but something, or how else are barriers to be broken down?'²⁰

Here Adela is being broad-minded in a liberal, humanist, romantic and enlightened way that is perhaps just as totalising as the narrow-mindedness it wants to overcome. The clash between Aziz and Adela is the clash of totalising discourses, two forms of narrow-mindedness that have common roots in different forms of metaphysics.

For Aziz, barriers to unity are very important, they sustain his understanding of self and world. They are prejudices that for him are true, and they protect him from the question in his heart:

... who shall own India if the British quit? The Hindu natives or the minority Muslim community? This essential political question in the Indian sub-continent perturbs Aziz's mind throughout the novel, but in his deeper self he is also concerned with the quest for a spiritual home, which is resolved partly by his flight from English society to the Hindu state of Mau, and partly by his continued allegiance to Sufi poetry and Islamic religion.²¹

In Mau Aziz finds such a home, where he continues to coexist with, but never comprehends, the horizon of Godbole. But because it is actually the Hindu horizon that encompasses Aziz, Forster does baptise him into that horizon, along with Fielding and the children of the beloved Mrs Moore. Aziz is baptised into the 'oboum' of Hinduism, into the:

... ragged edges of religion ... unsatisfactory and undramatic tangles ... 'God is Love' ... no man could say where was the emotional centre of it, any more than he could locate the heart of a cloud (310).

However, this baptism, so indelibly a part of the reality of Hindu India, will never be confirmed in Aziz's mind or heart.

Aziz will remain an exclusive and orthodox Moslem to the end. While he utters the final challenge to Fielding at the end of the novel, that his family will drive out every Englishman from India, into the sea, and then 'you and I shall be friends' (316), he is offering no hope of Moslem-Hindu detente. He is not, in any meaningful sense, embracing the social or political or religious necessity of contemporary India, rather he is merely romanticising, merely invoking the lost glory of an Islamic empire that can never, any more than the British raj, embrace the reality of India.

V

Harold Bloom once observed that 'western conceptualisation is Greek, and yet western religion, however conceptualised, is not'.²² If this is true (and I think it is) then, notwithstanding the language of orthodox theology and doctrine, a distinction must be made between classical metaphysics—as the subject of an ongoing postmetaphysical interrogation—and the lived experience of an authentic Christian person. Critics have invariably overlooked the textual evidence which demonstrates that in *A Passage to India* Forster was aware, as a modern, of the distinction between the religion of Mrs Moore (and her younger children Ralph and Stella), and the religion of the British raj.

Mrs Moore represents the spirit of an authentic Christianity rooted in the east. That is why there is a mutual recognition and friendship between Aziz and Mrs Moore. They are fellow monotheists and, in a sense, they are both orientals in spite of what Edward Said wants to believe. Aziz declares this to be so (45) and he upholds the sacredness of Mrs Moore's eastern horizon throughout the novel, even during his suffering at the hands of the civil servants and their classical metaphysics. His horizon fuses with hers, as much as the monotheistic horizons can fuse, and this process of legitimisation and fusion is advanced when he recognises the eastern spirit of Mrs Moore in her younger son, Ralph the divine fool (306). However, for Forster, the monotheistic horizons form a solipsism that cannot embrace the whole reality of India.

As an 'authentic' Christian Mrs Moore accepts that Indian wasps are not English wasps. When she hangs up her cloak, she discovers a wasp: 'Perhaps he mistook the peg for a branch—no Indian animal has any sense of an interior' (55). She calls the wasp a 'pretty dear' and leaves it alone, because—unlike the civil servants of Chandrapore—her horizon accepts that the

distinction between outside-inside (and also the distinction between exterior-interior, conscious-unconscious and transcendent-immanent) is blurred and indistinct. However there are limits to this acceptance, and so later she admits: 'I like mysteries but I rather dislike muddles' (86) suggesting that the two categories are exclusive within her horizon.

Of course, this is before the confrontation of her 'further revelation' at the caves, where the muddle *is* the mystery. At the beginning of the novel, however sincere and authentic a Christian she is, Mrs Moore upholds a world view that places a high value upon clarity and places limits on inclusiveness. These limits are carefully described in the theology of old Mr Graysford and young Mr Sorley, two 'devoted missionaries who lived out beyond the slaughter-houses, always travelled third on the railways, and never came to the Club'. Here their theology is contrasted with that of the Hindu horizon:

In our Father's house there are many mansions, they taught, and there alone will the incompatible multitudes of mankind be welcomed and soothed. No one shall be turned away by the servants on that veranda, be he black or white, not one shall be kept standing who approaches with a loving heart. And why should the divine hospitality cease here? Consider, with all reverence, the monkeys. May there not be a mansion for the monkeys also? Old Mr Graysford said No, but young Mr Sorley, who was advanced, said Yes; he saw no reason why monkeys should not have their collateral share of bliss, and he had sympathetic discussions about them with his Hindu friends. And the jackals? Jackals were indeed less to Mr Sorley's mind, but he admitted that the mercy of God, being infinite, may well embrace all mammals. And the wasps? He became uneasy during the descent to wasps, and was apt to change the conversation. And oranges, cactuses, crystals and mud? And the bacteria inside Mr Sorley? No, no, this is going too far. We must exclude someone from our gathering, or we shall be left with nothing (58).

According to Forster, even liberal Christianity cannot imagine that the muddle of nothing, negation, no-thing-ness, are aspects of the mystery of God or Brahman. That is why Mrs Moore's acceptance of the wasp on the peg still does not prepare her for a violent clash of horizons at the Marabar Caves. She remains essentially dualistic (but only in the same sense that the Moslem Aziz remains dualistic) and, also like Aziz, she worships a creator God that has particular and exclusive attributes, a God who is a mystery but not a muddle.

When describing Mrs Moore's cosmic vision at the Marabar Caves Ganguly notices that, perhaps as a result of her experience of India so far, on the journey to the caves she 'is gradually breaking worldly attachment, yet is not altogether free'.²³ At the caves she discovers an ultimate freedom, a negation,

an *horizontverschmelzung* with Hinduism that gradually unfolds in three stages: experience of the echo; a revelation given by the echo; and the aftermath of that revelation.

In Forster's schema Aziz is impervious to the significance of the echo, a sound that is 'important to the Hindus and ridiculed by the Muslims',²⁴ while Mrs Moore is sensitive to, and challenged by, the same echo that ends in the syllable 'OUM or AUM or OM', a mantra of negation found only in the Vedic literature.²⁵ As Ganguly explains:

AUM is all this—what was, what is, and what will be. It is also what is beyond the three divisions of time, that is the unmanifest ground of the manifest universe. All this is *Brahman*, of which Aum is the sound symbol. The self is *BRAHMAN*.²⁶

Clearly the novel can never simply be about the west clashing with the east as long as the significance of the echo is understood. The Christian Mrs Moore is negatively transformed by the sound-symbol of the Brahman, while the Moslem Dr Aziz is not affected by it at all.

The echo, Forster says, 'is entirely devoid of distinction' (158–9) as the sound-symbol of a God without attributes, and that God is the source of both the sublime and the ridiculous.²⁷ This revelation of meaning and non-meaning resonates in Mrs Moore's mind and causes her to murmur 'Pathos, piety, courage—they exist, but are identical, and so is filth. Everything exists and nothing has value' (160). As Forster goes on to explain:

Devils are of the North, and poems can be written about them, but no one could romanticize the Marabar, because it robbed infinity and eternity of their vastness, the only quality that accommodates them to mankind ... Then she was terrified over an area larger than usual; the universe, never comprehensible to her intellect, offered no repose to her soul, the mood of the last two months took definite form at last, and she realised that she didn't want to write to her children, didn't want to communicate with anyone, not even with God. She sat motionless with horror ... For a time she thought, 'I am going to be ill,' to comfort herself, then she surrendered to the vision (161).

At this point her horizon fuses with the *BRAHMAN* and she loses all interest in worldly affairs, her 'state of mind clearly leads to nothingness'.²⁸ But unlike Godbole her *horizontverschmelzung* is momentary because 'she has not the yogic power to attain the reality beneath the appearance'.²⁹

Soon she will leave India, to die on the voyage home, and as she sets sail thousands of coconut palms wave her farewell and tell her: 'So you thought an echo was India; you took the Marabar Caves as final?' (214). For Forster, the message of the echo is an incomplete one, for while it suggests there is no personal God to communicate with, it does affirm that the *BRAHMAN*

can be communicated with, just as Godbole communicates with Krishna in the last section of the novel, through worship and through his whole outlook on life. That is why Caves are followed by Temple, because it is in the temple that the reader finds the meaning of the caves.

In the novel the caves form a hiatus between Moslem and Hindu, or between Mosque and Temple. For the Moslem, the echo in the caves is meaningless, but the negation of the caves and their echo does not mean that all is 'a vision of unmeaningness and terror', it can also mean there is a simple message of joy in all life.³⁰ This negative truth is not grasped by the Christian Mrs Moore, but then neither is it grasped by the Moslem Aziz. That is one of Forster's major points: while horizons of the two monotheist archetypes of the novel are both described and represented by the author and found wanting, and while the author is more sympathetic with the pantheistic Hindu horizon, the novel does not naively attack or dismiss 'poor little talkative Christianity' (161), and neither does it naively dismiss the logocentric and metaphysical Islam. Forster is not nearly as shallow as recent postcolonial and cultural critics want him to appear.

VI

Professor Godbole, is a Deccani Brahman, 'a priest or a teacher in the Hindu social order [who] represents the intellect or the head of the society'.³¹ In the scheme of the novel he represents an archetypal Hindu horizon. He remains an enigmatic character to those other characters, eastern and western alike who—being dominated by the horizon of language, reason and enlightenment—cannot share, or find meaning in, the muddle of the Hindu enigma.

When Godbole enters the novel 'his whole appearance suggested harmony—as if he had reconciled the products of East and West, mental as well as physical, and could never be discomposed' (89). Adela and Mrs Moore 'hoped that he would supplement Dr Aziz by saying something about religion. But he only ate—ate and ate, smiling, never letting his eyes catch sight of his hand' (89). His only reply to their wish for clarity is to sing a song, or *raja*, described as a maze of noises, 'none harsh or unpleasant' but equally 'none intelligible' (95). This *raja* at times contained 'the illusion of a Western melody' but its message negates the illusions of western metaphysics.

Godbole and Fielding were originally invited on Aziz's excursion to the caves, but they missed the train because of Godbole's *pujah*: 'he had miscalculated the length of a prayer' (144). This highlights what the moderns understand as the paradigmatic differences between the linear and timebound monotheists and the circular and timeless pantheists. If Godbole had managed to catch the train, the drama at the caves would certainly have had a different, and perhaps less dramatic outcome. However, the author contrived that the Hindu teacher and leader would be absent, so that the imagined compatibility

of the Christian and Moslem horizons could be put to the test: as Mrs Moore remarks to Aziz with naive candour: 'We shall be all Moslems together now, as you promised' (144).

The consequences of Godbole's absence are the different responses between Moslem, Christian and enlightened secular humanist to what happens, or does not happen, in the Marabar Caves, whether that be the 'oboum' that does occur, or the assault of Adela that probably does not. Ultimately the only thing that does happen at the cave is that 'reality' asserts itself. This is acknowledged to be 'tragic' by those whose horizons construct and contain 'reality' within a symbolics of tragedy, at least until the tragedy is exposed as an illusion. The construct of evil is also invoked, that it might be measured against a monotheistic horizon that imagines evil as the antithesis of God and the good, and against a pantheistic horizon that sees both evil and good as a synthesis of *BRAHMAN*.

When Fielding wishes to engage an apparently disinterested Godbole in the seriousness of the charges facing Aziz; when he wants to turn those charges into a battle of right versus wrong, good versus evil; when he wants it to be acknowledged that Adela has suffered some kind of 'appalling experience'; when he wants to question (what he believes to be) the Hindu belief that 'good and evil are the same', Godbole makes one of the few incisive and oracular statements in the novel:

'... nothing can be performed in isolation. All perform a good action, when one is performed, and when an evil action is performed, all perform it. To illustrate my meaning, let me take the case in point as an example. I am informed that an evil action was performed in the Marabar Hills, and that a highly esteemed English lady is now seriously ill in consequence. My answer to that is this: that action was performed by Dr Aziz.' He stopped and sucked in his thin cheeks. 'It was performed by the guide.' He stopped again. 'It was performed by you.' Now he had an air of daring and of coyness. 'It was performed by me.' He looked shyly down the sleeve of his own coat. 'And by my students. It was even performed by the lady herself. When evil occurs, it expresses the whole of the universe. Similarly when good occurs ... And similarly when suffering occurs, and so on and so forth, and everything is anything and nothing something' (186).

Godbole affirms that: 'Good and evil are different, as their names imply. But, in my own humble opinion, they are both of them aspects of my Lord' (186). Having uttered this unappealing truth Godbole will soon 'slip off unmolested to his new job ... he always did possess the knack of slipping off' (198).

The Temple section of the novel is dominated by Godbole's re-enactment of the birth of Krishna, his worship of the God who comes but will not come, who is an absent-presence, and by his humble fusion of horizons, his *horizontverschmelzung* with the deceased Mrs Moore. This fusion seems to occur through Hindu worship, during the birth ceremony, as Godbole remembers a wasp: 'He loved the wasp equally, he impelled it likewise, he was imitating God' (284). This is associated with Mrs Moore's earlier encounter with a wasp on her cloak peg, and her acceptance of its inability to distinguish between inside-outside.

During this main event of the Hindu religious year Godbole is beset with strange thoughts:

He had, with increasing vividness, again seen Mrs Moore, and round her faintly clinging forms of trouble. He was a Brahman, she a Christian, but it made no difference, it made no difference whether she was a trick of his memory or a telepathic appeal. It was his duty, as it was his desire, to place himself in the position of God and to love her, and to place himself in her position and to say to God, 'Come, come, come, come.' This was all he could do. How inadequate! But each according to his own capacities, and he knew that his own were small. 'One old Englishwoman, and one little wasp, little wasp,' he thought, as he stepped out of the temple into the gray of a pouring wet morning, 'It does not seem much, still, it is more than I am myself' (288).

In spite of the missionaries Graysford and Sorley who must, however liberal they might be, exclude wasps from their plan of salvation, it is interesting that what spiritual connection, or *horizontverschmelzung*, is made in the novel between the great religions is made *through* the authentic Christian horizon of Mrs Moore.

Aziz, who spends much time trying to keep the flies out of his home, declares to the end that he does not comprehend Hindus. But he maintains a devotion to the memory of Mrs Moore, and it seems significant, to me at least, that he is given the grace to overcome his resentment and anger towards the British when he sees the spirit of Mrs Moore in her son Ralph, who is also an authentic Christian. Likewise, there is a spiritual union that is ultimately achieved between Godbole and Mrs Moore, or between Hindu and Christian, and yet the novel records no such union between Godbole and Aziz, between Hindu and Moslem.

In an age of dead authors and dead white males, several readers will refuse to see any resemblance of an authorial plan in my reading of the novel, in order to reinforce their belief that no such schema can or ought to exist. And yet my desire is not to offer up the novel as a kind of covert Christian apologetics—that was not the author's intention—but merely to demonstrate the complexity of the novel's, and the author's, postmetaphysical hermen-

eutics. In that schema, which encodes and embodies Forster's imperfect understanding of the reality of India, there is an irony: Hindus and Moslems coexist with but do not comprehend each other, and yet each of these religions is able to recognise, in their different ways, a spirit of divine truth in Christianity. That is why the spirit of Mrs Moore, or Esmis Esmoor, is so important to the action of the novel, and to its resolution.

VII

I have argued that in understanding *A Passage to India* it is helpful to locate a postmetaphysical hermeneutic of the Christian, Moslem and Hindu horizons in the novel, and consider how they interact.

Forster's purpose in describing and representing these horizons, and their intermittent fusings and clashings, is never to champion the claims of one over the other, although he does appear to sympathise more with the pantheistic Hindus. Each horizon has its own flickering of revealing and concealing, its own truths and falsehoods, its own adequacies and inadequacies. Whether the author told the truth or lied in his portrayal of the Moslem and Hindu horizons is a matter of debate and opinion. It is sufficient to say there are enough Indian commentators who have devoted a great deal of scholarship to demonstrating the depth, density and integrity of the novel as a portrait of India under a waning British rule, to vindicate the author.

With regard to the Christian horizon, it must be noted that Forster did not regard himself as a Christian and, like so many of his age, his class, and his aesthetic ideology, he was dominated by the need to criticise, if not orthodox Christianity, then certainly classical metaphysics. For the sake of interpretive truth, we can now make this important distinction, in order to grasp more fully the complexity of what Forster achieved, or wanted to achieve.

I find it interesting that Adela Quested, having realised her mistake in the caves, does retreat from India a wiser person, but she shuts the door against any of the religious truths that permeate the novel. This might be consistent with her status as a secular, liberal, and enlightened trope. However, Cyril Fielding is a similar trope, and perhaps ironically it is through him that the Christian and Hindu *horizontverschmelzung* continue beyond the end of the novel. The theologically-attuned reader knows this will happen because Fielding is dominated by the desire to know if Godbole still says 'Come, come?' Aziz doesn't know, or care, but Fielding is deeply interested:

Fielding sighed, opened his lips, shut them, then said with a little laugh, 'I can't explain, because it isn't in words at all, but why do my wife and her brother like Hinduism, though they take no interest in its forms? They won't talk to me about this. They know I think *a certain side of their lives* is a mistake, and are

shy. That's why I wish you would talk to them, for at all events you're oriental' (313). [italics mine]

Clearly Ralph and Stella are practising, and obviously sincere committed Christians, much to the chagrin of the secular, liberal and enlightened Fielding, who wants to be tolerant like any good narrowly broad-minded westerner.

It does seem odd that Fielding still presumes Aziz will understand, and can explain, Hinduism to his wife and brother-in-law, simply because Aziz is an 'oriental', that western construct Edward Said so carefully alerts us to.³² However, if Fielding is, in spite of his liberal humanism, still a naive orientalist in Said's sense of the word, then Forster certainly is not. A close reading the novel demonstrates this, and it demonstrates also that, while Forster interrogates the solipsism of classical metaphysics, he also leaves open the possibility that, within the 'only connect' of human relationships, within the clash of human horizons, within the great religions of the world, there is always the possibility of *horizontverschmelzung*, however brief, however incomplete.

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