

Howards End by E. M. Forster [B2]

Il rapporto tra tre famiglie di estrazione e valori sociali molto diversi riflette i cambiamenti della società britannica all'inizio del XX secolo. Un dramma dallo stile delicato, costellato di riflessioni esistenziali.

A quintessentially English novel about class and privilege, *Howards End* by E. M. Forster follows the fortunes of three contrasting but interconnected families. The novel is set in the early 20th century, a time of rapid industrialisation, mass urbanisation and the emergence of a capitalist class structure; a time when the old ruling classes were forced to yield power to the burgeoning middle classes.

COUNTRY ESTATE

The novel centres on *Howards End*, the country estate belonging to the wealthy Wilcox family. During their travels, the Wilcoxes meet and befriend sisters Helen and Margaret Schlegel, who are cultured, liberal and bohemian. However, one day, Helen mistakenly takes the umbrella of Leonard Bast, the young man sitting beside her at a concert, and their lives change. Leonard, an insurance clerk of working-class origins, is aware of the cultural distance between them: "Her speeches fluttered away from the young man like birds. If only he could talk like this, he would have caught the world. Oh, to acquire culture! Oh, to pronounce foreign names correctly! Oh, to be well informed, discoursing at ease on every subject that a lady started! [...] His brain might be full of names, he might even have heard of Monet and Debussy; the trouble was that he could not string them together into a sentence, he could not make them "tell", he could not quite forget about his stolen umbrella." "Questi discorsi svolazzavano via dal giovane come uccelli. Se solo avesse saputo parlare in quel modo, avrebbe conquistato il mondo. Oh, farsi una cultura! Oh, pronunciare correttamente i nomi stranieri! Oh, essere un uomo ben informato, che discorre con disinvoltura di qualsiasi argomento abordato da una signora! [...] Il suo cervello poteva essere pieno di nomi, poteva anche sapere chi fossero Monet e Debussy; il guaio era che non

riusciva a metterli insieme in una frase, non riusciva a farli «parlare»... e nemmeno a dimenticare del tutto l'ombrello rubato”.

RISK

Mrs. Wilcox becomes close friends with Margaret, and even **bequeaths** Howards End to her. However, after Mrs. Wilcox's death, her husband, Henry Wilcox, ignores her instructions. Helen, meanwhile, is determined to help Leonard Bast and his wife, and **seeks advice** from Henry. He **warns** her that Leonard's employer is insolvent. Unlike the Wilcoxes and the Schlegels, Leonard cannot afford to take risks, as Margaret explains to her aunt: “‘I hope to risk things all my life.’ ‘Oh Margaret, most dangerous.’ ‘But after all,’ she continued with a smile, ‘there’s never any great risk as long as you have money [...] You and I and the Wilcoxes stand upon money as upon islands. It is so firm beneath our feet that we forget its very existence.’” “«Spero di correre rischi per tutta la vita.» «Oh, Margaret, è molto pericoloso.» «Dopo tutto» continuò la nipote con un sorriso, «il rischio non è mai mai grosso finché si ha denaro[...] Tu e io e i Wilcox poggiamo sul denaro come su un’isola. È così stabile sotto i nostri piedi che dimentichiamo persino che esista»”.

PRAGMATIC

While Helen is idealistic, Margaret is pragmatic, although it still surprises everyone when she agrees to marry Henry. Helen, meanwhile, continues to support the Basts. Leonard diligently reads books and seeks to educate himself in art and culture. Following Henry's advice, he leaves a secure job, and finds himself unemployed. Henry refuses to help. Helen, meeting Leonard, is **wracked by guilt**. “‘Don’t you worry’, he pleaded. ‘I can’t bear that. We shall be all right if I get work. If I could only get work—something regular to do. Then it wouldn’t be so bad again. I don’t trouble after books as I used. I can imagine that with regular work we should settle down again. It stops one thinking. ‘Settle down to what?’ ‘Oh, just settle down.’” “«Non si preoccupi» egli supplicò. «Non posso sopportarlo. Noi staremo bene, se trovo lavoro. Solo un lavoro... qualcosa di regolare da fare. Allora la

situazione non sarebbe più così brutta. Non mi preoccupo dei libri come facevo prima. Immagino che con un lavoro regolare dovremmo di nuovo sistemarci. Questo fa smettere di pensare.» «Sistemarsi in che cosa?» «Oh, soltanto sistemarsi.».

TEMPTATION

Helen becomes pregnant, but refuses to name the father of her child. As Margaret's sister, she **brings shame** to the Wilcox family and Henry rejects her as immoral. His son, Charles, believes Leonard to be responsible, and **tricks** him into a meeting at Howards End. A terrible tragedy occurs that divides the Schlegels and Wilcoxes. Can **forgiveness** ever be found?

Margaret's philosophy is central to the resolution of Forster's drama: "Only connect!" That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its highest. Live in fragments no longer." "Null'altro che connettere! Questo era tutto il suo sermone. Null'altro che connettere la prosa con la passione, allora entrambe ne saranno esaltate e l'amore umano apparirà al suo culmine. Non vivere più in frammenti".

CONNECTION

Howards End explores the need for human connection and the **fateful** consequences of living in 'fragments', that is, both socially apart, and with the inner and outer life **at odds**. While the Wilcoxes represent the outer nature of business and capitalism, the Schlegels demonstrate inner passion and integrity. Caught in between, the Bastys have little hope without understanding from the others; a connection of head and heart that ultimately **fails** them.

Glossary

- **country estate** = tenuta in campagna
- **seeks advice** = chiedere consiglio
- **forgiveness** = perdono
- **burgeoning** = nascenti
- **at odds** = in disaccordo
- **fails** = fallire
- **ruling classes** = classi dirigenti
- **insurance clerk** = impiegato di un'assicurazione
- **aware** = consapevole
- **tricks** = ingannare
- **to yield** = cedere
- **warns** = avvertire
- **wracked by guilt** = tormentata dalla colpa
- **brings shame** = disonorare
- **fateful** = fatidico
- **bequeaths** = lasciare in eredità