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**MRS WILCOX'S HOLY OF HOLIES, MR WILCOX'S
PROPERTY – TWO KINDS OF SOCIAL SPACE IN
E.M. FORSTER'S *HOWARDS END***

In his book *The Production of Space* Henri Lefebvre differentiates between two basic types of social space: absolute space, which could be described as sacred and symbolic, and abstract space – devoid of any spirituality space of the modern capitalist state. Both are kinds of social space, which, according to Lefebvre, is produced by spatial practice, that is activities of a certain group of people in a certain environment.

Absolute space is the space of pre-modern societies, it is primarily religious (but also political) in character, it has strong bonds with nature and it assumes meanings addressed not to the intellect but to imagination and emotions. Abstract space appeared with the advent of capitalism, it is founded on the power of the state and that of capital¹ with its network of business centres, banks and motorways. It is characterized by the receding of nature and it entails technology, applied sciences and knowledge bound to power (cf. Lefebvre (2000)).

Abstract space is the social space of the modern countries of the West. However, absolute space survived there in certain niches. One of them, according to Lefebvre, could be the space of home² (Lefebvre 2000:121–122). It is the aim of this article to show that Mrs Wilcox's house in E.M. Forster's *Howards End* may be seen as such a niche of sacred and intimate absolute space in the midst of reigning abstract space of the modern capitalist state.

¹ The connection between capitalism and state power is also stressed by David Harvey. In his view, it is impossible to separate capitalism from the exercise of state power as both are engaged in a dialectical interaction: *The rise of capitalism was accompanied, and in some respects preceded, by the creation of, and transformation of, state institutions and functions to meet the specific needs of capitalism* (Harvey 2001:282).

² Lefebvre draws here on the ideas of Gaston Bachelard and Martin Heidegger, who in their works show the spiritual and symbolic importance of home for human existence.

The first description of the house at Howards End appears in the very first page of the novel when Helen Schlegel describes it in a letter to her sister as an old little red-brick house, covered with a vine and *altogether delightful* (Forster 2000:19). In the course of the novel it becomes clear that the house was something more than just *delightful*. The person who had the strongest bond with the house was Ruth Wilcox, whose family had owned the house for generations and who was born in it. Ruth Wilcox had a religious attitude to the house, for her it was clearly something sacred, *the Holy of Holies* (Forster 2000:95). Therefore, in order to explain her relationship to the house one has to understand the idea of sacredness.

According to Mircea Eliade, for a religious man space is not homogenous, there appear in it fragments of different quality. There is the sacred space, strong and important, and there are other spaces, not sacred and therefore devoid of structure and consistency. The religious man feels the opposition between the sacred space, the only real one, and the amorphous rest. This opposition allows him to establish the sacred space as ‘the solid point’ or ‘the centre’ and thus orientate himself in the chaotic homogeneity. In this way he can live a real life (Eliade 1974:50–51). When Ruth learns that the lease of Margaret’s house is drawing to its close and that Margaret will have to leave it, she says that losing Howards End would be worse for her than dying: *‘I would rather die than – oh, poor girls! Can what they call civilization be right, if people mayn’t die in the room where they were born? My dear, I am so sorry –’* (Forster 2000:93). She is so afraid of the world without her home because this would be the world with no ‘solid point’. Deprived of the house she would have nothing to guide her through life.

The question remains: Why was Howards End, a house, so sacred for Ruth? In his *The Poetics of Space* Gaston Bachelard presents the meaning of home for people who are willing to look at the world in an imaginative way. Here Eliade’s sacrum is replaced by a house as a source of the feeling of intimacy. Still, the similarity between Eliade’s sacrum and Bachelard’s house is striking:

In the life of a man the house thrusts aside contingencies, its councils of continuity are unceasing. Without it, man would be a dispersed being. It maintains him through the storms of the heavens and those of life. It is body and soul. It is the human being’s first world (Bachelard 1994:6–7).

The house in which one was born is the primary source of being-well, which is originally associated with being. It is a kind of paradise which gratifies the dweller with all the essential benefits.

To explain the significance of the house of childhood it is better to rely on dream³ than on thought: In order to sense, across the years, our attachment to the house we were born in, dream is more powerful than thought. It is our

³ Bachelard often uses the word *dream* in the sense of “daydream”.

unconscious force that crystallizes our remotest memories (Bachelard 1994:16). Dreaming about childhood home resuscitates also the experience of childhood itself and helps to keep this experience alive, even when the exact memory of it fades: It is on the plane of the daydream and not on that of facts that childhood remains alive and poetically useful within us. Through this permanent childhood, we maintain the poetry of the past (Bachelard 1994:16).

At the end of her conversation with Margaret in her London flat Ruth strikes *a curious note*:

'I – I wonder whether you ever think about yourself.'

'I think of nothing else,' said Margaret, blushing, but letting her hand remain in that of the invalid.

'I wonder. I wondered at Heilderberg.'

'I'm sure!'

'I almost think –'

'Yes?' asked Margaret, for there was a long pause – a pause that was somehow akin to the flicker of the fire, the quiver of the reading-lamp upon their hands, the white blur from the window; a pause of shifting and eternal shadows.

'I almost think you forget you're a girl' (Forster 2000:82–83).

Pressed by Margaret for a clarification of this statement, Ruth said: *'I only meant that I'm fifty-one, and that to me both of you – read it all in some book or other; I cannot put things clearly'*. So Margaret came with her own answer – what Ruth meant was 'inexperience': *'I'm no better than Helen, you mean, and yet I presume to advise her'*. Ruth readily agreed and in return was flooded with Margaret's half-defensive yet buoyant sermon on the meaning of life. Apparently, Ruth appreciated the speech: *'Indeed, you put the difficulties of life splendidly,' said Mrs Wilcox withdrawing her hand into the deeper shadows. 'It is just what I should have liked to say about them myself'* (Forster 2000:83). But did she really mean what she said?

When a few days later she was asked by Margaret to a little party given in her honour, Ruth did not enjoy the conversation: *Clever talk alarmed her, and withered her delicate imaginings; it was the social counterpart of a motorcar, all jerks, and she was a wisp of hay, a flower* (Forster 2000:84). In spite of this after the party she assured Margaret that she really enjoyed it. And before she told Margaret about her forgetting of being a girl there was a pause that was *somehow* akin to images of home intimacy, *a pause of shifting and eternal shadows*. And then, at the same time that she was praising Margaret's *preaching* (Forster 2000:83), she withdrew her hand into – again – *the deeper shadows*. These shadows somehow stand in contrast to Margaret's voluble brightness, like *a wisp of hay* could stand in contrast to a motorcar.

Therefore, it is quite possible that Ruth agreed with what Margaret said because otherwise she would have to question her friend's insight, of which Margaret was undoubtedly proud, and this possibility *alarmed her*. So maybe what Ruth meant was not that both Helen and Margaret were inexperienced and

childish and Margaret tried to act as if she were not, but that they both, in spite of their youth, forgot that they were children, or rather, forgot the children in themselves. To be a child means to think about oneself. But not by analysing one's attitude to the world and people, as Margaret did. Ruth's slow monotonous voice during conversation with Margaret suggested that for her facts of life – *pictures, concerts and people* – were of *small and equal value* (Forster 2000:80-81). Her voice quickened only when she was talking about Howards End, because she was talking then about herself, or rather, about her memories and dreams. She was reliving *the poetry of the past*, the past which sometimes reached beyond her life.

According to Bachelard, one's house may be the source of *daydreams that illuminate the synthesis of immemorial and recollected* (Bachelard 1994:5), that is of imagination and memory. Among the recollected was for Ruth her pony – *dead, ever so long ago* – which once had its paddock at Howards End, and the memory of which gave to her words *an indescribable ring* (Forster 2000:82). But through Howards End Ruth had also contact with the past that she herself could not remember. She cared about her ancestors, who returned her love by bestowing upon her *the instinctive wisdom*. It was this wisdom that forced her to act when Aunt Juley arrived at Howards End to Helen's rescue: *When she saw Charles angry, Paul frightened and Mrs Munt in tears, she heard her ancestors say: 'Separate those human beings who will hurt each other most. The rest can wait'* (Forster 2000:36). And she did as her ancestors bade her to do.

It was this occasion, when Ruth, without being told by anyone, learnt about the secret engagement of Helen and Paul at Howards End, that first intrigued the Schlegel sisters. Eventually, it was Margaret who came to know Ruth better and who grew more and more fascinated with the woman. When a few years after Ruth's death Margaret began to understand her friend, she told her sister: *'I feel that you and I and Henry are only fragments of that woman's mind. She knows everything. She is everything. She is the house, and the tree that leans over it'* (Forster 2000:305). She ascribes to Ruth magical powers of omniscience and omnipresence. But, first of all, she identifies her with the house in Howards End, being aware that this was the source of her powers.

According to Bernd Jager, a house, when it is really inhabited, *becomes a source of vision and light according to which we see:*

To enter and come to inhabit a place fully means to withdraw the limits of our bodily existence to include that place – to come to incorporate it and to live it henceforth as ground of revelation rather than as panorama. An environment seen thus is transformed into a place which opens a perspective to the world (Jager 1989:220).

Thus, in the place of real dwelling the body recedes in such a way that a world can come to appear. A similar attitude to dwelling can be found in Martin Heidegger's 'Building Dwelling Thinking':

To say that mortals are is to say that in dwelling they persist through spaces by virtue of their stay among things and locales. And only because mortals pervade, persist through, spaces by their very essence are they able to go through spaces. But in going through spaces we do not give up our standing in them. Rather, we always go through spaces in such a way that we already sustain them by staying constantly with near and remote locales and things (Heidegger 1994:359).

Crucial here is the identification of being and dwelling. Heidegger comes to this conclusion by analysing the existing and forgotten meanings and forms of the verb *bauen*, “to build”. It turns out that *bauen* originally meant “to dwell” (the Old High German *buan*), but it is also related to the word *bin* in the versions: *ich bin, du bist* and imperative form *bis*. He concludes: *The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans are on the earth, is buan, dwelling. To be a human being means to be on the earth as a mortal. It means to dwell (Heidegger 1994:349).*

However, this proper meaning of *bauen*, that is “to dwell”, falls into oblivion. According to Heidegger, it is not a simple shift of meaning. What happens here is that dwelling is no longer experienced as being. It is no longer thought even as the basic quality of being. This loss appears because *with the essential words of language, what they genuinely say easily falls into oblivion in favour of foreground meanings (Heidegger 1994:350)*. Language communicates to us the essence of things, provided that we respect its own essence. What reigns, though, is clever but uncontrollable talking and writing all over the world, or one could say, using Margaret’s phrase, that the world is dominated by *gibbering monkeys*. According to Heidegger, people behave as if they were the masters of language, whereas in fact language is the master of people. Thus, *language withdraws from man its simple and high speech. But its primal call does not thereby become incapable of speech; it merely falls silent. Man, though, fails to heed this silence (Heidegger 1994:350).*

Gaston Bachelard, for whom intimate dwelling is identical with being-well, *originally associated with being*, claims that when we talk about our childhood home minute descriptions of the *fluent type of literature* fail us. Because the houses to which we return in dreams belong to the *literature of depth* and a mere mention which strikes true will suffice:

All I ought to say about my childhood home is just barely enough to place me, myself, in an oneiric situation, to set me on the threshold of a day-dream in which I shall find repose in the past. Then I may hope that my page will possess a sonority that will ring true – a voice so remote within me, that it will be the voice we all hear when we listen as far back as memory reaches, on the very limits of memory, beyond memory perhaps, in the field of immemorial. All we communicate to others is an orientation towards what is secret without ever being able to tell the secret objectively (Bachelard 1994:13).

During their conversations in London Ruth tried to communicate to Margaret *an orientation towards* her own world, whose centre was Howards End. But Margaret failed to heed the silences and nuances in their conversations.

One day, however, when Ruth and Margaret were shopping together before Christmas, Ruth invited her friend to go with her the same evening to see Howards End: '*Come down with me to Howards End now,*' she said, *more vehemently than ever. 'I want you to see it. You have never seen it. I want to hear what you say about it, for you do put things so wonderfully'* (Forster 2000:93).

The problem here is that with these very words she interrupted unceremoniously another of Margaret's *puttings things wonderfully*, so Margaret's opinion does not seem to be the real motive behind the invitation. In fact, Ruth already knew that she was terminally ill and when she learnt that her friend was to lose her home she realized that Margaret could be the best heir for her Holy of Holies. And it was rather not Margaret's gift of talking that brought her to this conclusion. Ruth, as she herself admitted, was guided in life by instinct and it must have been this instinct which told her that Margaret would understand Howards End better than Henry or Charles. Instinct also told her that only seeing of Howards End would convince Margaret about the exceptionality of the house.

Margaret knew nothing about Ruth's illness and at first took her words at their face value – an invitation of a bookish friend to hear her opinion on a dear house. So, scanning the gloomy air and the tired face of her friend, Margaret rejected the offer. But after parting with Ruth, remembering the passion in her voice when she was inviting her to Howards End, the passion that at first she dismissed as a result of hysterical overtiredness, Margaret realized that it would not be a normal visit to a friend's country house. She was supposed to have a share in her friend's only passion, for Howards End, as she now understood, was Ruth's one and only passion. To reject the offer was to reject an appeal to imagination. She caught up with Ruth at the railway station. However, she was not destined to see Howards End yet. Unexpected meeting with Henry and Evie on the platform brought the trip to a sharp end.

She eventually saw the house a few years later. While she was deaf to the *orientations* towards the house, the sight of the house – and the tree – really enchanted her. She had to see them to realize their exceptionality, for they moved her imagination⁴ and she was to think about them *through many a windy night and London day*. Looking at the tree Margaret wondered about its strange relationship to the house:

It was a comrade, bending over the house, strength and adventure in its roots, but in its utmost fingers tenderness, and the girth, that a dozen men could not have spanned, became in the end evanescent, till pale bud clusters seemed to float in the air. It was a comrade (Forster 2000:206).

⁴ According to Eliade, imagination is not equivalent to arbitrary invention – it must be fed by actual images, which are then continuously recreated, reactualized and repeated. Thus, imagination allows us to see the world in its fullness, as the power and purpose of images is to show all that which escapes conceptualization (Eliade 1974:30).

The tender strength of the tree bending over the house resembles the confidence which a tree exudes when it is entrusted with a nest. According to Gaston Bachelard, when one daydreams about sheltering in a nest one returns to the sources of the ideal, oneiric house: *The nest, quite as much as the oneiric house and the oneiric house quite as much as the nest – if we ourselves are at the origins of our dreams – knows nothing of the hostility of the world* (Bachelard 1994:103). And for Margaret, the union of the house and the tree was the sign *not of eternity, but of hope on this side of the grave* (Forster 2000:206).

In fact, because of the wych-elm tree, Howards End could be regarded as an absolute space in its clearest form.

The cradle of absolute space – its origin, if we are to use that term – is a fragment of agropastoral space, a set of places named and exploited by peasants, or by nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoralists. A moment comes when, through the actions of masters or conquerors, a part of this space is assigned a new role, and henceforward appears as transcendent, as sacred (i.e. inhabited by divine forces), as magical and cosmic (Lefebvre 2000:234).

When Mrs Wilcox once described the tree to Margaret she told her that there were pig's teeth stuck into the trunk of the tree – they had been put there by the country people who believed that empowered in this way the bark of the tree would cure a toothache of anyone who chew it. Then she asked Margaret:

'Do you think that the tree really did cure toothache, if one believed in it?'

'Of course it did. It would cure anything – once.'

'Certainly I remember cases – you see, I lived at Howards End long, long before Mr Wilcox knew it. I was born there.'

The conversation again shifted (Forster 2000:82).

It was probably this profession of faith on Margaret's part that attracted Ruth's closer attention. She never told her husband about the teeth, knowing what his reaction would be, but she saw Margaret as the kindred spirit. Margaret herself, though, began to really appreciate the value and meaning of home only when the lease of the house in which she lived, Wickham Place, was drawing to its close. It was then that everywhere around in the house she began to see things that reminded her about her childhood, things that were her mother's or her father's, things that were now useless to her or to Helen or Tibby but because of their power to evoke images of the past could not be disposed of: *Round every knob and cushion in the house sentiment gathered, a sentiment that was at times personal, but more often a faint piety to the dead, a prolongation of rites that might have ended at the grave* (Forster 2000:154).

However, the power of their belongings was not gone with the disappearance of Wickham Place. But to resonate again with the images of the past they needed a matching place. Miss Avery felt such affinity between the Schlegels' belongings and Howards End when she deliberately unpacked them in the house, where they were supposed to be just stored. And the things helped

to reconcile the two sisters when they met after pregnant Helen was lured to Howards End by Henry and anxious Margaret. When the two sisters were left alone in the house it was the presence of their books and furniture which evoked some shared memories and gave them the knowledge *that they never could be parted because their love was rested in common things* (Forster 2000:291). This knowledge came after their initial attempts at reasoning and arguments failed to dispel hurting distrust. It was because their relationship was based on something else than reason:

Explanations and appeals had failed; they had tried for a common meeting ground, and had only made each other unhappy. And all the time their salvation was lying round them – the past sanctifying present; the present, with wild heart-throb, declaring that there would after all be a future, with laughter and the voices of children (Forster 2000: 292),

Past, present, future – ancestors, siblings, children – all three equally important for human relationships, giving knowledge, love and hope. According to Lefebvre, absolute space preserves and incorporates *bloodlines, family, unmediated relationships* as they are perceived as aspects of nature, the primary source of absolute space (Lefebvre 2000:48).

However, the family unit is also a point of reference of abstract space, but here it is perceived in a different way, namely as the means of reproducing social relations (Lefebvre 2000:52). For the Wilcoxes, who according to Miss Avery *breed like rabbits*, their family was clearly a way of reproducing social relations, of continuing the class of ‘imperialists’ who would govern the world. According to Forster, the Imperial:

[...] hopes to inherit the earth. It breeds as quickly as the yeoman, and as soundly: strong is the temptation to acclaim it as a super-yeoman, who carries his country’s virtue overseas. But the Imperialist is not what he thinks or seems. He is a destroyer. He prepares the way for cosmopolitanism, and though his ambitions may be fulfilled the earth that he inherits will be gray (Forster 2000:315).

The Imperial is contrasted by Forster with the yeoman, whose working hours are ruled *not by a London office but by the movements of the crops and the sun* (Forster 2000:314). The yeoman lives in agreement with nature while the Imperial is the destroyer. He has no bond with the earth, therefore he has no affection for it. Forster’s main accusation here is that the imperialist introduces cosmopolitanism. Thus he is the champion of the civilization of luggage whose epitome was London.

As a great city bustling with life London may be fascinating, but according to Forster it lacks something: *Certainly London fascinates. One visualizes it as a tract of quivering gray, intelligent without purpose, and excitable without love; as a spirit that has altered before it can be chronicled; as a heart that certainly beats, but with no pulsation of humanity* (Forster 2000:116). To the affluent middle-class Schlegel sisters at first London seemed to be in perfect agreement

with the life they lead. They were going to concerts, attending meetings, giving speeches, entertaining friends. Changes in London's architecture appeared to mirror the changes in their social life, new buildings replacing old buildings like new friends replacing old ones.

It was only when the lease of Wickham place was about to expire that Margaret began to see the meaning of these changes in the city. She realized that her very own home, in which she had spent almost thirty years of her life and which had seen so much happiness, could be and would be erased from the surface of the earth only because its owner hoped to make more money from a block of flats that would be built in its place. The fragility and transience of her home made her look at London in a new way. And she did not like what she saw – the architecture of hurry accommodating livelier and livelier way of life. Now she realized that the faster and faster rhythm of London life was dictated by millionaires like the owner of Wickham place, whose only driving force was the desire to multiply their capital.

When some time later, after hearing from Henry that the relatively new Ducie Street was going down, she complained to him, now her fiancé, about this constant flux of London, he saw nothing wrong in this – in spite of the fact that he himself had a house in this street. For him it was just a sign that things were moving and this was good for business (Forster 2000:184). With this opinion Henry embraced the idea of nomadic civilization, which, although it allows people to accumulate wealth, deprives them of the bond with the earth.

People's old affection for roots in the earth and stability seems, in this new-old civilization, to be replaced by their infatuation with the invention that stands for a set of completely contrasting values, namely the car. In *Howards End* it is Wilcoxes who welcome wholeheartedly this new invention. For Forster the car is the incarnation of the devilry of machines. The car throbs and stinks, it is responsible for the streets smelling with petrol and the ubiquity of dust which is raised whenever a car passes. But what is most important, a person travelling in a car loses contact with the earth. The scenery seen from a car resembles more a porridge than trees and mountains. For Margaret travelling by car trees, houses, people, animals, hills merged and heaved into one dirtiness. A person going by car loses the sense of space, which is the basis of all earthly beauty (Forster 2000:204).

According to Lefebvre, a reduced sense of space is the essential experience of driving a car. Lefebvre claims that what takes place during a journey by car is that three-dimensional experience is reduced to two dimensions. A driver of a car is concerned only with reaching the destination and should see only what he needs to see for this purpose.

*Space is defined in this context in terms of the perception of an **abstract subject**, such as a driver of a motor vehicle, equipped with a collective common sense, namely the capacity to read the symbols of the highway code, and with a sole organ – the eye – placed in the service of his*

movement within the visual field. Thus space appears solely in its reduced forms. **Volume** leaves the field to **surface**, and any overall view surrenders to visual signals spaced out along fixed trajectories already laid down in the 'plan' (Lefebvre 2000:313).

Wilcoxes, for whom driving was the favourite type of spending holidays, apparently approved this reduced sense of space. And certainly they championed reduced sense of time. Henry Wilcox lived in the everlasting present. His mind was that of a practical businessman, who does not want to get distracted and therefore lives concentrated on as little as possible. His time scope was ten minutes: *He lived for the five minutes that have passed and the five to come; he had the business mind.* This attitude to time was particularly useful when he was to deal with failures in his life, whether unsuccessful business investments or disastrous relationships: *Jacky rejoined Howards End and Ducie Street, and the vermilion motor-car, and the Argentine Hard Dollars, and all the things and people for whom he had never had much use, and had less now. Their memory hampered him* (Forster 2000:244).

Such attitude to time is, according to Lefebvre, characteristic of modernity, the advent of which engendered the disappearance of time from social space.

Our time, then, this most essential part of lived experience, this greatest good of all goods, is no longer visible to us, no longer intelligible. It cannot be constructed. It is consumed, exhausted, and that is all. It leaves no traces. It is concealed in space, hidden under a pile of debris to be disposed of as soon as possible; after all, rubbish is a pollutant (Lefebvre 2000:95–96).

Time that the modern man like Henry is no longer able to see is most likely to thrive in the house in which one spent many years, where it is transformed into what Forster calls *the precious distillation of years*. And through the house one has connection with the earth that is the surest anchor in time. But for Henry house was not any kind of distillation – it was supposed to be a convenient base for daily goings to work and large enough for entertaining fellow businessmen. House was a kind of investment that should yield interest in the form of its convenience and which could be sold with profit. That was his attitude to the houses in Ducie Street and in Oniton, the houses which he had no misgivings to get rid of after discovering their drawbacks.

However, Howards End, the house of his first wife and the place where his children were born, seemed to be an exception. When after Ruth's funeral Henry received a note which she had made on her deathbed and in which she wished the house to be given after her death to Margaret, he and the rest of his family were shocked: *To them Howards End was a house: they could not know that to her it had been a spirit, for which she sought a spiritual heir* (Forster 2000:107). Not understanding her motives, they treated the note as an act of treachery. From the moment when they learnt about the note the Wilcoxes became very sensitive about the house. Having no use for it themselves, they grew very tense whenever any of the Schlegels came near the house. When pregnant Helen wanted to

spend her last night before returning to Germany in Howards End, thinking that one night in the house *would give her pleasure and do her good* and Margaret talked to Henry to obtain his permission, he pretended not to understand the situation:

'I could understand it if it was her old home, because a home, or a house' he changed the word designedly; he had thought of a telling point – 'because a house in which one has once lived becomes in a sort of way sacred, I don't know why. Associations and so on' (Forster 2000:298).

For a moment it seemed that Ruth was mistaken believing that Henry had no real affection for the house – he said plainly that it was sacred for him *in a sort of way*. The question remains here whether his notion of sacredness was the same holiness of spirit that Ruth was seeking an heir for.

It was only the next morning when Henry made it clear what was really sacred for him when he talked to Charles about evicting the two sisters from Howards End.

'The house is mine – and, Charles, it will be yours – and when I say that no one is to live there I mean that no one is to live there. I won't have it.' He looked angrily at the moon. *'To my mind this question is connected with something far greater, the rights of property itself'* (Forster 2000:317).

For Henry the most sacred link between a person and a house was the right of property, the right based on the idea of prohibition. According to Lefebvre, prohibition is the meaning most often conveyed by abstract space, it is the negative basis of the social order and *the reverse side and the carapace of property* (Lefebvre 2000:319). By breaking his prohibition, the sisters violated Henry's rights of property and this he could not stand.

So it seems that, after all, Howards End was also an investment for Henry, an investment whose yielded interest was Ruth's love. Henry himself was not comfortable in the house. In Miss Avery's words, it lay *too much on land* for the Wilcoxes. Her words on the surface level could refer to their hay fever, as neither Henry nor Charles could *stand up against a field in June*. But what Miss Avery really meant was that the Wilcoxes were unable to comprehend the mysterious bond between the house and nature.

When Henry married Ruth, he saw no sacredness in her beloved house. He accepted Howards End with its tree as part and parcel of the marriage and his attitude to it was that of a businessman who for one reason or other has to save a decayed enterprise. But he did not feel any affection for the house. However, for Ruth he was the last chance of saving the property – she greeted him as a deliverer.

Even Miss Avery, who did not like Wilcoxes, admitted while talking to Margaret that for Howards End they were better than nothing. They kept the place going. But only that. According to her, Ruth should not have married a businessman but a soldier, *some real soldier* (Forster 2000:269). She did not say what she meant by a *real soldier*, but Margaret understood it as a criticism of her

husband *far more trenchant than any of her own*. What kind of soldier did Miss Avery have in mind?

This is how Henri Lefebvre sums up his reflection on war:

To summarize: before the advent of capitalism, the part played by violence was extra-economic; under the dominion of capitalism and of the world market, it assumed an economic role in the accumulation process; and in consequence the economic sphere became dominant. This is not to say that economic relations were now identical to relations of power, but merely that the two could no longer be separated (Lefebvre 2000:276).

The soldier in the era of capitalism is a mercenary at the service of the businessman. It is doubtful whether Miss Avery had such a soldier on her mind. What she thought about was someone of a different mentality. Someone like Margaret's father. It was Miss Avery who drew his sword from its scabbard and hung it *naked among the sober volumes* when she was unpacking the Schlegels' things in Howards End. As if she guessed a real soldier in him.

In fact, Ernst Schlegel despised materialism and was not pleased with the way that soldiers were used by the modern state. He fought bravely in the name of his German fatherland and in his small way contributed to its victory over France. But the fruits of victory disappointed him:

Peace came – it was all very immense, one had turned into an Empire – but he knew that some quality had vanished for which not all Alsace-Lorraine could compensate him. Germany a commercial power, Germany a naval power, Germany with colonies here and a Forward Policy there, and legitimate aspirations in the other place, might appeal to others, and fitly served by them; for his own part, he abstained from the fruits of victory, and naturalized himself in England (Forster 2000:42).

He wanted to wait for the clouds of materialism that gathered over his fatherland to disperse but he did not live long enough. He left his sword along with his dislike for the material to his daughters. And the sword eventually found its way to Howards End.

Here the sword was used again, but, ironically enough, by the representative of all that Ernst Schlegel despised. And, duly enough, the representative was punished. The event showed that even if the modern capitalist evolved from the warrior of the past, as Margaret once fantasized, he changed in the process. He could be equally powerful, he could have his hands on all the ropes, but his world was that of telegrams and anger, as Margaret once described it, the world where in times of crisis one has nothing to fall back upon. In prison Charles, wanting to keep the appearances of respectability, decided to change his name and to move to a different part of England, in this way symbolically breaking off his ties with his ancestors and his family house – the two things so dear to his mother.

At the end of the novel the house in Howards End may be still seen as a niche of absolute space in the dominating abstract space of the modern capitalist state – it is Margaret who eventually becomes its *spiritual heir*, as Ruth wished.

In modern society absolute space is no longer a totalising experience of a whole social group, as it was in pre-modern times, but rather a personal matter of individual members of this group. What is important here is the mental attitude, the ability to invest the world or a part of the world with a symbolic meaning and thus to give it a different social dimension. Ruth Wilcox believed that Margaret was the only person capable of seeing in her house something more than just a building and she was not wrong. Forster himself had no illusions about the exceptionality of this kind of people and therefore the fragility of the kind of social space that Howards End represented. It had to be a *deus-ex-machina* kind of the turn in the plot that saved the house from the encroachment of abstract space represented by Charles Wilcox. And Forster is clear – it will be the people like Charles, the imperial, who will inherit the earth.

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