



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR HOWARD'S END BY E. M. FORSTER

1. The differences between the two Schlegel sisters are highlighted in their reactions to Beethoven: Helen "can see heroes and shipwrecks in the music's flood," while Margaret "can see only the music." Discuss the disparity in their outlooks and how this leads to disagreements, for example, over Leonard Bast and Henry Wilcox.
2. Given Forster's portrayal of Henry Wilcox, what do you think attracts Margaret to him? Why does she accept his proposal of marriage, even though she admits to her sister that she does not love him? Does she grow to love him in the end?
3. Compared to more radical modernist contemporaries like D. H. Lawrence and Ford Madox Ford, Forster's retention of the omniscient narrator appears conservative and traditional. Yet the narrator's "omniscience" is distinctively qualified and tentative: "It is rather a moment when the commentator should step forward. Ought the Wilcoxes to have offered their home to Margaret? I think not." Whose viewpoint (or viewpoints) does the narrator convey?
4. The juxtaposition of masculine principles (money, logic, conquest, the external life) and feminine principles (spirit, intuition, accommodation, the inner life) is perhaps best embodied in the characters of Henry and Helen. Margaret, however, is less stereotypically feminine and maternal, saying "I do not love children. I am thankful I have none." The narrator tells us that "On the whole she sided with men as they are." When Margaret ultimately "charged straight through these Wilcoxes" and united Helen and Henry at Howards End, was it a victory in the masculine or feminine mode?
5. Leonard Bast is portrayed as a spiritual orphan, "sucked into the town" and loosed from the moorings of his working-class origins. Are the Wilcoxes and the Schlegels responsible for his death? To what extent is his ascent from poverty hindered by his own personal limitations and ambitions?
6. Although Forster's work is not conventionally religious, he frequently expresses a deep spirituality. Discuss the spiritual outlook expressed in Margaret's contemplation on love (Chapter XX), Mrs. Wilcox's bond with the English countryside, and Helen's "mind that readily shreds the visible."
7. "I'm broken—I'm ended," says Henry Wilcox as he contemplates his son's imminent arrest near the end of the book. Has Henry in fact changed at the end of the novel? Have his values been transformed by his marriage to Margaret? Before their marriage the narrator asserts that Henry "did alter her character—a little." Is that true?
8. In the final chapter, Margaret and Helen's vista from Howards End is spoiled only by the "red rust" in the distance, the mark of London encroaching on the pristine landscape. Discuss Forster's view of technology and his hope for a civilization that will "rest on the earth."



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9. Images of water are repeatedly evoked in *Howards End* to suggest the dynamic ebb and flow of life, "progress," and the rush of time. London is a place where "all the qualities, good, bad, and indifferent, [are] streaming away." Contrast these images with the farm house, wych-elm, and meadow that bind the characters to the earth and the past.
10. "More and more," Margaret protests, "do I refuse to draw my income and sneer at those who guarantee it.... Hurray for riches!" Margaret's vigorous defense of the material basis of her lifestyle, a defense that shocks some of her family and friends, reflects Forster's own reexamination of the anti business, antimaterialist sentiments he had imbibed during his university education. How do her comments highlight the limitations of both the intellectuals' and the capitalists' attitudes toward wealth? Why can't she and her family ultimately help the Leonard Bast of the world— let alone the "unthinkable" poorer classes—financially?
11. On the surface, Ruth Wilcox is very different from Margaret Schlegel: unworldly, apolitical, more easily accepting of her husband's ways and views. On what basis does she sense such a close bond with Margaret and come to see her as the proper "spiritual heir" of *Howards End*? What does Margaret mean when she says to Helen, "I feel that you and I and Henry are only fragments of that woman's mind"?

Questions from Penguin Classics Edition.



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