



# East is East? The Sense of Place in David Lean's A Passage to India (1984)

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## **East is East? The sense of place in David Lean's *A Passage to India* (1984)**

David Lean's name is immediately associated with *Lawrence of Arabia* or *Doctor Zhivago* while his last film, *A Passage to India*, is not as celebrated outside Britain. Set during the British Raj, its story highlights the misunderstandings between two cultures; interestingly, the Britons are not the only ones to be out of place in the subcontinent, and Indians too may no longer feel at home. Although both communities sometimes try to connect, it seems they are doomed to failure by the natural forces around them – as the emphasis on the landscapes and water element in day or night scenes tends to prove. Through an analysis of the film, its dialogues and the different types of shots used, this case study proposes to explore the representation of space and place in relation to questions of otherness, identity, sexuality and ethnicity – an Indian doctor being tried for attempted rape of an English girl –, but also to the question of soundscapes – the echo, whether actual or in the heroine's head, being a central motif closely linked with forgiveness and the characters' final redemption and sense of belonging.

Keywords: space; place; David Lean; *A Passage to India*; British Raj; identity

### **Introduction**

Set in the 1920s in the lead-up to the country's independence, David Lean's *A Passage to India*, adapted from E. M. Forster's eponymous novel, has a documentary aspect: the mixed feelings of Adela Quested, the protagonist, certainly reflect those of many young English girls who had to go and live in the Indian Empire: the first scenes set in Bombay or Chandrapore stage incongruous Indian bands performing 'Tea for Two' or 'God Save the King', but also colonial characters who think it is their right and duty to rule the land, who look down on the natives and refuse to socialise with them or to discover their culture. But Adela has not travelled all the way from England to eat cucumber sandwiches and she is yearning to see 'the real India', which will lead her to understand who she is and where she belongs.

She is captivated by the beauty of the architecture and of the landscapes, and David Lean, who includes many outdoor scenes filmed on location in India, particularly emphasizes

water, with shots of the ocean, and imagery of the moon reflected in the Ganges and the monsoon rain. And yet, colourful India soon becomes mysterious India when Adela enters the Marabar Caves: the darkness of the caves can be seen as a metaphor for the inner demons of this girl who is supposed to marry soon – thus, to leap into the unknown – and has reached a crossroads in her life; she is shy and, at the same time, eager to discover physical love... but not necessarily with her fiancé.

This case study proposes to explore the representation of space and place in relation to questions of otherness, identity, sexuality and ethnicity – Dr Aziz being tried for attempted rape of the English girl – but also to the question of soundscapes – the echo, whether actual or in Adela's head, being a central motif closely linked with forgiveness and the characters' final redemption.

### **A. British India: one place, two cultures**

David Lean's taste for epic, wide-open spaces and breathtaking scenery is well known, and his last film, *A Passage to India*, is in this respect characteristic. The director had visited the country several times; in fact, he used to travel a lot, often changed homes and chose to live in hotels around the world for most of his life – even settling in a caravan in the middle of the desert during the shooting of *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962). He declared, 'I sort of travelled in a car and put my clothing in a case and wandered around. It's a wonderful thing, you know, going to strange places'. He admitted he was 'a romantic', so that 'his heart [would] never be at home. [...] He [lived] at a distance, a singular address for the movies' greatest poet of the far horizon'.<sup>1</sup> The character of Adela, who is to marry Ronny, an Anglo-Indian, is excited at the idea of travelling to the subcontinent, especially as she has never left England before. David Lean explained:

There are two lots of people that go to India: some get off the plane and want to get the next plane out; others want to stay for six months – and she obviously is one who wanted to stay for six months, and I wanted to catch a bit of that.<sup>2</sup>

In a certain way, Adela's voyage starts in the P&O office in London where she buys her one-way ticket: her attention is captured by the photographs of a ship, the Taj Mahal and the Marabar Caves hanging from the wall. Interestingly, the girl will not visit the Taj Mahal,

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<sup>1</sup> Jay Cocks, 'Adventures in the Dream Department', in *David Lean: Interviews*, edited by Steven Organ, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 58-66; here 66.

<sup>2</sup> Harlan Kennedy, 'I'm a Picture Chap', in *David Lean: Interviews*, edited by Steven Organ, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 77-86; here 82.

India's most famous monument. Moreover, the city she is going to, Chandrapore, is fictitious, and so are the caves and the ruined Hindu temple she will see. This means that taking such a journey is a leap into the unknown, not only for her, but also for the spectator who will find it hard to identify any of the locations.

The clerk, who probably spends his days sitting at his desk filling out forms for others, tells Adela he envies her because she is going to discover 'new horizons'; since she has never left her homeland, the phrase is of particular significance, and the framed pictures we are shown in subjective camera 'represent [...] an unknown filled with promise of [...] adventure, but far from the security of familiar surroundings'.<sup>3</sup> In an essay on space and place, Yi-Fu Tuan observes that:

Space lies open; it suggests the future and invites action. On the negative side, space and freedom are a threat. [...] Enclosed and humanised space is place. Compared to space, place is a calm centre of established values. Human beings require both space and place.<sup>4</sup>

Adela, indeed, looks ready to leave her daily routine – place – to cross the oceans and see the wider world – space –, however upsetting it may be.

And yet, though the arrival in Bombay is definitely colourful – in every sense of the word –, the girl, as soon as she reaches Chandrapore, finds herself trapped in some kind of artificial environment and separate territory. As a matter of fact, 'the colonials are cocooned in their own insulated world'<sup>5</sup> and seem to need place more than space: they have recreated some usual settings, living in their own nicely-kept districts with symmetrical street planning, identical bungalows and red post boxes, which has nothing to do with the way space is organised in a genuine Indian town or city. So, Adela does not really feel uprooted at first; the 'strange places' and 'far horizon' she expected are absent, and instead of being able to explore an unknown country in an unknown subcontinent, she finds herself confined to small bounded spaces, being invited to the Club, to a game of polo, or having to attend 'a tiresome musical play' which she and Mrs Moore, her future mother-in-law, have already seen in London. Thus, aside from the climate, it is almost as if Adela had never left the British Isles.

The young woman does not hesitate to express her wishes and, since she and Mrs Moore really want to meet some Indians, Collector Turton, albeit with little enthusiasm, proposes to

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<sup>3</sup> Alain Silver and James Ursini, *David Lean and His Films*, (Los Angeles: Silman-James Press, 1992), 212.

<sup>4</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), 54.

<sup>5</sup> Gene D. Phillips, *Beyond the Epic: The Life and Films of David Lean*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 428.

organise 'a Bridge Party'. Not surprisingly, this ambitious event, supposed to bring together East and West, does not meet the two ladies' expectations, especially because the English, far from playing the game, remain distant on that occasion. Only Fielding, the schoolmaster, appears to be naturally kind towards the Indians, and he promises Adela to organise a tea party at his home with just a few guests, among whom will be Aziz and Godbole, a Brahman.

Communication is easy with Aziz, who is happy and proud to socialise with the English and who even invites Adela and Mrs Moore to his place; however, quickly realising how ashamed he would be if they ever crossed the threshold of his modest house, he changes his plans to propose a picnic at the caves. As to Professor Godbole, he speaks very little and stays apart, not sitting at the table with the others. He does not approve the project of Aziz but fails to explain why. Godbole is 'obscure and fatalistic, [and this] character [...] represents the inscrutability of the East'.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, he seems to mistrust the English; and yet, a little while later, he will speak quite freely to Adela and they will casually sit side by side, their feet in the water tank. This moment of peace will nevertheless be broken by the intrusion of a furious Ronny who will order his fiancée to leave at once, thus putting everybody in their place.

In fact, racial tensions are manifest from the moment the girl and Mrs Moore set foot in Chandrapore. As they are going from the railway station to Ronny's house in a carriage, a couple of revealing incidents occur. Two Indians riding their bicycles, Aziz and his friend, make their first appearance as they are hit by Turton's car. His chauffeur, who was driving too fast, will not bother to stop. Such an attitude illustrates the arrogance and domineering mood of the British as well as their refusal to share public space in a country that is not their own. Adela, who will not witness that scene, is amazed by the hustle and bustle of the town and its marketplace, but suddenly the look on her face changes when she sees Indians carrying a body wrapped in a shroud. Her fiancé, who is no less than the City Magistrate, tells her, 'I'm sorry. We'll soon be out of this'. And indeed, the next shot is a close-up on a signpost that reads 'Trafalgar Rd.', 'Kitchener Ave.' and 'Wellington Rd.'.

What the girl does when she enters Ronny's bungalow for the first time is meaningful: she crosses to the other side of the room, stops on the terrace – as though she needed some breathing space – and looks at the distant Marabar Hills. After such a long and tiring trip, and although she is thousands of miles away from home, Adela still seems to be quite frustrated and unable to stand still. From here onward, she is going to be constantly on the move, whether on her bicycle, on an early morning train or even sitting atop an elephant: getting to India is

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 424.

not an end as such, but just the beginning of a new journey and Adela will 'escape' as often as she can.

## **B. Exotic landscapes and personal doubts**

The first sequences of *A Passage to India*, and in particular the rail journey between Bombay and Chandrapore, suggest that the film will be built on a series of contrasts between open and confined spaces. June Perry Levine observes that:

[...] in a scene in the dining car, with the Englishwomen and the Turtons talking about how Ronny and Adela met in the Lake [District], Lean moves the camera to an out-the-window shot of moonlight on water. The mysterious night is crosscut with Adela and Mrs Moore's wanting to meet Indians socially and being lectured by Mrs Turton: 'East is East... a question of culture'. This editing pattern feels as if an adventurous conflict is being set up: the English inside, India outside [...].<sup>8</sup>

It is noteworthy that the shot of the moonlight is a tracking sideways assuming Adela's point of view: the girl, who visibly dislikes the Turtons and their conversation, and also realises that Ronny may have changed for the worse, looks through the window. In filming the landscape from her point of view, David Lean shows that she wants to get away – already. There is obviously some irony in the juxtaposition of such shots, the majestic scenery highlighting even more the emptiness of the Anglo-Indians' comments, and Adela's disappointment and loneliness.

Mrs Moore is shocked too by the Turtons' attitude. Though she is not physically fit for long walks in the sun and will not be able to climb to the upper Marabar Caves, she is also longing to see authentic India and meet its people. During the performance of *Cousin Kate* at the Club, she is the one who actually slips away to go to the mosque. The place has neither roof nor windows, is overgrown with vegetation, and thus the emphasis is on nature again; besides, the scene starts with a shot of the moon reflected in the tank where Aziz is making his ablutions. Since he has just been treated rudely by Major Callendar, his wife, a friend of hers and their servant, the deserted place of worship has a symbolic function: '[Aziz] has gone from the hostility of the English world to the comfort of Islam'.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> June Perry Levine, 'Passage to the Odeon: Too Lean', *Literature Film Quarterly* 14 (3) (1986): 139-150; here 148.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

Interestingly, Mrs Moore, who is a Christian and wears a cross, has not gone to the church built by the Anglo-Indians to find God; instead, she chooses to approach a religion that is very different from hers. The passage has a dreamlike dimension with the wind blowing dead leaves, and Aziz is startled by Mrs Moore's appearance, thinking he has seen a ghost; then, realising it is an English lady, he imagines that, like many of her fellow countrywomen, she has not bothered to take off her shoes. And yet, she has, and they start a conversation; the Indian doctor is amazed at her kindness and they discover they have several things in common. Ironically, in just a few minutes, he and Mrs Moore seem to have filled the gap between their two cultures much more than Turton's 'Bridge Party' ever will.

As they look at the Ganges, Aziz explains there can be dead bodies floating past, as well as crocodiles. Mrs Moore cannot help exclaiming, 'What a terrible river'. But, overcome by the splendour of such a view, she promptly adds, 'What a wonderful river'. Alain Silver and James Ursini note that the whole scene implies 'the power of the natural forces', and that 'Mrs Moore's impulsive remarks [...] summarise the conflicting qualities of the environment in which Lean situates his characters'.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, a moment later, Mrs Moore is back at the Club where no native is allowed except as a servant; she feels very uncomfortable as 'God Save the King' is performed and everybody stands in silence, including the Indian staff.

The director makes a close-up on her face, and she looks back. He then cuts to a long shot of the Ganges which could seem subjective; but the elderly lady is in the middle of a big room and, though she may catch a glimpse of the quiet river, there would be furniture in the foreground were this a point-of-view shot, whereas here, the Ganges fills the frame. A medium long shot follows and shows a crocodile eating a body. This has two denotations. First, yet again, the idea of contrast between two worlds is obvious, and the anthem sounds even more out of place; second, Levine reminds us that in the novel, 'Forster gives Mrs Moore a certain prescience, a connection with the universe', a feature emerging in this particular scene where Lean suggests that 'Mrs Moore is in tune with what happens in the Indian landscape'.<sup>11</sup>

And yet, the elderly lady is frequently disoriented by those exotic surroundings, and she quickly realises that she does not belong in British India. Her doubts, as we will see, are also mystical and metaphysical. But Adela is younger and her experience of the subcontinent will lead her to other kinds of uncertainties. The first major turning point in the story is the bicycle ride in the countryside during which the girl ventures off the beaten track and discovers

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<sup>10</sup> Silver and Ursini, *David Lean*, 219; 218.

<sup>11</sup> Levine, 'Passage to the Odeon', 143.

a number of erotic statues on an ancient temple colonised by vines. The scene is commonly called Adela's 'sexual awakening'<sup>12</sup> for she is upset by the sculptures as the shot/reverse shot pattern of the passage and Maurice Jarre's music make clear. She suddenly notices dozens of monkeys perched atop the shrine, and they start screaming and chasing her. The young woman is both fascinated and frightened by the incident<sup>13</sup>, as David Lean himself explained<sup>14</sup>.

On the night of her engagement to Ronny, while in bed, she cannot help thinking about the statues: the insertion of shots quite similar to those of the previous scene and the use of the same musical theme are a clever substitute for a voice-over. The only difference is that the sculptures are shown at dusk whereas the girl saw them in broad daylight; thus, it is as though she had not really left that place, or found herself in two places at the same time, which hints at her turmoil. The fact that a storm breaks outside and the wind starts blowing through Adela's open window strengthens such an impression, the roaring thunder being reminiscent of the monkeys. Silver and Ursini point out that, 'as the narrative develops, so does the depth of her conflict, for [...] she will try to balance her needs for personal independence, social enfranchisement through marriage, and sexual fulfilment'.<sup>15</sup>

The episode of the temple buried in the forest, as well as revealing Adela's hidden face and latent sexual desire, shows that, by 'repeatedly cross[ing] frontiers' and 'subvert[ing] [...] spatial conventions'<sup>16</sup>, she is taking risks. Maybe Ronny's anger when he finds her sitting by the pool with Godbole and Aziz is not only the consequence of simple racism. 'If [...] Adela is the "independent sort," it is in the context of colonial India in the 1920s, neither a time nor a place much receptive to women with minds of their own'.<sup>17</sup> By choosing to follow Aziz on a tour of the Marabar Caves, the English girl will lose her bearings even more, and the impressive hills will act as a point of no return for her, Mrs Moore, but also their Indian guide.

### **C. In darkest India?**

'India forces one to come face to face with oneself. It can be rather disturbing', Mrs Moore tells Adela on the day of her engagement, summarising perfectly the role of space and place in

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<sup>12</sup> Constantine Santas, *The Epic Films of David Lean*, (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2012), 138.

<sup>13</sup> Silver and Ursini, *David Lean*, 213.

<sup>14</sup> Kennedy, 'I'm a Picture Chap', 82.

<sup>15</sup> Silver and Ursini, *David Lean*, 212.

<sup>16</sup> Wendy Everett and Axel Goodbody, 'Introduction', in *Revisiting Space: Space and Place in European Cinema*, edited by Wendy Everett and Axel Goodbody, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), 9-21; here 15.

<sup>17</sup> Silver and Ursini, *David Lean*, 217.



the film, and announcing the fateful excursion to the Marabar Caves. In *A Passage to India*, the landscape and cityscape are definitely ‘more than mere inert backdrops’.<sup>18</sup> Richard Schickel even considers that ‘Lean uses India not just as a colourful and exotic setting but as a decisive force in shaping the story he is telling, almost as a character’.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the numerous long shots or extreme long shots of natural sites – whether rivers, steep mountains, valleys, ravines or forests – tend to suggest that the elements are all-powerful, in particular when the main characters are included in those shots, lost in the immense surroundings, looking so insignificant and vulnerable.

The two ladies are equally impressed by their train journey and the elephant ride to reach the caves, high in the mountains. But whereas Adela’s enthusiasm appears to be unabated, Mrs Moore collapses as soon as they visit the first cave. The small dark chamber is inherently stressful, especially as too many people enter at the same time. And yet, claustrophobia is not the only cause of such physical and mental distress. Indeed, Aziz, keen to please Mrs Moore, calls her name; the ensuing echo, strange and haunting, is unbearable for the elderly woman who rushes out, though the blazing sun is no less oppressive. She sits down in the shade waiting to recover and we see the moon from her point of view; an extreme close-up of its surface follows, making the craters clearly visible. This shot is supposed to be subjective, but Mrs Moore could not possibly see the lunar ground in such detail<sup>20</sup>; so, the purpose, here again, is to insist on her ‘prescience’.

From that moment, the elderly lady is changed forever. What she then says – ‘I suppose, like many old people, I sometimes think we are merely passing figures in a godless universe’ – is to be contrasted with what she told Aziz in the mosque – ‘God is here’. Thus, Mrs Moore is so unnerved by this experience that, as David Lean put it, ‘[she] loses her faith in there, or her faith is badly shaken’.<sup>21</sup> While wide-open spaces could be a source of anxiety for her, confinement proves to be even more terrifying. Silver and Ursini argue that ‘if what happens at the caves shakes [her] beliefs, it is because they expose her to nature’s darker, more secret and unsettling side’.<sup>22</sup> This means that, by accepting to go into a simple hole in the rock, whose

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<sup>18</sup> Mikel J. Koven, ‘Space and Place in Italian *Giallo* Cinema: The Ambivalence of Modernity’, in *Revisiting Space: Space and Place in European Cinema*, edited by Wendy Everett and Axel Goodbody, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), 115-131; here 126.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Schickel, ‘A Superb *Passage to India*’, *Time* (31 December 1984), 54.

<sup>20</sup> Silver and Ursini, *David Lean*, 223.

<sup>21</sup> David Ehrenstein, ‘Epic Dialogue’, in *David Lean: Interviews*, edited by Steven Organ, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 67-76; here 72.

<sup>22</sup> Silver and Ursini, *David Lean*, 223.

quality defies comprehension, Mrs Moore is violently confronted with the emptiness of human life.

Adela's vision of the world is to be deeply shaken too. While she is proceeding to the Kawa Dol Caves accompanied only by Aziz and a guide, they stop and she looks down at Chandrapore through binoculars. 'It's almost a mirage', she says. She then starts asking Aziz personal questions about his feelings for his wife. It seems she is wondering whether she should marry Ronny. Confirmation is given later at the trial, when Adela declares, 'Seeing Chandrapore so far away, I realised I didn't love him'. There is thus a direct link between a specific place in a foreign country – the hills – and the fact Adela is keeping a distance. Lean explained, 'You know, it happens to people when they go down to the Mediterranean on holiday – Swedes, Finns, English people – come down to Spain and behave as they wouldn't normally. It's that sort of thing'.<sup>23</sup>

Adela is indeed a rather prudish girl when she lands in India. But now that she is climbing up to the second site with Aziz, she cannot conceal her physical attraction for him, especially when he extends his hand to her. Once they have reached Kawa Dol, Aziz steps away to smoke a cigarette, and Adela decides to walk into one of the caves alone. She strikes a match, which creates an 'explosion of sound' that hits her<sup>24</sup>, and the noises heard from then on become subjective as the girl is overwhelmed by some kind of strong rumbling echo. When Aziz appears at the entrance and calls for her, she blows out the match, stays motionless and does not answer. The resonance suddenly grows intolerable and she starts crying; Lean cuts to water spilling over the tank below where the elephant is bathing. A hysterical Adela finally rushes down the slope while Aziz is left desperately looking for her.

Lean does not show us what exactly happened to the girl; in fact, Adela herself will never really know. And yet, the editing clearly suggests that she has not been assaulted, her repressed sexuality, combined with a feeling of guilt, having led her to imagine the attempted rape.<sup>25</sup> Of course, the puzzling echo also has a crucial role to play in what seems to be 'a full-blown hallucination'.<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, Aziz is in no way shown penetrating the cave: he only appears in backlighting, seen from Adela's point of view, framed in the rectangular opening – arches being a recurrent motif in the film<sup>27</sup>, notably when the girl ventures to the monkey

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<sup>23</sup> Kennedy, 'I'm a Picture Chap', 82.

<sup>24</sup> Silver and Ursini, *David Lean*, 223.

<sup>25</sup> Phillips, *Beyond the Epic*, 430; Santas, *The Epic Films*, 139.

<sup>26</sup> Levine, 'Passage to the Odeon', 143.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

shrine. Apart from 'the Freudian suggestions' of the shot<sup>28</sup>, the emphasis here is on liminal space, which implies some inevitable change, whatever Aziz decides to do. After the 'sexual awakening' at the temple, the caves have taken Adela a step further, and the spilling of water could imply that she had her 'first orgasm'.<sup>29</sup>

In the same way as Mrs Moore has to face the idea of her imminent death, Adela is brutally confronted with conflicting emotions at Marabar. The hills and caves bring the two women back to reality and in that sense, the place matches the definition proposed by Evelyn Preuss, according to which 'the landscape emerges as a metaphor for the liability of the unacknowledged and dissimulated part of ourselves and our world, i.e. that which is invisible, because it is eschewed by our minds or otherwise eludes our perception'.<sup>30</sup> Ironically, it is in the dark that both characters start opening their eyes, but Mrs Moore will never rid herself of the obsessive echo, which will result in a permanent gloominess.

The elderly lady thus refuses to testify on Aziz's behalf and leaves India before his trial starts. She is adamant that 'nothing [she] can say or do will make the least difference', thereby suggesting that people are not in control of their own fate. Lean almost put the following Hindu proverb into the film:

In very simple terms, we're like a leaf on a river and we've got a very small paddle. We can go this way or that way, but only minutely. We're on that damn river and we're going to be taken down it to some destination.<sup>31</sup>

This applies to all characters, and particularly to Mrs Moore. Indeed, she tells Ronny she must 'get away from all this muddle and fuss into some cave of [her] own, some shelf', but she will die before reaching home, on a starry night, and will be buried at sea – the ultimate proof of her unfathomable link with the natural world.

A few minutes before she passes away, Mrs Moore, standing alone on the deck of the ship, seems to be at peace. In her last conversation with Ronny about the incident at the caves, she had bitterly told him, 'You will never understand the nature of that place [...], nor will anyone else in that ridiculous court of yours'. The elderly lady had very little sense of community when she arrived in Chandrapore, preferring to meet Indians, and now that the

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<sup>28</sup> Arthur Lindley, 'Raj as Romance/Raj as Parody: Lean's and Forster's Passages to India', *Literature Film Quarterly* 20 (1) (1992): 61-67; here 66.

<sup>29</sup> Howard Maxford, *David Lean*, (London: B. T. Batsford, 2000), 152.

<sup>30</sup> Evelyn Preuss, 'To See or Not to See? Topographies of Repression in Konrad Wolf's *I Was Nineteen* and *The Naked Man on the Sportsground*', in *Revisiting Space: Space and Place in European Cinema*, edited by Wendy Everett and Axel Goodbody, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), 209-240; here 228.

<sup>31</sup> Cocks, 'Adventures in the Dream Department', 64.

English and the Indians are turning against each other because of Adela's accusations, Mrs Moore has to admit that, by coming there, she wandered astray. According to Gene D. Phillips:

The Marabar Caves provide the central metaphor of both the novel and the film: individuals call out to each other and receive nothing but an echo in reply, suggesting the failure of human beings to communicate with each other in a meaningful way.<sup>32</sup>

Such an analysis reflects the misunderstandings between the mother and her son, Adela and Aziz, as well as the cultural and social gap between two races in the context of the British Raj.

The scene in which Adela is taken to the courthouse in the Turtons' car is the exact opposite of that of the Collector's arrival at the beginning of the film: the streets are now crowded with angry demonstrators swarming around the vehicle, breaking one of its windows, forcing the chauffeur to drive slowly. The Indians are thus reappropriating public space; in a way, they are taking power. The girl being the cause of all this chaos, it is obvious that the English courtroom will be the last step of her stay in India. As for Mrs Moore, although she has already left the country, she '[hangs] over the trial', dying in the middle of it<sup>33</sup>; if the characters, unlike the spectators, will learn about it later, the elderly lady's presence is none the less clearly felt in the sequence for the crowd chants her name and it resonates in the courtroom. But this kind of echo, contrary to that of the caves, offers temporary relief to Adela.

When Adela testifies, she goes back, mentally, into the cave, and '[her] flashbacks [...] are an exorcism, or a shock treatment'.<sup>34</sup> Just after she recants, the rain starts to fall and she looks at it through the glass roof: the rumble of thunder seems to blow away her echo and torments, and this sudden 'deluge [...] provides a "catharsis" of emotions'.<sup>35</sup> But Adela's ambivalence has led her to be ostracised – not so much by the Indians as by the British community itself. A similar paradox applies to Aziz: though he is free and has become a national hero, he cannot forgive the English and no longer feels at home in Chandrapore. A simple visit to some caves, combined with prejudices and colonial feelings, has blurred the characters' sense of place, making this film, like many others by David Lean, an 'epic [journey] of disillusioned self-discovery'.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Phillips, *Beyond the Epic*, 430.

<sup>33</sup> Kennedy, 'I'm a Picture Chap', 83.

<sup>34</sup> Silver and Ursini, *David Lean*, 217.

<sup>35</sup> Santas, *The Epic Films*, 144.

<sup>36</sup> Cocks, 'Adventures in the Dream Department', 61.

## Conclusion

E. M. Forster borrowed the title of his novel from Walt Whitman who regarded the opening of the Suez Canal as the start of a new era in which the nations would become closer to one another, eventually turning into ‘a single global family’.<sup>37</sup> In that respect, the book is far less optimistic than the poem; but David Lean chose quite a different ending, for the film does not stop immediately after the trial whose outcome, though fairly positive, leaves a bitter taste to the protagonists. Instead, a single dissolve takes the spectator to Kashmir where Aziz has started a new life in a place not directly under British rule, and that he can call his own. Fielding comes to visit him and they are reconciled. He is travelling with his wife, who happens to be Mrs Moore’s daughter; thus, in a way, Aziz is allowed to meet the reincarnation of his beloved Mrs Moore, which definitively wipes out past resentments. Aziz also writes a letter to Adela, in which he forgives her: he now realises that she had got ‘the worst of both worlds’<sup>38</sup> and that, thanks to her courage, he is free rather than in prison.

With this epilogue, Lean seems to gather East and West. And yet, the Fieldings leave and Aziz remains alone. As for Adela, who was unstable during most of the narrative, she went back to England long ago and now lives there on a permanent basis. In the last scene, ‘she reads [the letter] by a window, where outside it is raining. This brings the film, which opens with her standing in the rain, looking inside the [travel agent’s] office where she will book [her] passage to India, full circle’.<sup>39</sup> The young woman no longer yearns for adventure and new horizons; she finds herself in an enclosed space, in familiar surroundings, and seems to belong to no other place. So, it appears that the English should live in England and the Indians, in India. French philosopher Vincent Descombes asks:

Where is the character at home? The question bears less on a geographical territory than a rhetorical territory [...]. The character is at home when he is at ease in the rhetoric of the people with whom he shares life. The sign of being at home is the ability to make oneself understood without too much difficulty, and to follow the reasoning of others without any need for long explanations.<sup>40</sup>

Would a ‘third space’ exist – one ‘in which former dichotomies preventing intercultural

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<sup>37</sup> Phillips, *Beyond the Epic*, 405.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 431.

<sup>39</sup> Stephen M. Silverman, *David Lean*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992), 187.

<sup>40</sup> Vincent Descombes, *Proust: Philosophie du Roman*, (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1987), 179.

friendship and understanding could be erased', as Elena Oliete-Aldea puts it?<sup>41</sup> If Aziz will probably never see his English friends again, communication is nevertheless fully restored in the final sequence, and misjudgements have disappeared on both sides. Moreover, the Indian doctor is reconciled with Adela while he is in Asia and she is in Europe; the cross-cutting and voice-over used in the scene transcend not only place but time: Aziz writes his letter to Miss Quested, and she reads it simultaneously. Lean's ending, far from being a cliché, is more convincing than one in which the two protagonists might have met again in a particular environment. They are now at peace and have found their place; yet, their respective homes are not so much distinct geographical territories as symbolic ones, and this makes Aziz and Adela's sense of inner and spatial harmony all the stronger.

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<sup>41</sup> Elena Oliete-Aldea, *Hybrid Heritage on Screen: The 'Raj Revival' in the Thatcher Era*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 5.