The 'inner mumble': Forster, free expression and International PEN

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Throughout his life, Forster's was a staunch defender of freedom of expression. He opposed the suppression of Lawrence's *The Rainbow* in 1915, writing to Sir Henry Newbolt to encourage him to defend the novel because 'the right to literary expression is as great in war as it was ever in peace, and in far greater danger, and I write on the chance of your being willing and able to protect it'.[1] In 1928, he protested against literary censorship more publicly, signing letters to the press and offering to stand as a witness in the Radclyffe Hall *The Well of Loneliness* trial. He also agreed to take on the unenviable task of approaching Hall on behalf of the Bloomsbury group, a meeting that famously played out extremely badly. Forster's low opinion of her novel did not go down at all well with Hall. He spoke publicly in defence of James Hanley's right to write freely about sex in his novel *Boy* in 1935 at the Paris *Congrès International des Ecrivains*; a speech that was subsequently published as the essay 'Liberty in England'. He defended and promoted Mulk Raj Anand's novel, *Untouchable*, a potentially problematic novel, in 1936. After a libel writ was issued against *Abinger Harvest* in 1934, he also protested British Libel Law, and served as a literary representative on the Porter Committee on the Law of

[1] E. M. Forster, Letter to Sir Henry Newbolt, 7 November, 1915, in Mary Lago and P. N. Furbank (eds.), *Selected Letters of E. M. Forster: vol. i 1879-1920* (London 1983) p. 231.

Defamation in 1939. He took the stand on behalf of D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in the watershed 1960 trial of Penguin Books.

In addition to defending free expression, he also campaigned on behalf of civil liberties more broadly, becoming President of the newly formed National Council for Civil Liberties in 1934, after he published a fierce denunciation of the Incitement to Disaffection Sedition Bill and the BBC's suppression of agitation against it in *Time and Tide*.

While these activities are well-known, Forster's thirty-year involvement in the International Writers' organisation, International PEN, is less so. In this essay I will outline what this involvement entailed, and why it might be significant for our understanding of Forster's views on freedom of expression, and his role as a public intellectual.

Forster joined the PEN organisation in 1928, seven years after its foundation (PEN stands for Poets, Playwrights, Essayists and Novelists). Created in 1921 as a London dining club open to women (no such club existed at that time) PEN's founder Catherine Dawson Scott collected together a group of Edwardian and feminist writers, including John Galsworthy, H. G. Wells, May Sinclair, Radclyffe Hall, Vita Sackville-West, and Rebecca West. Soon afterwards Dawson Scott and Galsworthy, PEN's first President, persuaded many of the most prominent global writers to become honorary members, including W. B. Yeats, Rabindranath Tagore,

Maurice Maeterlink, Selma Lagerlöff, Thomas Mann, Heinrich Mann, Robert Musil, Alfonso Reyes, and Knut Hamsun.

From the start PEN promoted what Dawson Scott called 'international friendliness', and cooperation with the cultural wing of the League of Nations. Its internationalist agenda fuelled its drive to establish centres around the world. By 1923, these efforts had already born fruit, with PEN centres in most European cities, the US, as well as Mexico City and Buenos Aires. By the 1930s, there were further centres in India, Iraq, South Africa, Japan, Argentina and many other places.

Members often suggested that PEN was a twentieth century 'Republic of Letters', but this was a Republic whose running and rapid expansion required membership rules, a codified structure, and, from 1927, a set of 'Principles'. By 1930, the organisation had an International President, an Executive Committee, a series of rules, a set of principles, annual Congresses in different cities around Europe and in New York, at which declarations, statements and policy were decided; as well as forty-three centres in thirty-four countries stretching from London to Mexico City, China and South Africa, and a membership of over three thousand writers.

In face of the rise of Fascism, German nationalism, the wilting power of the League of Nations, and the persecution of writers in many European states, PEN members were beginning to stand outside the organisation in order to identify and mobilise its cultural power and commit it to the defence of free expression, and

writers in exile and in prison. In 1934, H. G. Wells, who became International PEN President after the death of John Galsworthy in 1933, committed PEN to an 'activism' in the defence of the 'single issue' of freedom of expression, specifically for writers in exile and in prison. In the late 1930s, PEN liaised with British and US governments to help refugee writers fleeing Germany, France, Eastern Europe, Spain and Italy. After the Second World War, PEN worked closely with newly formed UN bodies, and acquired consultative status to UNESCO in 1948, and as an organisation they were asked to disseminate the principles of the UDHR.

Forster was a prominent and active member of the organisation. International PEN liked to list its most distinguished global members on their correspondence and during campaigns, and Forster's name was liberally applied to the organisation's paperwork from 1928 onwards. But he was also an active participant. He was asked, but politely declined, to become London PEN President on 12th July, 1935. PEN secretary Hermon Ould, acutely aware of the competition to PEN posed by the newly formed, Soviet-funded, Paris-based *Congrès International des Ecrivains*, pitched the role to Forster by appealing to his liberalism: PEN is the only 'international body of writers', Ould insisted, 'expressing what may be called the "liberal" view' and 'believing that coercion and suppression by the Left are no more desirable than

coercion and suppression by the Right. In a word, we object to any interference with the movement of the human mind and its free expression'.[2]

Forster was also a willing signatory to many PEN protest letters and declarations, signing, for instance, the PEN reaffirmation of its principles on free expression in 1935, the letter sent to General Franco in support of imprisoned writer, Arthur Koestler in 1938, the International PEN statement to the Press defending 'freedom of conscience' and the 'liberty to speak' against Nazism-Fascism on July 10th 1940, and the collective English PEN letter to *The Times* in 1957 on behalf of imprisoned Hungarian writers Tibor Déry, Zoltan Zelk, Gyula Hay and Tibor Tardis.[3]

As well as signing letters and declarations, Forster also participated in PEN events. He attended and spoke at London PEN Club dinners, such as the PEN tribute to Henry Nevinson in December 1936. He presided over the 1944 London PEN conference which celebrated the tercentenary of Milton's *Areopagitica*. He appeared as a prominent guest speaker at the 1944 All-India PEN Congress on literature, one of the largest literary congresses ever held in India, with writers and politicians such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan in attendance. He attended the 1954 Amsterdam Congress as an honorary member. He also

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[2] Hermon Ould, Letter to E. M. Forster, 12th July 1935, p. 1, PEN Records, Box 7, Folder.

[3] 'Hungarian Writers on Trial', *Times* (29 October 1957) p. 11.

sometimes publicly intervened or voiced his views on PEN proceedings. He recorded his opinions of the highly controversial 1946 Stockholm PEN Congress, where members voted in favour of drawing up a list of writers who should not be allowed to rejoin PEN because they had been identified as collaborators, an action Forster opposed.

Forster's activities on behalf of or within the PEN organisation, then, were various and sustained over a thirty year period. While these activities can be viewed as the public expression of Forster's existing liberal beliefs in writers' rights to free speech, I want to suggest that his free speech arguments were often situated responses both to specific events and to his own activities.

Many have connected Forster's free speech arguments, as well as his role as a public intellectual, to his liberalism, broadly defined. Forster's self-assessment that his liberalism was historically out of step - he belonged, as he self-effacingly put it to the 'fag-end of Victorian liberalism' and was a 'liberal who has found liberalism crumbling beneath him' – set the framework for subsequent discussions of the divided nature of his liberal views.[4] Lionel Trilling judged that Forster was both committed to liberal thinking, and at 'war with the liberal imagination', a contradiction that grounded his broader argument that liberal politics was in conflict

[4] E. M. Forster, 'What I Believe', in *Two Cheers for Democracy* (Harmondsworth 1965) pp. 75-84: 83.

with meaningful modern literature. The 'ideals and absolutes', as well as the 'hard work' of repeated organisational procedures required for liberal politics, was, for Trilling, in tension with a modern literature defined by 'variousness, possibility, complexity, and difficulty'.[5] Forster's literary imagination, Trilling argued, dwelt in the paradoxes and ambivalences of a moral realism in which opposed principles such as good and evil cannot hold.[6]

More recent discussions of Forster's liberalism, specifically his views on liberal tolerance, liberal guilt and liberal irony, by Daniel Born, Brian May, and Paul Armstrong have followed Trilling's steer, by highlighting the paradoxes both within liberal thought and Forster's interpretation of it.[7]

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[5] Lionel Trilling, 'Preface', *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (Harmondsworth 1970) p. 14.

[6] Lionel Trilling, 'E. M. Forster', *The Kenyon Review*, 4/2 (1942) pp. 165 -166.

[7] Daniel Born, 'Private Gardens, Public Swamps: *Howards End* and the Revaluation of Liberal Guilt', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 25/2 (1992) pp. 141-159; Brian May, 'Neoliberalism in Rorty and Forster', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 39/2 (1993) pp. 185-207; Paul B. Armstrong, 'Two Cheers for Tolerance: E. M. Forster: Ironic Liberalism and the Indirection of Style', *Modernism/modernity*, 16/2 (2009) pp. 281-299.

That there are internal conflicts within liberal philosophy is nowhere more true than in the area of freedom of expression. One of the abiding tensions in liberal thought, from John Stuart Mill onwards, is the conflict between, on the one hand, the foundational claim that the right to freedom of speech is central to individual self-development and a functioning democracy– the idea, for instance, that deliberative debate produces rational subjectivity and, through the testing of opinions, the development of truth - and, on the other hand, the identification of the dangers associated with the powerful censoriousness of mass opinion – Mill's famous insistence about the need to defend the minority from the tyranny of majority opinion.

Forster's arguments in defence of free expression mined Mill's premise that speech is foundational to the agency and development of individual subjectivity *and* at the same time the arena of repressive sociological forces. He was attuned to the individual and minority free speech implications of Mill's 'tyranny of majority opinion', conditions he connected to modern technologies of mass distributed opinion. But Forster's liberal free speech arguments were also the product of situated responses to historical events and shifts, and to the parameters and power of organisational structures. I want to suggest that, far from being in conflict with the political demands of repeated organisational procedures, as Trilling would have it, Forster's literary imagination proved insightful about the free speech implications of modern bureaucratic structures and the behavioural norms they spawned.

The timing of Forster's decision to join PEN, on 10th December 1928, less than a month after the *Well of Loneliness* court judgement, was not accidental. The Well case, as Stuart Christie has argued, was significant for the decision to take up a more public intellectual role, partly because it 'represented a gear-change in Forster's opposition to government literary meddling'.[8] The PEN timing coincided with and formed part of the crystallisation of Forster's belief that he was unable to write freely about his own sexuality, and with his strengthening conviction that writers, including gay and lesbian writers, should, as he put it in a later essay, be able to 'write freely about sex'.[9] His commitment also coincided with his writing of a number of sexually explicit and, at the time, unpublishable short stories, including 'Dr Woolacott' (1927), 'Arthur Snatchfold' (1928) and 'The Classical Annex' (1930-31).

From 1924 to 1929 Conservative Home Secretary William Joynson-Hicks clamped down heavily on radical politics and sexual liberalisation in the UK, including the publication of obscene books. What T. S. Eliot referred to as 'the censorship movement', which involved both Obscenity and Libel Laws, ignited

[8] Stuart Christie, 'E. M. Forster as Public Intellectual', *Literature Compass*, 3/1 (2005) pp. 43-52: 44.

[9] Forster, 'Liberty in England', p. 64.

vocal opposition from writers.[10] Arguments tended to be defensive in nature, working to shield the literary text and literary sphere, sharply demarcated from pornographic writing, from the prohibitions of the law courts.

Forster's response to the Well trial focused on the problem for minorities of an intensifying UK censorship culture that was a product both of paternalistic government laws and the forceful expression of opinion when amplified by modern mass distributed newspapers. Both Forster's anonymous article for the *Nation and Athenaeum* and Forster's and Woolf's joint letter to the *Nation and Athenaeum* mined and adapted Mill's argument that the rights of the minority must be defended against the power of mass opinion. Forster attacked the undemocratic and censoring power of the popular press, in this case the *Sunday Express*: a 'single article in the *Sunday Express*', he complained, had caused 'the almost immediate suppression of a book'.[11]

Forster and Woolf also advocated a moral realism in their defence of the rights of sexual minorities: the 'subject-matter of the book exists as a fact among the

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[10] T. S. Eliot, 'Letter to Amabel Williams Ellis', 28 October 1928, in Valerie Eliot and Hugh Houghton (eds.), *The Letters of T. S. Eliot: 1928-1929*, *vol.* iv (New Haven, CT 2011) p. 291.

[11] E. M. Forster, 'The New Censorship', *Nation and Athenaeum* (1 September 1928) p. 696.

many other facts of life. It is recognized by science and recognizable in history. It forms, of course, an extremely small fraction of the sum-total of human emotions, it enters personally into very few lives, and is uninteresting or repellent to the majority; nevertheless it exists'.[12]

In his humorous satire, 'Mrs Grundy at the Parkers' (1932), Forster took aim at the more nebulous power of the moralising and censorious majority, and specifically identified what he saw as its modern conditions and features. He described the modern situation as one in which moral codes, rather than being imposed from the outside as ideals and prohibitions, have been internalised, created through an 'atmosphere of self-consciousness and fear'. The satire identifies a shift in the location of moral thinking, from ideals to behavioural habits. The average man, Forster writes, 'has habits instead of ideals', while the hypocritical censorious behaviour of committee members is a product of fear rather than belief. [13]

The differences between ideals and behavioural habits was one that coloured Forster's more politicised interventions on censorship and free speech from the mid 1930s. 'Liberty in England' (1935) was originally delivered as a lecture at the Paris

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[12] E. M. Forster and Virginia Woolf, 'The New Censorship', *Nation and Athenaeum* (8 September 1928) p. 726.

[13] E. M. Forster, 'Mrs Grundy at the Parkers', in Elizabeth Heine (ed.), *Abinger Harvest and England's Pleasant Land* (London 1996) pp. 14-18: 15.

Congrès International des Ecrivains in 1935. It was written in the wake of the passing in the UK of The Incitement to Disaffection Act of 1934, and to address the largely Communist-affiliated Paris event. Forster took as his target the role of the State in suppressing individual expression. He criticised what he and others viewed as the extended mechanisms of bureaucratic governmental control, both within totalitarian *and* liberal democratic nation states – what he identified as the peculiarly British formation of 'Fabian Fascism'. Fabian Fascism, as Forster defined it, was the 'dictator-spirit working quietly away behind the façade of constitutional forms, passing a little law (like the Sedition Act) here, endorsing a departmental tyranny there, emphasizing the national need of secrecy elsewhere'.[14] Forster located British Fascistic politics in embedded bureaucratic structures and the quietly secretive behaviours they produced.

Activism in defence of free expression also needed to be clear about how action could create effects. In his PEN tribute to Henry Nevinson in 1936 he paid attention to the location of active disobedience, praising Nevinson's virtue of disobedience, what he called 'the most difficult and necessary virtue', because 'Nevinson is certainly a gay free-lance but not the theoretical freelance, because he

[14] E. M. Forster, 'Liberty in England', in *Abinger Harvest*, pp. 60-66: 62.

has never disobeyed on principle or held the theory that the underdog is always right'.[15]

Forster's sensitivity to the situated nature of free speech activism was also central to his Presidential address to the English PEN Symposium to commemorate the tercentenary of the publication of Milton's *Areopagitica*, which was held from 22nd to 26th August, 1944. Because English PEN President Storm Jameson was ill, Forster agreed to deliver the Presidential address, something he confessed he had never done before.

The *Areopagitica* conference took place during a key stage of the war, while London was still reeling from the effects of the June terror bombing campaign, which left 22,000 civilians dead, and Allied forces were in the midst of the final battle for Paris. On the penultimate day of the Conference, and much to the joy of its participants, Paris was liberated. With the United Nations to come into existence officially the following year, Allied governments and people had, by August 1944, begun to look beyond the end of the war, and at the future transnational organisational structures, reconstruction, and values, that would define the post-war world.

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[15] 'P.E.N. Club Honours Mr. Henry Nevinson: Mr E. M. Forster on His "Virtue of disobedience"', *Guardian* (9 December 1936) p. 14.

Much of Forster's speech, as well as the Symposium as a whole, was devoted to thinking not only about how to defend freedom of expression in the context of Fascism and totalitarianism, but also about the international organisational structures that would be required after the War to protect such freedoms.

Forster published an essay on Milton under the conference's title 'The Tercentenary of the "Areopagitica"' in the essay collection *Two Cheers for Democracy*, in 1951. His 'Presidential Address' for the conference, however, was a different speech, and was published in the 1944 PEN collection of conference essays, *Freedom of Expression*. It is notable that while 'The Tercentenary of the *Areopagitica*' attends to Milton's ideas in relation to British democratic traditions, the scope of Forster's 'Presidential Address' entailed both a robust internationalism, and a degree of reflection on the possible impact of organisations on the post-war settlement. 'PEN', as Forster declared, 'is an international body. This cannot be said too often at a moment when internationalism is unfashionable'. Shifting to the collective pronoun, he continued: 'we are a world association of writers, not an association of British or even of Allied writers. We stand for the creative impulse which existed before nationality was invented and which will continue to exist when that dubious invention has been scrapped'.[16]

[16] E. M. Forster, 'Presidential Address', in Hermon Ould (ed.), *Freedom of Expression: A Symposium* (Port Washington, NY 1970) pp. 9-14: 9.

Forster used Milton's arguments to flesh out the parameters of the 'creative impulse' of this ahistorical transnational 'we'. He discussed one of his long-standing preoccupations, the problem of secrecy: 'Secrecy is our immediate enemy.' As he put it: 'That is the lesson I draw from the Areopagitica.' Forster adopted and adapted Milton's attack on judgements passed in 'darknesse' and his insistence that the question of whether a book is 'reason itself' or a 'Monster' is one that must be decided upon out in the open. Virtue, too, is meaningless if constrained to the private realm: 'I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister'd virtue, unexercis'd & unbreath'd, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race'.[17] Milton's famous words prompted Forster to picture the modern global conditions of secrecy as a 'darkened room':

> The world has become a darkened room, with more and more proceedings in camera, secret committees, national and local, banned books, withheld lists of banned books, censorships, prohibited areas, and officials so esoteric that they can scarcely be mentioned even in cipher.[18]

The use of Milton to construct an intellectual free speech history presupposed and constructed, amongst other things, a theory of free speech history itself. The Milton

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[17] John Milton, *Areopagitica: And Other Political Writings of John Milton* (Indianapolis 1999) p. 13, 17.

[18] Forster, 'Presidential Address', p. 12.

conference not only took place during a transitional period of the War, it also represented a turning point in the cultural significance and politicisation of Milton's free speech arguments. Milton's legacy had split opinion in the 1920s and 1930s. T. S. Eliot notoriously attacked the 'deterioration' to which he had 'subjected the language' and judged him 'unsatisfactory' from a moral, theological, psychological and political philosophical point of view. But Milton's free speech arguments had also sporadically been invoked as important for a British history of civil liberties. As Forster put it in 'Liberty in England' if the moderns 'could assert what had been asserted by Milton in his century and by Shelley and by Dickens in theirs, we should have no fear for our liberties.'[19] Forster's genealogy of literary civil libertarians both historicised their assertions and, by emphasising the 'if' and the 'could', also placed a question mark over both the strength of assertion and the power of their modern heirs.

During the 1950s Cold War, however, Milton's writings on free speech, and specifically his *Areopagitica*, would become central to a series of more overtly political debates about the anti-Communist nature of a Western-based civil liberties tradition. The US publication of the first volume of Don M. Wolfe's multi-volume Yale edition of Milton's prose works in 1953 led to the politicisation of Milton's *Areopagitica* in the fraught US university politics of the 1950s. While Milton was lauded by Wolfe and others as an important defender of civil liberties and a 'symbol'

[19] Forster, 'Liberty in England', p. 60.

of what they called 'resistance to totalitarianism', Wolfe's historicist edition was criticised by others dedicated to what Sharon Achinstein calls the 'decontextualizing and depoliticizing that were the enabling intellectual conditions of the Cold War academy'.[20]

PEN's *Areopagitica* Conference was also the occasion for the politicisation of Milton's argument. His defence of the 'liberty of unlicenced printing' was claimed as a proto-Soviet anti-Fascist tract, *and* as the founding text of a free speech tradition opposed to Soviet style 'totalitarianism', as Herbert Read put it. Others resisted such rewritings, and were much more sober about the kind of modern freedoms and free speech arguments Milton might reasonably be said to prefigure or promote, with delegates particularly picking up on the authoritarian anti-populist strands of his thought.

Forster engaged directly with these historical constructions. He distinguished between what he claimed were the two broad ways of thinking about freedom and history in evidence at the Symposium. The first group of people, whom he called the 'musts', see history as a knowable, scientific, plotted process and therefore view the future as predictable. The second class of people, whom he called the 'oughts', view history as following no rhythm, pattern or plot, they cannot predict the future except

[20] Sharon Achinstein, 'Cold War Milton', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 77/3 (2008) pp. 801-836: 803.

as the ‘play of the contingent and the unseen’. The problem, for them, is immediate: ‘What ought I to do now?’ And to decide the content and force of the 'ought' they appeal to something within; ‘to conscience’. Forster’s two classes of people were prominent at the Symposium, with a number of Communist Party ‘musts’ such as Olaf Stapledon and Ivor Montagu claiming Milton as a kind of Soviet-style anti-Fascist, and liberal 'oughts' such as Robert Pollard insisting that Milton’s free speech argument was founded on an idea that freedom of conscience was an inalienable right.

Forster, who often constructed his arguments by identifying two polarised positions and situating himself between them, identified himself as an ‘impure ought’. He could see an ‘inevitable process’ in himself that he could not see at work in society: ‘call it taste, call it conscience’. This ‘inner voice’ or, in the wonderfully Forsterian formulation that features in my paper’s title, this ‘inner mumble’ tells him that ‘the immediate need for humanity is spiritual’. His ‘ought’ is impure, as he puts it, because he does not say, as a pure 'ought' would, ‘Let’s be good and damn the consequences’. That is, as he says, ‘too bleak’ for him.[21]

Instead, the moral life mapped by Forster’s ‘conscience’ and its inner mumble, is one that does take responsibility for the consequences of its individualism. Forster’s ironic slippage from inner voice to ‘inner mumble’ captures the indistinct, uncertain or inarticulate nature of individual conscience. The idea of the inner

[21] Forster, ‘Presidential Address’, p. 12.

mumble extends Forster's arguments about the individual literary and moral costs of secrecy and self-censorship, and captures what he sees as the modern conflict not only between individual moral agency and totalitarian politics, but also between moral agency and sociological tendencies and political regulations in the realm of free speech. It does so by harnessing the aesthetic language of taste, complexity and undecidability subsequently adopted by Trilling.

Forster's inner mumble is an expression of what Amanda Anderson has called the 'Bleak Liberalism' of the 1940s and 1950s, a formation that 'engaged', as she puts it, 'sober and even stark views of historical development, political dynamics, and human and social psychology'. As Anderson argues, this bleak liberal viewpoint acknowledged the gap between 'the invisible hand and the self-interested individual' and between Mill's 'moral agent and darker sociological tendencies'.[22]

Forster's 'inner mumble' would seem to be an uncertain and inarticulate moral foundation and framework for decision and action; and an inadequate basis for rebuilding the post-war future. It claims no legislative function in the sphere of morality or politics and proposes no strong claim about the individual independence Mill identified with freedom of speech. Nevertheless, Forster's inner mumble is one that appeals to an uncertain and open-ended, but significant communitarian ethics; one that acknowledges and takes responsibility for the consequences of speech, and

[22] Amanda Anderson, *Bleak Liberalism* (Chicago 2016) pp. 2, 3.

which in other contexts might generate interpersonal structures of shame or tolerance. We could perhaps see the limits to Forster's bleakness or the boundary between the inner and the mumble in his formulation that he would not say 'let's be good and damn the consequences' - for the 'friend' whom he hoped he would have the 'guts' not to betray in favour of his country in 'What I Believe'.[23] The question then would be, how far would the category of a friend stretch? To his acquaintances? Everyone at the Areopagitica conference? All members of PEN? All writers? All persons? The humanistic internationalist language of the person that would be announced in the Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 would subsequently be adopted and asserted by PEN in the 1950s; for example in the 1957 PEN letter to *The Times* concerning the imprisonment of Hungarian writers. [24]

I will conclude this essay with a brief foray into the free speech challenges of the immediate post-war period. After the war, many writers and PEN members confronted the implications of Fascist or inhumane speech (what we would now call hate speech) for arguments in defence of writers' rights to free speech. At the first PEN congress after the war, in Stockholm in 1946, PEN members debated whether war time Fascist and Nazi collaborators should be allowed to re-join PEN, and whether their Fascist speech should be curtailed because of its dangerous and corrosive effects on the public sphere. The Dutch centre proposed a motion in which PEN centres would draw up a list of Fascists or collaborators, who would be denied

[23] Forster, 'What I Believe', p. 76.
[24] Forster, 'Hungarian Writers on Trial', p. 11.

admittance or re-admittance to the PEN organisation. When it came to the vote on the motion it was carried decisively, with 17 in favour, 6 against and 3 abstentions.

Forster responded to the debate in a radio broadcast of 1946, where he interpreted the differences of opinion as a direct result of war-time experiences:

> The seventeen in favour were all members of European countries which had been occupied by the Nazis during the war, and had suffered from informers. The six against and the three abstentions belonged to countries that had not been so occupied – such as the United States of America, Great Britain, China. It was a vote of the unfortunate against the fortunate.

Expanding on the British position, he stated: 'we hadn't to undergo psychological misery like Holland or France and that seems to be the dividing line. I know that I should have voted *against* the Black List. I am glad the Indian delegate voted against it, and I am certain those who voted for it were ill-advised; still I understand the mentality'.[25]

Forster's assessment of the inner conflicts in the PEN organisation over writer collaborators acknowledged the situatedess of national responses to a free speech dilemma. Forster admitted his principled opposition to collaborator lists, but

[25] E. M. Forster, 'Black List for Authors?', *Listener*, 36/917, 8 August 1946, p. 10.

recognised and understood that the experience of occupation might override principle. This balanced or equivocal assessment captures a consistent feature of his liberal free speech arguments: he sought to understand both the principles and situatedness of the responses to free speech questions.