

# Art in E. M. Forster's *Where Angels Fear to Tread*

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For N. U. Rivera

“Do they care about literature and art? That is most important when you come o think of it. Literature and art. Most important.”<sup>1</sup> Aunt Juley’s query pertaining to the Wilcoxes in the novel *Howards End* reveals E. M. Forster’s position on the place of art in life. Next only to the cultivation of personal relationships, Forster believed that the contemplation of art was the most important human activity, an idea that he and his Bloomsbury friends allegedly adopted from G. E. Moore’s *Principia Ethica*.<sup>2</sup> A work of art, he averred in the essay “Art for Art’s Sake,” “is the only material object in the universe which may possess internal harmony.”<sup>3</sup> In a muddled world, it has the capacity to enrich the individual, enlarge the imagination, and increase one’s sensitivity. Forster disavowed that art alone matters, but he never doubted its value and never ceased to champion it.<sup>4</sup> In one essay, he contended that society

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<sup>1</sup> E. M. Forster, *Howards End* (New York: Bantam, 1985 [London: Edward Arnold, 1910]), 5.

<sup>2</sup> K. W. Gransden, *E. M. Forster* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), 5.

<sup>3</sup> E. M. Forster, “Art for Art’s Sake,” in *Two Cheers for Democracy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1951 [1938]), 92. The idea is reiterated in “The Challenge of Our Time,” also in *Two Cheers for Democracy*: “Art is valuable not because it is educational (though it may be), not because it is recreative (though it may be), not because everyone enjoys it (for everyone does not), not even because it has to do with beauty. It is valuable because it has to do with order, and creates little worlds of its own, possessing internal harmony, in the bosom of this disoriented planet” (59-60).

<sup>4</sup> See *ibid.* An exposition of Forster’s views on art is Alan Wilde, *Art and Order: A Study of E. M. Forster* (New York University Press, 1964). Forster’s short story “The Celestial Omnibus,” in which Mr. Bons’s misdirected worship of art bars him from entering the celestial city, is fictional representation of Forster’s moderate version of “art for art’s sake.” *Collected Tales of E. M. Forster* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952

even owes the artist a space to create fresh perspectives and to question existing conditions.<sup>5</sup>

It is not surprising, then, that art — whether visual, musical, literary, or architectural — figures in a number of his works. In *Howards End*, for example, Margaret questions the value of interpreting one art form in terms of another (“If Monet’s really Debussy, and Debussy’s really Monet, neither gentleman is worth a salt — that’s my opinion”<sup>6</sup>). In *Maurice*, Alec blackmails the eponymous hero while they look at relics of Assyrian art at the British Museum. In *A Room with a View*, the contrasts between Lucy’s two suitors and the life that each represents — a life of rooms without views versus a life of open spaces — are typified by the difference between Gothic and Renaissance art.<sup>7</sup> Finally, the short stories, “The Celestial Omnibus,” and, “Other Kingdom,” bring Virgil, Ovid, and specially Dante quite literally to life; while “The Classical Annex,” and “The Obelisk,” charge ancient sculpture and architecture with sexual meanings.

The deployment of art as a literary device by Forster is evident as early as in his first novel, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905). Forster resorts to Italian painting to underscore the conflict in the novel, namely, the values of Sawston (in the words of one of the characters, “the idleness, the stupidity, the respectability, the petty unselfishness”<sup>8</sup>), versus those of Italy. While he once confessed at being a poor critic of painting (“I am bad at looking at pictures”<sup>9</sup>), Forster shows in the novel that he at least knows how to deploy paintings as a novelist. The artworks described or alluded to in the work more than effect realism (for the novel is, after

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[London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1947]), 49-74.

<sup>5</sup> “The Duty of Society to the Artist,” in *Two Cheers for Democracy*, 95-100. See also “Anonymity: An Inquiry” (77-88), “Does Culture Matter?” (100-07), “The Raison d’Être of Criticism in the Arts” (107-123), “The C Minor of that Life” (123-26), “Not Listening to Music” (127-30), and “Not Looking at Pictures” (130-34).

<sup>6</sup> Forster, *Howards End*, 29. For an account of the structural and symbolic uses of music in the novel, see Andrea K. Weatherhead, “*Howards End*: Beethoven’s Fifth,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 31 (Summer-Autumn, 1985): 247-64.

<sup>7</sup> Nigel Messenger, *How to Study an E. M. Forster Novel* (Hampshire and London: Macmillan, 1991), 70-9.

<sup>8</sup> E. M. Forster, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, with introduction by Jeffrey Meyers (New York: Bantam, 1996 [London: Edward Arnold, 1905]), 131. Subsequent quotations from the novel are taken from this edition.

<sup>9</sup> Forster, “Not Looking at Pictures,” in *Two Cheers for Democracy*, 131.

all, partly set in Italy, in fictional Monteriano, and the characters visit churches). Rather, they illuminate Forster's own art: a case of the visual complimenting the verbal.

The plot of *Where Angels Fear to Tread* revolves around two trips to Italy. Philip Herriton is tasked by his domineering mother to talk his widowed sister-in-law Lilia — on vacation in Italy with her chaperone, Caroline Abbott, a spinster “good, quiet, dull, and amiable, and young only because she was twenty-three” (21) — out of marrying Gino Carella, the son of an Italian dentist, to preserve the family's reputation. Philip, however, arrives too late. Lilia has already married Gino. Caroline is remorseful for having encouraged the match. Both she and Philip return defeated to Sawston. Lilia's happiness, however, is short-lived, as Gino proves unfaithful and mercenary, and his notions of masculinity imprison her. She dies in childbirth.

Meanwhile, life among the Herritons proceeds as usual: Philip's mother and sister “worked and played cards. Philip read a book” (6-7). Mrs. Herriton takes over Lilia's duties in raising her daughter Irma, from whom the Herritons have kept the news of Lilia's elopement. The placid existence of the Herritons is disrupted when Irma receives a postcard from her “lital brother.” Caroline, hoping to undo what she thinks has been her fault, plans to “rescue” the baby from Gino. Apprised of Caroline's plan to raise the baby in England, Mrs. Herriton, “who could not bear to seem less charitable than others” (91), dispatches Philip again, this time with Harriet to badger him, to bargain with Gino for the baby. They find Caroline already in Italy.

Both Philip and Caroline, however, have a change of heart when they realize that Gino truly loves the baby and will not be bribed. Despite their differences, Philip and Gino bond. Caroline and Philip agree to leave the baby with Gino. Philip orders the carriages for their return, but unknown to both him and Caroline, Harriet has kidnapped the baby. Philip and Harriet's carriage collide with Caroline's. The baby dies in the accident, Philip suffers a broken arm, and Harriet is distraught. When Philip tells Gino the truth, Gino tortures him, almost breaking his arm, but Caroline arrives and saves him. On the train to Sawston, Caroline professes her love for Gino, at the same time that Philip is aware of, but is unable to articulate, his attraction to Caroline.

The chief artwork in the novel is the fresco depicting the last moments of Deodata, patron saint of Monteriano, in the fifth chapel of

the Collegiate Church of Santa Deodata. Forster gives us an account of Deodata's life, a life of "sweetness and barbarity," in chapter six:

So holy was she that all her life she lay upon her back on the house of her mother, refusing to eat, refusing to play, refusing to work. The devil, envious of such sanctity, tempted her in various ways. He dangled grapes above her, he showed her fascinating toys, he pushed soft pillows beneath her aching head. When all proved vain he tripped up the mother and flung her downstairs before her very eyes. But so holy was the saint that she never picked her mother up, but lay upon her back through all, and thus assured her throne in Paradise. She was only fifteen when she died, which shows how much is within the reach of any school-girl. (104)

Following her death, the city's victories over the other Italian states, including Siena, were "all gained through the invocation of her name" (104).

The fresco itself is described in detail in another chapter:

[Philip's] eyes rested agreeably on Santa Deodata, who was dying in full sanctity upon her back. There was a window open behind her, revealing just such a view as he had seen that morning, and on her widowed mother's dresser there stood just such another copper pot. The saint looked neither at the view nor at the pot, and at her widowed mother still less. For lo! she had a vision: the head and shoulders of St. Augustine were sliding like some miraculous enamel along the rough-cast wall. It is a gentle saint who is content with half another saint to see her die. In her death, as in her life, Santa Deodata did not accomplish much. (156-57)

The half-mocking tone of these descriptions, to which we shall return, should not be overlooked.

In these passages, Forster is playing with history and hagiography. Monteriano, with its many towers, is actually San Gimignano.<sup>10</sup> Santa Deodata is Forster's version of Santa Fina (or Seraphina), to whom a

<sup>10</sup> The historical data come from S. P. Rosenbaum, "Towards a Literary History of Monteriano," *Twentieth Century Literature* 31 (Summer/Autumn 1985): 185-98; Wilfred Stone, *The Cave and the Mountain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), 170; and Jeffrey Meyers's introduction to the novel, xi. The fictitious Baedeker entry on Monteriano (15-16) contains an equally fictitious allusion by Dante to the town.

chapel in the Collegiate Church in San Gimignano is consecrated. The fresco described in the novel is based on an actual work: St. Gregory Announces the Death of Santa Fina (ca. 1475) by Domenico Ghirlandaio (1449-1494). The general compositions of the paintings are more or less similar, except that instead of the dresser, Ghirlandaio placed a table on which are a plate of fruit, a decanter, and a glass.<sup>11</sup> (See appendix)

Something of Santa Fina's life must be mentioned for one to appreciate the liberties Forster took with her legend.<sup>12</sup> Santa Fina was a pretty girl born to a poor family. She spent her time spinning, sewing, and praying. She always gave food to the poor. At age ten, she contracted diseases that left her body paralyzed. To imitate Christ, she lay on a plank of wood in the last five or six years of her life without changing position. The side where she lay on eventually became infested with mice and worms. The devil is said to have pushed her mother down the stairs to torment her, but she remained steadfast. She is said to have kept her eyes on the crucifix as she prayed, "It is not my wounds but thine, O Christ, that hurt me."

After the death of her mother, her friend Beldia took care of her. She was so weak that Beldia had to raise her head since she herself had not the strength to do it. St. Gregory (not St. Augustine, as it is in the novel) appeared to her, saying, "Dear child, on my festival God will give you rest." Eight days later, on St. Gregory's feast day (March 12), she died. Sources differ as to whether she was removed from the decaying plank of wood, but all agree that fragrant white violets were found growing on the side where she had laid.

Many miracles were attributed to her, the most popular being her restoration of Beldia's crippled arm. In *Lives of the Saints*, we read that "she is said, as she lay dead, to have raised her hand and to have clasped and healed the injured arm of her friend Beldia." She is also said to have

<sup>11</sup> The fresco is discussed in Jean K. Cadogan, *Domenico Ghirlandaio: Artist and Artisan* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 45-55, 203-207. In the novel, the artist is Giovanni da Empoli, who is mentioned in a short story by Forster, "The Helping Hand," where he is the subject of an art book. See *The Life to Come and Other Stories* (London: Edward Arnold, 1972), 55-60.

<sup>12</sup> Information on the saint's life is taken from *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, ed. Herbert Thurston, S. J. and Donald Attwater, vol. 1 (London: Burns and Oates, 1956), 577-78; Cadogan, 204-05; and <http://saints.catholic.org/saints/fina.html>, internet, accessed April 2002.

cured blindness and saved people from the plague.

In his introduction to the novel, Jeffrey Meyers writes that aspects of the life of the saint mirror qualities of the major characters of the novel. Lilia on her deathbed resembles the dying Seraphina, expiring “in exemplary and expiatory fashion.” Philip is also as inactive. Harriet “has Fina’s rather joyless religion,” and Caroline “share her renunciation of physical love.”<sup>13</sup> Critics aside from Meyers agree that of all the characters, it is Philip with whom the painting is most frequently linked.<sup>14</sup> What these critics have noted in passing is here developed.

In the two major instances that the fresco is described, it is through Philip’s eyes that we see it. The first happens when Philip and Harriet arrive in Monteriano. She has been haranguing him about his mission to get Lilia’s baby from Gino. Philip shuts her out, however, and “in the spirit of the cultivated tourist” (104), he gazes at the tower of the Collegiate Church of Santa Deodata. The life of the saint and the making of the fresco are then recounted. Forster adds: “Santa Deodata was better company than Harriet, and she kept Philip in a pleasant dream until the legno drew up to their hotel” (105). Later, Philip and Caroline enter the chapel. Caroline explains that Gino has won her over to his side and that he will not give the baby up. “Why aren’t you angry with me?” she asks Philip. Philip replies that he understands her “all sides, I think” (156). Philip then looks at the fresco, which Forster proceeds to describe.

The juxtaposition between the painting of the saint and the character in both instances suggests the identification between them. Both are inactive, physically in the case of Deodata and morally in the case of Philip. In the painting, the preponderance of straight and rigid lines conveys the impression of Deodata/Fina’s immobility, an almost literal rendering of rigor mortis. Whatever signs of life there are — the view of the countryside, the hint of roses in the garden — are contained within the small frame of the window or the open door. There is a stark contrast between the interior (rigid, severe, lifeless) and the exterior (with its images of light and suggestively renascent vegetation and flowers). The fruits of the plate appear rotten, and the nearly lifeless saint herself stares straight at St. Gregory, oblivious of either mother

<sup>13</sup> Meyers, xvi.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Wilde, 23 and Rosenbaum, 187-88.

or Beldia.<sup>15</sup>

In Philip's case, he, too, takes the path of least resistance, if at all. He takes orders, first from his mother and then from his sister. His physical appearance hints at his passivity:

He was a tall, weakly-built young man, whose clothes had to be judiciously padded on the shoulders in order to make him pass muster. His face was plain rather than not, and there was a curious mixture in it of good and bad. He had a fine forehead and a good large nose, and both observation and sympathy were in his eyes. But below the nose and eyes all was confusion...

Philip himself, as a boy, had been keenly conscious of these defects. Sometimes when he had been bullied or hustled about at school he would retire to his cubicle and examine his face in a looking-glass, and he would sigh and say, "It is a weak face. I shall never carve a place for myself in the world." (71-72)

When the novel opens, Forster is almost unforgiving in his description of Philip. Philip, we are told, refuses Lilia's invitation to accompany her to Italy even though "his career at the Bar was not so intense as to prevent occasional holidays... he himself often found pleasure in the idea that he was too busy to leave town" (2). Later, when his mother dispatches him to Monteriano, we read, "I will do all I can," said Philip in a low voice. It was the first time he had had anything to do" (18).

Philip represents what Wilde calls "the aesthetic view of life" in Forster's fiction, a view of life that vitiates one. For the most part of the novel, he comes across as a mere spectator, retreating from responsibility by putting on an air of intellectual superiority. Just as Deodata gazes at the crucifix as her mother begs for food or falls down the stairs, so also Philip observes his mother and Caroline plotting and counter-plotting

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Cadogan's comments on the actual frescos by Ghirlandaio: "The S. Fina frescos are distinguished from later narratives [of Ghirlandaio's] in another way: in their lack of action. Rosenauer noted this curiously frozen quality, observing that the single events are extracted from the story and arranged around the saint like attributes, thereby extinguishing the sense of time" (206). In Ghirlandaio's fresco the two women are identified as Beldia and Beldia's daughter Benvenuta, not Beldia and the widowed mother (Cadogan, 206).



about the baby, indifferent to the moral consequences. The mission to “rescue” the baby he views as an amusing tableau: “Harriet, worked by his mother; Mrs. Herriton, worked by Miss Abbott; Gino, worked by a cheque — what better entertainment could he desire?” (98).

Even his enthusiasm for Italy turns out to be superficial. It is a sanitized Italy he worships, not the real Italy of Gino where beauty mingles with brutality, an idea that is symbolized by the city’s towers, which “reach up to heaven... and down to the other place” (118). Despite telling Lilia to “love and understand the Italians, for the people are more marvellous than the land” (2), he shares his mother’s contempt: “For three years he had sung the praises of the Italians, but he had never contemplated having one as a relative” (18).<sup>16</sup> Philip recoils further at the fact that Gino’s father is a dentist: “A dentist in fairyland!... He [Philip] feared that Romance might die” (26). Forster is quick to refute his view, informing the reader of Philip’s self-deceived: “Romance only dies with life. No pair of pincers will ever pull it out of us. But there is a spurious sentiment which cannot resist the unexpected and the incongruous and the grotesque” (26-7).

The fresco as Forster describes it and the saint’s life as he re-invents it can be brought to bear on Philip’s character. The mock ironic tone in the passages describing the painting, achieved by Forster’s omissions and exaggerations of aspects of the saint’s life, is meant to apply to Philip’s fecklessness. Deodata’s “aching head,” her lying upon her back “all her life,” not her last five or six years, on some unspecified object, not a plank of wood, and finally, her calm repose throughout her mother’s fall and, indeed, “through all” give one the impression not of suffering or penance but of luxuria or sloth. “Refusing to work,” Deodata is more sponge than saint, getting a ride at the expense of her mother. As Forster describes her, it is even likely, as Wilfred Stone infers, that she despises her mother (the dying saint looked at her mother “still less” than she did the view), and if so, the “saint” projects Philip’s “passive hostility” towards Mrs. Herriton.<sup>17</sup> There is no mention of her charity,

<sup>16</sup> Cf. later in the novel: “And Philip had seen that face [Gino’s] before in Italy a hundred times—seen it and loved it, for it was not merely beautiful, but had the charm which is the rightful heritage of all who are born on that soil. But he did not want to see it opposite him at dinner. It was not the face of a gentleman” (31).

<sup>17</sup> Stone, 178.



that "she was never idle, occupied with work or prayer," or that she became ill because of it. The verdict is simply: "In her death, as in her life, Santa Deodata did not accomplish much." (157).

Philip, however, is redeemable. "I wish something would happen to you, my dear friend; I wish something would happen to you" (159), Caroline tells him. Something does. At one point in the novel, at least, Philip ceases to be a mere observer and becomes a participant. This happens at the opera, where vulgarity (the plastic flowers, the unruly crowd, the sculpture of semi-naked ladies adorning the proscenium who "would have nodded to the young men on the ceiling of the Sistine" [122]) and romance blend quite naturally. The vitality of Italy (not the sanitized Italy of Baedeker and Philip's recollections) sweeps over the place. As one critic notes, "though the singer, like the flowers, is past her best, Forster shows very well that it is the spirit of communal celebration, not formal perfection, that lies at the heart of Italian opera."<sup>18</sup> We read:

Lucia began to sing, and there was a moment's silence. She was stout and ugly; but her voice was still beautiful, and as she sang the theatre murmured like a hive of happy bees. All through the coloratura she was accompanied by sighs, and its top note was drowned in a shout of universal joy. (124-25)

Amid the celebratory atmosphere, Philip "forgets himself as well as his mission" (125). He is hoisted up, literally, to Gino's box—becoming for a moment the center of attraction, a show as much as a spectator of a show.<sup>19</sup> There social barriers dissolve, and Philip "connects" with Gino's set of tradesmen's sons, medical students, solicitor's clerks, and sons of dentists. Called "Fra Filippo... A relative! A brother," Philip is "enchanted by the kind, cheerful voices, the laughter that was never vapid" (128) — a camaraderie he has never experienced in rigid, antiseptic Sawston.

If the Announcement illuminates Philip's character, Ghirlandaio's other fresco on the saint hints at Caroline's function in the novel. Although it is not described, we are told that there are two murals in

<sup>18</sup> Messenger, 48.

<sup>19</sup> John Sayre Martin, *E. M. Forster: The Endless Journey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 17.

the chapel; and as Forster has taken pains to draw parallels between Ghirlandaio's Announcement and its fictional counterpart, it seems reasonable to suppose that he intended readers to recall the actual companion piece as well. *Obsequies of the Saint* shows the dead Santa Fina on a catafalque and the two healing miracles she performs: restoring the sight of the blind and curing a paralyzed arm. In the background are angels ringing the bells in one of the towers of San Gimignano.<sup>20</sup> (See appendix)

Meyers already notes that Caroline nurses Philip's broken arm, just as Fina cures Beldia's paralyzed arm.<sup>21</sup> It may be conjectured here that just as the saint gives sight to the blind choirboy, so also does Caroline open Philip's eyes. Caroline acts as Philip's moral gadfly, plainly laying out the dilemma for Philip: "Do you want the child to stop with his father, who loves him and will bring him up badly, or do you want him to come to Sawston, where no one loves him, but where he will be brought up well? Settle it... But don't go talking about an 'honourable failure,' which means simply not thinking and not acting at all" (158). She adds, "Oh, what's the use of your fair-mindedness if you never decide for yourself?... I'm muddle-headed and stupid, and not worth a quarter of you, but I have tried to do what seemed right at the time. And you — your brain and your insight are splendid. But when you see what's right you're too idle to do it" (158).<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> See Cadogan, 45-55, 203-207.

<sup>21</sup> Meyers, xvi.

<sup>22</sup> Forster may here be using Caroline as mouthpiece to express his own doubts about the liberalism that he and the members of the Bloomsbury group, with whom he is often associated, espoused. When Forster was asked by the *Paris Review* to identify which characters represent him, he replied, "Rickie [of *The Longest Journey*] more than any. And also Philip. And Cecil [of *A Room with a View*] has got something of Philip in him" (interview by P. N. Furbank and F. J. H. Haskell, in *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews*, ed. Malcolm Cowley [New York: Viking Press, 1957], 33). Caroline Abbott is Forster's "devil's advocate" (Stone, 179). Given the ending of the novel, Forster was apparently convinced of the value of liberalism, although he would be less optimistic later in his career. Although Philip does not act, Philip sees, to use a favorite phrase of the Bloomsbury group, "on the whole." It is, in fact, the distance he assumes that enables him to have, "a general view of the muddle," as even Caroline concurs. "Nobody but himself would ever see round it now. And to see round it he was standing at an immense distance" (193-94). Harriet, true to her name, "harries" people, but for all her bluster and unflinching religious piety, she ends up kidnapping and killing the baby. Significantly, whenever Harriet opens the window, her eyes are assaulted by

The sight of her a chapter later transfigures Philip. Like Deodata in her dying moments, Philip experiences a salvific vision. The moment comes as Caroline rescues Philip from death and comforts the grieving Gino. When Philip sees Caroline embracing Gino, Philip reaches an epiphany:

He was happy; he was assured that there was greatness in the world. There came to him an earnest desire to be good through the example of this good woman. He would try henceforth to be worthy of the things she had revealed. Quietly, without hysterical prayers or banging of drums, he underwent conversion. He was saved. (182)

Not only does Philip (for once) assume responsibility — and suffer its painful consequences — but also does he acquire a new sense of purpose. In the last chapter, on the train back to England, Philip decides to leave Sawston and his mother, whose own moral bankruptcy is depicted as the chief source of his misery, and to work in London. The stirrings of love are another indicator. On the train, he realizes that he loves Caroline and tries, though unsuccessfully, to communicate his feelings, thinking, “That laughter in the theatre, those silver stars in the purple sky, even the violets of a departed spring, all had helped, and sorrow had helped also, and so had tenderness to others” (190). The image of the violets, the flowers that miraculously bloomed at the death of the paralytic Deodata, as the train enters the tunnel on the way to his “New Life,” seems to ratify his conversion.<sup>23</sup> While it must be admitted that his conversion is only partial (indeed, not a few critics

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smuts. The question of liberalism is discussed in Frederick Crews, *E. M. Forster: The Perils of Humanism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1962). See also Lionel Trilling, “Forster and the Liberal Imagination,” in *Forster: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1966), 71–80. For Philip as Forster’s alter ego, see Martin, 15, Stone, 177, Wilde, 24, and especially Rosenbaum, 182.

<sup>23</sup> Philip’s words (“Here beginneth the New Life”), often repeated in the novel, come from Dante’s *La Vita Nuova*. The parallels between Dante and Philip — chiefly, their spiritual initiation and the role of woman in the process — are discussed in Martin, 21–24. The violets anticipate the violet fields where Lucy’s “conversion” occurs in *A Room with a View*. Cf. “The road to Monteriano must traverse innumerable flowers” (25).

are unconvinced<sup>24</sup>), his resolution to dissociate himself from Sawston, the broadening of his sympathies, his unshackling from self-deception, and even his aborted attempt at romance bodes well—tiny steps, to be sure, but also remarkable ones for someone who has been a spiritual paralytic all his life. For Austin Warren, Philip “grows in humanity.”<sup>25</sup>

The function of Caroline as giver of insight is bolstered further by Forster’s recourse to another painting, or rather a cluster of paintings: those of the Madonna. Caroline appears in two tableaux, which are also the novel’s most dramatic moments. In both, she becomes a Mary figure. The first occurs in chapter seven, when she attempts to convince Gino to surrender the baby. However, seeing father and son together, her resolve weakens. She begins to realize “the horrible truth, that wicked people are capable of love... She was in the presence of something greater than right or wrong” (143). The baby ceases to be a “word” or a “principle” (136). Moreover, despite herself, she falls in love with Gino: “The man was majestic; he was a part of Nature” (146). When she washes the baby with Gino, Forster describes the scene in the language of art:

She sacrificed her own clean handkerchief. He put a chair for her on the loggia, which faced westward, and was still pleasant and cool. There she sat, with twenty miles of view behind her, and he placed the dripping baby on her knee. It shone now with health and beauty: it seemed to reflect light, like a copper vessel. Just such a baby Bellini sets languid on his mother’s lap, or Signorelli flings wriggling on pavements of marble, or Lorenzo di Credi, more reverent but less divine, lays carefully among flowers, with his head upon a wisp of golden straw. (147)

The composition of the scene is clearly inspired by paintings of the Madonna and Child, a fact underscored by the fact that Gino is looking at the two figures. Then, “to get a better view, he knelt by the side of the chair, with his hands clasped before him” (147). In this pose does

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Meyers and Messenger. Gransden writes, “They [Caroline and Philip] stand on the periphery of adventure, and tiptoe away. They have acknowledged the forces of life, and though they will never themselves surrender to these forces, yet they have become wise. . . . To a writer like Hemingway, it would be nothing” (28-29).

<sup>25</sup> Austin Warren, “E. M. Forster,” in *Forster: A Collection of Critical Essays*, 53.

Philip find them, and to him, the scene “to all intents and purposes” was that of “the Virgin and Child, with Donor” (147).

The second tableau is found in chapter nine, when Caroline saves Philip from Gino's fury. The scene, as pointed out earlier, marks Philip's moral conversion. Again, in describing Caroline, Forster uses imagery from art depicting the Madonna. Gino stumbles towards Caroline “like a child” and clings to her:

All through the day Miss Abbott had seemed to Philip like a goddess, and more than ever did she seem so now. Many people look younger and more intimate during great emotion. But some there are who look older, and remote, and he could not think there was little difference in years, and none in composition, between her and the man whose head was laid upon her breast. Her eyes were open, full of infinite pity and full of majesty, as if they discerned he boundaries of sorrow, and saw unimaginable tracts beyond. Such eyes he had seen in great pictures but never in a mortal. Her hands were folded round the sufferer, stroking him lightly, for even a goddess can do no more than that. And it seemed fitting, too, that she should bend her head and touch his forehead with her lips. (181-82)

Messenger notes that the scene is reminiscent of paintings of the Pieta.<sup>26</sup> Caroline's eyes “full of infinite pity,” and Gino's resting “upon her breast” link them with Mary and Christ, respectively. While Forster does not, as it were, give this tableau a title as he does with the first, in the paragraph that follows the scene, he emphasizes its significance, for Philip “looked away, as he sometimes looked away from the great pictures where visible forms suddenly become inadequate for the things they have shown to us” (182).

In these scenes, Forster uses “great pictures” to convey Caroline's character. He makes us relate Caroline with Mary, as much as he makes us associate Philip with Santa Deodata/Fina. In one sense, Caroline is like the Virgin, as she resists physical passion, and even though she admits to Philip that she is attracted to Gino, she knows that consummation is impossible. Like Mary, Caroline also acts as mediator — first (misguided by her upbringing) between Sawston and Italy,

<sup>26</sup> Messenger, 38.

and then between the two male characters. Her queenly authority is asserted when she utters the novel's "moral": "This thing stops here... I will have no more intentional evil. We are not to fight with each other any more" (181). She then presides over a kind of ritual when she makes the two male character drink milk from the same cup. The religious overtones are not easy to overlook: the men are partaking of a sacrament of forgiveness and healing.<sup>27</sup>

In a sense, Caroline is a spiritual mother figure to the two men. She shows a genuine concern for Philip's character and points out his moral lassitude. It is by her acts of "goodness" that Philip is redeemed physically and spiritually. She leads him to confront his self-delusions and, if we are to believe Philip's final words in the novel, to action. As for Gino, significantly described as a child several times in the novel (Lilia calls and treats him so, as does Caroline), she succeeds in tempering his brutality. To Gino, she is a "superior being — a goddess" (194).

The art of E. M. Forster is better appreciated if one takes into consideration the other arts; in this case, the art of painting. Forster either alludes to a specific artwork or contrives a scene to resemble one. In each case, he illuminates his work by generating associations and triggering meanings. This is perhaps one resource the novelist and the reader should not ignore, a resource that he apparently believed in even after he had stopped writing fiction. For as he says in an essay written thirty years after his first novel, "Not-looking at art leads to one goal only. Looking at it leads to so many."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> E. M. Forster, "Not Looking at Pictures," in *Two Cheers for Democracy*, 140.





