

## ENGLISH EXPERIENCE IN ITALIAN LANDSCAPE: PLACE AND RECREATED PLACE IN E. M. FORSTER'S ITALIAN NOVELS

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### Abstract

*Setting in E. M. Forster's novels is always subtle and intriguing, especially in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905) and *A Room with a View* (1908). In these two Italian novels, setting, especially Florence and Monteriano, assumes delicate relationship to the psychological development of the major characters. This article tries to construct the spatial text embedded in each of the two Italian novels so as to give validity to the presupposition that literary text of a place is always a re-creation of the physical one. The spatial text is constructed through the discussion of two interconnected issues: place and place-as-text. Verbal configurations of places often reflect the bias of the interpreter: the writer's and even the characters' reading of a place often give it a new property that transcends the original one. It is the perspective of the beholder that gives the place its form and meaning.*

**Key words:** E. M. Forster, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, *A Room with a View*, *Setting*

### 1. PLACE AND EXPERIENCE

Place in literary works is not just accessory; it often plays a crucial role that is closely connected with sensory and imaginative experience. Ernst Cassirer argues that place in literature is not just "the space of pure cognition" but should belong to "the space of sense perception."<sup>1</sup> Alexander Gellay (1973) also disagrees of treating setting merely as the backdrop. In his opinion, the material world should be seen as "solicitations to the reader" and as "modifications of his perceptive capacities" (p. 189). The most notable example is the place in William Wordsworth's poetry. For Wordsworth, place is not just a geographical locale but, as Leonard Lutwack (1984) proposes, is used as "frames within which the poet ranges freely in pursuit of a chain of reflections that spring from associations," and, moreover, mental interaction ultimately "transcend[s] place" and gives birth to "a variety of ideas—freedom, faith, divinity" (p. 15). This kind of transcendence is best dramatized in his "Daffodil" poem. There is a dual and progressive process in the poet's appreciation of the place, namely, the daffodil field in the Lake District. The poet starts with the process of pure cognition: he sees a beautiful scene and is immediately captivated by the scene. And then he sees beyond the beautiful scene. The transcending moment takes place in the final lines of the poem which record the afterglow reverberated from the scene long after the moment of pure cognition: "For oft, when on my couch I lie/In vacant or pensive mood/They flash upon that inward eye/Which is the bliss of solitude;/And then my heart with pleasure fills/And dances with the daffodils."<sup>2</sup> Here the poet contrasts two ways of viewing place: one via physical eyes and the other via "inward eye." For the poet, the inward eye registers what the physical eyes see and turns it into an epiphanic experience. Wordsworth in this poem vividly exemplifies the intimate interaction between place and human experience.

J. E. Malpas (1999) in *Place and Experience* expands the role of place and argues that place is not inanimate but is endowed with active nature. He goes further to propose that place is "both humanized and humanizing" (p. 2). To consider place humanizing emphasizes both the tie of the human being to location and, more important, human beings' dependence on the place for their identity. As Wordsworth (1995) himself once wrote: "these fields, these hills . . . were his living Being, more than his own Blood" (p. 195). Leonard Lutwack proposes a reverse connection of the place's dependence on human appreciation. He argues that place has no meaning at all without subjective response. He emphasizes that "places are neither good nor bad in themselves but in the values attached to them,"

<sup>1</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Vol. 2, Chapter 2 "Mythical Thought."

<sup>2</sup> Lines 19-24.

and, moreover, “the qualities of places are determined by the subjective responses of people according to their cultural heritage, sex, occupation and personal predicaments” (Lutwack, 1984, p. 35). In a sense, place is partly real and partly made up by experience. Susan Hill (1987) writes about her own experience of place:

Whenever I go to a place and this starts happening, it is as though I develop another sense, or else all my other senses becomes more acute—I see, hear, smell things more vividly and strongly, and there is an atmosphere which is partly real, partly made up, so that I can’t precisely tell which is the real place and which is the place within me, the one I am creating. (pp. 59-60)

Therefore, whenever a human being is placed within a place, the process creates not simply a relation between the viewer and the viewed. Instead, it unfolds a complex interaction that involves both interdependence and mutual transformation.

However, Malpas bestows place an even more unconventional role. His argument that place can also be “humanized” is more thought-provoking. It may denote a double meaning which not only gives place human character but also gives it life. Discussing Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty*, John Wylie (2007) grants a similar role to place. He argues that “landscape is sensed and represented as a creative and elemental force in its own right” (p. 141). That is to say, a landscape is not just something to look at, but it “creates and enables a number of different relationships and connections between observer, observed and environment” (Wylie, 2007, p. 142). Instead of being a static scene to look at, Wylie contends that landscape can be “mobile and multi-sensory,” and “it shapes us as we shape it” (p. 143). Therefore, the relations between people and land could be active, embodied, and dynamic, and, according to Wylie, these relations are ongoing and evolving. They constitute “an embedded and engaged being-in-the-world” (p. 144). Humanized and humanizing, the place has little value taken apart from human experience, and, for some human beings, the place offers life-changing and even identity-forming experience. Therefore, place and people fold into and co-construct each other through different forms of interaction.

Since the exploration of the place is indistinguishable from the exploration, the rediscovery of human character and life, the real value in investigating fictional place is not descriptive exactitude but the projections of the viewer’s private inner world via place, or the so-called “lived experience” (Wylie, 2007, p. 141). Real or visionary, setting in E. M. Forster’s novels is always subtle and intriguing, especially in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905) and *A Room with a View* (1908). In these Forster’s two Italian novels, setting plays an essential role in shaping the psychology of and in triggering the psychological changes in the major characters. Moreover, setting sometimes assumes human characters, and characters are sometimes merged with the landscape and become part of it. In these two novels, such unique interactions take place primarily in Florence and Monteriano, a pair of urban-rural, real-visionary Italian locales with rich cultural heritage but different forms of glamor. English tourists approach the Italian landscape with different manners of appreciation. Passionate tourists fall immediately head over heels for its irresistible charm and magnetic allure. Some, however, remain detached and untouched throughout. Different from these two radical types of viewers are some highly perceptive character-viewers whose perception of the Italian landscape is keen but floating. Such interaction is vividly dramatized via the two dominant Tuscan scenes in which vitality demonstrated by towers, piazzas, cathedrals, and humanity is juxtaposed with dark, inherent brutality underneath them. It is through these viewers’ experiences that the interaction between place and subjective response is the most intense and is what this paper is concerned with. The interaction between place and experience will first be addressed through unfolding the distinctive features this special landscape incorporate, which includes the dual aspect of physical landscape and human landscape.

## 2. THE PHYSICAL LANDSCAPE

The physical landscape of the two novels is significantly interconnected. The most prominent issue of these two novels is undoubtedly romantic love. And the success or the failure of it relies heavily and quite often on the physical landscape. The three main places—Florence, Monteriano, and Fiesole—comprises an urban-countryside geo-construct that complements and, at the same time, contrasts. Moreover, this set of setting presents an almost complete overview of the Italian Tuscan natural and artistic beauty. As far as practical tourism is concerned, it offers tourists in the two novels easy daily excursions because it covers a comfortable touring area with Florence as the center within a radius of fifty kilometers. This area showcases all the main Tuscan sights, but, at the same time, it furnishes an interesting contrast between urban landscape and that in the countryside.

Florence and its vicinity constitute the most important shared landscape in these two novels. The main Italian setting in *A Room with a View*, Florence is no doubt an all-time grade-A tourist attraction. The city is first and foremost an embodiment of art. Birthplace of Renaissance, Florence is an abundant treasure-house of cultural heritage, Renaissance art and architecture, and monuments. The city is also home to numerous prestigious museums and art galleries, such as the Uffizi Gallery and the Palazzo Pitti. The Arno, a view Lucy Honeychurch longs to own, adds romantic touch to the city's already rich cultural heritage. In *A Room with a View*, no doubt, Florence never fails to capture the English tourists' attention with its architecture, history, art, and the view.

The city's cultural and artistic ambience, however, only plays a minor role in the two young couple's search for identity. The real value of Florence for the major characters is, as Michael L. Ross (1994) asserts, its "upsetting effect" (p. 80). The strongest impact the city exerts on the two young lovers' experience is the fight scene in the piazza, in which Florentine beauty is darkened by the Italian brutal vitality that upsets George's and Lucy's efforts to maintain composure. Florence recedes even to a minor role in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* to serve only as an important point of reference for Monteriano, the novel's major Italian setting. On their way to Monteriano to bring Lilia's baby back to England, Harriet and Philip make a short stop at Florence. This short sojourn brings about a radical view of Florence uncommonly perceived by English tourists. Harriet demonstrates strong aversion to this generally acclaimed beautiful city as she "crawled like a wounded creature through the streets, and swooned before various masterpieces of art" (Forster, 2014, p. 69), and her comment of Florence is vastly disparaging: "Italy was beastly, and Florence station is the centre of beastly Italy" (p. 70). Despite Florence's immense beauty, antiquity, and grandeur, which has made the city synonymous with beauty, it is never the center of romance in Forster's Italian novels. Just as George Emerson's big question mark shows, Florence engenders confusion and uncertainty.

The real romance of the two novels takes place in the Italian countryside. The fates of Lucy and George converge at Fiesole, a town on a scenic height above Florence. The time and the place are just right. Phaethon, the carriage driver, and Persephone, his lover, herald with a romantic prelude when they display unrestrained lovemaking that shocks the English philistine tourists. The climax occurs when Lucy inadvertently falls down into a sea of violets, a scene that makes romance inevitable:

The violet field from her feet the ground sloped sharply into view, and violets ran down in rivulets and streams and cataracts, irrigating the hillside with blue, eddying round the tree stems, collecting into pools in the hollows, covering the grass with spots of azure foam. But never again were they in such profusion; this terrace was the well-head, the primal source whence beauty gushed out to water the earth. (Forster, 1989, p. 78)

The violet field in the countryside offers a perfect locus for total liberation from social constraints, and it is also there that one is not afraid to recognize one's true desire. Even though this perfect match between self and nature is short-lived, it inspires the young lovers and leaves them a similar long-lasting impact as Wordsworth's daffodils.

Unlike the actual physical setting in *A Room with a View*, the setting of *Where Angels Fear to Tread* is not real. The story takes places mainly at Monteriano, a fictional Tuscan country locale whose geo-historical information is known only through its proximity to Poggibonsi, a real town in the province of Siena, Tuscany, not very far from Florence. With its close geo-historical connection with

the familiar places, it is not difficult for the reader to project his/her imagination about the place. Monteriano constitutes what Philip Herriton terms an off-the-track setting which has lost much of its historical importance but still retains some hidden charms. Like most small Tuscan towns, Monteriano is blessed with some historically valuable but decaying heritage. The three most outstanding attractions, as the novel describes, are the Walls, the towers, and the Collegiate Church of Santa Deodata. These attractions quite unfailingly provoke romantic but, at the same time, intimidating feelings from the English tourists. Monteriano is guarded by the Walls with two famous entrances—the Sienna Gate and the Volterra Gate. Travel books recommend a walk around it. People can catch sight of the Walls from afar when approaching the town. The appealing view of the Walls is presented through Philip's first impression: "The hazy green of the olives rose up to its walls, and it seemed to float in isolation between trees and sky, like some fantastic ship city of a dream. Its colour was brown, and it revealed not a single house—nothing but the narrow circle of the walls, and behind them seventeen towers" (Forster, 2014, pp. 23-24). The description is fair and clear, but Philip's feeling is confused—"It was impossible to praise it as beautiful, but it was also impossible to damn it as quaint" (p. 24). Such discrepancy manifest between Philip's appreciation and his feeling quite often found in the Italian experience of Forster's English protagonists shows that viewing and perception are not always affected or evaluated by the same criteria.

In addition to the Walls, the first sight that catches the viewers' attention from afar before entering the town is the towers. These towers record and embody the declining history of Monteriano. There are seventeen of them—"all that was left of the fifty-two that had filled the city in her prime. Some were only stumps, some were inclining stiffly to their fall, some were still erect, piercing like masts into the blue" (Forster, 2014, p. 24). Towers are the symbol of vitality; dilapidated towers, on the other hand, may reflect the loss of vitality. However, Monteriano towers, through broken, are transformed into different forms of antiquities that still possess charm and sublimity. Rocca, a kitchen garden where there is a ladder up to a broken tower and where you can see all the other towers below, the plain, and all the other hills, is considered the best attraction in Monteriano, especially at sunset. Like many other Italian places in the two novels, Rocca is endowed with ambiguous attributes: it is charming and vulgar at the same time. Whereas it offers the best view from which the tourists can see the tower "[reach] up to heaven," Rocca is also tarnished by the banality of real for its base is in shadow and pasted over with advertisements (Forster, 2014, p. 80). This kind of conflicting attributes is shared by other important Italian scenes.

Equally romantic but apprehensive is the Collegiate Church of Santa Deodata. Topped by a cross, the Church tower is one of the seventeen towers. The town's spiritual center, the Church is dedicated to Santa Deodata, a holy maiden of the Dark Ages and the city's patron saint. The story of Santa Deodata and her martyrdom are strangely mingled with sweetness and barbarity. She was fifteen when she died. All her life she lay upon her back, refusing to do anything. Devil tried to tempt her to move with food, toys and even by flinging her widowed mother downstairs but all in vain. Giovanni da Empoli came and painted the death and burial of the saint on frescos on the fifth chapel on the right, for which the famous Baedeker gave a star. Even though Santa Deodata was an uncharacteristic saint and did not seem to accomplish anything when she was alive, her inspiration on the people of the little town was overwhelming: the evocation of her name helped Monteriano to win victories over its neighboring towns. Santa Deodata thus becomes an uncanny embodiment of purity, piety, and perseverance.

Centered in Florence, the physical landscape of the two Italian novels extends to its outer rim of small country towns and even into an imaginary realm that bears recognizable similarities to some typical Tuscan places. The physical landscape is further enveloped in rich history, antiquity, art, and natural beauty which greatly magnify its charm and attraction but, at the same time, induce awe and apprehension. Such awesome and apprehensive feelings are more strongly reflected in English characters' reaction to the Italian human landscape, an unusual merge of human being with physical landscape.

### 3. THE HUMAN LANDSCAPE

For most English tourists in Forster's novels, Italian physical landscape is spectacular and captivating; English sensibility seldom fails to appreciate or read the beauty, the antiquities, and the romantic aspects embodied in the Italian geo-historical scenes. However, when it comes to Italian people, opinions polarize. Some English characters are deeply fascinated by Italian vitality and passion—two qualities largely suppressed in the English temperament. Some, on the other hand, are greatly annoyed and treat the two qualities as impulsiveness and vulgarity, especially when manifest in Italian males. Communal in both opinions are profound incomprehension and perplexity that trouble most English characters when they try to judge the Italians by applying their habitual standard. It seems that the Italians and the character they emanate have constituted for the English tourists a significant part of the Italian landscape to appreciate and to experience.

*A Room with a View* only touches a little on the disorientating effect of the Italian people on English tourists. In the novel, the Italians only play minor roles, but they merge with the place and add vibrant colors to it. Two major encounters serve to highlight the enhancing and even disorienting effect of the Italian people. The effect is dramatized by Lucy's two characteristic falls. The first encounter takes place in the Loggia where Lucy got caught in a fight between two Italian young men. Before she realized what really happened, one of the Italian fell into Lucy's arms and died. Lucy's subdued emotion is reflected through the narrator's undemonstrative descriptions: "He frowned; he bent towards Lucy with a look of interest, as if he had an important message for her. He opened his lips to deliver it, and a stream of red came out between them and trickled down his unshaven chin" (Forster, 1989, pp. 47-48). However, such unfamiliar vitality and brutality shocked Lucy into a faint and into George Emerson's arms. Lucy's fall/faint shows that the static beauty of the Loggia or the frescoes by Giotto at Santa Croce can easily be interpreted or analyzed, but it becomes intimidating and incomprehensible when added by Italian humanity. Therefore, the dying Italian young man, a scene that goes beyond Lucy's comprehension, is merged with the Florentine landscape to offer Lucy a fresh but perplexing experience that is both inviting and appalling.

Moreover, the Italian scenery is enhanced by the Italian unreserved passion. Different English perceptions of the Italian passion are contrasted during a trip to Fiesole. Rev. Eager, a fastidious ascetic, disapproves of the Italians' spontaneity and frivolity. He is learned in aesthetics but keeps the "pernicious charm" of Italy [meaning the Italian people] at bay (Forster, 1989, p. 23). Rev. Eager's Hebraism is contrasted with Hellenism adopted by the emotional and the intuitive characters like the Emersons. For them real art cannot be separated from life. As Michael L. Ross tellingly points out: "The masterworks of the Florentine past serve life valuably as long as they do not usurp the primacy of life: as long as painted surfaces are not allowed to obscure 'the blue sky and the men and women who live under it'" (83). The conflict erupted when the driver Phaethon was found flirting with his pretended sister Persephone. While Mr. Emerson encouraged it, Mr. Eager was so strongly shocked that he ordered the girl to leave. Even though Lucy's reaction in this incident is ambivalent, but she definitely feels elated and touched when the lovers plead to her for help. The country journey, which has a bumpy and tiresome start, is suddenly set off by the romantic display of Phaethon and Persephone, clearly a symbol of spring and romance.

A climactic scene which brings Lucy and George together is achieved through a misunderstanding. On hearing Lucy's request in her crappy Italian for Mr. Beebe and Mr. Eager's whereabouts, the Italian young driver, who greeted her with the courtesy of a host and the assurance of a relative, adopted the role of a missionary and misguided her to George. While receiving the violets from the driver's hand, Lucy experienced a kind of ecstasy: "In the company of this common man the world was beautiful and direct. For the first time she felt the influence of Spring." Through the Italian driver's assistance, Lucy encounters and, at the same time, fulfills her role of the goddess Spring through her second fall. The catalyst of the transmutation is not only the violet, a flower recurrent in Forster's Italian novels, but, most significantly, the driver, who assumes the role of Cupid and makes Lucy falls in love with George. And for a short moment, Lucy did become an incarnation of Persephone for George who "contemplated her, as one who had fallen out of heaven" and who "saw radiant joy in her face" (Forster, 1989, p. 78). Spring, therefore, is the totality of the experience that the English tourists look

for in *A Room with a View*. The experience of spring can easily be found ubiquitously in common, direct, and beautiful Italians. And this kind of experience can only be obtained by someone who could recognize and appreciate these qualities in the Italian.

Gino is a perfect embodiment of rustic art and all the essential qualities for the experience of spring: He is common, he is direct, he is beautiful, and he is also young. For Lilia, a woman who has already been past her prime of youth, Gino is revitalizing and comforting. Before leaving for Italy, Philip unwittingly recommended the Italians to her: “Love and understand the Italians, for the people are more marvellous than the land” (Forster, 2014, p. 8). Seeming like acting on Philip’s advice, Lilia falls immediately in love with Gino. When Lilia first saw Gino, he was part of a gorgeous and alluring landscape: “It was there she had first seen him sitting on the mud wall that faced the Volterra gate. She remembered how the evening sun had struck his hair, and how he had smiled down at her, and being both sentimental and unrefined, was determined to have the man and the place together” (Forster, 2014, p. 32). When Philip first saw Gino, though with some grudge in mind, he could not help being taken away by the young Italian’s beauty: “Philip had seen the face 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 the soil” (Forster, 2014, p. 25). For Phillip, the beautiful and charming Italians have always played a huge role in his high estimation of the Italian landscape. Even Miss Abbott, a conventional and respectable Edwardian English lady, cannot resist Gino’s charm. As she admitted it to Phillip, she was swept away by Gino during her encounter with Gino: “All that winter I seemed to be waking up to beauty and splendor and I don’t know what” (Forster, 2014, p. 57). She could not help falling in love with Gino herself, even though she was sure in the end her feelings would not be reciprocated: “He’s not a gentleman, nor a Christian, nor good in any way. He’s never flattered me nor honoured me. But because he’s handsome, that’s been enough. That son of an Italian dentist, with a pretty face” (Forster, 2014, pp. 128-129). Gino’s charm explodes in a bathing scene. With a determination to separate the baby with the father, she became disorientated while she watched Gino bathe the baby. She thought she saw and was deeply touched by a holy ritual though which eventually shattered her determination: “It was too late to go. She turned away her head when Gino lifted his son to his lips. The man was majestic; he was a part of Nature; in no ordinary love scene could he ever be so great. Gino passionately embracing. Miss Abbott reverently averting her eyes” (Forster, 2014, p. 99). The bathing scene contains multiple substances. It is a work of art, a religious faith, and a beautiful scene. And it also provokes the mixed reaction of love, admiration, and even ecstasy from Miss Abbott, which eventually leads to self-disintegration.

In addition to his charming appearance, Gino possesses strong personality that substantializes the bilious Italian youths in *A Room with a View*. Lilia initially regards this strong personality trait as part of Gino’s charm and as occasional bout: “it had been rather fun to let him get the upper hand” (44). However, when she realizes such strong personality is threatening to contain her, Lilia feels terrified: “it was galling to discover that he could not do otherwise. He had a good strong will when he chose to use it, and would not have had the least scruple in using bolts and locks to put it into effect. There was plenty of brutality deep down in him. . . .” (Forster, 2014, p. 44). A final showdown soon completely subdued and silenced her:

His figure rather than his face altered, the shoulders falling forward till his coat wrinkled across the back and pulled away from his wrists. He seemed all arms. He edged round the table to where she was sitting, and she sprang away and held the chair, expressionless eyes, and slowly stretched out his left hand. (Forster, 2014, p. 45)

Italian violence and brutality are no strange or fresh ideas since they have been profusely demonstrated in paintings, sculptures, or plays. However, Gino’s display of them in real life stuns and terrifies Lilia. Equally stunned and terrified is Phillip when Gino got into a fight with him after Phillip insulted him on their first meeting. Italian propensity for of violence and brutality is the most enormous impact for almost all the English protagonists to bear in their Italian experience.

Therefore, the coexistence of the two extreme personality traits in the Italians characterized by a sunny side of immeasurable vigor, charm, ease, and geniality and a dark side of unruly violence, irascibility, and impulsiveness perpetually and profoundly perplexes the English tourists in *A Room with A View* and *Where Angels Fear to Tread*.

#### 4. THE FATEFUL ENCOUNTER

The real English experience takes place not just through their contact with physical (cultural and natural) landscape. The experience is a complicated process in which the physical landscape is enhanced and, at the same time, overwhelmed by human landscape. Sometimes, the human landscape is viewed as a static art work, but, more often than not, the human landscape carries out direct engagement with the English tourists. Such encounter, if intensely occurred, often results in life-changing experience. The English-Italian encounter is described quite differently in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *A Room with a View*, not only in details but also in intensity. The fundamental difference lies in the different roles human landscape assume in the two novels. In *A Room with a View*, despite that the Italians play an essential role in awakening the dormant passion in George and Lucy, they remain as the backdrop; no solid encounter has ever been taken place between them. As far as the English experience is concerned, in this novel the Italian human landscape either exerts “pernicious” influence that corrupts, or amorous one that revitalizes. That is to say, the Italians are always the unengaging others who simply function as catalyst or media but have no solid interaction in the English experience. This distancing of the Italians disables them from having real encounter with the English characters or exerting more momentous influence on the English experience.

The real fateful and multilayered encounter between the English and the Italian takes place in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*. In the novel, the encounter is activated all by a single name—Gino, who changes the destiny of all the English characters involved. The English experience with Gino is demonstrated from four different perspectives—Lilia’s, Phillip and Harriet Harrington’s, and Miss Abbot’s. Lilia’s perspective is direct, and her experience is hands-on: she marries Gino and gives birth to his son, but her understanding of Gino is still based on the sensory, and, therefore, is partial and precarious. Lilia’s first encounter with Gino takes place under a perfect balance between natural and human landscape. Like many half-baked tourists, Lilia was attracted by the superficial beauty of things. However, unlike most tourists who just appreciate and then leave, Lilia jumps head-on into the landscape from which she is unable to escape. Lilia’s tragedy results from her naive objectification of a human being. In her naiveté, she tries to remove Gino from the beautiful landscape and to treat him as a toy that she could play with. Lilia’s marriage with Gino represents a capitalistic mindset to own a beautiful object with capital. Her inability to fully understand Gino as an Italian male and her refusal to embrace the landscape she once admired entails a personal tragedy. Lilia eventually gets stranded in the landscape she tries to appropriate but fails. The price Lilia pays for her naivety is dear: her life.

Lilia’s perception of the Italian landscape represents, in Phillip Harrington’s words, the “spurious sentiment” of the English experience that exults in “the unexpected and the incongruous and the grotesque” (Forster, 2014, p. 23). Such sentiment is genuine but delicate—“A touch will loosen it” (Forster, 2014, p. 23). She represents one of the “fools” who “rush in,” as the original line from which the novel’s title derives suggests. This kind of sentiment is also shared by Phillip Harrington, the central character in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and also the novel’s central reflector. The reader’s perception of Monteriano comes mainly from Phillip. Phillip also represents a kind of artist reflector whose well-educated and upper-middle-class background has helped him to cultivate sound and informed aesthetic judgement. Therefore, for the reader, Phillip’s perspective becomes the most authoritative and credible among the four. Before Lilia’s fateful marriage, Phillip is the champion of Italy. A frequent visitor to Italy, Phillip shows marked and passionate devotion to the Italian and is jokingly referred to by his sister Harriet as catching the “Italymania” (Forster, 2014, p. 70). In his previous journeys to Italy, he has “absorbed into one aesthetic whole olive-trees, blue sky, frescoes, country inns, saints, peasants, mosaics, statues, beggars” (Forster, 2014, p. 51). All his energies and enthusiasms have been devoted to Italy, for him “the championship of beauty” (Forster, 2014, p. 51).

However, Phillip's perspective wavers because of Gino. Phillip's initial idealization of Italy, or his contraction of "Italymania," has been put under its first test with the marriage of Lilia and Gino. It was Phillip who directed Lilia the right way to appreciate Italy: "it is only by going off the track that you get to know the country" (8), but he finds it hard to accept the result when Lilia follows his advice and moves even more forward. This self-conflicting sentiment, of course, is first aroused by Lilia's violation of basic English upper-middle-class cultural taboo, that is, intercultural marriage and the breakdown of class boundary. Moreover, even though Phillip is claimed to be "the champion" of Italy, he never really steps over cultural boundary to accept or fully understand the Italians. Therefore, perplexity and even fear comprise Phillip's sentiment about the Italians. For Phillip, whose sentiment is typical to a certain degree, Italians are safe as long as they are framed in art works or objectified as part of the landscape. Therefore, for any Italian to come out of the landscape or the frame to become his social equal terms is unimaginable for Phillip. Despite an ardent admirer of Italy, Phillip's irrational comment on Lilia's marriage with Gino testifies to his unconscious but habitual objectification of and contempt for the Italians: "For three years he had sung the praises of Italians, but he had never contemplated having one as a relative" (Forster, 2014, pp. 17-18). Having to treat Gino as one of his own means for Phillip the collapse of his ideal Italy:

A dentist! A dentist at Monteriano. A dentist in fairyland! False teeth and laughing gas and the tilting chair at a place which knew the Etruscan League, and the Pax Romana, and Alaric himself, and the Countess Matilda, and the Middle Ages, all fighting and holiness, and the Renaissance, all fighting and beauty! He thought of Lilia no longer. He was anxious for himself: he feared that Romance might die. (Forster, 2014, p. 23)

Phillip's initial preference for Italy over Sawston, his hometown, is thus turned upside down with the sudden intrusion of an Italian into his social circle. When he arrived at Monteriano, he brought along with his newly-cultivated hostility: "He was in the enemy's country, and everything—the hot sun, the cold air behind the heat, the endless rows of olive-trees, regular yet mysterious—seemed hostile to the placid atmosphere of Sawston in which his thoughts took birth" (Forster, 2014, p. 20). Even his aesthetic judgement is turned biased—even though Gino fulfills every standard of Phillip's ideal of a handsome man, Phillip refuses to see the beauty in him. In addition, surrounded by the same beautiful landscape, Phillip can no longer feel the beauty.

Phillip's new judgement of Italy is characterized by ambivalence and contradiction. In spite of his animosity to everything about Italy during his first Monteriano journey, flash of his old passion erupts time and again and follows Phillip's from the outside to the inside of Monteriano. Just before arriving at Monteriano, Phillip is unconsciously attracted by the Tuscan scenery before him: "The trees of the wood were small and leafless, but noticeable for this—that their stems stood in violets as rocks stand in the summer sea. . . . Nor are there so many in Art, for no painter has the courage. His eyes had registered the beauty" (Forster, 2014, pp. 21-22). Outside the town, Phillip is again stunned by its rustic beauty: "The hazy green of the olives rose up to its walls, and it seemed to float in isolation between trees and sky, like some fantastic ship city of a dream" (Forster, 2014, pp. 23-4). The moment Phillip arrives at the town, he leads the reader to a perfect Tuscan scene: "They emerged from the trees on to the terrace before the walk, with the vision of half Tuscany radiant in the sun behind them" (Forster, 2014, p. 24). Inside the town, Phillip is thrilled by the rustic Italian folk culture: "Greeted by a mixture of curiosity and kindness which makes each Italian arrival so wonderful" (Forster, 2014, p. 24). No matter how strong his determination to antagonize Gino, when he catches the first sight of Gino, Phillip finds beauty, not antipathy: "Philip had seen the face 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 the soil" (Forster, 2014, p. 25). Even though Phillip's judgement and sensitivity are checked by the prospect of Lilia's marriage with Gino, he still cannot sever his connection with Italy.

In Phillip's frame of mind, notwithstanding all of Gino's appealing qualities, Gino's place should always belong in the realm of the "spectacle" for the tourists like him to appreciate and should never be self-assumed to become one in his social circle: "he did not want to see it opposite him at dinner. It was not the face of a gentleman" (Forster, 2014, pp. 25-26). Miss Abbott's accusation—"You look on

life as a spectacle; you don't enter it" (Forster, 2014, p. 128)—points out tellingly Phillip's existential crisis—his detachment from or his fear of human connection and intimacy, very much similar to young Lucy Honeychurch's. Phillip's crisis is more fully exposed during his second visit to Monteriano. Phillip's first mission is to rescue an English lady from her villainous Italian husband, and his second mission is to save a baby from its villainous Italian father. Phillip starts both mission similarly hard-hearted and determined. However, once again his aversion to Gino diminishes when he is placed within the ambience of the Italian town. His aesthetic sensitivity can no longer remain suppressed the moment he steps into the theater: "In the theater: he forgot himself as well as his mission. He was not even an enthusiastic visitor. For he had been in this place always. It was his home" (Forster, 2014, p. 86). Moreover, even when facing his supposed enemy, Phillip not only overpasses their previous conflict, but he discovers new charm in Gino: "Philip found a certain grace and lightness in his companion which he had never noticed in English. He did not suspect he was more graceful too" (Forster, 2014, p. 81). His regained sensitivity also helps Phillip to see new light in Miss Abbot, a young woman Phillip always considers unattractive:

The hot red theatre; outside the theatre, towers and dark gates and mediaeval walls; beyond the walls olive-trees in the starlight and white winding roads and fireflies and untroubled dust; and here in the middle of it all, Miss Abbot, wishing she had not come looking like a guy. She had made the right remark. (Forster, 2014, p. 85)

No matter how hard Phillip tries to suppress his passion, a mere encounter in the theater shatters all his defense mechanism and his determination. In both missions, all Phillip can rely on to justify his cause is a mindset rooted in tourists' pleasure principle and class consciousness. Handsome Italians like Gino are something to be looked at and appreciated; they should always remain in a picture and should never attempt to become one of his social peers.

In the clash between the English and the Italian, Miss Abbot is the only character in the novel who is genuinely encompassing. She has a clearer view of the whole situation, and she is willing to acknowledge the difference between the Italians and the English. In her interrogation of Phillip—"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?" (Forster, 2014, p. 107), she clearly lays out the strengths and weaknesses in each culture. She also has a more tolerant attitude towards people, English or Italian. Different from her fellow countrymen, her opinion of people is not class-oriented but is evaluated through their behavior and intention. In the novel, the role Miss Abbot plays can be seen as the English personification of the Italian Santa Deodota, a maiden saint who did nothing but was the cause of human triumph. Unlike Phillip, who looks on life only as a spectacle and doesn't enter it, Miss Abbot jumps right into the spectacle she loves and finds herself a rightful and beautiful place in it. Her willingness to embrace the good and the evil is first shown in her attitude towards Lilia's romantic attachment to Gino. Unlike other English characters who simply disapprove and reject, she finds her share in their happiness: "Have she ever been so happy before? Yes, a night in March, the night Gino and Lilia had told her of their love" (Forster, 2014, p. 88).

Miss Caroline Abbot is not totally free from scruples, but, unlike Phillip, who judges rationally, she would go with her heart rather than with her mind. The future of motherless baby puts her again in a catch-22 situation, and her initial thought is to retrieve the baby from its father's bad influence. In watching Gino bathe the baby, however, she changes her mind. From the scene, Miss Abbot finds in Gino out of his crude nature some refined qualities that she deems precious: "This cruel vicious fellow knew of strange refinements. The horrible truth, that wicked people are capable of love, stood naked before her, and her moral being was abashed" (Forster, 2014, p. 97). The moment Miss Abbot confirms Gino's goodness, her mind is open enough to embrace Gino. The way Miss Abbot accepts and embraces the Italian is turned by Forster into a Renaissance art work with the title of "The Virgin and the Child with the Donor," in which Miss Abbot is painted as a goddess:

There they sat, with twenty miles of view behind her, and he placed the dripping baby on her knee. It shone new 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 de Credi, more reverent but less divine, lays carefully among flowers, with his head upon a wisp of golden straw. For a time Gino contemplated them standing. Then, to get a better view, he knelt by the side of the chair, with his hands clasped before him. (Forster, 2014, p. 100)

In this painting, Miss Abbot is perfectly merged with the Italian. In becoming part of the Italian landscape, Miss Abbot is not without her price to pay. She has a whole nation and the whole national prejudice to tackle, and she does it at the risk of her own moral integrity: “This time—the same place—the same thing’—and she begin to beat down her happiness, knowing it to be *sinful*. She was here to champion morality and purity, and the holy life of an English home” (Forster, 2014, *Italic mine*, p. 89). Like Santa Deodota, who discards life and all that she is familiar with to become a saint, Miss Abbot is in a sense sanctified because of her bravery to resist national prejudice and her persistence in upholding the goodness in human beings.

The climactic moment that Miss Abbot is being sanctified takes place right after the death of the baby. Guided by Philip’s eyes, the reader watches Miss Abbot performs the ritual of sacrament by pacifying the emotionally explosive Gino, who is mourning over his son's death, and sees her help Phillip arrive at his spiritual awakening:

He [Philip] 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 henceforward to be worthy of the things she had revealed. Quietly, without hysterical prayers or banging of drums, he underwent conversion. He was saved. (Forster, 2014, p. 123)

The Last-Supper overtone here is overwhelming when the two men share the baby’s milk at Miss Abbot’s order, and then Phillip breaks the jug the contains the milk. The significance is three-layered. Through the sharing ritual, sadness brought by the baby’s death and the enmity between Gino and Phillip is miraculously healed and resolved. Moreover, through Miss Abbot’s influence the bond and interconnectedness between the two are firmly established. Most significantly, Miss Abbot has the ability to transform the most unbearable into something closest to art: “This woman was a goddess to the end. For her no love could be degrading: she stood outside all degradation. This episode, which she thought so sordid, and which was so tragic for him, remained supremely beautiful” (Forster, 2014, p. 130). Through the invocation of Saints Deodota, the Monteriao people defeat their enmity; however, through the assistance of Miss Abbot, the modern goddess, love and humanity triumph.

## 5. CONCLUSION

As an aesthician-tourist, Philip is perceptive enough to appreciate to a great extent what the Italian landscape can offer. His “Italymania” shows his admiration for the Italian culture is unreserved but precarious. Mrs. Herriton’s judgement, though somewhat similar to Phillip’s, points out very tellingly her son’s blind spot: “It may be full of beautiful pictures and churches, but we cannot judge a country by anything but its men” (Forster, 2014, p. 53). From Phillip’s perspective manifests a marked characteristic most Forster’s central reflectors manifest, that is, the association of asceticism with aestheticism (Langland, 1978, p. 95). A common sentiment shared by the majority of them is a certain degree of fear for or detachment from the Italian people who embody unbridled and consuming passion that is quite unfamiliar in the English culture. To conceal their fear and puzzlement, the English tourists often tend to exclude or objectify the Italians from their experience. The objectification of the Gino, or in other words, to treat Gino as part of the landscape is the attitude both Lilia and Phillip display. It is the root of Phillip’s Italymania and the source of Lilia’s romanticism. There could be delicate balance as long as the tourists remain as the tourists, and the landscape stays in the distance. Only which such safe distance is maintained can the English tourists look safely for their aesthetic experience, and the Italian landscape can escape from being pernicious.

However, this stable tourist-landscape relation becomes annihilated once the distance between them disappears. The marriage between Gino and Lilia breaks the safe distance and creates great disturbances. That a decent English woman’s honor is to be contaminated by a beautiful but evil

Italian young man destroys the stability between tourists and landscape and horrifies her the English circle. Phillip, the central reflector, wakes up from his Italymania the moment he learns of Lilia's marriage. In Phillip's comment on Lilia's marriage—"I am not blaming you now. But I blame the glamour of Italy" (Forster, 2014, p. 28), there is complicated mixture of compliment and denunciation of the Italy he loves. It can be productive and cultivating, but it can also be damaging and destructive.

Destruction, at the same time, can lead to reconstruction if it is treated wisely. Lilia's death caused by her own unpreparedness to rush in an unknown territory and Phillip's disillusionment caused by his inability to recognize Gino's subjectivity have a chance to be redeemed by the birth of the baby. The baby is a strong and vital link that might offer a possible way out for the two incompatible parties and an opportunity to reconstruct what has been previously damaged. The baby is English, it is Italian, and it is also both. Or, in simple terms, the baby could redefine the whole concept of Italy and the Italian for all the protagonists. Phillip's second visit to Monteriano can be seen as a journey of reconstruction, which all depends on how Phillip sees the baby. When he first insists on removing the baby from Gino, his influence by a national prejudice is still strong—"generations of ancestors, good, bad, or indifferent, forbid the Latin man to be chivalrous to the northern woman, the northern woman to forgive the Latin man" (Forster, 2014, p. 48). Initially, Phillip, like Harriet, is not emotionally connected with the baby; what he really looks for is simply a self-righteous liberating mission. Miss Abbot has her own doubt about leaving the baby with the father, but she is the only one who has the capacity to establish genuine connection with the baby and the father. The connection is achieved through the help of Gino, through his open and unpretentious love for the baby. When she is finally able to love the baby and to feel Gino's love, Italy is again beautiful for her and because of her. Phillip is finally saved precariously through the beauty Miss Abbot achieved through the baby. Closer contact with the baby and Miss Abbot makes Phillip see his own existential crisis—his inability to accept Gino and his blindness of his own cruelty. He finds himself become a heartless person to tear the lovers apart and a malicious one to deny a baby its fatherly protection. And this new connection rids Phillip of his prejudice.

Even though all the main protagonists seem to procure redemption, as Langland (1978) argues, the resolution "punctuates loss" (p. 95). The death of the baby highlights the gloomy keynote of the novel, that is, the limit of human capacity to love. One less pronounced issue the two novels touch on is the risk one must take in objectifying other human beings. In *A Room with a View*, the Italians have no solid roles and remain always in the backdrop as part of the landscape. In *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, the Italians move forward to the front stage to interact with the English people. Such interaction leads to other more challenging issues: "Is it possible to embrace good and evil at the same time?" and "How can one accept another person as one's own?" In *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, we have an answer: Phillip loves Gino and Italy for their beauty, but beauty itself is insufficient in establishing human connection, only "human love and love of truth sometimes conquer where love of beauty fails." (Forster, 2014, p. 51) Moreover, it needs angels or goddesses like Miss Abbot to achieve it.

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