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The film version of Edward Morgan Forster's *A Room with a View* directed by James Ivory, produced by Ismail Merchant with the screenplay written by Ruth Prawer Jhabvala won three Academy awards. The film is well known to most cinema and TV viewers. Along with the realisations of *Maurice* and *Howard's End* also produced by Merchant and Ivory as well as *A Passage to India* directed by David Lean the film greatly boosted interest in E. M. Forster's works. As it is often treated as a classic example of adaptation of literature on screen it is worthwhile to try to evaluate to what extent its authors attempted to reflect in their work the symbolic strata of their literary source.

Every suggestion of infidelity towards the original seems at first glance difficult to defend as the authors did put a lot of effort in establishing certain "literariness" of their product. The films opens with list of characters vaguely reminding of openings of Victorian editions of plays or of the silent movies. The characters are grouped by vignettes for example the Emersons by a goat's head (which may symbolise the God Pan though combining this symbolic, however often used in Forster's works, with the Emersons seems a bit far-fetched\(^1\))

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while the Reverends Beebe and Eager and the novelist Eleanor Lavish by a Satyr. The very film is divided into two parts "Florence" and "Home" which are further subdivided into "chapters" whose titles are introduced as separate shots again with Victorian vignettes. This fidelity is nevertheless only superficial. The book is actually divided into two untitled parts while of its twenty chapters only ten are left and one is added.ii

The editor of the Abinger Edition of *A Room with a View* and one of the most noted Forster specialists, Oliver Stallybras commented upon the novel that though light in touch it may be, but it is very far from lightweight; indeed, it is as cunningly organised and complex a novel as any Forster wrote (Forster 1978: 18).

Stallybras supported this claim further on providing quite a long list of

contrasted pairs, related images, symbols, leitmotivs and highly charged words (...) which give the novel its extraordinary resonance. [These are:] rooms and views; light, shadow and darkness; spring and autumn; colours; violets and other flowers; water, baptism and blood; Christian rituals and pagan deities; faith and love; clothes and nudity; the Middle Ages and the Renaissance; Leonardo and Michelangelo; various composers; art and life; muddle; peevishness; the preposition across. (Forster 1978, 18-19).

Quite naturally, it would be impossible to render all these images, symbols and words in a film of a hundred minutes running time. Some of them must get lost in translation from

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ii "Under a Loggia" A romance set in Italy.
one medium into another as the preposition "across" which appears mainly in descriptions. Similarly the division of characters into "the people of the room" and "the people of the view" which is also done mainly in descriptions is quite difficult to be retained.iii An attentive viewing of the film, especially when supported by a close reading of the book reveals, however, that a great lot of mainly visual elements which could easily be used in the film were either lost or replaced, quite often without any meaningful explanation or motivation.

*Room with a View* was most certainly a great success as a film which the awards clearly proved. A specialist in literary history must approach it, however, with the warning of Michele Willems in mind: "one should not confuse visual richness and visual significance" (Willems: 99). The visual richness, a fidelity to an (idealised though as in any film produced by Merchant and Ivory) image of the Edwardian England and Italy at the turn of the centuries is most obvious. The question remains whether this richness reflects the visual material of the novel.

It is the visual significance and especially the parts of the film in which the significance intended by the novel is lost that should be the subject of a detailed study. The following presentation shall concentrate on six most important and symbolically charged events of the novel: Lucy's arrival in Florence, murder in the Piazza Signoria, kiss in Fiesole, visit to the Sacred Lake with Cecil, the bathe in the Lake, "lying to Mr Emerson" and the final scene, again set in Florence.

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iii See for example the description of Cecil Vyse (Forster 105-6).
The novel opens in the dining room of the Pensione Bertolini where:

[Lucy] looked at the two rows of English people who were sitting at the table; at the row of white bottles of water and red bottles of wine that ran between the English people. (Forster: 23)

This single sentence introduces a number divisions that will continue throughout the novel. The division of the English people sitting by the table is stressed by the two rows of bottles filled with water and wine thus, introducing symbolically the opposition of wine and blood from the Stallybras' list and an element of Christian rituals\textsuperscript{iv}. Little of this is retained in the film. The action starts not \textit{in medias res}, as it is in the book, but from an introduction, in one of the "rooms without a view" which are not really described in the book.\textsuperscript{356} When it moves to the dining room, the characters sit by a round table while the bottles are set to no order at all; for example George has two bottles, one full of wine and one of water in front of him.

The events of the following three chapters are squeezed into one, called "In Santa Croce with no Baedeker". This chapter starts with a striking change in drawing of the character of the main heroine, Lucy Honeychurch. In the novel, she is described as a typical representative of her class, she does not dare to leave the Pensione without a proper company, it is only Mrs Lavish who takes her for a walk. Only when the self-appointed

\textsuperscript{iv} An allusion to this appears in the film when during her walk with Mrs Bartlett (one not described in the novel) Mrs Lavish says about Lucy: "Italy will transfigure her." This quotation was actually taken from \textit{Where Angels Fear to Tread}, another novel of E. M. Forster.
guide disappears, Lucy starts to explore by herself. Lucy of the film leaves on her first day without her chaperone, Mrs Bartlett, which can hardly be put to "too much Beethoven" (Forster: 59) as her piano concert is also cut short. Rather surprisingly, in the film Eleanor Lavish from the very beginning concentrates her attention on Charlotte Bartlett.

The introduction to what in the book is the fourth chapter, inconspicuously entitled "Fourth Chapter", is a sequence of short shots of sculptures exhibited in Piazza Signoria. The shots are full of aggression and dynamics which is further stressed by the score as if they were intended to serve as an introduction to the violent murder that Lucy is to witness within a minute. Again this is a vast departure from the original mood:

The great square was in shadow; the sunshine had come too late to strike it. Neptune was already insubstantial in the twilight, half god, half ghost, and his fountain plashed dreamily to the men and satyrs who idled together on its marge. (...) It was the hour of unreality... (Forster: 61)

Forster puts a special stress on the creation of element of shock, trying to make the murder as surprising and unexpected to the reader as it is for Lucy. Jhabvala prefers to warn her audience.

In the film even the time of day is wrong - and yet again we must refer to the Stallybras' list and the meaning of light, shadow and darkness which play such an important role in the book. In the novel Lucy leaves the Pensione Bertolini in the early evening, after the rain, which made her stay at home instead of joining an excursion with her chaperone; in the film
she has been walking since morning and it can only be early afternoon.

Slow viewing of the scene reveals one more interesting thing. When having witnessed murder, Lucy faints in the square she loses her hat and drops photographs which land in a pool of blood. George, who goes to fetch them, attempts to wash the photographs in the water from the fountain, and failing to do so throws them to the Arno (Forster 1978: 63-4). In the film, the photographs drop on the pavement while the hat lands in the pool of blood, however, when George arrives to fetch them, they are placed as it is described in the novel.

In the novel, on entering the square Lucy visits a shop and buys at least nine postcards presenting works of art which are immediately listed (Forster: 61) the first of which being Boticelli's *Birth of Venus*. In the film Lucy buys something in a stand, all that the audience will learn about her purchase is that these were "her postcards". The omission is especially meaningful as further on when approaching George in a field by Fiesole Lucy will be described as Venus from the Boticelli's painting. All the subsequent references to the Renaissance and attitude towards that age prevailing at the turn of the centuries are therefore lost.

This attitude towards works of art mentioned in the novel can be seen also in the scene of meeting of Cecil Vyse and Emersons in the National Gallery in London. In the novel the gentlemen meet in front of a painting by Luca Signorelli (Forster 1978: 136) which Oliver Stallybras identified as *The Triumph of Chastity: Love Disarmed and Bound* (Forster 1978: 250)
while in the film the painting in the background is Ucello's
*Battle of San Romano*.

The third crucial scene for the novel is the outing to
Fiesole during which George kisses Lucy for the first time.
Within this scene the departure from the original is the most
striking. The field in which the encounter takes place is
described in the following passage:

> a little open terrace, which was covered with violets from end to
> end. [...] the ground sloped sharply into the 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. This terrace was a well-head, the primal source whence
> beauty gushed out to water the earth. (Forster: 88)

{358} This description is aimed at transforming the field
into a surface of water, the most recurrent symbol in the novel,
an effect which is achieved by the multitude of water-related
vocabulary. For George Lucy comes downwards from a hill
walking on water like Venus from the painting (mentioned
earlier in the text) by Boticelli. Thus, the scene combines the
symbolic meanings of water (birth, sexuality, femininity) with
artistic allusion to an early Renaissance painting. Quite
surprisingly the field in the film is covered from end to end
with golden barley with red poppies here and there.\(^v\)

\(^v\) This scene is also an example of rather loose treatment of the meaning of
colours applied by Forster. In the novel the sixth chapter ends in the
following sentence “The silence of life had been broken by Miss Bartlett, who
stood brown against the view.” (Forster: 89). In the film her dress is white as
Lucy’s.
This change (even if probably enforced by conditions on location) is, rather fortunately, retained throughout the film. When in the chapter "The Disaster Within" (in the film called "Under a Loggia") the scene is recalled by Cecil who reads its description from a novel by Eleanor Lavish, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala changes the quotation from: "The season was spring [...] Afar off the towers of Florence, while the bank on which she sat was carpeted with violets" (Forster: 179) into "a golden sea of barley touched with crimson stains of poppies." Such consistence does not alter, however, the basic fact that the intended symbolic meaning is yet again lost.

The two following scenes invite much less criticism. The bathe in the Sacred Lake takes place almost as described in the book. Even some visual similarity to Wagnerian opera mentioned in the text is retained, even though "the three gentlemen rotated in the pool breast high, after the fashion of the nymphs in Göttterdammerung" (Forster: 149) for a short time quickly to pick a fight.

A striking difference can be found in behaviour of George. In the novel he is described as passive, full of dread and apathy as he has just learned about Lucy’s engagement to Cecil. At the same time his physical beauty is stressed throughout the passage:

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vi This is another instance of a "simplification" of the original. The author of the book in the Forster's novel is called Joseph Emery Prank. Lucy only guesses that it must be a pseudonym of Eleanor Lavish. Actually, the name Lavish was a prank (one of quite a few in the novel) in itself, as the model for the character was Mrs Emily Spender (alluding thus to the phrase "a lavish spendy"), a second-rate novelist and a great-aunt of the poet Stephen Spender (Forster: 237-8).
wetting his hair - a sure sign of apathy - [George] followed Freddy into the divine, as indifferent as if he were a statue [...] [he sat] Michelangelesque on the flooded margin\textsuperscript{vii}. The bank broke away and he fell into the pool... (Forster: 148-9)

George in the film is vigorous, he chatters gaily with his companions and finally jumps into the pond.

This change in character drawing seems much more general in the film, the heroes of Jhabvala are much more active and lively than these of Forster. As this example proves even when such an attitude goes against the meaning of the plot. Also Lucy is presented as a much more self-assured person than the heroine of the novel to the extent of being impolite. During their return from London Lucy reads a book while her mother attempts to fathom the reasons of her rather hasty departure for Greece. To draw a general conclusion: Forster's characters are passive, they mainly react to external circumstances, while Jhabvala's characters make things happen.

The crucial scene of "Lying to Mr Emerson" was changed by the script-writer not so much in the visual design (which more or less complies with the description given by E. M. Forster) as in the construction. In the novel, after the arrival of Mrs and Miss Honeychurch "Miss Bartlett at once came forward, and after a long preamble asked a great favour: might she go to church?" (Forster: 216). Lucy refuses to go to church ("No church for me, thank you") and is led to Mr Beebe's study instead where she meets Mr Emerson.

\textsuperscript{vii} A suggestion could be made that the director wanted to avoid showing male nudity on screen and that was the reason why Julian Sands did not sit "Michelangelesque" on the bank, however, within next few seconds of the film all the three actors are shown naked running around the pond.
The dialogue that follows continues for more than eight pages. It starts from a general feeling of despair as Mr Emerson is grieved by the state of his son while Lucy has just realised that the Emersons' departure renders her escape to Greece and all her consequent lies pointless. Gradually, as they both learn about the actual state of affairs and the muddle created by Lucy is more and more solved, the atmosphere changes and Lucy finally bursts in tears. In that moment, Mr Beebe enters the room and attempts to interfere but, fortunately, it is too late. Lucy has made up her mind to accept her love for George.

In the film this emotionally charged scene is split into two. Mrs Bartlett finds refuge from the rain not in the hall but in Mr Beebe's study and, though with clearly visible reluctance, she explains the situation at Windy Corner to Mr Emerson. When Lucy arrives to fetch her, Mr Emerson knows everything he should. Therefore, the discussion does take place in a different manner, as Mr Emerson has a complete knowledge of the situation. It should be stated here that the screenplay does use it to its advantage - Lucy Honeychurch of the film is a much stronger personality and Mr Emerson strengthened by his knowledge can much more convincingly persuade her to stop deceiving everyone.

The last chapter of the novel, "The End of the Middle Ages" also underwent serious changes. In the novel Lucy is busy mending George's sock, in the film she reads a letter from Freddy. Instead of a "chapter heading" this "chapter" begins with Charlotte reading in bed a letter from Lucy, in which she describes a scene which is identical with that opening the novel
- a meeting with an English girl who arrived in Florence with her chaperone and was not given a promised room with a view.

The sock which needs mending and George's refusal to participate in an outing are placed in the novel quite purposefully to suggest one thing - "they had no money to throw away on driving" (Forster: 227). Jhabvala however seems to forget that:

the Honeychurches had not forgiven [Lucy]; they were disgusted at her past hypocrisy; she had alienated Windy Corner, perhaps for ever. (Forster: 228)

However, even though this does not comply with the meaning of the final chapter of the novel, such an ending (much happier than Forster's) reflects somehow Forster's own Appendix. A View without a Room written in 1958 and consequently added to most later editions of the novel.

{361} As it is visible from the examples presented above the attitude of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala and James Ivory to the literary material can be best described as light-weight. It is beyond doubt that the film is a great achievement as a work of cinematic art. However, as far as a visual representation of Forster's symbolic prose the film is very much of a failure. It would be too harsh to quote here Frank Wadsworth who commented upon an early film realisation of King Lear: "it was not only an abridgement but a perversion as well" (Wadsworth: 267). It seems, however, that the authors of the film preferred to treat the novel as material for a plot of their screenplay rather than an autonomous work of art which they would attempt to convert into cinematic idiom. To express this in a more
metaphorical way, the results suggest that instead of copying a painting, the authors used a black-and-white sketch as their point of departure. The picture is there but the brushwork is completely lost.

An unequivocal evaluation is the more difficult that it has to be carried out on two separate levels. On the one hand, we have an adaptation of a literary work, "cunningly organised and complex". On the other hand, we have a very successful autonomous work of cinematic art. The question remains what was the aim of its creators. The answer with great probability is that they treated the novel as a charming love story, intending to use it in order to create another film recreating England of the period just before the Great War, while also bringing to the attention of readers an author quite unjustly forgotten. As this last aim has been fully achieved, at least some of their mistakes and concessions might be overlooked while harsh criticism from a Forster scholar must be tempered by gratefulness.

Bibliography

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