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The Shaping of the Double Vision. 
The Symbolic Systems of the Italian Novels of Edward Morgan Forster.

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>AH</td>
<td>Forster, Edward Morgan. <em>Abinger Harvest</em>.</td>
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<td>AN</td>
<td>Forster, Edward Morgan. <em>Aspects of the Novel</em>.</td>
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<td>CS</td>
<td>Forster, Edward Morgan. <em>Collected Short Stories</em>.</td>
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<td>HE</td>
<td>Forster, Edward Morgan. <em>Howards End</em>.</td>
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<td>LC</td>
<td>Forster, Edward Morgan. <em>The Life to Come and Other Stories</em>.</td>
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<td>LN</td>
<td>Forster, Edward Morgan. <em>Lucy Novels</em></td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Forster, Edward Morgan. <em>Maurice</em>.</td>
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<td>PI</td>
<td>Forster, Edward Morgan. <em>A Passage to India</em>.</td>
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<td>PP</td>
<td>Forster, Edward Morgan. <em>Pharos and Pharillon</em>.</td>
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<td>RV</td>
<td>Forster, Edward Morgan. <em>A Room with a View</em>.</td>
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<td>TC</td>
<td>Forster, Edward Morgan. <em>Two Cheers for Democracy</em>.</td>
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<td>WA</td>
<td>Forster, Edward Morgan. <em>Where Angels Fear to Tread</em>.</td>
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To attempt exactly to define the meaning of the symbol would be to suggest it is inadequate.

Rex Warner

INTRODUCTION

Edward Morgan Forster and his Italian novels

Over a hundred and twenty five years after his birth and more than thirty years after his death the place of Edward Morgan Forster in English literature is still unclear. On the one hand we may find an abundance of positive opinions such as this of David Lodge who, with

[most judges ... would rank E. M. Forster second or third among native English novelists of this century - below Lawrence, though not necessarily below Virginia Woolf (1973: 473).

On the other hand Forster, difficult to place within existing divisions into schools and generations, slips through the nets of critics and scholars.

He is not really an Edwardian as he is most often labelled. Any more detailed analysis proves that he is an "Edwardian" mainly by virtue of the date of his literary debut. One can hardly describe A Passage to India as an Edwardian novel while the earlier works show little affinity with either Arnold Bennett or H. G. Wells. Neither is he a modernist, but it is just as disputable to call him a pre-modernist as Henry James and Joseph Conrad are sometimes called, although it is difficult not to notice the modernity of his works and the influence he had on such Modernists as Virginia Woolf or D. H. Lawrence. Even his literary affiliation with the Bloomsbury group is a matter of doubt (Wilde 1985: 2, Piggford 1997: 90). Wherever we want to place him, he does not fit, he sticks to his "outsider's view of things" (Beer 1979: 3) or remains, to use Forster's own words with which he described Cavafy, "a gentleman standing absolutely motionless at a slight angle to the universe" (PP: 91). Such a writer can easily risk being omitted from volumes of history of literature as a "difficult case" or at least risks being removed to the margins.

Forster's usage of symbolism can hardly be presented as a recent discovery, however, there is a considerable lack of systematic approach. The vast available critical material has been so far presented mostly in minor detailed studies, very often fragmentary without an attempt of providing a more general, especially theoretical, overview. Most of the available critical analyses of Forster's symbolism do not attempt to formulate a theoretical framework. This should not suggest, however, that insights presented in the existing studies are worthless. On the contrary, very often they form an invaluable source of information. In this respect the

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1 In a private conversation in July 2001, David Lodge remarked that he had changed his mind since and now he would gladly replace Virginia Woolf with Evelyn Waugh.

2 However, a recently published study stresses Forster's affinity with Modernism but does so mainly on the basis of his last novel A Passage to India (Medalie 2002).
aim of the present book is double - it gathers the existing critical material and simultaneously proposes a theoretically based approach to its organisation as well as offering new information which is the result of applying such an approach in critical practice.

The symbolism of the Italian novels is especially worthy of a new critical analysis as they have so far been rarely the subject of such a scrutiny, a fact which has been duly noticed by Forsterians. This is by no means a surprise as the unsurpassed masterpiece of Forster's symbolic fiction is *A Passage to India*. It is one of my basic assumptions that a part of the importance of the Italian novels lies in the fact that they constitute the first step in the development of Forster's symbolism, the middle stage of which are the so called English novels: *The Longest Journey*, *Howards End* and (to a minor extent) *Maurice*. This assumption must result in a very broad approach to the critical material gathered for the study. Consequently, all available studies in Forster's symbolism were considered for this book.

The sources and types of symbols and symbolism Forster uses in his fiction are manifold and consequently any attempts to analyse them which would be based upon one specifically defined concept of the symbol (such as that proposed by Lakshmi 1987) are doomed to failure. We must take into consideration that E. M. Forster is not at all interested in any consistency in his choice of sources and types of his symbolism. He feels just as free to use recognized (also known as established or traditional) literary symbols (though the meanings he implies may differ from those usually associated with specific symbols) as he is to invent his own. Therefore a theoretical framework as comprehensive as possible is necessary to allow a complete presentation of the symbolic level of the Italian novels. Any narrow definition would only lead to leaving out a vital part of these symbolic systems.

Forster's interest lies in such a placing of his symbolism within the text which would create a music-like effect which he calls "rhythms". Any object (clothes, guidebooks, letters, boxes), animal (wasp, bird, horse), plant (violets, olives, roses, asphodels), or natural phenomenon (rainstorm, light, darkness) may be used to form such rhythms thus attaining the symbolic quality by its place within the structure of the text rather than by some inherent qualities which could be defined as "symbolic". A methodology which allows a presentation of symbolism conceived in such a way was proposed by Michael Riffaterre in his work *Fictional Truth* (1990) where Riffaterre presented two symbolic systems - subtext and syllepsis. These concepts shall form the core both for the theoretical framework and the practical analyses presented in this book but their application will be expanded.

E. M. Forster wrote six novels: *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905), *The Longest Journey* (1907), *A Room with a View* (1908), *Howards End* (1910), *Maurice* (written 1913-14, edited until 1960, and published posthumously 1971) and *A Passage to India* (1924). He was also the author of a number of short stories which were first published in various magazines and later appeared in book form in *The Celestial..."

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3 Frederick McDowell notes for example that "Forster ['s Italian] novels have more sparingly engaged the writers of journal articles, but *A Room with a View*, nevertheless, received more attention than the novel generally recognised as its superior, *Where Angels Fear to Tread.*" (1979: 281) while Robert K. Martin added that: "Critics and scholars have paid less attention to [the Italian] novels within the last few years" (1982: 326). These comments still hold true in the year 2004.
Omnibus and Other Stories (1911) and The Eternal Moment and Other Stories (1928). Further short stories were published in 1953 in The Hill of Devi and, posthumously, in The Life to Come and Other Stories (1975). E. M. Forster was also the author of two literary biographies and a volume of literary criticism Aspects of the Novel (1927). He was an active broadcaster for the BBC, literary reviewer, essayist and critic. Three collections of his non-fiction works appeared during his lifetime: Pharos and Pharillon (1923), Abinger Harvest (1936), and Two Cheers for Democracy (1951) while the collection The Prince’s Tale and Other Uncollected Writings was published only in 1998. The Abinger Edition, the critical edition of complete works started in the early 1970s and although intended to include twenty volumes, has already passed that number and is still incomplete.

The term "Italian novels" is used in this book to describe the first and third novels published by E. M. Forster: Where Angels Fear to Tread (1905) and A Room with a View (1908) which provide the core of the textual corpus used for the following analysis along with a selection of short stories published within the same period. According to unpublished manuscripts such as "Three Countries", a lecture given in Italy in the 1950s, Forster himself used this term. As he stated: "two of my novels - Where Angels Fear to Tread and A Room with a View - are mainly Italian" (Stallybras 1978: 8). The term was used in reference to the two novels among others by Crews 1962, Thomson 1967, and Dowling 1985. Brander 1968 was the first to discuss the novels along with selected short stories and this approach shall be followed here.

The seven short stories which may also be referred to as "Italian" include: "Albergo Empedocle" (1903), "The Story of a Panic" (1904), "The Road from Colonus" (1904), "The Curate's Friend" (1907), "Other Kingdom" (1909), "The Story of the Siren" (1920) and "Ansell" (1975)5. This choice is supported not only by their thematic coherence but also by the fact that they belong almost entirely to his first writing period which ended so curiously and suddenly in 1908 (CS: 7). All these short stories were written between May 1902 and the publication of A Room with a View in 1908.

The reason for their introduction in the following analyses is that very often they offer a slightly different angle at which we are able to see better techniques which Forster mastered in the novels. The best argument for their inclusion has been provided by Glen Cavaliero:

The short stories, indeed, are essential to any understanding of his imaginative world. (…) They provide, as short stories tend to do, clear instances of authorial obsessions; and they thus highlight the novels, which put those obsessions to more objective use (1979: 39).

It should be added here that the list of the Italian novels provided above is not exhaustive. We are in the happy position to have access to surviving parts of the two early drafts of A Room with a View published in 1977 as The Lucy Novels. As they elucidate certain questions raised by the final version, they shall also be referred to in

4 Forster had the habit of working concurrently on various novels while such work could sometimes stretch for many years. Work on a novel which was finally entitled A Room with a View began in 1902 and continued till 1908 while Where Angels Fear to Tread was written rather quickly in 1904-1905.

5 The dates given in brackets are those of the first publications. Five of these short stories were initially published in literary magazines, "The Story of the Siren" appeared as a pamphlet published by Hogarth Press while "Ansell" (written 1903) was not published during Forster’s lifetime.
the present work. Still it is impossible to treat them as separate and complete literary works. Apart from a similar setting all these works are connected by a common system of symbolic reference which to a large degree defines Forster's literary style. It is also possible to indicate other common features, e.g. references to literature, mythology or paintings, which transcend the boundaries set for the present book.

The construction of this system was the starting point of a stylistic development which found its next step in the so called English or Suburban novels (The Longest Journey, Howards End and Maurice) only to be completed in A Passage to India. This system retains throughout this period a number of typical characteristics such as sources of symbolic reference. In the discussion of specific symbolic systems, their occurrence in the later works of E. M. Forster shall also be mentioned when necessary to present the effects of this development. Forster's non-fiction will also be indicated as a source of his critical thought as well as of additional information on his symbolic references. Yet my main aim is to discuss the presence and specific usage of the symbolic systems in the early works or the Italian novels of Edward Morgan Forster.