

Anna Kwiatkowska, 2013.
Sztuka na miarę, czyli dwa światy
bohaterów E. M. Forstera
(Olsztyn: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu
Warmińsko-Mazurskiego)

Krzysztof Fordoński

University of Warsaw

Anna Kwiatkowska's book, *Sztuka na miarę, czyli dwa światy bohaterów E. M. Forstera* (*Art Made to Measure: The Two Worlds of E. M. Forster's Characters*), the first such extensive study on E. M. Forster published in Poland, deals with the role of the fine arts in Forster's works (the analysis includes his novels, except *A Passage to India*, and one short story). Although the subject was discussed before by other scholars such as David Dowling in *Bloomsbury Aesthetics and the Novels of Forster and Woolf* or Barbara Rosecrance in *Forster's Narrative Vision* (their views are presented in the text), the analysis has never been so wide and meticulous even though it has been quite clear for a long time that the issue is of crucial importance for Forster's oeuvre. Kwiatkowska presents a comprehensive overview of the existing research, which repeatedly proves that the matter has often been treated superficially, while some of the generally accepted concepts prove limited or simply erroneous under her scrutiny.

Kwiatkowska begins her book by indicating Forster's position in the history of English literature. In her opinion, it is a separate place between Victorian and Edwardian literatures and modern literature. Forster aims at presenting the new world of the early 20th century with the use of classical literary techniques, but he does so in his own, inimitable way. She presents the views concerning fiction writing and the place of the fine arts in literature at the time. She pays special attention to Forster's writings dealing with literary theory, concentrating on the best known *Aspects of the Novel*, but discusses also an impressive selection of his essays, especially those showing his interest in classical music.

Three chapters of the book deal with three possible approaches to art and the possibilities of its presence in everyday life which can be discerned among Forster's characters. The first chapter, "Cudze wzorce" ("Foreign Models"), discusses these characters who in a variety of ways become lost in their quest for art. Their failure is usually caused by an uncritical approach to the views generally accepted in their society (the chapter opens with a presentation of the late Victorian aesthetics) which the characters choose to accept as their own. The choice, in turn, often results in internal conflicts. The analysis concentrates on six selected examples, such as Rev. Eager (*A Room with a View*) seeking the tactile values of Giotto he read about in his Baedeker, Lucy Honeychurch (*A Room with a View*), who fails to appreciate the beauty of Florence according to the same Baedeker, and, finally, Leonard Bast (*Howards End*), who initially seeks spiritual development through Ruskin and classical music, understanding little of either.

In the second chapter, entitled "Sztuka jako kod" ("The Art as a Code"), Kwiatkowska discusses those of Forster's characters who attempt to perceive the surrounding reality through the lens of art. In these cases their understanding of art is by far more advanced than that of the characters analysed in the first chapter. Their knowledge of art, however, makes them blind to the reality that surrounds them, and, consequently, limits them. Kwiatkowska presents the issue again on selected examples such as Clive Durham (*Maurice*), who tries to see the reality through Ancient art and culture, as Kwiatkowska states: "the books are a world in itself" (83), Cecil Vyse (*A Room with a View*), who desperately wants to see his fiancée, Lucy Honeychurch, as a "woman of Leonardo da Vinci", failing to see in her an actual human being, Rickie Eliot (*The Longest Journey*), who is equally blinded to actual qualities of his wife Agnes, and Philip Herriton (*Where Angels Fear to Tread*) looking at Caroline Abbott through Italian art.

The third chapter, "Wymiar egzystencjalny sztuki", deals, as the title suggests, with the existential dimensions of art, the possibilities of living at peace with oneself, and examples of such situations in Forster's works. Kwiatkowska returns here to some of the characters analysed previously, such as Lucy Honeychurch, who first discovers music as a means of expressing herself and then seeks her own understanding of the fine arts, Rickie Eliot, who seeks refuge in literature, and Clive Durham, who discovers his mistakes when he juxtaposes his vision of Greece with the actual country.

Kwiatkowska ends the chapter with a proposal of a three-stage pattern of emotional transformation which several of Forster's characters undergo while others remain stuck in their emotional rut. On the basis of selected characters and scenes from the novels, Kwiatkowska indicates how these phenomena touch characters from various walks of life, as well as how these characters embrace the arts (most often music, also painting and other graphic arts). She points out the precision with which Forster accomplishes his task either with references to works of art (one should point out here that the book includes illustrations showing the works mentioned in Forster's novels) or language and narrative devices.

The book is written in a lively style, making it accessible to a general public regardless of the complexity of the present subject matter. Kwiatkowska draws the attention of the reader to a relative scarcity of available Polish translations of Forster's works (a crucial problem here is that a lack of precision in these translations greatly limits the possibilities of using them in a scholarly work). Consequently, quotations are given twice, in the original and in translation. One should point out here that Forster's presence in Poland is rather limited: out of his six novels four have been translated so far, there are six translations of his short stories, and none of his other works, as we can see from the included bibliography. The book is consequently addressed to a far broader audience of scholars and students of literature in Poland who might get to know a largely unnoticed English writer, although it should be on the reading list of anyone interested in literature, aesthetics, and history of art. It might, perhaps, be too much to expect an English-language edition of the whole text, but the material certainly deserves at the very least a partial publication as journal articles.