Veiled Visions:
Ekphrastic Manipulation by E. M. Forster

Mykyta Isagulov, University of Exeter, United Kingdom
ORCID: 0000-0001-6562-4736

Abstract: This paper examines the nature of ekphrasis in E. M. Forster's novels *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905) and *A Room with a View* (1908). These "Italian" texts stem from the same drafts and share the same vision of Italy as an opposition to deeply conventional and traditional Edwardian England. In these novels, Forster's ekphrasis and ekphrastic depictions seem to be more than just a narrative device inherited from classic epic tradition. I argue that, when viewed broadly as a tool of medialisation of the text, ekphrasis presents layers of meaning, acting as a "veil" that can both conceal and reveal. The close reading of the novels, consequently, shows that ekphrasis is a "lens" of authorial manipulation: it reflects the self-deception of Forster's characters and Forster's deception of his readers, inviting them into an interplay of perception and misperception. The writer deliberately and strategically employs ekphrasis to challenge the reader's expectations, deepen emotional resonance, and reveal profound cultural and artistic binaries and dualities embedded in the narration and plots. Mainly, this is done through the fragmentation principle and "mute" links to other texts and works of art. Weaving in different ekphrastic frameworks – muted frescoes, generalised paintings, "invisible" ekphrasis – Forster creates layered narratives that invite informed readers to engage with elements external to the novels. These elements support and broaden the stories and expand interpretative possibilities. Ultimately, in Forster's Italian novels, ekphrasis is not used just to describe artefacts but to reveal profound meanings and divides through carefully constructed frameworks.

Classic Ekphrasis and Modern Ekphrasis

In traditional perception, ekphrasis is seen as praising a work of art (an artefact) by, usually, a poet (who is its observer, perceiver – beholder). In larger textual forms like epic, ekphrasis is an artistic *intermezzo*, insertion into the global narratorial fabric. The Homeric depiction of the shield of Achilles in *Iliad* is the most obvious example of classic ekphrasis: an artwork, a shield of divine quality and beauty, is praised by the singing *aoidos*, reflecting the key goal of ekphrasis – to integrate art into life (Becker 1995, 63). While the poetic song depicts the shield's scenes reflecting the ordinary life of the ancient Greeks (marriage, harvesting, etc.) and praises the overall beauty of the artefact, the ekphrasis, in the context of the whole *Iliad*, contrasts the other songs of the epic, as they are war-related and depict opposite phenomena: death, destruction, suffering, betrayal, etc. This peace—war binary is not accentuated directly; therefore, ekphrasis may feel like a stylistically alien fragment, extending the scope of the epic beyond the events in Troy. Such additional context brought forward, although in the form of highly poetic and sentimental insertion, justifies the need to look at ekphrases from a different perspective: I argue that, having evolved in modern writings, it can be seen as a *non*-conventional medialised tool bearing non-traditional functionality of appealing to the beholder's feelings and emotions and manipulating them to an extent greater than could be done through *aoidic* singing, thereby transforming the traditional understanding of ekphrasis.

In its classic form, ekphrasis is a poetic work that is being sung or read aloud and is dedicated to a technical (Dionysian) work of art, usually a sculpture, often a painting or an architectural building of unusual beauty (Eidt 2008; Roby 2016; Koopman 2018; Panagiotidou 2022). It usually praises it and is devoid of any criticism or other emotions attributed to it by the poet. Such classic ekphrasis is believed to be a rare form in literature, as it is associated with the detailed epic-like narration by an *aoidos*, a singing Hellenic poet who describes everything, including an extraordinary artefact. In fact, as a description of an artefact, ekphrasis is not uncommon for the literary medium: it is one of the conventional and stereotypical forms of art synthesis and art syncretism, often studied by the morphology of arts. Eventually, ekphrasis is discussed and employed in the context of the promotion of higher art forms, becoming an Apollonian product.

From the perspective of the twenty-first century, however, having witnessed the theories on intertextuality and intermediality that stemmed from the studies of the morphology of arts and syncretism, ekphrasis – in a broad contemporary sense – can be seen as a verbal description, depiction, or deiction of the visual work of art, non-verbal artefact, or any other type of medial product (Becker 1995, 14; Elleström 2014, 33). As *fin-de-siècle* and modernist writers experiment a lot with various medial forms, attempting to create modernist epics conveyed through the genre of a novel mostly, their ekphrasis – modern ekphrasis – can be seen as such that evolved into a creative tool of incorporation of one medium into another, or a reflection of one art by another. These reflections are inter-art and inter-medial, quite logically extending the context of the novels: ekphrasis used in a modernist literary text links various artefacts and attaches vast layers of history as fragments, enlarging the overall fabric of each text. Modernism repurposes ekphrasis just like any other previous literary tool and form: as an outcome of textual experiments, modern ekphrasis becomes shorter, sometimes evolving into a brief ekphrastic depiction. It may also depict new arts and media forms – such as photography, cinematography, and musical pieces – depriving paintings and sculptures of the exclusive attention of a classic ekphrasis.

As an outcome, repurposed ekphrasis changes its functionality, too: while modernists write their own epics, they switch from detailed praising depictions of an artefact by an *aoidos* to the personalised and often autobiographic presentation of feelings and emotions *caused* by this artefact. Subsequently, ekphrasis starts to reflect the *perception* of the artistic object, not the object itself: it is no longer a technical, refined, highly poetic form but a vision of art by any person of importance to the narration, which may be seen as a reflection of the overall trend of individuation and focusing on the inner self that developed at the turn of the century (Gagnier 2010). Thus, through their ekphrastic descriptions, artefacts bring the feelings and emotions of the characters to the foreground, with the technical qualities of the artefact becoming a matter of lesser importance. These unmentioned details, however, remain essential as they are the ones that may add additional meanings and extend the stories conveyed by the writers, as the relationship between the artefact (as an object of art with its history and details), the writer (who consciously chooses it), and the emotions and feelings (aroused, described, and presented as an ekphrasis to the reader) is a product of literary manipulation, a bridge that links art, history, the personality of the writer and their literary product together, a veiled vision that bears deceptive qualities.

Due to such transformation, the border between any description and a highly artistic, poetic depiction of a visual artefact (i.e., ekphrasis) becomes erased (Becker 1995, 15). One may argue, however, that E. M. Forster's texts present distinct cases of early-modernist use of ekphrasis as manipulated, reshaped instruments of narration. His novels *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905) and *A Room with a View* (1908) are traditionally referred to as his Italian texts: they share various structural elements as they stem from the same source and supplement one another. Based on Forster's classical geographical disposition of characters, these novels bring the key characters to Italy and, eventually, have significant layers of discussions on and descriptions of European arts. Consequently, both novels contain ekphrastic depictions and ekphrases which are limited in number, are meticulously measured in length, and occupy a specific position in the overall narration. Based on close reading, I argue that they aim at a particular affect required by the context and messages Forster would like to share covertly, targeting the emotions of readers. Hence, Forster's ekphrases may be seen as *medial iconotexts* in a broad meaning, that is, iconic depictions "urging the 'reader' to make sense with both verbal and iconic signs in one artefact" (Wagner 1996, 16). Seeing ekphrases as such signs would eventually make them classic cases of intermediality as "specific relations among dissimilar media products and general relations among different media types" (Elleström 2017, 510); this would also confirm that they have their own traditions and rules and are flexible, adjustable, and often veiled literary tools of modern literature. Overall, we would argue that in Forster's Italian novels, ekphrasis supports the cultural abyss, characters' splits, opposing rigid Englishness to Italian paganistic, Pan-related lifestyle; however, in this paper, I should focus on the affective functionality of ekphrases that targets the reader's emotions and, due to its veiled character, can be seen as a tool of deception or manipulation: narratives created by the writer are enriched with cultural and artistic binaries and linked through fragmentation to vast layers of arts, media, and myths. Whether overt or covert, Forsterian ekphrasis challenges the reader's perception, revealing the complexities and conflicts that lie beneath the surface of the text.

Fragmentation and Manipulations

When the one-to-one relationship of classic ekphrasis between the poetic text and the visual form becomes vague, it opens the floor for interpretations and requires narratological and linguistic analysis (Koopman 2018, 257). As W. J. T.

Mitchell argues, the "dichotomy between the text and image mirrors the relationship between the self and the other" (Panagiotidou 2022, 27); hence, modern ekphrasis establishes prisms that allow a re-evaluation of the artefacts and the historical and artistic contexts. In literature, specifically, it is based on the collaboration of texts with other media and the "parodying" quality of literature and the novel as an ever-documenting mass-form of the highly medialised twentieth century (Bakhtin 1981, 7). Relations with other media, literature's engagement with other arts – through ekphrasis and any other tools – facilitate the principle of fragmentation, when, within a larger artistic fabric, the works link to each other, extending the context, enlarging the story via references, echoes, allusions, and parallels which can be often veiled, covert, and unexplained.

Fragmentation, which has its own tradition in the Renaissance and Romanticism, makes modernist novels more profound and more complex for the informed reader if they are willing to explore the connected fragments. For example, it extends Forster's Italian novels, which are relatively short and have simple plots. In this regard, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *A Room with a View* may be read as pop products, or, alternatively, be studied or investigated by the curious beholder. Readers may be analysing these and other modernist texts in the same way as the novels may be analysing them: as Bakhtin says, the authors reflect themselves in the novels to an extent similar to the reader's intention to pursue such reflection (Bakhtin 1975, 106). In most cases, no one will ever uncover the genuine intentions of Forster or other artists, and the interpretations will remain speculative to a certain degree. The choice of artefacts to be described and the ekphrastic frameworks developed, however, remain conscious: Forster integrates his characters into paintings (and operatic and musical media) intentionally, and such ekphrases can be seen as "partisan representations of […] traditions and mentalités" (Wagner 1996, 37).

The revealing of such forms and cases can be done through Bakhtinian methodology, that is, structural analysis, identification of all medial elements (alien to the text or not), and their respective interpretation through semiotics, structuralism, and hermeneutics – philology overall (see Bakhtin 1975, 1981). In many instances, however, the ekphrastic cases may lack a clearly determined frame, which would require the meaning of the artefact depicted, described, or deicted to be interpreted with a certain amount of the beholder's freedom and flexibility (Bilman 2013, 13). Respectively, it may be expected that the use of ekphrases of famous paintings, covertly and overtly, would be aimed at specific

messages, conclusions, or emotions, yet this may also be veiled with other elements or meanings, associations, forming a layer of manipulated deception: a direct concept may be put in front of the beholder, yet under a particular allusive or metaphoric veil, dependent on the whole narration. If readers are keen to decipher the writer's message, be flexible, or see additional fragments attached, they will succeed. These messages and fragments that come veiled – "signs, codes, and frames" – are not "silent or inaccessible": they should be seen as cases of what Bryan Wolf calls "cultural ekphrasis" (Wagner 1996, 36), a re-unification of literary and pictorial media implanted, in Forster's case, for irony, ridicule, mockery of traditionalism, the offence of English readers. While some ekphrases remain veiled and coded to such an extent that it would be difficult to recognise them, they, nevertheless, are "images with thought, voice, and motion" and allow for a pretty confident assumption (Bilman 2013, 63).

Muted Fresco

Overall, Forster's cultural ekphrases may be seen as traditional ekphrases, generalised ekphrases, dialogic ekphrasis in terms of their frameworks, or others. The first example I would like to provide is the portrayal of Caroline Abbott in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*. There, she is repeatedly associated with Santa Deodata, a local saint of the fictional town of Monteriano. While doing so, Forster incorporates a duality into ekphrases, which plays with the reader's expectations. Ostensibly a straightforward ekphrasis, it is very classic yet without poetic attributes:

> [Santa Deodata] 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 roughcast 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. (Forster [1905] 2007, 108)

Here, in fact, Forster closely follows Domenico Ghirlandaio's fresco *Announcement of Death to St. Fina* (1473–75) in Collegiata di Santa Maria Assunta in San

Gimignano. The ekphrasis, however, is more than a mere description of the local saint from San Gimignano, the town that served as a prototype for Monteriano and was visited by Forster during his *grand tour* to Italy in 1901. Forster's depiction of the fresco is loaded with irony and foreshadows Caroline's own fate: in her life, she will not accomplish much either and will suffer from her own split and cultural abyss she would try to bridge. Ekphrasis of a fresco becomes a dialogic tool: it creates a duality between the visual and textual, the historical and the contemporary, the saintly and the mundane. Caroline's association with real Santa Fina (in the eyes of fictional Philip Herriton, a connoisseur of Italy and its art) suggests both her virtues and her ultimate powerlessness in the face of rigid societal norms, a theme that runs throughout the novel. An ekphrasised traditional Renaissance framework is charged with sarcasm, as Caroline cannot be a medieval saint in the modern world: seeking the ability to help people, she also launches all the dramatic events of the story that will climax with the death of a child who was associated through another ekphrasis with Christ. Eventually, the ekphrasis of Ghirlandaio's fresco becomes one of many Forsterian cultural and artistic allusions that bear prophetic functionality: the key characters, the Englishmen, are unable to understand Italy and abandon the world of traditions and stereotypes; their actions will lead to the destruction of the only human being who could bridge the divide – Forster's abyss – between two cultures and civilisations.

While being a dialogic ekphrasis in terms of the high-level motifs and topics it supports, the ekphrasis has a dual character in the physical sense, too: the actual chapel of Santa Fina in San Gimignano has *two* frescoes, and Forster provides readers with the realistic ekphrasis of the first one only, yet he also relies on the second work of Ghirlandaio, *The Funeral of St. Fina* (1473–75). While it is not described or mentioned directly, it impacts the narration. This "mute" pictorial artefact follows the actual death of Santa Fina: her deathbed and all the city towers are covered in violets, signalling a religious miracle. Unlike the fresco, which remains mute, violets are mentioned by Forster in several pictorial descriptions to build the image of Italian forests (looking like a sea) and Monteriano (as a brown castle or ship). *A Room with a View* also uses violets in a critical scene in Italy: there, George Emerson kisses Lucy Honeychurch in a meadow full of violets. Through Hellenic mythology, this contextual use of violets can be associated either with Hades kidnapping Persephone or Athenian democracy and freedom: these two interlinked motifs and the freedom—imprisonment binary are critical for both novels. Eventually, the unmentioned visual image,

the second fresco, becomes appropriated and translated into the story through non-ekphrastic tools (Becker 1995, 109). Additional fragments, however, get attached to novels only if the reader is familiar with both of them, knows that Forster worked on them in parallel, realises that Santa Deodata is Santa Fina, and that Ghirlandaio authored two artefacts on this female martyr. Forster's conscious manipulation is to present half of the story of a martyr through ekphrasis and link the other half through symbols and allusions, without direct ekphrastic incorporation.

Generalised Painting

While the above ekphrasis is dialogic, deceptive, and manipulative due to the second fresco being veiled by Forster, the comparison of the half-Italian, half-English child with Christ, on the contrary, happens overtly. In another scene of *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, Forster fits a seemingly regular scene of a child bathing into the ekphrastic framework, too: it is one of the cases when the writer starts sending the beholders direct messages. However, they also are incomplete or partial. They are built through the framework of the merged or generalised ekphrastic descriptions of well-known and *named* paintings, for instance:

> There she [Caroline] sat, with twenty miles of view behind her, and he [Gino] 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. 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. | So they were when Philip entered, and saw, to all intents and purposes, the Virgin and Child, with Donor. (Forster [1905] 2007, 102-03)

Openly naming the painters and the pictorial framework, Forster builds an "inclusive rhetoric" with the primary goal of provoking by the visual image and bringing to the surface the experience of the reader (Becker 1995, 109, 15).

Upper-middle-class Englishmen on the stereotypical *grand tour* to Italy would have followed Baedeker guides and, most probably, seen the mentioned paintings in the art galleries or, upon their return home to England, at the National Gallery, as the tradition dictated to maintain a continued interest in Italian art and culture. The question is whether contemporary readers (or English readers Forster attacked in his times through his irony and sarcasm) will eventually realise that in this generalised ekphrasis, Forster confuses the details, purposely or not: what remains clear, however, is that the writer refers to a specific religious and pictorial cliché through ekphrasis, and the consequent "transmediation of fictitious media" serves its purpose, which is to provoke thought (Elleström 2014, 25). As readers may realise while reflecting on this ekphrasis, Gino Carella, unfortunately, does not stand up to the qualities of a donor, Caroline Abbott is not a martyr or Madonna who deserves admiration, and the child has no name, is always referred to as "it", and has to die due to the unwillingness of the adult Englishmen to bridge the cultural abyss. Eventually, the ekphrasis is one of several medialised instances that highlight how Englishmen transform from indicative Christians into acting demons.

Should this ekphrasis have been presented through other eyes, it could have gone differently. Philip Herriton, as a fan of Italy, however, sees it precisely through the framework of the Italian Renaissance, a framework that he admires but which, nevertheless, is alien to his culture. *A Room with a View* contains only one ekphrasis related to pictorial art (in addition to many musical ones, which reflect Lucy's soul and emotional torments) and, luckily, it presents the domestic version of such ekphrasis, giving the reader an alternative lens:

> Lucy still sat at the piano with her hands over the keys. She was glad, but he had expected greater gladness. Her mother bent over her. Freddy, to whom she had been singing, reclined on the floor with his head against her, and an unlit pipe between his lips. Oddly enough, the group was beautiful. Mr Beebe, who loved the art of the past, was reminded of a favourite theme, the *Santa Conversazione*, in which people who care for one another are painted chatting together about noble things […]. (Forster [1908] 2018, 176)

This ekphrasis belongs to Mr Beebe, a simple cleric whose perception should strengthen the image of family and blood ties. It, however, does the opposite:

in this scene (and the scene in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, too), readers are reminded of the distance between the textual ekphrasis and actual artworks (Becker 1995, 110), which bridges reality and imaginary to "carry a symbolic value" (Bilman 2013, 2). The ekphrastic framework for the English family is intermingled with Walter Scott's *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819): the tragedy of his Lucy is integrated in detail through the ekphrasis of Gaetano Donizetti's operatic adaptation, *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835), in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, and is revived by Forster's Lucy in England in *A Room with a View*. This makes Donizetti's opera and Scott's novel two critical fragments attached to both novels of Forster. Eventually, the parallel with the holy family alludes to the would-be disownment of Lucy Honeychurch by her family. Charged with sarcasm, this ekphrasis ridicules the pictorial traditions through another stereotypical scene from Italian art, showing the unfitting character of conventionalism and encouraging the reader to seek benefits in the new world and embrace modernity. Lucy's actions that will follow – echoes to the tragedy of Scott's Lucy and Persephone's kidnapping and life in the Underworld – bring her to another kiss with George, the one that results in a marriage in exile, leaving a bitter aftertaste. Like previously, the ekphrasis receives additional meanings and encourages readers to know more about Scott's novel, Donizetti's opera based on it, as they supplement the short texts of Forster's Italian novels as their mute fragments. All of them signal inevitable tragedies, which may be seen as a semi-covert form of effect on readers who are familiar with these artefacts. Eventually, the reliance on such meanings (and artistic fragments) should be well managed to ensure a "perceptual and cognitive" act of reception (Elleström 2014, 12).

Invisible Landscape

While the previous cases are decipherable, and an informed reader can identify the manipulation, some cases are not explicit acts of deception. For instance, this is the first vision of Italy by the Englishmen, the imagery that brings forward the forest—sea binary in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*:

> [The] carriage entered a little wood, which lay brown and sombre across the cultivated hill. 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. [...] The cart-ruts were channels, the hollows lagoons; even the dry white margin of the road was

splashed, like a causeway soon to be submerged under the ad-
vancing tide of spring. […] But as they climbed higher the country
opened up, and there appeared, high on a hill to the right, Monteri-
ano. 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 – 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 [1905] 2007, 19-21)

Initially, this depiction of a town (ekphrastic as it is an urban form combining var-
ious architectural artefacts) seems to be a non-manipulative metaphor, which pre-
sents nothing unusual. The modern ekphrasis, however, is built as an interrelation
of cognition, perception, and memory (Bilman 2013, 35): given the further use of the
pictorial medium in the novel and the repetitiveness of similar descriptions regard-
ing the Italian part of the story, this excerpt could be perceived as a generalised
unnamed ekphrasis of a rather typical Renaissance Italian painting with a *sfumato*
effect. By Forster's will, such landscape follows the main characters throughout
the novel and can be seen in arcs, between columns, in window openings, and
even on the fresco of Santa Fina. If Forster was conscious in this metaphoric de-
piction – and we think he was, given its repetitiveness in crucial scenes – then the
contextualised fragment of Italian art should be evoked automatically in the minds
of informed beholders, for whom decoding, as Bilman says, would be a learnt tech-
nique (Bilman 2013, 105). For others, there would be a need for more profound
historical knowledge about the Renaissance landscape frameworks, without which
the whole passage may be perceived as either an element unworthy of attention
or a sensible yet unknown alien artistic code (Bilman 2013, 105).

Thinking of *why* Forster employed generalised ekphrastic depictions covertly,
not naming it like in the case of Madonna and Child, there is a need to remember
that Forster was overly cautious about the content of his novels and the structure
of repetitions built on their pages. Throughout *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (and
A Room with a View, too), he opposes Englishness and Italianness to reveal outdat-
ed traditionalism and conservatism, expose stereotypes, and resist the rigidness
of society. He places his characters in a foreign context as part of this strategy,

surrounding them with a non-English routine, including the untypical urbanised landscape. In this case, it is the Italian town of San Gimignano, which is presented under the name Monteriano. Indeed, the towers are present in the city, and the bluish and hazy Tuscan landscape surrounds it. What we see as a manipulation for fiction is that the colours of San Gimignano are not brown: such a choice seems to be purposeful, not as an element of a fictional world but as an element needed for the metaphor of a ship. This reticence, along with the overall brown—bluish, brown—violet opposition in Italian novels supports the contrast between English sea-based culture and the Italian Renaissance legacy of which Forster was fond. This may be seen as Forster's reliance on basic mythologemes defined in various myths and stories and recorded and imprinted at the level of collective subconsciousness, forming "a woven fabric of signs" (Wagner 1996, 32).

Uninformed English readers will probably see no symbolic importance of violets or the colour brown, and they will not link violets to Santa Fina and see them as an attribute foreshadowing the development of Caroline as the bearer of this saint's archetype. The metaphor of the ship, eventually, would be acceptable. The contemporary reader, hopefully, will be willing to go deeper in their investigation of the Forsterian texts: if so, they might soon realise that this passage interacts with other elements, echoing Santa Fina and her death, Persephone and Hades' underworld, and Hellenic democracy, as well as the *sfumato*-like vagueness of Italian scenery. The reader might also notice that the colour brown dominates in the descriptions provided by the Englishmen or regarding them: Italy is made hazy by the narrator, yet English characters choose a brownish palette while perceiving the alien landscape. On the one hand, such *sfumato*—brown opposition shows that Italy is not England and that the characters are out of their regular domains and places of comfort; on the other hand, the repeated use of the ekphrastic depiction of a landscape (as an echo of Italian frescoes and paintings) supports the stereotypical imagery of Italy and feeds the intercultural abyss (Isagulov 2023, 209). Additionally, it should be borne in mind that in Italian paintings, brown is avoided in landscapes in favour of gold, shades of yellow, and red; in contrast, the English academic traditions, still very strong when Forster went on his *grand tour*, would, most probably, rely on J. M. W. Turner, John Constable, or Joshua Reynolds (Isagulov 2023), which dictates the use of all shades of brown to depict the *English* landscape. Hence, the use of brown for the Italian pictorial framework, in this case, makes the ekphrastic depiction acceptable for the English reader, domesticated. Subsequently, this supports the veiled opposition of two artistic schools and

cultural legacies (English and Italian, Renaissance and academic), supporting the abyss at another level.

As an outcome, the seemingly minor scene acquires strategic meaning and symbolic and metaphoric powers: colours of the covert ekphrasis enhance the binary of two cultures, the English–Italian abyss that will be cultivated in the novel by Forster through different medialised forms and textual modes. The dialogism, veiled and constructed through external fragments, creates a contextual vacuum, which the beholder has to fill. This vacuum can be interpreted by the reader as the irony of the arranger, Forster's sarcasm, stereotypes offensive to the English reader of the early twentieth century, or a consequence of the writer's own ambivalence, his touching of the topics but never accentuating them. The decoding of such ekphrastic depictions and other ekphrases becomes dependent exclusively on whether the reader will "notice" an ekphrasis as a medial product and attribute meaning to it (Elleström 2014, 13), or will prefer to skip it in favour of following a "simpler" logic of the text, where violets are just flowers and Caroline and Lucy are merely indecisive young women. However, the reader may see them as much more through the dialogic nature of such ekphrases. Lucy and Caroline may be perceived as modern embodiments of Santa Fina and Persephone, or fighters, or persons close to Pan and the vast legacy of Antiquity that they cannot fit into the reality of modern life due to the rigidness of society and the oppressed position of women in both England and Italy (Finkelstein 1975, 17–18).

Conclusion: Modernist Deception

Ekphrasis may function as a sophisticated deceptive or manipulative tool, enriching the narrative and challenging readers. By embedding visual references within his Italian texts, Forster creates multi-layered stories that demand careful interpretation and search for attached fragments from other arts and media. The manipulation of the writer with ekphrastic scenes and ekphrastic frameworks not only enhances the aesthetic complexity of *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *A Room with a View* but also engages the reader in a deeper exploration of the cultural, aesthetic, and philosophical themes and integrated artistic codes.

Forster's use of ekphrasis may be seen as a manipulative narratorial technique evoking specific responses from the readership: whether through generalisation, dialogism, or classical straightforwardness, the employed pictorial fragments and frameworks invite readers to look beyond and question the perspective

of the characters or the narrator. The interplay between the visual and the textual, the real and the imagined, makes Forster's ekphrasis a means of both artistic expression and intellectual challenge.

Consequently, modern ekphrases become inseparable anchors of the text: they come as tools, modes, highly sensible or significantly veiled allusions. In most instances, if taken out of respective contexts, they do not say anything by themselves, although in the scope of the whole novel (or sometimes in the context of the writer's life, the historical context he or his readers lived in), they become ploys. It is easy to skip such ekphrastic cases and pay no attention to them; it is also possible to stop and check and find additional supporting materials that might enrich the context of the novels and their messages. Such checks could show if an ekphrasis can be regarded as an artifice, a passage with a double bottom, or a skeleton key to an additional artistic fragment. Or not: it may show that the writer meant no deception or manipulation.

Consequently, the novels and the ekphrases in them become the metaphoric, inter-art, and inter-media keyholes: the reader is always given the option of peeping into each of them and seeing another room, space, or the possibility to pass by, in ignorance or unwillingness to make it more complex and complicated. As an outcome, Forster presents the reader exclusively with such an option, and it is the reader's choice whether they want to be "lured" into another allusion, or not, as they might be willing to build their own strategy of reading based on their own experiences, historical contexts, and knowledge of art history. If the reader follows the route proposed by Forster and partially veiled by him, they will also face the veiled binaries, the conflicts they feed, the opposition of arts, artistic epochs, cultures, traditions, and mentalities – topics that may be disturbing, emotionally charged, and unpleasant. As a manipulative tool, ekphrasis helps Forster integrate pictorial frameworks and sarcastically reveal the cultural biases, splits, and divides, evoking uneasy feelings and serving as the background for deeper cultural and historical conflicts.

Works Cited

Bakhtin, M. M. 1975. *Вопросы литературы и эстетики [Questions of Literature and Aesthetics]*. Moscow: Художественная литература.

Bakhtin, M. M. 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Edited by Michael Holquist, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Becker, Andrew Sprague. 1995. *The Shield of Achilles and the Poetics of Ekphrasis.* Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Bilman, Emilie. 2013. *Modern Ekphrasis*. Bern: Peter Lang.

Eidt, Laura M. Sager. 2008. *Writing and Filming the Painting: Ekphrasis in Literature and Film*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Elleström, Lars. 2014. *Media Transformation: The Transfer of Media Characteristics among Media*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Elleström, Lars. 2017. "Adaptation and Intermediality." In *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, edited by Thomas M. Leitch. New York: Oxford University Press.

Finkelstein, Bonnie Blumenthal. 1975. *Forster's Women: Eternal Differences*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Forster, E. M. 2007 [1905]. *Where Angels Fear to Tread*. London: Edward Arnold. Reprint: London: Penguin Books.

Forster, E. M. 2018 [1908]. *A Room with a View*. London: Edward Arnold. Reprint, New York: Penguin Books.

Gagnier, Regenia. 2010. *Individualism, Decadence and Globalization: On the Relationship of Part to Whole, 1859–1920*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Isagulov, Mykyta. 2023. "Language of Intermediality: Merging Arts, Cultures and Literature." *International Journal of Languages, Literature and Linguistics* vol. 9, no. 3: 208–13.

Koopman, Niels. 2018. *Ancient Greek Ekphrasis: Between Description and Narration: Five Linguistic and Narratological Case Studies*. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Panagiotidou, Maria-Eirini. 2022. *The Poetics of Ekphrasis: A Stylistic Approach*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature.

Roby, Courtney. 2016. *Technical Ekphrasis in Greek and Roman Science and Literature: The Written Machine Between Alexandria and Rome*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wagner, Peter. 1996. "Introduction: Ekphrasis, Iconotexts, and Intermediality – the State(s) of the Art(s)." In *Icons – Texts – Iconotexts: Essays on Ekphrasis and Intermediality*, edited by Peter Wagner. Berlin and New York: De Gruyter.