



Title	The Shade of Monteriano in E. M. Forster' s Where Angels Fear to Tread
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Citation	待兼山論叢. 文学篇. 2011, 45, p. 37-50
Version Type	VoR
URL	https://hdl.handle.net/11094/25127
rights	
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The Shade of Monteriano in E. M. Forster's *Where Angels Fear to Tread*

Ryoichi KOMEDA

Keywords: homosociality, self-deception, self-discovery, self-reflection,
touristic experience

Introduction

In E. M. Forster's first novel, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905),¹⁾ Philip Herriton and Caroline Abbott grow as people through self-discoveries and self-reflections, in the foreign culture of Monteriano, a fictional town in Italy. In Forster's novels, almost all protagonists accomplish this kind of growth through the attainment of an understanding of the difference between their anticipations and actual experience. In regard to this pattern James Buzard says, "Forster's characters repeatedly enact a failed encounter with the 'real' which they believe themselves to have met" (26). Philip and Caroline also experience an alteration in their perception of both themselves and others through this same kind of failed encounter.

These significant encounters in Monteriano result from each interaction they have with Gino Carella, who is a son of an Italian dentist. For better or worse, Gino is such a sincere a person that he does not hide anything from those around him. Relevant to this point is Fredrick Crews' following remark: "Gino is at once brutal and tender, a bad husband but a good father [...]; one must be morally flexible to see his nature in its true colors" (74). Philip and Caroline are fascinated by Gino's disposition, as they grew up in a suburb of London called Sawston, where politeness is more important than honesty. Philip and Caroline alternately overestimate and underestimate him as an incarnation of Monteriano's spirit until at last they discard their misconceptions and accept him for who he is.

The problem that remains, however, is that they do not have a

chance to notice the hardships that Lilia Herriton, Philip's sister-in-law, endures after marrying Gino. Although they ascribe her death to Gino's selfishness or to his seemingly innocent cruelty, a possibility remains that her death is instead a result of Monteriano's cultural conventions, which includes the severe repression of women. If this is the actual cause of her death, Philip and Caroline are prevented from encountering the hidden hardships that Lilia faced, and consequently miss the opportunity to revise their concepts of what is "real." Does this text show, therefore, not only the importance of the existence of others in touristic experience, but also the limitations, which is a very important theme in Forster's later novels?

The twofold purpose of this paper is to first prove that in this text, Lilia's experiences after marrying Gino are deliberately concealed from Philip and Caroline while on their trips, and then, to locate the novel as the first appearance of a crucial theme for Forster's later novels. Although this theme manifests itself differently in each text, it can generally be stated as follows: it is most difficult for people to develop long-running personal relationships with people from different cultures or social classes.

I . The Light and Shadow of Monteriano

First of all I have to clarify the duplicity of Monteriano's spirit as experienced by Lilia in order to later demonstrate that Philip and Caroline are exposed to only one side of this duplicity.

This novel begins with a scene where a young widow called Lilia Herriton leaves England for Italy. She has yet to become familiar with the very strict customs of the Herriton family and ends up having an experience that left her feeling bitter toward her mother-in-law, Mrs. Herriton. One day Mrs. Herriton suggests that Lilia go traveling in Italy with their neighbor, Caroline Abbot, for Mrs. Herriton wishes Lilia not to make a row in Sawston for a while. As she sets out on her travels, Philip, an avid admirer of Italian culture, gives Lilia the following advice: "Love and understand the Italians, for the people are more marvelous than the land" (1). She clearly took his words to heart as she falls in love with Gino in Monteriano. When Philip is sent to dissuade her from continuing the relationship any further, he discovers that Lilia and Gino have already

been wed. Lilia decides on this marriage because of her genuine love for Gino, but also because of the freedom it offers from the oppression she had experienced while she is with the Herritons and in Sawston.

Even though it is true that the training a lady must endure in the Herriton family is, in some respects, quite violent, it did not guarantee that the customs of Monteriano were less violent. After Lilia becomes the wife of an Italian man, Monteriano's conventions compel her to live a quite different life from what she had expected. When she is a tourist, she is entitled to almost equal rights as an Italian male. For example, she could move about freely whenever she wished, without needing to obtain any special permission. Once she becomes his wife, however, Gino strictly forbids her from going out. In this novel, Italian people appear to tourists as cheerful and not locked into any particular set of conventions. The truth, however, is that this utopian image is preserved only at the expenses of Italian female lives.²⁾

There one may enjoy that exquisite luxury of socialism—that true socialism which is based not on equality of income or character, but on the equality of manners. In the democracy of the *caffè* or the street the great question of our life has been solved, and the brotherhood of man is reality. But it is accomplished at the at the expense of the sisterhood of women. (36)

Men share this atmosphere of freedom with each other, but on the other side of the coin, women are resultantly compelled to obey men and to act in accordance with their own social class. The narrator describes the repressive conventions that existed for women as follows:

The women—they have, of course, their house and their church, with its admirable and frequent services, to which they were escorted by the maid. Otherwise they do not go out much, for it is not genteel to walk, and you are too poor to keep a carriage. [...] It is all very sad. But one conclusion emerges—life is very pleasant in Italy if you are a man. (36)

This biased cultural tradition forces Lilia to be obedient to her very

arrogant and conventional husband. As a result of the continuation of such a repressed life and the additional emotional strain from Gino's adultery, she gets accustomed to a life with much more self-deception than she has known in Sawston:

She [Lilia] had given up everything for him [Gino]—her daughter, her relatives, her friends, all the little comforts and luxuries of a civilized life—and even if she had the courage to break away there was no one who would receive her now. [...] So it was better to live on humbly, trying not to feel, endeavouring by a cheerful demeanour to put things right. (47)

Lilia's suffering and solitude in Monteriano had been so great that she dies as soon as she gives birth to a baby.

Judging from the above argument, one can understand that the reason why tourists have few chances to encounter the dark side of Monteriano is that it is the very convention itself that impedes sisterhood on the street or at the theatre or in the train. After marrying an Italian, Lilia experiences Monteriano's cruelty, which she had not been aware of when she was a tourist. Can Abbot and Philip, then, identify this hidden cruelty on their own trips? In the next section, I will consider whether the text sets up some devices that prevent them from seeing anything beyond the tourist's view of Monteriano.

II. Caroline's Prudent Love

Harriet Herriton, Philip's sister, also goes to Monteriano with her brother. Yet, unlike Philip, she is never able to reposition her view of Monteriano because her Low-Church fervor prevents her from understanding or accepting other values. In this novel, the characters who do successfully revise their own viewpoints on their trips, with the exception of Lilia, are Caroline and Philip. To begin with, I will prove that in Caroline's experience in Monteriano, she is kept from encountering scenes of female hardship.

She feels such an acute sense of responsibility for Lilia's death that she decides to take the baby back from the evil Italian in order to raise

the child as she imagines Lilia would have wanted. Caroline also rejects the polite but deceptive customs of Sawston and hopes that her own feelings are sincere. Unbeknownst to Philip, it is Caroline that persuades Lilia to marry Gino when she hears of Lilia's love for him. Afterward Caroline explains to Philip the justification for her advice to Lilia as follows: "Why shouldn't she [Lilia] break with the deadening life where she had got into a groove, and would go on in it, getting more and more—worse and unhappy—apathetic till she died?" (60-61). Thus she feels that she was directly responsible for Lilia's death and visits Monteriano again in order to take the baby under her protection. On the other hand, Mrs. Herriton tells Philip and Harriet to bring the baby back in order to show the neighborhood her strong sense of responsibility for the baby. It is on this retrieval mission that Philip meets Abbot again in Monteriano.

Initially Caroline attributes Lilia's death to Gino's infidelity and inexperience as a husband, and she does not notice the longstanding oppressive customs of the town, which Gino simply follows. She believes that the tragedy could have been prevented if only Gino had been older. This sentiment can be seen in her following remark: "Lilia—that I should dare to say it!—must have been cowardly. He was only a boy—just going to turn into something fine, I thought—and she must have mismanaged him" (61).

Caroline's prejudice against Gino, however, gradually dissolved through her interactions with him, and moreover, she realizes that she has fallen in love with him. She initially dislikes him for she thinks that he had killed his wife through pressure and mental abuse, but when she visits his house, she is impressed by the genuine love he displays for his baby. This scene seems to have moved her so much that she gives up trying to take the baby back to Sawston. At the end of this novel, she tells Philip at last about her love for Gino while they are on the train out of Italy. She confesses to Philip, "He's [Gino] never flattered me nor honored me. But because he's handsome, that's been enough. The son of an Italian dentist, with a pretty face" (146).

Caroline's self-acceptance of the fact that she loves him signifies her own personal improvement because she has gained a new level of sincerity

in her own feelings. It is this theme which is repeated in Forster's other novels, especially in his *A Room with a View* (1908). One point that should be noted is that she comes to be more timid after she finds herself in love with Gino. She says to Philip on the train: "If I [Caroline] saw him often, [...] I might remember what he is like. Or he might grow old. But I dare not risk it, so nothing can alter me now" (146). Alan Wilde thinks that her intentional avoidance prevents her from growing up: "[I]t [love] is an instrument of her [Caroline's] growth, but it leads to nothing outside of herself; it opens no doors to personal relations" (26). Being sincere to one's own feeling is, however, not necessarily the same as following one's own feeling, as public compensation is required in the latter. Forster is very sensitive to this aspect of human consciousness. In particular, he shows this preparedness for compensation in *Maurice*. In the novel, Maurice Hall decides to resign from his position as compensation for choosing to have a homosexual relationship with Alec Scudder. Therefore, it can be said that Caroline takes a step forward in that she, who grew up being forced to lead a life full of self-deception, accomplishes this sincere self-discovery. Caroline's love for Gino is, therefore, a very significant experience for her.

The "wreath of smoke" is a very important hint for identifying the beginning of Caroline's love for Gino. After confessing to Philip her love for Gino, she reflects on when her love for him had budded. Subsequent to her confession, she makes the following remark to Philip:

"The time I thought you weak and heedless, and went instead of you to get the baby. That began it, as far as I know the beginning. Or it may have begun when you took us to the theatre, and I saw him mixed up with music and light. Afterwards, in the church, I prayed for us all; not for anything new, but that we might just be as we were—he with the child he loved, you and I and Harriet safe out of the place—and that I might never see him or speak to him again. I could have pulled through then—the thing was only coming near, *like a wreath of smoke*; it hadn't wrapped me round." (146-47, emphasis added)

Here, in the phrase "like a wreath of smoke," smoke serves as a kind of

metaphor for Gino's attraction. This takes on greater significance as a scene in which Caroline is enveloped within an actual ring of smoke. In chapter VI, on the day succeeding the opera that she has been to with Philip and Harriet, she visits Gino in order to discuss whether or not she might be able to take the baby to Sawston. When she arrives, however, she discovers that he is away from home and so she decides to wait for him in his house. After a while, Gino returns back, smoking, but does not notice that Caroline is seated in the next room. As she waits, the smoke slowly approaches her: "The ring had extended its pale blue coils towards her. She lost self-control. It enveloped her. As if it was a breath from the pit, she screamed" (103). This scene suggests that the beginning of her love for Gino has been sparked the day before. For although she has yet to meet Gino on that day, she has been already experiencing feelings of love for him. In other words, her love for him, as she says, has begun "when you took us to the theatre."

This is why her love first takes shape in the theatre, where Gino enjoys entertaining Philip on the bright side of Monteriano. This is a clear example of the male fraternization from which female dwellers are excluded:

Phillip had whispered introductions to the pleasant people who had pulled him in—tradesmen's sons perhaps they were, or medical students, or solicitor's clerks, or sons of other dentists. There is no knowing who is who in Italy. (97)

For Caroline, who is still in the position of the tourist, and therefore able to appreciate the bright side of Monteriano, the social interaction is so attractive that she not only forgets her original mission but also encounters a new opportunity of self-improvement, as can be seen from Lionel Trilling's indication: "Miss Abbott is charmed [by the atmosphere of the theatre] and she is sorry that she has not brought any pretty cloths: something has indeed happened to her moral fibre" (60). The bright side, hence, remains very attractive to her to the end. She grows as a person in Monteriano regardless of the town's dark side, for as an outsider, she is not forced to confront the unpleasant truth known all too well by its

female residents.

III. Ideal Male Homosociality in Monteriano

It can be said that Philip Heritton is the most important character in this novel. Forster writes to R.C. Trevelyan, "The object of the book is the improvement of Philip" (*Selected Letters* I 51). Accordingly, it is very interesting to see how he grows as a person in Monteriano. This section will attempt to prove that Philip's improvement is also dependent upon the prevention of his encounter with scenes of oppression produced by Monteriano's brotherhood.

Philip's improvement in Monteriano is repeatedly influenced by the bright sphere of male social interaction, which comes at the expenses of women. Again, the theatre scene clearly depicts this process. In the same way as Caroline, his experience of the theatre is, as Fredric Crews puts it, very decisive for Philip in his acceptance of Monteriano through Gino. Crews points out, "From this point [the visit to the theatre] on Philip is sympathetic with Gino, and though he fails to oppose Harriet strongly and hence fails to prevent the disastrous kidnapping, he remains on Gino's side—even after Gino in his grief has attempted to murder him" (77). As mentioned above, Forster states that the object of this novel is Philip's improvement and accordingly, Barbara Rosecrance explains his improvement on this trip as follows: "[F]rom aestheticism and self-delusion, he has moved to awareness of nature's supremacy, to comprehension of the complex nature of good and evil, and thence to the realization [...] of the necessity for personal commitment" (45). This improvement for Philip is realized through his interaction with Gino or Caroline while his positive impression of Monteriano is kept intact.

While it is clear that the scene at the theatre is indispensable for both Caroline and Philip, it is noteworthy that we read this scene in terms of queer reading. One reason Philip cannot see women being discriminated against in the theatre is because the discrimination has already taken place on a more basic level and as a result, they are not permitted to socialize with other women in that setting. Consider, however, that if he were gay, he may have experienced as hard a situation

as Italian wives typically did, for in a male-dominated society misogyny often works in collusion with homophobia. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick points out, "the historical manifestation of this patriarchal oppression of homosexuality have been savage and nearly endless" (3). If the male homosociality in Monteriano also reflects an ideological homophobia, it is not only the female inhabitants of Monteriano, but also its homosexuals who fall victim to the institutionalized male bonds. Philip may realize directly another exclusive convention of Monteriano.

There are some points that warrant the reader to regard Philip as homosexual. Robert K. Martin, for instance, indicates that, "Philip's apparent love for Caloline is in fact a displacement of his desire for Gino" (256). S. P. Rosenbaum also points out Philip's tendency toward homosexuality: "The 'almost alarming intimacy' of his relationship with Gino emerges as an amusing homoerotic complement to his love for Caroline" (44). According to Nicolas Royle, Philip's reply to Caroline on the train leaving Italy, in particular, has a double meaning. When Caroline confesses that she loves Gino on the train, Philip promptly replies, "Rather! I love him, too" (133). Royle points out: "The sense of 'I love him' remains, we might say, both crude and ambiguous" (9).

To begin with, we have to pay attention to whether or not Philip's love for Caroline includes some degree of sexual attraction. Although Philip has positive feelings for Caroline, it does not necessarily mean that he harbors any romantic love for her. Philip's interest in her picks up when she sends Gino's message to him: "He [Gino] only asked after you [Philip], and wished he hadn't been so rude to you eighteen months ago" (88). When she relays Gino's apology, Philip feels so happy: "This tiny piece of civility [by Gino] had changed his [Philip's] mood" (88). It is after the delivery of this message that, "he [Philip] watched her [Caroline] in silence, and was more attracted to her than he had ever been before" (89). Although channelled through Caroline, one must note that Philip's interest lies first and foremost in Gino.

It can be said that Philip loves Caroline as a source of authority who authenticates his desire for Gino in that he admires her more than ever after he knows that her feelings are for Gino rather than him. When the

novel comes to the final scene, Philip regards Gino as Endymion and Calorine as Selene and admires her as a goddess with great satisfaction:

Philip's eyes were fixed on the Campanile of Airolo. But he saw instead the fair myth of Endymion. This woman [Caroline] was a goddess to the end. For her no love could be degrading: she stood outside all degradation. (147)

It is quite suitable that Philip makes an association with the myth of Endymion in this situation because Selene's desire for her lover serves as an appropriate metaphor for Caroline's love of Gino. The eternal sleep of Endymion by which Selene preserves his beauty and youth is represented here in that after Caroline leaves Italy, her love for Gino seems to her everlasting: "If I [Caroline] saw him often, [...] I might remember what he is like. Or he might grow old. But I dare not risk it, so nothing can alter me now" (146). This structural similarity in the two narratives is what allows Philip to transform Caroline into Selene in his mind. This change is worth notice, for it can mean that the nature of his "mediator of desire" has also undergone a fundamental change.³⁾ J. Hillis Miller explains very lucidly the necessity of what René Girard calls "mediator of desire":

[T]he psychological mechanism whereby desire is never direct but always routed through the desire of someone else whose authority authenticates my desire. If he or she finds something desirable it must be worth having, but without the help of another I cannot tell what I should want to have or to do. (82)

Put simply, "my desire" is directed by "the desire of someone else." This is how the "triangle of desire" (Girard 83) is formed between the subject, the mediator, and the object. Philip tends to regard Caroline's desire as a model for what he too should find desirable. He worships her as a Madonna or a goddess so much so that "[t]here came to him an earnest desire to be good through the example of this good woman" (138). Caroline is, so to speak, his ideal "mediator of desire." At this point Caroline seems to Philip divine in that she reaffirms his love for Gino. This is why he wishes that "she stood outside all degradation" because he hopes that her

love for Gino remains pure and intact so that she can serve as his ideal “mediator of desire.” For him the best thing on this trip is that he clearly realizes his love for Gino and that is exactly why he is not troubled by her love for the Italian rather than himself. Finally he thinks with great satisfaction of “all the wonderful things had happened” (148). Philip, therefore, appears to be more homosexual than bisexual, and certainly much less heterosexual. If he is gay, then, what kind of influence did the brotherhood of Monteriano have on him?

The uncertain texture of the novel makes it possible for the brotherhood of Monteriano to allow actual homoerotic behavior. As mentioned above, Nicolas Royle points out that: “Forster’s novel [*Where Angels Fear to Tread*] mixes the crude and ambiguous; it plays with the sexual suggestiveness of language, with innuendo and double meaning” (9). This uncertainty also encroaches upon the brotherhood of man that is present in the opera:

[A]t the opera Philip finds “amiable youth bent [...] and invited him to enter” (97); [...] In mole-like fashion, the language of the novel leaves us unclear: Where is it operating? At what level is working? Is the meaning at the surface or the underneath, in a sub-text? Or is it somehow both and neither? (10)

Thanks to this textual ambivalence, a reader cannot completely exclude a homosexual interpretation from the surface of this text or from other spheres of sub-text. It is impossible to rule out the possibility of a queer reading from the opera scene, where Philip partakes in the atmosphere of exquisite luxury that is created through fraternization with men. Male homosocial desire in Monteriano cannot help but to include homosexual desire. This is how Philip’s homosexual experience unfolds within the legitimized social boundaries. He engages with other males on their own terms and therefore never encounters the dark side of Monteriano.

The text, therefore, denies Philip any harsh or unpleasant encounter with the repressive conventions of Monteriano, even though he is, in fact, gay. His improvement in Monteriano also has nothing to do with Lilia’s experience.

Conclusion

Based on the above arguments, it can be said that Philip and Caroline encounter others in Monteriano as outsiders rather than victims of the concealed sphere of the brotherhood. Their experiences and Lilia's after her marriage form a counterpoint in this novel. Although their experiences are so valuable in and of themselves, they never actually intersect with those of Lilia. Their experiences suggest that for any community, there is a sphere that tourists cannot penetrate.

It is the concept of this sphere that is very important in Forster's later novels such as *Howards End* (1910) and *A Passage to India* (1924). These novels suggest that the true difficulties one faces in developing personal relationships are more prevalent in long-running relationships rather than brief encounters. In *Howards End*, it is only after Margaret Schlegel marries Henry Wilcox that she encounters real hardship in her personal relationship with him. In *A Passage to India*, as well, Aziz originally believes that Indians can make friends with friendly British people, but in the last portion of the novel, he comes to the realization that friendly British people are actually one and the same with the oppressors of India.

Where Angels Fear to Tread demonstrates early on this intensely sensitive issue for Forster's later novels in that the experiences of Philip and Caroline never intersect with Lilia's experience after she marries—the realm of brief encounters is kept entirely separate from the realities of long term intimacy.

Notes

- 1) E. M. Forster, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, ed. Oliver Stallybrass. (1905; London: Edward Arnold, 1975). All references to this book are given parenthetically.
- 2) According to Tess Cosselett, Forster's description of Italy is not necessarily true in terms of Mary Ward. See Cosselett, "Revisiting Fictional Italy, 1887-1908: Vernon Lee, Mary Ward, and E. M. Forster" 318.
- 3) René Girard's term. See René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self*

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(Graduate Student)

SUMMARY

The Shade of Monteriano

in E. M. Forster's *Where Angels Fear to Tread*

Ryoichi KOMEDA

In E. M. Forster's first novel, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905), Philip Herriton and Caroline Abbott grow as people through their self-discoveries and self-reflections, in the foreign culture of Monteriano, a fictional town in Italy. In Forster's novels, almost all protagonists accomplish this kind of self-discovery and self-reflection through the attainment of an understanding of the difference between their anticipations and actual experience. In regard to this pattern James Buzard says, "Forster's characters repeatedly enact a failed encounter with the 'real' which they believe themselves to have met" (26). Philip and Caroline also experience an alteration in their perception of both themselves and others through this same kind of failed encounter. The problem is, however, that they do not have a chance to notice the hardships that Lilia Herriton, Philip's sister-in-law, endures after marrying Gino. This text shows not only the importance of the existence of others in touristic experience, but also the limitations, which is a very important theme in Forster's later novels. That is to say, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* demonstrates early on exactly how intensely sensitive of an issue this is for Forster's later novels in that the experiences of Philip and Caroline never intersect with Lilia's experience after she marries—the realm of brief encounters is kept entirely separate from the realities of long term intimacy.