Towards a Regime of Authenticity
Reading *A Room with a View* through the Lens of Contemporary Romance Scholarship

Francesca Pierini
Asian University for Women (<francesca.pierini@auw.edu.bd>)

Abstract

Through an analysis of E.M. Forster's *A Room with A View* (1908), this article sets itself the twofold aim of (1) shedding light on the changes in courtship and the choosing of a partner that have characterised personal and romantic relationships over the last century, and (2) exploring an instance of the literary construction of Italian otherness in Anglophone fiction. By analysing the novel in the light of several recent insights and findings in (literary/popular) romance scholarship, this article corroborates the affiliations of *A Room with a View* with the romantic literary tradition.

Keywords: *A Room with a View*, Courtship Practices, E.M. Forster, Eva Illouz, Italian Otherness

The form [of the romance novel] has attracted writers of acknowledged genius – Richardson, Austen, Brontë, Trollope, and Forster […] Using the eight essential elements of the romance novel […] society defined, the meeting, the barrier, the attraction, the declaration, the point of ritual death, the recognition and the betrothal – doubled, amplified, diminished, echoed, made as comic or as serious as context required – these and other canonical romance writers have employed this form to free their heroines from the barrier and free them to choose the hero. Joy and happiness, both for the heroine and hero, and for the reader, follow.
(Pamela Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, 2003)

1. A Room with a View *as Romantic Novel*

At the beginning of the 20th century, "literary fiction […] moves away from the romance novel form" (Regis 2003, 100). E.M. Forster's literary imagination is placed at the crossroads of this important parting. Positioned between two centuries, Jane Austen and Modernism, England and its others (Italy/India), the realm of the "undeveloped heart" and a difficult to attain but still achievable proficiency in emotional matters, Forster's work stands on the cusp of the literary "great divide" which sees literary and popular forms of fiction take neatly separate directions for several decades (Huyssen 1986).[1] With *A Room with a View* (1908), Forster creates one of the last canonized literary romances of the pre-wars era, a "light-hearted" romantic story of great formal complexity and extraordinary existential depth, with an H.E.A. ending – romance scholars' jargon for "happily-ever-after" – of astonishing realism and gentle sadness.

The first part of this essay proposes a discussion of Forster's novel in light of the eight narrative elements, isolated by Pamela Regis, which constitute the markers of romantic narratives, focusing, in particular, on the novel's "happy ending" and its quality of unresolved ambivalence. It will then be suggested that *A Room with a View* is one of the first modern romantic narratives to display the emergence of a "regime of authenticity" (Illouz 2012, 31), an important turn in romantic relationships, as well as in literature about them, towards conceiving of courtship, and the choice of one's partner, as a fundamentally individual and private matter, rather than a process a young woman would go through from a position of encasement within familial protective relations. Lastly, the article will present a final reflection on Italy as a cultural/imaginary construct enduringly associated with notions of existential authenticity and truth, evincing the affiliation between this notion and the imperial cultural standpoint shared by pre-modernist and modernist authors.

In the novel, Italy plays a crucial and symbolic role in the heroine's transformation and in her discovery and acceptance of honest, genuine, and unaffected values. The novel seems to epitomise perfectly, and solidify once and for all, the dichotomy between Italy as a spiritual/sensual world and England as a rational one: "For Italy was offering her the most priceless of all possessions – her own soul" (Forster 2012b, 115). In other words, *A Room with A View* epitomizes the Hegelian approach to the other, whose exotic characteristics must be sensibly incorporated by the modern normative subject in order for him or her to reconnect with a precious but potentially unsettling existential dimension.

Throughout the novel, Forster stages a story dominated by dichotomies. The "positive" terms of the dichotomies belong to Italy, and only the most genuine, sensitive, and truly unconventional characters among the British are capable of letting themselves be transfigured by the Italian experience in a way that makes it possible for them to better understand themselves and their milieu. This certainly happens to Lucy who overcomes society's restrictions and her self-imposed renunciation in order to achieve a better knowledge of herself that does not deny her love and sexual attraction to George Emerson.

According to Pamela Regis, the modern romance novel – of which, in *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* (2003), she sketches the history and pre-modern literary affiliations – is "a work of prose fiction that tells the story of the courtship and betrothal of one or more her-

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[1] E.M. Forster, by making use of a long-established discursive tradition that depicts Italy as the bearer of a unique cluster of counter-values perceived at the opposite spectrum of British ideals, creates a series of narratives dominated by a game of loathing and attraction towards the Italian other, a mechanism characterized by powerful and contradicting patterns. See Pierini 2017-18, 2019.

oines" (2003, 27). Regis individuates eight essential narrative elements to be used as analytical categories for understanding the romance, several "events" in the storyline which must occur for a romance novel to be defined as such.

By applying her eight essential elements to Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Regis illustrates the movement "from a state of unfreedom to one of freedom" (2003, 30) which, she maintains, constitutes the trajectory of every romantic plot:

Eight narrative events take a heroine in a romance novel from encumbered to free. In one or more scenes, romance novels always depict the following: the initial state of society in which heroine and hero must court, the meeting between heroine and hero, the barrier to the union of heroine and hero, the attraction between heroine and hero, the declaration of love between heroine and hero, the point of ritual death, the recognition by heroine and hero of the means to overcome the barrier, and the betrothal. These elements are essential. (*Ibidem*)[2]

This schema allows for a virtually endless number of variations: the meeting between heroine and hero can be recounted in flashbacks, for instance, the "betrothal" is often figurative, and, more relevantly to our discussion, the barrier can be thoroughly internal, that is to say constituted by the "attitudes, temperament, values, and beliefs held by heroine and hero that prevent the union" (32). In modern and contemporary romance novels, barriers tend to be internal, signifying an "inability or unwillingness to declare for each other, and the declaration scene marks the end of this barrier" (34).

In the case of *A Room with a View*, the eight elements are all present, but, as Regis explains, Forster experiments with them significantly. He works them to the point of making them unrecognizable: "Where Austen employed them quietly, submerging them in the narrative, Forster manipulates them brazenly" (100).

Firstly, Forster creates two points of ritual death. Secondly, he makes some of the eight narrative elements overlap with one another. The first moment of ritual death takes place in Chapter 4, the well-known sequence in which Lucy witnesses a murder in Piazza della Signoria. Lucy falls unconscious at the sight of the nameless Italian man dying; her fainting, Regis argues, is "a simulacrum of mortality that signals her own death. She revives in the hero's arms" (101). "George's embrace is [Lucy's] initiation into physical attraction and sexuality, marked by the blood on the photograph of Venus" (102). The first point of ritual death, therefore, coincides with the narrative element of the first meeting between hero and heroine, the first one in which Lucy and George spend some time alone.[3]

Chapter 4 inaugurates the long segment of the novel in which barriers must be removed: engagement to the wrong man, geographical distance from George, Charlotte's (apparent) disapproval of the union between heroine and hero, and the tardive condemnation of Lucy's mother. The most cumbersome barriers, however, are Lucy's internal ones: her fear to recognize and act

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[2] "The 'point of ritual death' is that moment, in a romance novel, when the union between heroine and hero seems completely impossible. It is marked by death or its simulacrum (for example fainting or illness); by the risk of death; or by any number of images or events that suggest death, however metaphorically (for example, darkness, sadness, despair, or winter)" (Regis 2003, 14). As Bonnie Blumenthal Finkelstein observes: "when Lucy rejects George, the novel's tone shifts and becomes dark. Lucy herself suddenly becomes aware of autumn […]" (1973, 283).

[3] Arguably, the first point of ritual death, on a narrative, rather than symbolic level, takes place when Lucy decides to leave for Rome without seeing George. We do not see Lucy in Rome, but we meet her again, in England, on the day of her betrothal to Cecil Vyse. A second one is when Lucy refuses George before breaking her engagement to Cecil.

upon her feelings for George. If Lucy wants to live fully and in harmony with herself, she has to overcome the "muddle" inside and around: all that pride, the prejudice, and heaps of denial.

The second point of ritual death occurs when Lucy denies to Cecil, Mr Emerson, and herself, her feelings for George. Lucy is successfully overcoming the muddle separating her from freedom and emancipation; not yet the muddle separating her from sexuality. These two steps are achieved, in the novel, over two different phases of growing self-acceptance: "She could never marry [...] She must be one of the women whom she had praised so eloquently, who care for liberty and not for men; she must forget that George loved her…" (Forster 2012b, 183).

Lucy's insincere "feminism" – "as if a girl can't break it off for the sake of freedom" (182) – together with all her internal barriers, comes apart during her conversation with Mr Emerson. Over the course of this long encounter, Regis explains, Forster makes three of the eight narrative elements happen simultaneously: the second point of ritual death, Lucy's recognition of her true feelings, and the declaration of love between heroine and hero which, quite uniquely, takes place in George's absence, as Mr Emerson makes it on George's behalf.

This is an interesting turn, especially if we read it in the light of Lisa Fletcher's understanding of the romance novel as a genre defined by the speech act "I love you", the performative utterance which constitutes, in Fletcher's view, the very essence of the genre.

Forster makes the declaration happen very late in the story; a characteristic which has become quite typical of romance fiction. George does not declare his love to Lucy because he already did, and because he is not with her this time; Lucy cannot declare her feelings for George to his father, but admits them *de facto*, by not denying Mr. Emerson's suppositions.[4] The sentence "I love you", therefore, never gets spoken by hero and heroine to one another.

However, the whole sequence of the love declaration "in absence" is not at all a negation of the importance of the speech-act. Hero and heroine very nearly lose one another because of all the lies and misunderstandings, the muddle Lucy has created along the way. The missed declaration is only the last blunder. By creating so much chaotic "movement" around it – characters that very nearly miss one another and crucial conversations that come close to never taking place – Forster, it could be argued, draws attention to it, to a canonical moment of satisfaction (for the reader especially) that never takes place in order to make space for, and call attention to, personal conflicts and modern inner struggles.

2. Despite Its Happy Ending

At the end of the novel, Lucy achieves happiness and freedom with George at the price of a break with her family. She "pays" her emancipation with a (temporary?) alienation from her mother and brother which taints the blissful mood of the novel's happy ending: "[George's] content was absolute, but hers held bitterness: The Honeychurches had not forgiven them; they were disgusted at her past hypocrisy; she had alienated Windy Corner, perhaps for ever" (218).

Detecting its ambivalent note, critics have diversely commented on the novel's happy ending. Barbara Rosecrance, for instance, affirms that "despite the happy ending, Forster implies a

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[4] Mr. Emerson makes Lucy see twice. At the beginning of the story, he gives her the gift of a view on Florence: "[…] and when she reached her own room she opened the window and breathed the clean night air, thinking of the kind old man who had enabled her to see the lights dancing in the Arno…" (Forster 2012b, 14). At the end of the story, Mr. Emerson makes Lucy see a different kind of "light", the truth of her feelings towards George: "She could not understand him; the words were indeed remote. Yet as he spoke the darkness was withdrawn, veil after veil, and she saw to the bottom of her soul" (213).

modern condition" (1982, 90). The modern condition Rosecrance detects, I wish to argue, is precisely given by the ending's deliberate characteristic of defectiveness. The conclusion of the novel – and the final sequence of its best-known cinematic transposition, in which Lucy and George kiss on the windowsill of their Florentine hotel room, enveloped by the warm rays of the sun – sees Lucy and George looking out of the window together. The window, of course, frames the view the protagonist has fought for all along, and marriage is the beginning of another – unknown – story, which unfolds before Lucy and George just like the course of the river Arno. I believe there is, in Forster's reticence to wholly embrace a happy ending, an elusive but telling clue of his liminal position vis-à-vis the novelistic form he is dealing with. In a way, Forster is at a window too – a threshold perhaps – contemplating the future of romantic stories.

On the one hand, Forster creates his happy ending, on the other, he has clearly learnt (from Austen?) the lesson that freedom, self-knowledge and personal emancipation come at the price of coming to terms with one's flaws, sometimes the most aggravating to acknowledge. Again, all that pride, the prejudice, and heaps of denial.

In her sociological analysis of courtship in the novelistic world of Jane Austen, Eva Illouz observes that in that literary (and social) context "courtship was a process conducted within the framework of one's kin and neighbours" (2012, 27). This means that courtship, as described by Austen, used to be "an activity in which the woman's self was naturally enmeshed within and protected by her social network and kin" (*ibidem*). This approach to the romantic encounter aimed at creating a bounded time and space in which the suitor's "credentials", could be evaluated. These not only comprised his financial situation, but also his moral character, manners, and behaviour. Sometimes, his past would be investigated by the young girl's family by activating a network of common acquaintances.

The purpose of this practice, Illouz explains, was not only that of securing, for the young woman, the most suitable partner in marriage, it was also that of creating a safe environment in which romantic emotions could grow, be monitored, and cultivated with the least possible risk, for the girl, to experience harmful and overwhelming feelings:

During courtship the woman's self was solidly 'encased' in her close relationships, and […] these played an active role in the process of evaluating the suitor and forging a bond with him. Because several people participated in the social task of evaluating and judging a suitor and potential husband, the woman's opinion was a reflection and extension of her social network. A woman's sentiments for a man were activated along with the opinion that others expressed about him. The intertwining of sentiment and judgment, of individual feelings and collective observation, implies that when loving someone and ultimately making a decision about a prospective spouse, one was incessantly immersed in the moral universe of norms and taboos of the group and that one's romantic involvement was entangled with the web of one's commitment to others. (28-29)

In *A Room with a View*, we see at work numerous clues and traces of the legacy of this process and of its effects on the young protagonist's behaviour and psyche. In general terms, Lucy is used to rely heavily on other peoples' opinion in all kinds of matters: from artworks to human character. Left to her own devices, she does not know what and whom to like. Deciding if a person "will do" (7) seems to be a matter for collective discernment. In other words, "approval" will come, for Lucy, from an authoritative figure, or from the familial/social group she belongs to. She is not used to be autonomous in recognizing and expressing her own preferences. Therefore, for instance, she asks trusted acquaintances, such as Mr. Beebe, if the Emersons are good, if she is "allowed to like them": "Mr Beebe – Old Mr Emerson, is he nice or not nice? I do so want to know" (Forster 2012b, 37).

More specifically, Lucy decides to break her engagement to Cecil when George makes her see him as the members of her family have always seen him. When Cecil refuses to play tennis with Freddy, articulating as an excuse a complicated explanation of his character, Lucy finally sees his snobbery and pomposity. Lucy's social milieu and the people she grew up among matter to her, even if she is able, more and more, to detect their flaws; she does not want to be obliged to "pick sides" between her husband and her family and friends. The fact that George wishes Lucy to be her own person always, and is willing to work on the side of himself that wants to exert control over her, plays a big role in Lucy's final decision.

The main problem with Lucy's engagement to George, therefore, seems to be that she goes through a fundamental process, one which has been, for a long time, regulated and codified within the context of a small community, all alone, depriving her family, and her mother especially, of the role she was expected to play in it.

Naturally, Lucy's behaviour is not an act of conscious rebellion against the older order of things; she follows, instinctively and clumsily, a deeper and unacknowledged necessity to choose independence and authenticity over conventions. Hiding her perceptions and feelings is costly to her: "This solitude oppressed her; she was accustomed to have her thoughts confirmed by others or, at all events, contradicted; it was too dreadful not to know whether she was thinking right or wrong" (47). But her mother calls this muddled secrecy "hypocrisy" (218). Lucy has been duplicitous because she has chosen to go through a fundamental social and emotive process alone, making perhaps the most important decision of her life, and one of the last ones in which her mother was to be involved, on her own, independently of "the web of one's commitment to others" (Illouz 2012, 29).

3. Regime of Performativity/Regime of Authenticity

According to the older model of engagement practices, courtship "advanced by subtle gradations, with couples first speaking, then walking out together, and finally keeping company once their mutual attraction had been confirmed" (30). Illouz calls this model "regime of performativity of emotions", indicating a regulated and ritualistic practice "in which emotions are induced by the ritualized actions and expressions of sentiments" (*ibidem*):

In a performative (i.e., ritualized) regime of emotions, one not only reveals but also comes to feel sentiments after the performance of rituals of conduct and the decoding of their meaning. It is thus an incremental process, often induced by another's use of appropriate signs and codes of love […] In such a regime, one of the two parties took on the social role of inducing the emotions of the other, and this role fell on the man. In a performative regime of emotions, the woman was not and perhaps could not be overwhelmed by the object of love; courtship followed rules of engagement such that the woman was drawn in a close and intense bond progressively. She responded to signs of emotions whose patterns of expression were well rehearsed. (*Ibidem*)

This set of practices is opposed to the contemporary regime of "emotional authenticity" (31), which characterizes modern-day romantic relationships:

Authenticity demands that actors know their feelings; that they act on such feelings, which must then be the actual building blocks of a relationship; that people reveal their feelings to themselves (and preferably to others as well); and that they make decisions about relationships and commit themselves based on these feelings. A regime of emotional authenticity makes people scrutinize their own and another's emotions in order to decide on the importance, intensity, and future significance of the relationship. (Illouz 2012, 31)

Later in her study, Illouz further explains that the contemporary set of practices which regulate the contemporary regime of romantic relationships belongs to a world in which:

> Individuals, by and large, must rely only on themselves to figure out whether they are attracted to someone, and whether they should love someone, making the choice of a partner the result of an individual decision-making reached through a complex process of emotional and cognitive evaluation. (50)

Lucy, clumsily and unwillingly, takes an important step towards a more recent regime of romantic relationships, one certainly more familiar to contemporary readers. Lucy was not expected to choose her partner in marriage alone, at least not entirely. She feels something for George almost immediately, but instead of submitting this feeling to the established practice of courtship and the collective judgement of her loved ones, she denies it at first, then keeps it to herself getting deeper and deeper into a muddle she will be rescued from, at the last minute, by old Mr. Emerson. By forcing Lucy to turn, perhaps for the first time, her gaze inwardly, Mr. Emerson will lead Lucy along the path of revealing her feelings to herself and to him. Ultimately, she will make her decision based on those feelings.

Of course, courtship practices had changed over the course of the century separating Austen and Forster. There is a scene, in *A Room with a View*, that is especially revelatory of this shift at the same time as it exposes the lingering presence of older practices. In a letter to Mrs. Vyse, Mrs. Honeychurch writes that "[…] Cecil has just asked my permission about it [marrying Lucy] and I should be delighted, if Lucy wishes it […] I was rather amused at Cecil asking my permission at all. He has always gone in for unconventionality, and parents nowhere, and so forth" (Forster 2012b, 86). Mrs. Honeychurch's worldly attitude and explicit intention to let Lucy decide for herself reveal an awareness of modern ways.

At the same time, Mrs. Honeychurch proudly makes sure of mentioning to Mrs. Vyse the bond of trust between her daughter and herself. She continues by writing: "Young people must decide for themselves. I know that Lucy likes your son, because she tells me everything […]" (89). Hence Mrs. Honeychurch seems to be communicating the fact that although she knows she is expected to act as if she does not have a say in the matter, she actually knows that she does – and she wishes Mrs. Vyse to know this as well.

As already pointed out, Lucy's promise to Charlotte, and the chain of muddled falsehoods she will have to keep fabricating after her first lie, will keep Mrs. Honeychurch ignorant of the events, and she will practically be the last person to know of Lucy's experiences and suffering. Therefore, even if Forster creates a happy ending that formally adheres to the rules of romantic fiction (the betrothal/marriage), he also adumbrates the world of existential isolation typical of the modern (and postmodern) condition, and of all who decide to exert full agency by taking complete responsibility in the matters of the heart.

Interestingly enough, *A Room with a View* is one of the last canonized Anglophone romantic novels of the pre-wars period, a text in which Forster poetically articulates his own "view" (pun intended) of happiness as flawed, burdened, incomplete, and carrying with it a measure of personal loss.[5] From this time onwards, happy endings will only be permitted to continue in popular romance fiction, whose uplifting qualities and entertaining vocation will be more and more read as markers of dubious literary value.

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[5] In the essay "Pessimism in Literature" (1907) Forster observes that: "We of today know that whatever marriage is, it is not an end. We know that it is rather a beginning, and that the lovers enter upon life's real problems when those wedding bells are silent" (135). Just a little later in the same essay, Forster asks: "Is there any happy situation on earth that does not contain the seeds of decay, or at all events of transformation?" (137).

4. The Imperial Imaginary

After a very long intermission – one which reminds us of the time intervened between "sunny" *A Room with a View* and "pessimistic" *A Passage to India* (1924) – Anglophone literary fiction will slowly reprise the canonization of its romances. This will occur towards the second half/end of the century, with texts – such as John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), and A.S. Byatt's *Possession: A Romance* (1990) – that have thoroughly appropriated a perspective on the romantic as a fundamentally conflicted and, by then, controversial genre.

Both Fowles and Byatt "make space", as it were, for such an awareness and translate it into their pages. Carrying within them the legacy of modernism and postmodernism, both texts decide not to choose between happy/unhappy, sunny/gloomy, pre-modern linearity/postmodern pastiche. Instead, they resolve the allegedly naïve, un-chic, and passé quality of the happy ending by splitting it into two – both novels present a double/split narrative structure: one of the two narratives ends well; the other not so much.

Let us take a step back to the time of Modernism, which, as Nicholas Daly argues, elaborating upon Suzanne Clark's study on women writers from that era, "established its own sense of integrity through a rejection of sentimental discourse. Outside its own hard critical carapace, this modernist story of origins maintained, lay the sentimental, associated with popular success, women's culture, and an outmoded Victorianism" (1999, 119). Daly also argues that the relation between high modernism and the more popular forms of fiction – not only the romantic novel, but also adventure and gothic narratives[6] – is far more complex than usually acknowledged.

If, on the one hand, "The success of modernism may have come to mean that popular fiction in general, and not just the 'woman's novel', appeared as immature, an embarrassing stage of arrested literary development" (120), on the other hand, the two forms have been characterized, beyond the obvious differences, by some commonalities, such as "the relations of subjects and objects under a nascent consumer culture" (123), and, more relevantly to this article, by the manifestation, in their narratives, in form and/or content, of the imperial culture/episteme. Both traditions, Daly maintains, refer to "the same imperial imaginary"[7] (*ibidem*). In modernist primitivism, a literary tradition parallel to that of high modernism:

The margins of modernity are reconceived as places from which to express dissatisfaction with modern metropolitan culture. Writers position themselves outside the modern, on the side of the 'primitive'; for them the primitive embodies a green world of wholeness and authenticity elsewhere lost to modernization. (118)

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[6] Modernism's distaste for the sentimental was not only directed to women's literature but extended to "the patriotic zeal and the emotionally charged relations between men that we find in the adventure novel" (Daly 1999, 120). The focus on narrative development, typical of these genres, was also perceived as a problem: "to lose oneself in a story was no better than to yield to the pleasures of the herd" (*ibidem*). It should be clarified, however, that when Forster wrote *A Room with a View*, he was deliberately experimenting with a literary genre that was perceived as legitimate and integral to the British literary tradition, not yet gendered as feminine and branded as cheap: "the women's romance novel, as a mass market subcategory of the romance mode, began to acquire its pejorative […] associations with exclusively female writers and readers only in the third decade of the twentieth century, in the years following E.M. Hull's publication of *The Sheik* in 1919" (Hipsky 2011, 2).

[7] "While the modernist primitives identify with the foreign and the exotic rather than with the domestic, the contours of the imperial imaginary, the delimitations of inside/outside, modern/primitive, remain essentially the same. Ultimately, modernism can no more think its way out of the categories of imperial culture than can popular fiction" (Daly 1999, 148).

Although D.H. Lawrence is perhaps the author who most aptly represents this cultural and literary attitude, I wish to contend it is also detectable in Foster's writing.[8] What makes this analysis difficult, however, is the fact that Forster makes his characters appropriate it, often the ones he most disapproves of – demonstrating, with this, his own conflicted attitude towards and distrust of it. Forster's "imperial imaginary" mainly comes through when he depicts Italy as an ideal opportunity to recover a lost dimension of existence. Italy is made to live, exist – and function – within a previous stage of humanity's historical and spiritual development, one Forster can contemplate from a more advanced position, discerning what is good about it, what his British characters should learn and incorporate, and what should be discarded.

When Lucy overcomes society's restrictions and her self-imposed renunciation to achieve a better knowledge of herself, she does it in Italy – a constructed space that enables her new-found autonomy and ongoing maturation:

Life, so far as she troubled to conceive it, was a circle of rich, pleasant people, with identical interests and identical foes. In this circle one thought, married and died. Outside it were poverty and vulgarity, for ever trying to enter, just as the London fog tries to enter the pine-woods, pouring through the gaps in the northern hills. But in Italy, where anyone who chooses may warm himself in equality, as in the sun, this conception of life vanished. Her senses expanded; she felt that there was no one whom she might not get to like, that social barriers were irremovable, doubtless, but not particularly high. You jump over them just as you jump into a peasant's olive-yard in the Apennines, and he is glad to see you. She returned with new eyes. (2012b, 115)

The passage begins with a reference to the conformist nature of social intercourse among wealthy British people and ends with a joyous informal jump into the field of a farmer: pleasant, unmenacing, a "milder and friendlier" brand of those poverty and vulgarity one, in Italy, could occasionally approach and even learn from.

Importantly, Forster states in the passage that Lucy's senses "expanded". In other words, Lucy learns to comprehend more. She perceives the limits of her social horizon, and her capacity to go beyond it is closely connected to a kind of understanding that is not merely intellectual – and/or exclusively dependant on her capacity to follow duty and conventions – but increased and completed by physical and emotional development.

Moreover, Forster "connects" Italy to a notion of "authenticity" in the sense of recognition and discernment of one's true feelings. This is a trope – escaping to Italy (or to the south of Europe) to find the answer to important existential and sentimental questions – that will live long after *A Room with a View*. Of course, Forster did not entirely invent the connection. His construction of Italy is a particularly successful combination of two different but complementary matrixes of thought that have characterized Anglophone literature over the course of the modern centuries and still hold a place in contemporary popular literature. In very broad terms, one of them identifies the south of Europe as the unenlightened place of Catholicism and despotism, primitivism and closeness to the senses; the other approach, going back to the Enlightenment, equates proximity to nature with a lack of rationality.

So it happens that Forster's Italy is the semi-rational and semi-magical realm in which Pan can still make an appearance. Italy is the lingering in the air of magical opera songs Caroline

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[8] As an instance of Lawrence's heterotopic construction of a foreign space, Daly mentions his literary creation of New Mexico. Italy too could very well serve as an emblematic heterotopic construct, a space for existential choices of personal renewal and/or extinguishment, as texts such as *The Lost Girl* (1920) and *Aaron's Rod* (1922), as well as Lawrence's Italian diaries, full of a nostalgic yearning (and contempt) for the Italian "primitive" world, demonstrate.

Abbott hears in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905), during that last night in Monteriano before events take a tragic turn. It is the Italian cab driver in *A Room with a View*, representing perpetual paganism outside all history: "neither the Ages of Faith nor the Age of Doubt had touched him; he was Phaethon in Tuscany driving a cab" (2012b, 60) and, in a more explicitly primitivistic tone, is enchanted and industrious Vorta of *The Eternal Moment* (1928) before the appearance of "civilization".

Italians, who live in a semi-motionless world that civilization and modernity are changing at a slow pace, do not share with the British the alienations and estrangements of the modern world. Feeling at ease in and in harmony with nature, free of those intellectual trials and social constrains that constitute the core of British civilization, they can, unconsciously and unintentionally, effect change in the British characters, reminding them of a more immediate and less contrived way of being in the world.

Of course, one can translate this trope of existential pre-modern "authenticity" into many forms and adapt it to different literary genres, and numerous authors have employed and still employ "Italy" as a term of comparison and opposition through which they assess and evaluate specific aspects of their own culture. From this perspective, popular romantic fiction may constitute a privileged venue for the contemporary literary construction of "Italy", because it often fully accepts the legacy of Italian otherness – and its supposedly "magical" and "irrational" qualities – and re-locates it within a context of popular values and sentimental meanings. The result is that all these assumptions are made particularly transparent for observation and investigation.

In contemporary Anglophone narratives, literary and popular, "Italy" is frequently depicted as a positive realm of otherness, a heterotopic creation, a space for the appreciation of art and its deeper meanings, for rewiring with sensual pleasures, the ideal location for a hedonistic holiday, for a temporary re-joining with one's profounder self, an emotional outlet, a space for the elaboration of loss, for sexual initiation, for self-imposed exile. Sometimes, it is a magical, "suspended" space and a time-capsule, a parallel universe of continuous history and traditions, and of unbroken origins.[9]

5. Concluding Remarks

A Room with a View reflects Forster's perspective on the romance novel as a complex and increasingly conflicted fictional form. Seeking a realistic solution to its happy ending, the novel's conclusion respects the formal rules of the romance genre, which entail the betrothal of the protagonist at the end of the story. However, Forster experiments in form and content, elaborating upon the eight essential narrative elements of the romance and planting the ugly seed of personal loss in the last sunny sequence.

The novel, one of the last British literary romances of the last century to be canonized as such, evinces for the reader a movement towards a modern and recognizable regime of sentimental relationships characterized by increased autonomy and isolation. Courtship, falling in love, and marriage, become more and more a personal prerogative rather than a social one.

Exploring the perspective on the south of Europe – characteristic of primitivist authors – as an "other space" particularly suited for personal discoveries and romantic encounters, offers

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[9] For a study of Italy as the chosen space for self-imposed exile, see Fordoński 2003. For a discussion of Italy as a heterotopic creation, see Gloria Lauri-Lucente's (2015) study of the filmic transpositions of Forster's "Italian novels". Lastly, for a study focusing on the literary fantasy of unbroken traditions and pure origins, see Pierini 2020.

the opportunity to reflect on the intersecting trajectories of literary and popular fiction, as well as on the endurance and ubiquity of some of the cultural categories and ethical values of our imagery and cultural taxonomies. The crucial point at which all these paths cross, the shared perspective for vastly diverse literary constructions, is the imperial cultural episteme shared by numerous pre modernist and modernist narratives.

A British protagonist "goes back" to Italy from the end of history, seeking solutions to individual and collective discontents in a world perceived as alluring, dangerous, rich of possibilities and discontinuous with the contemporary. This expedient/notion is at the core of highly diverse Anglophone narratives in which Italy (perceived as alluring, sensual, entertaining, but a little backwards and not without dangers), and romance (an alluring literary genre, entertaining, sensual, but a little naïve/passé, and not without dangers), have been often associated with one another. This connection has been artistically developed by narratives that function, at the same time, as expressive outlets, mirrors, conduits and precincts for expressing, as well as containing, complex and contradicting meanings of longing for and/or emancipation from the past.

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