

Language of Intermediality: Merging Arts, Cultures and Literature

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Abstract—The paper demonstrates through specific examples the peculiarities of intermedial ‘language’ employed by E.M. Forster to enlarge the contextual field of his novel *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905). Thus, through the application of the close reading technique and hermeneutical method, it covers the specificity of pictorial depictions and theatrical medium, as well as intermedial references integrated into the canvas of the literary artefact to extend its contextual field, draw borders between cultures, deepen the conflicts. It concludes that the writer applies specific intermedial language patterns and frameworks to extend the context of the plot and deepen the conflicts and oppositions between English and Italian, own and strange, old and new.

Index Terms—Art studies, British literature, Englishness, intermediality

I. INTRODUCTION: INTERMEDIAL ‘LANGUAGE’

Intermediality is “(the study of) specific relations among dissimilar media products and general relations among different media types” [1]. Although the term was coined in the early 1980s, the phenomenon existed long before that and can be traced back to the use of ekphrasis in Homer’s *Iliad* [2] or syncretism of mythology. Nowadays intermediality remains an overly broad and complex concept and theory, uniting over fifty various terms into an umbrella and hypernym [3, 4]. This overview of specific examples focuses on what can be named ‘conventional’ intermediality [5], i.e., the medial variety of forms of the work of art (e.g., the musicalization of literature, plasticity of music), or what Werner Wolf and Irina O. Rajewsky call ‘intermedial references’ [3, 6]. While the paper highlights such intermedial references, however, contrary to the typologies of Wolf and Rajewsky, it sees them as a referencing of works from other media in the given medium and a contribution to the specific dialogue of cultures through quotes, reminiscence, self-quoting, and citing [5]. This category is seen as a product of the peculiarities of literary texts and the domination of the verbal medium.

Thus, as a modernist writer and fighter of class difference and hypocrisy, E.M. Forster uses various intermedial components in his novel *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905): the integration of pictorial and theatrical media and referential quotes into the literary work serves the purpose of making a seemingly ‘simple and boring’ plot deeper by adding philosophical meanings — through linking additional informational layers from other media and arts, namely literature, painting, and opera. The purpose of such intermedial elements is to ‘spice up’ the conflict of cultures and build the opposition or what can be called modernist

‘binaries’ [7] — to enlarge the contextual field of the novel, similarly to the fragmentation of Renaissance or Romanticism. In the case of *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, these binaries create multiple layers of the conflict, building culture-, medium- and art-based oppositions between art and life, life and history, geni and filisters, ecstatic Dionysian and harmonic Apollonian [8], British and Italian, modern and old, serving as bricks to the grandeur arch of the conflict of own and strange. This plexus of conflicts is rooted in the title of the novel, conscious quoting of other works of art, plot parallels (e.g., Italian operatic adaptation of Walter Scott’s novel as seen by Englishmen visiting an Italian province town), the opposition of arts, and ‘dislocation’ of the characters out of their regular cultural context.

II. PICTORIAL MEDIUM

The presence of pictorial integrations or ‘recycling’ of the pictures into a verbal, literary form can be traced in several key scenes of the novel. For that, Forster uses two types of depictions: literary portraits of main characters and multiple depictions of Italian nature as seen through the eyes of British visitors, both forms being ekphratic.

One of many cases of an ekphratic depiction can be seen in the following passage:

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. It was impossible to praise it as beautiful, but it was also impossible to damn it as quaint [9].

This very first description of Monteriano¹ in the novel demonstrates an initial contrast between Englishness and Italianness: the stress on nature may remind of the Italian Renaissance paintings, as most often such vague hazy-green mounts and hills are typical of Italian paintings — they can usually be seen depicted in the arches, between the columns, in the window openings or staircases portrayed by ‘religious’ painters (see, for instance, Giotto’s *Deposition*, the 1320s, Perugino’s *The Virgin Appearing to St. Bernard*, c. 1490–1494, da Vinci’s *The Last Supper*, c. 1495–1498, or *Mona Lisa*, 1503–1506, Correggio’s *Nativity*, 1529–1530). The same depiction of a landscape accompanies the main characters when they are already in the town — this is either a

Manuscript received March 5, 2023; revised April 10, 2023; accepted May 3, 2023.

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¹ In fact, Forster was describing the city of San Gimignano in Italy.

view from the hotel windows, the panoramic view from Gino's house, or the view from the windows of the cathedral, or the landscape on Santa Deodata frescoes.² It 'haunts' the characters everywhere, being a tool of making the setting Italian, forming the image of Italy as a country with deep cultural traditions, where life is not still as nature resembles a living bright sea.

At the same time, the metaphor of a brown ship-city surrounded by greenery can make one think of an English part of the story, as brown masts and walls of Monteriano are often compared to a ship or a castle (cf. Englishmen's house is his castle), or a fortress, linked to power (cf. the dominant role played of British Empire in the world in the early XX century). Brown colour seems very logical here, even though the actual towers of San Gimignano are made of white-grey limestone. Besides, brown is not typical for Italian paintings, as nature in Italy has a very bright palette: most Italian Renaissance painters tend to use golden and yellow-red shades instead of brown (see, for instance, Simone Martini's *Annunciation with St. Margaret and St. Ansanus*, 1333, Pietro del Pollaiuolo's *Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian*, 1475, Botticelli's *Youth of Moses*, 1481–1482). However, brown became a trend for the British Islands in the XIX century and became a typical characteristic of English academic painting (see, for instance, works of J. M. W. Turner, John Constable, and Joshua Reynolds), as all varieties of it have been used to depict British nature. One cannot be sure whether Forster did it subconsciously or through self-aware artistic usage, although one of the many borderlines between English and Italian is 'drawn' in the novel using a pictorial medium and art. What one can be sure about is the fact that the brown palette was deeply rooted in the English mentality at the time of writing of the novel and along with the image of a ship (cf. the metaphor of England ruling the seas), this builds the 'intrusion' of Englishness into the Italian landscape.

Regarding the (more) conscious synthesis of literary and pictorial media, in several instances, Forster introduces depictions of well-known landscapes. In the scene, when Harriet and Philip arrive in Italy for the first time, the reader's attention is drawn to the violets:

At that moment 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. There are such violets in England, but not so many. Nor are there so many in Art, for no painter has the courage. The cart-ruts were channels, the hollow lagoons; even the dry white margin of the road was splashed, like a causeway soon to be submerged under the advancing tide of spring [9].

In between many nautical metaphors used on the pages of the novel, the reader is once again presented with the vision of the sea. However, this time it is the Italian forest that is untypically brown: bright green colours of Italianness are absent, and brown trees are seen as rocks. At the same time, violets are not a rare finding in the paintings: there exist bright cases in turn-of-the-century paintings which could be known

to Forster (see, for instance, Manet's *Bouquet of Violets*, 1872, Edward C. Leavitt's *Violets*, 1885). However, Forster is partially right, as violets are rather a pictorial accessory for women (see paintings of D.G. Rossetti) or part of still-life paintings, whereas they are rarely depicted as part of landscapes.

The writer also combines obvious conventional and referential intermedial elements in the novel, which are, undoubtedly, used consciously and on purpose. Thus, one of them is the description of Gino and his child which transforms into famous paintings from the Italian Renaissance:

Gino lifted his son to his lips. This was something too remote from the prettiness of the nursery. The man was majestic; he was a part of Nature; in no ordinary love scene could he ever be so great. ... Gino passionately embracing his son... She sacrificed her own clean handkerchief. He put a chair for her on the loggia, which faced westward, and was still pleasant and cool. There she sat, with twenty miles of view behind her, and he 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 [9].

This very description does not require much deciphering, as the writer tells the readers directly that it is a synthesis of several paintings depicting the Madonna, baby Christ, and the magi. The reference is to multiple paintings of Giovanni Bellini, Luca Signorelli, Lorenzo di Credi and, in fact, many other Italian painters who belong to the Florence quattrocento period and are unique in their own way, as they did not get under influence of the later generation of such artistic geni as da Vinci, Rafael, or Michelangelo. Traditions set by these early masters would later inspire English pre-Raphaelites, whose invisible presence can be felt throughout the novel as well.

Literary portraits in the novel are also of an ekphratic nature — one of them can be seen in the novel when Forster decides to depict the Santa Fina's Chapel in the basilica of San Gimignano — Collegiata di Santa Maria Assunta:

Santa Deodata, who 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 rough-cast wall. It is a gentle saint who is content with half another saint to see her die [9].

² The actual saint described by Forster under this name is Santa Fina, a local saint from San Gimignano who lived in 1238–1253. Frescoes are in the local basilica and were painted by Domenico Ghirlandaio around 1475.

The short depiction of a real fresco by Ghirlandaio invisibly links the novel's plot through intermedial references to the other fresco of the basilica — the one depicting the death of Santa Fina: when she died, her wounds miraculously healed and the rotten board on which she lied for five years got covered by live violets. Moreover, during the funeral, all towers and walls of San Gimignano got covered in flowers, which resembles the violet sea and brown rocks described earlier. This link between Santa Fina and the sea of violets is, probably, the key unifying element in the novel which merges English and Italian cultures: it is built by Forster through a skilful integration of pictorial medium into a literary text.

Moreover, the image of Carolina, whom Philip falls in love with when he sees her standing next to these frescoes, resembles the image of Santa Fina as depicted by Benozzo Gozzoli (c. 1465): it is also another example of a literary portrait in the novel:

Her eyes were open, full of infinite pity and full of majesty, as if they discerned the boundaries of sorrow, and saw unimaginable tracts beyond. Such eyes he had seen in great pictures but never in a mortal. Her hands were folded round the sufferer, stroking him lightly, for even a goddess can do no more than that. And it seemed fitting, too, that she should bend her head and touch his forehead with her lips. Philip looked away, as he sometimes looked away from the great pictures where visible forms suddenly become inadequate for the things they have shown to us. He was happy; he was assured that there was greatness in the world [9].

This final scene of the novel can be seen as another version of the Virgin and Child, however, this time Philip is a child in Caroline's hands, as she is the only English person in the novel who not only managed to understand the spirit of Italy but become a part of it, feel it. In this sense, through the 'covert' linkage to the Italian Renaissance painting, she becomes Santa Fina of the novel — a young and beautiful lady, who is forced to wait and hope for a miracle, and after the death of a child help others heal their wounds.

III. THEATRICAL MEDIUM

The use of a theatrical medium in the novel by Forster takes place in several instances. First, it builds the vision of Italy by Englishmen as a stage performance — due to the dynamics of speech, the verbal features of the Italian language, active gesticulation of Italians — it may feel that the characters are actors and viewers at the same time:

She finished; and he was dumb, for she had spoken truly. Then, alas! the absurdity of his own position grew upon him, and he laughed — as he would have laughed at the same situation on the stage [9].

This passage echoes theatrical scripts, the playwright's remarks — such language and style may be dictated by the fusion of theatrical and literary media in the story. Other mentions of the stage by Forster demonstrate that the life of the main characters is like acting and should be seen as a theatrical process of pretending and imitation. In other instances, theatrical art is shown as a typical attribute of an Italian lifestyle, for instance:

The Italians are essentially dramatic; they look on death and love as spectacles. I don't doubt that he persuaded himself... that he had behaved admirably, both as husband and widower [9].

However, the climax of the medial integration and the anti-climax of the whole novel is the description of Gaetano Donizetti's opera staged in the Italian province. Through the depiction of *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835) based on Walter Scott's novel *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819), Forster draws a clear borderline between Italian perception of opera (i.e., involvement) and the contrasting Englishness of Harriet, who stresses the need to know how to listen, not to actually listen and enjoy the music:

The audience accompanied with tappings and drummings, swaying in the melody like corn in the wind. Harriet, though she did not care for music, knew how to listen to it. She uttered an acid "Shish!" [9].

Moreover, theatre is depicted by Forster as an interrelated process of empathy/compassion and joint enjoyment, as the spectators appreciate the singing, whilst the singer draws inspiration from the audience:

Lucia began to sing ... her voice was still beautiful, and as she sang the theatre murmured like a hive of happy bees. All through the coloratura she was accompanied by sighs, and its top note was drowned in a shout of universal joy. The singers drew inspiration from the audience ... [9].

This intermedial link allows Forster to show, ironically and sarcastically, the synthesis of the borderless Italian society, whereas the English company remains very hierarchical, and the English characters are living (or acting) their own lives, alone, all by themselves. The depicted 'anarchy' of the theatre would not be possible in Britain in the early XX century, however, in Italy the distance between the stage and the audience disappears, allowing Italians to be themselves and genuinely enjoy the art. Such lack of artistic distance is clearly shown in another scene:

Violent waves of excitement, all arising from very little, went sweeping round the theatre. The climax was reached in the mad scene. Lucia suddenly gathered up her streaming hair and bowed her acknowledgment to the audience. Then from the back of the stage—she feigned not to see it—there advanced a kind of bamboo clothes-horse, stuck all over with bouquets. It was very ugly, and most of the flowers in it were false. Lucia knew this, and so did the audience; and they all knew that the clothes-horse was a piece of stage property, brought in to make the performance go year after year. None the less did it unloose the great deeps. With a scream of amazement and joy she embraced the animal, pulled out one or two practicable blossoms, pressed them to her lips, and flung them into her admirers. They flung them back, with loud melodious cries, and a little boy in one of the stageboxes snatched up his sister's carnations and offered them. "Che carino!" exclaimed the singer. She darted at the little boy and kissed him. Now the noise became tremendous [9].

This vivid integration of the theatrical medium in the literary work is probably the brightest case of intermediality

in the novel. It demonstrates energy and emotions, the vividness of Italians and the treatment of art as a joint mutually enjoyable process, as opposed to English conservatism and reservedness.

IV. INTERMEDIAL REFERENCES

Though intermedial references may be considered the least 'worthy of attention' form of intermediality [3, 10], they form another crucial layer of Forster's intermedial language employed to develop the inter-cultural, inter-art and inter-mentality conflicts as well as extend the context of the novel.

To create a specific setting and locus, evoke additional thoughts and comparison, Forster uses seemingly 'chaotic' references, such as mentions of specific architectural buildings, sculptures, paintings, literary works, and music. He also links five additional literary layers through referential intermediality to deepen the plot: they are related to Walter Scott, Alexander Pope, William Shakespeare, Dante Alighieri, and the Bible.

The title of the novel itself refers the reader to Alexander Pope's poem *An Essay on Criticism* (1709):

*Name a new play, and he's the poet's friend,
Nay show'd his faults—but when would poets mend?
No place so sacred from such fops is barr'd,
Nor is Paul's church more safe than Paul's
churchyard:
Nay, fly to altars; there they'll talk you dead:
For fools rush in where angels fear to tread [11].*

The poem speaks of the dialectics between art and its perception, and Pope's opinion is that any art should follow nature, be based on harmony, be perceived by informed and understanding connoisseurs, whereas Forster's novel serves a satirical response to most of these claims. As a modernist writer and aestheticist Forster thinks of the role of art and depicts England as a country that went independent way due to its geographic isolation, having lost connections with previous cultural epochs, whereas Italy is shown as a direct descendent of one of Europe's brightest civilizations. Consequently, Italianness becomes like a firework for the English characters [12], as art has never been an important aspect of national life in England [13].

Pope's layer is not represented in the name of the novel and reference to his poem on arts only, one of the key but silent and gloomy characters is called Mrs. Theobald, who is a direct reference to Lewis Theobald (1688–1744), the first editor of Shakespeare's heritage, creator of the Shakespearean canon, who has been rivalled by Pope: thus, Pope depicted Theobald as a key character in *The Dunciad* (1728), having accused him of forfeiting the canon.

William Shakespeare is not only the object of discord between Pope and Theobald but he is also referred to on the pages of the novel within one of the literary portraits:

*Lilia had achieved pathos despite herself, for there
are some situations in which vulgarity counts no
longer. Not Cordelia nor Imogen more deserves our
tears [9].*

This mention is very ironic, as Lilia's character is very 'flat' and primitive and can hardly be compared to such deep and intense Shakespearean characters as Cordelia from *King Lear* (1606) or Imogen from *Cymbeline* (1611).

The second Shakespearean reference is a tool to 'strip' the British characters of their comfort zone and force them to face the Italian reality around:

*And on the second day the heat struck them, like a
hand laid over the mouth, just as they were walking
to see the tomb of Juliet. From that moment
everything went wrong. They fled from Verona.
Harriet's sketch-book was stolen, and the bottle of
ammonia in her trunk burst over her prayer-book, so
that purple patches appeared on all her clothes [9].*

The writer forces his characters to abandon their idyllic world of Englishness (and Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*) and face the reality (of Italy and Verona) through heat (unknown to England), loss of the sketch-book (which could be perceived as another instance of broken distance between an artist and the object of art), and loss of prayer-book (as abandoning of religion in a catholic country and Harriet's acting against the Biblical norms).

The third reference to Shakespeare, also being a literary portrait, relates to Gino, 'a source of evil' for English characters:

*His back was turned, and he was lighting a cigar. He
was not speaking to Miss Abbott. He could not even
be expecting her. The vista of the landing and the two
open doors made him both remote and significant,
like an actor on the stage, intimate and
unapproachable at the same time. She could no more
call out to him than if he was Hamlet [9].*

Here one sees once again a typical painting — doors, and an arch with a peaceful Italian landscape: this is a depiction of a dramatic actor made by comparing an Italian person with an English drama character, which is another way for Forster to mix and oppose two cultures.

Intermedial references to Dante mostly serve the purpose of deepening the pseudo-tragic image of Lilia. At the very beginning of the novel, when she is ushered on the trip to Italy, Philip says, as if predicting her future:

Here beginneth the New Life [9].

The same phrase appears in the middle of the story, when the English characters get to know of Lilia's death and her child's birth in Italy, however, this time it is a prediction for Philip, Carolina, and Gino. The importance of this quote is in the fact that it is taken from Dante's *New Life* (1295) translated by a pre-Raphaelite Dante Gabriel Rossetti in 1861:

*In that part of the book of my memory, before which
is little that can be read, there is a rubric, saying,
"Incipit Vita Nova". (Here beginneth the New Life)
[14].*

New Life is the first major work written in spoken Italian, not Latin. It speaks of love, feelings, and the death of the female object of love, which echoes the content of the novel, whereas Forster, consciously or not, chooses the translation of pre-Raphaelite Rossetti and not the widely spread or more popular versions of Theodor Martin (1862) or Charles Eliot Norton (1896).

Another reference to Dante — his *Divine Comedy* — is put in the words of Gino, which sounds like the mocking of Italianness:

*Italy too, is a great country. She has produced many
famous men—for example Garibaldi and Dante. The*

latter wrote the 'Inferno,' the 'Purgatorio,' the 'Paradiso.' The 'Inferno' is the most beautiful." And with the complacent tone of one who has received a solid education, he quoted the opening lines — *Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita / Mi ritrovai per una selva oscura / Che la diritta via era smarrita*³ — a quotation which was more apt than he supposed [9].

Using the language of stereotypes, Forster shows that the key characters, Philip and Carolina, are lost in the forest of English poshness, prejudice, pride and will be later 'saved' by Italy. Philip's case is even more illustrative, as he lost his way being in between love for Italy and unwillingness to have an Italian relative [12].

The layer of Biblical allusions and quotes contributes to the intermedial links between the novel and other works of art and processes. These are either mere mentioning of the Bible and its characters to form the Englishness, traditional British way of living, or actual references, for instance:

A house divided against itself cannot stand [9].

This quote from *Matthew* 12:25 characterizes the politics of Mrs. Harriton regarding an English family, which should remain a dignified and unified cell of English society. She also uses another quote:

Let the dead bury their dead [9].

It comes from *Luke* 9:59-62 and *Matthew* 8:22 and is employed to cover up the truth about the events in Italy. The third Biblical quote, one from *Psalms of David*, is used by Forster to characterise Harriet when she kidnaps the English-Italian child to save the reputation of her English family, which, unfortunately, leads to the child's tragic death:

Blessed be the Lord my God who teacheth my hands to war and my fingers to fight [9].

As stated above, Walter Scott is represented through his historic novel *The Bride of Lammermoor*, which plays a critical role in the plot through its adaptation in the form of Donizetti's opera *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Except for the theatrical medium integrated into Forster's novel for specific purposes demonstrated above, this choice of an Italian opera based on a Scottish novel forces the reader to think of the primaevial wholeness of the art in Italy and the limited imperfection of English society, as English people are dependent on the social opinions and voluntarily follow its strictest rules [13].

The depicted operatic medium and choice of Scott's literary work refers to the problem of arts and their interrelations as well, as the informed reader will find out that the novel opens with a discussion between a fictional writer and the imaginary painter Dick Tinto on painting, drama, and literature. Dick advises the writer to avoid the pompous and lengthy dialogues in favour of applying pictorial tools in the novel and proposing the reader fragments only:

"Description," he said, "was to the author of a romance exactly what drawing and tinting were to a painter: words were his colours, and, if properly employed, they could not fail to place the scene which he wished to conjure up as effectually before the mind's eye as the tablet or canvas presents it to the bodily organ. The same rules," he contended,

"applied to both, and an exuberance of dialogue, in the former case, was a verbose and laborious mode of composition which went to confound the proper art of fictitious narrative with that of the drama, a widely different species of composition, of which dialogue was the very essence, because all, excepting the language to be made use of, was presented to the eye by the dresses, and persons, and actions of the performers upon the stage. But as nothing," said Dick, "can be more dull than a long narrative written upon the plan of a drama, so where you have approached most near to that species of composition, by indulging in prolonged scenes of mere conversation, the course of your story has become chill and constrained, and you have lost the power of arresting the attention and exciting the imagination, in which upon other occasions you may be considered as having succeeded tolerably well." [15]

Forster, as the reader can see, follows these principles throughout the novel and builds it like a staged show, making it a seemingly easy read, however, the fragmentation principle adds additional meanings and problems to the plot, bringing forward multiple conflicts and oppositions.

V. CONCLUSION

E. M. Forster employs specific intermedial 'language' in his novel. Thus, he 'implants' into the text the pictorial medium — through ekphratic depictions of Italy and ekphratic portraits of main characters linked to well-known paintings; the theatrical medium — through describing Walter Scott's novel staged as opera in Italy; multiple intermedial references enlarging the context through five additional literary layers — of Alexander Pope, William Shakespeare, Dante Alighieri, Walter Scott, and Bible.

The integration and combinations of various intermedial elements help the writer to contrast Italy and Britain, to show the difference in mentalities of the English and Italian characters, to oppose Englishness to the Italian lifestyle and culture, and to compare and contrast the artistic heritage of two countries.

The intermedial fusion, referencing, recycling of material from literary, pictorial and theatrical arts and its application to the novel with available verbal tools extend its context, broaden the range of topics raised, deepen the intercultural conflict portrayed and link additional artistic fragments to the novel's fabric.

Consequently, intermedial 'language' helps merge opera, paintings and literature, verbal and non-verbal media, and collide two cultures and mentalities rooted in these art forms and traditions.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

FUNDING

This publication was supported by the Daniel Masters Sanctuary Scholarship as part of the PhD research funding at the University of Exeter.

³ In the middle of our life's journey / I found myself in a dark forest / that the straight path was lost.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author thanks Prof. Tatiana Telichko from Donetsk National University, Ukraine for the supervision of the Master thesis which led to the given paper; Dr. Mark Steven and Prof. Regenia Gagnier from the University of Exeter, United Kingdom for their supervision of the current PhD research.

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