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Classical Land/scapes: Transformative Geography in E. M. Forster's Early Short Fiction

J. H. D. SCOURFIELD

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Abstract

Tout comme les romans de E. M. Forster publiés en 1905 et 1908 qui évoquent l'Italie, plusieurs de ses contes antérieurs explorent les rapports complexes entre les Anglais et les pays méditerranéens. Cependant il s'agit ici d'une Méditerranée différente, un monde provenant moins du Moyen Âge ou de la Renaissance que de l'Antiquité classique, reflétant tant l'éducation de Forster que ses voyages importants en Italie et en Grèce entre 1901 et 1903. Dans cet article je me propose de considérer la manière dont Forster se sert de constructions de l'espace antique dans deux contes où l'action se déroule dans des endroits isolés de la région méditerranéenne pour remettre en question les usages claustrophobiques de l'Angleterre édouardienne ; dans ces lieux intemporels se trouve la possibilité d'une transformation et d'une évasion au-delà d'une frontière qui limite le désir. Façonné notamment par la poésie pastorale de Théocrite, le paysage de "The Story of a Panic" serait habité non seulement par Pan mais aussi par Dionysos, lesquels peuvent être considérés comme étant également responsables de la libération de Eustace Robinson dans la nature ; l'analyse des contextes littéraires et intellectuels de l'époque aide à mieux comprendre la manière dont Forster exploite ces figures divines. Dans "The Road from Colonus" transformation et délivrance restent inachevées—le potentiel est toujours présent, cependant, dans un paysage où se côtoient à la fois des éléments du locus amoenus pastoral et des aspects du cadre de la mort mystique d'Oedipe dans *Oedipe à Colonne* de Sophocle. Pourtant le terme "paysage," tel qu'il s'applique à cette construction géographique de Forster, aurait besoin d'être nuancé, car "The Story of a Panic" met en valeur aussi une distinction importante entre, d'une part, la terre solide, capable d'effectuer des transformations puissantes, et, d'autre part, le paysage proprement dit, l'incarnation esthétisée, domestiquée et impuissante de la terre—la civilisation en désaccord avec la vie.



Index terms

Keywords : Forster (Edward Morgan), short stories, Mediterranean, classics, pastoral, Theocritus' Idylls, Pan, Dionysus, Nietzsche (Friedrich), Sophocles, landscape, transformation, escape

Full text

- 1 E. M. Forster's abiding interest in alterity is manifested in various ways in his fiction, not least in his explorations of sexuality and class, but it is the encounter between the English and foreign lands that represents the most prominent instantiation of the theme. Across the range of his *oeuvre*, however, the depiction of this encounter undergoes a significant change in perspective. At the end of the second part of his final novel, *A Passage to India* (1924), the sympathetic school principal, Cyril Fielding, returns from Chandrapore to England via Bombay, Alexandria, Crete, and Venice, where he is struck by "the joys of form," which he contrasts with what he now perceives as the formlessness of India; these joys, however, cannot be communicated to his Indian friends in the picture-postcards he writes to them:

They would see the sumptuousness of Venice, not its shape, and though Venice was not Europe it was part of the Mediterranean harmony. The Mediterranean is the human norm. When men leave that exquisite lake, whether through the Bosphorus or the Pillars of Hercules, they approach the monstrous and extraordinary.¹

- 2 If the narrator's voice here may be held to ventriloquize Forster, the author's position has markedly shifted. For in his Edwardian fiction the Mediterranean repeatedly appears as a place not of harmony but of dissonance, where the monstrous and extraordinary rise to challenge the normative. The key texts here are not the 'Italian' novels of 1905 and 1908, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *A Room with a View*, though they are not altogether devoid of such features, but a number of early short stories; and it is relevant that, while the engagement of the English with southern Europe, as a site both of difference and of (frequently suppressed or unacknowledged) desire, is a critical focus of all these works, the stories differ markedly from the novels in their historico-cultural character. For whereas the present of the novels is informed mainly by the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, it is the world of classical Antiquity which colours and indeed intrudes, sometimes violently, into the present of the short fiction.
- 3 In October 1901, a few months after coming down from Cambridge University, where he had studied Classics, Forster set out on a long first visit to Italy. A diary entry for 11 October, written at Cadenabbia on Lake Como, records a walk taken that afternoon to a chapel above the town. Noting the chill of the shade on his descent, Forster writes: "I begin to realize why Virgil & Theocritus always state so definitely whether their shepherds are in the shade or the sun" (Gardner 1.103). This observation evidently reflects, in a general way, Forster's classical education, and more specifically his keen interest in pastoral. But no less important for present purposes is the explicit connection it makes between Classics, even as embodied in the highly stylized poetry of Virgil's *Eclogues* and Theocritus' *Idylls*, and 'real life'.
- 4 In a broad sense, pastoral informs much of Forster's work.² Sometimes this is transposed to England. The landscape of rural Wiltshire is significant in *The Longest Journey* (1907), which also evokes ancient pastoral more directly; the posthumously published *Maurice* (1971) famously envisages a "greenwood," where homosexual lovers



can reside, "liv[ing] outside class, without relations or money."³ A short story dating from 1905,⁴ "Other Kingdom," set in rural Hertfordshire, opens with a quotation from Virgil's second *Eclogue* (2.60) and engages with the poem, and the *Eclogue* book as a whole, in a complex way; the "Other Kingdom" of the title is a copse of beech trees, itself calling to mind the Virgilian landscape.⁵ This story will be seen to have close relevance to my concerns in this article, but most of my attention will be more properly devoted to two stories with Mediterranean settings, where, as in "Other Kingdom," landscape and action are intimately related.

- 5 On his own account, Forster's career as a writer of fiction began with a story written in the spring of 1902, while still on his extended Italian tour. In a valley above Ravello on the Amalfi coast (he recalls, more than forty years later), he experienced a moment of profound inspiration: "[T]he first chapter of the story rushed into my mind as if it had waited for me there."⁶ The epiphanic quality of this experience, as Forster recounts it, reflects the central event of "The Story of a Panic" itself, which is set in precisely the same Italian location. The main actors in the drama are a group of English tourists, who decide one day "to go for a picnic up in the chestnut woods"⁷ above Ravello. The chestnut woods, already mentioned in the first sentence of the story and emphasized thereafter, themselves suggest the world of pastoral: like the beech, the chestnut belongs to the imaginary space of Virgil's *Eclogues*.⁸ Climbing to the head of the valley, the party take in the view; in the words of the narrator, an obtuse and charmless man named Tytler:

The valley ended in a vast hollow, shaped like a cup, into which radiated ravines from the precipitous hills around. Both the valley and the ravines and the ribs of hill that divided the ravines were covered with leafy chestnut, so that the general appearance was that of a many-fingered green hand, palm upwards, which was clutching convulsively to keep us in its grasp. Far down the valley we could see Ravello and the sea, but that was the only sign of another world. (Forster 1997, 2)

- 6 Here, the pastoral character of the landscape is indicated not only by the reference to chestnut trees, but, I suggest, by the simile comparing the valley to a cup. In the first of Theocritus' *Idylls*, a goatherd describes at length (1.27-56) a splendidly carved wooden cup, or *kissubion*, the scenes on which, as well as other features, are widely regarded as programmatic for the poet's work.⁹ This famous ekphrasis, by one of Forster's favourite poets,¹⁰ might well be felt to be evoked in a context with other pastoral cues and an ekphrastic description of the valley itself.¹¹ But the atmosphere of the passage is heavy and mysterious, threatening (the "green hand [...] clutching convulsively to keep us in its grasp," 2), far removed from the gentle world of gift-exchange and country song (even a song of lament) depicted in *Idyll* 1; and the strangeness of the locale is underscored by the reference in the final sentence to "another world," the significance of which will become more clearly apparent by the end of the story.

- 7 The uncanny emerges in full force after the picnic. Everything becomes still and suspenseful; then, suddenly, a "cat's-paw of wind" is seen "running down one of the ridges opposite" (5), and, as deep fear rises in the narrator and his companions, begins to travel up the ridge on which they stand; whereupon fear turns to panic:

Who moved first has never been settled. It is enough to say that in one second we were tearing away along the hillside [...] The sky might have been black as I ran, and the trees short grass, and the hillside a level road; for I saw nothing and heard nothing and felt nothing, since all the channels of sense and reason were blocked. It was not the spiritual fear that one has known at other times, but brutal, overmastering, physical fear, stopping up the ears, and dropping clouds before the eyes, and filling the mouth with foul tastes. And it was no ordinary humiliation that survived; for I had been afraid, not as a man, but as a beast. (Forster 1997, 6)



- 8 One member of the party, however, is not caught up in this overwhelming terror. Eustace Robinson, a lazy, feeble, grumbling English boy of fourteen or fifteen, characterized by the narrator as "indescribably repellent" (1), is later found by the others lying silently in the clearing from which they had fled. Thereafter Eustace begins to undergo a remarkable transformation, behaving in unaccustomed and peculiar ways. During the night, he is found in the hotel garden, "saluting, praising, and blessing the great forces and manifestations of Nature," in these terms:

He spoke first of night and the stars and planets above his head, of the swarms of fireflies below him, of the invisible sea below the fireflies, of the great rocks covered with anemones and shells that were slumbering in the invisible sea. He spoke of the rivers and waterfalls, of the ripening bunches of grapes, of the smoking cone of Vesuvius and the hidden fire-channels that made the smoke [...] And then he spoke of the rain and the wind by which all things are changed, of the air through which all things live, and of the woods in which all things can be hidden. (Forster 1997, 16)

- 9 There is much that might be said on this passage, and I shall return to it. But to bring the story first to its conclusion, an attempt made by the disapproving English guests at the hotel to "corner [Eustace] among the asphalt paths" (16) fails, and it is only when they purchase the help of a young waiter, Gennaro, with whom Eustace has formed an unlikely friendship, that they are able to catch him and confine him against his will to his room: a small room with a barred window, a room without a view, which Eustace loathes. Regretting this act, and convinced that Eustace will die in consequence of his incarceration, Gennaro seizes an opportunity to free him: the two leap from an upper window into the garden, where Eustace proceeds to jump over the parapet of the garden wall into the trees below—and disappears, "the valley [...] resound[ing] [with] the shouts and the laughter of the escaping boy" (22).

- 10 What we are to imagine has happened is not far to seek. Through the title itself and many details in the text, Forster directs us to construe the experience on the hillside as an encounter with the god Pan, whose initiate Eustace becomes. Here we enter the wilder margins of pastoral, yet it remains easily recognizable territory: Pan is mentioned already in the third line of Theocritus' first *Idyll*, to be identified a dozen lines later (1.16) as a source of fear, and is a familiar figure in Virgil's *Eclogues* and elsewhere in the tradition.¹² The haunting presence of the god in "The Story of a Panic" far outdoes in intensity the comparable mystery in "Other Kingdom," but for all this, and the difference in their geographical settings, the stories have much in common, and comparison is instructive. The young woman "out of 'Ireland'"¹³ at the heart of "Other Kingdom," the aptly named Evelyn Beaumont, one day simply vanishes into the eponymous beech copse, transformed, it seems, into a tree herself.¹⁴ In so doing, she avoids marriage to her fiancé, the wealthy businessman Harcourt Worters, who wants to bind the copse, which he has purchased for her, more closely to his estate, to fence it in, "tether" it by "a ribbon of asphalt" (63; cf. 57) to the house: in essence, to tame nature and bring it under the control of civilization. Central to both this story and "The Story of a Panic" are the notions of space, boundaries, transformation, and escape. As Eustace dreads the prospect of confinement to his room and Gennaro fears that he will die there, so Miss Beaumont pleads with Harcourt not to fence in the wood: "I hate fences. And bridges. And all paths [...] I must be on the outside, I must be where anyone can reach me" (57-8). In both stories, escape involves crossing a boundary into the wild (the garden wall in Eustace's case, the stream separating the copse from the estate in Miss Beaumont's); the idea of escape is underlined by the presence of the word itself in the final sentence;¹⁵ and the natural landscape is instrumental in effecting the transformation.



11 The image of Eustace trapped in his small hotel room is, I think, particularly potent, because one of the things Forster is doing in both these stories (as elsewhere) is to critique a conventional, restrictive, claustrophobic kind of Englishness, with which are associated, for example, the Church,¹⁶ the world of commerce and money represented by Harcourt Woters, and indeed deadening approaches to the study of Greek and Latin.¹⁷ It is from this that the Mediterranean hillsides and woods, and their pastorally inflected English counterparts, afford the possibility of release. "The Story of a Panic" presents this distinction with particular clarity, in the dual response of Eustace and his companions to the approach of the "cat's-paw of wind" along the ridge above Ravello. For him, this means liberation; in them, it engenders fear, and this is easily interpretable as fear of the Other. An important context here may be found in the representations of Pan in the English literature of the late nineteenth century, where the sinister, terrifying aspect of the god had come into prominence. A central figure in this background is Swinburne, who emphasizes the terrifying side in his 1891 poem "A Nympholept," and in "Pan and Thalassius" (1887) clearly echoes the expression of fear about disturbing Pan at noontide found in Theocritus' first *Idyll*.¹⁸ In the field of prose fiction, Patricia Merivale identifies an "upsurge of the terrifying Pan [...] between 1890 and 1930, but especially from 1904 to 1912," associating it with the late-Victorian and Edwardian horror story (Merivale 154). At the same time, the tradition of the benevolent Pan remains, and Merivale (226) can connect the experience of Forster's Eustace with the 'universal' Pan of early nineteenth-century Romanticism.¹⁹

12 Beyond its specific connections with pastoral poetry, the landscape of "The Story of a Panic" is an appropriate haunt for Pan as a god of mountains and forests, linked in myth and cult with the geographical Arcadia.²⁰ Philippe Borgeaud describes this territory thus:

Pan undeniably identifies a landscape, but one that is more than a spatial location. He is, after all, a god, and a sign not of the picturesque but of the supernatural [...] These arid districts, where goatherds and huntsmen move about at a distance from the cultivated fields, on the mountain or along rocky shores, represent the limits beyond which human expertise, *techne* or *sophia*, loses its hold on reality [...] [a] marginal land [...] [where] people [...] surrender themselves to activities that are at best of doubtful value, or dangerous; they are exposed here to powers greater than themselves. (Borgeaud 59-60)

13 The events that take place above Ravello and the consequent behaviour of Eustace can readily be understood in terms of such a space. There is, however, another, less overt, divine presence in the story, closely related to Pan in classical literature and art (and occasionally in cult), but offering a different set of interpretative filters: namely, the god Dionysus.²¹ Two key signals are evident in the passage describing Eustace's praises of Nature (190-191 above): most obviously, "the ripening bunches of grapes," but also the immediately following reference to "the smoking cone of Vesuvius," whose slopes, before the eruption of AD 79, were famously rich in vineyards.²² An epigram of Martial (4.44.1-3) explicitly associates the volcano and Dionysus' Roman counterpart, Bacchus, and in the context of Forster's visits to Naples in 1902 (Furbank 1.91-2) we might be tempted to see lurking in the background the well-known fresco depicting Bacchus and Vesuvius from the House of the Centenary at Pompeii, excavated in 1879-80. The metaphorical relevance of an erupting volcano to Forster's story is also quite clear,²³ and the point can be added that the eruption of Vesuvius destroyed a city, the embodiment of civilization, of which the story (like "Other Kingdom") is implicitly critical. Again, when Eustace is found in the clearing after the panic, lying motionless as if dead, he suddenly opens his eyes and smiles: a "peculiar," "disquieting" smile (8), strongly emphasized, which might well evoke the smiling god of the *Homeric Hymn to*



Dionysus or Euripides' *Bacchae*.²⁴ Perhaps significant in this connection too is the choice of the name 'Eustace', commonly held to be etymologically connected with the Greek adjective *eustachus*, 'rich in ears of corn', i.e. 'fruitful', and easily associated with *eustaphulos*, 'rich in grapes', a known epithet of the god.²⁵

- 14 Forster's exploitation of the figure of Dionysus may owe something to the Cambridge atmosphere of his student years, though specifically Frazerian influence is hard to identify,²⁶ and while Forster had personal connections in common with Jane Harrison and some of his later work displays an interest in matters that reflect major concerns of hers (Rainey 292-3), it was not until 1903 that she completed and published the first edition of her groundbreaking *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*. Harrison's substantial chapter on Dionysus in this book nevertheless points towards another important matrix for the Dionysian elements in "The Story of a Panic," and that is Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*,²⁷ whose publication in 1872 is commonly held to inaugurate the modern study of the god.²⁸ In Richard Seaford's analysis, four features of the Nietzschean Dionysiac "have set the agenda for much subsequent writing": the privileging of Athenian tragedy; an emphasis on contradiction or duality; a further emphasis on the dissolution of boundaries; and the abstraction of the Dionysiac into a metaphysical principle (Seaford 6-7). The last two of these seem particularly relevant to the present discussion. A little earlier I identified boundaries, transformation, and escape as central notions in "The Story of a Panic." The boundaries between human and animal and human and god are dissolved or breached in the case of Eustace, who wears the Dionysiac smile and is described as behaving like a dog or a goat (11) and, after leaping from the parapet of the garden wall, as "alight[ing] in an olive tree, looking like a great white moth" (21); the crossing of the physical boundary of the wall into the natural landscape of the valley below underscores the transformation, and suggests the achievement of unity with nature. What is absent from the story is any kind of social dimension, which was to become important in Harrison's understanding of Dionysus in her later work, *Themis* (1912), and which already has a place in Nietzsche's.²⁹ Like Evelyn Beaumont in "Other Kingdom," Eustace separates from human society: after uttering the praises of Nature, he says, "And then [...] there are men, but I can't make them out so well" (16; cf. 18), and the whole tenor of the story is that human society, in the form most available to him, cuts him off from life. Gennaro's observation, after Eustace's leap into the trees, is telling: "[H]e is saved [...] Now, instead of dying he will live!" (21).

- 15 Forster's treatment of myth as metaphor in this story can also be seen to align with Nietzsche's conception of the Dionysiac as a kind of metaphysical principle, abstracted from history and cult.³⁰ Indeed, it is not at all difficult to read the story in terms of the polarity between Apollonian and Dionysiac (order and disorder, culture and nature), though we should bear in mind that this antithesis in itself predates Nietzsche (Henrichs 220, Seaford 143). A hint of the same can be detected in "Other Kingdom,"³¹ while in *Maurice* we find an analogous contrast between Athene (cerebral, virginal) and Bacchus (physical, sexual).³² But for reasons that will become apparent at the conclusion of this article, the obvious allegorical dimension of Forster's use of Greek myth in "The Story of a Panic" is not one that I wish, finally, to stress.

- 16 Much of the pattern perceptible in "The Story of a Panic" and "Other Kingdom" is also evident in a second story with a Mediterranean setting. In "The Road from Colonus," published in 1904, following Forster's first visit to Greece the previous year, a party of English tourists find themselves in a grove of plane trees surrounding a small Khan, or country inn, in Messenia.³³ Elements of the pastoral *locus amoenus* are again present—cool shade, and water in a dry land, pouring from a spring emerging from a great hollowed-out tree:



[T]he enormous plane that leant towards the Khan was hollow – it had been burnt out for charcoal – and from its living trunk there gushed an impetuous spring, coating the bark with fern and moss, and flowing over the mule track to create fertile meadows beyond. The simple country folk had paid to beauty and mystery such tribute as they could, for in the rind of the tree a shrine was cut, holding a lamp and a little picture of the Virgin, inheritor of the Naiad's and Dryad's joint abode.³⁴

17 Plane trees themselves belong to the world of Theocritus' *Idylls*, where they are again closely associated with water, and in one poem form a sacred shrine, which Forster here echoes.³⁵ The story alludes most obviously, however, to Sophocles' tragedy *Oedipus at Colonus*, not only in the title but in various ways in the text itself. The central character of the story, Mr Lucas (whose name suggests the Latin *lucus*, 'grove'), and his daughter, Ethel, are expressly paralleled in the narrative (76, 79) with the aged Oedipus and Antigone, who in the play has guided her blind father through years of wandering following his banishment from Thebes to the place where he is preordained to die. The play's setting at Colonus, near Athens, is also explicitly recalled in a way which connects the place directly to the story's Greek location (79), and both settings are marked by a sacred grove and a stream of sweet water.³⁶

18 The Messenian grove has a profound effect on Mr Lucas, and he wishes to stay at the inn for a night, or a week, feeling that this will enable him to possess the Greece he had imagined for forty years, but which had so far eluded him on this, his first visit to the country, late in his life. And as he contemplates this, in the face of opposition from his daughter and other companions,

the issue assumed gigantic proportions, and he believed that he was not merely stopping because he had regained youth or seen beauty or found happiness, but because in that place and with those people [the Greeks at the inn] a supreme event was awaiting him which would transfigure the face of the world. (Forster 1997, 82)

19 Ethel has other ideas; and Mr Lucas "suddenly felt himself lifted off the ground, and sat sideways on the saddle, and at the same time the mule started off at a trot" (82), stealing the old man away and returning him to England.

20 Back home, some months later, a package arrives for Ethel: asphodel bulbs, sent from Athens by one of the tour party. They are wrapped in newspaper, and Ethel, re-testing her modern Greek, reads from the paper an account of a tragedy that had occurred in rural Greece: a tree had fallen on a little Khan and crushed to death the five occupants. The identity of the inn is unmistakable; and it further transpires that the accident had occurred on the very night after Mr Lucas and his companions had left. "[A]ghast at the narrowness of the escape" (85), Ethel attributes their "deliverance" to Providence (86). But the implication of the Sophoclean allusions is that Mr Lucas, who has reverted to his old self and his humdrum life, and whose memory of the place has grown vague and detached, has been deprived of "the destiny he foresaw" (82): the kind of splendid, mystical, heroizing end accorded in the tragedy to Oedipus.

21 "The Road from Colonus," then, is a story of transformation denied; Mr Lucas's "escape" at the end of the story is quite different in kind from the escapes of Eustace Robinson or Evelyn Beaumont. But the possibility of transformation, of deliverance from the cloying life of middle-class Edwardian England and the attainment of desire, is all the same reasserted; and as in "The Story of a Panic," it is the remoter reaches of the Mediterranean landscape, where present and classical past seem to intersect, that afford this possibility.³⁷ One further layer, however, remains to be added to my analysis of this Forsterian construction. In "The Story of a Panic," the experience of the English tourists on the ridge above Ravello is powerfully corporeal. The narrator describes the fear that



seizes him, when the "cat's-paw of wind" approaches, as "brutal, overmastering, physical," affecting his organs of sense (6; 189 above). The change that overcomes Eustace manifests itself in physical terms: a boy whose "favourite occupations were lounging on the terrace in an easy chair and loafing along the high road," who was too afraid to learn to swim, whose "features were pale [...] chest contracted [...] muscles undeveloped" (2), begins to "step [...] out manfully, for the first time in his life, holding his head up and taking deep draughts of air into his chest" (10), scrambles over rocks, races about in the wood, even rolls on the ground upon the footmarks of a goat (8-9). Eustace's relationship with the god, whether thought of as Pan or Dionysus, is presented as a relationship with the land, a point fully underlined in the narrator's anthropomorphic description of the terrain of the panic (188 above); the eerie image of the "many-fingered green hand" (2) is later repeated in a reference to "the green fingers of the valley" (5), and echoed when the inspired Eustace is depicted as singing "anything that came into his head," including "five-finger exercises" (15). Set against this sense of direct contact with the land, the earth, is the tendency of the narrator and other characters to see the land not as itself but in terms of art. The narrator introduces his description of the valley with the words, "I have visited a good deal of fine *scenery* before and since, but have found little that has pleased me more" (2; emphasis mine); and follows it with this conversation:

'Oh, what a perfectly lovely place,' said my daughter Rose. 'What a picture it would make!'

'Yes,' said Mr Sandbach. 'Many a famous European gallery would be proud to have a landscape a tithe as beautiful as this upon its walls.'

'On the contrary,' said Leyland, 'it would make a very poor picture. Indeed, it is not paintable at all.'

'And why is that?' said Rose, with far more deference than he deserved.

'Look, in the first place,' he replied, 'how intolerably straight against the sky is the line of the hill. It would need breaking up and diversifying. And where we are standing the whole thing is out of perspective. Besides, all the colouring is monotonous and crude.'

'I do not know anything about pictures,' I put in, 'and I do not pretend to know: but I know what is beautiful when I see it, and I am thoroughly content with this.'

(Forster 1997, 2-3)

- 22 Though in the concluding sentence the narrator hints at an uncharacteristic attunement to the natural world, the emphasis on painting in this passage suggests a contrast between the transformative power of the land and its loss through its aestheticization and domestication as landscape.³⁸ Forster makes a similar kind of contrast, though without the overt mythologizing, in *A Room with a View*, a novel much concerned with the distinction between art and life.³⁹ "The Story of a Panic" implies that there are those, like Eustace, who can enter in and be transformed and liberated (and we should remember that Dionysus is the god of liberation); and there are others, for whom the transformative possibilities of nature are occluded by the confinement of their lives within the narrow frames of civilization and the fear of what lies beyond the wall, in "the woods in which all things can be hidden" (16). The irony of this reality being located in a world suffused by the fantasies of myth and pastoral is, of course, something from which there is no escape.⁴⁰



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Notes

¹ *A Passage to India*, ch. 32 (Forster 1978, 270-1).

² Criticism has, however, tended to avoid close examination of Forster's engagement with the ancient texts. Exceptions include Hall, who emphasizes the importance of Theocritus for the short fiction, characterizing the stories themselves as 'idylls'; and more recently Sultzbach, who (29-39) invokes specific passages from Virgil's *Eclogues* in her ecocritical analysis of "The Story of a Panic" and "Other Kingdom."

³ *Maurice*, chs. 44, 45 (Forster 1999, 200, 207); cf. also Forster's "Notes on *Maurice*" (written in 1960), in Forster 1999, 216, 219.

⁴ But not published until 1909; see Gardner 1.132, 216 n. 110.

⁵ From the very first line of the collection (1.1), which presents the shepherd Tityrus reclining in the shade of a beech; see also esp. *Eclogues* 2.3-4, 5.13-14.

⁶ Introduction to his *Collected Short Stories* (1947): Forster 1997, xv. Forster goes on to



present "The Road from Colonus," discussed below (196-198), as similarly dependent on "an encounter with the genius loci" (xvi).

7 "The Story of a Panic" (Forster 1997, 1-22), 2.

8 See Virgil, *Eclogues* 1.81, 2.52, 7.53.

9 For the programmatic character of *Idyll* 1, see esp. Cairns (95-105 on the *kissubion*).

10 See especially his discussion of Theocritus in *Alexandria* (1922; Forster 2004, 37-8), which elaborates on a position already taken in his student days ("Adoniasusae [*Idyll* 15] is absolutely perfect": journal entry for 31 January 1898 [Gardner 1.46]). It is significant too that Rickie Elliot in *The Longest Journey*, who in important regards mirrors Forster himself, holds Theocritus to be "the greatest of Greek poets" (ch. 1; Forster 1984, 5).

11 Note also that the *kissubion* is described before all else as *bathu*, "deep" (*Idyll* 1.27), which Forster's "vast hollow" echoes; and finally, in summation, as "a wonder [*teras*] to amaze your mind" (1.56), where *teras* connotes the supernatural (cf. Hunter 84 ad loc.). Translations from ancient texts are my own throughout.

12 See, e.g., Virgil, *Eclogues* 2.31-3, 4.58-9, 10.26; Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe*, *passim*; Nemesianus, *Eclogue* 3.

13 "Other Kingdom" (Forster 1997, 45-67), 52; cf. 61.

14 For the story as a re-telling of the myth of Apollo and Daphne, see esp. Williams.

15 As noted also by Papazoglou 80. For "The Story of a Panic," see above; "Other Kingdom" ends with Harcourt Worters' estranged ward, Jack Ford, himself in love with Evelyn Beaumont, telling Harcourt that "[s]he has escaped you absolutely, for ever and ever, as long as there are branches to shade men from the sun" (67).

16 In "The Story of a Panic" it is telling that Eustace would rather be left alone in his room than be supervised by Mr Sandbach, a retired curate (1), who has declared Pan to be dead (4): "'Never mind, dear boy,' said kind Mr Sandbach. 'I will bear you company till the morning.' At this [Eustace's] convulsive struggles began again. 'Oh, please, not that. Anything but that'" (19).

17 For Evelyn Beaumont in "Other Kingdom," for whom "the classics [...] are so *natural*" (53; emphasis mine), the transition into the pastoral world is (one might say) facilitated by her reading of Virgil's *Eclogues*, which disclose that world to her; for her tutor, Inskip, an employee of Harcourt's, by contrast, the Latin text is not a means of transformation but an object for grammatical analysis, as in the opening line of the story. In another early short story, "Ansell" (1902/3; Forster 1972, 1-9), a young classical scholar working on a dry grammatical topic, the Greek optative, is liberated by a serendipitous accident into a quite different sort of life, finding a new kind of desire—a new optative—in a countryside with pastoral overtones.

18 Cf. Merivale 97. Compare "Pan and Thalassius" 44-6 "Such wrath on thy nostril quivers | As once in Sicilian heat | Bade herdsmen quail" (Swinburne 3.216) with Theocritus, *Idylls* 1.15-18 "It is not right, shepherd, it is not right for us to play the pipe at noon. We fear Pan, for at that time, weary from hunting, he rests. He is sharp-tempered, and bitter anger sits ever at his nostril."

19 Cf. "Other Kingdom," 46, where an allusion to the violent story of Pan and Syrinx is incongruously connected with the identification of Pan as "Universal Nature." Merivale discusses Forster's treatment of Pan in detail at 180-91 (180-4 on "The Story of a Panic"); for a more recent overview, see Jeffreys 14-17.

20 Cf. Borgeaud 3-5, 60. For the 'Arcadia' of the pastoral imagination, see esp. Snell (for whom it is a Virgilian creation, or 'discovery'), Jenkyns (who attributes the construct rather to Sannazaro).

21 For the association of Pan and Dionysus in Greek literature see, e.g., *Homeric Hymn to Pan*, (in pastoral) Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe*, esp. Book 4; in art, Boardman 933-5; on cultic relations, Borgeaud 112, 174 (also 178, on their absence in Attica). The presence of the Dionysian in "The Story of a Panic" is observed by Crews 128-9, in the context of a discussion that takes its starting-point from Nietzsche (cf. below, 194-196), but without examination of textual detail.

22 See, e.g. Columella 3.2.10, Florus, *Epitome* 1.11 (1.16.5); on the viticulture and viniculture of the region, Tchernia 176-7.

23 Cf. Swinburne, "A Nympholept" 134-8: "Where Etna shudders with passion and pain volcanic | That rend her heart as with anguish that rends a man's, | Where Typho labours, and finds not his thews Titanic, | In breathless torment that ever the flame's breath fans, | Men felt and feared thee [Pan] of old [...]" (Swinburne 6.134).

24 *Homeric Hymn to Dionysus* (*Hymn* 7) 14-15; Euripides, *Bacchae* 439, 1021. As Billings 20 has recently reminded us, the Greek verb in the *Bacchae* passages, *gelaō*, actually means 'laugh'



(cf. Halliwell 136 with n. 86; for the linguistic/semantic complexity, 520-7); but it is rendered 'smile' in both these places in two major translations of the 1890s (Coleridge 110, 118, Way 385, 418, both of which interpret the smile of *Bacchae* 1021 as betokening mockery): the idea of a smiling Dionysus had a firm place in the contemporary imagination (as in ours). Eustace's apparent death and sudden awakening might also point to the resurrection myth of Dionysus Zagreus, in which the god is restored to life after being dismembered by the Titans.

25 Beauman 112, presumably following Doloff 46, prefers to connect the name, most improbably, with the Latin *ustus*, 'inflamed', while also registering 'fruitful' as a possible meaning. For Lane 106 it "resonates quietly with 'ecstasy'." Forster was fond of speaking names. Also significant in "The Story of a Panic" is 'Gennaro', a derivative of 'Ianuarius', evoking Janus, Roman god of doorways, transitions, and beginnings: through him, Eustace escapes to a new life. Further, Gennaro, we are told, is "the stop-gap waiter," a replacement for "the nice English-speaking Emmanuele," who is away (10): in Hebrew, 'Emmanuele' of course means 'God is with us', but in this story it is not this God who is 'with us' but "the great God Pan," wrongly declared by two of the English characters, prior to the epiphany on the hillside, to be dead (4)—and, as I have been arguing, Dionysus too. 'Eustachus' and 'Eustaphulos' are both found as names of rustic characters in Alciiphron (2.15-16, 19); for *eustaphulos* as an epithet of Dionysus, see *Inscriptiones Graecae* 7.3098.

26 Discussing Forster's questioning of Christianity at this time, P. N. Furbank's more or less official biography maintains (1.62) that the influence of Frazer reached him only at second hand, while Frederick Crews, whose concise analysis of the intellectual landscape (Crews 124-31) remains helpful, holds that "[o]n the whole" Forster's use of myth in the short fiction "does not depart from the English Romantic tradition. We need not refer to the anthropologists to see parallels to his way of regarding the Greeks" (131).

27 See Harrison 1922, 445 n. 4, where she draws attention to the contrast drawn by Nietzsche between Apollo and Dionysus, writing "Apollo, careful to remain his splendid self, projects an image, a dream, and calls it *god* [emphasis original]. It is illusion (*Schein*), its watchword is limitation (*Maass*), Know thyself, Nothing too much. Dionysos breaks all bonds; his motto is the limitless Excess (*Uebermaass*), Ecstasy."

28 See, e.g., Henrichs 206, Seaford 6.

29 The matter is complex, for Nietzsche appears to distinguish between 'community' (*Gemeinsamkeit*), which is Dionysian and unifying, and 'society' (*Gesellschaft*), which imposes a gulf between individuals (*The Birth of Tragedy*, chs. 1, 7: Nietzsche 29-30, 56). I am grateful to Richard Seaford for a stimulating discussion of this and associated questions. The issue does not, however, affect the essential point I am making about Eustace's severance from the human realm. For the link between Harrison and Nietzsche, cf. Henrichs 231; for Harrison's interpretations of Dionysus generally, see McGinty 71-103.

30 Cf. also Pater, who (7-8) describes Dionysus as "the *spiritual form* of the vine" and Pan as "the *spiritual form* of Arcadia" (his emphases). On Pater's essay, originally published in 1876, see Henrichs 237-9, Fowler, esp. 250-1, both of whom underline the similarities between Pater's and Nietzsche's representations of Dionysus, while remaining uncommitted to the view that Pater had actually read Nietzsche. Fowler 250 and (with greater certainty) Ribeyrol 213-14 also detect the influence of Pater (as well as Nietzsche and Frazer) on Harrison: the intellectual context is rich and complicated, and questions of 'influence' even more than usually problematic. Such difficulties are explicitly recognized in regard to Forster's relationship to Pater by Martin (101), in an illuminating discussion that concentrates particularly on *The Longest Journey*. Much of the Paterian 'inheritance' that Martin identifies (see esp. 101-2) can be seen also in "The Story of a Panic" (which he does not mention; but cf. Jeffreys 15); and the emphasis he places on Dionysiac myth—though different aspects from those with which I am here concerned—also points to the relevance of Pater to this text.

31 Note especially the characterization of Harcourt Worters as Apollo, "radiating energy and wealth, like a terrestrial sun" (Forster 1997, 60); it is perhaps not only the Apollo-Daphne story (n. 14 above) that is evoked here.

32 See *Maurice*, ch. 22 (Forster 1999, 97; Clive Durham's attachment to Athene); ch. 37 (Forster 1999, 162; Maurice described as "bacchanalian," shortly before his first sexual encounter with Alec Scudder).

33 Perhaps not insignificantly, geographically adjacent to Arcadia, with its pastoral connotations (cf. n. 20 above).

34 "The Road from Colonus" (Forster 1997, 75-86), 77.

35 See esp. *Idylls* 22.37-41, (for the shrine) 25.18-22.

36 Compare particularly "The Road from Colonus," 77 ("The water pressed up steadily and



noiselessly from the hollow roots and hidden crevices of the plane, forming a wonderful amber pool ere it spilt over the lip of bark on to the earth outside. Mr Lucas tasted it and it was sweet [...]") with Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus* 158-60 ("[the grove] where the water of the mixing-bowl runs together with the honeyed drink-offerings"). The honey is evoked in the amber colour of the water as well as its sweetness.

37 For a further variation on the transformation theme, in a different kind of classical setting in Sicily, see "Albergo Empedocle" (1903; Forster 1972, 10-35).

38 The materiality of the land is key; cf. Buzard 295-6 on the human body: "[B]odies assert themselves and their materiality throughout Forster's work, in opposition to the falsely spiritual and romanticized experience that is tourism's stock-in-trade."

39 While George Emerson, whose first name evokes the soil (Greek *geōrgos* = 'earth-worker', 'farmer'), is moved to kiss Lucy Honeychurch for the first time amid the natural beauty of the flower-bedecked hillside below Fiesole (*A Room with a View*, ch. 6: Forster 1977, 67-8), the clergyman Mr Eager can see the view of Florence from the same promontory only in terms of the paintings of Alessio Baldovinetti, who "had a decided feeling for landscape" (chs. 5-6: Forster 1977, 49-50, 64).

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About the author

J. H. D. Scourfield

National University of Ireland Maynooth

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