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The title "Personal Olympus" may seem a bit too vast for the subject matter of the present paper. The number of gods Forster summons in his works is quite limited though some of them as Pan seem almost ubiquitous especially in the early fiction. Some gods as Dionysus or Apollo never appear in person, while others as Demeter or Venus participate in the events only as sculptures or paintings. Their influence is nevertheless felt very vividly.

The presence of mythological element in Forster's early fiction is peculiar both to Forster and his epoch and may serve to differentiate the Edwardians from both earlier and later generations of writers. The purpose of this paper is to present the sources and roles of the ancient deities which E. M. Forster employed in his novels and short stories.

The first source of Forster's personal mythology was his preoccupation with Antiquity which started in his secondary

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1 Some critics find the gods so ubiquitous that they seek them even where they really cannot be found: "No Indian is really dignified except the outcast Punkah-Wallah in the court scene. But the Punkah-boy is not an individual at all, he is a symbol. He is the Pan-figure, the catalyst, whose physical beauty is inspiring for a homosexual man and whom the writer, for that reason, exalts to the level of the inspirer of truth" (Rahman 1984: 50).
school and was strengthened during his stay at Cambridge and studies in history and Classics. Direct influence of such people as Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson combined with very wide reading both in classics and contemporary studies in Ancient culture. Voyages to the Mediterranean which Forster began upon his graduation in 1902 further strengthened this interest.

An evaluation of his early works allows us to assume that Forster was decidedly a good student yet:

use of mythology in his short stories 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; it is implicit in Cambridge classicism of the 1890s and in the fashionable literature of that decade (Crews, 1960: 102).

It would be unfair to limit Forster's interest in mythology to fashion. The role mythology plays especially in his novels, proves that he intends to take it seriously - mythological references are used exclusively in the crucial moments of the plots. In *Where Angels Fear to Tread* they appear at the very end of the novel - Philip Herriton starts to see the world in mythical terms only once he is "saved". Similarly in *A Room with a View* there are five major references to the Ancient gods - all of which are connected with events decisive for the plot. As Frederick Crews puts it “*A Room with a View* depends on

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2 See for example Forster's reading list from 1899 in Furbank, 1979: 70.
mythology for thematic coherence as well as for decoration.” (1960:97)

Robert K. Martin tried to dig somewhat deeper in the search of sources of Forsterian mythology. His conclusions are, however, not really convincing as he pointed out one and one only source of Forster's mythology - the works of Walter Pater. As Martin claims:

> critics have generally been slightly vague about ... sources [of Forster's mythmaking], citing the general interest in anthropology at Cambridge at the turn of the century. The fullest treatment of the subject, for instance, comments on Forster, 'The archaeological discoveries that were synthesized by Cambridge scholars were embodied, hot off the press, into the young student's short stories. [...] Forster may well have known the work of Frazer, Rouse, Harrison, Cornford, and others, but he took most of the mythological structure of The Longest Journey from Pater's essays in Greek Studies and his recreation of Dionysus myth in 'Denys l'Auxerrois' (Martin, 1982: 109-110).

Forster naturally did know the works of Walter Pater, yet the same sources that Martin uses (Forster's Commonplace Book for example) prove beyond any reasonable doubt that his studies were much wider and deeper. Ironically, in the period in question Forster claimed to dislike Pater (Furbank, 1979: 132) and only upon rereading him (and or maybe more precisely because of recognising his own links with the writer
as a fellow homosexual) he found him more interesting (Furbank, 1979: 159).

The studies of Richard Ellmann allow us to place Forster's interest in mythology into a contemporary context. According to Ellmann:

Almost to a man, Edwardian writers rejected Christianity, and having done so, they felt free to use it, for while they did not need religion, they did need religious metaphors (1960: 192). The Edwardians were looking for ways to express their conviction that we can be religious about life itself, and they naturally adopted metaphors offered by the religion they knew best (1960: 196).

Forster although he had rejected Christianity and religion as such in his early twenties felt free to use religious metaphors (one should mark here primarily his usage of the words "salvation" and "saved", though more direct Christian references are usually ironical which is especially clear in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*) but the ancient mythology proved a source of religious metaphors probably more valuable than Christianity. It was there that he sought the "mythology of his fantasies" to use the term introduced by James McConkey:

Fantasy includes that which involves, directly or through implication, a double structure: what we see about us is transformed by placing it in operation within another

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3 See also Forster's concept of fantasy in Forster 1955: 105-124.
framework, and that second framework is the "mythology" (1971: 46).

The choice of especially Greek mythology as his source did reflect on the one hand the influence of Forster's friend and teacher, Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson after whom Forster was “looking to Greece for an antidote to Christian ascetism. The antidote ... is not licentiousness but a detached and sophisticated acceptance of man's physical nature” (Crews 1960: 103).

Yet the roots of this approach lie deeper in the teachings of Matthew Arnold and his ideas of hebraism opposed to hellenism. Forster used Arnold's concepts in his own way allowing for changes which took place since the Victorian times4.

The usage of mythological references were sometimes criticized as a proof of escapism5. An exemplary critical approach is that of John Colmer, though his opinion that “Forster found it easier to mythologize the ideal harmony of love than to present it in concrete human terms” (1975: 52) does not seem justified. Mythology serves in Forster's works to provide comments upon human love, it is often his cunning method to draw the reader's attention to actual meaning of events which shall be fully explained only further in the text. It is also mythology that allows to “make concrete ... the

4 A detailed analysis of these differences can be found in Martin 1977: 70.

5 One might quote here for example Walter Dixon Scott (Gardner 1973: 172). This attitude to Forster was later characteristic of the followers of Lionel Trilling who saw the writer first of all as a liberal humanist.
often abstract conflict of the Arcadian and the civilized” (Merivale, 1969: 181).

Mythology used in literary works created at the turn of the century naturally draws attention to the Nietschean distinction between Dionysian and Apollonian principles. Two of Forsterian critics discussed the issue - Frederick C. Crews (1960: 97-112) argues that the works in question only superficially adhere to the former as it is the Apollonian principle of order and clarity that permeates Forster's works. This view was repeatedly opposed in 1977 and 1982 by Richard K. Martin who pointed out Dionysus as the major god of Forster's fiction. Martin sees Dionysus as the god whose myth is a veiled representation of homosexuality (Herz 1982: 101-102).

The usage of references to mythology allowed Forster to introduce successfully a variety of issues into his novels and short stories yet the importance he ascribed to mythology seems to wane as time goes by. Pan who in his first short story "The Story of a Panic" is mighty enough to bring the death to those who refuse to yield to his power turns in A Room with a View into:

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not the great god Pan, who has been buried these two thousand years, but the little god Pan, who presides over social contretemps and unsuccessful picnics (Forster, 1978: 90).

Similarly in *The Longest Journey* Demeter is only a photograph hanging in Stephen Wonham's attic room.

It is difficult to point out exactly when the process starts as Forster approaches his gods with irony from the very beginning as it is in "Other Kingdom" (e.g. Forster 1954: 59-60). Yet the early introduction and "reinvigoration of the images of traditional mythology" was just a stage in his development. What was to follow was “the search for a mythology with a human face which ... in *The Longest Journey*, and in *Howards End* - finds its culminating moment” (Stape 1990: 150).

The two novels quoted above do not make use of the Ancient mythology. Forster's aim there was to try to create a mythology for England but even then his attempts seemed half-hearted. Greece and her culture returns in *Maurice* as a model of society which accepted homosexuality but references to mythology are scarce. And in his last novel *A Passage to India* Forster found another source of his symbolic - Indian culture and nature.

Here Forster turns over his art, for the first and apparently the last time, to a single controlling vision, which, though it eclipses

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7 To make the irony even stronger Forster mocks a short story similar to "Other Kingdom" in *The Longest Journey.*
his humanism, finally produces a novel with something of the power and wholeness of a myth itself (Crews 1960: 112).

It may seem that Forster rejected Classic mythological symbolic altogether soon after the First World War. This conclusion, though it could have seemed quite valid before 1972, cannot be treated seriously anymore. One more god (or a half-god, to be precise) lurked in his manuscripts which were unearthed only after the writer's death. It was Priapus, the son of Dionysus.

According to G. K. Das the posthumous short stories more or less directly pay repeated tribute to the Priapic symbol:

the frequently self-sufficient and anonymous phallus that figures variously as the torque or the obelisk and at times appears more directly as the sailor Tony or, most notably, as the enlarging member of the statue in "The Classical Annex" (Das 1979: 205).

During Forster's lifetime, however, Priapus' presence was limited to short stories which he showed only to the most trusted friends and large part of which he destroyed.

It is difficult to point out the major deity in Forster's fiction. The candidates are Hermes (Herz 1979), Dionysus

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8 This rather strange term was introduced by Norman Page (1977) to mean surviving homoerotic short stories which were published only after Forster's death.
Surprisingly, neither of the three does appear directly in the works in question. Hermes is only the addressee of collections of Forster's short stories mentioned in his prefaces, Demeter is mentioned as the mother of Persephone and mentioned as a photograph of the famous sculpture of Demeter of Cnidus in *The Longest Journey*, while Dionysus does not appear at all. Only sons of the two male deities Priapus and Pan can be found in the discussed texts.

Lack of direct presence, however, does not equal powerlessness. Venus participates in the events only doubly removed - on a painting on a postcard (Forster, 1978: 61). The meaning becomes clear further on when Lucy "plays" Venus from the painting of Botticelli in the scene among the violets. The passions that Venus stands for apparently do not require the presence of the goddess - humans possess them if only they have "courage and love" to show them and let them lead their lives. Similarly Neptune is only a sculpture (Forster 1978: 61) yet he is present throughout the novel in the pervasive water symbolic (Sullivan 1976: 218-219).

Of other Olympic gods Apollo is referred to more directly in *A Room with a View* (Forster 1978: 167) to replace Phaeton but his indirect influence in other works is much more important. "Other Kingdom" in its general pattern is a parody of the myth of Apollo and Daphne (Martin 1976: 54; Crews 1962: 130). Miss Raby is presented as a Sibyl, a lover and later a priestess of Apollo, a similarity which is revealed with the discovery of Sibyl frescoes (Hagopian 1965: 214).
A god and a goddess of lesser importance appear very much in person in *A Room with a View*:

It was Phaethon who drove them to Fiesole that memorable day, a youth all irresponsibility and fire ... And it was Persephone whom he asked leave to pick up on the way, saying that she was his sister -- Persephone, tall and slender and pale, returning with the Spring to her mother's cottage, and still shading her eyes from the unaccustomed light (Forster 1978: 79).

The choice of names is not as whimsical as it may seem, for they reverberate significantly throughout the rest of the novel. Persephone in particular becomes symbolically identified with Lucy herself, who must accustom her eyes to the "light" in order to free herself from emotional bondage. In the end, Lucy plays the role of a redemptive Persephone, uniting with George in his Hades-like darkness - "I have been into the dark," he tells her, "and I am going back into it, unless you will try to understand" (Forster 1978: 167) - and thereby drawing him back, Phaeton-like, toward the light (Ross 1980: 163-164).

The story of Persephone, a myth of fertility and seasonal renewal, is closely connected with that of her mother, Demeter, a goddess for whom young Forster cultivated a special fondness (Ross 1980: 167).
The theme of Demeter is, however, introduced only by external evidence as setting of the two novels in yearly frame of seasons. Phaeton plays a double role in the novel - he is not only the coachman (as he was in the myth). It is him who leads Lucy towards the light when "by mistake" leads her to George. He returns in the last chapter of the novel (Forster 1978: 228-230):

The [final] paragraph carries more weight than its length suggests. Phaeton has just reappeared, in the shape of the coachman who wants Lucy and George to go for a ride. When they refuse, he goes away singing. His song takes up the musical theme in the novel and then serves to introduce a different music, reaching below imaginative art to more basic instincts, which find their crown in youthful vitality and fertility. At this point, also, the 'view' finally comes into its own (Beer 1963: 66).

Number of references suggest that a presentation of Forster's Olympus must include a smaller deity which preferred the forests of Arcadia to the summit of Olympus - Pan. In early short stories such as "The Story of a Panic" Forster's Pan "is the guide into a profound mystical experience, which has as concomitants the emotions of terror and ecstasy" (Merivale 1969: 180-181).

The presence of Pan is by no means surprising as in the period of Forster's early works (1902-1908) where the God is mentioned the most often "the theme of Pan was 'in the air', it
was all pervasive. It may be found in Yeats' poetry of the 1890s, in Meredith's novels ... in the nature writing of Richard Jefferies ... and, at a much more popular level, in Saki and in Kenneth Grahame's *Wind in the Willows*” (Colmer 1975: 29).

Pan represents the wild nature as well as wildness of human nature with a special stress on sexuality. In the Edwardian period, however, he becomes more and more "civilised" not the Great God Pan but "the god of picnics". Forster did not immediately follow the spirit of his time and more modern readings of his works seem to agree with an anonymous reviewer who claimed that as Forster never actually was interested in nature (a claim which is largely false even though the conclusions the reviewer draws from them are true) his Pan

represents an idea of human behaviour - a complete life without conventional restraints, a life that acknowledges 'bestiality'. Which is to say that Forster's Pan is the deity of a homosexual world, or a world in which homosexuality is natural. He is necessary to the stories and novels simply because, in Forster's Sawston-and-Cambridge world,

9 "The [Edwardian] tradition is summed up in J. M. Barrie's enormously popular *Peter Pan*, first produced in 1904, the same year that saw the appearance of Forster 'The Story of Panic' (Cavaliero 1979: 38).

10 A quotation from G. K. Das can serve as a good example "Forster manages through his Pan figures to intimate sexuality (largely, though by no means exclusively, homosexuality) and at the same time to desexualise it [in "The Story of Panic"] (Das 1979: 197). Similar views can be found in Martin, 1977 and 1982.
homosexual love could not be a force in itself; it was only by supernatural intervention that direct emotion could find expression (Gardner 1973: 484).

Pan is the most visible of minor deities which appear in Forster's fiction far more often than Olympic gods, proving thus his preoccupation with mythology with a human face. It is necessary at least to mention here such half-gods as Eros and Psyché (as a cheap copy of sculpture - Forster 1978: 73), Castor and Pollux ("The Point of It"), Endymion (Forster 1976: 160) Perseus, Hercules (sculptures in Piazza Signoria - Forster 1978: 78) or Orion ("Machine Stops") and mythological creatures as Sybils (frescoes - "Eternal Moment"), Sirens ("The Story of the Siren"), Fauns ("The Curate's Friend"), Dryads ("Other Kingdom") as well as humans who experienced contacts with gods: Pasiphaë (Forster 1976: 159), and Oedipus ("The Road from Colonus").

Within the first five years of his writing career Forster developed his mythology to successfully express the

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11 The list is by no means complete though some suggestion of divine presence that can be found in critical sources fail to convince e.g. Heath 1994 finds January (the month when Lucy is supposed to get married) a symbol of Januarius, the god-figure which looks two ways at once (399) and asks to confer it to duplicitous Gennaro in "A Story of a Panic" (Heath 1994: 429).

12 Eros is also mentioned as a symbol of physical love - with Athena as a symbol of wisdom in Forster 1978: 194. John H. Stape introduces the concept of Eros and Psyché myth as expressing "initiation into wholeness" in Maurice - both Maurice and Alec enter their beloved's bedrooms through the window as Eros does in Keats' "Ode to Psyche" (Stape 1990: 146).
most important themes of his fiction yet quite early he became dissatisfied with this source of symbolic. This dissatisfaction which can be traced in an ironical handling of mythical themes in _The Longest Journey_ (1907) becomes clear in _Howards End_ (1910). The decisive breaking point came in 1913 with the writing of _Maurice_ where Greece is presented as 'a heap of old stones without any paint on it' (Forster 1972: 100-101) no longer able to offer any genuine inspiration. Forster's art developed still to find its fruition in _A Passage to India_ but the Olympic gods deserted him. Only Priapus, the trickster, kept him company till 1958 when E. M. Forster ceased to write completely.

Bibliography


Heath, Jeffrey. 1994 "Kissing and Telling: Turning Round in *A Room with a View*" Twentieth Century Literature 40.4.


