Forster's Arnoldian Comedy: Hebraism, Hellenism, and *A Room with a View*

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In an essay of 1944, E. M. Forster described Matthew Arnold as "of all the Victorians most to my taste: a great poet, a civilized citizen, and a prophet who has managed to project himself into our present troubles, so that when we read him now he seems to be in the room." Forster's taste for Arnold dates back to the early years of his career, and its formative influence has not gone unnoticed by critics. Wilfred Stone, quoting Forster's tribute, comments: "Forster is deeply in Arnold's debt. Arnold's words again and again become Forster's, and the notion of a general and harmonious expansion is the very heart of Forster's esthetic ideal. Both are humanists, both are self-divided; Arnold more than any other Victorian helps us grasp Forster's dialectic of experience." Among Forster's works, Howards End (1910) has been singled out as eminently Arnoldian in conception and bearing. But Arnold's presence is, I believe, equally felt in another of Forster's "rooms": the novel A Room with a View (1908). It is true that Arnold's analysis in Culture and Anarchy of the English class structure, and its relation to the new industrial and commercial society, bears less directly on the earlier novel than on the later one. Yet if A Room with a View is less obviously concerned with the "condition of England," it is all the more concerned with the condition of Englishness. Arnold's appraisal of English cultural tendencies, and in particular his celebrated dichotomy between "Hebraism" and "Hellenism," are closely connected with the assortment of "views" we are given in Forster's novel. In what follows, I will attempt to show how this connection applies to Forster's treatment, in the book, of his characters, of Italy, and of Italian art; and also, how Forster's "dialectic of experience," though it parallels Arnold's, modifies and in some ways contradicts it.

In Culture and Anarchy, Arnold repeatedly draws on Swift's metaphor of "sweetness and light" to signify "the central and happy idea of the essential character of human perfection," an idea whose discovery he attributes to the ancient Greeks. It is, I think, no coincidence that the name Forster was to settle on for his heroine in A Room with a View - Lucy Honeychurch - concisely embodies Arnold's pair of watchwords. Not that Lucy's actual personality, as we perceive it, can be said to exemplify any "essential character of human perfection"; rather, her name suggests an envisioned ideal toward which she herself only gradually progresses, as she proceeds on a lengthy and often backtracking journey away from "darkness" and into the "light."
It is unlikely that Forster's initial conception of Lucy as a character, or of his "Lucy novel" as a whole, was inspired by his reading of Arnold. The book developed over a number of years along paths of its own, and certainly not as a direct and deliberate response to Arnold's or any other writer's ideas. Yet *Culture and Anarchy* provides a singularly illuminating context within which to read *A Room with a View*; and a careful study of the novel suggests that Forster must have been conscious of Arnold's relevance to his cast of characters and their actions. Lucy's name is only one token among many of the novel's close involvement with Arnold's thought, and with Victorian frames of mind in general. The "portraits of the late Queen and the late Poet Laureate" that decorate the dining room of the Pension Bertolini help immediately to establish the ethical and cultural climate that prevails there, and that is encountered repeatedly throughout the story. Arnold's magisterial analysis of mid-Victorian assumptions was familiar enough to Forster to serve him as a precedent for his own satire of Edwardian propriety and convention; yet, as will be seen, Forster implicitly challenges the precedent even while incorporating it into his fiction. We must therefore be wary of assuming, as Stone does, a near equivalence between Forster's paramount values and Arnold's: "Culture is Arnold's final and all-embracing absolute, as Art is Forster's." As other critics have plausibly pointed out, art is far from representing any sort of "absolute" in *A Room with a View*. Alan Wilde, commenting on George's act of throwing Lucy's blood-stained art photographs into the Arno, concludes: "Art (the photographs: life arranged and formally stabilized) must give way before real life, as revealed by the suddenness of death." Oliver Stallybrass refers to Forster's "clearly implied preference for cheerful philistinism over supercilious good taste" in the novel, and adds: "In no other novel, certainly, are the representatives of 'culture' so consistently unpleasant." Yet it would be equally mistaken to assume that Forster's purpose in *A Room with a View* is to come to the defense of the beleaguered philistines. The Arnoldian conception of culture cannot, after all, be reduced to mere "supercilious good taste"; Arnold himself rather testily repudiates attempts to identify his position with "something bookish, pedantic and futile" (CA 6). For Arnold, "culture" means a way of being that is not narrow but inclusive: "harmonious perfection," the many-sided development of individual thought and experience (CA 11). Forster's "unpleasant" aesthetes must therefore be judged inadequate representatives of culture by Arnold's own essential standards, standards to which Forster, however radically he may modify them, still largely subscribes. In *A Room with a View*, as in *Culture and Anarchy*, the most immediate threat to culture, and to the genuinely cultivated life, is posed by those who embrace an ideal that is rigid, sectarian and exclusive, rather than catholic and open.

Miss Charlotte Bartlett is perhaps the purest exemplar in Forster's cast of characters of those mental and moral tendencies to which Arnold applied the term "Hebraism." Throughout the book, she abides, or at least consciously attempts to abide, by the Puritan "strictness of conscience" that Arnold opposes to the Hellenist "spontan-
eity of consciousness" (CA 132); as Wilde remarks, "her reactions lack all spontaneity, following from her allegiance to this or that code of formalized behavior." Her life is devoted to the Hebraist values of "conduct and obedience," rather than to the Greek ideal of "seeing things as they really are" (CA 131). To cite Rickie Elliot's Arnoldian observation in The Longest Journey, "the Greeks looked very straight at things"; Miss Bartlett is no Greek, and she looks askance. In A Room with a View - as its title suggests - sight itself functions as a controlling metaphor; and one major way in which Charlotte imposes her repressive will on Lucy is by blocking her field of vision. For Charlotte, naked reality - above all, of course, the naked human body - is something that must be clothed. She typically impresses on Lucy the idea that a painted nude figure, for example Botticelli's Venus, is a "pity" (RV 40); even her insistence on "concealing the sex" of the person who has rescued Lucy in Piazza Signoria (RV 51) betrays her squinting, fig-leaf mentality.

"Charlotte's energy! And her unselfishness!" (RV 12). In indoctrinating Lucy with her own cloistered and inhibiting notions of propriety, Miss Bartlett displays what Arnold calls "the intense and convinced energy with which the Hebrew . . . threw himself upon his ideal of righteousness" (CA 38). Her mind rigidly categorizes behavior according to fixed and polarized absolutes: "delicacies," for example, against "brutality" (RV 4); naively, she believes that "delicacy" and "beauty" must be synonymous (RV 10). To her, Italy, and the subtle synthesis Italy embodies of apparently disparate values - vitality and grace, art and nature - are, almost by definition, profoundly alien. In Arnold's terms, she walks staunchly through the Italian peninsula by the best light she has, but does not take sufficient care that her light be not darkness (CA 11); her prudish delicacy keeps her from seeing things "in their beauty . . . with a kind of aerial ease, clearness, and radiancy" (CA 134). For Forster, as for Arnold, such perfervid single-mindedness "leads to a narrow and twisted growth of our religious side itself" (CA 14); it is ultimately the freethinking Mr. Emerson, rather than the outwardly observant Charlotte, who is described by the narrator as "profoundly religious" (RV 199). If Charlotte "works like a great artist," she does so, ironically, by elaborating a life-denying Hebraist grand design, creating only "a shame-faced world of precautions and barriers which may avert evil, but which do not seem to bring good" (RV 78-79).

But if the presentation of Miss Bartlett can quite readily be assimilated to Arnold's concept of Hebraism, in his treatment of a character like the Reverend Cuthbert Eager Forster is clearly bent on refining and complicating Arnoldian terms. In Mr. Eager, Forster shows an essentially Hebraist mentality coexisting with a proprietary claim to official "culture." As Arnold observes, "the space which sin fills in Hebraism, as compared with Hellenism, is indeed prodigious" (CA 135); and prodigious indeed is the space which sin fills in Mr. Eager's mind. It is, in fact, his insistence on the sinfulness of refusing a child baptism that has (somewhat melodramatically) caused Mr. Emerson's wife to "go under" (RV 197), though the clergyman self-righteously accuses Mr. Emerson of
responsibility for his wife's death. Nevertheless, Mr. Eager is securely established in Florence among the colony of expatriate English literati and "artistic" amateurs; apparently he has gained for himself some standing as an "authority" on Italian art. We first glimpse him in the church of Santa Croce, expounding Giotto to a rapt flock who appear to accept his pious utterances as gospel.

If Mr. Eager is a Hebraist in Hellenist clothing, his fellow-clergyman, Mr. Beebe, comes much closer to exemplifying "culture" in a faithfully Arnoldian sense. Mr. Beebe's urbane disinterest contrasts with the narrowminded bigotry of the Mr. Eagers and Miss Bartletts, allowing him to look with good-humored tolerance on those people, such as the Emersons, whose intellectual or religious convictions differ from his. Largely free from the moral blindness that afflicts the novel's more intransigent characters, he possesses a "sweetness and light" that endows him with genuine sympathetic insight into the nature of a girl like Lucy. Yet, in Forster's world, Mr. Beebe's variety of sweetness and light, though good in itself, is not good enough. For Mr. Beebe possesses another and less conspicuous tendency - asceticism - which reveals a crucial divergence between Arnoldian and Forsterian standards of judgment.

For Arnold, "religion" and "culture," whatever their general differences in emphasis, coincide in drawing a vital distinction between the human and the animal. "Religion says: The kingdom of God is within you; and culture, in like manner, places human perfection in an internal condition, in the growth and predominance of our humanity proper, as distinguished from our animality" (CA 47). Man's need to "rescue his life from thraldom to the passing moment and to his bodily senses" is, according to Arnold, recognized as clearly by Sophocles and Plato as by "the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews" (CA 37-38); and some such recognition is indispensable to a properly human life. It is on this ethical issue of the need to suppress the body and its unruly "animal" impulses that Forster most decisively parts company, not only with Arnold but with Victorian presuppositions en masse. Near the end of A Room with a View, Forster's principal spokesman, Mr. Emerson, insists to Lucy: "Love is of the body; not the body, but of the body!" (RV 202).

For Forster, as for Mr. Emerson, it is through such an acceptance of the body that the soul can be liberated; we shall enter the Garden of Eden only "'when we no longer despise our bodies'" (RV 126). Mr. Beebe's "tolerance and culture" (RV 186), united with his sincere if undemonstrative Christian piety, may qualify him as an exemplar of the best of both Arnoldian worlds; but his covert belief in celibacy as a ruling principle leaves him, in Forster's more modern world, a Hellenist manque. He confesses revealingly that, while "'Italy is just about as much as we can manage,'" Greece itself "'is altogether too big for our little lot!'" (RV 177). It is not, after all, so surprising that he should end up making a "compact" with that arch-Hebraist, Miss Bartlett, to safeguard Lucy's virginity.

Lucy's "fiasco," Cecil Vyse, though ostensibly the most "cultured" Italophile in the novel, fails similarly to live up to Forster's emended Hellenist criteria. His priggish lack of spontaneity might disqualify him by Arnold's standards alone; but his essentially
celibate nature, akin to Mr. Beebe's, exposes him as painfully inadequate by Forster's added touchstone. What is especially original in Forster's treatment of the character is his perception—hardly to be found in Arnold—of the secret affinity between the aestheticist and the ascetic tempers, an affinity residing in their common detachment from full, sensuous emotional experience. Cecil's absorption in Italian Renaissance art is flagrantly literary andprecious. Far from corresponding to any "pagan" impulses within his nature, it simply disguises his preeminently "medieval" cast of personality:

He was medieval. Like a Gothic statue. Tall and refined, with shoulders that seemed braced square by an effort of the will, and a head that was tilted a little higher than the usual level of vision, he resembled those fastidious saints who guard the portals of a French cathedral. Well educated, well endowed, and not deficient physically, he remained in the grip of a certain devil whom the modern world knows as self-consciousness, and whom the medieval, with dimmer vision, worshipped as asceticism. A Gothic statue implies celibacy, just as a Greek statue implies fruition. . . . (RV 86-87)

We immediately suspect that Cecil's moral as well as his physical angle of vision is "tilted," that he wants the true Hellenist capacity to "see things as they really are" (C 131), and that his whole nature is inherently unfruitful. Later, when he circumspectly kisses Lucy, his gold pince-nez becomes dislodged and gets "flattened between them" (RV 108)—a neat emblem of how the constricting and distorting lenses of snobbish convention separate him from reality; most pointedly, of course, from the reality of Lucy's body.

If the medieval Cecil bears a family resemblance to any "Renaissance" figure, it is to the Duke of Ferrara in Robert Browning's poem "My Last Duchess." Yet Browning's Duke is himself in some ways an essentially medieval type: a feudal tyrant imbued with a cinquecento pride in his "collection." Cecil views his bride-to-be, as the Duke views his wife—that-which, in the light of an eminently "collectable" objet d'art: "But Italy worked some marvel in her. It gave her light, and—which he held more precious—it gave her shadow. . . . She was like a woman of Leonardo da Vinci's, whom we love not so much for herself as for the things that she will not tell us. The things are assuredly not of this life; no woman of Leonardo's could have anything so vulgar as a 'story'" (RV 88). Browning's Duke, all too plainly, feels happier with his wife "painted on the wall"—where he can disclose or banish her lifelike image at his will—than he ever had felt with her independent existence as a troublesomey living and therefore "unmanageable" human being. Similarly, Lucy's role as Cecil's lady will entail staying securely within her frame to be admired and pondered, rather than indulging in the unseemly vulgarity of experiencing life for herself. Having once "acquired" (RV 101) the beautiful Lucy, Cecil finds himself disturbed by unexpected displays of emotion on her part that mar the aesthetic effect, making her face look "inartistic" (RV 116). Her indignant outburst against Mr. Eager constitutes one such disturbance: "It was as if one should see the Leonardo on the ceiling of the Sistine. He longed to hint to her that
not here lay her vocation; that a woman's power and charm reside
in mystery, not in muscular rant" (RV 99). Cecil, like the Duke
of Ferrara, favors "artistic" stasis in his women over spontaneous
vitality; and the marvelously economical image of "Neptune taming
a sea-horse" with which Browning ends his poem applies as telling-
ly to Forster's lordly young aesthete as to Browning's overbearing
Italian nobleman.

Perhaps the most damaging evidence of Cecil's unHellenic sterility
is that for him, as for his mother, Italy at bottom signifies a
"museum" (RV 122); one in which Lucy - that enigmatic Leonardo -
is to be ensconced as a crowning display piece. The inadequacy of
such a view is self-evident by Arnold's standards as well as by
Forster's; far from constituting a museum, Italy and the Italian
Renaissance figure for both writers as a living latter-day embodi-
ment of the Hellenist spirit. One must add, however, that to Arnold
such a development of Hellenism was fraught with moral risk. His-
torically, in Arnold's view, the sensuous hedonism of pagan anti-
quity leads to a decadence which can be redeemed only through a
salutary dose of the contrary tendency: "When the alma Venus, the
life-giving and joy-giving power of nature, so fondly cherished by
the pagan world, could not save her followers from self-dissatis-
faction and ennui, the severe words of the apostle came bracingly
and refreshingly: 'Let no man deceive you with vain words, for be-
cause of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of
disobedience'" (CA 137). The "touching asceticism of medieval
Christianity" is one necessary and intrinsically healthy outcome
of this reaction against pagan self-indulgence; yet here, once
again, Arnold's historical pendulum swings to the point of excess,
bringing about a needed opposing thrust from the contrary force.
This new thrust actualizes itself, in history, as the Renaissance:
"As the great movement of Christianity was a triumph of Hebraism
and man's moral impulses, so the great movement which goes by the
name of the Renascence was an uprising and re-instatement of man's
intellectual impulses and of Hellenism" (CA 139). Yet once again
"the Renascence, that great reawakening of Hellenism, that irresist-
able return of humanity to nature and to seeing things as they are,
which in art, in literature, and in physics, produced such splendid
fruits, had, like the anterior Hellenism of the Pagan world, a side
of moral weakness, and of relaxation or insensibility of the moral
fibre" (CA 141). And for Arnold it was specifically in Italy that
this side of moral weakness "showed itself with the most startling
plainness."

At first blush, the modern Italy of A Room with a View seems to
abound with evidence of such "moral weakness": for example, the
murder that Lucy witnesses in Piazza Signoria, or the unabashed
dalliance of the coachman, "Phaeton," with his presumed "sister." Yet
Forster writes about Italy in the spirit of a confirmed "child
of disobedience" blithely heedless of "the wrath of God"; behavior
that outrages conventional Anglo-Saxon moral expectations becomes,
in this fictive milieu, a manifestation of insuppressible passion
and vitality. Forster's Italy merges art, nature and sexuality in
a composite image which is not reducible to any of its single ele-
ments, but which offers in its wholeness a vibrant answer to life-
mutilating English propriety. To Lucy, it offers "the most price-
less of all possessions - her own soul" (RV 110); she returns to England "with new eyes."

If for Arnold Italy is in some respects a cause for fastidiously raised eyebrows, Forster - like Browning in such poems as "The Englishman in Italy" - portrays that country as above all an "eye-opener" for the Northern visitor. As P. N. Furbank observes, Forster's early experience of Italy had worked a parallel miracle for his own creative vision: "Italy, which he had been slow to love, had at last done a great thing for him. It had told him that one could live in the imagination; and he knew now for certain that he was a writer." But there are healthy and unhealthy ways of learning the lesson Italy has to teach; at best, it may help the viewer to see art itself in terms of life, but it may also, at worst, lure him into the pharisaical habit of seeing life in terms of art. Cecil, the prime offender in this regard, realizes his warped sight only belatedly, when he has already lost Lucy: "He looked at her, instead of through her, for the first time since they were engaged. From a Leonardo she had become a living woman, with mysteries and forces of her own, with qualities that even eluded art" (RV 171). Lucy herself, though she is not, like Cecil, blinkered by the habit of aestheticism, needs to free her "seeing" from a more common sort of ingrained exclusiveness; her Hebraist defenses against her feeling for George begin to crumble only once she has "entertained an image that had physical beauty" (RV 143). Later, when she has been provoked by her confrontation with George at last to observe Cecil's priggish behavior honestly, the "scales fall from her eyes" (RV 168); in dismissing her fiancé, she tells him: "'There are days when one sees clearly, and this is one of them!'" (RV 170). She has by now begun to embrace, on Forster's special terms, Arnold's Hellenist principle: "To get rid of one's ignorance, to see things as they are" (CA 134). Yet she is still a wavering Hellenist; panic-stricken by her submerged feeling for George, she continues to shrink from "self-knowledge and . . . that king of terrors - Light" (RV 191-2). She is not yet ready to absorb the truth of Mr. Emerson's creed - a creed that Arnold, for one, would be wary of endorsing: "Passion does not blind" (RV 196).

Art itself, when approached with a direct receptiveness rather than a tilted pedantic scrutiny, can become not an enemy but a powerful aid to the sort of "seeing" that Mr. Emerson favors and that Lucy at length achieves. As Jeffrey Meyers observes, "In the course of the novel the heroine, Lucy Honeychurch, moves from a separation to an integration of art and life, and her development is measured by her change from a purely aesthetic object to a mature woman awakened through art to self-knowledge." The artist who seems most emphatically to typify such an "integration of art and life" is Michelangelo; and Lucy's sense of George's attractiveness is validated when she "sees" him "at Rome, on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, carrying a burden of acorns" (RV 24). She glimpses what Yeats in "Under Ben Bulben" calls the "proof" that Michelangelo left "on the Sistine Chapel roof" of art's secret purpose - "profane perfection of mankind." But the initial stimulus to Lucy's vision comes from her sudden sight of the Della Robbia babies on the portico of the Spedale degli Innocenti:
For one ravishing moment Italy appeared. She stood in the Square of the Annunziata and saw in the living terracotta those divine babies whom no cheap reproduction can ever stale. There they stood, with their shining limbs bursting from the garments of charity, and their strong white arms extended against circlets of heaven. Lucy thought she had never seen anything more beautiful . . . . (RV 18)

Della Robbia's babies can be so readily equated with "Italy" itself, because they embody artistically the main values that, for Forster, the country holds: youth, vigor and robust vitality. The clay of which they have been formed is "living"; they resist in Blakean fashion the swaddling bands intended to repress them - "their shining limbs bursting from the garments of charity" - and they rise triumphantly in relief above their own material medium - "their strong white arms extended against circlets of heaven." It is a promising sign that Lucy prefers this quintessence of jubilant Renaissance secularism to Giotto's more admired medieval frescoes; and the always-pragmatic Mr. Emerson gives his blessing to her view: "A baby is worth a dozen saints!" (RV 25).

Nevertheless, Giotto too emblematizes "Italy" to the Hellenist's attuned gaze - a gaze unlike that of the Reverend Mr. Eager:

"Remember," he was saying, "the facts about this church of Santa Croce; how it was built by faith in the full fervour of medievalism, before any taint of the Renaissance had appeared. Observe how Giotto in these frescoes . . . is untroubled by the snares of anatomy and perspective. Could anything be more majestic, more pathetic, beautiful, true? How little, we feel, avails knowledge and technical cleverness against a man who truly feels!" (RV 22)

Mr. Eager's gushing enthusiasm for the frescoes derives from his confidence that they represent what Arnold calls "the touching asceticism of medieval Christianity," an asceticism which Mr. Eager is, predictably, more eager than Arnold himself to embrace as an unquestionable and absolute good. But there is no reason to accept as definitive the chaplain's estimate of the frescoes as unadulterated Hebraism. To begin with, his view is patently overstated; and it also, as Meyers notes, conflicts with the view of the art critic whom Forster himself is likeliest to have trusted: Roger Fry, who sees Giotto's Ascension of Saint John not as medieval but as "a strange anticipation of Cinquecento art." Mr. Emerson's indignant rejoinder, however, does not really challenge the chaplain's reading of the painting, but merely shifts the basis of judgment to empirical and sociological grounds: "'Built by faith indeed! That simply means the workmen weren't paid properly. And as for the frescoes, I see no truth in them. Look at that fat man in blue! He must weigh as much as I do, and he is shooting into the sky like an air-balloon!'" (RV 23). It is rather George whose view of the fresco, however unscholarly, enables him to penetrate behind its Gothic conventions and grasp the imaginative "truth" it contains: "'It happened like this, if it happened at all. I would rather go up to heaven by myself than be pushed by cherubs; and if I got there
I should like my friends to lean out of it, just as they do here'" (RV 23). For George, human life becomes in Giotto's hands what for Arnold it becomes "in the hands of Hellenism" - "invested with a kind of aerial ease, clearness, and radiancy" (CA 134).16

Italian art stands, in A Room with a View, as an essentially Hellenizing force; it is potentially life-enhancing, as long as it does not usurp the primacy of life itself; as long as painted surfaces are not allowed to obscure "the blue sky and the men and women who live under it" (RV 14), or Giotto's "tactile values" given perverse precedence over the value of touch. The "heroes and gods" who haunt Lucy's imagination and who refuse stubbornly to be dismissed as "the nonsense of schoolgirls" (RV 72) find the stone-built grandeur of the Piazza Signoria as suitable a trysting-place as "the solitude of Nature" (RV 57). The Hellenism of Forster's Italy, however, links a responsiveness to both natural and artistic beauty with the paramount human truth of passion; a connection that is implicit in Mr. Emerson's climactic, and victorious, appeal to Lucy: "Now it is all dark. Now Beauty and Passion seem never to have existed. I know. But remember the mountains over Florence and the view" (RV 204). For Arnold, the leading and most admirable principle of the Hellenist spirit is intellect; a principle with which "the alma Venus, the life-giving and joy-giving power of nature" works in an unstable and potentially subversive alliance. For Forster, on the other hand, "passion and truth" - "Eros" and "Pallas Athene" - are inseparably "allied deities" (RV 174); and Lucy, in her "enlightened" condition, has "sinned" against both together. It is only Mr. Emerson's sane affirmation of both truth and passion that at last gives her "a sense of deities reconciled"; that restores her, in words that shift Arnold's famous pronouncement on Sophocles into an unexpected context, to a "wholeness" and "steadiness" of seeing: "It was as if he had made her see the whole of everything at once" (RV 204).

Forster's Italy is, above all, the locus of "wholeness," where apparently warring deities are reconciled; where for example the drivers, without theological misgivings, pour out their souls "to the dryads and the saints" (RV 72). Against this capacious and tolerant background, George and Lucy are themselves eventually reconciled, to the accompaniment of pervasive imagery of contrasted darkness and light, and with pointed reference to parallels in pagan mythology. The classical names that Forster assigns to the young driver and his "sister" on the occasion of the outing to Fiesole - "Phaeton" and "Persephone" - are not as whimsically arch as they may at first seem, for they reverberate significantly throughout the rest of the novel. Persephone in particular - "tall and slender and pale, returning with the spring to her mother's cottage, and still shading her eyes from the unaccustomed light" (RV 58) - becomes symbolically identified with Lucy herself, who not only returns literally to her mother's cottage, but who must, on a less literal level, accustom her eyes to the "light" in order to free herself from emotional bondage. Lucy suffers a "spasm of envy" (RV 61) during the drive while watching Persephone "misbehave" with her young man; and, during the squabble that follows, the Italian girl underscores the connection when she appeals to Lucy by pointing enigmatically at the other carriage - the one in which George is
riding. It is she, and Phaeton, who interpret "the message that Lucy had received five days before from the lips of a dying man" (RV 69) - in effect, the need to rescue life, through love, from the jaws of death and darkness. 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'" (RV 167) - and thereby drawing him back, Phaeton-like, toward the light. By so doing, she herself at last redeems her own claim to the "soul" that Italy had granted her."

Through this imaginatively transformed pagan myth of imprisonment and fertility, Forster effectively celebrates the victory of his personal Hellenistic vision, a vision that blends sexual passion, beauty-worship and self-knowledge. Against this vision, Lucy's artificially implanted Hebraism fights an inopportune battle: "Love felt and returned, love which our bodies exact and our hearts have transfigured, love which is the most real thing that we shall ever meet, reappeared now as the world's enemy, and she must stifle it" (RV 161). Her mental preparations for the conflict are described by Forster with the help of an apt Hebrew word: "As her brain clouded over, as the memory of the views grew dim and the words of the book [Miss Lavish's novel] died away, she returned to her old shibboleth of nerves" (RV 161). At the climactic moment of the story, in her last-ditch stand against Mr. Emerson and love, she even desperately screens her "view" with a slab of Hebrew law in her anxiety to block Hellenist projectiles: "Lucy selected a book - a volume of Old Testament commentaries. Holding it up to her eyes, she said: 'I have no wish to discuss Italy or any subject connected with your son'" (RV 196) - the symbolism is perhaps blatant, but it is eloquent. Despite Lucy's efforts, her antagonist's words hit home, purging her Hebraist blindness: "As he spoke the darkness was withdrawn, veil after veil, and she saw to the bottom of her soul" (RV 202). So, for Lucy, clarity of sight puts an end to the "dark ages" - and, in effect, to the Victorian age. She has at last come into full possession of the "sweetness and light" that her own name betokens. She has grasped "the idea of beauty and of a human nature perfect on all its sides" (CA 54) which Arnold commends, but which Forster has reinterpreted for his own, and Lucy's, generation.

Forster's novel thus endorses Arnold's concept of Hellenism - a free and spontaneous play of mind that rejects a grim and unswerving loyalty to moral absolutes - while giving, unlike Arnold, a joint and equal primacy to values of passion and impulse. We might conclude by asking whether Forster, in so amending Arnold's principle, is not himself moving towards a new sort of absolutism: an absolutism of passion. Certainly, when he speaks of "the vast armies of the benighted" who "have sinned against passion and truth" (RV 174), Forster's very language smacks of a Hebraism applied somewhat strenuously to sexual and emotional matters; we seem already to be standing in the shadow, not of Arnold, but of that apostle of sexual Hebraism, D. H. Lawrence. However that may be, A Room with a View deserves more credit than it is often given for dealing seriously and imaginatively, yet also light-heartedly, with issues whose importance has persisted from Arnold's age into our own. The work that Forster's foremost editor rather patronizingly terms "this
charming period novel" is also, among other things, a novel that places its own period wittily and searchingly in perspective; and the neighborly quarrel Forster implicitly stages with his most revered Victorian predecessor is central to this achievement.

NOTES


4 Matthew Arnold, Culture and Anarchy (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1960), p. 54. Further references to this work will be given parenthetically within the text.

5 Although Forster had decided on "Lucy" as his heroine's first name by the time (late 1901 or early 1902) of his first attempts at writing the novel, he experimented with several alternatives - "Beringer," "Protheroe," "Bartlett," "Denton," "Hoyt" - before finally settling on "Honeychurch" as her surname. See E. M. Forster, The Lucy Novels: Early Sketches for A Room with a View (Lond: Edward Arnold, 1977), p. 19 (editor's note). Jeffrey Meyers notices the reference to "sweetness and light" in Lucy's name, but traces it back to the original source in Swift's Battle of the Books," rather than to Arnold. On this basis, and on the grounds that the Reverend Mr. Beebe's name contains the word "bee," Meyers makes a somewhat strained connection between the two characters. See Jeffrey Meyers, "Vacant Heart and Hand and Eye": The Homosexual Theme in A Room with a View," English Literature in Transition, XIII: (1970), 187. Oliver Stallybrass, in his notes to the Abinger Edition of A Room with a View, dismisses Meyers' suggestions, objecting that "the names Lucy and Beebe ... were chosen so early in the genesis of the novel ... as to make any such intention on Forster's part very unlikely." E. M. Forster, A Room with a View (Lond: Edward Arnold, 1977), p. 235 (note to p. 186). Nevertheless, the trouble Forster took in determining Lucy's full name surely indicates that he was concerned about the name's possible resonance. Such resonance is clearly attached to the names of other characters in the novel; thus, "Vyse" suggests a constricting grip, while "Emerson" recalls the American proponent of broad and unconventional "views." The names "Eager" and "Lavish" (the latter punningly derived from the actual Emily Spender) would not be out of place in a Jonsonian comedy of humors. Mey-
ers' proposed connection between Lucy's name and "The Battle of the Books," however, seems far less plausible than the connection with *Culture and Anarchy*, where the phrase "sweetness and light" becomes, of course, an incessantly repeated tag-line. The warmth of Forster's feeling for Arnold, in any case, contrasts bluntly with the coolness of his admiration for Swift. See for example his comments on *Gulliver's Travels* in *Two Cheers for Democracy*, p. 226.

6 E. M. Forster, *A Room with a View* (Lond: Edward Arnold, 1977), p. 2. Further references to this edition of the novel will be given parenthetically within the text.

7 *The Cave and the Mountain*, p. 10.


9 *A Room with a View*, p. xv.

10 *Art and Order*, p. 52.


12 In his much later essay, "Art for Art's Sake" (1949), Forster is still concerned to point out the life-denying effects of too exclusive a preoccupation with aesthetic matters. While his main emphasis in the essay falls on the "internal order" which makes any work of art self-contained and self-justifying, he begins by disavowing "the silly idea that only art matters"; "No one can spend his or her life entirely in the creation or the appreciation of masterpieces. Man lives, and ought to live, in a complex world, full of conflicting claims, and if we simplified them down into the aesthetic he would be sterilized" (*Two Cheers for Democracy*, pp. 96-97). In calling to mind the stereotype of the 'nineties aesthete who "carried a poppy or a lily or a long peacock's feather in his medieval hand," he echoes the language of the most celebrated late-Victorian satirical caricature of the professional aesthete: W. S. Gilbert's Bunthorne in *Patience*. Bunthorne, who combines in his "particularly pure" nature thoroughgoing aestheticism with a mediavally ascetic demeanor, clearly stands as a literary ancestor of Cecil Vyse.

13 Furbank, I, 93. While Italy did not, of course, figure in any such crucial a way in Arnold's imaginative development, it is worth mentioning that he gave his intellectual support to the cause of Italian unification. See Matthew Arnold, *England and the Italian Question* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1953).


15 *Painting and the Novel*, p. 41.

16 Meyers calls Giotto's painting "an organising principle in the novel," and observes perceptively that "Forster constructs a witty analogy between Lucy and St. John, for whenever Lucy follows Mr. Emerson's advice and moves toward illumination (portrayed in the painting by the golden rays that emanate from
According to one derivation, "It is believed that the last half of the word Persephone comes from a word meaning 'to show' and evokes an idea of light." New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology (Lond: Hamlyn, 1968), p. 165. Thus, whether or not Forster was aware of it, the implications of Persephone's name coincide with those of Lucy's. It is also worth noting that, just as Hades abducted Persephone by surprise while she was gathering flowers in a field, so George kisses Lucy by surprise in a field of violets. The story of Persephone, a myth of fertility and seasonal renewal, is closely connected with that of her mother, Demeter, a goddess for whom the young Forster cultivated a special fondness. (See, for example, The Longest Journey, where the only decoration of Stephen Wonham's room is a picture of the Demeter of Cnidos.) "It seems probable that Persephone was originally merely another aspect of Demeter" (Larousse Encyclopedia, p. 156). The "mysteries" of both goddesses that were celebrated in the yearly Eleusinian rites contrast ironically with the Leonardesque "mystery" that Cecil affects to see in Lucy's face.

A Room with a View, p. xix.