

ABSTRACT: Forster's posthumously published short story about a Roman statue which comes to life in a museum can be read as an appropriation of the myth of Pygmalion in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (10.243-97), the most famous example of a tale in which a statue becomes human. The Ovidian narrative frame gives homosexuality a significant role, as it is focalized through Orpheus, who rejects the many women who find him sexually attractive, and instead pursues young males (*Met.* 10.78-85). Ovid's classic version of the Pygmalion myth has inspired a multitude of artistic responses, most of which have downplayed homosexual undertones.

This paper suggests that Forster's 'The Classical Annex' offers a provocative counterpart. Forster's response to Ovid can be seen as an attempt to emphasize the homosexual aspect of an ancient myth in which homosexuality was present but marginalized, and should be read against contemporary attempts to deny the homosexual nature of love in antiquity (an issue Forster touched upon in his novel *Maurice*). In contrast, Forster asserts the positive homosexual nature of Classical eros and the inadequacy of some contemporary would-be 'curators' of Classical culture via his reinterpretation of a classic myth of male heterosexual desire and domination.

The myth of Pygmalion, as related in Book 10 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, is the classic tale in which a statue comes to life. The Ovidian narrative has inspired many artistic responses, and continues to evoke strong reactions from both creative artists and scholars, many of whom have focused on problematic elements such as the possessive male gaze, the potentially non-consensual aspect of the sexual encounter between man and vivified statue, and Ovid's emphasis on Pygmalion as a creative

artist.¹ Recently, scholars have emphasized that the episode's presentation of Pygmalion's rejection of flesh and blood women is coloured by its narrator, Orpheus, who after losing his wife, Eurydice, also shuns women, pursuing the love of boys instead.² In this paper, I consider E. M. Forster's 'The Classical Annex', a short story in which a male statue comes to life and has sex with a boy, in the light of Ovid's telling of the Pygmalion myth, and examine how Forster appropriates the myth as a provocative counterpart to the version found in the *Metamorphoses*, bringing homosexual undertones to the fore. My close reading of this story's response to its model has wider implications for studies of Forster as well as of Classical reception: a major concern throughout my paper is to show that this apparently minor story partakes in many of Forster's larger literary concerns, not least in the way in which it demonstrates his characteristic and nuanced understanding of, and engagement with, the contested nature of the reception of the ancient world.

Forster's interest in Classical literature and culture, and views on its reception,

Earlier versions of this paper were delivered at Durham University's Classical Work in Progress seminar and at the Annual Conference of the Classical Association in Newcastle in 2006. I owe thanks to David Scourfield and Justine Wolfenden for their sensitive criticism of earlier versions of this paper, Polly Weddle, whose work on human interaction with statues prompted me to write this paper, and Richard Marshall, who alerted me to the material included in my appendix. Thanks are also due to Justine McConnell for sending me her work on Forster and the Classics, and Nikolai Endres and Pau Gilabert for sharing their work on Forster and reading an earlier version of this paper. All translations provided are my own.

¹ E.g. (Sharrock 1991) and (Gross 1992).

² Eg. (Brown 2005: 127-8).

can be illustrated by necessarily brief reference to his life and works. After reading for the Classical Tripos at King's College, Cambridge from 1897 to 1900, Forster continued to take an active interest in Classics throughout his long life.³ Forster's fiction reflects his strong investment in Classics, both in terms of direct Classical references, and at a deeper level.⁴ His work frequently suggests that antiquity provides a refreshing alternative to stultifying contemporary middle-class English *mores*: for example, in the early short story 'Ansell' (c. 1902/ 3), a Cambridge Fellowship candidate writing a dissertation on the Greek optative abandons the dry world of academia for a more sensuous life in touch with nature. Again, in the short story, 'Other Kingdom' (first published 1909), which opens with a tutor translating *Eclogues* 2.60 (*quem fugis! a demens? habitarunt di quoque siluas*), the heroine flees from her materialistic, vulgar, and prosaic fiance into the woods where she is metamorphosed into a tree, a transformation based on that of Daphne fleeing the rapist Apollo in the first book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.⁵ As this story suggests, Forster emphasized a wild, untrammelled side to the Classical world at odds with modern bourgeois civilization, as yet another short story, 'The Story of a Panic' (1904) can illustrate.

The Classical world provided Forster, then, with an idealized alternative to

³ Forster taught Latin at the Working Men's College in Bloomsbury from 1902 (Furbank 1977: 97). His 'Commonplace Book' (Forster 1985) demonstrates his Classical interests over many years at e.g. 196, 203, 246-7, 251.

⁴ Cf. e.g. (McConnell 2004), (Trilling 1962: 35) (for the unsympathetic view that 'the Greek myths made too deep an impression on Forster'), and (Thorpe 1969: 69) for Forster's 'sophisticated play with [...] Classical items' in his short stories.

⁵ (Williams 1999).

contemporary society. One of the aspects of antiquity that most interested Forster, as a homosexual man at a time when sexual acts between men were reviled by society and forbidden by law, was the frank acknowledgement and even celebration of same-sex love in many ancient sources, and this accounts for Forster's frequent privileging of Classical society over contemporary values.⁶ Forster was hardly alone in such a response; Linda Dowling's excellent *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (1994) has charted the role played in Victorian culture by the reception of the Classics – and in particular, ancient Greek and Greece – in legitimating love between men; Dowling examines the centrality of Oxford in the contestation of the relationship between Hellenism and homosexuality. The Cambridge-educated Forster was nevertheless well aware that same-sex desire in antiquity provoked strong and differing contemporaneous reactions, and his novel *Maurice* (written 1913-14, revised before posthumous publication in 1971) dramatizes such opposing responses. While some professional scholars attempted to obfuscate or even deny the prominence of same-sex love in the ancient world, as is reflected in the passage in which the Dean famously instructs his class to 'Omit: a reference to the unspeakable vice of the Greeks' (Forster 1971: 50),⁷ others, such as Maurice's first love, Clive Durham, 'the

⁶ See (Bakshi 1996: 37 and 47 ff.), on the importance of the Classical world for Forster and other homosexual writers of the Victorian and Edwardian periods.

⁷ (Halperin 1990, 1 and *passim*). That the scholar is referred to by his title may nod to the bowdlerization of physical love between men in Plato's dialogues practised by their translator, Benjamin Jowett, Master of Balliol: (Turner 1981: 425-27) quotes passages from all three editions of Jowett's *The Dialogues of Plato* (1871, 1875, 1892) which either denigrate homosexuality or deny that Plato seriously advocated homosexual love. Forster was also exposed to a different approach: his Cambridge

best Classical scholar of his year' (Forster 1971: 75), saw in antiquity a precedent for their own desires and conduct. Durham suggests that the Dean 'ought to lose his fellowship' (Forster 1971: 50) for his hypocrisy in bowdlerizing the Classics and tells his fellow student Maurice that 'The Greeks, or most of them, were that way inclined, and to omit is to omit the mainstay of Athenian society' (Forster 1971: 50), advising Maurice to read the *Symposium*.⁸ We later learn (Forster 1971: 67-68) that Durham sees in Plato's *Phaedrus* 'his malady described exquisitely, calmly, as a passion which we can direct, like any other, towards good or bad. Here was no invitation to licence. [...]', and takes Plato as 'offering a new guide to life', and Maurice eventually responds to Durham's declaration of love for him by stating that '[...] I came to say it – in your very own way – I have always been like the Greeks and didn't know' (Forster 1971: 62). Forster, however, paints Durham's idealizing interest in the Classics as bloodlessly intellectual, comparing it unfavourably with Maurice's attitude (Forster 1971: 99):

mentor and friend, Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, published in 1896 the popular *The Greek View of Life*, where he approves of 'passionate friendship between men', claims that the Greeks 'set the love of man for man far above that of man for woman', and even acknowledges the physicality of such friendships, quoting Plato at length. Forster is less likely to have encountered such German studies of ancient pederasty as (Müller 1820-24) and (Meier 1837), on which, see now (Davidson 2007: 105-7).

⁸ Maurice has apparently not read the *Symposium*, although we learn that 'he had explored Martial' (Forster 1971: 50), a nod to the importance of *Roman* as well as Greek models of homosexuality which has been entirely ignored: see the Introduction to (Ingleheart 2015) (forthcoming).

Maurice had no use for Greece. His interest in the Classics had been slight and obscene, and had vanished when he loved Clive. The stories of Harmodius and Aristogeiton, of Phaedrus, of the Theban Band were well enough for those whose hearts were empty, but no substitute for life. That Clive should occasionally prefer them puzzled him.

However, Maurice later returns to antiquity as a model, at least in the freedom it offered male lovers: when he is advised to ‘live in some country that has adopted the Code Napoleon’, since ‘your type was once put to death in England’, Maurice suggests that in the past, men could ‘take to the greenwood’, saying ‘It strikes me there may have been more about the Greeks – Theban Band – and the rest of it. Well, this wasn’t unlike.’ (Forster 1971: 185). Classical precedents for love between men are therefore not entirely discarded by the novel’s hero; *interpretation* is vital, and *Maurice* shows Forster’s acute sensitivity to different receptions of ancient same-sex love.⁹

Reception of the Classical world plays an even more significant role in Forster’s ‘The Classical Annex’. This short story, written in the early 1930s,¹⁰ was one of several first published posthumously in 1972, two years after Forster’s death and five years after male homosexuality was decriminalized in England. It forms part of the collection entitled *The Life to Come and Other Stories*, which includes stories

⁹ On differing responses to same-sex relations in antiquity as portrayed in *Maurice*, see (Orrells 2011: 218-34),

¹⁰ On 5th January 1931, Forster wrote to J. R. Ackerley that he had recently written ‘a short rude story called “The Classical Annex”’: (Stape 1993: 107).

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unpublished in Forster's lifetime because of their often explicit homosexual content. In 'The Classical Annex', a statue, focalized through the Curator of a provincial museum as 'a worthless late Roman work',¹¹ 'an athlete or gladiator of the non-intellectual type',¹² comes to life on two occasions. Initially, the Curator enlists the help of religion to return the statue to its previous inanimate state, but is nonetheless disgusted by 'an obscene change in the statue's physique' which means that the fig-leaf which previously covered the statue's modesty no longer serves its purpose. The second coming of the statue has disastrous results for the Curator: when he realizes that his son, Denis, has gone to the empty museum, he rushes there to avert a meeting

¹¹ We might expect a Greek statue, given the strong contemporary connection between homosexuality and Greece (see Dowling 1994 *passim*). That it is Roman may acknowledge Forster's source; alternatively, perhaps the statue's Roman origin reflects its impressive endowment: its penis is covered by 'a veritable giant among fig-leaves'. See (Williams 1999: 86-91) on the Roman preference for large penises. In his *Commonplace Book* in 1963, Forster noted that the Greeks sculpted 'pricks too small', commenting 'I remain puzzled by Greek hesitancy in the sixth and seventh century B.C. If *pudenda* at all, why not of the normal size?' (Forster 1985: 246-47).

¹² This description hints that the statue represents no ideal or 'platonic' abstraction, but a flesh and blood man with human appetites: for the connection between athleticism and Greek homosexuality, see (Scanlon 2002: 236-49) on images of Eros and athletes and (Davidson 2007: 484-86); for Roman gladiators viewed as sexually desirable and potent, see e.g. Juvenal 6.103-13, (Hopkins 1983: 21-23). For homoerotically charged gladiators, David Scourfield compares (Forster 2003: 49), where the suggestively named Lance plays the 'Dying Gladiator' while fooling around with his brother, before going on to imitate other statues.

between Denis and the statue. The Curator is too late: he overhears an apparently pleasurable sexual encounter between the two, which he interrupts by again invoking religion to return the statue to the realm of art. However, a more noticeable change in the statue is apparent: we infer that a new 'Hellenistic group' is the result of the coupling of Denis and the statue, frozen in the act of love. The new statuary group, publicly displayed once 'the Curator and the circumstances of his retirement were forgotten', is known as 'The Wrestling Lesson'. The story concludes with its description by a city councillor as a 'Very nice piece, very decent [...] Look 'ow the elder brother's got the little chappie down. Look 'ow well the little chappie's taking it.'

Reaction to the collection as a whole has been mixed: literary evaluation of the stories with homosexual content has been hindered by a 1922 diary entry in which Forster records that he has 'burnt my indecent writings ... written not to express myself but to excite myself.' (Stallybrass 1972: 18). The notion that some of the collection's stories are erotica rather than 'literary', coupled with homophobia, led one reviewer to claim that 'The Classical Annex' sends a 'thrill of horror' through its readers, and to label several aspects of the story 'objectionable.'¹³ However, even sensible and sensitive literary criticism has tended to marginalize this story.¹⁴ Although he claims that the homosexually-themed stories 'have all, in varying

¹³ Miller 1973, 9.

¹⁴ Summers 1983, while rating Forster's homosexual stories in *The Life to Come* 'among the finest tales, ironic, witty, resonant, and angry' (274), labels "The Classical Annex" 'jocular' and 'a slight fantasy' (284), while nevertheless noting that 'Even the apparently facetious tales contain sober truths' (291). Malek 1975 is an exception to the rule.

degrees, transcended their origin',¹⁵ Oliver Stallybrass, in his introduction to the first edition of *The Life to Come*, groups the collection's stories into two groups, the first of which he claims 'need not detain us long.' It is to this group, which he describes as 'cocking a more or less cheerful snook at the heterosexual world in general and certain selected targets – women, the Church, pedantic schoolmasters, town councillors – in particular' that Stallybrass assigns 'The Classical Annex', differentiating it from stories in which he claims that some of Forster's 'profoundest concerns – love, death, truth, social and racial differences – find powerful and sombre expression' (Stallybrass 1972: 17-18). This is a fairly typical critical reaction: Forster's earliest biographer, P. N. Furbank, claimed that Forster 'made a clear distinction ... between the facetious and the serious homosexual stories.' (Stallybrass 1972: 18).

While it should be clear from the outline of the story provided above that much in 'The Classical Annex' is 'facetious', I would challenge the view that this renders the story negligible. In Classical studies, the idea that the facetious lacks profundity, and thus value, long hindered a proper appreciation of Ovid's work; recent evaluations of Ovid do more justice to the poet, taking his work seriously, comic features and all, and paying attention to style and literary play as marks of great literature no less than high seriousness.¹⁶ Furthermore, as I suggest in this paper, several weighty issues which are characteristic of his wider literary concerns surface

¹⁵ Stallybrass apparently believes that stories written with sexual excitement as an aim cannot be great literature. Contrast with this modern prejudice the high reputation of Catullus, who claims that the ability to provoke sexually is desirable in poetry: Catullus 16.5-11.

¹⁶ Cf. e.g. (Hardie 2002: 4-8).

in Forster's story, such as sexuality, censorship, the values of Middle England, and religion. In addition, Forster's engagement in this story with Classics and its contemporary rôle and reception appears entirely serious, and just as characteristic of Forster's most profound and abiding themes as those identified by Stallybrass above. Furthermore, nowhere is the 'seriousness' of the story more apparent than in its – often playful – use of the Ovidian Pygmalion myth as a literary model; an aspect of the story which has previously been unrecognized. Frederick Williams and Stephen Doloff have recently suggested that Forster's model or inspiration is a tale with homosexual elements involving the Cnidian Aphrodite in Lucian, *Amores* 8.173 ff.¹⁷ However, the major model for the story is more likely to be the myth of Pygmalion in the *Metamorphoses*,¹⁸ a far more mainstream Classical source, which had already provided Forster with a model for the story "Other Kingdom". I detect multiple levels on which Forster reacts to *Met.* 10's version of the Pygmalion myth, not least its homosexual subtext.

Before examining these, let us first turn to a brief examination of the myth of Pygmalion as related in Ovid, *Met.* 10. The misogynistic Pygmalion, choosing to live his life without women, sculpts and then falls in love with a beautiful statue of a virgin. After he prays to Venus, the statue comes to life. The unnamed statue appears as a passive object of male desire, and, once she achieves human form, has sex with her creator/ lover and bears his child. So far, so heterosexual. However, Ovid's

¹⁷ (Williams 1999) and (Doloff 2000).

¹⁸ The combination of homosexual love, wrestling, the rejection of sex, and a falling statue suggests as another model Theocritus, *Idyll* 23, where a boy, after rejecting a passionate (male) lover, bathes at a wrestling school and is killed by a falling statue of Eros. I posit another, more contemporary influence, in the appendix.

narrative frame foregrounds homosexuality: Pygmalion's story is one of several narrated in Book 10 by the singer Orpheus, of whom we are told:

[...] omnemque refugerat Orpheus
femineam Venerem, seu quod male cesserat illi,
siue fidem dederat; multas tamen ardor habebat
iungere se uati, multae doluere repulsae.
ille etiam Thracum populis fuit auctor amorem
in teneros transferre mares citraque iuuentam
aetatis breue uer et primos carpere flores.

[...] Orpheus had fled from all
love of women, whether because that had gone badly for him,
or he had given his faith; however, a desire to have sex
with the bard gripped many women, who grieved rejected.
He even was the originator for the peoples of Thrace of
transferring love to tender males and before early manhood
plucking the brief spring of their age and first flowers.

(*Met.* 10.79-85)

Artistic adaptations of Ovid's version of the story of Pygmalion have tended to ignore or downplay homosexual aspects. However, George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1912), may knowingly nod towards homosexuality by describing Henry Higgins and his friend Colonel Pickering as not 'the marrying sort'.¹⁹ Given his Classical background and sexual orientation, Forster was surely acutely aware of the Ovidian

¹⁹ (Shaw 1931: 741).

frame of the myth, and several of his contemporaries and fellow homosexuals were also interested in exploring myths of same-sex desire in the *Met.*: for example, compare A.E. Housman's poem on Narcissus in his 1896 *A Shropshire Lad*.²⁰

Such contemporary artistic interest in the tale of Pygmalion and other myths with homosexual content in the *Met.* tips the balance of probability in favour of Ovid's Pygmalion as the model for Forster's story. Many artists in various media engaged with this myth in the years up to 1930-1, as is clear even from a quick glance at (Davidson Reid 1993), and it is tempting to speculate that Forster was influenced by such re-workings of the *Metamorphoses*; however, that is a topic for another paper. I turn now instead to examining the extent to which 'The Classical Annex' reacts to the Pygmalion myth as told by Ovid.

One aspect of Forster's story that strongly suggests the Ovidian Pygmalion is the role which metamorphosis plays; an element conspicuously absent in the Cnidian Aphrodite story in Lucian's *Amores*. Forster's story presents us with not one metamorphosis, but several, as the statue comes to life twice, and the Curator's son Denis finally becomes part of a new statuary group. Multiple metamorphoses are a feature of Ovid's *Met.* in general and the story of Pygmalion in particular: in *Met.* 10, the story of Pygmalion is introduced by Orpheus' reference to Pygmalion's hatred of the promiscuous Propoetides, who are transformed into stones (10.238-42),²¹ an

²⁰ *A Shropshire Lad* XV. The echoing phrasing ('Look/ gaze not in my eyes' and 'A Grecian lad') in the opening and closing lines of each stanza owes a debt to the connection of the story of the nymph Echo to the myth of Narcissus; a connection first found at Ovid, *Met.* 3.339-510.

²¹ Cf. also *Met.* 10.64-7, where Orpheus' reaction to the final loss of his wife is compared with the stupefaction of an unknown man at the sight of Cerberus.

anticipatory doublet of and reversal of the fate of Pygmalion's statue. Forster's repeated metamorphoses of his statue (and the ultimate metamorphosis of Denis into stone) may thus nod to the fact that two metamorphoses involving statues or stones are involved in Ovid's Pygmalion myth.

The agency that causes Forster's statue to come to life may also allude to Venus, the goddess of love and the power behind the transformations in the Pygmalion myth in *Metamorphoses* 10.²² For Forster, writing in the twentieth century, without the pantheon of Olympian gods and their intervention in human affairs, the processes of metamorphosis are more obscure. We are never directly told what brings this statue to life. Nevertheless, Forster hints that sexual desire plays a part: when the Curator investigates strange breakages in the Classical Annex at the start of the story, he finds that a Tanagra statuette of a 'charming little girl' has 'chipped her pretty hat', a statuette of a 'bearded Etruscan thing' is also broken, and 'a small plaque representing a nymph had cracked, and an Apis bull had slid towards it, toppling it onto its nose'. As the Curator remarks, 'Misfortunes tended to come in pairs'; let us briefly consider what these pairs suggest about the powers operating in the Classical Annex. Both have sexual undertones, given that male and female are involved.²³ More obviously, nymphs are often presented as hypersexualized (Ovid alludes to and frequently disrupts this common view in the *Metamorphoses*),²⁴ and the bull which

²² *Met.* 10.270 ff. and 295.

²³ (Malek 1975: 4) notes the 'sexual antics' of the 'Greek and Roman male and female objects'.

²⁴ Compare e.g. the nymphs Echo and Salmacis who make sexual overtures to Narcissus and Hermaphroditus respectively (*Met.* 3.370-401 and 4.285-379) with those who snatch Hercules' beloved Hylas (Apollonius, *Argonautica* 1.1221-39,

causes the plaque of the nymph to break may represent male sexuality.²⁵ Sexual elements become more prominent when things start to move in the Classical Annex in the Curator's presence: firstly, the fig-leaf which has been attached to the nude statue falls off, presumably under direct anatomical pressure from the statue, since when the Curator attempts to reapply the fig-leaf to spare the modesty of the museum's cleaner, he finds that it 'tilted out unsuitably'. Strange happenings multiply: when the Curator turns his attention to the terracotta statuettes of girl and bearded Etruscan, he discovers that, although he had placed them 'at least a foot apart', 'now they lay together, and, queerer still, appeared to have stuck. He had never known terracottas stick before – probably the result of the damp Bigglesmouth climate.' A prosaic twentieth-century explanation, but in light of the later union of Denis with the statue, we might see this as a *sexual* union. When the Curator bends down with his back to the statue and tries to separate the terracottas: 'he heard a string snap, and the fig-leaf whizzed across the room'. As the Curator leaps into the Early Christian Sarcophagus, 'the nude had cracked off its pedestal and was swaying to fall on him.' The reader may well infer that the statue has violent sexual designs upon the Curator. The Curator himself certainly seems to view the statue as a potential sexual aggressor; recovering from his shock, and the 'one particular apparition' that 'threaten[ed] him'

Theocritus, *Idyll* 13, and Propertius 1.20); cf. too the knowing nymphs of *Met.* 2.452, who, despite attending the virginal Diana, realize that Callisto is pregnant. The *Met.* frequently disrupts stereotypes of nymphs by presenting them as the chaste, unwilling victims of rapes perpetuated by male gods: Daphne in *Met.* 1 provides a model for many such later episodes.

²⁵ Cf. the bull in Seneca, *Phaedra* 1007-1034, that causes the death of Hippolytus, who denies the importance of sex.

– that is, the ‘obscene change in the statue’s physique’ – he considers that ‘Clearly something was loose in the Classical Annex, some obscene breath from the past.’

The Curator’s ‘obscene breath from the past’ may allude to Forster’s Ovidian model: as in the Pygmalion myth, so here too the force that vivifies the Classical Annex and its statues may be Venus. But for the repressed museum Curator, Venus is not the life-affirming goddess of sex and sexuality who deserves due worship, but a threatening, transgressive force. The only force that appears capable within the story of stopping this obscene breath from the past, and the sexual activity that comes with it, is Christianity: on both occasions when the contents of the Classical Annex come to life, the Curator manages to return the contents to their status as mere museum exhibits by making the sign of the Cross. The implied equation of Christianity with death and the denial of the flesh (it is significant that the Curator leaps into a *sarcophagus* [= ancient Greek ‘flesh-eating’] to escape the statue’s advances) and, conversely, of the Classical world with life and sexual pleasure, is typically Forsterian.²⁶

Sex and Venus are ambiguous, troubling presences in the Ovidian version of the Pygmalion myth. Although Venus punishes the Propoetides for denying her divinity by making them become the first prostitutes,²⁷ she apparently rewards

²⁶ Cf. e.g. (Forster 1985: 108) where the Greeks are identified as ‘normal healthy children’ and (Gilbert 2004). Note too Denis’ speaking name: a near-reversal of ‘sinned’ (I am grateful to David Scourfield for this point) and derived from Dionysus, the Greek god of wine often associated with licence: (Doloff 2000: 342, n. 9).

²⁷ One might infer that the Propoetides deny Venus’ divinity (*Met.* 10.238-9) by rejecting sexual activity (cf. Aphrodite’s punishment of Hippolytus’ ‘insult’ in spurning sex: Eur. *Hipp.* 10-22): cf. (Brown 2005: 128-9).

Pygmalion's sexual desire for his statue by transforming it into Pygmalion's longed-for wife. Ovid then relates that, once Pygmalion's statue comes to life, the goddess attends the marriage she had arranged, and when nine months have passed, a child is born of the union of the statue and Pygmalion (*Met.* 10.295-7); a roundabout way of saying that Pygmalion immediately has sex with his new 'wife'. Such elliptical expression may owe something to the fact that Ovid's narrator at this point is Orpheus, who has rejected women and embraced the love of boys after the loss of his wife immediately following their wedding (*Met.* 10.8-10). Forster, however, makes it much more explicit that when a statue comes to life, its contact with humans will involve sex. The sex scene between the statue and Denis is focalized entirely through the Curator, who can only hear what is happening, as 'none of the lights were on'. The reader fumbles along in the dark museum with the Curator, who has already heard his son giggling, and who:

dared not call out or give any sign, and crept forward cautiously, guiding himself by well-known objects, like the oaken churns, until he heard his son say, "Aren't you awful?" and there was the sound of a kiss. Gladiatorial feints, post-Classical suction, a brute planning its revenge. There was not a moment to lose, and as the giggling started again and soared up into hysterics against a ground-bass of grunts the Curator stepped into the Christian sarcophagus and made the sign of the Cross.

In the fevered, incomplete sentence 'Gladiatorial feints, post-Classical suction, a brute planning its revenge', the Curator's negative view of sex as domination and revenge is depicted. Such a description might better fit the Ovidian story, where the

statue is a passive recipient of the erotic attentions of the misogynistic Pygmalion. Several critics have pointed out that Pygmalion virtually rapes his creation, as there can be little opportunity for refusal or consent, and many artists have been troubled by this aspect of Ovid's myth.²⁸ I detect little sexual violence or domination in Forster's story, however, at least in the scene between Denis and the statue, where the sexual attraction and acts appear mutual:²⁹ witness Denis' giggling, flirtatious 'aren't you awful?', and pleasure in the act, hinted at in the description of Denis' rôle in the new statue-group: 'Look 'ow well the little chappie's taking it.'

As in Ovid, a new creation results from the coupling of human and statue: the Hellenistic group of the 'Wrestling Lesson' formed by Denis and the statue locked in an embrace, and (mis)interpreted as wrestling brothers by the people of Bigglesmouth.³⁰ I wish to explore for a moment the implications of this final metamorphosis. Despite the Ovidian model, this transformation into a statue is surely not a punishment, mirroring that of the Propoetides into stones, nor is it likely that by

²⁸ A recent example is (Duffy 1999: 51-2), where Pygmalion sounds like a rapist as he speaks to the statue: 'blunt endearments, what he'd do and how./ His words were terrible.'

²⁹ Such mutual sexual attraction would be unsurprising, given that the statue is an athlete or gladiator, and Denis is keen on football. (Matz 2007: 40) claims the statue 'rapes' Denis; Forster is more nuanced than he allows.

³⁰ Forster here perhaps reacts to actual interpretations of ancient art: cf. (Dover 1978: 4, n. 5) on Greek vase-paintings: 'I am far from claiming expertise in the interpretation of pictures, but I am fortified by seeing that experts sometimes err, e.g. in describing a typical pair of males engaged in intercrural copulation as "wrestlers" [...]'.
[...].

ending his story with his lovers transfigured into stone, Forster accepted a common contemporary perception of homosexuality as a sterile dead-end,³¹ in contrast to Ovid's Pygmalion myth, where male sculptor and female statue produce a new child. That Forster's union of boy and statue results in a new artistic creation which revitalizes attention in the museum's previously ignored Classical exhibits strongly suggests that the ending of the story is *not* an example of sterility.³² An even more positive interpretation seems possible. In the transformation of the statue and Denis into the new Hellenistic group in which their bodies are entwined, Forster presents us with the merging of lover and beloved to create a new and beautiful entity, echoing a very few tales in the *Metamorphoses* where devoted lovers are transformed in ways which give a concrete, physical and eternal form to their mutual attachment.³³

³¹ Cf. Maurice's sadness at realising that no child can result from the love between himself and Clive in *Maurice*, 90. See also e.g. (Duffy 2001: 332), on Victorian emphases on the 'non-reproductivity of homosexual acts as their defining characteristic'.

³² Another way of looking at the end of Forster's tale is that it has a certain degree of realism, reflecting the lack of options open to contemporary homosexual men: there is nowhere for these lovers to go, in fiction or in life.

³³ Cf. the myths of Pyramus and Thisbe, who desire to be married (*Met.* 4.60-61) and are united by having mulberries preserve *gemini monimenta cruoris* ('a memorial of their twinned blood', *Met.* 4.161); Philemon and Baucis, who pray for death at the same moment to avoid separation (*Met.* 8.708-10), and are transformed into trees which grow from a single trunk (*Met.* 8.714-20); and Alcyone and Ceyx, who, in answer to Alcyone's prayer to be united in death with her husband (*Met.* 11.705-7), are metamorphosed into sea-birds which mate for life (*Met.* 11.741-748).

Forster's merging of his willing lovers may provide a homosexual rewriting of these Ovidian myths, rewarding his lovers with a form of deathless marriage, a privilege only given to a few heterosexual couples in the *Metamorphoses*. Furthermore, in uniting the modern boy with the Roman statue, Forster may suggest the creation of a new Classical past, inflected and mediated through the many previous versions of that past, as he attempts to return the corporeal and the sexual to that past, rather than deny such facets of the Classical world. In the creation of a new statue interpreted as that of wrestlers, Forster may also hint at the homosexual cachet enjoyed by the famous 'Uffizi wrestlers', a Roman marble copy of an original Greek sculpture, housed in the Uffizi, which has a long history of homoerotic fetishization.³⁴ For example, in Johan Zoffany's painting 'The Tribuna of the Uffizi' (completed 1777), the notorious artist Thomas Patch, banished from Rome apparently for a homosexual incident in 1755,³⁵ points towards the statue; the statue, along with other artwork of obvious homoerotic appeal, impresses Charles Warren Stoddard on a 1875 trip to Florence;³⁶ and the statue still features in homosexual pornography.³⁷

³⁴ Forster would thus mischievously mirror the erotic responses to this statue of wrestlers from men with same-sex desires by having viewers misinterpret an erotic scenario as involving wrestling; a neat reversal which would fit well with Forster's interest in differing interpretations of same-sex love in antiquity.

³⁵ (Belsey 2004).

³⁶ (Katz 2001: 206).

³⁷ A copy of the statue appears in the background of a photograph depicting a Thai man with an erect penis at <http://www.queer-arts.org/ClassicalAlibi/pages/95%20Thai%20%26%20Roman%20marble.htm> [accessed 19 July 2013].

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The characterization of Denis and the sexual rôle he plays may also hint at the broader context of the Pygmalion myth in the *Metamorphoses*. Against the background of its narration by Orpheus, the originator of pederasty for the Thracians, it seems significant that Denis is repeatedly characterized as a boy in ‘The Classical Annex’: he is described as such by his mother, who deplores the youthful impetuosity that leads him to rush down to the museum in ‘practically nothing but his football shorts’: ‘He’s getting awfully headstrong and excitable.’ This characterization continues in Denis’ description as a ‘little chappie’ in the new statuary group. There are also hints that the statue plays Orpheus’ role as an older, active partner in initiating Denis into homosexual pleasure:³⁸ as part of the new statuary group, the statue is described as ‘the elder brother’, and seems to take the lead in seducing Denis. Furthermore, the transformation of Denis and the statue into a new statuary group entitled ‘The Wrestling Lesson’ hints at the rôle of education in ancient models of love between men and boys: for Greek education, on the Platonic model, takes place at least partly in the gymnasium,³⁹ where wrestling was an important activity. The statue thus initiates the boy Denis, who is receptive to the Classical world in a way that his father cannot be, into an understanding of the ancient world which involves

³⁸ Cf. (Da Silva 1998) on youthfulness in Forster’s homosexual short stories. “The Classical Annex” differs from the other stories in *The Life to Come* in stressing that the adolescence of one of the participants in homosexual affairs; references to Arthur Snatchfold as a ‘lad’ or ‘boy’ (Forster 1972: 133, 134, 135) are focalized through the aged Conway, and Snatchfold is a ‘young man’ elsewhere (Forster 1972: 135). This different emphasis can be explained by the prominent role adolescence played in Classical models of male-male love.

³⁹ Cf. e.g. Plato, *Charmides*, set in its entirety in the palaestra (*Charmides* 1).
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same-sex love.

One final important issue that arises in the context of Forster's reception of Ovid's myth is the question of who plays the role of Pygmalion, the creator of art. The Curator seems crucial here: his intervention succeeds in turning the statue back into an inanimate object on two occasions, finally creating a new statue group. But the fact that the Curator creates a statue from a living being is the opposite of Pygmalion's rôle as a creative force in Ovid, and there are other hints that the Curator is an *anti*-Pygmalion figure. He is unimpressed by the museum's nude statue: 'he had never liked it, and had reported strongly against purchasing it, and he liked it less than ever in the twilight that began to invade the dingy museum. The City Fathers had wanted something life-sized and cheap, "and they've got 'em both, by gad," he murmured'. This provides a strong contrast with Pygmalion, who gives his statue a beauty more perfect than that of any woman who is born – in Orpheus' misogynistic formulation – and falls in love with his own creation:

interea niueum mira feliciter arte

sculpsit ebur formamque dedit, qua femina nasci

nulla potest, operisque sui concepit amorem.

Meanwhile he sculpted snow-white ivory with amazing skill

and gave it a beauty, which no woman can possibly be

born with, and he conceived a love for his own work.

(Ovid *Met.* 10.247-8)

Pygmalion attempts to enhance the beauty and lifelike qualities of his statue by adorning it with various accessories (*Met.* 10.259 ff.), but finds the statue no less

beautiful naked (*Met.* 10.266). Contrast the Curator's treatment of the statue: he attempts to censor rather than enhance its sexuality by covering its life-sized appendage with a fig-leaf.

However, the Curator does have a limited creative rôle in the story: his final interference unwittingly leads to the new Hellenistic statue group. The Curator also appears in the rôle of creator vis à vis his son Denis, as Forster makes explicit when the Curator muses, 'how much more personable was his own son Denis than this Classical lout'. This is very much a case of the artist falling in love with his own work; compare Denis' giggling as overheard by the Curator: 'a familiar, an adorable sound.' The Curator is able to appreciate male beauty, albeit in his own son. This aspect may further reflect Forster's source for 'The Classical Annex', as the myth which follows that of Pygmalion in the *Metamorphoses* relates incestuous desire between a child and a father: the love of Myrrha (Pygmalion's descendant) for her own father, Cinyras (*Met.* 10.298-502).⁴⁰ However, although Ovid's Pygmalion controls his beautiful creation, physically and sexually, Forster's Curator is powerless to prevent Denis from having sex with the statue.⁴¹ One aspect of the Pygmalion myth

⁴⁰ See (Da Silva 1998: 8) on Forsterian hints at the Curator's sexual attraction towards his own son, and (Brown 2005: 128) on Ovidian connections between the myths of Pygmalion and Myrrha/ Cinyras.

⁴¹ Cf. the comment of the Curator's wife that Denis is 'getting awfully headstrong and excitable'; an acknowledgement that his parents cannot cope with their son's burgeoning sexuality? Forster's portrayal of a father who objects to his son's homosexuality may owe something to an unpublished manuscript by Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, 'A [Platonic] Dialogue [on homosexuality]', where a father expresses discomfort at his son's homosexuality to a friend who himself turns out to

that continues to trouble readers is that Ovid's Pygmalion appears to be rewarded, gaining his desire at the end of the myth, something which modern reworkings have reversed (see, for example, Duffy 1999, where, after faking an orgasm with Pygmalion, the former statue 'ha[sn't] seen him since'). Insofar as the Curator plays the role of Pygmalion for the purposes of Forster's story, the Pygmalion character who seeks to control the sexuality of his creation is punished: the Curator does not just lose his son to the new Hellenistic statue's sexual advances, but his reaction to the new statue once he switches the light on is extreme: that the statue is only exhibited publicly once the Curator and the circumstances of his retirement are forgotten, hints at the Curator's breakdown. The powerlessness of Pygmalion's creation is clear in Ovid through the fact that the statue is never actually named;⁴² Forster visits this fate upon the Curator himself, who is only ever referred to as 'the Curator', and whose fate is to be forgotten at the end of the story.⁴³

Since the Curator does not fit the rôle of Pygmalion in this story perfectly, we might briefly consider another candidate for the rôle of the Ovidian artist besotted with his creation: Forster himself, who, on the evidence of his diaries, created art such as this story for his private sexual pleasure, just as Pygmalion had done in Ovid's story. Both men were aware that their creations are unacceptable to the societies that

be homosexual (*non uidi*; reference in (Lane 2001: 83)).

⁴² See (Reinhold 1971).

⁴³ Forster therefore effectively visits upon the Curator the censorship that the Curator had himself attempted to enforce. Cf. Forster's indignation at museums' censorship: (Forster 198: 236-37) and (Furbank 1977: 84) (Forster on the covering of the pudenda of nude statues: 'Talking of fig leaves, how flagrantly indecent are the statues in the Uffizi with their little brown paper bathing drawers.').

they lived in; however, Pygmalion's dilemma is solved by a divine intervention that allows him to realize his desires, whereas Forster's story of homosexual love on an ancient model remained unpublished until after his death and the end of laws criminalising homosexuality in England.

Forster's valorising of ancient paradigms of homosexuality in 'The Classical Annex' is worth exploring for the way in which the story comments upon the reception of Classics and those who act as the curators of Classical culture. As in the differing views on Platonic love that emerge from *Maurice* (see above), throughout our story Forster emphasizes that Classical culture is not always safe in the hands of the professionals who are supposed to be its guardians, but who instead seek to censor the presence of homosexuality in the ancient world. Despite his Oxford education, the Curator is not fit to preserve a Classical past which he does not understand. The inadequacy of the Curator is foregrounded in the story's first sentence: 'The Municipal Museum at Bigglesmouth was badly off for Greek and Roman stuff, and the Curator rather neglected what was known as the Classical Annex.' Other evidence of the Curator's negligence is damningly heaped up: for example, when the Curator hears of breakages in the Classical Annex, we are told that 'It was like hearing of the death of a worthy but tedious relative'; his attitude to the statue marks him as an unsuitable Curator, particularly when he tells it that 'Scrap-heap's the place for you [...] Broken up for road metal – that's all you're worth'; and he sees himself as above his task as Curator when he ponders 'why should his time be wasted over all this rubbish?' as he attempts to attach the fig-leaf to the statue. The use of the term 'Curator' (the only name he receives in the story) further exposes his inadequacy, given the derivation from the Latin *curo*, *curare*, 'to watch over, look after, care for' (*OLD* 1); all things that the Curator fails to do for the Classical items in his charge.

We have seen, then, how Forster responds in multiple ways to Ovid's version of the Pygmalion myth and its homosexual subtext in 'The Classical Annex', as well as how this story fits with Forster's wider concerns; in particular, his keen interest in the contemporary reception of antiquity. Forster's story depicts the public servants of Bigglesmouth (as represented by the Curator) as unfit to protect and continue the heritage of the Classical world, given their indifference to it, and, more seriously, their misunderstanding of and hostility to the presence of sexuality in that world. However, the story is not (necessarily) ultimately pessimistic about contemporary responses to the Classical. The story ends on the humorous note of Councillor Bodkin's misinterpretation of the new statue as 'very decent'; that the statue 'became quite a feature at Bigglesmouth' after the previous lack of interest in the Classical Annex may hint that it can be interpreted rather differently,⁴⁴ as may Bodkin's concentration on 'how well the little chappie's taking it'. Forster's interest in the contestation of the meaning of the Classical past and his acknowledgement of differing interpretations affords yet another example of his constant engagement with his Ovidian model; for one of the characteristic features of the *Metamorphoses* is the way in which the narrative voice allows for varied interpretations: for example, at *Met.* 10.80-81, two alternatives are offered to explain Orpheus' rejection of women.⁴⁵

In concluding, I wish to analyse the broader implications of Forster's profound debt to his Ovidian model. Studies such as those of Turner 1981 and Dowling 1994 have rightly emphasized the crucial rôle of the reception of Greek models in constructing a modern homosexual identity. Although scholarship has recently begun

⁴⁴ Even the Curator realizes that some are attracted to the sexuality of Classical statues: he considers disposing 'of the nude as a Priapus to some connoisseur.'

⁴⁵ Cf. e.g. *Met.* 1.765-6 and 3.253-5.

to explore the importance of the reception of Rome and Latin literature in this regard,⁴⁶ the field remains under-researched. While a major study of this phenomenon remains a desideratum, it is my hope that Forster's detailed engagement with Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in 'The Classical Annex', as traced in this paper, can help to provide a stimulus for such research.

Appendix: Edward Perry Warren and Rodin's *The Kiss*

I am grateful to Richard Marshall for suggesting that Forster may have found more contemporary inspiration for 'The Classical Annex' in the controversy over the display in Lewes of a copy (now in the Tate) of Rodin's *Le Baiser* (*The Kiss*), commissioned by the homosexual art collector Edward Perry Warren (1860-1928). In a letter to Rodin from William Rothstein, it is specified that 'as this replica will be for himself [Warren], the man's sex be modelled as it would have been modelled by a Greek – he suspects that in the Luxembourg group you suppressed slightly that detail due to the museum restraint.'⁴⁷ Warren offered to lend the statue, commissioned in 1900 and finished in 1904, for public display to Lewes Town Hall, where it was exhibited in a corner of the Assembly Room used for concerts between December

⁴⁶ See, for example, (Prettejohn 1999) and (Lyon 1999). (Vance 1997: 17) notes that 'Algernon Swinburne, enthusiast for the naked, the nude and antique, strenuously projected himself as a Hellenist among Hellenists, but even he owed almost as much to Rome, and to Latin sources, as to Greece.'

⁴⁷ Letter from Rothstein to Rodin, dated 25 June 1900 (*non uidi*); quoted in (Tahinci 2004: 111).

1914 and February 1917.⁴⁸ It was removed from display because of worries about immorality: ‘Since young soldiers were at that time often present at concerts, the town fathers were worried that the statue might have “a prurient effect” on them.’⁴⁹ As Marshall convincingly suggests, the combination of nude male statuary, genitalia, censorship of nudity on sexual grounds, and a small-town mentality in this single notorious affair strikingly parallels the themes of ‘The Classical Annex’.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Cf. (Tahinci 2004: 112).

⁴⁹ (Sox 1991: 254). Forster may mischievously allude to the effect that ancient statues can have upon the young in *Maurice*, where Mr. Ducie, visiting the British Museum, says that the Museum ‘raised questions even in the minds of boys’ (*Maurice*, 196); just before this, Maurice and Scudder see an Assyrian bull apparently ‘with five legs’ (i.e. the ‘fifth leg’ is a phallus).

⁵⁰ Forster would probably have been aware of the controversy, given his visits from 1913 onwards to the Woolfs, who lived near Lewes: see the index in (Stape 1993).

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