

A room with a view and the birth of venus essay sample



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The cult of melancholy has spread through history and consequently literature and art; its dark, romantic sentiment is closely associated with poets and artists. Thus, it is appropriately endured by both the Painter, an artist living in the Renaissance Italy, and George, who Forster constantly refers to as a Renaissance figure. Both characters, at one point, feel a faltering despair that life is not worth living. Both authors use explicit religious references, as George is living 'in Hell' and the Painter is '... abandoned by God'. However, where the Painter is frightened of his sorrow, George embraces it in order to change.

It is Mr. Emerson who reveals the nature of George's melancholy, against the backdrop of Santa Croce. Forster's irony is evident as the Emerson's are firm atheists and by presenting them in a place of worship he creates a sense of inversion. Or what could be referred to as Mr. Emerson does: a 'muddle', which resonates throughout the Chapter. Similarly, this inversion is replicated when Alessandra discovers the Painter in his despair in Chapel. It had previously been bathed in 'sunlight... falling directly in a broad band of gold' but is now 'fallen in darkness'.

The religious imagery here is clear. Dunant uses contrast between the 'gold' which is linked with the holy and 'darkness' which is associated with devilry. Forster uses a similar comparison between 'Paradise' and 'Hell' in reference to George when he states that 'he lives in Hell'. Both authors frequently associate the theme of religion with melancholy because if hope is a key concept in religion, particularly Christianity, than melancholy represents losing all hope. Both Forster and Dunant use excerpts from poetry to illustrate melancholy in some way.

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Alessandra quotes the first Canto of Dante's *Inferno*, it begins 'Mid-way along the journey of our life, /I woke to find myself in a dark wood, /For I had wondered off from the straight path.' Here, Dunant uses this extract to indicate what the Painter could be feeling. The piece uses the metaphor of being lost in a 'dark wood' to represent despair. This is reminiscent of the 'darkness' Dunant mentions herself and could refer to how the Painter left his Monastery, a holy place, for the city of Florence, where he is exposed to a multitude of sins.

Similarly, Forster has Mr. Emerson to quote the first stanza of a poem from 'A Shropshire Lad' by A. E. Houseman but uses it to pinpoint what is troubling George, '... twelve-winded sky... Blew hither: here am I. '. Mr. Emerson asks '... why does it distress him?' Ironically, George does not seem to be losing faith in God but is losing the faith to not believe in him. This suggests that George is confused much like the Painter.

While they were growing up they were both taught to believe different but firm ideologies, however, when the Painter is exposed to sins such as violence and lust (through Alessandra) he begins to lose sight of the 'straight path' of God and it could be said when that when George is exposed to society and he sees his father's shortcomings his belief in his father's way of thinking is shaken. Another form of imagery used by both authors is the illustrated when Mr. Emerson tells Lucy that George must, 'Pull out from those depths' and Dunant does the same when Alessandra describes the Painter as being in a 'pit of despair'.

This again evokes religion, specifically images of hell, as hell is often portrayed as being beneath heaven. This again places both George and the Painter in a metaphorical hell, reinforcing the idea that they are drowning underneath the strain of their melancholy and highlighting their suffering. Colours, specifically dark and light colours, are used as a device by both authors to portray melancholy. This is first suggested in 'The Birth of Venus' when Alessandra claims she is, '... tired of pen and ink... everything I capture with it looks somehow melancholy' whilst talking to the Painter.

Dunant is suggesting that a lack of colour reflects what it is to suffer from melancholy, which is shown when the Painter paints, 'the Devil, his black hairy body splayed out'. However, when the Painter is not suffering from melancholy, he paints Alessandra a picture, 'vibrant with colour' of the Virgin Mary. This contrast in colour is reflected in Forster's writing, when George is submersed in his melancholy he is described with 'shadows' and 'grayness' but later on in the novel with 'light' and 'sunshine'. When their characters are experiencing melancholy Dunant and Forster both use the animal imagery to stress the impact it has.

Dunant writes '... more like a growl than any words...' when alluding to the Painter. Similarly, Forster refers to George as a 'creature'. The language indicates that the melancholy slowly diminishes the humanity of George and the Painter and encroaches on their personality transforming them into something more animalistic. In the Fourth Chapter of 'A Room with a View', George and Lucy are talking about the dramatic events in square of Santa Croce. George proclaims that he 'wants to live', suggesting that he has been reborn and is fighting his melancholy.

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Dunant uses the same theme of rebirth in the Painter, it manifests when he has sex with Alessandra as it gives him a 'second chance at life'. This act signifies crossing a 'boundary' that both authors use to show that their characters are no longer plagued by their melancholy. Another key parallel between the two novels is the use of the main female protagonist to aid George and the Painter in recovering from the effects of melancholy. For George, it is Lucy who makes him see the past his despair. However, Lucy does not actively encourage George to reject his misery although Mr.

Emerson suggests it; instead she is a symbol or beacon of hope for George to associate with. This is perfectly illustrated when George proclaims that, 'I have been into the dark, and I am going back into it, unless you understand', when Lucy refuses to realise that she is love with George. George suggests that without Lucy he has no 'chance of joy' and will begin to slip back into his melancholy. In the structure of the sentence itself, the use of punctuation divides the sentence and slows the pace of George's words thus emphasizing the urgency of his need for Lucy to understand that her love means the escape of his misery.

In 'The Birth of Venus', Alessandra also helps the Painter but in opposition to Lucy she actively pursues him, while the Painter is the one who attempts to withdraw from her. Alessandra is able to do this because like George she has seen through her own 'sorrow' or 'muddle'. She is able to explain to the Painter her own experience with melancholy in the form of what could be compared to as a sermon. This is comparable to what George does for Lucy in chapter 16. The long paragraphs detailing their experiences are almost biblical because it details their journey from light to dark.

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George talks of discovering the world as 'glorious water and sun' and Alessandra describes finding that 'God was light'. Their stories seem to have a sort of moral that they want either the Painter or Lucy to use to see past their own despair. Another key theme raised through melancholy is that of sexual awakening. The Painter and Alessandra prove this more openly and after they have slept with one another, the Painter immediately has his appetite for life restored as his 'wounds begin to heal' and 'some of his spirit were returned to him'.

The same is for George when he and Lucy kiss for the first time, their embrace solidifies everything that George proclaimed he would do after the death of the man in the square, it encourages him to live life with 'courage and love' as opposed to fear and sorrow. The ending of both novels leave George and the Painter successful in overcoming their melancholy. Both writers see that their plight permeates throughout the novels and thus present that the strain of melancholy is eventually resolved through the help of other characters and weave their problems together to build a skillful resolution.