



The Celestial Omnibus and Other Stories

E.M. Forster

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The boy who resided at Agathox Lodge, 28, Buckingham Park Road, Surbiton, had often been puzzled by the old sign-post that stood almost opposite. He asked his mother about it, and she replied that it was a joke, and not a very nice one, which had been made many years back by some naughty young men, and that the police ought to remove it. For there were two strange things about this sign-post: firstly, it pointed up a blank alley, and, secondly, it had painted on it in faded characters, the words, "To Heaven."

The Celestial Omnibus and Other Stories Details

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Jay says

I find it very difficult to review a short story collection. I don't like to review each story individually, because I don't have enough time, but it seems like I skip too much if I do otherwise. Sometimes I review the collection with a vague conglomeration of what I felt of the stories as a whole, but that really doesn't say much about the stories. In the worst case, I write a review that ends up being potentially off-topic because all it does is talk about how I tend to review short story books without ever taking the time to mention that the stories, perhaps, all have open-ended finales that act like a guitar left alone but still ringing out one note long after the musicians have left the stage as they resound through my head for hours and even days after the last word, or that, in other cases, the title story is possibly my favorite because the veil between the ordinary world and the fantastical world drops most fully, or, at times, that a story entitled "Other Kingdom," perhaps, shows how mistaken people can be in the images that they create of each other. I have decided to risk this review being off-topic, though, as a method of testing the waters again. Will this review remain for a week? A month? A year? A decade? A century? An eon? I'll be watching.

Tocotin says

A nice collection of stories with fantasy/supernatural element; the main theme seems to be the forces of nature and imagination versus rules of society and reason. Some of the stories were slightly too sublime for my taste, but I liked "The Story of a Panic" and "The Road from Colonus".

Ape says

2010 bookcrossing review:

I've only started reading this today and I've read the first two stories of six, but I've enjoyed them so much that I feel the need to write already!

The first story is called The Story of a Panic, and is set in Italy at a hotel where several Brits are staying. This is of course many decades ago. The narrator is this guy with his young family, and he is such a horrible character, arrogant, narrow minded and full of his own self-worth. Get a feeling of him from these:

"I should always insist on prompt and cheerful obedience, if I had a son" (p7) - whilst bitching about this supposedly badly behaved, waste of a space boy (and goodness, this guy should meet the jobs of today, because there really is nothing wrong with the child)

"I always make a point of behaving pleasantly to Italians, however little they may deserve it;" (p22) and he carries on throughout about how Italians are inferior to Englishmen "and a leap like that would never have killed an Englishman" (p 38)

Basically, the brits go out to the woods one day on a picnic. They're idly chattering, about how Pan doesn't exist anymore etc, whilst the "horrid boy" Eustace is whittling a whistle from a bit of wood. He then plays it,

a horrid high pitched noise and everyone goes into a panic mode and runs off. They eventually recompose themselves and go back to the picnic site, to find the boy lying on his back, surrounded by little goat hoof marks. Back at the hotel he goes a bit nuts and has to be out in nature, claiming he will die if locked in his room.

Then there's The Other Side of the Hedge - which is a kind of surreal tale of the rat race, and getting out of it and appreciating what life is supposed to be like.

Radhika says

It is quite an interesting read. Forster has a very important message in it and that is to not be too proud of your knowledge for it may surprise you. The reader is touched by the innocence of the young boy and at certain places wishes to hold the same truthful and pure heart as that of the child.

Rachel Barber says

Magical, allegorical short stories, with Forster's light, sly hand.

Emily says

More like 3.5

Michele says

The Celestial Omnibus is a delightful (did I just say delightful? ugh! but it really was sheer pleasure to read) short story about a boy who visits heaven and returns with wonderful stories that no one will believe. It's nicely crafted, concise, and highly imaginative... heaven is a sort of literary haven for heroes, gods, and good writers. It's only about 15 pages, but lots of fun.

The Machine Stops is another short story that I'd read before. It was included in the Science Fiction Research Association anthology (published in the nineties). It tells of a machine dependent society that fails when the machine fails. Nothing real imaginative there, but Forster wrote it in 1928, when machine dependence had not reached the supercomputer-phase yet and I imagine it's warning was more potent at the time (and it also hadn't been done to death by then either). What I like about it is its bleakness about the whole possibility.

Both stories are found in the Penguin Selected Stories of E. M. Forster, so it's cheap to pick up. Even though these are the only two of the collection recommended to me, it's likely that I'll read more of them.

Barbara Justiniano says

Wonderful compilation of 6 short stories.

Duane says

This is a different side of Forster that we see here. This is a collection of allegorical short stories that he considered fantasy. Very much on the lines of C.S. Lewis with a little Tolkien thrown in. The Celestial Omnibus gets top billing, but they were all quite good.

Nancy Oakes says

Much more about this book later, but I finished this book about 3 a.m. this morning and I literally have not stopped thinking about it since. I just ordered Forster's Selected Stories, hoping that the other stories in that book are as good as these are.

Seriously -- super book. My favorite quotation from the entire collection:

"Lasciate ogni baldanza voi che entrate."

Melissa says

I received an ARC of this title from Dover Publications through NetGalley.

This brief collection of stories show the true depth of Forster's literary talent and his ability to infuse fantasy and imagination into his stories. My favorite stories were two in the collection into which Forster incorporates many classical references.

In the Celestial Omnibus, a boy discovers a sign for an omnibus in the lane across from his house. The alley is a very odd place for an omnibus to pass through so the boy gets up very early one morning to investigate it. When the sun rises a carriage does appear out of the fog and the driver picks the boy up. The boy goes on a journey of a lifetime through the clouds and he meets nymphs and great writers and heroes from famous books. The omnibus driver is Sir Thomas Browne, the famous essayist, but the boy doesn't recognize or understand any of the famous people he meets; he just knows that he has had a wonderful time and has seen amazing things. The story is full of literary allusions and classical references but I won't give any of them away here so as not to spoil them for other readers.

When the boy comes home after having disappeared all day, his father canes him for telling lies about his supposed journey to heaven. The boy's neighbor, Mr. Bons, which happens to cleverly be "snob" spelled backwards, decides he will show the boy that no such omnibus possibly exists. But when the omnibus shows up in the alley and picks up Mr. Bons and the boy, Mr. Bons does not have the same wonderful experience on his journey as the boy; for Mr. Bons' imagination is not as carefree and vast as the boy and he does not witness the same remarkable landscape as the boy does. It is no wonder in the end that Mr. Bons meets a horrible fate.

My other favorite in the collection is a story entitled "Other Kingdom." In this story, an upper class aristocrat named Mr. Worters has taken a fiancé from Ireland, Evelyn Beaumont, who is much below his social status. In order to better educate his new fiancé, Mr. Worters hires a classics teacher, Mr. Inskip, to teach her Latin. It is evident from the beginning that Miss Beaumont does not have the intellectual capacity to learn ancient languages, but she does have a whimsical imagination and a carefree spirit.

Mr. Worters decides to buy his fiancé a wood, named Old Kingdom, for a wedding present. When Worters decides that the wood needs fences and paths and bridges, Miss Beaumont gets very upset that he is trying to organize and tame the natural wood. Through several allusions, the reader, or at least this reader, is quickly reminded of Ovid's story of Daphne and Apollo in the *Metamorphoses* in which Apollo attempts to capture and tame Daphne the wood nymph. Similar to Apollo, Worters learns the harsh lesson that he cannot tame nature or the spirit of this woman. Miss Beaumont has a metamorphosis of her own but it is not the type that Worters had hoped for.

This is a collection of stories that I will reach for and reread over and over again and every time I read them I will discover something new and different. I highly recommend *THE CELESTICAL OMNIBUS AND OTHER TALES* from Dover Publications.

For more of my reviews visit my blog: www.thebookbindersdaughter.com

Cait Poytress says

I have to admit that I am still getting used to Forster's style. He's not especially descriptive, which can be a good thing. I've read books that take pages upon pages to describe something as inconsequential as the front porch of a random building, down to the individual hues and intricate pattern of the wood grain. Um, no thanks. That's when I start skimming, in an attempt to keep my eyes from glazing over and drooping shut. However, Forster, in my opinion, goes too far in the opposite direction. Although I did notice it here and there in *A Room With a View*, it was much more obvious in this collection, probably due to the short story form. It was a bit disconcerting to begin a story and find myself plopped in mid-conversation amongst characters who are completely indistinguishable from one another (I am thinking specifically of *Other Kingdom*). Forster eventually gets around to sorting them out and the stories' backdrops and characters become clearer, but it does make for slightly uncomfortable reading in the first few pages.

I feel like the above is making it seem as if I didn't like his stories, but I did. I loved them. I loved the weaving together of Edwardian era characters and sensibilities with fantasy and fable. *The Story of a Panic*, *The Celestial Omnibus*, *Other Kingdom*, and *The Road from Colonus* were standouts, but honestly there's not a bad one in the bunch.

Laurel Hicks says

Such a fun story! There are two kinds of readers, two approaches to literature.

Bill says

A fantasy full of literary allusions (most which I probably missed), *The Celestial Omnibus* is a rant against

snobs, I think. Its villain is named Bots—snob spelled backwards ?) The Boy exudes innocence which nullifies all snobbery, and who conquers Bots (with the help of The Boys Immortal friends). Abandon hope...

Laura says

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