

**STUDY
REVISE** **AND**
for AS/A-level

A Room with a view

by E. M. Forster

- ▼ Written by experienced teachers and examiners
- ▼ Learn how to respond critically to your text
- ▼ In-depth analysis of all aspects of the text

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with additional material by Nicola Onyett

Series Editors:
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Using this guide



Why read this guide?

The purposes of this A-level Literature Guide are to enable you to organise your thoughts and responses to the text, deepen your understanding of key features and aspects and help you to address the particular requirements of examination questions and coursework tasks in order to obtain the best possible grade. It will also prove useful to those of you writing a coursework piece on the text as it provides a number of summaries, lists, analyses and references to help with the content and construction of the assignment.

Note that teachers and examiners are seeking, above all else, evidence of an *informed personal response to the text*. A guide such as this can help you to understand the text, form your own opinions, and suggest areas to think about, but it cannot replace your own ideas and responses as an informed and autonomous reader.

How to make the most of this guide

You may find it useful to read sections of this guide when you need them, rather than reading it from start to finish. For example, you may find it helpful to read the 'Contexts' section before you start reading the text, or to read the 'Scene summaries and commentaries' section in conjunction with the text – whether to back up your first reading of it at school or college or to help you revise. The sections relating to the Assessment Objectives will be especially useful in the weeks leading up to the exam.

NB: All page and chapter references are to the paperback Penguin English Library edition of *A Room with a View* (2012). Where a publication is given in the 'Taking it further' section on pages 100–1, the author's surname and publication date only are cited after the first full reference.



Key elements

This guide is designed to help you raise your achievement in your examination response to *A Room with a View*. It is intended for you to use throughout your AS/A-level English literature course. It will help you when you are studying the novel for the first time and also during your revision.

The following features have been used throughout this guide to help you focus your understanding of the novel:

Context

Context boxes give contextual evidence that relates directly to particular aspects of the text.

Build critical skills

Broaden your thinking about the text by answering the questions in the **Build critical skills** boxes. These help you to consider your own opinions in order to develop your skills of criticism and analysis.

CRITICAL VIEW

Critical view boxes highlight a particular critical viewpoint that is relevant to an aspect of the main text. This allows you to develop the higher-level skills needed to come up with your own interpretation of a text.

TASK

Tasks are short and focused. They allow you to engage directly with a particular aspect of the text.

Taking it further ►►

Taking it further boxes suggest and provide further background or illuminating parallels to the text.

Top ten quotation

A cross-reference to Top ten quotations (see pages 96–9 of this guide), where each quotation is accompanied by a commentary that shows why it is important.

Top ten quotation



Contexts

Target your thinking

- What different critical positions might be applied to *A Room with a View* to extend your knowledge of the text? (A01)
- How can understanding *A Room with a View* within a broad range of contexts deepen your understanding of the text and the ways in which different readers might respond to it? (A03)
- What links might be traced between *A Room with a View* and various other literary texts? (A04)
- How can applying various critical approaches enrich your understanding of *A Room with a View* and the ways in which different readers might interpret it? (A05)

Biographical context

Edward Morgan Forster was born in London in 1879, the only child of Alice and Edward Morgan Forster Senior, an architect who died when his son was very young. Financially well-off enough not to need to earn his living, Forster in fact worked throughout his life as an author, teacher, critic and essayist. When he arrived at King's College, Cambridge, in 1897, he made friends with several like-minded liberal thinkers and was elected an 'Apostle', a member of an elite intellectual discussion group. Several of its members – including the economist John Maynard Keynes, the essayist and critic Lytton Strachey and the publisher Leonard Woolf – later became affiliated with the so-called Bloomsbury set. (There is more information on the Bloomsbury set in the 'Literary Contexts' section on pages 71–3 of this study guide.)

During a year spent travelling in Italy and Greece, Forster collected much of the material for *A Room with a View*, in the autumn of 1901; for example, he and his mother Alice stayed at the Pensione Simi in Florence, which became the model for the Pension Bertolini. His Italian travels had already inspired two other novels by the time *A Room with a View* was published in 1908: *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905) and *The Longest Journey* (1907).



▲ E.M. Forster

Context

The Bloomsbury Group was an influential early-twentieth-century collective of thinkers, writers and artists who lived in or near the Bloomsbury area of London. Modern and liberal in their outlook, the group's cultural impact was vast in such diverse fields as literature, philosophy and economics.

Taking it further ►

Find out more about Forster's life, using online sources or some of the books listed at the end of this guide. Think carefully about the possible impact upon his work of the other Bloomsbury Group writers and thinkers he knew to develop your understanding of where Forster fits into English literary history.

TASK

Create a visual representation of the contextual background to *A Room with a View*. This might be a timeline or wall display that illustrates the key historical, political, social and cultural contexts to which E.M. Forster was responding.

Like his fellow Bloomsbury Group colleagues Virginia Woolf, John Maynard Keynes and Lytton Strachey, Forster was homosexual. Because homosexuality was illegal at the time it is never mentioned overtly in the writings he published in his lifetime, although he did refer to it in private letters. Forster's novel *Maurice*, about a homosexual relationship, was written in 1910–13 and circulated to friends but not published until 1972, after the author's death in 1970.

Forster's most famous and highly acclaimed – and last – novel is *A Passage to India*, published in 1924 with a lot of encouragement from his close friends Leonard and Virginia Woolf. After the publication of this last great work of fiction, Forster continued to write short stories, articles and reviews as well as teaching and working for the Red Cross in Egypt during World War I. *Aspects of the Novel*, a work of literary criticism based on a series of lectures he gave at Trinity College, Cambridge, was published in 1927 to considerable praise. Following the death of his mother in 1945 Forster was offered an honorary fellowship at King's College, Cambridge, where he had studied as an undergraduate, and he spent the rest of his life there. During the second half of his long life he continued to write essays and reviews. He refused a knighthood in 1949, but became a member of the exclusive and extremely prestigious Order of Merit (OM) just a year before his death in June 1970 at the age of 91.

Political, social and historical contexts

A changing political landscape: The rise of socialism and the road to war

A Room with a View is set at exactly the time it was written. In 1908 the Liberal government led by Herbert Asquith was beginning to challenge the status quo; within a couple of years Asquith's radical Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Welsh firebrand David Lloyd George, was planning his famous People's Budget, which had the clearly stated aim of taxing the rich to pay for social welfare programmes for the poor. In April 1909, Lloyd George declared that:

This is a war Budget. It is for raising money to wage implacable warfare against poverty and squalidness. I cannot help hoping and believing that before this generation has passed away, we shall have advanced a great step towards that good time, when poverty, and the wretchedness and human degradation which always follows in its camp, will be as remote to the people of this country as the wolves which once infested its forests.

(www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/britain1906to1918/g2/gallery2.htm)

The seismic political struggle between the Liberal government that controlled the House of Commons and the mainly Conservative peers who dominated the House of Lords raged for three years. The Conservatives saw the attempt to tax their property as an all-out attack based on class war and bitterly resisted the Liberals' attempts to get their finance bill through the House of Lords.

King Edward VII died during the budget crisis and in the end it was his son, George V, who was persuaded to agree to the creation of several hundred new Liberal peers to cancel out the inbuilt Conservative majority in the Lords. To avoid this nuclear option, the Conservative peers allowed the finance bill to pass. From that time on, traditionally the Lords has never tried to overrule a finance bill that has already been passed by the Commons.

A Room with a View's Mr Emerson is a socialist, as Mr Beebe acknowledges to the horrified Charlotte in Chapter 1. Socialists argue that money, land and property should be owned and controlled, perhaps communally, by the working people who generate it rather than by land or factory owners who control the workers and pass the resultant wealth from one generation to another within their own families. The Scottish miner Keir Hardie became the first elected socialist (Labour) MP in 1892. Eminent people such as the playwright George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) were also actively and vociferously supporting the cause through the Fabian Society which he co-founded with Beatrice and Sidney Webb and the novelist H.G. Wells in 1884 to promote evolutionary (gradual) socialism. Organisations such as these eventually fed into the modern Labour Party which emerged in its present form in 1900.

Mr Emerson is not presented as an aggressive political activist in the novel. His manner is gentle and reasonable and he never criticises the wealth or lifestyle of the people he speaks to, although he is very forthright. Modern readers of *A Room with a View* need to understand, however, the fear with which many middle- and upper-class Britons regarded anything to do with socialism in the time period in which the novel was written and set. Socialism was seen as a declaration of class war – an all-out assault on the traditional way of life of the well-off, whether their money had come from centuries of land owning ('old wealth') or from successful entrepreneurialism during the expansion of the manufacturing industries at home and in the colonies during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries ('new money').

Mr Emerson is never rude but as he believes in total equality; he will not defer to – let alone grovel to – people of a supposedly higher social class. He addresses everyone he speaks to as if they were his equals, and this is what Mr Beebe means when he says that Mr Emerson 'has no tact and no manners' (p.9).

International politics was also increasingly volatile during this period. The year 1908 was the midpoint between the accession of Edward VII and the outbreak of the Great War. England's increasingly friendly diplomatic relations with France were causing great disquiet in Germany and increasing tension between the major European powers. The situation was complicated by the strong personal dislike felt for Edward VII by his unstable and jealous nephew Wilhelm, the German Emperor (Kaiser). *A Room with a View*, therefore, takes place against a backdrop of escalating international tension; despite Edward VII's 1908 visit to Germany, the British press was publishing increasingly hostile articles about the arms race that appeared to be underway as the Kaiser built up the German Navy in an aggressive attempt to rival the Royal Navy – then the greatest in the world. Although there had not been a full-scale continental war in Europe since



▲ Timothy Spall as Mr Emerson and Rafe Spall as George Emerson in the 2007 film (father and son playing father and son)

Context

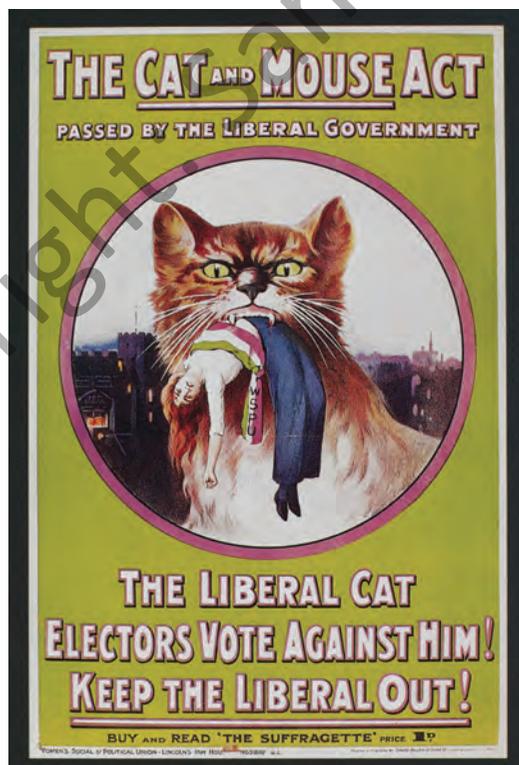
Following a public outcry to the force-feeding of hunger-striking suffragettes in prison, the Liberal government passed the notorious Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill Health) Act of 1913, also known as the Cat and Mouse Act. The Act meant that women would be released from prison when they became extremely ill, only to be sent back when they recovered their health. The nickname given to this oppressive piece of legislation refers to the way a cat plays with a mouse to prolong its torment before killing it.

the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815, the days of peace were in fact numbered and the terrible conflict which engulfed millions of young men like Cecil, George and Freddy was looming on the horizon.

The rise of the suffragettes

In June 1908, the year *A Room with a View* was published, there was a suffragette rally in Hyde Park attended by approximately 300,000 people. Forster's presentation of Lucy's development as an independent thinker and, eventually, wife, is therefore highly topical.

'Feminism' is a late-twentieth-century term. In Forster's time most people would have said that the focus of the campaigning by the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) founded in 1903 by Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters Christabel and Sylvia was to get women the vote. The WSPU were known as the Suffragettes. There was another, more peaceful, campaigning group: the Suffragists. Largely because they had had to take over men's jobs during World War I, women over 30 were eventually granted the right to vote in 1918, with equal voting rights for all adults over the age of 21 coming into force in 1928. Within the novel, Mrs Honeychurch refers disapprovingly to the WSPU's activities. There were demonstrations from 1906 and direct activities such as arson and vandalism, with many women being sent to prison where some were subjected to force-feeding to confound their hunger strikes.



▲ 1913 Poster protesting against the Cat and Mouse Act

Equality means more than the right to vote, though, and women have gone on campaigning through to the present day for the same job opportunities as men. This brings with it issues such as child care and maternity leave. In Forster's time it was almost unthinkable for a middle- or upper-class married woman to work outside the home. It was common for the employment of female teachers, civil servants and other professionals to be terminated when they married – the so-called 'marriage bar' – right up until World War I. Yet there were some small but significant signs of change. In 1908, Edith Morley, suffragette and Fabian, was appointed to the post of Professor of English at University College Reading, the first woman to hold an academic 'chair' in a British university. In the same year the medical pioneer Dr Elizabeth Garrett Anderson became the first woman to become an elected mayor.

Literary and cultural contexts

The Bloomsbury Group

By the time he was writing *A Room with a View*, Forster was associating with and influenced by a set of people who came to be known as the Bloomsbury Group. These were men and women, mostly libertarian rebels of various sorts, who met informally in the London (Bloomsbury) flat of the Stephen sisters. Still both unmarried, they were to become novelist Virginia Woolf and artist Vanessa Bell. Also in the group were the influential economist John Maynard Keynes, subversive biographer Lytton Strachey and writer/publisher David 'Bunny' Garnett among others. Forster was particularly friendly with Leonard Woolf, who became Virginia Woolf's husband. Many of the group were gay or bisexual and all were trying to break free of societal restraints. Forster's Lucy Honeychurch would have been intrigued. Her cousin Charlotte Bartlett would have been, outwardly at least, horrified and probably subliminally jealous of the group's free-thinking.

Modernism

Modernism is a massive umbrella term linking many different trends, developments, experiments and changes mainly in literature, art and music between – roughly – the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the outbreak of World War II in 1939. From the 1950s onward a newer still set of trends are lumped together as 'postmodernism'.

Modernism usually involved experimenting with form rather than presenting a work of art – whatever its form – in the conventional time-honoured way. 'Modernists' in art include people such as Pablo Picasso who painted *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)* (1911), a large oil painting of a group of naked prostitutes from a Barcelona brothel. A riot of colour and shape that makes no attempt to be naturalistic or representational, this painting upset many people (including several fellow painters) because it was so different from what had gone before. The ultra-conservative English visitors to Florence in *A Room*

with a View are, apparently, oblivious of these developments in the world of art and keen only to admire the work of painters such as Giotto from many centuries earlier.

In music Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951) was experimenting with the 12-tone scale which meant using every available note at will rather than using the conventional tradition of working mostly with 8 notes in a chosen key. This atonality makes it sound strikingly original even over a century after it was written. One of his string quartets (No. 2 in F sharp), premiered in 1908, the year *A Room with a View* was published, is a very long way from Lucy Honeychurch's Beethoven, Schumann and Mozart.

TASK

Using the information provided in this section, explore the ways in which *A Room with a View* can be seen as a traditional text and in what ways it can be seen as modernist.

In literature modernistic experiments with form often involved a move away from omniscient narration, enlarging brief moments into something very significant, intense and drawn out or characterised by an innovative use of language. Writers such as Virginia Woolf (*Mrs Dalloway*, 1925) and James Joyce (*Ulysses*, 1922) came to emphasise the consciousness of their characters rather than what happens to them. There was also a tendency for modernist authors to explore unconventional sexual relationships, as D.H. Lawrence did extensively. Set against these radical innovators, it seems clear why Forster is not grouped with them. Although written during the early years of modernism, *A Room with a View* is a novel still very much within the tradition of realism, in that nothing happens in it that couldn't quite easily occur in real life. It is set out in chapters and told chronologically by an omniscient narrator. Having said this, his central protagonist is a woman with sexual feelings which eventually lead her to a triumphantly unconventional marriage outside her own social class and that is a thoroughly modernist concept. And, although Forster certainly doesn't go as far as, say, his Bloomsbury associate Virginia Woolf's 'stream of consciousness' experiments, he does reflect on his character's interior thought processes in some depth and detail.

TASK

As you apply different critical positions to *A Room with a View*, keep a detailed reading diary. Discussing your interpretations with other students can also help you to challenge and develop your own ideas.

Critical contexts

Ways of thinking about texts

As an A-level student, you are required to demonstrate an understanding that the meaning of a text is not 'fixed' and that at various places within a text different interpretations are possible. These different interpretations may be supported by reference to the ideas of named critics or particular critical perspectives, but may also emerge from your own discussions with other students and your teacher. Either way, what really matters is that you have come to a personal interpretation of the novel through an understanding of a variety of ways in which its meanings are made.

Critical approaches

In 1967 the French literary theorist Roland Barthes wrote a hugely influential essay called 'The Death of the Author' in which he argued that the idea of an author or authority led people to believe it was possible to decode and hence

explain the essential 'meaning' of a text. For Barthes, the multiple different ways of making meaning in language and the fact that it is impossible to know the author's state of mind pretty much made a mockery of the idea of a 'knowable text'. The Marxist Barthes saw the concept of the author as another method of transforming a text into a consumer product which could be used up and replaced in a bourgeois westernised capitalist culture.

While the 'death of the author' theory might at first seem to suggest Roland Barthes effectively cut the reader's safety rope and left him or her dangling off a literary cliff, in fact his ideas can be seen as heralding the 'birth of the reader' and so empowering him or her. The reader-response approach to literature suggests that writers and readers *collaborate* to make meanings and that our responses will depend upon our own experiences, ideas and values. Unlike literary theories or critical positions which concentrate on the author, content or form of the text, reader-response theory privileges the role of the active reader in creating textual meanings. If you remember this, you may well feel more confident in assessing the performances, interpretations and literary-critical points of view you encounter. Moreover, by setting the novel at the centre of an intertextual web of contexts and connections, you can start to trace the assumptions underlying both *A Room with a View* itself and the responses of various readers to the text. By resisting the notion of fixed meanings, you are free to make the most of the shifting and unstable nature of the text itself. Thus while this section covers a variety of modern critical approaches that can shed considerable light on the novel, remember that you too are a critic, and as such you should always try to form your own interpretation of the text.

Feminist criticism

Feminist critics are interested in how women are represented in literature, challenging dominant traditional attitudes and ideas about how female characters (who are often seen through the eyes of male writers) feel, act and think. Feminist criticism challenges patriarchal assumptions by unpacking the gender stereotyping embodied in a text and exploring how such stereotypes can be undermined and resisted and has developed over the last 50 years or so as a way of studying literature with these issues in mind.

Given that *A Room with a View* was written in 1908, Lucy Honeychurch may be viewed as a progressive and forward-looking character in that she eventually assertively rejects her mother's values and seizes a relationship which will grant her 'equality beside the man she loved' (p.115). Feminist critics might note how Lucy begins to assert her independence in rebellion against the repressive Victorian attitudes exemplified by Charlotte, going into the city alone to buy postcards and witnessing a distressingly violent event. Yet a feminist critical perspective might still interpret Lucy's decision to marry at all as following the traditional patriarchal convention; had Forster been really brave he could have sent her off to Italy as George's lover or mistress. Then again, that would probably have seen the novel criticised or even banned for obscenity.

Build critical skills

As well as Roland Barthes, other critics closely associated with reader-response theory include the German Wolfgang Iser (1926–2007) and the American Stanley Fish (b. 1938). You might wish to research their ideas online to see how far you think they may be applied to *A Room with a View*.

TASK

As you read the novel, list all the occasions when Forster presents Lucy rebelling against the constraints of her social class and the customs of her day.

It is unarguable that the character of Lucy drives the narrative. She plays the major role in the text, while core issues associated with traditional male and female gender roles such as marriage, homemaking, education, work and civil rights are extensively debated within the context of the novel. Relationships between female characters are varied, vividly drawn, interestingly problematic and highly convincing and male–female relationships are analysed and dissected in forensic detail.

Build critical skills

In his essay 'Forster's Trespasses: Tourism and Cultural Politics,' James Buzard describes Lucy as 'a powerless and sexually naïve protagonist' who 'lurks behind the screen of custom, class and sex' (*E.M. Forster*, 1995). How far would a feminist critic agree that Lucy is powerless in view of what happens later in the novel? Is there another way of interpreting her caution?

Build critical skills

A Historicist view of *A Room with a View* might stress that the 'triumph' of George Emerson over Cecil Vyse in the competition for Lucy Honeychurch's hand in marriage reveals the rise of the middle class and the decline of the aristocracy in the early years of the twentieth century. How do you respond to this view of the text?

CRITICAL VIEW

In her influential work *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1975), the French feminist critic Hélène Cixous (b. 1937) coins the terms '*écriture féminine*' and 'white ink' to articulate what she saw as the challenges women face to find a way of expressing female difference in texts. Her standpoint is that language is not neutral, but forces women writers to communicate in a 'male' voice, encapsulating patriarchal oppression, which does not allow them to truly express themselves; *écriture féminine* theoretically offers a way for women writers to escape this trap. To what extent, in your view, is E.M. Forster, successful in creating the central character of Lucy Honeychurch?

Political criticism

The German philosopher and political thinker Karl Marx (1818–83) was the founder of modern communism. In *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) Marx stated, 'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.' Thus a Marxist literary critical perspective sees works of literature as inevitably conditioned by and reflective of the economic and political forces of their social context. Political criticism, which might include Historicist and Marxist approaches, reminds us that literary texts are products of a particular set of socio-political circumstances from which they cannot be divorced, and that they are informed by a range of cultural preoccupations and anxieties that manifest themselves regardless of whether they are consciously intended by the writer or not. Historicists remind us how texts engage with the warp and weft of history and look at the ways in which readers often find in texts ideas that confirm their own. Marxist critics see literary texts as material products which are part of – and help to explain – the processes of history, as Terry Eagleton notes:

Marxist criticism is not merely a 'sociology of literature', concerned with how novels get published and whether they mention the working class. Its aim is to explain the literary work more fully; and this means a sensitive attention to its forms, styles and meanings. But it also means grasping those forms, styles and meanings as the product of a particular history.

(Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 1976)

Marxist critics see capitalism as a system in which most people work to produce goods and services but do not share equally in the benefits of their labour because the ruling class owns the means of production. Hence Marxist critics see literature as inevitably bound up with the economic and political forces of the times in which they were written. The novel's central female character, Lucy, lacks any official social, political and economic authority as a young woman living in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Yet in some ways the narrative constantly exposes and condemns the **stultifying** conservative norms, ideas and values of Edwardian England, together with its laws, religion and system of education. Financially well-off enough to be able to live very comfortably without having to work for a living, Forster felt uneasy about this situation. This may be seen in his presentation of Mr Emerson and George's professional careers in journalism and engineering, and likeable Freddy Honeychurch as a trainee doctor. In contrast Cecil Vyse's proud boast to Mr Beebe that he has no profession – that is, he is a 'gentleman' who does not need to work for a living – is presented as both vulgar and crass (p.94). Zadie Smith has noted how interestingly Forster deals with characters who are 'privately incomered in a world where most people work' and links this to his own experience of 'independent financial security, because it made him feel that he could not understand the experience of the great majority of his fellow men' (Smith, 2003). Aspects of the text that would be well worth reviewing through this critical lens are referenced elsewhere in this study guide, particularly in the 'Chapter summaries and commentaries' and 'Themes' sections, but here is a reminder of those which are particularly worth revisiting:

- ▼ The class consciousness that causes Mr Emerson to be snubbed, shunned and sidelined within the context of a strictly hierarchical social structure.
- ▼ The division of the labour force, in that Mr Emerson and George work for their livings, whereas Cecil lives off unearned income.
- ▼ The presentation of Lennie, the 'gardener's boy'.
- ▼ The presentation of the Italian cab driver.

Psychoanalytic criticism

Sigmund Freud published one of the founding texts of psychoanalysis, *The Interpretation of Dreams (Die Traumdeutung)*, in 1900. Psychoanalytic critics see literature as dreamlike, since both fictions and dreams are inventions

Build critical skills

A Marxist reading of *A Room with a View* might suggest that human relationships are inevitably warped and distorted by the forces of a capitalist social and political system and that Lucy is in effect just another a commodity to be bought and traded. How do you respond to this view of the text?

stultifying: suffocating and inhibiting.

of the mind that, although based on reality, are obviously not literally true. Psychoanalytic critics look at the significance of the subconscious in order to explore literary representation of character; working with the theories developed by Freud over a century ago they analyse the effect of dreams, fantasies, unconscious desires and aspects of human sexuality, attaching great significance to the underlying hidden meanings of words and actions as revelations of the essential truth about someone's state of mind. Perhaps because it was written at a time when the ideas of Freud were becoming quite widely known in intellectual circles, several key scenes and events within *A Room with a View* lend themselves particularly well to being viewed through this critical lens. Indeed Forster explicitly refers to Freudian psychology at times, inviting his readers to look at the underlying motivations that may be seen to influence the conscious actions of his characters.

One example of how a psychoanalytic reading can be applied to the text is the incident in Chapter 1 when Charlotte Bartlett refuses Mr Emerson's offer to exchange rooms at the pension because she worries that there's an immoral intimacy in moving into a room just vacated by a man. The reader can interpret her behaviour as revealing more about her own repressed sexuality and secret inner longings than any real concern for Lucy's moral welfare. On the other hand right at the end of the novel, George Emerson suggests that 'far down in her heart' – i.e. unconsciously, and in complete negation of all her previous attempts to separate them – Charlotte wanted him and Lucy to be together, and therefore engineered the meeting between Lucy and his father at the rectory. This analysis of Charlotte's motivation, which seems to be endorsed by Forster, can certainly be read as being influenced by Freud.

Of course by far the most important character to look at through this critical lens is Lucy Honeychurch herself. The following examples are some of the ways in which it is possible to examine Lucy's behaviour from this perspective, but you will almost certainly be able to spot others:

- In Chapter 7, just after George has kissed her, Lucy's denial of her true feelings for him can be viewed as displacement illusions predicated upon her burgeoning feelings of mature sexuality being too frightening to be looked at directly. She comes close to admitting to Charlotte that she enjoyed George's kiss and was in fact anticipating and wanting it; 'I am a little to blame. I had silly thoughts. The sky, you know, was gold, and the ground all blue, and for a moment he looked like someone in a book ... Heroes – gods – the nonsense of schoolgirls.' Significantly, as she speaks, 'Lucy's body was shaken by deep sighs which nothing could repress'. She also tries to excuse George, telling Charlotte, 'I think he was taken by surprise, just as I was before', as if trying to rationalise away the kiss in rather primitively Freudian psychological terms, dismissing George's action and her own response as impulses driven by their unconscious minds. Doing this means Lucy can avoid confronting head-on the fact that they are both passionate individuals who feel a strong sexual desire for each other. Ironically, of course, the reader can

use the same psychological critical perspective to observe that Lucy is telling Charlotte a version of the story that reflects a more socially correct and less dangerous truth.

- ▼ When staying at Mrs Vyse's London flat in Chapter 11, Lucy has a nightmare that causes her to cry out in her sleep. Mrs Vyse finds her 'sitting upright [in bed] with her hand on her cheek'. This is shortly after Lucy has received a letter from Charlotte urging her to tell her mother about her 'secret' – that is, George's kiss. A nightmare is usually interpreted as the unconscious mind working through a powerful negative emotional response that breaks through to wake the sleeper and leave them feeling panicky and disorientated, and in a state of extreme shock, distress or fear. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud theorised that nightmares suggest the sufferer is reliving a past stressful event. In Freudian terms, Lucy's dream is very clearly an expression of the stressful situation in which she finds herself: a guest in her fiancé's home unable to forget her feelings for another man.
- ▼ In Chapter 14, Forster uses the language of psychology in a notably direct manner that actually invites the reader to apply such a reading. The narrator describes Lucy using the language of psychology – ironically enough as explained to her by Cecil – to rationalise away her own unconscious desire for George and to further obscure the truth about the depth of George's love for her. As Forster notes teasingly, however, while the reader might see through Lucy's subterfuges all too clearly, that's the easy bit. We can all do that, he suggests. The trickier question is, would the reader see things quite so clearly *if he or she were in Lucy's position themselves?* Of course not:

Lucy faced the situation bravely, though, like most of us, she only faced the situation that encompassed her. She never gazed inwards. If at times strange images rose from the depths, she put them down to nerves. When Cecil brought the Emersons to Summer Street, it had upset her nerves. Charlotte would burnish up past foolishness, and this might upset her nerves. She was nervous at night. When she talked to George – they met again almost immediately at the Rectory – his voice moved her deeply, and she wished to remain near him. How dreadful if she really wished to remain near him! Of course, the wish was due to nerves, which love to play such perverse tricks upon us.

Once she had suffered from 'things that came out of nothing and meant she didn't know what. Now Cecil had explained psychology to her one wet afternoon, and all the troubles of youth in an unknown world could be dismissed.'

It is obvious enough for the reader to conclude, 'She loves young Emerson.' A reader in Lucy's place would not find it obvious. Life is easy to chronicle, but bewildering to practise, and we welcome 'nerves' or any other shibboleth that will cloak our personal desire.



Top ten quotation

'She loved Cecil; George made her nervous; will the reader explain to her that the phrases should have been reversed?

But the external situation – she will face that bravely.'

(p.161)

CRITICAL VIEW

Critics closely associated with queer theory include the Americans Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1950–2009) and Adrienne Rich (1929–2012). You might wish to research their ideas online to see how far you think they might be applied to *A Room with a View*.

Queer theory

The term 'queer theory' was only coined in 1990, but since the late 1960s, as Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan note, critics had begun to examine the 'history of the oppression of gays, lesbians, and practitioners of sexualities other than those deemed normal by the dominant heterosexual group', as well as the 'countercultures of gay and lesbian writing that existed in parallel fashion with the dominant heterosexual culture' (Rivkin and Ryan, *Literary Theory*, 1999: 888). Queer theory is grounded in a debate about whether a person's sexuality is part of their essential self or socially constructed, questioning the default representation of heterosexuality as 'normal' and exploring 'non-heteronormative' sexual behaviour.

It isn't difficult to find undertones of suppressed homosexuality in *A Room with a View* if you bear in mind E.M. Forster's own sexual orientation. The character of Cecil Vyse is especially worth considering in this context. Mr Beebe seems to recognise something unusual about Cecil which makes him unlikely to be a suitable husband for Lucy. 'Mr Vyse is an ideal bachelor ... he's like me – better detached', Beebe notes (p.88). Lucy herself seems to instinctively sense a quality missing in Cecil which she has found, and been deeply disturbed by, in George. Cecil is – clearly – fond of Lucy, regards marriage as a conventional social obligation and is upset when she finally rejects him. The reader senses, however, that Mr Beebe – another man who doesn't seem to be interested in women – is right in that Cecil is not at heart the marrying sort.

An alternative interpretation would be that Mr Beebe has simply observed and identified with Cecil's self-absorption and knows that it is unlikely to make him a happy husband. There is a further hint when Cecil tries to kiss Lucy but 'as he approached ... found time to wish that he could recoil' as if he isn't physically drawn to her at all. While it could be that Cecil has no sexual experience, isn't used to kissing and is too nervous to do it with conviction and feeling, this essential innocence, typical of his social class and context, does little to inhibit George and Lucy. As Zadie Smith has noted, Forster's novels contain a group of:

'voyeurs' or 'conscientious abstainer[s]' from life ... A specific philosophic type is meant here: this is the man whose life-reading skills are as good as we might hope them to be, but who chooses only to read, to observe, but not to be involved. They are the novel's flaneurs. They invariably think of themselves as 'students of human nature', and they

are condemned by both authors as Aristotle properly condemns them, as people inured to the responsibilities of proper human involvement.

(Smith, 2003)

Smith includes both Mr Beebe and Cecil Vyse within this group, arguing that 'Forster's voyeurs are very much more layered, and are offered a great deal more empathy' than comparable characters in the novels of Jane Austen:

The most obvious reason is Forster's own personal interest in them. Several critics have pointed to a sublimated homosexuality here; they are, to a man, unmarried and uninterested, and as such they are estranged from the romantic fictions they inhabit.

(Smith, 2003)

George Emerson, who attracts Lucy so much – against the conditioned judgement of some members of her family – is an outsider. Forster was himself a different sort of outsider. He was gay, at a time when homosexuality was illegal. Modern readers and post-modernist critics of *A Room with a View* inevitably see parallels between the cautious, sometimes troubled Forster who often couldn't have what he wanted and George who sees the love of his life clearly before him but thinks it will elude him. 'He is not that sort [that is, homosexual] – no one whom I like seems to be', Forster wrote in 1908 of a man he was attracted to. At the same time we might detect echoes of Forster's own struggles with sexuality in a novel which presents the burgeoning sexuality of a young woman. As critic Claude Summers has observed, it is remarkable that Forster's wrestling with homosexual desire should give rise to one of the richest depictions of heterosexual love in the English language (1983).

TASK

Watch the final scene of each film version two or three times and compare each closely with the printed text. At this point in the story, how do you interpret each director's vision?

Performance context

When studying *A Room with a View*, watching either (or preferably both) the 1985 and 2007 film versions of the text will certainly enhance your ability to engage with the novel as long as you keep asking yourself what has been gained and what has been lost in the move from page to screen.