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**ASPECTS OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AND
SYMBOLISM IN EDWARD MORGAN FORSTER'S NOVEL
A ROOM WITH A VIEW
BA thesis**

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**TARTU
2018**

ABSTRACT

The motivation for writing this paper is mainly gaining more insight and knowledge on the symbolism Edward Morgan Forster is famed for and employs in his novel *A Room with a View* in order to convey his opinions on the relationships between social classes and the conventions prevalent in the society of the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. My aim is to gain a deeper understanding of Forster's perspectives regarding these issues by way of analysing the characters of this novel and their behaviours, the scenes Forster sets and the narrative techniques he uses to express certain ideas and motives.

In the introduction, I will explain the exact subject of this thesis and the motivation for analysing it, and I will present the sources I will use for the purpose of this research, as well as how I will use them.

In the first chapter, I will explore the background of Edward Morgan Forster's life and his novel *A Room with a View* by drawing on Philip Nicholas Furbank's *E. M. Forster: A Life*, Andrew Sanders' *The Short Oxford History of English Literature* and the Penguin Random House homepage; I will examine the film company Merchant Ivory Productions through their homepage, and I will also explore the differences between book and film and how these differences affect the analysis with the help of Julie Sanders' *Adaptation and Appropriation*.

In the second chapter, I will delve into the perception of class and how Forster's characters fit into society.

Following this is an extensive chapter concerning the different patterns of symbolism used in this novel, including some of the characters' associations with rooms or views and allusions to art, architecture and music. This is done by relying mostly on the novel itself, with some additional background information on certain topics extracted from the film adaptation and select articles, essays and other internet sources.

The results of the analysis executed in the thesis are presented in the conclusion.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	2
INTRODUCTION	4
EDWARD MORGAN FORSTER AND A <i>ROOM WITH A VIEW</i>	6
PERCEPTION OF CLASS	9
SYMBOLISM	13
CONCLUSION	26
LIST OF REFERENCES	28
Primary sources	28
Secondary sources	28
RESÛMEE	29

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, my aim is to analyse the symbolism and themes Edward Morgan Forster employs in his 1908 novel *A Room with a View* and, more specifically, how the characters and their interpersonal relationships are presented, how the issues relevant in the time period the book represents and was published in are depicted, as well as how life in the British upper classes is demonstrated and contrasted with the other social classes in this period. As the issues dealt with in this novel are not foreign to the modern society and the subtexts Forster develops through the course of the story can be interpreted in many ways, I feel that this is a compelling subject to study more closely.

In addition to the book, which is the main source of this thesis, I will also work with the Merchant Ivory Productions' 1985 film adaptation of the same name in order to draw comparisons and to better understand the symbolism used in the novel through the similarities of the book and film; the biography *E. M. Forster: A Life* by Philip Nicolas Furbank for a more in-depth analysis of Edward Morgan Forster's life, specifically the background and inspiration for the novel *A Room with a View*, for which I will also be using *The Short Oxford History of English Literature* by Andrew Sanders; *The Best Circles: Society, Etiquette and The Season* by Leonore Davidoff for character analysis, and select articles and essays for additional details which will help to further support my research.

Although the main focus of this thesis is not to compare the book and film versions of *A Room with a View*, but mainly to analyse the book, I believe that highlighting certain parallels between the two, as well as going into further detail in certain scenes seen in the film will help to draw attention to some interesting aspects of the symbolism and to facilitate the understanding of the allusions and subtexts Forster employs. As he is famed for the use of satire and symbolism to express his views on issues prevalent in his time, I am going to focus on analysing his viewpoints through his characters and their behaviours and the

narrative techniques he uses, as well as acquiring a better grasp of topics concerning class, reticence and sexual repression.

EDWARD MORGAN FORSTER AND *A ROOM WITH A VIEW*

Edward Morgan Forster was an English author whose novels mainly address the attitudes of the Edwardian middle class, repression of sexuality, social standards and traditions. His third novel, *A Room with a View*, which I will also be examining for the purpose of this thesis, tackles the issue of repressing one's desires in order to conform to society and the opinions which create barriers between social classes, and with this book, Forster does this in the guise of a "love story" (Sanders 2004: 497). In 1901, Forster and his mother travelled to Florence and the incentive for the novel can be traced back to this event, even though the writing of this book extended to around eight years. During this trip, Forster was inspired by the people he met in Italy and he modelled many of the characters after them. The hotel him and his mother stayed in was also the inspiration for the Pension Bertolini, and their experiences there were rather similar to those of Lucy Honeychurch and Charlotte Bartlett; for example, them discovering that most of the hotel was occupied by "elderly English ladies", which is why it felt as if they were back in England (Furbank 2008: 82). Through the multifaceted characters and the tumultuous relationship between the rather traditional Honeychurches, the spontaneous Emersons and many others, Forster has put into words his misgivings regarding English middle class society and his anguish due to having to conceal his true identity, the literary equivalent of himself being Lucy Honeychurch (Penguin Random House N.d.: para. 3). While reading the biography written by Furbank, an interesting parallel which is not specifically called attention to, but which supports this comparison, arises. Forster's mother reveals his absent-minded nature, saying that he constantly loses his things, forgets important information and even injures himself (Furbank 2008: 84). At one point, he breaks his right arm, but in his mother's words, he patiently "bears the inconvenience". This forces him to learn to write with his left hand, which proves to be challenging, but also becomes a source of hope and change. Forster explains that

writing with his left hand seems as if a different person is writing, which he thinks might facilitate the expression of ideas and thoughts he had previously found difficult to express (Furbank 2008: 89). It appears that due to this accident, Forster could not go to Greece as he had planned, but he was not troubled by it, because “at last Italy had begun to wake up, and he with it” (Furbank 2008: 90). This seems very similar to the experiences of Lucy, not in the sense that she physically injures herself, but that she also encounters situations which change her life and her way of thinking. An instance where this parallel becomes the most apparent is perhaps Lucy’s decision not to go to Greece, but to go to Italy with George (Forster 1958: 219). This certainly represents a life-changing event, after which Lucy has to become accustomed to a new way of life and behaviour, as did Forster, when he had to learn to write with his left hand.

Along with *A Room with a View*, the film company Merchant Ivory Productions produced two more film adaptations of Edward Morgan Forster’s books – *Maurice* and *Howard’s End*. However, *A Room with a View* was the first of Forster’s books to be adapted to much critical acclaim (Merchant Ivory Productions N.d.: para. 24, 25, 31). Here, it might be necessary to define adaptation, which typically implies “a more sustained and deeper engagement usually with a single text or source, than the more glancing act of allusion or quotation, even citation, allows” (Sanders 2015: 5). This seems like an appropriate classification for the film, as there are many similarities between it and the book, such as the chapter titles from the book serving as intertitles in the film and the almost identical conversations and situations, but there are some significant differences owing to the respective advantages of book and film that might prove useful to be mentioned, in order to enable the analysis of the symbolism used in the book from different perspectives. In the film, Merchant-Ivory has the obvious benefit of conveying the characters’ attitudes by making use of their demeanour and body language, as well as alluding to certain ideas in the

background of a scene, for example, without having to verbalise them; while in the book, the author must limit himself to words, but at the same time, he cannot overtly state the concepts he wishes to convey without them becoming excessively explanatory. This demonstrates that both book and film have their own advantages and disadvantages and should certainly be considered art in and of themselves. Despite these differences, the film is not rendered an appropriation. Although it is difficult to unequivocally explain the concept of it and its definitions range from positive to negative, it can be said that appropriation often involves “a more decisive journey away from the informing text into a wholly new cultural product and domain, often through the actions of interpolation and critique” (Sanders 2015: 35). Considering this, it might be deduced that Merchant-Ivory’s film is indeed an adaptation rather than an appropriation.

Therefore, it might be difficult to compare these two media with the purpose of finding significant differences to analyse. Instead of this, the main objective of contrasting them could be to better understand certain characters and situations by means of the similarities between them. For example, if a certain instance in the book seems ambiguous and is difficult to determine, and if the film includes a version of it as well, it might serve as a clarification as to what it could have been intended to express. Through the comparison of the book and the adaptation and by exploring Forster’s own background, it might be easier to illuminate specific aspects of the novel and to introduce different ideas and interpretations.

PERCEPTION OF CLASS

Prejudice between social classes has been an issue for centuries and still is today. Forster depicts this matter from the viewpoint that those of higher status tend to hold people that might, in some respects, be classified as inferior in disdain. He illustrates this by emphasising the differences between people of different classes and, more specifically, through some of the characters' behaviour towards those who are of a seemingly lower status.

Cecil Vyse, who is undoubtedly representative of the upper class, frequently engages in behaviour which expresses his stance in regards to the people he interacts with. For example, he seems to sneer whenever Mrs Honeychurch speaks and when Freddy plays the piano and sings comical songs (Forster 1958: 144). He appears patronising and judgmental, although mostly in his thoughts and expressions. He also calls the Emersons his protégés (Forster 1958: 164), implying that they are somewhat lesser in status and need guidance and education from him, even though it is revealed that Cecil is, in reality, not very interested in them or their welfare. This could be explained by the attitude towards people who neglected the rules and expectations of society, because they were seen as a threat and a source of trouble for the established system (Davidoff 1973: 39), and the same could be said about the Emersons, owing to their unorthodox approach to life. Forster goes on to elaborate on this prejudice by stating that Cecil does not realise Lucy wishes to be equal to him, not be protected by him, and this further corroborates the depiction of Cecil as someone with preconceived opinions. Seeing as this novel was partly intended as a satirical perspective on social norms, it would not be improbable to suggest Cecil's personality and behaviour could be due to the conditioning in the society he was brought up in. It often seems as though he is 'wearing a mask' and acting according to what is expected of him in his usual social circles, which, again, is not improbable, given the time period. There is one instance in the

novel when Forster, too, seems to support this. After Freddy leaves a bone on a chair in Windy Corner, Cecil is quite bothered, but then Forster says that “Cecil considered the bone and the Maple’s furniture separately; he did not realise that, taken together, they kindled the room into the life that he desired” (Forster 1958: 96–97). The fact that Cecil could accept Lucy’s judgement of his character without any feeling of contempt and thank her for it further shows the possibility of redemption for his character (Forster 1958: 185). Thus, perhaps he should not be considered a literal antagonist, but rather a representation of a specific quality which Forster expresses his dislike towards, yet also implies the possible improvement of.

Discrimination can also be seen in the behaviour of Eleanor Lavish and Charlotte Bartlett, and although they seem to be of the middle class, hierarchies exist within a class, as well. Miss Lavish is introduced as a seemingly clever, but arrogant woman. She tells Lucy that “you will never repent of a little civility to your inferiors” (Forster 1958: 21), and even after Lucy has said that the Emersons are kind people, Miss Lavish still insists that they are crude and that they do not belong in ‘her’ Italy (Forster 1958: 24), and after finding out that George works on the railway, she immediately assumes that he is a porter (Forster 1958: 72). Furthermore, although she does seem conflicted for a moment, she does not change her view on Mr Emerson when he protests against Mr Eager demanding the driver’s lover to leave while on their way to see a view, saying that “it is hard when a person you have classed as typically British speaks out of his character” (Forster 1958: 72). She claims to be open-minded and forward-thinking, but she is not as progressive as she claims to be if she cannot look past class differences even when she finds that she shares an opinion with someone. She believes that she is the only one who understands the essence of Italy and holds most other tourists in contempt. Although she might be correct, to some extent, in that a guide book cannot fully convey the intricacies and essence of a culture, Miss Lavish nevertheless

comes across as condescending, pretentious and, in Forster's words, "playful as a kitten, though without a kitten's grace" (Forster 1958: 21). It seems that Miss Lavish is supposed to portray the New Woman, prevalent at the end of the 19th century, who is described as wishing to gain control and freedom over her own life, being well-educated and "seeking to eliminate the double standard that shaped the sexual mores of the time" (Finney 1989: 195). Taking this into consideration, Miss Lavish does, in a sense, seem to be an example of this rebellious figure, but she ultimately fails in capturing the true essence of the progressive, free-thinking woman.

While Miss Lavish is very vocal about her supposed superiority, Miss Bartlett's actions are mostly subdued, sometimes even comically so. At the beginning of the novel, when Mr Emerson first addresses Ms Honeychurch and Ms Bartlett, the latter's thoughts are immediately revealed to the readers, showing that she has already determined what status he is of just by looking at his appearance, and this has lowered his worth in her eyes (Forster 1958: 8). She goes on to thank the older Emerson for offering them their rooms but says that it is "out of the question", without any further explanation (Forster 1958: 9), while in the film, she is depicted as being a bit more polite when she says "we could not impose on your kindness" (Ivory 1985: 5:51–5:55). The refusal, however, still stems from prejudice. Later in the story, she is also appalled when she discovers that George works on the railway, although it seems as if she is more worried about him being offended by the question (Forster 1958: 72). The author gives the readers ample opportunity to form an opinion on the rather old-fashioned Charlotte Bartlett, sometimes even going as far as mocking the way she speaks and conducts herself. Her cautious and dated behaviour might be the result of the "social pressure" that was put on women to care for their homes and family – in this case, Lucy – while maintaining discipline and trying to appear composed (Davidoff 1973: 92, 94). Nonetheless, at the end of the novel, she has gone through a kind of a change and instead of

attempting to thwart Lucy and George's relationship, they speculate that she might have instead encouraged it in the end (Forster 1958: 222–223).

In contrast to the satirical portrayal of Miss Bartlett, although Mr Emerson can also seem quite comical in his behaviour, he is portrayed in a much gentler manner, giving the impression that Forster has great respect for him. Such characters have appeared in Forster's other novels and have been termed 'noble peasants' – working-class people who are kind and caring, yet straightforward, and who believe in equality and love (Olson 1988: 394), and Mr Emerson certainly seems to correspond to this image. What is more, Forster created this character with Edward Carpenter in mind, who was "a social pioneer who believed in equality for women and open expression of homosexual love". Forster held Carpenter in high regard and considered him somewhat of a mentor, as he helped him better understand himself (Penguin Random House N.d.: para. 4).

Even though at no point does Forster explicitly indicate at either party being of any certain status, both the Emersons and the Honeychurches seem to be part of the middle class. Despite this, the Emersons are still regarded as if they are of the working class and although the Honeychurches are upper middle class, they still exhibit behavioural patterns peculiar to the middle class, but their worth is generally not diminished due to this. It is only Cecil whose thoughts often reveal his arrogance, how he wishes to refurbish Windy Corner and change Lucy 'for the better' (Forster 1958: 96).

SYMBOLISM

It would be rather inadequate to speak about *A Room with a View* without paying attention to the metaphors and symbolism it entails, through which Forster demonstrates the social stratification and prejudices throughout the novel.

The story begins to unfold after the main plot point is revealed at the beginning of the book, which is the desire for the titular room with a view. One of the most important distinctions that is made in this novel is some of the characters' associations with either a room – symbolic of inhibition, lack of passion and expression of feeling – or with nature and a view – symbolic of freedom, sincerity and unrestrained passion. Cecil addresses the suspicion he has about Lucy equating him to a room when they are out in nature and Lucy suggests they walk on the road, rather than on an unfrequented path through the forest (Forster 1958: 113). She denies this at first, but then acknowledges that she does, indeed, see him as being more fit for a room, particularly one without a view (Forster 1958: 114). While Cecil is disappointed with this comparison and would rather be connected with nature, it must be said that one cannot expect this if they do not behave accordingly, and it does not seem that Cecil makes any conscious attempts to better fit into this desired comparison. What unbalances this idea, however, is one action of his which stands out against the rest of his behaviour – after Lucy has accepted Cecil's proposal and he enters the Honeychurch residence at Windy Corner to announce this, he opens the curtains because he despises “the Honeychurch habit of sitting in the dark to save the furniture” and by doing so, he lets light into the room as well as reveals a view overlooking the terrace and the Sussex Weald (Forster 1958: 92–93). Due to Cecil being equated to the Medieval Revival and Gothic art – which is a subject that will be analysed more in depth later in this thesis – this action might seem out of character at first, seeing as this era and by extension, Gothic art might be seen as dispassionate, reserved and ‘dark’, so to speak. However, because it was not prompted by

the desire for a view, which Cecil pays no further attention to after opening the curtains, and because it is described as being done because of a tendency of the Honeychurches that he does not like, it can be assumed that there is no deeper meaning to it other than trying to show what kind of simple things irritate Cecil, showing him in a negative light immediately after he first appears.

Cecil sees Lucy as being associated with a view, but he then goes on to describe her as a flower, albeit one which blooms, but has no leaves (Forster 1958: 115). Not only does this reduce Lucy to a mere object, but the lack of leaves on the metaphorical flower also suggests that Cecil considers Lucy's beauty the only thing worthy of being admired, overlooking her qualities, the different sides of her and altogether depth that makes her into who she is. The association with a view – and therefore, nature – which Cecil makes is nevertheless correct, considering instances such as Forster describing Lucy playing in the woods near her home when she was little and bathing in the Sacred Lake (Forster 1958: 114) or her playing tennis and sitting on the grass (Forster 1958: 166), which clearly prove how comfortable she is not only in rooms with a view, but in nature. Another instance worth noting is when Lucy is explaining to George that he must stop any and all romantic advances upon her and that she is going to marry Cecil – all this happens in a room (Forster 1958: 176). She stands firm against George's reasonings and it seems that only after he has left and she walks outside does she consider what she truly believes and feels the onset of autumn and the decay of nature (Forster 1958: 179), perhaps symbolic of the possible end of Lucy and George's relationship. The implication that Lucy realises her true feelings when outside further supports the truthfulness of the connection of her with nature.

The same can be said for George as well. Although he is never explicitly connected to a view, he is often placed in settings which suggest his connection with one. One of the most prominent examples is in chapter six, when Lucy finds George standing in a field of violets.

Forster paints a vivid picture with his description of the view that unfolds in front of Lucy. It seems George's character invokes images of nature at its finest – rivers, hills and streams of violets resembling water, and it is as if Lucy finally comes to realise this, and possibly her love for George, when Forster writes “the view was forming at last” (Forster 1958: 75). The association of both these characters with nature and views is further reinforced at the end of the novel, when they are finally together and are sitting under an open window at the Pension Bertolini (Forster 1958: 221). Whether it is playing and bathing in the Sacred Lake with Freddy and Mr Beebe (Forster 1958: 137–140), playing tennis at Windy Corner (Forster 1958: 166) or kissing Lucy in the middle of a field (Forster 1958: 75), most of George's more important moments take place in the open air and it is apparent that he is a character who can only be thought of outdoors, in nature.

Although an incident concerning the Alans, the Emersons and violets was mentioned towards the beginning of the book (Forster 1958: 42), it was not elaborated on until a few chapters later, when Mr Beebe reveals that the Emersons had, at one point, decorated the Miss Alans' room with violets, which is why he associates them with the flowers (Forster 1958: 122), therefore effectively corroborating George's, as well as Mr Emerson's equation to them. The latter's association with a view is also illustrated in the first chapter of the novel, when Lucy thinks of him as someone who had “enabled her to see the lights dancing in the Arno and the cypresses of San Miniato, and the foot-hills of the Apennines, black against the rising moon” (Forster 1958: 18).

On the same page, Mr Emerson is contrasted with Miss Bartlett. When she embraces Lucy, the sensation is described as feeling like a “fog”, and further on, while Lucy opens the window in her room, Miss Bartlett is shown to close the window, lock the door and inspect the room, in case there are any hidden entries (Forster 1958: 18). Her always closing and locking doors and windows, but most importantly, ushering Lucy away from open windows

are situations that occur a few times in the novel (Forster 1958: 20, 82), but enough to become intriguing. It is worth noting that at one point in the book, Miss Catharine Alan has an adverse reaction to Lucy opening the window as well, and she goes on to stress the importance of shutting doors for the sake of privacy (Forster 1958: 38). Perhaps this is just due to Charlotte Bartlett's and Catharine Alan's inherent 'Englishness' and the desire for privacy, inhibition and detachment, which are suggested to be characteristic of British society. When regarding these actions in terms of the symbolism of views in this novel, this could be another manner in which Forster attempts to convey the association of certain characters with rooms, instead of views.

From the beginning of the book, it seems that Forster relies on references to art, particularly paintings and sculptures, in order to offer insight into the personalities of characters and to support certain subtexts which he has formed, such as Cecil Vyse representing the upper class. Furthermore, Forster (1958: 93) describes Cecil as being "medieval /.../ like a Gothic statue" – French Gothic, to be specific – and goes on to give a more detailed illustration of his resemblance to that art style. Here he also alludes to asceticism, which is "the practice of the denial of physical or psychological desires in order to attain a spiritual ideal or goal" (Encyclopædia Britannica 2013: para. 1). This was common in the Middle Ages as well as in the Victorian era during the Victorian Medieval Revival, and Cecil seems to be a good example of both these time periods, as asceticism can be found in the behaviours and beliefs of those in the upper class as well. Moreover, the Gothic revival of the 19th century incorporated the use of Gothic elements mainly for the purpose of aesthetics, rather than practicality. Its "picturesque and romantic qualities" were used in art and architecture without regard to whether these qualities would be functional or, in the case of construction, help in designing the structure of a building (Encyclopædia Britannica 2017: para. 2). In a way, the same could be said about Cecil. There is no instance

in the novel where he does anything that is of particular use to anyone and it seems that he puts more effort into his appearance than he does into developing his personality. However, it appears that he is aware of it, himself. For example, when asked about his profession, Cecil replies:

I have no profession /.../ It is another example of my decadence. My attitude – quite an indefensible one – is that so long as I am no trouble to anyone I have a right to do as I like. I know I ought to be getting money out of people, or devoting myself to things I don't care a straw about, but somehow, I've not been able to begin. (Forster 1958: 97–98)

Self-awareness in such a character is an intriguing quality, although he may not realise what kind of an impression he leaves by commending himself for his shortcomings. Furthermore, when Freddy asks him to play tennis, Cecil replies by saying “My dear Freddy, I am no athlete. As you well remarked this very morning, ‘There are some chaps who are no good for anything but books’; I plead guilty to being such a chap”. This, along with bringing Lucy to the realisation that she cannot tolerate being with Cecil any longer (Forster 1958: 180), is the prime example of Cecil Vyse representing Gothic art and the Victorian Medieval Revival.

When considering George, Forster describes him through Lucy's eyes as resembling the figures from Michelangelo's paintings, such as the one on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel (Forster 1958: 30). This allows the readers to see the similarities between the innovation Michelangelo brought into the world of art – for example, the detail in the muscles and skin, which was seen as rather controversial at the time – and the unconventional behaviour and habits of George. The connection is mentioned once again towards the end of the book, when George is seen reclining “Michelangelesque on the flooded margin” (Forster 1958: 138). It seems that the aim of the author is to liken the dynamic, passionate and realistic nature of Michelangelo's work to the sincerity George demonstrates, and to contrast this with the austere and unembellished style which both Cecil and Gothic art represent.

In addition to Cecil and George, Lucy is likened to a certain art style as well. Throughout the novel, she is described as though she is one of the women from Leonardo da Vinci's paintings. Cecil specifically highlights and marvels at the reticence she begins to display after the trip to Italy (Forster 1958: 95), but not so much in the sense of mystery as in the quiet beauty deemed appropriate for women to embody at the time. It is revealed through Lucy's behaviour and inner turmoil that which Cecil finds wonderful leaves her anxious and confused and prone to outbursts which do not correspond with the characteristics of da Vinci's paintings. When Lucy expresses her hatred towards the clergyman Mr Eager, Cecil remarks that it is as unbecoming as seeing a "Leonardo on the ceiling of the Sistine", which is an apt comparison theoretically, but odd in that the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel was painted by Michelangelo, who was renowned for the passion and power he could convey through his figures; therefore, whatever it is that Lucy represents would, most likely, belong on the ceiling of the Sistine, but this renders Cecil's comparison of Lucy to Leonardo da Vinci's paintings inaccurate. However, he goes on to say that even though "a woman's power and charm reside in mystery, not in muscular rant", he would allow her certain liberties, as such expression of one's thought might be a sign of life and spirit (Forster 1958: 106), but this strangely resembles the relationship between a master and a pet.

All these comparisons come together in the book as a type of timeline of its own. The readers are first introduced to Cecil as a representative of the art of the Middle Ages – it is worth noting that this is done without referring to a specific artist – then to Lucy and the paintings of Leonardo da Vinci, following by George and Michelangelo's work, both representative of the art of the Renaissance. As these two characters are connected in the art of this time period, they are also joined together by their mutual longing for genuineness and passion, while Cecil represents narrow-mindedness and self-righteousness, which is what

Lucy aims to escape from, although she does not fully realise this until the end of the novel. This timeline is further supported by the title of the twentieth chapter: “The End of the Middle Ages” (Forster 1958: 219). The readers are taken on a tour through the ages and by the end of the book, they see Lucy finally arriving in the Renaissance era, which could be interpreted as her acknowledging and accepting her feelings for George.

An interesting metaphor, albeit a rather obscure one, is revealed in the film after Lucy witnesses a murder in the Piazza della Signoria, but it is not, however, explicitly mentioned in the fourth chapter of the book. When Lucy and George are speaking on the embankment of the River Arno, the scene is filmed so that the Uffizi Gallery can be seen behind them, as well as the tower of the Palazzo Vecchio (Ivory 1985: 25:59–27:43). The Renaissance era Uffizi Gallery is a famous museum which houses some of the most well-known paintings in history, most of which are from the Renaissance era (Florence Museum N.d.: para. 10), while the Palazzo Vecchio, a significant government building, seen in the distance in the scene offers an undoubtedly more Gothic quality (Encyclopædia Britannica 2013: para. 1, para. 2). Furthermore, in order to build the large gallery in the U-shape the Grand Duke of Tuscany Cosimo I de’ Medici desired, many buildings were destroyed, most notably the San Pier Scheraggio church, built in the Romanesque style which eventually developed into the Gothic style (Uffizi.org N.d.: para. 3). The placement of the two main characters in front of the Renaissance era gallery, overshadowing a Medieval period building and made way for by demolishing an important church from that time seems very symbolic and quite like foreshadowing for Lucy’s escape from the personification of the Middle Ages in the form of Cecil into the Renaissance represented by George. Nonetheless, whether or not this symbolism is intentional is uncertain, but if it was truly a deliberate decision by Merchant-Ivory, it is quite a subtle yet clever reference worthy of comparison to those which Forster often employs.

Besides this, a very important point in the plot takes place in this scene. After having witnessed the murder in the Piazza della Signoria, Lucy faints and drops the pictures she had bought from a shop (Forster 1958: 46). George picks them up as per her request and afterwards, when Lucy and George are speaking in front of the Uffizi Gallery, he throws the pictures into the river in the middle of their conversation. When Lucy asks why he did it, he explains that he did not know what to do with them as they were covered in blood (Forster 1958: 49), which, as is obvious in the film but not mentioned in the book, they were not (Ivory 1985: 23:05). It is not clear whether this was intentional or a detail that the filmmakers missed, although it might be quite disrespectful to suggest that. The sincerity of George's behaviour and the lack of any indication of some veiled suggestions would certainly make more sense if the pictures were ruined, but if one were to assume that the pictures were truly not meant to be soiled with blood, and since no other explanation is offered as to why George throws the pictures into the river, this could be the subject of much speculation. Throughout the novel, the Emersons are portrayed as rather unconventional people and while it is true that they are the recipients of much disdain due to this, they are shown in a positive light and described as the type of people who wish to experience everything first-hand. As the pictures are of art from the Renaissance era, it could be said that Lucy buys them because the open expression of freedom, passion and sincerity illustrated in those pictures is what she strives to achieve but is repressing. Therefore, it may be that George disposes of them because he has already seen the beginnings of those qualities in Lucy and believes that it would be easier for her to accomplish all this if she is not tethered to material possessions that might give the illusion of having progressed into a new era, thus hindering her actual development. Then, George goes on to explain that something has changed for the both of them – even though Lucy denies it and acts as if she does not understand what he means – and he says that “I shall want to live” (Forster 1958: 51). This is an important stage in the story, because it is

the specific point where George realises that there is, indeed, more to life than what he had initially thought, and though this can be deduced the first time this sentence is said, only towards the end of the book does Forster explain that George truly wants to experience life at its fullest and to “stand for all he was worth in the sun” (Forster 1958: 166). Although he seems to have a pessimistic outlook on life and appears apathetic and melancholy throughout most of the novel, it is clear that he goes through a significant development – from seeing nothing worth living for and having question marks (which will be elaborated on in the next paragraph) overshadow every aspect of his life to realising that there might be people with the same ambitions and qualities as him. Considering this, the fact that this line was omitted from the film might be quite perplexing. One could argue that this was a small change on the part of the filmmakers due to the belief that it is better to show rather than to tell, but George ending the scene by saying “something’s happened to me, and to you” (Ivory 1985: 27:36–27:40) seems a bit too plain and straightforward, and somehow diminishes the mystery and the extent of George’s growth that Forster possibly aimed to present.

Another intriguing instance of symbolism that was briefly mentioned in the previous paragraph is the note of interrogation which seems to govern much of George’s life. First, Ms Bartlett finds it drawn on a piece of paper that is pinned to the wall in the room previously belonging to George, and after finding it disturbing and ominous, she decides against destroying it, but takes it down (Forster 1958: 18). Then, Mr Emerson explains to Lucy how George believes in the ‘everlasting Why’ when they are speaking in the Santa Croce church (Forster 1958: 32) and later in the story, George tells Mrs Honeychurch that as opposed to Freddy adopting cleverness as his philosophy, his first course of action in life is asking questions (Forster 1958: 162). Additionally, in the film, there is an instance where George forms a question mark out of the food he is eating and proceeds to show it to Lucy before they have even spoken (Ivory 1985: 4:06–4:11). Taking into account the manner in which

the narrator and Mr Emerson describe George, it seems as if by means of this question mark, he is questioning everything, life in particular, as well as his own place in it, but it might also have a more sombre meaning, indicating that not only does George question everything, but he does not see the point or value of anything. This might also be why Miss Bartlett found the question mark in her room so intimidating, as for a person who does not dare stray from the path laid out before her by those who determine what the norm in society is and is relatively content in her life, asking questions may seem like a sure way to bring about unpredictable consequences.

To avoid unexpected situations, Lucy Honeychurch relies on her Baedeker when traversing the streets of Florence, as was the case for many in the middle class. Both Baedeker and his travel guides and Ruskin and his critiques were seen as some type of beacons for the middle class, in the sense that people were able to identify with them and they could strive to rise to the same level as the aristocracy with the help and inspiration of these guides. Besides this, people looked to them for guidance in how to think and this is demonstrated in the novel as well. For example, when Lucy is left alone in the church of Santa Croce without her Baedeker, she worries how she will know what is worth looking at and considering beautiful if there is no one there to tell her (Forster 1958: 25). The ridiculousness of this sentiment is further supported when Lucy encounters the Emersons and after having explained her concern, Mr Emerson reacts rather sarcastically by saying “it’s worth minding, the loss of a Baedeker. *That’s* worth minding” (Forster 1958: 27). His dislike for people following such preconceived views becomes even more apparent when he repeatedly interrupts a lecturer “directing [the congregation] how to worship Giotto” speaking in the Santa Croce, who finally leaves with his audience, all of whom have guide-books with them (Forster 1958: 28–29). In actuality, Mr Emerson means no harm and merely finds that people should be open to different interpretations of the various aspects of life and

that it should be possible to at least discuss them, because it is senseless to just follow in somebody else's exact footsteps without question. It appears that he believes in looking at the 'big picture' and at every part of life, no matter how beautiful or ugly it is, as opposed to focusing on the minute details that have been processed to perfection. This is also evidenced at the end of the nineteenth chapter, where Forster writes that in later years, Lucy would go on to say that "it was as if [Mr Emerson] had made her see the whole of everything at once" (Forster 1958: 218). This perspective might be shared by George as well. For example, the instance when he throws the pictures Lucy had bought into the river (Forster 1958: 49) could be explained by the same reasoning – George, like his father, wishes to experience life as it is, not just the parts of it that everybody is familiar with and worships. Without restricting oneself to what others have said is worth worshipping and by being open-minded, it is possible to alleviate some of the pressure to belong that is put on people, as is displayed by Lucy, when "instead of acquiring information, she began to be happy" (Forster 1958: 25).

As in the case of the art references used throughout this novel, Forster also uses musical symbolism quite often, and one cannot look past the importance of music in this novel, especially when considering Lucy. Forster explains that playing the piano helps Lucy to escape from the real world and to be herself, to better cope with and understand life, and that music is accepting towards anyone, no matter what their background (Forster 1958: 34). It is eventually revealed that Lucy's growth is illustrated to the readers through some examples of music. Although she does not play perfectly, the passion she displays when playing the compositions of Beethoven is sometimes reprimanded, due to the excessive honesty and intensity the composer's works convey (Forster 1958: 35), and blamed, when Lucy makes decisions others consider unwise, such as impulsively partaking in an adventure, eliciting the remark "too much Beethoven" (Forster 1958: 43–44). However, the first thing Mr Beebe says to Lucy is that "if Miss Honeychurch ever takes to live as she plays, it will

be very exciting – both for us and for her” (Forster 1958: 36), alluding to the passion in Beethoven’s compositions, and that is the only instance in the novel when Lucy’s affinity towards Beethoven’s music is seen in a positive light. In hindsight, this could definitely be considered foreshadowing, as through playing the composer’s pieces, Lucy can express herself safely without being criticised for disregarding social norms, which is what she wishes to and does achieve in real life, to a certain extent. In the eleventh chapter, Cecil decides to invite some guests to his flat for a dinner-party, in order to begin introducing her into the circles he frequents. She plays Schumann on the piano and when Cecil asks her to play Beethoven, she refuses. She continues playing the piece by Schumann, which is described as being enchanting, yet melancholy and “incomplete”, unlike the works of Beethoven (Forster 1958: 129). This might be because of the sadness Lucy feels inside, when she realises that this new life in London would eventually alienate her from everything she loves at home. Although she is somewhat impressed by the people present, it seems she cannot bring herself to play something as inspiring and passionate as Beethoven where she feels it would not be appropriately received. Further in the story, she plays a piece by Gluck and when Cecil asks her to play a composition by Wagner, she does not obey once again. However, when she sees that George enters the room, she decides that she will play anything that Cecil wants (Forster 1958: 165). The reason for that most likely has nothing to do with Cecil himself, but the appearance of George and Lucy wanting to either have something to do, so that she would not have to confront George, or her wanting to give the impression that recent events have not impacted her at all. The opposite becomes apparent, however, when she “played a few bars of the Flower Maidens’ song very badly, and then she stopped” (Forster 1958: 165). Then, there is an instance where Lucy is playing the Sonatas of Mozart which are known for their complexity and versatility. She stops when Mr Beebe enters, and after he comments on them being “delicate”, she crosses over to Schumann, once again

symbolising the anguish she cannot express, but then returns to Mozart when Mr Beebe has left (Forster 1958: 192). Lucy not being able to keep to one single piece might be symbolic of the confusion she is experiencing, especially as she has just ended the engagement between her and Cecil.

These examples demonstrate that no matter how well Lucy conceals her true feelings and thoughts in real life, she cannot seem to do so when it comes to her piano playing. While it is true that music used to be an escape from the real world for her and a way to communicate her feelings, it has lost that function ever since she discovered the ‘muddle’ in her life, which signifies the confusion and turmoil she feels inside. This is indicated in her considering music ‘the employment of a child’ (Forster 1958: 80) after the first kiss with George Emerson has taken place, surely an event which confuses her even further. It seems that she no longer regards music as a means by which she can fully express herself, which is why her piano playing from this point forward seems inconsistent and ‘muddled’, and instead needs to establish a new way to comprehend and convey her feelings and thoughts. As becomes evident throughout the course of the novel, the solution to her problem is to do this without a medium in-between – she learns how to express what she feels and thinks through her words, despite the fact that it might not correspond with the behaviour that is expected in the society.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this thesis, I have analysed the many narrative techniques and instances of symbolism that Edward Morgan Forster uses in his novel *A Room with a View*, as a result of which it is possible to say that with these means, he displays considerable skill in expressing his opinions concerning the British society and the social norms that being a part of it entails.

There is not one certain manner in which it is possible to explain what Forster tries to express in every instance in this novel. Perhaps this is what he intended as well, because it is not incorrect to say that art, literature and music are meant to be interpreted in different ways, and even Mr Emerson is shown to support this by his vehement disapproval of tourists discovering a country only through their Baedeker Guides, therefore gaining a one-sided perspective on it. However, Forster's attitude towards the very topical issue of expected forms of behaviour in society and the prejudice between social classes becomes clear through his use of allusions, analogies and metaphors in a book which, at first glance, might seem like just a romance novel.

He illustrates the typical British upper class 'snob' in the form of Cecil Vyse, who constantly looks down upon those who are of a lower class – particularly the Emersons – but the author leaves the possibility of redemption for the character by demonstrating his capability for compassion at the end of the book. This implies he does not necessarily condemn a person as a whole for this kind of behaviour, as it is always possible to improve, and Forster further supports this by equating characters to art styles. He describes Cecil as being a representative of Gothic art and the Victorian Medieval Revival, alluding to Cecil's incompetence and narrow-mindedness, but describes Lucy and George as representatives of the Renaissance, specifically Leonardo da Vinci's and Michelangelo's art respectively, which signifies the passion, eccentricity and open-mindedness exhibited by these two characters. Through the introduction of these characters and their comparisons to these art

styles and time periods, Forster likens Lucy's development to the evolution of art and the progression of the world from the art of the Middle Ages to the art of the Renaissance, and the advancement through these time periods during the events of the novel might be the means by which Forster demonstrates that it is possible move on from past misconceptions and arrive in a more enlightened time. This interpretation is further bolstered by the characters' associations with rooms and views, along with several other metaphors throughout the novel, confirming the fact that while *A Room with a View* is a compelling love story, it is also a thought-provoking commentary on outdated social practices and prejudice between not only different social classes, but even those of the same class.

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RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Eva Jänes

Aspects of Social Stratification and Symbolism in Edward Morgan Forster's novel *A Room with a View*

Aspekte sotsiaalsest kihistumisest and sümbolismist Edward Morgan Forsteri romaanis "A Room with a View"

Bakalaureusetöö

2018

Lehekülgede arv: 29

Annotatsioon:

Antud töö eesmärk on uurida sotsiaalset kihistumist ja sümbolismi Edward Morgan Forsteri romaanis "A Room with a View", läbi mille ta demonstreerib oma arvamust klassidevaheliste suhete ja eelarvamuste ning sotsiaalsete normide osas 19. sajandi lõpul ja 20. sajandi alguses. Uurimistöö tulemuseks on sügavam arusaamine Forsteri vaatepunktidest seoses nende probleemidega, analüüsides romaani tegelasi ja nende käitumisviise, tegevuspaiku, mis Forster üles seab ning narratiivtehnikaid, mida Forster rakendab selleks, et väljendada teatud mõtteid ja motiive.

Sissejuhatus sisaldab endas töö teema kirjeldust ning põhjendust, miks see teema on uurimist väärt. Lisaks nimetatakse allikad, mida töö otstarbeks kasutatakse ning kuidas neid kasutatakse.

Esimeses peatükis antakse lühike ülevaade Edward Morgan Forsteri elust; põhiteemadest, mida ta oma raamatutes käsitleb; romaani "A Room with a View" taustast ning raamatu ja filmi erinevustest ja kuidas need mõjutavad analüüsi.

Järgmises peatükis analüüsitakse raamatutegelaste kuuluvust klassidesse, nende käitumist, klassidevahelist suhtlemist ning seda, millisel moel esineb raamatutegelaste vahel eelarvamusi.

Kolmandas peatükis vaadeldakse erinevaid sümbolismi esinemisvorme, sealhulgas tegelaste seostust ruumide või vaadetega ja viiteid kunstile, arhitektuurile ja muusikale.

Kokkuvõtvalt on võimalik öelda, et kuigi Edward Morgan Forster ei reeda täpselt, mida iga tema välja toodud metafoor või viide tähendab, jätab ta võimaluse erinevateks tõlgendusteks. Analüüsi põhjal võib järeldada, et käesoleva raamatu läbivaks teemaks on tollaegsete sotsiaalsete normide maha laitmine ja tõsiasi, et ühiskonnal on võimalik edasi areneda iganenud vaadetest.

Märksõnad: eelarvamused, inglise keel ja kirjandus, klassidevaheline suhtlus, sotsiaalne kihistumus, sümbolism

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