

A Room with a View

E.M. Forster (1908)

A Room with a View was published in 1908 and is set in Italy and Edwardian era England. Forster was inspired to write this novel after staying at a guesthouse while travelling in Italy.

Plot The novel begins in Italy, where Lucy Honeychurch, a young upper-middle class woman, and her older chaperone Charlotte Bartlett are in a guesthouse in Florence complaining that their room does not have a view. The Emersons, an unconventional lower-class father and his free-spirited son, offer to swap rooms as they have a wonderful view. Although initially refusing the offer, Charlotte eventually accepts after being convinced by the clergyman Mr Beebe that the Emersons are perfectly decent. Later one day when Lucy is out alone in Florence, she is rescued by George Emerson when she faints after witnessing a murder in a square. The two young people form an attachment, and on a later excursion to the countryside George kisses Lucy. Charlotte decides to take Lucy to Rome away from George, as she does not consider him an appropriate suitor. There, Lucy spends time with an old acquaintance Cecil Vyse, an upper-class sophisticated but rather pretentious young man. Upon her return to Surrey, England, Lucy accepts a proposal of marriage from Cecil. The Emersons move into a cottage near Lucy's home. George is invited by Lucy's brother Freddy to the Honeychurch's house for a game of tennis and kisses Lucy again. He tells her that Cecil does not love Lucy for herself, but because he considers her an object. Eventually after telling

many lies, both to herself and others, Lucy breaks off her engagement with Cecil and elopes with George. They return to Florence together and stay at the same guesthouse in the room with a view.

Themes *A Room with a View* is a **romance novel** whose romantic plot centres on Lucy's decision between George and Cecil.

The main theme is **the conflict between social convention and passion**. Lucy's relationship with George is not acceptable socially because George is of a lower social class, whereas Cecil would be a more conventional choice for Lucy, but would make her unhappy. Lucy has been brought up in a society where women should repress their passions and follow convention.

Women and femininity is also a central theme; a woman was expected to look and behave in a certain way in Edwardian society.

The theme of **passion and nature** is also present. The weather in the novel often reflects the emotions of the characters.

Style The narrative style Forster uses is **simple and conversational**, dotted with **lyrical passages** to describe moments of passion or descriptions of nature. He does not experiment with new forms of writing. An **omniscient narrator** provides further insight by addressing the reader and seeing directly into the characters' thoughts. Often the narrator shows the reader truths that the characters cannot see themselves, for example that Lucy loves George.

» Rounding it up

1. Answer the questions.

- a. Where is the novel set?
- b. Who are the main characters?
- c. What happens to Lucy in a square in Florence?
- d. How does the novel end?
- e. What are the three main themes?
- f. What kind of narrator does the novel have?

