

# Analysis of the last three paragraphs of chapter 1 of "a room with a view"



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The last three paragraphs of Chapter 1 of "A Room with a View" describe the actions of the two female protagonists, Lucy Honeychurch and Miss Bartlett, when they find themselves alone in their own rooms. This short scene is a brief yet extremely accurate representation of the contrast between those two different personalities, what they long for and how they perceive the outside world and its inevitable reality. These attitudes are present in the way Lucy and Miss Bartlett behave, so through the analysis of the actions it is possible to tell whether they are "Room" or "View" characters; whether their senses are still fresh or numbed by the flow of time; whether it is optimism or realism that is their driving force. One could perhaps say through this scene E. M. Forster really introduces us to Lucy and Miss Bartlett; the scene, despite the fact that it seems insignificant, foreshadows how these two women will behave and how they will affect or influence each other. As with the rest of the novel, the narrator is an objective and omniscient one. Even though the situation is described from the perspective of an outsider, i. e. in the third person, and even though there is no personal bond between the characters and the narrator, he still knows the thoughts and feelings of the two characters. Naturally, this kind of narration gives the readers a sense of freedom as to how they perceive the characters; the narrator does not judge them, so it is purely by their own actions or thoughts that we can formulate our own opinion - there is no favouritism on the side of the storyteller. Even the setting is the same for both characters, as if to show how they behave when in a similar situation. Despite the objectivity, it seems that the narrator is in some ways bonded with the characters, because their feelings are described in an engaged way, as if the narrator knew their causes and intensity. Therefore it is possible

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that through the narration of this scene, Forster intends to provoke the readers to create their own early ideas about Lucy and Miss Bartlett. This is done successfully, as it is difficult not to see the difference between them or not to sympathize with one more than the other. The sentence length is regulated and there is no suggestive difference between the sentences which describe Lucy and ones that describe Miss Bartlett. Perhaps this yet again alludes to the objectivity of narration. Polysyndeton is used with Lucy as much as it is used with Miss Bartlett, though in the description of Lucy's view from the window it seems to evoke excitement in the reader, as if rushing to illustrate the whole of the view. But when " and" is repeated when communicating Miss Bartlett's controlling actions, it gives those actions a prolonged, repetitive and monotonous feeling, which is so diverse from how the simple device of polysyndeton portrayed Lucy. It is also interesting that Forster inserted a comma in front of virtually every " and" in those three paragraphs. This seems to divide the sentences more than a comma or an " and" alone would, and it constantly disturbs the rhythm of the sentences but at the same time makes every action more bold and individual, as if significance could be found in every aspect of the characters' behaviour. The descriptive nature of the writing gives the situation more realism, as well as comedy – whereas the tone itself is generally kept serious as is the diction, it is the way Forster connects certain words and creates a barely visible, subtle exaggeration that demonstrates the situational comedy, especially when relating to Miss Bartlett. A simple sheet of paper with a note of interrogation seemed " portentous with evil" and " she was seized with an impulse to destroy it," which, in a hyperbolic way conveys Miss Bartlett's suspicious, controlling nature. Momentary hyperbole adds more vividness and humour

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to the passage, as on the surface Miss Bartlett appears to be calm and self-controlled and one would not suspect her of such drastic, violent thoughts. But the image that we get of Miss Bartlett is not only a comic, contradictory one – there is sadness in her, almost as if she were a living anachronism, a misunderstood, insecure being full of nostalgia, as if she longed for something unachievable. Although her sighing – which is said to be “ her habit” – is in a way humorous, it must be said that the sort of humour used here by Forster is definitely dark, a kind of schadenfreude, as the readers find it amusing to see Miss Bartlett’s lack of satisfaction or pleasure in life. Even her “ protecting embrace” “ gave Lucy the sensation of a fog;” the simile used here reflects the way she is judged by others as a strict, controlling, predictable older woman with no warmth in her soul, nothing which could make the “ fog” disappear. Perhaps Miss Bartlett’s personality is one of a healer, not only protecting Lucy from the world’s evils but also some past personal disappointment. It is possible that through the controlling way she acts now she is trying to fix or prevent something that she had no control over in the past. The fact that she “ fastened the window-shutters,” “ locked the door” and “ examined” the note of interrogation “ carefully” evokes an image of someone quite limited or simply scared of the abruptness and the constant ambivalence of life, someone who tries to find consolation in their careful idiosyncrasies – in fact, the adverb “ carefully” has been used twice in the last paragraph, emphasising even further Miss Bartlett’s desire for control. When she saw on the wall a sheet with “ an enormous note of interrogation,” she immediately asked herself: “ What does it mean?” and “ examined it.” Naturally, many others would react in a similar way, but in this context the fact that she tried to instantly analyse

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this simple note supports the view that she is indeed a character who is insecure and wishes to be conscious of everything and experience no elements of surprise in her life. Lucy, on the contrary, is portrayed as a more liberated, careless, youthful character. Her actions are full of hope and naïve positivity; after the “ protective embrace” which she received from her chaperone, she “ opened the window and breathed the clean night air,” releasing her from the “ sensation of a fog.” The narrator depicts this scene in a way that suggests movement, as if Lucy’s desire to become free at that moment were incredibly urgent, as if it had to be fulfilled rapidly. The contrast between Lucy and Miss Bartlett is shown here very strongly; the way they behave when they are alone mirrors their inner states. Again, in Lucy’s opinion, when she thought about Mr Emerson, to her he was a “ kind old man,” whereas Miss Bartlett was outraged by his spontaneity and saw him as a dangerous, unpredictable man. It is difficult to say whether one of them is right in their convictions, but it is noticeable that they are quite extreme in their assumptions – Miss Bartlett’s suspicions of conspiracies and dangers seem endless, whereas her protégée blindly believes mere appearances, without questioning their rightness or wrongness. In that way, Lucy’s perception of the world seems full of visual poetry; the personified “ lights dancing in the Arno” arouse an image of beauty and fantasy, at the same time referring to Lucy’s idealistic fantasy world where misery is not yet visible. But there is a premonition of disillusionment in the view which Lucy sees from her window: “ the Apennines, black against the rising moon...” The contrast between the illuminated moon and the dark mountains is more than suggestive in this context – at this point in the novel, Lucy is still a virginal, innocent girl whose idealistic dogmas have not yet experienced enough to

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fully understand misfortune or disappointment; therefore, she can be seen as the bright, “lunatic” or fantastic moon. The dark mountains which stand boldly against the view of the moon, could be a symbol of many inevitable aspects of existence that will affect Lucy later on – they could be seen as an allegory for Miss Bartlett who sometimes restrains Lucy’s freedom, as the serious choices that Lucy will have to make about love, or as foreshadowing of the fact that Lucy will soon have to grow up emotionally and become less naively optimistic. In conclusion, despite having an objective narrator, the last three paragraphs of Chapter 1 allow the readers to begin creating their first ideas about the two protagonists and sympathizing with them (or not) by looking at their actions from the perspective of an outside observer. By illustrating Lucy and Miss Bartlett in this way, Forster makes them rounded characters, as they both appear to have virtues as well as faults – Lucy’s optimism may be overly naïve and childlike, and Miss Bartlett’s controlling nature may have been caused by painful experiences, which would normally evoke sympathy and compassion. It is therefore hard to tell on the basis of those three paragraphs whether they are really “view” or “room” characters; it is most likely that they possess qualities belonging to each of those categories. In my opinion, this scene is a brief but meaningful introduction to the two characters and it seems to envelop their personalities, their desires and their personal ideologies in a figurative way that makes the reader find more profound meanings between the lines. Therefore, a more personal bond develops between the reader and the imperfect heroines.