

Class perceptions on personal choice

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Have we ever thought of what governs us when we make a choice? Are we ruled by certain cultural or ethnic perspectives, or do we value our feelings toward the person, who is expected to accompany us through joys and sorrows for the rest of our lives? Very often, cultural and class perceptions play the predominant role, when we make a romantic choice.

In his novel *A Room with a View*, E. M. Forster ironically depicts the increasing conflict between the real and the pretended and the impact, which class and social prejudice may have on what we call “true passion”. *A Room with a View* is an ironic depiction of the social narrow-sightedness and the lack of sincere spontaneous response to the feelings, which may change under the pressure of artificial class and cultural views of the conservative society.

Literature critics of the post-war period emphasize the growing level of British cultural self-consciousness that has gradually turned into a misrepresented set of class and cultural perceptions. “With the post-1945 decline of Britain as an economic, political, and military power, its international standing as well as its own sense of national identity have been increasingly determined on the level of cultural production” (Freedman 79).

Forster’s novel suggests that with time, this cultural consciousness has transformed into cultural and class prejudices that falsely positioned England as the predominant source of cultural trends in Europe. In this context, Forster’s Lucy reveals the hidden facets of English cultural perceptions.

Lucy’s character reflects the growing gap between her inner promptings to love and the external social pressures that tell her what she is expected to

tell or to do. Lucy “ was accustomed to having her thoughts confirmed by others... it was too dreadful not to know whether she was thinking right or wrong” (Forster), and even when she is prepared to take the single and the most appropriate decision, the distorted English visions of culture and class raise her doubts as for what she has to do.

Forster uses Italy as the mirror and the prism for evaluating the negative potential of cultural and class perceptions in the then England. The battle for a room with a view is actually the battle for nothing, because a room with a view will never offer any benefits to a person, who is too blind to see anything behind the window. Lucy’s battle over her happiness is very close to the situation, where the blind is persuaded that the room with a view is much better than the room without the one. “ How do you like this view of ours, Mr. Emerson? – I never notice much difference in views.

– What do you mean? – Because they’re all alike. Because all that matters in them is distance and air” (Forster). In the same manner, Lucy is coming to the realization that her relations with Cecil are nothing but an empty combination of the social prejudice and the decision that was imposed on her by the norms and traditions of her surrounding. “ As Forster’s narrative unfolds, it becomes clear that there must be something wrong with ‘ development’ in a code of behavior which can mistake delicacy for beauty, while treating frank talk about baths and stomachs as indecent, and kisses as insults” (Taque 94).

This cultural and class blindness and the fight for a better view are the central themes that accompany Lucy in her long journey to personal revelation. She is stifled by the air of indifference toward her feelings and

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desires; she is confronted by the need to follow the imposed behavioral code that evidently does not satisfy her inner strivings to be happy. Italy and the Italians open her eyes on the realities of her drastic existence within the narrow space of the social and class prejudice.

When she hears Mr. Beebe's remark that "Italians are a most unpleasant people. They pry everywhere, they see everything, and they know what we want before we know it ourselves. We are at their mercy" (Forster), she has nothing but to conclude, that her life and her future are at the mercy of the socially blind norms, which govern her choice.

For once, Lucy has to pause and rethink everything that was going through her mind and her soul. George leads her to re-considering her values. She is overfilled with emotion: "some emotion - pity, terror, love, but the emotion was strong - seized her, and she was aware of autumn. Summer was ending, and the evening brought her odours of decay, the more pathetic because they were reminiscent of spring.

That something or other mattered intellectually?" (Forster). A bright literary parallel between the English cultural norms and the odours of decay suggests that if Lucy fails to defend her right to choose, she will be doomed to spend the rest of her life in the pressuring atmosphere without any hope for moral and spiritual resurrection.

Mr. Emerson is correct stating that "we need a little directness to liberate the soul" (Forster); Lucy is searching some free space where she will be protected from the strong winds of English cultural and class perceptions. She wants to be free to express her feelings without a fear of being

condemned. Ultimately, she has the right for spontaneous feeling without any tint of reason, which conservative England is so actively imposing on her.