

The Symbolism Used by EM Forster in “A Room With A View”

During the book, Forster uses many symbols to add atmosphere and make the reader look deeper into the book and its meanings. The symbols are also used to illustrate, (sometimes subconsciously in the reader’s mind) what is going on in the minds of the various characters and, in particular, Lucy. He also uses symbols to help explain the characters, atmospheres and social situations during the book. In my opinion the three most significant and most common categories of symbols are Music, Mythology and Location.

Music

Music is used by Forster to portray the general atmosphere and as a symbol of Lucy’s repressed feelings and her development. In the opening paragraph of chapter 3, Forster writes that “Lucy, who found daily life rather chaotic, entered a more solid world when she opened the piano”. He goes on to explain why, claiming that “The kingdom of Music is not the kingdom of this world”, implying that Lucy plays to escape from this world, the physical reality, to another, the world of music, where passion and emotion thrive. Later on in the chapter, Forster describes her as a “true performer” and builds up the sense of emotion by using phrases such as “she was intoxicated by the mere feel of the notes”. The reason Forster uses this is to show that Lucy has a powerful, passionate and emotional personality on the inside, which she expresses while she plays the piano but is unable to display this colourful personality on the outside. This is, in fact, the main core of the book.

The third chapter repeatedly mentions Lucy’s playing of the Piano. The chapter itself is titled “**Music**, violets and the letter ‘S’”. Later on, once Mr Beebe and Lucy have been introduced, Mr Beebe comments on Lucy’s playing to the Vicar; “If Miss Honeychurch ever takes to live as she plays, it will be very exciting both for us and for her.” In this case, Forster uses Mr Beebe to narrate to any readers who have not yet picked up on the symbolism of Lucy’s piano playing.

Forster also uses the significance of different composers during the book. Lucy plays three composers during the book. She plays Beethoven, Mozart and Schumann. She plays

Beethoven when she is feeling rebellious and passionate. In chapter 3, when she is described as playing passionately and emotionally, she is playing Beethoven. Beethoven's music is passionate and emotional so this is, therefore, a direct symbolism. Playing piano, stirs her emotional potential, which makes her feel rebellious. We see this before the murder in the square. Lucy plays and then feels rebellious so goes out, by herself, and buys several photos, one of which depicts Venus, the Roman god, in the nude. Much of the scene is a symbol of her rebellion, such as the tower, which is a phallic symbol and represents her coming to terms with her sexuality, something that could be seen as rebellious against her sheltered upbringing.

Lucy does not play Beethoven when she is engaged to Cecil, but instead plays Schumann. Schumann's music is slow and very much symbolises Lucy's repression and lack of emotion. Forster sums Schumann up, when in chapter 11, after Cecil asks Lucy to play Beethoven but she continues with Schumann, he writes that Schumann's Music is sad; "the sadness of the incomplete" and implies that is dark and depressing.

Lucy plays Mozart in chapter 18 at the time when the engagement has been broken off. Again, the music represents the situation. The atmosphere has a sense of confusion, much like the music. The words of the song that Lucy and Freddy recite also have significance. The song itself is about shutting off feelings. Phrases in the song such as "vacant hand and eye" and "taste not when the wine cup glistens, speak not when the people listens" represent Lucy very well. There is also symbolism within the words of the song. Wine is often used to symbolise life, as it looks like blood.

Forster uses Music as a symbol to help create an atmosphere in the reader's mind, which is partly, like what is going on in Lucy's. This is much like the way a filmmaker would use real music in the background to help portray atmosphere and backup what is going on in the foreground.

Mythology

Forster uses mythological parallels in the book. The most significant of these is in chapter 6, when Lucy and several others go on out "in carriages to see a view". The driver of the carriage that Lucy is in is referred to as Phaethon and his girlfriend, who he pretends to the English is his sister, is referred to as Persephone. In Greek mythology, Phaethon is the son of

Helios, the sun god. One day Phaethon is supposed to have borrowed his father's chariot. He drove quickly and carelessly and lost control of the chariot, causing havoc on earth, before he crashed and died. Forster refers to the cab driver as "a youth all irresponsibility and fire, recklessly urging his master's horses up the stony hill". By using this parallel, Forster is trying to make the driver sound more interesting and explain what he is like. He is very much like Phaeton; reckless, risky, careless and laid-back. The girl he picks up is described as Persephone, "tall and slender and pale". The fact that Phaeton represents recklessness and Persephone represents life and death, because, in mythology the god of the Underworld kidnapped her, to a degree represent Lucy's inner feelings and development. Lucy has the potential to be active and full of life but is, at that point in the book, closer to death because of her repression. Phaeton represents all that Italians are, going with the heart and acting on impulse. This represents completely what Lucy is not but what George is a little bit like. It also draws a comparison between Italians and English people. Italians are like Phaeton and go with their hearts, but the English are repressed like Mr Eager, who wants to split the couple up. Phaeton leads Lucy to George when in her poor Italian she says "two good men, the younger one". This shows that Italians know the way, unlike the English.

Forster mentions Venus in chapter 4. Lucy buys several photos, one of which shows Venus naked. Venus is the Roman goddess of Love and Beauty, and therefore represents love and passion, what Lucy subconsciously is after when she rebels and leaves alone. The photo is covered with blood from the dying man. This, along with the tower throbbing in the sky is a symbolic loss of virginity. Lucy is then stopped from falling by George. This implies that the loss of virginity has something to do with George. It does not necessarily mean literal loss of virginity and could mean Lucy's loss of entire purity because of the kiss with George.

Later on in the book, in chapter 15, Forster mentions Apollo. He mentions him in the context; "The sun rose higher on its journey, guided, not by Phaethon, but by Apollo". Forster uses Apollo to try to create a sense of power and back up his description of the way the sun rose "competent, unswerving, divine."

Location

The locations, surroundings and backgrounds in the book often mirror what is going on in the foreground and are used as

symbols by Forster. We first see this in significance just before the kiss. Forster practically uses only the background and landscape to describe Lucy and George's feelings before the kiss. He spends a while describing the beauty of the view, and he says that "the view was forming at last; she [Lucy] could discern the river, the golden plain, other hills." This symbolises Lucy opening her feelings. Forster uses the symbolism of the view to explain Lucy finally coming to term with her feelings, and to help build up the feeling of passion in Lucy's mind. Forster does very well, after the kiss to eradicate this feeling by introducing the plain "brown" Charlotte Bartlett. Charlotte ruins the view in the same way that she ruined the kiss.

In chapter 12, Lucy finds George, Mr Beebe and Freddy bathing. Forster uses background and scenery to describe the difference between Cecil and George. He shows a difference between Cecil and George, which Lucy knows about. George is described as "barefoot, bare-chested, radiant and personable against the shadowy woods" which makes the reader associate him with the outdoors and sunlight. Cecil is fully clothed and is the only male of the six people to have not been bathing. He is portrayed as being uncomfortable surrounded by nature as is shown by him wanting to leave; "no business of ours, said Cecil". The lake is also the place where Cecil told Lucy, who agreed, that she only ever sees him indoors and the place where Cecil fails in trying to kiss Lucy, mainly because he was uncomfortable with the surroundings and because he was nervous and somewhat uncomfortable with Lucy. George is completely different and is totally comfortable with nature and with Lucy. George made the pool beautiful, "the pool had shrunk to its old size and lost its glory" the following day.

In chapter 15, Lucy and George kiss again. They kiss inside the shrubbery, again associating George with nature.

Chapter 18 is set at Windy Corner, which is described by Forster "Windy Corner lay, not on the summit of the ridge, but a few hundred feet down the southern slope, at the springing of one of the great buttresses that supported the hill." Windy corner is supposed to be ugly and look like a creation of nature, which implies randomness and disorganisation, much like the situation going on inside the house (the engagement is broken off in Windy Corner) and the music that Lucy is playing.

Forster generally uses location and landscape to help explain the characters, atmospheres and social situations during the book.

Forster's symbols work very well throughout the book and make the book seem very cleverly written. They also add a lot of depth to the book.