LUND UNIVERSITY
Humanities and Theology

Tracing Social Values in E.M. Forster's *A Room with a View*

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ENG K01 Literary Seminar
Bachelor Degree Essay
Spring 2011
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1. Introduction

The 20th century will probably be remembered as one of the most progressive periods in western history. The era saw significant changes in, among other things, politics, science, technology, economics, and culture. In Britain, there was another factor that contributed to the general modernization that is synonymous with the 20th century. In 1901, just in the beginning of the new century, Britain's longest reigning monarch, Queen Victoria, passed away. She had been the crowned head of Britain for 64 years, and her name was given to an entire age which became known as "the Victorian Era"; an age characterized by rigid morals and social values, religious worship and strict ideas on family life. Victoria was succeeded by her son Edward VII who reigned until his death in 1910. While there had been great changes during Victoria's time as a monarch, Edward's reign was characterized by an increasing sense of transformation.

During this period of progress, the British author E.M. Forster wrote one of his most appreciated novels – *A Room with a View*. The novel, which is a humorous portrayal of love and confusion set in Edwardian England, has often been described as a romantic and social comedy. Forster started writing the novel in 1901, the same year as Queen Victoria was succeeded by her son, but it was not published until 1908. During these years – 1901 to 1908 – Forster continuously worked on the manuscript, albeit with occasionally long intervals. He wrote various drafts that originally were to appear as different novels rather than the published *A Room with a View*, but the characters that figured in those drafts were similar to those that appeared in the final work (K. Hewitt 359). Especially the protagonist of *A Room with a View*, Lucy Honeychurch, appeared in various early drafts and Forster referred to her as Old Lucy and New Lucy (K. Hewitt 359).

In view of the fact that *A Room with a View* was the result of a process of writing during a period in time when the British society was changing and new values and ideas were being adopted, it is not surprising that Forster ended up with a different novel than he had initially imagined, creating a later version of Lucy that appeared "new" and made earlier versions seem "old". In fact, I would like to argue that it is partly because the novel was written during a transitional period that the early Lucy seemed "old", as if belonging in times gone by, and the later Lucy seemed "new", as if belonging to the future. In other words, the two Lucys may have been the result of the transition from one mode of thinking – characterized by "old" Victorian values – to another, which embraced more progressive ideas and "new" Edwardian

values.

Although no definite distinctions can be made between these periods – after all, change is often a process rather than an occurrence with immediate effects – some general conclusions can be drawn about the prevailing values for each period. The difference between them is discernible in *A Room with a View*, where the characters sometimes clash exceedingly in values and ideas. I intend to show that distinctions can be made between characters who express a "Victorian" mindset, embracing rather conservative ideas and thoughts; characters who express an "Edwardian" mindset, being comparatively more "radical" in thought, and finally, characters that seem to be oscillating between these positions. These distinctions are mainly visible in the way the characters reason about gender, class and religion**,** which is why the first section of this essay will be devoted to outlining a short historical background of the Victorian and Edwardian Eras that summarizes the general attitude to these issues. The second section analyses most of the central characters in *A Room with a View* and connects their attitudes towards gender, religion and class to the Victorian or Edwardian Era, or to a position somewhere in between the two.

2. Historical Background

The Victorian Era was characterized by confidence, power and prosperity. The British Empire was at its height and had taken possession of large areas of the world. The popular catch phrase "the sun never sets on the British Empire" was literally true; the British controlled so many areas all over the world that the sun was bound to always be shining somewhere. The Empire provided employment and business opportunities, not to mention a sense of adventure, for enterprising people of all classes, and as the Empire grew, so did the national pride (Mitchell 284).

While the Empire was continually expanding and advancing internationally, at home the British society was also advancing and altered in many ways during the Victorian Era. Technological advancements, such as the industrial revolution that had started in the previous century, and the railway, changed the lives of many and contributed to the transformation of Britain from a largely rural and agricultural society to an urban and industrial society (Gunn 239). The cities grew rapidly, and so did the population. This was partly a result of the rise of the middle-class, which had grown more quickly during the 19th century than ever before, and

had expanded to include greater differences in wealth, social positions and professions. These circumstances forced a change in the political balance, and by 1914 politics and government had become the business of the middle class, leaving the monarchy and old aristocracy with very little power (McDowall 131).

These industrial, technological and urban changes in the British society laid the foundation for the emergence of Britain as a wealthy and powerful nation during the 19th century. The symbol for this success was Queen Victoria. As she reigned from 1837 to 1901, she was synonymous with Britain and the Empire. Her symbolic importance facilitated the admiration of her as a monarch and the values she represented. Her strict and rigid views on moral values, religion and family life were highly influential, and the Victorian Era has become synonymous with propriety, repression and prudishness.

These notions are perhaps most visible in the Victorian idea of family life, which was a particularly important ideal during this period. The family was seen as an assurance of social stability. Marriage was a cultural norm and for women often a financial necessity (D'Cruze 267). However, David McDowall states that during the 19th century more people started to marry for personal, rather than economical reasons, the exception being the very rich (137). It gradually became possible for both men and women to choose a partner with whom they felt that they would be happy. However, women were still regarded as inferior to men and patriarchal values were strong. The man was the master of his family and household, and his wife was legally his property until nearly the end of the century (McDowall 137). According to Mary Lyndon Shanley, the hierarchy within the Victorian family reflected the hierarchy within society (5). Every member of the family was given a particular place within the family circle, just like he or she had a particular place in society. Husbands and wives resided in separate realms. Men, being the family heads, were the "public" faces of their families, having careers and being involved in politics. Women on the other hand, were confined to the home (Shanley 5). They were considered to be less independent and courageous than men. They were also considered less intelligent, not primarily because of their lack of intellect, but because their energy was spent on childbirth. Thus, women were regarded as the weaker sex, and this was ascribed to biology.

However, during the Edwardian Era, this view was challenged and women's emancipation was slowly increasing. One of the reasons for this development was that women were now demanding equality and freedom. Although some British women, as well as some men, had been arguing for women's suffrage since the 1860's, the movement for women's votes gained ground during the Edwardian Era with organisations such as the National Union of Women's

Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) and the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) (Collette 119).

During the Victorian Era, religion played a significant role in people's lives. Men, women and children, regardless of age or class, were influenced by religious beliefs. Apart from the Church of England, there were many other, smaller church communions that attracted members, such as Roman Catholicism and Evangelism (Smith 337; Mitchell 244). Religious education was common and many religious communities distributed various literature, that instructed people on moral and religious conduct (Cruttenden 63). In other words, religion was very present in the lives of most Victorians. However, as the 19th century proceeded, religion and Christianity were increasingly questioned. A contributing factor to this development was Charles Darwin's ground-breaking *On the Origin of Species*, which was published in 1859 and completely overthrew the idea of God as the creator of human life. The idea that men had evolved from apes shocked and upset many churchgoers and created a crisis in the Church (Cruttenden 63; McDowall 155).

This decline in faith escalated during the Edwardian Era and the Victorian emphasis on the importance of religion was no longer as strong. By 1900, only 19 percent of the population in London went regularly to church (McDowall 152). The authority of the Church of England was weakened, especially in the cities, but even in the countryside the village priests lost much of the power and the influence they had possessed during the Victorian Era. McDowall offers two possible explanations for this. Firstly, people now had greater individual freedom to choose what role religion should play in their lives. In the villages, many people had previously gone to church because the squire, who was the landowning gentry and thus also the landlord and employer of many villagers, had forced them. As more people moved to the big, industrial cities, they were now free to do as they pleased. Secondly, it became possible to devote one's Sundays to other activities. Towards the end of the Victorian Era, museums, libraries, parks, swimming pools, not to mention alehouses and pubs, had been built both in the cities and the suburbs, and they attracted an increasing amount of people (McDowall 152-153; Mitchell 24). In short, the result of these changes was that religion, having formerly been constantly present in several "spheres" of life, was now becoming increasingly detached and "lost relevance to national, social and political life" (Mews 470).

Nevertheless, in some groups of society religion still played an important role in the early 20th century. The upper classes were still ardent supporters of religion and they expected no less from their servants. Both in towns and in the countryside, the upper classes thought it proper to go to church on Sundays (Laski 210). However, it is important to note, as

Marghanita Laski does, that religion still played a prominent role for traditional ceremonies such as birth, marriage and death in all groups of society, even though many, as Laski labels them, "progressive" people managed without them (210).

The concept of class was important in Victorian Britain. Martin Hewitt states that class "was a pervasive part of contemporaries' world-view, and class-distinctions were deeply embedded in the social fabric" (305). Simply put, the British society was "class-based" and distinctly so. People had different prospects, constraints and ambitions depending on what class they belonged to. They dressed, spoke, behaved and carried themselves according to social status and rarely entered marriages transgressing class-boundaries (M. Hewitt 316). People were expected to know their place in the class-hierarchy and conform to the conventions of their class. It was not considered proper to behave like a member of a class above or below your own (Mitchell 18). Even though the English society could be divided into several social strata, it was more common to speak about three different classes (although distinctions could be made within these as well): the working-class, the middle-class, and the upper-class. The working-class consisted of men, women and even children, who did "visible" work, that is, work of an often physical nature, which left them with visible marks, such as dirt and stains, on their clothes and hands. Such work was often found in the factories and mining industry. The middle-class also had to work for their income, but their work was "clean", involving professions that demanded more mental than physical effort, such as clerical work, teaching and bookkeeping. The upper-class consisted of the aristocrats and the landed gentry. Their titles and land were inherited, and their income was generated by the rental of their property, which meant that for many there was no need to do any paid job (Mitchell 18-21).

During the Edwardian Era, Britain was still a class-based society and class was an important part of one's identity. Consequently, social and economic inequality continued to characterize the British society; the wealthiest 10 per cent of Britain's population managed 90 per cent of its total wealth (Miles 337-340). However, as the Edwardian Era progressed, the old class distinctions were becoming increasingly blurred (Mitchell 17).

The political situation in Britain in the beginning of the 20th century resembled the situation at the end of the 19th century. The Liberal party (which was often referred to as the "Radical party") and the Conservative party had been "alternating" in power during the last decades of the Victorian Era. At the turn of the century, it was the Conservatives that held office. However, in the General Election of 1906, the political climate changed. The result of the election was not just another shift in power between the Liberal party and the

Conservatives, but an uprising of smaller political parties, in particular the Labour Party. This was important, partly because the members of the Labour Party had working-class and trade-union backgrounds, which meant that it was now possible for men of low income to become MPs, and partly because some of the members were Socialists. During the 19th century Socialism gained ground as a political and economical theory and influenced social reformers in both Europe and America. In the beginning of the 20th century it became even more influential and various associations were founded, such as the Fabian Society, whose aim was to form a rational socialist state (Priestley 120). But Socialism was also met by resistance by many of the British leaders. The Conservatives, business leaders, and to some extent also Liberals, were frightened by the Socialists' tendencies to be atheists and, above all, by their criticism of the aristocratic lifestyle (Briggs 77; Corey and Ochoa 415-416; McDowall 156). Nevertheless, the Election of 1906 showed that winds of change were blowing that could not be stopped. As individual freedom increased during the Edwardian Era, so did the courage to question the established values of society. More books were being written that "questioned conventional ideas of religion, politics and sex" (Hynes 254).

To summarize, the general attitudes to gender, religion and class during the Victorian Era, changed somewhat during the Edwardian Era. The greatest difference was that the freedom of the individual increased during the latter era, making it possible for both men and women to take greater control of their lives. Whether the characters in *A Room with a View* are labelled "Victorian" or "Edwardian" in this essay, depends on whether they embrace values that are closer to the stricter Victorian Era, or whether they adhere to values that embrace the budding freedom of the Edwardian Era.

3. Analysis

3.1. The Refined Victorians

There are many characters in *A Room with a View* that appear to be more inclined to advocate Victorian ideals rather than "new" ideas. These characters are predominantly members of the upper-class, or at least they consider themselves to be of a respectable social standing. The ideal that they most strongly seem to support is that of the innocent and pure woman. According to Martha Vicinus, the Victorian ideal of the "perfect lady" was most "fully developed in the upper middle class" (ix). Young women were brought

up to be innocent and sexually ignorant so that their chastity would be preserved. If their innocence was lost in any way, a woman's chastity became vulnerable and the woman herself susceptible to transgressions (Vicinus ix; Cominos 157). It was therefore of utmost importance that the innocence of young women was preserved. However, as has been previously mentioned, women were regarded as the inferior sex during the Victorian Era. They were considered to be weak and frail and less intelligent than men. Consequently, young women could not be trusted, in fact, they were not even regarded to be able, to preserve and protect the "innocence of their consciousness" (Cominos 157). Instead it was the duty and responsibility of the mothers to shield their daughters from any awareness of sex and sexuality, or as Cominos puts it, "from a reality which the genteel classes perceived to be sexually contaminated" (157).

The most conspicuous and stalwart advocate of this ideal is perhaps Miss Charlotte Bartlett, Lucy's older cousin and chaperon in Italy, who has unyielding ideas of what is proper social conduct in general, and what is proper social conduct for young women in particular. Although her social standing is not made entirely clear, it is possible to assume that she belongs to the upper-middle-class based on her relationship with the Honeychurch family, whose social position seems to be somewhere between an upper-middle-class family and the gentry, and on the fact that although she is a spinster, she does not work in order to support herself. Her presumed social status as a member of the upper-middle-class would perhaps explain why she supports the ideal of the "perfect lady".

That Miss Bartlett has strong opinions of what young women should or should not be exposed to, becomes clear already in the novel's opening scene at the pension Bertolini where the cousins are staying during their trip to Italy. Upon being offered to exchange rooms with the Emersons after having complained of the lack of view in her and Lucy's rooms, Miss Bartlett is remarkably rude. She immediately disapproves of both father and son, deeming their offer to be highly inappropriate. She is particularly offended by the Emersons' audacity to propose something that would entail that her young, unmarried cousin was put under an obligation to them (8). As Lucy's chaperon, Miss Bartlett takes on the responsibility of Lucy's mother to protect her from any sexual awakening. Her strong reluctance to even let Lucy have the room of the younger Mr. Emerson, shows how seriously she takes her task and consequently also her conviction of the Victorian feminine ideal. Her behaviour gives the impression that she is trying to present herself as a member of the respectable Victorian England, where young unmarried women are not entangled in various affairs with young unmarried men.

Another representative of the Victorian ideal of chastity is Reverend Cuthbert Eager, who Lucy and Miss Bartlett meet in Italy. When he finds out that Lucy has witnessed a murder, he seems more disturbed by the fact that Lucy was strolling along the Italian streets unchaperoned than by the murder and the impact of it on Lucy. Indeed, he looks so disapproving that Miss Bartlett feels prompted to explain that Lucy was in fact escorted back to the pension by one of the other guests. However, she adroitly manages to avoid revealing that the escort in question was a young man.

Mr. Eager shows the same condemnation of inappropriate interaction between the sexes when he and some of the Bertolini-guests, including Lucy and Miss Bartlett, drive out in carriages on an outing in the Italian hills. One of their drivers, a young Italian man, brings along a young woman whom he introduces as his sister. It quickly becomes clear that the driver and the woman are not siblings, but lovers. Mr. Eager, upon realizing this, orders the women to leave and refuses to tip the driver. He congratulates himself on his dismissal of the lovers. Of course, Mr. Eager, being a man of the Church, would perceive his determination to expose the lovers as a victory. The Victorian ideal of the chaste and pure women was also a Christian ideal, and the Church could point to the Virgin Mary as an exemplary model. Consequently, Mr. Eager's stance towards premarital relations between the sexes is not surprising, but his actions nevertheless promote Victorian values. As was mentioned previously, the Church enjoyed a great deal of influence and power during the Victorian Era. Mr. Eager uses that influence by taking his authority as a Reverend for granted, assuming that his view on the matter will be recognized as correct and thus be followed. According to Jeffrey Heath, Mr. Eager is a man who tries to "'wrap up' unruly and vibrant real life under the cloaks and hoods of cultured and fitting behaviour" (397). Mr. Eager comes across as a man who is too absorbed in his own notions of propriety and conventional social behaviour to see that his actions have not had the effect of a moral rebuke that reminds the reproved lovers of chastity and purity; rather, it has set two people apart who were no real harm to Mr. Eager. They posed no threat to him as a person, but to the beliefs that he embraces as a representative of the Church. If he had not succeeded in separating the lovers, his authority as a Reverend would have been undermined. Consequently, the social order of the Victorian society, where the church was central, would have risked being overthrown. Mr. Eager's actions could be seen as an attempt to secure and preserve this order.

Mr. Eager also manifests himself as a member of Victorian England by displaying some of the class-snobbery that was typical for many Victorians. As mentioned in the previous chapter, class distinctions were important for the Victorians, and class was revealed in

clothes, speech manners, education etc. In other words, it was fairly easy to detect people's social background and categorise them according to class. This is precisely what Mr. Eager does. He has a habit of "[selecting] those of his migratory sheep that seemed worthy, and give them a few hours in the pastures of the permanent" (47). He claims that he dislikes Mr. Emerson because he has "murdered his wife in the sight of God" (50). However, there appears to be more reasons than one for Mr. Eager's repugnance to Mr. Emerson. When he tells Lucy and Miss Bartlett of Mr. Emerson's humble origins as a mechanic and journalist for the Socialistic press, he does it with a hint of triumph; he happens to know it "for a fact" (49). He also expresses doubt that working-class men visiting Florence, however pleasing he would find it to see them there, would make much of their stay (49). He is implying that common labourers, because of their presumably poor education, would not be able to appreciate, let alone understand, the beauty and the cultural and intellectual significance of Florence. Mr. Eager seems to hold decisive, albeit somewhat concealed, notions of who is a "worthy sheep", and it does not seem to be the sheep that is blackened by the dirt of labour and toil.

The last advocate of Victorian ideals is Cecil Vyse, Lucy's fiancé. He is the character with the highest social standing and epitomizes the aristocratic gentleman who has been educated but does not work to support himself, and who quotes the Victorian Poet Laureate Alfred, Lord Tennyson (Mitchell 17-21) Just like Miss Bartlett, Cecil, "who always felt that he must lead women, though he knew not whither, and protect them, though he knew not against what" (122), has firm notions of women and femininity. Like Miss Bartlett and Mr. Eager, he advocates the ideal of chastity, desiring Lucy to be "untouched" (135). His view on women appears to come close to the Victorian concept of women that declared them to be the weak, sensitive, independent and unintelligent sex; a view that helped preserve the idealistic myth of the "rational male and the emotional, intuitive female" (Conway 147). Cecil seems to accept this idea of women as feeble and delicate creatures that need the help, protection and good judgment of a man. He is quick to offer Lucy this sort of assistance since he "[believes] that women revere men for their manliness" (101) and that Lucy admires him "because he is a man" (110). Heath suggests that Cecil, like Miss Bartlett, "shields [Lucy] from direct experience" (417), which is a rather apt remark. Cecil reflects on his and Lucy's visit to London in terms of whether it will do Lucy harm or not and resolves that it will not do her any harm, which ultimately makes him realize the visit. He concludes that Lucy is markedly distressed when they stumble upon George, Freddy and Mr. Beebe bathing outdoors and tries to smooth it over by stating that they should pay no attention to the scene (122).

By his incessant manner of sheltering Lucy from the world he is telling her what to feel, or

rather, what he is expecting her to feel. Cecil sees Lucy as an idealised woman – innocent, pure, sensitive, frail and mysterious. He compares her to Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa, whom he loves "not so much for herself as for the things that she will not tell us" (83). Heath states that he "looks through [Lucy] instead of at her" (417). He wants her to conform to the image he has of her, completely disregarding her personality and opinions. He frequently imposes his own ideas on her, telling her what to think about people and things, while he laughs at her thoughts as being of "feminine inconsequence" (92). He is unable to look beyond her sex and see her as an individual with her own thoughts. The only thing that he appears to see is the inferior woman that needs his help and protection, and cannot be trusted in making decisions on her own.

Both Cecil and Mr. Eager seem to rely more on conventions than on people's feelings when they judge characters. Heath remarks that Mr. Eager "lectures others about feelings without having any of his own" (399); a remark that perhaps is applicable to Cecil as well, but that seems harsh. Nevertheless, it is not entirely unwarranted. Mr. Eager and Cecil have no real skills in judging how people feel, which makes them come across as somewhat insensitive. They seem to be so focused on conventions and upholding a Victorian ideology that they see people as either conforming or not conforming to their ideals. They do not see that everyone cannot, or will not adapt to the same beliefs; they do not see the individual.

3.2. The "Scandalous" Edwardians

The characters in *A Room with a View* that seem more "Edwardian" often manage to upset their more conventional surroundings by their comparatively liberal conduct and manner of speech. They frequently disregard social convention and expectation. Their thoughts and opinions are characterized by individualism and they dare to differ from those around them in their values and principles.

The character that stands out the most because of his "unconventional" beliefs is Mr. Emerson. Despite his good intentions, he constantly manages to offend his surroundings by violating proper social behaviour with his abrupt manner of speaking and his rather unabashed honesty. In fact, he is introduced to the reader making a *faux pas* of this kind in an milieu that should perhaps have prevented him from infringing established Victorian propriety:

> [Miss Bartlett] looked at the two rows of English people who were sitting at the table; at the row of white bottles of water and red bottles of wine that ran between the English

people; at the portraits of the late Queen and the late Poet Laureate that hung behind the English people, heavily framed; at the notice of the English church. (3)

It is in this environment, distinctly marked with the presence of Victorian authorities who may remind its observers of proper Victorian conduct, that Mr. Emerson attracts the disapproval of the guests at the pension Bertolini, by interrupting the conversation of Miss Bartlett and Lucy to offer them his and his son's rooms which have a view. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Miss Bartlett reacts strongly to this and she "knew that the intruder was ill-bred, even before she glanced at him" (4). The other guests, "the better class of tourists", are also "shocked" at Mr. Emerson's offer (4). They agree that Mr. Emerson, and to some extent also his son George, have behaved highly inappropriate by bluntly and tactlessly making such an offer to two single ladies.

Miss Bartlett infers from Mr. Emerson's "ungentlemanly" behaviour that he must be a Socialist, which is confirmed by Mr. Beebe. That the old-fashioned Miss Bartlett would associate ill-mannered behaviour with Socialism is not surprising considering that there was a fear and scepticism of socialism abound. By connecting Socialism with bad manners, Miss Bartlett is indicating her dislike of the ideology and suggesting that she does not regard Mr. Emerson as one of "the better class of tourists". However, Mr. Emerson does not seem to care about labels of that sort, but seems more concerned with standing up for what he believes in. Having "married up" he has left his working-class background and is perhaps now a part of the middle-class or even the upper-middle-class. In all events he is probably in possession of some wealth, otherwise his trip to Italy would not have been likely. Having obtained a better social standing than before, one would perhaps expect Mr. Emerson to protect the interests of the new class he belongs to. Yet he does not seem to be inclined to do that. He has remained a Socialist despite climbing the social latter. Instead of conforming to the conventional middle-class ideals and voting for a party that seeks to benefit that class, he has retained his old beliefs, no matter what people like Cecil and Mr. Eager might think of it. He appears to value individualism and self-respect above conformity and social expectations.

During the rest of the novel, Mr. Emerson continues to question convention and espouse more liberal ideas. Unlike most of the other characters who attend church, Mr. Emerson openly admits his atheism (184-185). As mentioned in the first chapter, although more people started questioning religion and the existence of God during the Edwardian Era, religious rites were still widely respected and followed. Mr. Emerson however, does not even appear to be disposed to uphold religious ceremonies. This becomes clear when it is revealed that George

was never baptized because Mr. Emerson would not allow it (184). This view on religion seems to place Mr. Emerson among the "progressive" people that emerged during the Edwardian Era (see first chapter).

His lack of faith may be connected to his political stance, but it may also be a result of his unbending confidence in the individual. Mr. Emerson does not seem to believe in authorities or hierarchies, but believes that each individual can and should take responsibility for his or her own life. This is especially noticeable in his attitude towards the sexes. He believes in equality for men and women, refusing, unlike Cecil, to accept the Victorian idea of female inferiority. He maintains that "[the sexes] shall be [equal] . . . The Garden of Eden which you place in the past, is really yet to come. But not until [men and women] are comrades shall we enter the Garden" (117). With reference to the Victorian view on women, this remark is rather controversial, both in the novel and possibly to Victorian-minded readers of the time. That his attitude is unusual is perhaps best reflected in the fact that women were not allowed to vote when *A Room with a View* was published, which could be seen as an indication that few people would disagree with the established belief that women were inferior to men. Mr. Emerson, however, is not concerned with established beliefs, but speaks up for what *he* believes in.

Not unexpectedly, another of the more "radical" characters that appear in *A Room with a View* is Mr. Emerson's son, George Emerson. Although it is not explicitly stated whether he too is an atheist, he, like his father, does not attend church. Heath asserts that the sadness that George displays in the beginning of the novel emanates from his continuous search for meaning (401). This statement could strengthen the possibility that George too is an atheist and moreover it suggests that George, like his father, is not a stranger to questioning established "truths". Religion seems to offer him no comfort when he seeks to understand why "the things of the universe" will not fit (25). He is in search for something new, something different than the trite religious mantra that perhaps still gave those who clung to religion a sense of meaning, and he "shall want to live" to find it (42).

Throughout the novel George demonstrates more similarities with his father's independent way of thinking than with the Victorian characters who tend to be unable to deviate from manners and customs. He shares Mr. Emerson's idea of equality between the sexes. While Cecil has more or less replaced the real Lucy with the ideal woman and persuaded himself that that is what he sees in her, George seeks to know the real Lucy; he seeks the individual behind the ideal. He wants her to have "[her] own thoughts even when [he] holds [her] in his arms" (155) and revolts against the view on women that Cecil endorses:

> [Cecil] daren't let a woman decide. He's the type who's kept Europe back for a thousand years. Every moment of his life he's forming you, telling you what's charming or amusing or ladylike, telling you what a man thinks womanly; and you, you of all women, listen to his voice instead of to your own. (154-155)

As in the case of his father, George's statement would probably make many contemporary readers raise their eyebrows, again with reference to the fact that women did not have the vote when the novel was published. As remarked earlier, this may give a hint of society's view in general on the benefit of women having and voicing their "own" thoughts. The male population especially disagreed with this idea and their opinion of suffragettes fighting for the vote became more and more negative. However, there were a number of well-known men, predominantly Radicals and Socialists, that sympathised with the suffragettes (Priestley 212). George seems to belong to this exception. Even though, like with the matter of his religiosity, nothing is explicitly stated regarding George's stance to women's suffrage, based on his attitude toward gender and equality, it seems plausible that he is a supporter, at least ideologically if not actively. Taking into account that his father is a Socialist, it does not seem improbable that George has been raised a Socialist and shares his father's political opinion which increases the possibility of him being a sympathiser with the suffragette movement as the Socialists tended to support it.

Carl Freedman calls George "a figure of the future and of vitality – and an implicit enemy to the old order" (95). Indeed, most of his opinions and actions suggest that he challenges many established conventions. Apart from his apparent sympathy with Socialism and feminism, which could be viewed as challenging the traditional politics in England as neither movement had that many members and was relatively new, he also challenges the idea of a class-based society. As Freedman points out, George is only one generation removed from the working class (95), and as a railway clerk his social position would usually be considered lower middle-class (Mitchell 20). His social standing is thus below Lucy's, whose social position is closer to the gentry. It was mentioned in the first chapter that during the Victorian era, during "the old order", people were expected to know their place and keep within their own class. When George kisses Lucy, he does not only ignore the Victorian gentlemanly ideal that stated that a gentleman should behave "honourably" to women and exercise self-control (Mitchell 272), he also completely disregards the class barriers between himself and Lucy and acts as if they were equals.

3.3. The Victorian Edwardians

There are some characters in *A Room with a View* whose thoughts and values make it difficult to place them within a single "mindset". One such character is Lucy's mother, Mrs. Honeychurch, who has many similarities with the Victorian characters. For example, she shares their class-consciousness. She asserts that "there *is* a right sort [of people] and a wrong sort and it's affectation to pretend there isn't" (106). She reprimands Lucy for questioning this statement and trusts her environment to have dealings only with the right sort of people. It has been mentioned in previous chapters that in the class-based Victorian society, the mixing of the classes was neither expected nor approved of. Keeping this in mind, it is not implausible that when Mrs. Honeychurch talks about "the right sort of people", she really means people of the upper-classes: respectable people. This could be seen as support for maintaining class-hierarchy, placing Mrs. Honeychurch closer to characters like Mr. Eager and further away from characters like George.

Ironically, even though Mrs. Honeychurch's statement can be interpreted as her favouring class-boundaries, her own social status is a result of breaking these boundaries. Mrs. Honeychurch does not have the enviable social background of Cecil Vyse, but is nonetheless regarded to be of a respectable social standing. Her husband was a solicitor, which would probably place him within the middle-classes (Mitchell 19-21). He built the home of the Honeychurch family as a speculation but became so pleased with the result that the Honeychurches moved in there themselves when the district was growing. As members from the upper-classes in London moved there, they assumed that the Honeychurches were remnants of the local aristocracy. Although it was eventually discovered that they in fact were not, people were so fond of Mrs. Honeychurch that they treated her family as if they were of equivalent social standing with themselves (102). In other words, the Honeychurch family managed to climb the social ladder without inheriting a new aristocratic title. Consequently, if Mrs. Honeychurch's view on class is closer to that of the Victorian Era, her rising status is closer to the Edwardian "blurring" of the classes (see first chapter). She has defied the very norms that she seems to value.

Mrs. Honeychurch also seems to share the Victorian characters' view on women. It appears that she accepts the idea of women being less capable than men as she does not believe in giving them too much responsibility. She advises her neighbour Sir Harry Otway to only let his houses to men and to "beware of women altogether" (97). She disapproves of Miss Lavish's novel because "nothing roused Mrs. Honeychurch so much as literature in the

hands of females" and declares that "[i]f books must be written, let them be written by men" (128). Her attitude seems to suggest that women should not be trusted with any enterprise, because they, unlike men, cannot manage it. Bonnie Finkelstein calls Mrs. Honeychurch an "anti-feminist" (285), which is not an unreasonable remark. She vehemently objects when Lucy tells her that she would not mind sharing a flat in London with another woman. Mrs. Honeychurch condemns this as unfitting for a young woman and expresses fear that such a frivolous lifestyle will turn Lucy into a suffragette who "[agitates] and [screams] and [is] carried off kicking by the police" (180). Finkelstein states that Mrs. Honeychurch "is just as concerned over a 'woman's place' as Cecil is" (285). Indeed it seems that she tends to criticize women whenever they enter into the realms of men. Literature and politics were largely the business of men, both during the Victorian and the Edwardian Era, while women were confined to the home. Mrs. Honeychurch's sharp reproof of women who try to create other possibilities for themselves could be seen as her supporting the confinement of women to the home.

However, this seemingly Victorian attitude on Mrs. Honeychurch's part is yet again contradicted by her own status. As Finkelstein points out, although Mrs. Honeychurch wants to confine other women to the home, "she herself is in an unusually free position" (285). Being a widow and having a son who is not yet considered to be an adult, she is the head of her house and there is no man around to confine her to "a 'woman's place'" (286). Whatever conventional ideas of women she tends to voice, she herself is a rather good example of an emancipated woman.

Although Mrs. Honeychurch, who "hate[s] all changes" (169), embraces many of the values prevalent during the Victorian Era, she also appears as a woman who has already revolted against some of those norms. Whether or not she is aware of it, Mrs. Honeychurch appears simultaneously as a representative of the "old" Victorian order, and of the "new" Edwardian emancipation.

Another character that is difficult to connect with either Victorian or Edwardian values is the protagonist of *A Room with A View* – Lucy Honeychurch. She starts off as a character who, not necessary believes in, but nevertheless accepts the values put upon her by the Victorian characters. According to Philip Wagner, she is "shackled by Victorian conventionality" (276). This conventionality is represented by Cecil, Miss Bartlett, Mr. Eager and to some extent by Mrs. Honeychurch. Apart from Mr. Eager, all these characters have a strong influence on Lucy, and it seems that she is constantly trying to conform to their ideals:

[Lucy] had accepted their ideals without questioning – their kindly affluence, their

> inexplosive religion, their dislike of paper-bags, orange-peel and broken bottles. . . . Life so far as she had troubled to conceive it, was a circle of rich, pleasant people with identical interests and identical foes. In this circle one thought, married and died. (102)

Lucy, trying to think within the Victorian "circle", suppresses her own beliefs and opinions. She repeatedly questions herself; being "accustomed to having her thoughts confirmed by others or, at all events, contradicted; it was dreadful not to know whether she was thinking right or wrong" (43). She tries to act according to how she thinks that she is expected to act, "[feeling] that [she] ought to be offended with [George], or at all events be offended before him" and "that her mother might not like her talking to that kind of person, and that Charlotte would object most strongly" (21, 25).

Lucy is particularly influenced by Cecil's and Charlotte's notions of the ideal Victorian woman. Charlotte explains to her that "[i]t was not that ladies were inferior to men; it was that they were different. Their mission was to inspire others rather than to achieve themselves. . . . [i]f a [lady] rushed into the fray herself she would first be censured, then despised and finally ignored" (37). This idea of the woman serving as a foil to the man is retrieved in Cecil's view of women. In his opinion, women seem to be around so that they can "revere men for their manliness" (101). They appear to be waiting for protection and instruction so that they can thus inspire men to be heroic and noble. This corresponds to Finkelstein's observation that Lucy is taught to look up to the ideal of the medieval lady (276). The medieval lady, not unlike the Victorian perfect lady, is a chaste "maiden-in-distress" who needs the assistance of a knight, or of the Victorian equivalent: the gentleman (Finkelstein 276). Cecil views himself as this gentleman, or knight, who will protect Lucy from the outside world and who will save her from ignorance by teaching her to view the world through his eyes. Lucy seems to accept this. When Cecil laughs at her ideas of "feminine inconsequence" all is quite as it should be because Lucy is a girl. As such she shakes off subjects "as [being] too difficult for a girl" (99). She devotes herself to serious literature because it is "dreadful how little she [knows] (139). By conforming to Cecil's conception of the ideal woman instead of questioning it, Lucy is accepting the Victorian ideal as a norm. Consequently, she is also reinforcing the authority of the Victorian ideology and contributing to maintaining the feminine ideal. Her choice to adapt herself to it strengthens the notion that there is no room for diversity, for individualism, in her society.

However, throughout the novel Lucy also shows tendencies of doubting these ideals and asks why "most big things" are "unladylike" (37). She is described as a rebel, "but not the

kind that [Cecil] understood – a rebel who desired not a wider dwelling-room, but equality beside the man she loved" (103). Lucy's rebellious spirit seems to lie in a willingness to question established conventions like the social status of women. By questioning why women cannot achieve "big things" she also shows that she has confidence in herself despite her inferior position as a woman. When she buys a picture of Botticelli's "Birth of Venus", in which Venus is nude, Charlotte tries to dissuade her from buying it (38). Lucy however, ignores her advice and buys it anyway, for the first time showing that confidence and trusting in her own opinion and taste.

If Cecil and Charlotte try to suppress Lucy's rebellious spirit, the Emersons encourage it. They challenge her, making her question the conventions she is used to. When Lucy worries about coming to the Santa Croce Church by herself, she is perplexed by their reaction which is simply "why shouldn't you come by yourself?" (21). According to Heath, "[t]he Emersons give [Lucy] a 'sense of larger and unsuspected issues,' and make her 'conscious of some new idea' as they show her the world 'from their own strange standpoint'" (400). George makes her consider what equality between the sexes means, and Mr. Emerson exposes her, observing that instead of expressing her own opinions she is repeating what older people have said to her (21). They seek to know Lucy as an individual and are genuinely interested in her opinions. They function as a catalyst to make Lucy open her eyes and realize that she does not believe in values put upon her by others. Consequently, she liberates herself from them. She breaks her engagement with Cecil and marries George even though her family disapproves. From having formerly been a member of "the old order" who does what is expected of her by society, she grows into a citizen of the 20th century that has an increasing freedom of choice.

4. Conclusion

As was mentioned in the introduction, no clear-cut distinctions can be made between the Victorian and the Edwardian Era, and although people had many opposing beliefs during the same era, it is possible to discern general differences in the ideals that the characters in *A Room with a View* embrace. The main difference seems to be that the Victorian characters' attitude to religion, gender and class is more constricted. There is no room for discussion or deviation; there is only one proper way to look at matters. The Edwardian characters' attitudes, on the other hand, are characterized by open-mindedness. People are allowed to choose for themselves what stance they should take to different issues.

Similarities could be found between the characters within the same "era", which might explain why they adhere to certain principles. The characters that adhere to values that could be labeled "Victorian", generally have a respectable social standing. Both Cecil and Mr. Eager have a respected social position, which they presumably have in common with Miss Bartlett. As the upper-classes were privileged in the Victorian society, it seems reasonable that these characters should cling to ideals of that time as a way to preserve a social order that is advantageous to them. To the extent that Mrs. Honeychurch could be viewed as an advocate of Victorian values, this applies to her as well. Regardless of whether she is "entitled" to her social status, she enjoys the privileges of it. As she is considered an upper-class member by others, she perhaps feels that she needs to defend their social position, so that she may keep hers. George and Mr. Emerson are of a lower social standing than the other characters. Therefore it is likewise not surprising that they should challenge a social order that has tried to confine them to a certain class and limit their opportunities in life.

Since *A Room with a View* was written during a transitional period, it could be expected that there would be some characters that are difficult to see as either Victorian or Edwardian. Mrs. Honeychurch's and Lucy's ambivalent position highlights the fact that change is a process and may take several years, or even decades. They are good examples of how "old" values often are abandoned as a society changes, and replaced with "new" values that are more fitting. Many contemporary readers of the novel were probably also oscillating between "old" and "new" values, trying to adjust to the 20th century.

A Room with a View could be seen as encouraging its contemporary readers to embrace a new time and alternate values, daring to think as individualists in a society that is beginning to allow, and even encourage, individualism. Mr. Emerson, George and Lucy are more sympathetically portrayed than Mr. Eager, Miss Bartlett and Cecil. When Mrs. Honeychurch shows tendencies of "going against" convention, she comes across as a more likeable character that is kind and tolerant, than when she scolds her surroundings for wanting independence or questioning class-systems. The Emersons represent an alternative vision of society where individualism is valued above conformity. With individualism follows freedom of choice, and even though George and Lucy upset many people by choosing to marry, they gain happiness, and readers can feel assured that by having chosen her own path, Lucy will have a free life with the man she loves.

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