

E.M. Forster's ***A Room with a View***



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Humanities at Hertog

Wednesdays | Jan. 5, 12, 19 & 26
Syllabus

HERTOG 2026 HUMANITIES SEMINAR

E.M. FORSTER'S *A ROOM WITH A VIEW*

Cheryl Miller, Director, Hertog Foundation

What better way to begin the new year than with E.M. Forster's *A Room with a View*—a “bright and merry” story of “passion requited” and “love attained”? Published in 1908, Forster's novel follows Lucy Honeychurch, a sensitive young Englishwoman whose chance encounter with the unconventional Emersons in Florence, Italy, offers her not only the titular room with a view, but also a new perspective on her own life. Together, we will read and discuss the novel in light of Forster's humanist credo of “tolerance, good temper, and sympathy,” and we will view the acclaimed 1985 Merchant-Ivory film adaptation starring Helena Bonham-Carter, Julian Sands, and Daniel Day-Lewis.

This seminar will meet online weekly on **Mondays** from **6 to 8 PM ET**.

Course Materials:

- E.M. Forster, *A Room with a View* (1908)
- Course Reader

Discussion Papers: Each fellow will be responsible for completing a brief discussion paper (1-2 pages, single-spaced). See below for your assignment. **Papers are due the day before your assigned session by 5 PM ET.** Please provide page numbers for textual citations. They should be posted on the course Slack channel and will be part of the assigned readings for the session. Paper-writers should be ready to briefly present their ideas during the seminar.

Film Viewing: For those interested, we will host an optional group viewing of the 1985 film adaptation of the novel. Your TA will poll you on possible dates and times. If you cannot make the group showing, please view the film on your own before our final session.

Monday, January 5, 2026

6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. ET

Session I: A Room

Readings:

- *A Room with a View* (RWV), Part 1, Chs. 1–5

Recommended Listening & Viewing:

- [Beethoven, Piano Sonata No. 32 in C Minor, Op. 111](#)
- [Giotto, Frescoes at Santa Croce](#)
- [Andrea della Robbia, Glazed terra-cotta reliefs of swaddled babies](#)
- Lucy's postcards:
 - [Botticelli, The Birth of Venus](#)
 - [Giorgione, The Tempest](#)
 - [The Idolino](#)
 - [Apoxyomenos](#)
 - [Fra Angelico, Coronation of the Virgin](#)
 - [Guido Reni, The Madonna Sewing](#)

Topics:

- Lucy Honeychurch
- Art
- George Emerson
- The “Real”

Discussion Questions:

1. Why are both Lucy and Charlotte suspicious of Mr. Emerson's offer to exchange rooms? What do they fear from his offer?
2. Lucy longs to experience “the true Italy.” How do guides, guidebooks, and fellow travelers help—or hinder—her search?
3. What do we learn about the characters from their responses to art—Giotto's frescoes, Miss Lavish's novels, Lucy's piano playing, and her postcards?
4. What troubles George? Why does Mr. Emerson seek Lucy as a companion for him?
5. How do Lucy and George each respond to the “real event” that takes place in the Piazza?

Monday, January 12, 2026

6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. ET**Session II: A View****Readings:**

- *RWV*, Part 1, Chs. 6–7, Part 2, Chs. 8–10
- Theoi Project, [Phaethon](#) and [Persephone](#)

Topics:

- Italy & England
- Muddles
- Violets
- The Middle Ages & Chivalry

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What is the significance of Italy as a setting? How does it function differently from England in the novel?
- 2) What does it mean to be “muddled”?
- 3) Compare the scene on the terrace of violets to the earlier scene on the Piazza. What precipitates this encounter between Lucy and George?
- 4) In what sense is Cecil Vyse “medieval”?
- 5) Compare Cecil's and George's attitudes toward marriage and women. Do they behave “chivalrously” toward Lucy—and should they?

Monday, January 19, 2026

6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. ET

Session III: The Sacred Lake

Readings:

- *RWV*, Part 2, Chs. 11–15

Recommended Listening:

- [Schumann, "Warum?", *Fantasiestücke* Op. 12](#)
- [Gluck, "Plus j'observe ces lieux," *Armide*](#)
- [Wagner, Flower Maidens, *Parsifal*](#)

Topics:

- Music
- The Sacred Lake
- Freddy
- Kisses

Discussion Questions:

- 1) How does Lucy try to justify her engagement to Cecil to herself and her family?
- 2) Why does Lucy refuse to play Beethoven? How does the music she plays instead reveal the state of her mind and heart?
- 3) How does the bath in the Sacred Lake influence what follows?
- 4) What role does Freddy play in bringing Lucy and George together?
- 5) George's kiss recurs as a motif in the novel. How does this second kiss differ from the first in Florence? From Cecil's kiss?

Monday, January 26, 2026

6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. ET

Session IV: The End of the Middle Ages

Readings:

- *RWV*, Part 2, Chs. 16–20
- Forster, "A View without a Room," 1958
- [Forster, "What I Believe," 1938](#)

Recommended Listening:

- [Mozart, Piano Sonatas](#)
- [Sir Walter Scott, "Lucy Ashton's Song"](#)

Film Viewing:

- [*A Room with a View* \(1985\)](#)

Topics:

- Lies & Truth

- Marriage
- Fate
- Endings

Discussion Questions:

- 1) In what ways does Lucy lie to herself and to others? What finally enables her to tell the truth?
- 2) Near the end of the novel, both Charlotte and Mr. Beebe act in surprising ways. What accounts for their change of heart?
- 3) What role does religion play in the novel's moral vision? Consider the figures of Mr. Beebe, Mr. Eager, and Mr. Emerson.
- 4) Why must Lucy marry?
- 5) In what sense is the final chapter "the end of the Middle Ages"? What new "age" is beginning?
- 6) Consider the coincidences and reversals that bring Lucy and George together. George calls this "Fate." Is he right? Is the ending convincing? Satisfying?
- 7) In 1958, Forster added a postscript to *A Room with a View*. How does his update change—or challenge—your sense of the novel's ending? Do you think it possible for Lucy and George to "retain the View" they enjoyed on their honeymoon after their experiences of two world wars? What about today?

About E.M. Forster



Edward Morgan Forster was born on January 1, 1879, in London and was raised from infancy by his mother and paternal aunts after his father's death.

Forster's boyhood experiences at the Tonbridge School, Kent, were an unpleasant contrast to the happiness he found at home, and his suffering left him with an abiding dislike of the English public school system. At King's College, Cambridge, however, he was able to pursue freely his varied interests in philosophy, literature, and Mediterranean civilization, and he soon determined to devote his life to writing.

His first two novels, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905) and *The Longest Journey* (1907), were both poorly received, and it was not until the publication of *Howards End*, in 1910, that Forster achieved his first major success as a novelist, with the work many considered his finest creation.

Forster first visited India during 1912 and 1913, and after three years as a noncombatant in Alexandria, Egypt, during World War I and several years in England, he returned for an extended visit in 1921. From those experiences came his most celebrated novel, *A Passage to India*, his darkest and most probing work and perhaps the best novel about India written by a foreigner.

As a man of letters, Forster was honored during and after World War II for his resistance to any and all forms of tyranny and totalitarianism, and King's College awarded him a permanent fellowship in 1949.

He spent his later years at Cambridge writing and teaching, and died in Coventry, England, on June 7, 1970. His novel, *Maurice*, written several decades earlier, was published posthumously in 1971.

***A Room with a View* Timeline**

1879	E.M. Forster born in London. His father dies of tuberculosis before Forster's second birthday.
1897–1901	Studied at King's College, Cambridge, becoming a member of the Apostles Society and meeting future Bloomsbury Group members.
1901–03	Began writing seriously after a year-long tour of Italy and Austria with his mother. The first draft of <i>RWV</i> 's Italian section (titled "Lucy") is started, but put aside.
1905	Published his first novel, <i>Where Angels Fear to Tread</i> .
1907	Published <i>The Longest Journey</i> .
1908	Published <i>A Room with a View</i> .
1910	Published <i>Howard's End</i> , his first major success.
1912	Began his first major visit to India and started writing <i>A Passage to India</i> .
1914	Became a conscientious objector at the outbreak of World War I.
1915–19	Worked for the Red Cross in Alexandria, Egypt.
1925	Published <i>A Passage to India</i> , considered his masterpiece and his final novel.
1927	Published <i>Aspects of the Novel</i> , a collection of literary criticism.
1930–40s	Became a notable broadcaster on BBC radio.
1946	Elected an honorary fellow of King's College and resides at the college.
1951	Published <i>Two Cheers for Democracy</i> , a collection of essays and broadcasts.
1970	Died in Coventry at age 91.

A View Without a Room

A Room with a View was published in 1908. Here we are in 1958 and it occurs to me to wonder what the characters have been doing during the interval. They were created even earlier than 1908. The Italian half of the novel was almost the first piece of fiction I attempted. I laid it aside to write and publish two other novels, and then returned to it and added the English half. It is not my preferred novel – *The Longest Journey* is that – but it may fairly be called the nicest. It contains a hero and heroine who are supposed to be good, good-looking and in love – and who are promised happiness. Have they achieved it?

Let me think.

Lucy (Mrs. George Emerson) must now be in her late sixties, George in his early seventies – a ripe age, though not as ripe as my own. They are still a personable couple, and fond of each other and of their children and grandchildren. But where do they live? Ah, that is the difficulty, and that is why I have entitled this article 'A View without a Room'. I cannot think where George and Lucy live.

After their Florentine honeymoon they probably settled down in Hampstead. No – in Highgate. That is pretty clear, and the next six years were from the point of view of amenity the best they ever experienced. George cleared out of the railway and got a better-paid clerkship in a government office, Lucy brought a nice little dowry along with her, which they were too sensible not to enjoy, and Miss Bartlett left them what she termed her little all. (Who would have thought it of Cousin Charlotte? I should never have thought anything else.) They had a servant who slept in, and were becoming comfortable capitalists when World War I exploded – the war that was to end war – and spoiled everything.

George instantly became a conscientious objector. He accepted alternative service, so did not go to prison, but he lost his government job and was out of the running for Homes for Heroes when peace came. Mrs. Honeychurch was terribly upset by her son-in-law's conduct.

Lucy now got on her high horse and declared herself a conscientious objector too, and ran a more immediate risk by continuing to play Beethoven. Hun music! She was overheard and reported, and the police called. Old Mr. Emerson, who lived with the young couple, addressed the police at length. They told him he had better look out. Shortly afterwards he died, still looking out and confident that Love and Truth would see humanity through in the end.

They saw the family through, which is something. No government authorized or ever will authorize either Love or Truth, but they worked privately in this case and helped the squalid move from Highgate to Carshalton. The George Emersons now had two girls and a boy and were beginning to want a real home – somewhere in the country where they would take root and unobtrusively found a dynasty. But civilization was not moving that way. The characters in my other novels were experiencing similar troubles. *Howard's End* is a hunt for a home. India is a *Passage* for Indians as well as English. No resting-place.

For a time Windy Corner dangled illusively. After Mrs. Honeychurch's death there was a chance of moving into that much loved house. But Freddy, who had inherited it, was obliged to sell and realize the capital for the upbringing of his family. And unsuccessful yet prolific doctor, Freddy could not do other than sell. Windy Corner disappeared, its garden was built over, and the name of Honeychurch resounded in Surrey no more.

In due course World War II broke out – the one that was to end with a durable peace. George instantly enlisted. Being both intelligent and passionate, he could distinguish between a Germany that was not much worse than England and a Germany that was devilish. At the age of fifty he could recognize in Hitlerism an enemy of the heart as well as of the head and the arts. He discovered that he loved fighting and had been starved by its absence, and also discovered that away from his wife he did not remain chaste.

For Lucy the war was less varied. She gave some music lessons and broadcast some Beethoven, who was quite all right this time, but the little flat at Watford, where she was trying to keep things together against George's return, was bombed, the loss of her possessions and mementos was complete, and the same thing happened to their married daughter, away at Nuneaton.

At the front George rose to the rank of corporal, was wounded and taken prisoner in Africa, and imprisoned in Mussolini's Italy, where he found the Italians sometimes sympathetic as they had been in his tourist days, and sometimes less sympathetic.

When Italy collapsed he moved northward through the chaos towards Florence. The beloved city had changed, but not unrecognizably. The Trinita Bridge had been destroyed, both ends of the Ponte Vecchio were in a mess, but the Piazza Signoria, where once a trifling murder had occurred, still survived. So did the district where the Pension Bertolini had once flourished – nothing damaged at all.

And George set out – as I did myself a few years later – to locate the particular building. He failed. For though nothing is damaged all is changed. The houses on that stretch of the Lungarno have been renumbered and remodelled and, as it were, remelted, some of the facades have been extended, others have shrunk, so that it is impossible to decide which room was romantic half a century ago. George had therefore to report to Lucy that the View was still there and that the Room must be there, too, but could not be found. She was glad of the news, although at that moment she was homeless. It was something to have retained a View, and, secure in it and in their love as long as they have one another to love, George and Lucy await World War III – the one that would end war and everything else, too.

Cecil Vyse must not be omitted from this prophetic retrospect. He moved out of the Emersons' circle but was not altogether out of mine. With his integrity and intelligence he was destined for confidential work, and in 1914 he was seconded to Information or whatever the withholding of information was then entitled. I had an example of his propaganda, and a very welcome one, at Alexandria. A quiet little party was held on the outskirts of that city, and someone wanted a little Beethoven. The hostess demurred. Hun music might compromise us. But a young officer spoke up. 'No, it's all right,' he said, 'a chap who know about those things from the inside told me Beethoven's definitely Belgian.'

The chap in question must have been Cecil. The mixture of mischief and culture is unmistakable. Our hostess was reassured, the ban was lifted, and the Moonlight Sonata shimmered into the desert.