

Three Characters in the Novel A Room with a View

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In the novel *A Room With a View*, E. M. Forster deals with the theme of self-fulfilment of human beings. He chiefly describes how Lucy Honeychurch, an English middle class girl, fulfils her development through love, through her relationships with others. In describing Lucy's development. Forster paints us a rich gallery of various characters besides the heroine and the hero. In this paper, I am going to discuss three of them; Charlotte Bartlett, Mr. Emerson and Reverend Eager.

Charlotte Bartlett, Lucy's elder cousin, is one of the key characters in the novel. She represents a kind of person that Lucy might become but that readers as well as Forster himself does not want Lucy to be. She is the embodiment of the snobbery, sterility and hypocrisy of the English upper-middle class. Being a middle-aged spinster herself, Charlotte has lived an accepted life. She encases herself in the decaying Victorian gentility and morality and keeps herself from any notion of possible comradeship between the sexes. As soon as she enters her room at the pension, she "fastened the window-shutters and locked the door" (*A Room With a View*, E. M. Forster, P34). She shuts herself up from experiencing and enjoying life. Thus she remains undeveloped. Worst of all, Charlotte always tries to hold Lucy back from developing and she proves to be the biggest obstacle to Lucy's development.

On their first day in Florence. Charlotte and Lucy both feel very disappointed at not having been given a room with a view. However, when another two tourists at the pension, Mr. Emerson and his son George offers them an exchange of the rooms, Charlotte is shocked. She considers herself a tourist of a better class than that of the Emersons and looks down upon the Emersons. She regards it indecent for her to have any acquaintance with these vulgar and ill-bred people like the Emersons. More-over, she tries to put all these snobbish ideas into Lucy's head and prevents Lucy from showing her interest and eagerness to have a room with a view.

Although at dinner, Charlotte insists that Lucy should have a room with a view, when she finally accepts Mr. Emerson's offer upon the persuasion of Reverend Mr. Beebe, she takes the largest room. Here is her explanation to Lucy, which can only express her hypocrisy and sterility: "Naturally, of course, I should have given it to you; but I happen to know that it belongs to the young man, and I was sure your mother would not like it." (Forster, P33)

The disturbances over the exchange of the rooms in the opening chapter not only offers us some glimpses of the snobbish, sterile and selfish characteristics of Charlotte Bartlett, but more importantly, it warns us that Charlotte is exercising her influence upon Lucy and trying to bring Lucy into her way of thinking and living. After only reading the first chapter, we can not help being anxious for Lucy: What will Lucy become so long as she has Charlotte as the chaperon?

In the following days of their tour in Florence, Charlotte appears more and more irritating and intolerable, and we get more insights into her character. All the time Charlotte advertises herself as a "responsible" chaperone, and that everything she does is on Lucy's account and will do Lucy good. In fact, Charlotte produces discomfort and muddle wherever she goes. She often debases herself so as to make Lucy feel guilty and to get a better control over Lucy. She never understands what Lucy really needs. Everything she has done always goes against Lucy's desire for development and freedom. She keeps inflicting her own conventional ideas upon Lucy and teaching Lucy how to be "decently and properly".

Charlotte has deprived herself of any love and passion, and she tries her best to drive Lucy into a barren spinsterhood like her own. She never loses a chance to repress Lucy's desire for love and freedom. Every critical moment when Lucy is about to develop, to face the truth and beauty of life, Charlotte will appear as a reminder to Lucy of social conventions and hold Lucy back. When she sees the seriousness of George's feeling for Lucy, she deliberately attempts to turn Lucy against him. She disproves Lucy's being together with the Emersons and makes Lucy feel uneasy and even guilty at being with the Emersons. It is Charlotte who interrupts the embrace on the violet-covered hill-side at Fiesole. Dumbfounded as she is at George's kiss, Lucy does not think it an insult. However, it is Charlotte who, convinced herself, convinces Lucy that George, like all men, is a rake and his kiss but a masculine exploit; "We fear him for you, dear. You are so young and inexperienced, you have lived among such nice people, that you can not realize what men can be—how they can take a brutal pleasure in insulting a woman whom her sex does not protect and rally round." (Forster, P95—P96). What is a "selfless" chaperone and an artist in precaution! What a cheerless, loveless world Charlotte presents to Lucy! In this way, Charlotte seduces Lucy into her policy of leaving Florence for Rome where Cecil and his mother are staying. She succeeds once more in tearing Lucy and George apart. And she makes Lucy deeper in the muddle.

Charlotte's shadow follows Lucy all the time and she gives Lucy no peace. After Lucy returns England, especially after the Emersons move to the Summer Street, Lucy becomes more and more conscious of her feeling for George. It is at this time that Charlotte comes to visit Windy Corner. She drones again and again in Lucy's ears that George is a cad: "once a cad, always a cad." (Forster, P166). After George kisses Lucy again, Charlotte silently presides over a scene in which Lucy demands that George never see her again. Then she congratulates Lucy on her refusing George: "It isn't everyone who could boast such a conquest, dearest, is it?... You are so sensible and brave—so unlike the girls of my day." (Forster, P188). When Lucy decides to go to Greece with the Miss Alans, no one, even Mr. Beebe can understand Lucy's decision except Charlotte because she knows clearly that Lucy is walking

along the same path as she herself did many years ago, "the night received her (Lucy), as it had received Miss Bartlett thirty years before." (Forster, P194). She regards the escape an salvation for Lucy and beckons Lucy to join the vast armies of the benighted, of whom she herself is one.

Charlotte is drawing Lucy nearer and nearer to herself, to the brink of an everlasting spinsterhood when she unexpectedly betrays a change of her heart. It seems that before the end Charlotte suddenly comes to realize what a fuss she has made and decides to give Lucy and George one more chance. Knowing that Mr. Emerson is in Mr. Beebe's study, she brings Lucy there, thus provides Lucy an occasion for recognizing her love for George.

Strange and sudden as it is, the final reversal brings a flicker of hope for Charlotte. It indicates that Charlotte Bartlett, as George says to Lucy, has not "frozen and withered up all through", (Forster, P230) and she still retains a human spark which religion and society have not yet snuffed out. Therefore, Forster succeeds in adding a hint of human complexity to an otherwise flat character and making Charlotte Bartlett a multi-dimensional character.

Standing out as a contrast with Charlotte Bartlett, is Mr. Emerson, George's father. Unlike Charlotte, Mr. Emerson is sincere, straight forward and kind-hearted. "He is kind to people because he loves them." (Forster, P45). He has no tact and never keeps his opinions to himself. He does things not out of social gentility but of his own spontaneity. When he overhears Charlotte and Lucy complaining about not having a room with a view, he offers loudly and publicly that he and his son can exchange rooms with the two ladies. He can not understand and attacks Charlotte's over-pretension about accepting his offer.

Mr. Emerson is a real nature man. Reality for him lies not as much in society as in nature. He knows "that we come from the winds and that we shall return to them, that all life is perhaps a knot, a tangle, a blemish in the eternal smoothness." (Forster, P47). However, he does not believe in this world — sorrow; "Let us love one other, and work and rejoice." (Forster, P47). Mr. Emerson is not such a person who is easily influenced by society and others. He has his own mind. Those tourists at the pension regard him as vulgar, irreligious and ill-mannered, but he does not care about it and sticks to his own way of living. He is contemptuous of religious orthodoxy and declares that human being is the most important in the world. "a baby is worth a dozen saints." (Forster, P46). Mr. Emerson has a view of life which enables him to see through social conventions. He opposes conventionalism and is not inhibited by those hypocritical moralities and social codes. He prefers the unconscious life to the repressions of society. When, on their outing to Fiesole, Mr. Eager coldly separates the Italian driver and his lover, Mr. Emerson protests for the couple. He warns the tourists not to "go fighting against the spring." (Forster, P84).

During Lucy's development, Mr. Emerson has played a very important role and served as a spiritual guide for Lucy. By offering Lucy a room with a view, he is not only giving Lucy a view of the River Arno, but most significant of all, he is helping Lucy adopt a new view of life, which will be the key cause and motivation of Lucy's development. He tells Lucy to listen to her own heart and break through the eggshell of social conventions. When Lucy primly refuses the Emersons' invitation to join their tour in the church in Santa Croce, Mr. Emerson

says that she is repeating what she has heard older people say and is pretending to be touchy. It is Mr. Emerson who warns Lucy to beware of muddle. He asks Lucy to understand his son and not to allow herself to become muddled by listening to others: "You are inclined to get muddled if I may judge from last night. Let yourself go. Pull out from the depths those thoughts that you do not understand, and spread them out in the sunlight and know the meaning of them. By understanding George you may learn to understand yourself. It will be good for both of you" (Forster, P47).

Mr. Emerson urges Lucy to give a truthful response to her own feeling, to seize the beauty of life and fully enjoy it. Before the end when Lucy is about to enter the army of the benighted by lying to George that she does not love him, Mr. Emerson comes to rescue her. He forces Lucy to see that she loves George and must marry him, "You love the boy body and soul, plainly, directly, as he loves you. . . You must marry, or your life will be wasted. . . You can transmute love, ignore it, muddle it, but you can never pull it out of you. . ." (Forster, P223). What he says shows Lucy the holiness of direct desire and that in gaining George, she will gain something for the whole world. It is Mr. Emerson who gives Lucy the strength to face and accept the truth. Thus, he helps Lucy fulfil the last stage of her development.

The last character I'd like to discuss is the Reverend Mr. Eager. Just like Charlotte Bartlett, Mr. Eager is a representative of "the sterility, snobbery and hypocrisy of the self — consciously cultured English abroad." Being an English resident in Florence, he considers himself superior to the tourists at the pension and prides himself on knowing the "real" Italy unlike the common tourists. (Forster, P71). He turns life art and sins against passion, which is an important part of life. In his eyes, the event in Piazza, which is a symbol of strong passion, is a disgrace to the fair traditional city: "This very square — so I am told — witnessed yesterday the most sordid of tragedy. To one who loves the Florence of Dante and Savonarola there is something portentous in such desecration — portentous and humiliating." (Forster, P71 — P72). He flaunts that he loves Florence, yet he treats that Florentine vendor of photograph in a very rude way. On their outing to Fiesole, it is Mr. Eager who brutally and unreasonably separates the Italian driver and his lover. He even considers it a "victory" (Forster, P84).

Together with Charlotte Bartlett and others, Mr. Eager "does his bit" in the general conspiracy to keep Lucy and George apart. He looks down upon the Emersons and several times he backbites the Emersons in Lucy's presence. On their return from Fiesole when Mr. Emerson worries for his son who is walking in the rain, come Mr. Eager's words: "Typical behaviour. In the presence of reality that kind of person invariably breaks down." (Forster, P92). After her encounter with George on the Piazza, Lucy comes to know more about George and begins to find him interesting. At this moment, however, Mr. Eager tells Lucy and Charlotte what he "knows" about the Emersons. He hints that not only are the Emersons socialists, disbelievers and the descendants of labourers, but Mr. Emerson is a criminal as well: "he murdered his wife in the sight of God" (Forster, P90). However, in the end, it turns out that Mr. Eager's accusation of Mr. Emerson is totally false. (Forster, P218). It is Mr. Eager who harries Mrs. Emerson to death by convincing her that her son has had typhoid as a

result of his not having been baptized. The murderer is none but Mr. Eager himself. He is a supreme liar and hypocrite. By telling Lucy such a false story. Mr. Eager is intending to make Lucy hostile to the Emersons and turn Lucy away from George. He is intending to murder Lucy's soul. However, ironically enough, the effect of what he has told Lucy about the Emersons is to make the Emersons more appealing to Lucy; she cannot believe the accusation, but it adds to the romantic air of Florence, "a magic city where people thought and did the most extraordinary things." (Forster, P76). Lucy even begins to defend the Emersons against the accusation even though she herself is not aware of it.

To sum up, the three characters have their own characteristics and play different roles in the novel by either accelerating or hindering Lucy's development.

Reference:

- 1 Crows. F. C., E. M. Forster The Peril of Humanism, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1962
- 2 Forster E. M., A Room With a View, Penguin, 1908
- 3 Martin. J. S., E. M. Forster The Endless Journey, C. U. P. England, 1976

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要处理好常抓不懈和重点突破的关系。我们讲的选拔,当然要有一定的“跨越”,按部就班就谈不上选拔。如果死守着台阶观念,领导班子年轻化的目标就无法实现。培养和选拔年轻干部工作,必须保持稳定性和连续性,常抓不懈。在此基础上把握时机,抓住重点,采取过硬措施,使工作有所突破。

第二,既要重视年轻干部的选拔,又要注意领导班子的梯次配备。各级领导班子提出一定的年轻干部比例要求,目的是保持合理的年龄结构,以利于新老干部在合作中交替,在交替中合作。但这并不是规定只是在某个年龄段取人,也不意味着在任职年龄上搞“一刀切”。年轻化是相对领导班子年龄老化而言的,不是说领导班子只能由年轻干部组成。班子配备还是以梯次年龄结构为宜,这可以变各年龄段干部的优势为结合优势(优势互补)。如果硬性规定某个层次的领导班子只能由某个年龄段的人组成,对那些不符合这个年龄段要求但身体尚好、德才兼优的干部置之不用,就会造成极大的人才浪费。所以说,只有不断地把优秀年轻干部及时地充实到领导班子中去,才能实现领导班子的年龄梯次配备和新老成员的平稳交替。

第三,既要做好“选拔一批人”,又要做好“培养一批人”的工作。培养造就社会主义现代化建设事业的接班人,最重要、最紧迫的任务是培养选拔大批德才兼备的领导干部,但这不是唯一的任务,也不是一项孤立的工作。建设有中国特色的社会主义,不仅需要大批能够坚持党的基本路线,善于治党、治国的领导干部,还需要数量众多、素质优秀的各类人才。当代青年是进入21世纪建设有中国特色社会主义事业的接班人。我们要在新的严峻的国际形势和众多挑战面前立于不败之地,很大程度上取决于青年一代的素质。因此培养教育好青年一代,是党和国家的前途、命运和希望所在。同时,现在的青年一代也是党和国家干部队伍的后备力量,他们的素质如何,将直接影响未来的干部素质,因此现在培养教育好青年一代也是为培养年轻干部工作打基础,这是一项长期的工作,必须持之以恒地抓下去。