

Response Paper for *A Room With a View*

In Jean E. Kennard's article, "Victims of Convention," Kennard spends her time critiquing novels such as *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, and *Middlemarch* for doing the seemingly unthinkable — allowing their female protagonists to both rebel against societal gender norms and fall in love. Kennard turns this criticism over to *A Room With a View* as well, arguing that Lucy's relationship with George causes her to assume his identity instead of cultivating one of her own, simply by marrying the man at the end of the novel. Kennard also accuses the novel of following into the "two suitors" trap, which grants the female protagonist a patriarchal-fueled sense of individualistic triumph when she chooses the correct man to marry at the end, which in this novel's case is George Emerson (the other suitor being Cecil, a man of tradition). Using Doris Lessing's novel, *A Proper Marriage*, Kennard develops a wildly biased thesis that 20th century novels, such as *A Room With a View*, are solely defining women through their relationships. Apparently, Kennard thinks a woman can't have it all.

This article is severely problematic as it creates a harmful binary for women, which is: either be liberated and turn away all notions of romantic love with men, or allow yourself to fall in love and be complacent within the patriarchy. If the goal of feminism is to allow women to possess agency over themselves and their own lives, which the novels under scrutiny here exemplify, then criticizing novels for allowing their feminist protagonists to genuinely fall in love and choose marriage (instead of having it undesirably thrust upon them) is just as bad as the patriarchal societies that they are frustrated with. Both ideologies scrutinize a woman's say in her own life. The idea that Kennard is presenting within this article assumes there are only two kinds of women, the trapped housewife and the rebellious spinster. This in turn dehumanizes the female sex even further by removing all nuance from women. *A Room With a View's* Lucy

Honeychurch does not fall under either category, so of course Forster's choice to allow her to find herself and fall in love is something inexplicably unsettling to Kennard's ideology here.

Besides introducing Lucy to culture and art, as well as inspiring a degree of independence and confidence within her that others kept her from embracing, George Emerson is more than just the better of the "two suitors" — he is an equal partner to Lucy. He acknowledges the reality of their patriarchal society, while simultaneously admitting to Lucy that his intentions for her are to simply accompany her and love her throughout her journey to self-discovery. When Lucy confronts George criticizing Cecil for a habit he somewhat engages in, which is inadvertently telling Lucy what to do, George apologetically admits to this and says, "“This desire to govern a woman—it lies very deep, and men and women must fight it together before they shall enter the garden. But I do love you surely in a better way than he does.” He thought. “Yes—really in a better way. I want you to have your own thoughts even when I hold you in my arms.”” (Forster) His self-awareness and ability to admit his wrongdoings, while simultaneously proving the sheer purity of his intentions throughout this passage, along with the rest of the novel, is a testament to both George's character and Lucy's choice to marry him. While the thought of Lucy achieving self-discovery on her own seems exciting and thrilling, especially since we seldom see female characters engage in such adventures, who are we to police her choice to embark on this journey with a romantic partner? Lucy's choice to be with George is her own and based off of the passion, adventure, and lust for life that George inspires within Lucy, he is clearly a positive influence and a perfect partner in her search for herself. Her love for George and her personal agency can coexist just fine, which is unfortunate for Kennard's surprisingly sexist viewpoint.