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Limits of Self-Discovery and Independence in *A Room With a View*

E. M. Foster's *A Room With a View* follows Lucy's development in womanhood and individuality. While it may seem that this book offers a woman's successful experiences at maturing on the surface, many critics argue that E. M. Forster falls short as Lucy's identity is dependent on her love interest. Jean E. Kennard, for example, provides a thoughtful analysis in "Victims of Convention" regarding this co-dependence. Essentially, Kennard argues that authors such as E.M Forster, and consequently female characters, are confined to the social conventions of their time, therefore suppressing the potential for the female experience to be explored outside of male relationships. Kennard believes one major fallacy within *A Room With a View* is Lucy's desire to reject the "medieval lady" and all limitations that come with embodying her. While her beliefs are striking and powerful for her time period and character development, she never actually breaks out of the mold. The maturity Lucy yearns for, and the roots for, "involves becoming one's own person, living one's own life" (Kennard 26). As Kennard suggests, "Lucy has not become a new person, certainly not her own person... To mature is to become oneself, but Lucy has not become herself; she has become George" (26). Social conventions thwart Lucy's self-discovery, and her identity is bound to her marriage, if not for her title as a wife, then her relationship with the "perfect" man. She assumes George's identity in a sense, by adapting to his ideas and even regurgitating them. Ultimately, Kennard suggests that authors such as E. M. Forster writes in limited conditions that result in limited explorations of women's experience,

questioning how different Lucy would be if she had left her home and lived life truly independently.

While I agree with Kennard's stance on Lucy's lack of development, E. M. Forster attempts to subtly challenge the conventions he writes under, primarily through Lucy's growing ability to speak genuinely. Miss Bartlett becomes a mild antagonist by the end of the book, where Lucy's spoken opinion changes drastically. During their stay at the Bertolini, Lucy is self-conscious of what she says to Miss Bartlett, thinking such things as, "I must have been selfish or unkind; I must be more careful. It is so dreadful for Charlotte, being poor" (Forster 8). Not only does she think about her opinion, but Lucy pities Miss Bartlett and wants to be more tactful. She is not particularly annoyed by Miss Bartlett and actually wants to make her feel comfortable. In contrast, after Mrs. Honeychurch proposes inviting Miss Bartlett over to Windy Corney, Lucy exclaims, "She gets on our nerves. You haven't seen her lately, and don't realize how tiresome she can be, though so good" (Forster 114). Though this instance was before Lucy finding out Miss Bartlett shared her secret, it is interesting to see Lucy openly discuss her feelings. Not only does she express dislike, but she does so vocally and to more than one person. Considering her inability to form and speak her opinions at the beginning of the book, Lucy has come a long way in self-growth. This is a subtle way in which Forster introduces Lucy's growth, maturity, and a sense of independence within limiting conventions. Her opinions of others are slowly becoming her own, and when they are not, they at least align with what she thinks is suitable for her. In the end, while Kennard makes a compelling argument for the limitations of women in modern novels, E. M. Foster attempts to create a space for Lucy's internal character development cleverly.

### Works Cited

Forster, E. M. (1995). *A Room With a View*. Dover Publications.

Kennard, Jean E. "Victims of Convention." *Pacific Coast Philology*, vol. 8, 1973, pp. 23–27.

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