

## HOMOSEXUALITY IN E. M. FORSTER'S MAURICE

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The present paper is an attempt to explore the homosexuality in E. M. Forster's posthumously published novel, *Maurice* (1971). He is a prolific author of Edwardian literary tradition, who has penned several essays, critical reviews, various significant biographies and short stories. Forster's novels reflect a broad vision of human experiences, which not only enriches the Edwardian literary tradition, but it also adds a significant milestone in the tradition of world literature. His literary creations, though they articulate the various socio-cultural problems, Forster is conscious about the equilibrium of the didacticism and the entertainment value. As a result, his novels are popular even in the modern period and have become a subject of film adaptation.

*Maurice*, Forster's posthumously published novel, gives a detailed account of his life and progress of the protagonist Maurice Hall. Unlike earlier novels of Forster wherein problematic sexuality is largely hidden, in *Maurice*, this theme is not only predominant but also taken to the point of justification. All other themes in the novel such as platonic love, development of the character, marriage and social relations are in a way subordinated to the overbearing theme of homosexuality.

Forster delayed the publication because of the public and legal opposition to homosexuality though this novel was probably written in 1913. Forster, a prolific writer, would have held back his novel for any other reason. This delay on the part of Forster itself is suggestive that the main theme of the novel is homosexuality—an uneasy theme for the early twentieth century English society. Forster knew that it would be too controversial, however, by the time he died, British attitudes and law towards homosexuality changed and its official publication in 1971 represent this change.

In 1961, Forster in a note written had observed that though, the novel ended unhappily with the two male lovers separating, it would have got published. What Forster implied was

that a novel ends in the happy union of two male lovers would be considered as a novel that recommends a crime of homosexuality. Ironically, six years later homosexuality decriminalised in England. *Maurice* as a novel on homosexuality was quite different from the conventional novels of on sexuality and human relationship. In the novel, Forster was trying to articulate, what life can be if one is homosexual male and, out of compulsion, obligated to follow a path which is not that of homosexual love and marriage. One should also keep in mind that in the earlier novels of Forster, love and its fulfilment in marriage was a favourite subject. The novels which go before *Maurice* mostly follow the Edwardian moral norms. Though homosexuality is hinted in *A Room with a View*, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *The Longest Journey*, a clear pairing of two male characters to form the core relationships appears predominantly in *Maurice*. Readers can easily find the continuation of the relationships between Philip and Gino in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and that of the step-brothers Rickie and Stephen in *The Longest Journey* and the culminations of these relations in the link between Maurice and Alec in last novel. Further, one can also read novel by placing the theme of male bonding at the centre of enquiry that would enable one to look at homosexuality as a kind of emotional bonding between two male characters. When Forster wrote *Maurice*, homosexuality was a private matter and its erotic aspects were alone discussed in the society, discontents the emotional and psychological aspect of the same. In *Maurice*, Forster deals with the subject of homosexuality with clear emphasis on emotional and social aspects of sexuality.

Before one gets into a detailed discussion of homosexuality a theme, it is necessary to define the term to understand the complete range of its implication. Merriam's Webster Dictionary explains homosexuality as "an erotic activity with another of the same sex." The same dictionary describes the word 'homosexual' as relating to or involving sexual intercourse between the persons of the same sex. It also explains 'homosexual' being characterized by a tendency to direct sexual desire to another to same sex. Both the definitions of 'homosexual' and 'homosexuality' emphasizes the erotic desire as the underlined factor of this particular human behaviour. (Web) However, writers and artists who have dealt with the theme of homosexuality have seen this alternate sexual behaviour not as a disorder but as different form of sexuality.

Forster's *Maurice* is an attempt to consider the emotional, social inter-personal and cultural implications of homosexual relations between Maurice and Alec. *Maurice* explores

the experiences of homosexual male in the hostile world. It is also an attempt to understand homosexual experience and add a new realm of man-man relationship to the literature. In the first chapter of the novel, the readers are introduced to the theme of homosexuality when the fourteen years old Maurice is introduced by his schoolmaster to the hetero-sexual relationship and Maurice's homosexuality becomes appropriate when Maurice shows aversion to female body. Maurice suddenly understands that shame is companion to sexuality and "then darkness rolled up again, the darkness that is primeval and not eternal, and yields to its own painful dawn." (20) This idea of darkness is related to sexuality never leaves Maurice throughout the novel. The sense of shame which he associates with sexuality is doubled when he understands that he is a homosexual and this shame makes his life more miserable. Maurice is always under the scare that he might be exposed as homosexual, a sinner, a practitioner of unlawful sexuality in an orthodox society.

Experiences of homosexuality chase Maurice throughout his development. At Cambridge, Clive Durham introduces him to the idea of love between men, in the light of the dominant concept of platonic love of opposite sexes. However, Maurice takes Clive as his first love while Clive is more interested in the classical platonic theory. In this context, one can interpret Clive's interest in platonic theory is an indication of his sense of shame as an attempt to cover up his homosexual erotic desire. Clive comes under the pressure of the Edwardian upper middle class norms and finally surrenders. His desire for respectability leads him to break off with Maurice and marry Anne. He, thus, opts for conventional homosexual life. Maurice on the other hand, rebels against the sexual norms of the society though his relations with Clive end happily. When Maurice suggests Clive that they may live together, Clive reveals the fact that his interest in Maurice is not physical, but largely emotional. Eventually, Clive leaves Maurice and assumes his social position. This change in Clive can be understood as the social pressure on a homosexual to make a choice between a social position and the true sexual identity. What Forster presents in the case of Clive is that in a conventional society, homosexuals have to wear a mask of respectability and their sexual orientation. Gorton also explains Clive and Maurice relations as a journey to self discovery. He indicates that this male-bonding in the novel indicates two different positions of homosexuality- Maurice representing of entire desire and Clive-representing the spiritual aspect. He also examines how Maurice-Clive relationship is really complex as Clive, sometimes becomes attracted to women. Gorton provides a complex social and behavioural analysis of the different attitudes of Maurice and Clive towards homosexuality:

*Clive extols homosexuality as a higher form of love, a spiritual connection that must be left physically unconsummated to uphold its surpassing nobility. Yet a love so beaten down by over-intellectualization will starve for lack of sustenance. Maurice is left to burn, while Clive, according to the narrator, somehow becomes attracted to women. (Web)*

This rejection of Clive makes Maurice to reconsider his sexuality, making him aware that he has denied the company of his male lover which makes him confused and this confusion takes him to a hypnotist. However, the hypnotist who doesn't understand the psychological and emotional problems of homosexual cannot give him any cure.

Forster's depiction of homosexuality is not nearly analyses of man-man relationship but a depiction of its logic potential in normative Edwardian society. In this tragedy, Maurice stands out as a great champion who inaugurated the tradition of homosexuality in literature. In a conventional homosexual narrative like Christopher Marlow's Edward II, the protagonist dies, facing the problem of rejection. However, Maurice averts this tragic end and decides to live with Alec against all the pressures of the society. The Edwardian concept of happy ending novel is the one that ends into resolution of marriage between a man and the woman. Any novel that goes against this pattern was considered tragic and hence not easily accepted in the society.

*Maurice* depicts also the psychological aspects of homosexuality. Throughout the novel Maurice undertakes a journey into his own mind towards an acceptance of homosexuality. He has to negotiate the society and the shame before accepting finally that he can be happy only with Alec. The psychological aspects of homosexuality are partly imposed by the homosexual norms of the orthodox English society that compel an individual to be a good citizen. Maurice finds it very difficult to articulate his sexuality in an orthodox society which discourages even though open discussions on normal sexuality and hence one can imagine how such a society would have made homosexuality unspeakable. It is explored when Maurice says that:

*I'm an unspeakable of the Oscar Wilde sort." At last judgment [sic] came. He could scarcely believe his ears. It was "Rubbish, rubbish!" He had expected many things, but not this; for if his words were rubbish his life was a dream. ... "Who put that lie into your head? You whom I see and know to be a decent*

*fellow! We'll never mention it again. No—I'll not discuss. I'll not discuss. The worst thing I could do for you is discuss it. (159)*

In Maurice, Forster also depicts the social conditions which allow friendship between two men, but not homosexual relationship. For instance, the relationship between Clive and Maurice is made possible by Oxford's Liberal environment, a residential college for young men. Oxford gives Maurice and Clive a chance to spend time together and perceives a relationship without any danger of suspicion. However when Clive and Maurice live schools the expectations of the society strain their relationship. Forster indicates how the real world is big challenge for two bachelors, living together when everyman is expected to marry and start a family. Maurice is also made to feel that he has cheated his parents as he thinks that it is a shame to be sterile and not passing on the family lineage by marrying and having kids. However, Maurice gradually understands that not having children is natural consequence of homosexuality while Clive feels that he cannot questions the social expectation:

*These children will be a nuisance," he [Clive] remarked during a canter. "What children?" "Mine! The need of an heir for Penge [Clive's family's estate]. My mother calls it marriage, but that was all she was thinking of. (96)*

Forster gives ample evidence of a homosexual link between Maurice and Clive. At Oxford, they embrace like lovers though they are immediately separated by other friends approaching them:

*Now Durham stretched up to him, stroked his hair. They lapsed one another. They were lying breast against breast soon, head was on shoulder, but just as their cheeks met someone called "Hall" from the court, and he answered: he always had answered when people called. Both started violently, and Durham sprang to the mantelpiece where he leant his head on his arm. (57)*

What is also revealed in this episode is the shame in the minds of Maurice and Clive, as if they have done something illicit. Also suggests the point that their relationship has to be kept a secret even from the contact of other students.

Forster's *Maurice* could be studied as a novel in which the central characters enter adulthood by negotiating his different sexuality. Forster throws hints at Maurice's

homosexual interest as early as the third chapter. In this chapter, when Maurice is at Sunnington school he experiences a strange fantasy. Later, Maurice reflects on this fantasy and understands for the first time that he is more interested in male than girls. Though in a poetic language Forster reveals Maurice's homo-erotic leaning in describing his fantasy:

*He was playing foot-ball against a nondescript whose existence he resented. He made an effort and the nondescript turned into George, tat garden boy. But he had to be careful or it would reappear. George headed down the field towards him, naked and jumping over the wood stacks. (15)*

This fantasy also illustrates the psychoanalytical theory that gay-sexuality too is formed in the childhood itself. However, Maurice at this stage is not very comfortable with his liking for men and he brings religious yardsticks to access himself. He considers the body and sexuality as filth. One can understand that, what Maurice is uncomfortable with, is not his body but rather his unusual liking for men. Forster describes this psychological dilemma in Maurice that basically springs from his unorthodox from sexuality. He depicts, with details, the developmental crisis in Maurice. Owing to his homosexual identity:

*As soon as his body developed he became obscene. He supposed some special curse had descended on him, but he could not help, for even when receiving the Holy Communion filthy thought would arise in his mind. (16)*

Gorton also interprets the happy ending of the novel with Maurice and Alec to live together. According to him it indicates a stage in the development of Maurice where he becomes an individual, fully aware of the social consequences of his decision. Gorton explains this growth of individuality through homosexual relationship in psychological terms:

*It should also be noted that the happy endings in Maurice are limited to the pair of lovers, Maurice and Alec. Clive is tormented in old age after a lifetime wasted in a loveless marriage. Dr. Steven Centola, a Jungian psychologist, argues that Maurice fails to complete the final stage of the developmental process of "individuation." Instead of re-emerging into the world and engaging society as a fully self-aware person, Maurice disappears with Alec into the greenwood. They save each other by hiding in darkness where their love will be left alone. (Web)*

It is when Maurice enters Cambridge that he really comes very close to other males. He stands observing closely other boys in the campus and he realises that he is interested in boys such as Risley and Durham. Gradually, he starts visiting Durham and he also makes it a pint to hang around with Durham even while playing. Subsequently, he learns that he is physically and mentally attracted to Durham. Durham too responds to Maurice's need and they get along well, talking debating and playing. Forster describes their closeness with evident signs of physical closeness:

*They walked arms in arm or arm around shoulder now. When they sat it was nearly always in the same position- Maurice in a chair, and Durham at his feet, leaning against him. In the world of their friends this attracted no notice. Maurice would stroke Durham's hair. (37)*

One can note the conspicuous physical gestures in the image of Durham and Maurice walking arm and arm and in the word 'stoke' used in the passage.

Even in Cambridge Maurice juxtaposes his sexuality with faith. The believer in him continues to consider his liking for men as a sin. Durham comes up with a solution for this moral crisis in Maurice and he initiates Maurice into atheism. Once god is destabilizing from his concept of love, Maurice emerges freely into a relationship with Durham. From Durham he learns that passion and religion do not go together and he also learns to be expressive about his feelings and likings. Like a lover, in agony, he yearns for Durham and he thinks about Durham in his loneliness which allows himself to experience pains. Forster also traces their life together with clear gestures of physical and emotional intimacy.

The physical intimacy between Maurice and Durham slowly translate into verbal articulation of love. In a significant development Durham declares his feelings for Maurice, "Durham could not wait. People were all around them, but with eyes that had gone intensely blue he whispered, "I love you." (57) Maurice's initial reaction to Durham's open declaration of love reveals his fear of the orthodox society and the law against homosexuality. Though inwardly Maurice cherishes this moment, he alerts Durham of his status and the possibilities of them being treated as criminals. Maurice's words express a mixture of excitement, confusion and concerns:

*Durham, you're an Englishman. I'm another. Don't talk nonsense. I'm not offended, because I know you don't mean it, but it's the only subject absolutely beyond the limit as you know, it's the worst crime in the calendar, and you must never mention it again. Durham! a rotten notion really. (57)*

Though Maurice is worried about the reaction of the fellow students to his relationship with Durham he realizes that he can be happy only with a male partner. When he gets back to his room, he thinks about the incident and gradually accepts the fact that his body and his mind crave for a man and that his sexuality is different. This realization marks a significant stage in the identity formulation of Maurice- his journey towards acceptance of his difference and his desires. Forster records this development in Maurice, stating clearly that his love and sexuality cannot be separated:

*He would not deceive himself so much. He would not-and this was the -test pretend to care about women when the only sex that attracted him was his own. He loved men and always had loved them. He longed to embrace them and mingle his being with theirs. Now that the man who he returned his love had been lost, he admitted this. (53)*

Durham comes up for Maurice is not just an object of his sexual desire. Maurice feels for him as lover would feel for his partner and Durham reciprocates. They start exchanging words and glances as two passionate lovers would do. Slowly, but very surely, Maurice too is able to speech out his heart to Durham. Forster describes this incident, clearly underlying the point that both Maurice and Durham experience joy in their togetherness:

*He heard himself saying "I really love you as you love me," and Durham replying, "Is that so? Then I forgive you," and to the ardour of youth such a conversation seemed possible, though some how he did not conceive it as leading to joy. (54)*

Maurice and Durham also become a bit cautious of the other boys spying on their relationship. Like two lovers, they develop a silent understanding to avoid excess public display of their love. Even then the other boys in Cambridge notice some change in their behaviour. Forster depicts Maurice-Durham relationship from the perceptive of other students, implying again strongly the possibilities of a homosexual link:



*Even if they met in the court, Durham would affect to have forgotten something and run past him or away. He was surprised their friends did not notice the change, but few undergraduates are observant- they have too much to discover within themselves and it was don who remarked that Durham had stopped honeymooning with that Hall person. (54-55)*

In chapter ten Forster describes a conversation between Maurice and Durham that takes place in the night. This conversation touches upon romance, art, love, and pain. This conversation also indicates their realization that in an orthodox society, they cannot stay together and then the vision of Greek society drifts in us as an alternative for them:

*“That’s all, I think. Get married quickly and forget.” “Durham, I love you.”*

*He laughed bitterly. “I do – I have always—”*

*“Good night, good night.”*

*“I tell you, I do—I came to say it—in your very own way—I have always been like the Greeks and didn’t know.” “Expand the statement.” (56)*

Durham realizes that in the Edwardian society homosexuality is a crime so he wants to recover from homosexuality as a result he tries to convince Maurice for separation. In this context, Glen Cavaliero analyses Maurice-Durham relationship and argues that though they are passionate their love is partial and hence a failure. He remarks how contemporary morality strangles their homosexual love:

*While at Cambridge he meets and falls in love with a fellow undergraduate called Clive Durham. Clive returns his feelings, but by mutual though confused agreement the affair remains Platonic. In due course Clive gets married, and Maurice is forced to realise the true nature of his feelings and desires; but having sentimentalized them, he readily falls in with society’s verdict that he is ‘an unspeakable of Oscar Wilde sort’. Attempt to cure himself come to nothing, and he withers slowly in the hostile air of contemporary morality. (133-134)*

Later, Maurice cannot sleep until 2’o clock in the night he stays awake, terrified thinking about his separation from Durham. As he drifts into a semi-conscious daze he still calls out for Durham. Forster describes this incident to show how deeply Maurice loves Durham:

*As he alighted his name had been called out of dreams. The violence went out of his heart, and a purity that he had never imagined dwelt there instead. His friend had called him. He stood for a moment entranced, then the new emotion found him words, and laying his hand very gently upon the pillows he answered "Clive!" (57)*

This failure, according to Cavaliero is because Durham is not as passionate as Maurice. Cavaliero also points out the limitation in Durham as he likes to keep his relationship with Maurice more platonic. He observes:

*The crucial figure here is Clive. That his personality is subtly portrayed is not in this instance quite enough: his physical presence is needed if we are to share Maurice's tension and frustration to the full. But that presence is lacking: the early scenes between the two young men have a softness that is no substitute for eroticism, and the effect is now embarrassing. Indeed, Clive's determination to keep the affair Platonic, while consistent with the emotional sublimations of the time, does as it stands weaken the contrast between him and Alec. (1979: 134)*

However, Forster points out that Durham's decision to get married does not make him happy as he experiences no warmth in their relations and he feels rejected like the characters of Forster's earlier novel- Cecil Vyse and Henry Wilcox. What Forster shows in the novel is that Durham becomes unnatural by rejecting his true love and hence he is unhappy. Cavaliero explains Durham's unhappiness in terms of his rejection of his natural feelings:

*The denial of the flesh is a denial of the spirit also. Forster never wrote more scathingly than in those passages when Clive, after his marriage, patronises Maurice for his failure to follow suit. Maurice is going to London to consult a hypnotist, and allows Clive to believe that it is to seed a wife. (135)*

However, towards end of the novel Forster depicts Durham in a mood of repentance in a significant conversation. In chapter thirty-five Durham admits to Maurice that he would have been happy with him. This conversation reveals Forster's conviction that a homosexual love can also be fulfilling. This minute conversation brings out Durham's regret and Maurice's emerging positive identity as he embraces his homosexual identity more openly:

“Maurice dear, I wanted just to show I hadn’t forgotten the past. I quite agree—don’t let’s mention it ever again, but I wanted to show just this once.”

“All right.”

“Aren’t you thankful it’s ended properly?”

“How properly?” “Instead of that muddle last year.”

“Oh with you.”

“Quits and I’ll go.”

*Marice applied his lips to the starched cuff of a dress shirt. Having functioned, he withdrew, leaving Clive mire friendly than ever, and insistent he should return to Penge as soon as circumstances allowed this. (162)*

In contrast Maurice—Durham relationship which remains unfulfilled, Maurice—Alec relationship is more complete. Maurice’s affair with Alec is not only a matter of love but also an understanding that transcendent all kinds of boundaries. While, Durham in his affair with Maurice is not able to give up his upper-class affiliation, Maurice in his relationship with Alec is willing to forget the differences in class. Despite knowing that Alec is a servant he decides to go ahead with the affair.

Compare to Clive, Alec who comes from the lower class is more open towards his liking for Maurice. It becomes more apparent in the incident when Maurice calls out of his window, Alec climbs the available ladder to join Maurice in bed. This indicates symbolically that both Maurice and Alec will have to overlook respective social classes. Gorton captures the symbolic significance of Maurice-Alec relationship and also reveals that how Maurice surpasses the extremes of love and fear in his relationship with Alec:

*“Muddled” Maurice would have been unfamiliar with Carpenter or Whitman, so the four corners of the novel do not fully explain how he came to the insights that enabled him to plan a lifelong relationship with Alec. With an inspired push from the author, Maurice travels the last leg of his metaphoric journey from valley to mountaintop in an unseen leap. Through this brilliant authorial intrusion, Maurice foretells a post-Stonewall liberationist sensibility. Forster affirms gay self-acceptance and same-sex love that can thrive despite social reprobation. Maurice asserts the truth that gays cannot become fully human, fully alive, unless we embrace who we are. Forster bears*

*witness to the centrality of coming to terms with one's homosexuality in the formation of character for gay people. (Web)*

Alec enters Maurice's room through the window, reminding the romantic scene in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. This episode also underlines the presence of romantic love and mutual understanding of Maurice—Alec which is absent in his relations with Durham. Cavaliero analysis the merit of Maurice—Alec relationship and suggests that in this homosexual link, human values are also celebrated. In this connection Cavaliero writes:

*What is interesting about Maurice's affair with Alec is Forster's handling of a theme which had always interested him—that of class. One reward of the homosexual condition is that it readily transcends class barriers; and in the chapter where Maurice and Alec confronts each other in the British Museum, one of the strongest that Forster ever wrote, the struggle in them both between their sense of class and their belief in their own humanity is riveting. (137)*

Forster describes how Maurice feels contented in his relationship with Alec. In contrast to Maurice's love with Durham in which he feels sinful, in his relations with Alec he feels ennobled. Forster clearly captures this moral elevation in *Maurice* in chapter forty five:

*He had brought out the man in Alec, and not it was Alec's turn to bring out the hero in him. He knew what the call was, and what his answer must be. They must live outside class, without relations or money; they must work and stick to each other till death. (223)*

Critics have also considered Maurice's homosexuality as an inward journey. For instance, Glen Cavaliero thinks that Maurice's homosexual identity gives him a different social location to think beyond barriers. Claude Summers argues that Maurice's homosexuality provides him with psychological space. Summers points out that Maurice's failure to be converted to heterosexuality gives him an inner peace and eventually he is not disturbed as he comes to turn his different but not abnormal sexuality. Summers also considers Maurice and Durham as the symbols of flesh and intellect respectively in the novel. By doing so, Summers argues that when Maurice is eventually more happy than Durham, it is the ultimate victory of the flesh over the intellect. According to Summers Maurice—Durham relationship is only a reflection of Durham's intellectualism and hence it fails. He points out

that, “The Maurice-Clive relationship is limited, for it is based on distrust of the body and on a bookish—hence false—Hellenism.”(155) Summers also observes that Maurice-Durham relationship is hindered by Durham’s fear of homosexuality. Summers traces the roots of Durham’s fears which really spoil their relationship:

*Clive’s distrust of the body and contempt for his sexuality are deeply rooted in his subconscious. They result from his having internalized the Christian prohibitions that he outwardly rejects and they are reflected as well in his extreme reaction to Maurice’s understandable shock at his declaration of love. Clive requests his friend not to mention his “criminal morbidity” to anyone and tells him, “It is a lasting grief to have insulted you. (155-156)*

It is also very interesting to notice the way Forster naturalizes Alec, in contrast to the artificiality that Durham represent. When Maurice first acknowledges Alec’s individuality, interestingly it is in the backdrop of the nature.

Thus one can say that the two sets of homosexual relationships described in Maurice, symbolize two different traditions, ideologies and attitudes to humanity. Maurice-Durham relationship is largely portrayed as platonic and immature while Maurice-Alec relationship is founded on the concept of unconditional love—a love that transcends social classes, interpersonal differences and fear which comes to represent higher human values.

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