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English 449T

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Mutually Exclusive: Being Gay and Being a Man in E.M. Forster's *Maurice*

E.M. Forster lived and worked in a version of England focused on legal forms of oppression and repression. That which personally affected him most was the criminalization of homosexuality. In place before he was born and not fully repealed until after he died, these laws legally enforced the alienation of queer people and structures of heteronormativity – the idea that heterosexual relationships are the default in a society, and anything else is strange or even dangerous.

Before investigating Forster's fictional construction of English heteronormativity, it is important to first outline the legal and cultural heteronormativity surrounding Forster's real life as he wrote. The Labouchere amendment, enacted in 1885 and upheld long after *Maurice* was written, made any male homosexual action legally punishable. Alexandra Deluise describes the law as treating “any potentially homosexual behavior as a crime.” The technical term used was “gross indecency” and lacked definition so as to allow broad persecution across any actions perceived as homosexual. Just twenty years prior Forster had seen that very law punish Oscar Wilde, and in another thirty-eight he would see it do the same to Alan Turing – to say nothing of the thousands of men convicted both before and after them.

Literary trials to deem works obscene also occurred at the time, with Forster attending one himself in support of the author whose work was on trial – *Radclyffe Hall* – which took place in 1928, 14 years after Forster finished his work on *Maurice* and tucked it away for the

decades to come. Works found obscene were put on trial and censored, and for men there was precedent – Oscar Wilde - for trials of another nature to turn into trials of gross indecency. Though Forster may not have guarded or hidden homosexuality in his work intended to be published posthumously, he wasn't deluded about the society he was writing in and about. The environment was hostile. The law, however, is not much the subject of *Maurice* – he instead addressed cultural notions of acceptable men and of homosexuality.

E.M. Forster's novel entitled *Maurice* may have been published in 1971 after his death, but he first drafted it in 1914, at the end of England's Edwardian era. He used the novel not just to critique social norms at the time, but also to examine people's relation to them. Through *Maurice* – both the novel and the character – Forster expressed homosexuality as an identity in direct opposition to the dominant social identities expected of men at the time. He looked at the ways in which gay men could not fit within traditional notions of religion, health, masculinity, or even society at large. He did so primarily through the evolving sexualities of two characters – Maurice and Clive – in which one man accepted his sexuality and did not remain within English society, and the other ultimately rejected homosexuality to retain his place. While he took care to accurately portray these widely held beliefs, he never vilified these gay characters. He quite honestly examined the ways in which English society rejected them and their status as men, but he never rejected them himself.

The University of Cambridge, a prominent setting within *Maurice* and the place where Clive and Maurice meet, is a school steeped in religious traditions. It is here that Forster forces his characters to reckon with the inability of religion – particularly English Christianity – and homosexuality to coexist. The work here is twofold – Forster presents this exclusivity both

through the Cambridge's condemnation of homosexuality and each character's relationship to religion and homosexuality. When characters practice religion, they repress homosexuality. When they express homosexuality, they neglect religion. As soon as Clive and Maurice meet, each character's relationship with religion is established and from there shifts as the two men grow closer.

Throughout the Cambridge portion of the novel, it is clearly established that the university does not approve of homosexuality. This establishes religious attitudes towards homosexuality because the church has historically guided the beliefs and practices of English universities, including Cambridge. During Maurice's education at Cambridge, the dean instructed a student to "Omit: a reference to the unspeakable vice of the Greeks." (Forster, 51), in a translation class as it is so intolerable it should not be allowed even in the classroom. The guidelines of religious institutions were so strict and anti-homosexuality that people were not to address or speak of it. Additionally, right before Maurice is expelled and as he and Clive drive away from the school for an intimate day together, the dean calls out for them not to leave. When they return, Maurice is suspended and only allowed to return if he provides an apology. To return he must repent. On the surface the dean is demanding an apology for his rude behavior, not his homosexual behavior. As Maurice reflects, though, he finds that that is not the whole truth. As he spends time away from university, he concludes the following – "If a woman had been in that side-car, if then he had refused to stop at the Dean's bidding, would Dr. Barry have required an apology from him? Surely not." (Forster, 85). This particular conclusion is in response to a different but connected incident, but shows all the same how he is treated differently because he is romantically interested in men rather than women. He is being punished for having gone on a romantic endeavor with Clive. In all likelihood, he would still be at Cambridge had he not

skipped chapel and class with a man but rather a woman. Though it is not in so many words, this sequence of events amounts to Maurice being expelled for exploring a homosexual relationship with Clive.

In addition to his writing on Cambridge's treatment of homosexuality and religion, Forster used his characters to examine the relationship between homosexuality and religion. In particular, he looked at Clive and Maurice – their relationship beginning is the catalyst for Maurice's religious detachment and their relationship ending is the catalyst for Clive's reconnection to religion. Before the two men are intimate, Clive is rather atheistic – despite his devout youth - and tends to skip church services while Maurice regularly attends them. Clive, the less practicing of the two, is also the one who is cognizant of his sexuality at this time while Maurice is completely ignorant of his own interest in men. At this point, Clive isn't particularly sure about Maurice and even considers him boring. It is only after Maurice picks up Clive's habit of missing church that he begins to find him interesting and Maurice grows attached to Clive in manners beyond friendship.

At this point, with the two of them growing physically and intellectually closer, Clive expresses that he believes he is damned for his sexuality. He has come to the understanding that who he is is antithetical to religion. Maurice, upon beginning to realize his own sexuality, feels that he is “understanding nothing except that man has been created to feel pain and loneliness without help from heaven.” (Forster, 58). Once he accepts and expresses on his realization of being gay, he feels cast out not only from religion, but specifically from heaven, mirroring Clive's own feeling of condemnation.

The presence of religion in this novel subsides after a prominent moment in which Clive feels he has been struck with normality – he has become heterosexual. The transition is

physically represented by an illness, but Clive himself expresses it as “a blind alteration of the life spirit” (Forster, 118) which indicates a reunion with spirituality. He comes to this spiritual realization in Greece, surrounded by the environment representative of the homosexuality he used to feel connected to. He finds himself displeased with such an environment, and drawn towards women on a spiritual level. Clive felt himself distanced from religion while he engaged in a gay relationship, but finds himself drawn back into religious ideas when he starts to feel attraction towards women. This points towards the matter separating Clive from religion being his homosexuality.

With Clive’s spiritual transition, the novel transitions towards a medical examination of homosexuality. It is at this point in the novel that Forster refocuses on idea of homosexuality not just as a sin, but as an illness. Maurice seeks treatment first with his family doctor, then a retired doctor and finally with a hypnotist named Dr. Lasker Jones because his sexuality is not only outside norms of religion, but also norms of health. At this time in England, standards for mental health or sanity included attraction to the opposite sex, and varying forms of pseudoscience aimed to diagnose and treat homosexuality – if it was acknowledged at all. Psychologists at this time were beginning to consider homosexuality a medical issue rather than a lifestyle choice, and came about this conclusion in different ways. Freud, for example, believed that all people were “innately bisexual” but between birth and adulthood would come into heterosexuality if they grew as they were supposed to – making homosexuality an error in health. Psychologists had differing opinions on the origins of homosexuality – most either agreed it to be development gone wrong or theorized it to be a disease - but they all agreed on one thing – “the proper development of sexual desire in a human being would, ultimately, always lead to

heterosexuality.” (Deluise, 12). This defines homosexuality as an indication of lackluster health, and a condition to be treated through hypnosis or a variety of therapies.

Forster introduces the idea of homosexuality as illness first through Clive, soon after he confesses his love for Maurice and is met with rejection. He writes in a note asking that Maurice “not to mention my criminal morbidity.” (Forster, 60) This is a reference both to the illegality of his feelings and the perception of illness – morbidity indicates disease. Clive even envies the health of Maurice before his affection is reciprocated. Forster then more thoroughly demonstrates the at-large denial and rejection of homosexuality in the medical field through a series of doctors. The first doctor consulted is the Hall family doctor, Jowitt, and Maurice only asks if he works with any homosexual men. Jowitt responds that he does not, as that is “asylum work.” Then comes Maurice’s attempted treatment with Dr. Barry, a retired doctor that he seeks out in hope of being cured. Initially misunderstanding the point of their meeting, Dr. Barry assumes him to have some sort of STD or STI until the moment Maurice describes himself as “an unspeakable of the Oscar Wilde sort.” This phrasing itself attests to the ways in which Forster framed homosexuality as antithetical to dominant culture – when referencing homosexuality they refuse to even name it because it is so taboo - but Dr. Barry’s reaction speaks to his framing of the relationship between homosexuality and the medical community. He first shouts that it is rubbish, then follows with “Who put that lie into your head? You whom I see and know to be a decent fellow! We’ll never mention it again.” (Forster, 159). He completely writes off Maurice’s concerns, won’t speak of it, tells him he is wrong and refuses to point him in the direction of someone who might help him. Homosexuality is so far outside of what is accepted or tolerated that it is indeed unspeakable, even were it to be considered a medical issue.

At this point, Maurice's interaction with Dr. Barry has clearly established that gay men exist outside the bounds of what English people would expect of a healthy man. From there Maurice, seeking to return to the ideal of a healthy man he once was, dives deeper into his search for medical treatment, seeking out a hypnotist and finding Dr. Lasker Jones. While Dr. Jones was willing to speak of homosexuality, he also found need to treat it as a disease, diagnosing Maurice with "congenital homosexuality." (Forster, 180) . He introduces more fully the idea that homosexuality, when not ignored, was seen as illness. However, later in the novel after failing to cure him, he pivots on his treatment of Maurice and more fully expresses the relationship of English society to gay men – he says that "England has always been disinclined to accept human nature," (Forster, 211) at once validating Maurice as natural and acknowledging the fault of England in forcing homosexuality to occupy a place in society opposite to acceptable identities. This is part of Forster's effort to ensure that despite endeavoring to honestly portray English attitudes towards homosexuality, he would not let them go unchallenged.

The last specific facet of dominant ideology at the time that Forster presented as antithetical to homosexuality is the concept of masculinity contemporary to the novel. Masculinity at the time was defined by athleticism, aggression, and lack of emotion or ability to express feelings. (Hartree, 4).

Clive's journey is the one that sets up the contrast between male homosexuality and accepted masculinity best. When he is first introduced he and Maurice are drastically different. Clive, the character who is already aware of his interest in men, is softer, less athletic, and less aggressive. Upon first meeting Maurice, he believes him heterosexual and identifies him as "a man who only liked women—one could tell that at a glance." (Forster, 72). Maurice, the character who has yet to realize his own sexuality is an athlete who checks all the boxes of

traditional masculinity. Their journeys then intertwine, and illuminate the dominant ideas of how homosexuality, masculinity, and emotional communication intersect. Masculine men were expected to be emotionally inarticulate – feelings were not to be expressed in words or that would be a weakness. Homosexual men were thought to be emasculated and by extension would be more effective at expressing and communicating important emotions. The scenes in which Clive and Maurice first begin their love affair demonstrate this idea incredibly well.

Clive, the man presented as less masculine, is the one to reveal his romantic feelings towards Maurice. He is the one who confesses both homosexuality and his love for Maurice, and is thus established as emotionally articulate. Maurice, the more masculine of the two, shuts down. He cannot process or fathom this idea or these feelings, despite reciprocating them. He is emotionally unaware, as one would expect a masculine heterosexual man to be. Later, Maurice understands. He understands at once that he is gay and that he feels love toward Clive – only once he begins to reckon with his own homosexuality does he begin to utilize skills inaccessible to masculine straight men.

From there, the roles reverse. When their relationship dies and Clive returns to exclusively loving women, he loses touch with his ability to communicate and express his emotions. Maurice, retaining his love for men, also maintains his ability to express himself and feels deep emotions. Thus the link is established – in an English society the only men that are masculine (and thus unable to access their feelings) are straight (and thus accepted by the dominant culture).

With these three facets of dominant English culture at the time (religion, medicine, and masculinity) explored, the final piece that ties the notion of homosexuality and dominant English culture being mutually exclusive together is direct address. Throughout the novel both Maurice,

Clive, and various side characters shed direct light on homosexuality not fitting within society. Even certain moments in which homosexuality doesn't seem to fit within common social practices become quite on the nose commentary particularly when coupled with Maurice's internal realizations. Underlying the novel is not only his realization of his sexuality, but also his realization that his sexuality others him.

This sort of moment is introduced astonishingly early in the novel, when Maurice is still quite young. Mr. Ducie, a teacher at his prep school, decides to introduce him to acceptable ideas of sex and sexuality (heterosexuality of course) by drawing diagrams in the sand. Maurice doesn't understand or take much interest save for his anger with Mr. Ducie for not having taught him anything of value. He later takes interest in sex, just with men. However, the novel uses this moment to set up the idea of what sex and sexuality is to the dominant English culture at the time – it is heterosexual, and Maurice's own gay identity does not fit within this, which he learns as he grows.

From there, the direct markers of his otherness only increase, and quite a few come from Maurice himself. Returning to the initiation of Maurice and Clive's relationship, part of Maurice's initial shock and rejection was rooted not just in his inability to access his own emotions, but also the understanding that pursuing a relationship with Clive would be deeply outside of acceptable bounds. He remarks to Clive that "You're an Englishman. I'm another. Don't talk nonsense." (Forster, 59). He bases his idea of this relationship being nonsense not just in that they are two men, but in that they are two *Englishmen*. The English expectations for men surrounding them makes impossible any form of love between them – were they in another society or culture the issue may be different, but as it stands they are two Englishmen, and Clive talks nonsense.

The last indication within the development and deterioration of their relationship that Forster is impressing upon his readers the opposing natures of homosexuality and England's expectations for men comes at Clive's home, Penge. Maurice is there visiting when it is made incredibly clear the Clive is expected to marry a woman with wealth to aid in the upkeep of his family home. Maurice is deeply upset by this and thinks to himself that "he and the beloved would vanish utterly, would continue neither in Heaven nor Earth." (Forster, 97). Maurice understands in this moment more than any before how impossible sustainable love with Clive is in England. Clive has to marry a woman and cut his ties to Maurice in the near future. With no place for them in religion and no place for them in England, there is simply no place for them. The demands on men in English society inevitable lead to the impossibility of homosexual relationships.

From there, Clive and Maurice go their separate ways. The two men find different fates, one reverting to heterosexuality to retain his place as a man in English society, and the other indeed relinquishing his identity as an Englishman. After Clive falls ill and subsequently reveals himself to be "normal", he finds himself attracted to Maurice's sister, Ada. He eventually marries a woman named Anne Woods, the news of which leads Maurice to seek treatment. This relationship is not particularly passionate or emotive – in reference to sex with his wife, he thinks that "though not disgraceful it had been sentimental and deserved oblivion" (Forster, 164). He explicitly equates emotion and sentimentality with uselessness and lack of value. We see Clive detached from many of the characteristics he possessed when we initially met him and he identified – albeit secretly – as homosexual. He is no longer particularly emotionally expressive, he has a marriage sanctioned by the church and no longer experiences such criminal morbidities

as he is now separated from the sin and illness of homosexuality. Having shed any expressions of homosexuality, Clive now meets quite perfectly the definition of a man to the English.

While Clive sinks into an anti-sentimental marriage, Maurice explores other options in his life. Forster uses the latter portion of the novel to introduce the idea of the greenwood, a space he writes as antithetical to English identity. In this way, the greenwood and gay men are meant for each other. As this goes on, Maurice finds a new man to love and does not repress his sexuality to retain his social identities. He instead leaves behind his social identity as a man in England to run away with his lover, Alec. Maurice and Alec escape into the greenwood. When the relationship of these two men survives, they physically remove themselves from the expectations for English men at the time and leave English society. While Forster establishes homosexuality as antithetical to the identities and lives expected of men in England, he also established the greenwood as antithetical to modernized English ideals. The greenwood is established as a natural place outside the realm of societal rules, first introduced at Maurice's final appointment with Dr. Lasker Jones. When discussing the reality of men like Maurice in England, Maurice says that in the past "men of my sort could take to the greenwood." (Forster, 212). The greenwood "symbolizes ... the very lack of identity." (Harned, 66). Within the greenwood there are no preestablished notions of what identifies and makes a man. The men, both those of the past as well as Maurice and Alec, use it to thrive without the burden of religion, medical ideals, or traditional masculinity weighing them down. Forster himself provides assurance of their success in this more idealized setting in his terminal note when he writes "Maurice and Alec still roam the greenwood." (Forster, 250).

Maurice – the novel and the man – outlines clearly the experiences awaiting a gay man in England. They outline that England was not meant for gay men, and that existing as a gay man is

to try to survive while defying the rules that lay out how exactly to be a man in England. An English man must be religious, he must be healthy in all ways, he must be aggressive and out of touch with his emotions. A gay man may not be any of those things. A gay man is required to question his place in England's church, he is automatically considered ill, and he must have at least enough introspection to have discovered his love for men. To be homosexual and to be an Edwardian English man are mutually exclusive. Even so, Forster outlines a way in which gay man can exist – he does not bend in his stance on gay men in England, but he offers another place for them. A natural place outside of these rigid expectations, they may love in the Greenwood.

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