E.M. Forster’s Maurice

“THE LOVE THAT DARE NOT SPEAK ITS NAME”
Forster’s Maurice:

- Maurice was written in 1913–1914 and revised in 1932 and 1959–1960. It was not published until 1971 after Forster’s death.
- Forster was writing A Passage to India at the time, but stopped writing his “Indian novel” in favour of Maurice.
- Forster was inspired by the poet and activist Edward Carpenter.
- On the left, Edward Carpenter and George Merrill: their relationship was the inspiration for Maurice Hall and Alec Scudder.
- Merrill touched Forster bottom after lunch and “like a lightning flash, the plot and characters of [Forster’s] new novel appeared to him” (The Guardian).
Edward Carpenter

- Carpenter came from a privileged family.
- He studied at Trinity Hall in Cambridge, where he became a fellow of Trinity Hall in 1867, following the resignation of Leslie Stephen.
- After he resigned from his position at Cambridge, he built a house in Millthorpe, where he developed his revolutionary ideas. He considered himself a feminist and socialist.
- Carpenter built himself a community of people he trusted and influenced writers, such as W. B. Yeats, Virginia Woolf, and D H Lawrence. Most notably, he began a close friendship with the author E.M. Forster.
Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, who was a close friend of Edward Carpenter and was closely associated with the Bloomsbury group, said that “popular opinion hasn’t managed” to put Edward “into prison and murder him … We must be thankful for small mercies.”
Historical Context

- Forster knew that *Maurice* could not be published in his lifetime.

- Historical circumstances: Oscar Wilde trial of 1895, the Criminal Law Amendment Bill passed a decade earlier "outlawing all forms of male homosexual contact", the Radclyffe Hall trials in 1928 (her novel *The Well of Loneliness* was judged obscene because it defended "unnatural practices between women").

- On the right, Oscar Wilde's trial as featured in the Illustrated Police News, a weekly tabloid newspaper, 1895.
Forster met Syed Ross Masood, a Muslim aristocrat, in England in 1906, and dedicated A Passage to India to him: “to Syed Ross Masood and to the seventeen years of our friendship.”

“His motive for going to India was to see Syed Ross Masood with whom he was deeply in love. The affection was lopsided: Forster had twice declared his feelings, but Masood was straight and couldn’t reciprocate. Nevertheless, the two men were close, and when Masood completed his legal studies and returned to India, Forster followed a few months later” (The Guardian).
Masti vs. Homosexual Identity

The terms gay, homosexual or lesbian may be problematic in South Asia (Nivedita Menon, “Outing Heteronormativity: Nation, Citizen, Feminist Disruptions”)

“Masti” - fun between men. This refers to “men who do not identify as gay, who are attracted to women, but have sex with men.”
The Birth of Homosexuality

“We must not forget that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized—Westphal's famous article of 1870 on "contrary sexual sensations" can stand as its date of birth ... The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.” (Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume I)
The Birth of Homosexuality

- Sexologists, psychotherapists began writing about homosexuality: Havelock Ellis’s theory of inversion (1897), Sigmund Freud’s theories of psychosexual development (late 19th-early 20th century), Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s theory of sexual perversion (1886).

- Havelock Ellis wrote in his autobiography, “Homosexuality was an aspect of sex which up to a few years before had interested me less than any, and I had known very little about it. But during those few years I had become interested in it. Partly I had found that some of my most highly esteemed friends were more or less homosexual (like Edward Carpenter, not to mention Edith).”
Forster’s Relationships with Men

- Forster lost his virginity to a wounded soldier in 1917 (Forster wrote in his diary that he “parted with respectability”) while working for the Red Cross in Egypt.

- Forster’s sexual awakening in his late 30s led to a series of romances with working class men including a tram conductor and two policemen.

- Following the death of his mother in 1945 Forster lived alone in London and Cambridge but maintained close friendships with a number of men, including a married policeman called Bob Buckingham. ([The Telegraph](https://www.telegraph.co.uk))
Homosexuality and Writing

- After *A Passage to India* (1924), Forster did not write any more novels.
- Before his death Forster wrote that “I should have been a more famous writer if I had written or rather published more, but sex prevented the latter.”
- “The marriage plot fiction had become a masquerade to him” (Wendy Moffat).
“The love that dare not speak its name.”

- “As long as they talk of the unspeakable vice of the Greeks they can’t expect fair play” (Forster, Maurice 84).
- “‘Do you come across unspeakables of the Oscar Wilde sort?’ But Jowitt replied, ‘No, that’s in the asylum work, thank God,’ which was discouraging, and perhaps it might be better to consult someone whom he should never see again. He thought of specialists, but did not know whether there were any for his disease, nor whether they would keep faith if he confided in them. On all other subjects he could command advice, but on this, which touched him daily, civilization was silent” (Forster, Maurice 136).
- “I am an unspeakable of the Oscar Wilde sort” (139).
- “Maurice, dear, I wanted just to show I hadn’t forgotten the past. I quite agree—don’t let’s mention it ever again” (153).
"The love that dare not speak its name."

"By the end of the 19th century, sexual knowledge, when it had become fully current ... that knowledge meant sexual knowledge, and secrets sexual secrets, there had in fact developed one particular sexuality that was distinctly constituted as secrecy" (Sedgwick, The Epistemology of the Closet 49).
“Mr. Cornwallis always suspected such friendships. It was not natural that men of different characters and tastes should be intimate, and although undergraduates, unlike schoolboys, are officially normal, the dons exercised a certain amount of watchfulness, and felt it right to spoil a love affair when they could.” (75)
"I want greater freedom for writers, both as creators and as critics. In England, more than elsewhere, their creative work is hampered because they can't write freely about sex, and I want it recognized that sex is a subject for serious treatment and also for comic treatment" (Forster, Abinger Harvest, 1914)
Searching for history

- Clive and Maurice both reject religion.
  - Dr. Barry: “Now listen to me, Maurice, never let that evil hallucination, that temptation from the devil, occur to you again” (138).
- Plato’s Symposium: “Omit: a reference to the unspeakable vice of the Greeks” (50)
- “I shall be attacked for a feminist & hinted at for a Sapphist,” Virginia Woolf after the publication of A Room of One’s Own.
Plato and the Aestheticization of Homosexual Love

- In the Symposium those males who love men are said to be the most noble, yet “do not act thus from any want of shame, but because they are valiant and manly, and have a manly countenance, and they embrace that which is like them.”
- Heterosexual relations are seen as common, and indeed more devotion is expected in homosexual love, since it is the more spiritual.
- Plato’s dialogue continues: “Evil is the vulgar lover who loves the body rather than the soul.”
- Heterosexuals are pregnant in the body only, but homosexuals have souls which are pregnant. The latter do not waste creative energy on having children: their offspring are wisdom and virtue.
‘I knew you read the *Symposium* in the vac,’ he said in a low voice. Maurice felt uneasy. ‘Then you understand—without me saying more—’ ‘How do you mean?’ Durham could not wait. People were all around them, but with eyes that had gone intensely blue he whispered, ‘I love you.’ (56)

▶ “The love that dare not speak its name.”
▶ Trying to find a language for homosexual love

Interaction Between Clive and Maurice
“He loved men and always had loved them. He longed to embrace them and mingle his being with theirs. Now that the man who returned his love had been lost, he admitted this” (58)
Lytton Strachey and Duncan Grant

"I am filled with ... joy,-not by the consummation of my own poor pleasure ... but by the sudden knowledge that he too was moved.... For the first time, I loved his soul. In the future when we meet, I want to be worthy ... of what I am feeling now. I want our intercourse to be unmarred by the weaknesses that I know are mine too often ... let us be occupied with the cleansing aspirations of our art as much as with each other and with ourselves.”  
(Hutcheon)

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“Dr. Barry had given the best advice he could. He had read no scientific works on Maurice’s subject. None had existed when he walked the hospitals, and any published since were German, and therefore suspect. Adverse to it by temperament, he endorsed the verdict of society gladly; that is to say, his verdict was theological. He held that only the most depraved could glance at Sodom.” (Forster, Maurice 140)
Religious and Medical Discourses on Homosexuality:

Dear Mrs [Erased],

I gather from your letter that your son is a homosexual. I am most impressed by the fact that you do not mention this term yourself in your information about him. May I question you why you avoid it? Homosexuality is assuredly no advantage, but it is nothing to be ashamed of, no vice, no degradation; it cannot be classified as an illness; we consider it to be a variation of the sexual function, produced by a certain arrest of sexual development. Many highly respectable individuals of ancient and modern times have been homosexuals, several of the greatest men among them. (Plato, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, etc). It is a great injustice to persecute homosexuality as a crime – and a cruelty, too. If you do not believe me, read the books of Havelock Ellis. (see full letter [here])
Religious and Medical Discourses on Homosexuality:

- Lasker Jones treats Maurice’s “congenital homosexuality” with hypnosis (158-159).
- Once, the treatment is not working Lasker Jones advises him to live in another country.
- “England has always been disinclined to accept human nature” (185)

Forster argues in *Maurice* that homosexuality is natural.

Charcot demonstrating hypnosis on a “hysterical” Salpêtrière patient, “Blanche” (Blanche Wittmann), who is supported by Dr. Josep Babiński (rear). (Image from Wikipedia)
The ending of the novel

- “Mr. Ducie's "All's right in the world. Male and Female," Dr. Barry's view of homosexuality as an "evil hallucination," Mr. Borenius's desire to see all "sexual irregularities" punished severely—all these tend to prove Forster's contention that England had "always been disinclined to accept human nature." The "outlaws," those who indulge in the "unspeakable vice of the Greeks," are finally forced out of society. Forster deliberately gave the novel a happy ending, however.” (Linda Hutcheon, “Revolt and the Ideal in Bloomsbury”)

- Maurice mentions Clive and Alec by their first names after their first night together.
Forster’s novel as a revolt against Victorian codes of proper behaviours

“It was not that Miss Olcott objected to having her hand pressed. Others had done it and Maurice could have done it had he guessed how. But she knew something was wrong. His touch revolted her. It was a corpse's. Springing up she cried, ‘Mr. Hall, don’t be silly. I mean don’t be silly. I am not saying it to make you sillier” (53).

➢ Genuine connection and honesty.
➢ Victorian ideas of propriety cause a rift between the sexes.
"If it had ended unhappily, with a lad dangling from a noose or with a suicidal pact, all would be well, for there is no pornography or seduction of minors. But the lovers get away unpunished and consequently recommend crime. For this reason the book remained in manuscript for fifty-eight years."
Maurice as a Bildungsroman (coming-of-age story)

- “He had brought out the man in Alec, and now it was Alec’s turn to bring out the hero in him” (Forster, Maurice 208)
"By far the most valuable things which we know or can imagine, are certain states of consciousness, which may be roughly described as the pleasures of human intercourse and the enjoyment of beautiful objects."

State of consciousness is not determined by sex.

Human intercourse implies any human interaction—it’s not limited to heterosexual interaction.
Virginia Woolf wrote to Roger Fry in 1921 that Dickinson had written a “dialogue upon homosexuality which he won't publish, for fear of the effect upon parents who might send their sons to Kings: and he is writing his autobiography which he won't publish for the same reason. So you see what dominates English literature is the parents of the young men who might be sent to Kings.”

The role of literature is not to educate but to create art.

The importance of honesty and genuine connection.

“Only connect” – Forster, *Howards End*