



Perpetuation of Heteronormativity in E.M. Forster's *Maurice*



Fig. 1: Pictured above is the Progress Pride flag.

Heteronormative: relating to, or based on the attitude that heterosexuality is the only normal and natural expression of sexuality

Claims Explored in *Maurice*

- Societal and familial factors serve to enforce uniformity of beliefs.
- Upper-middle class culture of dogmatism and conformity.
- The contradictory nature homosocial bonding within English educational institutions.
- The internalization of heteronormative beliefs, which in turn perpetuates restrictive and heteronormative standards.

Context

- *Maurice* was originally written from 1913-1914. The novel then underwent revisions from 1932-1960. The novel was finally published posthumously in 1971 after E.M. Forster's death.
- Forster did not wish to publish *Maurice* while he was alive, partially because he believed it would not have been publishable based on the time period's views towards same-sex love and relationships.
- *Maurice* is a bildungsroman which follows Maurice Hall from childhood to adulthood as he struggles with his homosexuality in the heteronormative society of 20th century England. His first homosexual relationship is with Clive Durham and although Clive eventually conforms to heteronormative standards, Maurice refuses to.

"All the world's against us."

-*Maurice* (229)



Fig. 2. Edward Morgan Forster (1879-1970), author of *Maurice*.

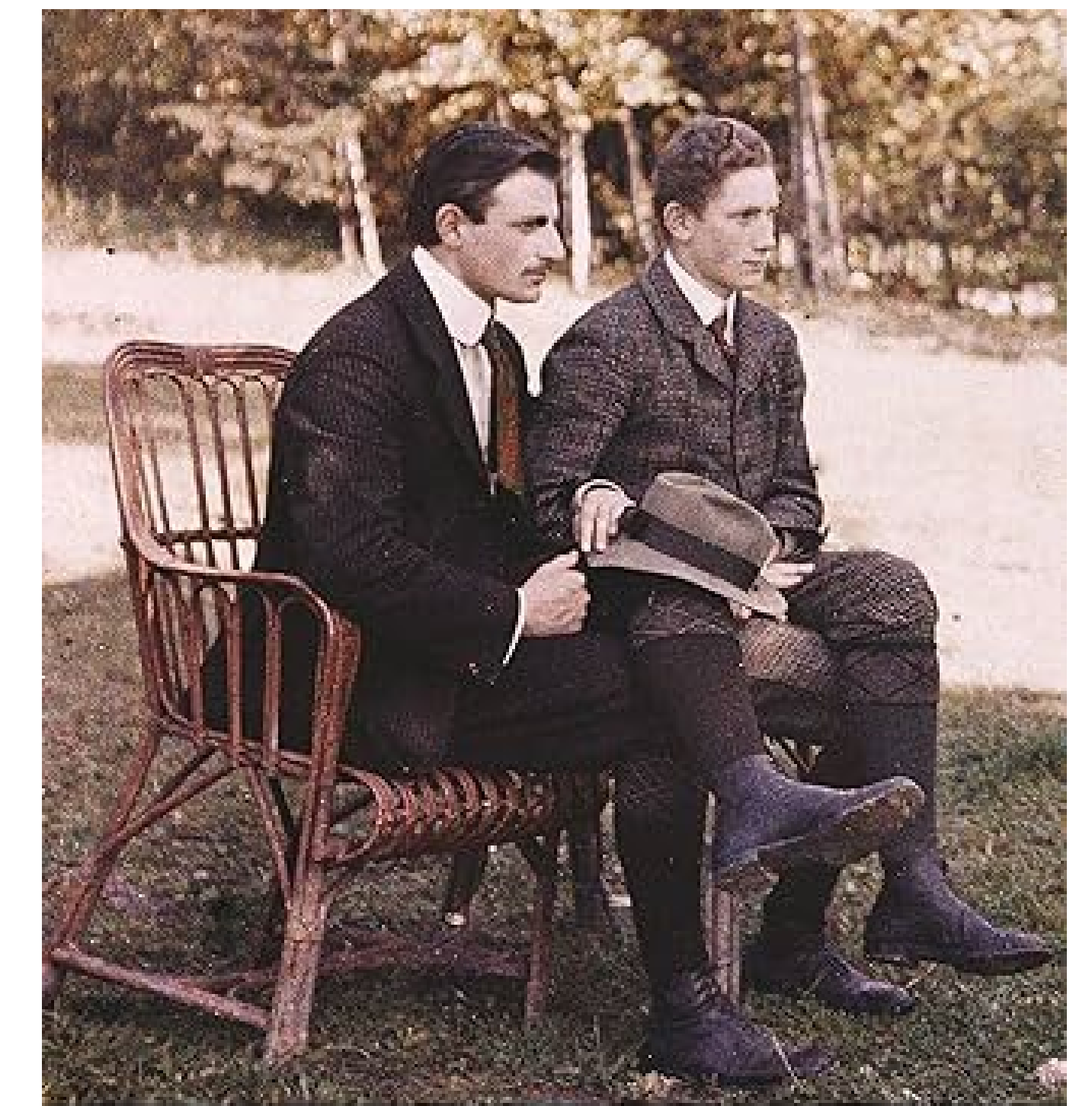


Fig. 3. Penguin Classics version of E.M. Forster's *Maurice* cover. Introduction by Leavitt examines the novel's significance in modern gay literature.

Education

- In *Maurice*, Clive and Maurice meet as students at Cambridge. During the early 20th century young middle-class men were greatly influenced and shaped by their education—which reflected the values and attitudes of the time. Although these schools stressed homosocial bonding, they did not condone same-sex relationships among the male student population. This poses a challenge for Clive and Maurice when they begin their relationship at the University of Cambridge, as they must always be conscious of their behavior when in the presence of others.

Family

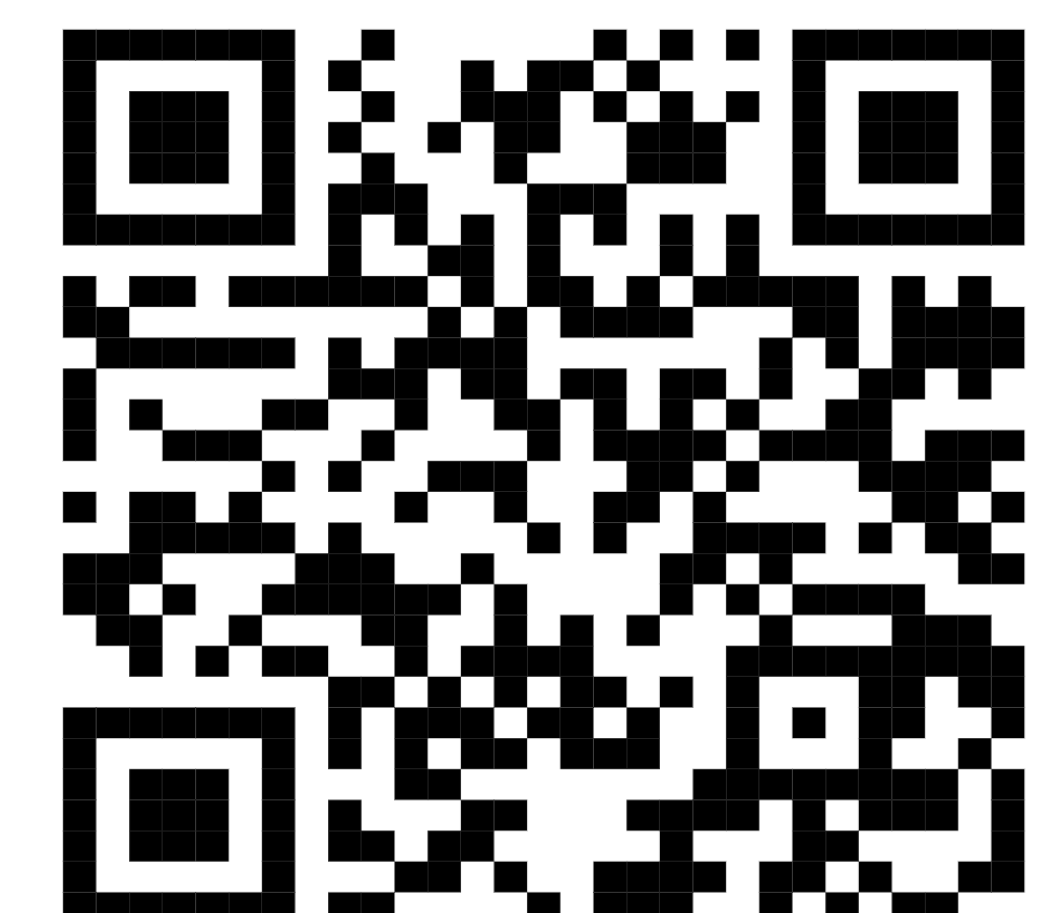
- Clive comes from an upper-class family and shall inherit his family's estate, but he must also sire an heir. This contributed to the strain within Clive and Maurice's relationship.

Marriage

- Ultimately Clive ends his relationship with Maurice and marries, allowing him to fulfill his familial obligations of producing an heir, fit in with society, and experience an "acceptable" relationship. In regard to his homosexuality, he views it as a "temporary aberration" (Nelson 318) and dismisses it, choosing to settle for the comfort of fitting into societal standards.

Conclusion

- Throughout *Maurice* we observe the underlying perpetuation of a heteronormative society, but through Clive we witness how conformity to these harmful ideas continues the cycle of discrimination and prejudice. This is illustrated when Maurice tells Clive of his new homosexual relationship. During the entire exchange Clive lacks compassion and understanding for his former friend, refusing to acknowledge Maurice's individuality. Maurice is able to reject heteronormative attitudes, yet Clive falls victim to them. Despite his convenient marriage and believing he is heterosexual, he may live the rest of his life "with his repression system working in permanent overdrive" (Corne 38).



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