Narrative Theory Unbound

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Two propositions, the one as seemingly outrageous as the other:

(i) There are no bad heterosexuals;
(ii) There are no conservative homosexuals.

Both statements are demonstrably untrue—the first, I would say, even more so than the second—yet both enjoy considerable, if largely unacknowledged, literary, cultural, and political currency. No less an authority than Freud, for instance, implicitly argues the validity of my first proposition:

In my experience anyone who is in any way, whether socially or ethically, abnormal mentally is invariably abnormal also in his sexual life. But many people are abnormal in their sexual life who in every other respect approximate to the average, and have, along with the rest, passed through the process of human cultural development, in which sexuality remains the weak spot. (Three Essays 149)

There are, to be sure, some good homosexuals, although the best among them—Freud’s primary example is Leonardo—effectively sublimate their sexuality out of existence. But there are, by Freudian definition, no bad hetero-
sexuals: examine the latent proclivities of the socially or ethically abnormal and you invariably find a practicing or a repressed pervert. The connection between social and sexual aberrance is causal, not casual, and it is homosexuality, not sexuality as such, that remains the weak spot in the process of human cultural development. Small wonder, then, that Freudianism proved an unprecedented historical success. The new science of the soul guarantees the ideological innocence of the regime of the norm.¹

E. M. Forster concurs with the etiology: sex is the prime mover, at least in Maurice, the most explicitly homosexual of his novels. But therein lies the extent of the similarity. What Freud construes as “the process of human cultural development” Forster exposes as the work of normalization; what Freud identifies as “the weak spot” in that process Forster celebrates as a happy redemption from it. Were it not for the seemingly trivial matter of the gender of his object choices, for instance, Maurice would have stepped smartly, as the novel puts it, “into the niche that England had prepared for him” (55). England proves accommodating, however, only to the marrying kind, and Maurice and Alec famously retreat into a “greenwood” that is literally utopian, socially no-place. Forster’s conclusion was much revised; it is still much reviled; yet it is in perfect keeping (or so I want to argue) with the broader sexual politics of a novel that utterly rejects the assimilationist fantasy that the perverse should approximate to the norm. Maurice is aggressively ordinary, yet he cannot be positioned within our dominant narratives of (homo) sexual self-fashioning and self-knowledge, cannot, in fact, be positioned within the conventions of narrative itself. Bakhtin holds that the novel is infinitely capacious, endlessly accommodating: there is no experience, meaning, or value that cannot be embraced in its heteroglossia.² Forster suggests otherwise. The traditional novel accommodates only the traditional couple (or ersatz variations thereof), and Maurice insists that its normalizing proclivities acknowledge themselves as such. Etymology mystifies. It is actually the “hetero,” the self-proclaimed dispensation of difference, that is given to the social reproduction of the same, the narrative return of the same. It is the “homo” that makes a difference.

There may be no conservative homosexuals in Forster’s novel, to return to the second of my two propositions, but it isn’t for want of trying. The young Maurice labors manfully to step into the niche that England has prepared for him, and if the early indications are to be trusted, he is well on his way to becoming a poster boy for heteronormativity. As luck would have it, however,

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¹. On this theme, see Morrison.
². See Bakhtin.
homosexuality intervenes, and homosexuality, as Forster insists in his “Terminal Note,” transforms everything:

In Maurice I tried to create a character who was unlike myself or what I supposed myself to be: someone handsome, healthy, bodily attractive, mentally torpid, not a bad business man and rather a snob. Into this mixture I dropped an ingredient that puzzles him, wakes him up, torments him and finally saves him. (250–51)

Normalness is not, as it is in Freud, something that the best of homosexuals should approximate to; on the contrary, it is everything that Maurice, the most sublimely ordinary of men, is spared. Lukács faults the modern novel for failing to negotiate a proper relation between “the eccentric and the socially average”; in privileging the former, it renders “sexual perversity” a type of “the condition humaine” (Realism 31). Forster’s novel explicitly thematizes the relation between the socially average and the sexually aberrant, but only to insist on their absolute incompatibility: “He [Maurice] had acted wrongly, and was still being punished—but wrongly because he had tried to get the best of both worlds” (215). Try as he might, Maurice cannot forge a working compromise between “both worlds,” cannot be both socially normative and sexually deviant. To mar Elvis Costello: homosexuality does something special to Mr. Average.

Or to quote Forster himself: “By pleasuring the body Maurice had confirmed—the very word was used in the final verdict—he had confirmed his spirit in its perversion, and cut himself off from the congregation of normal men” (214). Deed and identity. The passage inevitably suggests Foucault’s distinction between the sodomite, the perpetrator of perverse acts, and the nineteenth-century homosexual, the perverse individual. But where Foucault constructs a narrative of historical supersession—“the Great Paradigm Shift,” as Eve Sedgwick terms it—Victorian sexology acknowledges the definitional pull of both deed and identity. Krafft-Ebing, for instance, cautions that “perversion of the sexual instinct”

3. The posthumous publication of Maurice—which is to say, the transformative power of the belated revelation of homosexuality—structures the critical reception of the entirety of Forster’s oeuvre. The prologue to Wendy Moffat’s engaging biography of the novelist, for instance, takes its title from a remark by Christopher Isherwood: “Start with the Fact That He Was Homosexual.” Turnabout would not, however, be considered fair play, and it is difficult to imagine a biography of a straight novelist beginning with a prologue that posits heterosexuality as its explanatory key. See Moffat 1–21.

4. Foucault, History of Sexuality 43; Sedgwick 44–48. Forster himself distinguishes between deed and identity: “Thoughts: he [Maurice] had a dirty little collection. Acts: he desisted from these after the novelty was over, finding they brought him more fatigue than pleasure” (23).
is not to be confused with *perversity* in the sexual act, since the latter may be induced by conditions other than the psychopathological. The concrete perverse act, monstrous as it may be, is clinically not decisive. In order to differentiate between disease (perversion) and vice (perversity), one must investigate the whole personality of the individual and the original motive leading to the perverse act. Therein will be found the key to the diagnosis.\(^5\)

If "*perversity* in the sexual act" suggests the Victorian afterlife of sodomitical practices, "*perversion* of the sexual instinct" anticipates modern homosexual identity. And the one, Krafft-Ebing insists, cannot be confused with the other. For the former to issue in the latter, for vice to be indicative of a psychosexual disturbance, "the whole personality" must come into play. "Contrary sexual feelings," a gender-inappropriate identity, is the "key." Maurice, however, is clearly butcher than his soon-to-be-heterosexualized friend, yet it is Maurice, not Clive, who finally attains to full-fledged "perversion of the sexual instinct." In Forster, the "concrete perverse act" confirms the otherwise normative in the spirit of his perversion.

Freud is our great theoretician of the homosexual as Mr. Average, for Freud, unlike Krafft-Ebing, acknowledges the oxymoronic possibility (or is it?) that so dominates (or is it deforms?) gay personal ads: the "straight acting," "straight appearing," homosexual man. It in no way follows, however, that Freud holds the "key." Like Krafft-Ebing, Freud maintains that the concrete perverse act, however monstrous, does not a pervert make; indeed, no sexual act is decisive. As Deleuze and Guattari note: "Freud's greatness lies in having determined the essence or nature of desire, no longer in terms of objects, aims, or even sources (territories), but as an abstract subjective essence—libido or sexuality" (270). But again, therein lies the extent of the similarity. Krafft-Ebing maintains that perversity proper—perversions of the sexual instinct as opposed to perversity in the sexual act—is always attended by gender confusion or inversion. Freud argues that "the most complete mental masculinity can be combined with inversion" (*Three Essays* 142). For Krafft-Ebing, a gay man who is functionally indistinguishable from all other men in every respect save that of his sexuality is a contradiction in terms. For Freud, he is the perverse norm. Hence, the monumental 1915 footnote—but only a footnote—to *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*: "Psycho-analytic research is most decidedly opposed to any attempt at separating off homosexuals from the rest of mankind as a group of a special character" (145n1).

Like Freud, Forster gives us a straight-acting, straight-appearing gay man who is functionally indistinguishable from all other men in every aspect save

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5. As quoted in Davidson 80. See also Halperin’s reading of this passage (113–15).
that of his sexuality—the singularly unremarkable Maurice Hall. Unlike Freud, however, Forster radically separates off Maurice from the rest of humankind as an individual of a special character. In pleasuring the body, Mr. Average both confirms himself in his “spirit of perversion” and divorces himself “from the congregation of normal men.” Why the difference? Freud is only too eager to welcome sexual deviants into the psychoanalytic “congregation.” Why does Forster decline the invitation?

To argue Forster’s distance from Freud—his distance, that is, from the normative construction of the aberrant—is not to argue for any explicit dialogue between the two. When Maurice seeks medical advice, he is informed by Dr. Barry that his sexual proclivities are a “temptation from the devil” (159). The judgment is termed “theological,” which is to say, pre-Freudian. Dr. Barry regards anything written in German with suspicion, but were the doctor less phobic about continental developments, his judgment might have been more of the moment. (Freud was, of course, largely instrumental in the still ongoing project of repositioning sexuality beyond good and evil. But not, alas, beyond a more insidious binary of the normal and the aberrant, the healthy and the sick.) Maurice next visits Mr. Lasker Jones, a hypnotherapist, who diagnoses “congenital homosexuality” (180). Where Barry is disgusted, Lasker Jones is dispassionate, but the latter is no more efficacious than the former, and he too is, or soon will be, anachronistic: psychoanalysis becomes fully itself only when it breaks with the techniques of hypnosis pioneered by Charcot. True, the line “Maurice had two dreams; they will interpret him” (22) might have been lifted from a Freudian case study, and Maurice clearly participates in the lowering of the threshold of representation, the negotiation of interior spaces, that is now associated with all things Freudian. In the language of Forster’s own Aspects of the Novel:

“Character,” says Aristotle, “gives us qualities, but it is in actions—what we do—that we are happy or the reverse.” We have already decided that Aristotle is wrong and now we must face the consequences of disagreeing with him. “All human happiness and misery,” says Aristotle, “take the form of action.” We know better. We believe that happiness and misery exist in the secret life, which each of us lives privately, and to which (in his characters) the novelist has access. And by the secret life we mean the life for which there is no external evidence. (113)

The Aristotelian insistence on the priority of praxis over ethos, doing over being, logically subtends the category of the sodomite. Freud’s and Forster’s emphasis on “the secret life” heralds both the emergence of a new category of person, the modern “homosexual,” and a new modality of literature, the novel
of psychological depth.\textsuperscript{6} Forster, however, makes explicit what is implicit in psychoanalysis. The negotiation of the secret life is no less a theory of the social for its strategic insistence on the priority of the individual.

Certainly Mr. Ducie’s lecture to the young Maurice on the mysteries of reproductive sex—apparently little boys need to be schooled into heterosexuality no less than Greek grammar—argues the imbrication of the psychosexual and the social. “You don’t understand now, you will some day,” Ducie assures Maurice, “and when you do understand it, remember the poor old pedagogue who put you on the track. It all hangs together—all—and God’s in his heaven, All’s right with the world. Male and female! Ah wonderful” (15). It does indeed all hang together, the cosmic and the social, and cross-gender desire is the linchpin. God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve—the religious right is witless but not less right for that—and heteronormativity subtends the whole rotten system. Maurice loses his religion before his virginity; at Cambridge, he first succumbs to Clive’s atheism:

“Well, the whole show all hangs together.”

“So that if the Trinity went wrong it would invalidate the whole show?”

“I don’t see that. Not at all.” (48)

But as Mr. Ducie predicts, Maurice eventually does see that it all hangs together, and his first act of rebellion is to follow Clive in rejecting Holy Mother Church. It is finally sexual deviance, however, not theological apostasy, that invalidates “the whole show.” Borenius, the minister at Penge, Clive’s family home, is appropriately apocalyptic on the subject of sexual irregularity: “when the nations went a whoring they invariably ended by denying God, I think, and until all sexual irregularities and not some of them are penal the Church will never reconquer England” (237). This might seem, of course, only an added incentive to go a-whoring—as if there were not rewards enough—but Maurice comes to see in Rev. Borenius’s words the presence of a seriously skewed, but nevertheless legitimate, insight: “he knew now that there is no secret of humanity which, from a wrong angle, orthodoxy has not viewed, that religion is far more acute than science, and if it only added judgement to insight would be the greatest thing in the world” (237). The orthodox can imagine, if not appreciate, the possibility of a catastrophic rupture in the social order, and the orthodox, to their credit, know their enemies. “Unspeakables of

\textsuperscript{6} When in need of nomenclature, Freud tended to raid classical literature, particularly Greek drama. Freud is, however, less Greek than he believed: the psychoanalytic construction of homosexuality finds its logical corollary in the priority of ethos over praxis. The significant precursor is the novel of psychological depth.
the Oscar Wilde sort” (156) are now everywhere—no fashionable dinner party or academic conference is without at least one—but Forster reminds us not to get too comfortable at the table. Despite what the song claims, there is no place for us, at least as the social order is currently construed.

There is no place for us because homosexuality threatens the heterosexual reproduction of the same with difference, and heterosexuality is the dispensation of difference in name only. Forster is sufficiently Freudian (we all are) to register the significance of a slip of the tongue:

“He is a most clever man,” said Mrs Hall with finality, “and Mrs Barry’s the same.”

This slip of their mother’s tongue convulsed Ada and Kitty. They would not stop laughing at the idea of Mrs Barry’s being a man. (53)

The possibility that so amuses Ada and Kitty Maurice entertains in earnest: heterosexuality is predicated on the desire for “the same,” the return of “the same.” Maurice, like his father before him, is sent to Mr. Abraham’s school: “There is much to be said for apathy in education, and Mr Abraham’s pupils did not do so badly in the long run, became parents in their turn, and in some cases sent him their sons” (9). For Freud, the process by which children become parents who (re)produce children who becomes parents—the process, that is, by which the social order achieves stasis through the illusion of generational opposition and change—is nothing less than the master narrative of civilization itself:

At the same time as these plainly incestuous phantasies [the son’s desire for the mother, the daughter’s desire for the father] are overcome and repudiated, one of the most significant, but also one of the most painful, psychical achievements of the pubertal period is completed: detachment from parental authority, a process that alone makes possible the opposition, which is so important for the progress of civilization, between the new generation and the old. At every stage in the course of development which all human beings ought by rights to pass, a certain number are held back. (Three Essays 227)

“The reward for filial disobedience,” as Jane Austen terms it, is the reproduction of parental, heterosexual privilege, and only those of us incapable of detaching ourselves from parental authority fail to attain to it. (For example: boys who don’t turn out to be the marrying kind or girls who do but thereaf- ter refuse “to give their husbands” their “due” [Three Essays 227].) The “course of development which all human beings ought by rights to pass” thus pays a
double dividend. Opposition to compulsory heterosexuality is evacuated of all efficacy, even as the heterosexual reproduction of the same is preserved as hetero. The Maurice who is told “to copy” his father in every way (11), who is enjoined to “present the expectant world with a Maurice the third” (27), is a revolutionary in training. By the same (il)logic, the Maurice who breaks with his class and upbringing to abscond with Alec remains pathologically bound to his mother’s apron strings. Or so, in any case, psychoanalysis would have us believe. Foucault is routinely dismissed as a fetishist of power. Nothing in his work, however, rivals the dexterity with which Freud recuperates “disobedience” for the status quo.

Freud insists that etymology gets it right, that heterosexuality is in fact hetero in all things. In _Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego_, for instance, he argues that cross-gender desire “breaks through the group ties of race, national divisions, and the social class system”; like the Lawrence of _Lady Chatterley’s Lover_, he celebrates heterosexuality as the great solvent of class barriers (141). Yet the psychoanalytic guarantee that the parent–child relationship is at the root of everyone’s sexuality, that the nuclear family is the alpha and omega of all psychosexual development, suggests otherwise. In a premodern, predisciplinary “system of alliances,” children—specifically girls—are given in marriage as sacrifices to class solidarity or ambition. In the kinder, gentler world of bourgeois familialism, however, children give themselves, for better or worse, in love. Parents are denied sovereign authority over their children’s bodies, but only to be granted a compensatory, if less immediately discernible, privilege: the overt coercion of an older familialism is simply translated into an ideology of desire itself. (Again, psychoanalysis is no less a theory of the social for its strategic insistence on the priority of “the secret life.”) As Foucault puts it: psychoanalysis “made it possible—even when everything seemed to point to the reverse process—to keep the deployment of sexuality coupled to the system of alliance” (*History of Sexuality* 113). Or, as the songwriter puts it: psychoanalysis insists that I should want to marry a girl—were I the marrying kind—just like the kind of girl who married dear old dad. Maurice’s sense of solidarity with his class survives his first night of sex-making with Alec. “But I must belong to my class, that’s fixed,” he tells himself, “Anyhow, I must stick to my class” (215). It does not, however, survive the novel to which he lends his name.

The association of same-sex desire with cross-class alliances is not, of course, the newest news in town. Spectators at the trial of Oscar Wilde, for example, or at least those unfamiliar with the term “gross indecency,”

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7. “If the lady marries the gamekeeper,” Lawrence says of Connie and Mellors in “A Propos of _Lady Chatterley’s Lover_,” “it is not class spite, but in spite of class” (334).
might reasonably have taken it to mean an eroticism unconstrained by the
demands of class solidarity. Certainly Maurice initially understands homo-
sexuality exclusively in class terms: “The feeling that can impel a gentle-
man towards a person of lower class stands self-condemned” (151). (Mutatis
mutandis: the feeling that can impel a gentleman towards a person of the
same class stands as the self-evident good that is heterosexuality.) Noth-
ing in the novel challenges Maurice’s sense of homosexuality as a threat to
class solidarity. Everything, however, conspires to challenge his evaluation of
same-sex, cross-class liaisons. Mr. Cornwallis, the Don who sends Maurice
down from Cambridge, thinks that class opposites should not attract: “It was
not natural that men of different characters and tastes should be intimate,
and although undergraduates, unlike schoolboys, were officially normal, the
dons exercised a certain amount of watchfulness” (79–80). Were Maurice,
like Clive, a member of a decaying gentry, rather than a solid bourgeois,
apparently the same surveillance would not be necessary. Dr. Barry thinks
it well and good that Maurice is sent down. “You got yourself into an atmo-
sphere for which you are not suited,” he informs the disgraced undergradu-
ate, “and you’ve very properly taken the first opportunity to get out of it”
(84). Although Cambridge affords limited opportunities for class mobility,
Maurice’s proper place, according to the doctor, is taking up the position
in the firm of Hill and Hall previously occupied by Mr. Hall senior—hence-
forth, presumably, Hill, Hall, and Homosexual. For his part, Clive con-
siders “intimacy with a social inferior . . . unthinkable” (242), which may well
be what saves him for the regime of compulsory heterosexuality. Once he
snaps straight, he returns to Penge and its leaky roof, marries a woman of his
own class, and pursues his father’s “seat”—the locution really deserves to be
read—in Parliament. The heterosexual Clive seems a changed man, yet the
change merely guarantees that nothing does change, nothing can change.

Edward Carpenter, whom Forster knew and admired, considered homo-
sexuality the antidote to all this hetero cloning of the same:

It is noticeable how often Uranians of good position and breeding are drawn
to rougher types . . . and frequently very permanent alliances grow up this
way, which although publically not acknowledged have a decided influence
on social institutions, customs and political tendencies—and which could
have a good deal more influence if they could be given a little more scope
and recognition. (237)

Forster concurs, but without the liberal faith. Homosexuality does not require
just a little more scope and recognition in order to work its special magic;
rather, social institutions are constitutively heterosexual and heterosexu-
izing. In his “Terminal Note,” Forster recalls that Carpenter “had hoped for
the generous recognition of an emotion and for the reintegration of some-
thing primitive”—that is, something gay—“into the common stock.” Forster
characterizes himself as “less optimistic,” although nevertheless given, at least
at one time, to the traditional humanist faith “that knowledge would bring
understanding” (255). Sadly, however, the only shift Forster can discern in the
fifty-odd years between the writing of Maurice and the “Terminal Note” is
“the change from ignorance and terror to familiarity and contempt” (255). “I
belong,” Forster remarked in a 1946 broadcast, “to the fag end of Victorian lib-
eralism” (qtd. in Smith 106)—again, the locution really deserves to be read—
and it is precisely Forster’s commitment to traditional liberal values that is
characteristically said to mark his distance from the poetics and politics of
High Modernism. Maurice is an exception. Unlike the conservative or the
radical, the liberal is constitutively incapable of imagining a catastrophic rup-
ture in the social order. Forster, however, can and does: the rupture went by
the name of that which cannot be named among Christians. Organizational
meetings for gay pride parades and the like invariably devolve into deb ates
about what the public face of homosexuality should be. Nice little, white little,
polite little boys and girls—nothing special, nothing threatening, about us—
or dykes on bikes. Consistency would demand that the author of Maurice, the
man once dubbed “The Closet Queen of the Century,” would recommend the
dykes. Forster’s representation of “the homosexual” was already considered
anachronistic in 1971, and today it is frequently dismissed as little more than
quaint, a remnant of the bad-old-days before the Liberation. Yet at a time
when the sexually perverse can imagine no greater good than the attainment
of the legal right to have and to hold, a sense of the homosexual as social
catastrophe is needful. E. M. Forster, seemingly the most anodyne of liberal
apologists, does precisely that.

In his “Terminal Note,” Forster concedes that both Clive and his treat-
ment of him deteriorate once he snaps straight (251), but the conversion to
heteronormativity is no less instructive for that. After suddenly abandon-
ing his same-sex, cross-class object (Maurice) and before settling on his
cross-sex, same-class object (Anne Woods), Clive flirts with Ada, Maurice’s
sister, a cross-sex, cross-class object. In a line that anticipates the opening
moments of The Waste Land, which is itself a monument to the eternal return
of the same, Ada is characterized as a “compromise between memory and desire” (124). She is, however, the wrong compromise—Clive’s one anxiety
while flirting with her is that Maurice will show up, “for a memory should
remain a memory” (125). Clive imposes a strategic ban on any mention of
his Cambridge indiscretions in the belief that homosexual memories should
be relegated to the safety of the past. Once he snaps straight, however, desire more than “compromises” with memory; it is absolutely coincident with it. In *Three Essays*, Freud insists that the heterosexual “finding of an object is in fact a refunding of it” (222), which is thus anything but “hetero” in relation to its origins. Forster concurs. Although her husband’s will specifies that Mrs. Durham occupy the Dowager House once her son marries, she never quite manages to move out. As in *Oedipus*, the prototype of all psychosexual development in Freud, the seriatim order of one after the other (mother then wife) collapses back on itself (wife as rediscovered, reconstituted mother). For Freud, the ostensible opposition between the generations is precisely what allows the younger generation to replicate the older. Forster, however, refuses to mystify the return of the same as the developmental: “Both houses and estate [Penge] were marked, not indeed with decay, but with the immobility that precedes it” (86). Penge is the privileged site of heterosexuality, and its genteel immobility bespeaks an exhausted social order.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*—a late work that makes explicit the recursive logic already operable in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*—Freud defines the instinctual “as the urge inherent in all organic life to restore an earlier state of things.” Far from “impelling us toward change and development,” as common sense or convention would have it, “the instincts are the expression of the conservative nature of living substance” (36). This may or may not be true of all “organic life”; it is certainly true, however, of all narrative life, which is structurally incapable of imagining an ending that is not determined by a “prior state of affairs.” Peter Brooks argues that narrative “operates as metaphor in its affirmation of resemblance”; it brings into relation different actions, combines them through perceived similarities, and appropriates them to a “common plot,” which requires “the rejection of all merely contingent (or unassimilatable) incident or action” (91). The “affirmation of resemblance” is the reproduction of the same but once removed, which suggests that narrative is also an expression of the “conservative”—small “c”—nature of all things. (Or, better, narrative is a conservative structuring of what is thus mystified as the conservative nature of all things.) The eponymous hero of John Weir’s *The Irreversible Decline of Eddie Socket* comes to regret “his failure to imagine a world in which there were any options other than the ones his parents presented” (166). The novel expresses the failure in psycho-

8. In *Maurice*, the options presented by the father include the familiar reduction of homosexuality to “just a phase”: “The ethereal past had blinded him [Maurice], and the highest happiness he could dream was a return to it. As he sat in his office working, he could not see the vast curve of his life, still less the ghost of his father sitting opposite. Mr Hall senior had neither fought nor thought; there had never been any occasion; he had supported society and moved
logical terms, but responsibility may well reside with Eddie’s generic dispensation. As early as June 1911, Forster wrote in his diary of his “weariness of the only subject I can and may treat—the love of men for women & vice versa” (qtd. in Moffat 6). The weariness is easily explained, then as now. It’s still the same old story—every Jack shall have his Jill—which is itself the story of the return of the same.

The married Clive literally returns to his family home at the novel’s end, the better to reproduce the same: the aptly named family “cell” remains the alpha and omega of all normative psychosexual development. “Beautiful conventions”—at once social and narrative—await the conjugal couple:

His [Clive’s] ideal of marriage was temperate and graceful, like all of his ideals, and he found a fit helpmate in Anne, who had refinement herself, and admired it in others. They loved each other tenderly. Beautiful conventions received them. (165)

To love tenderly is not, however, to love passionately:

When he [Clive] arrived in her [Anne’s] room after marriage, she did not know what he wanted. Clive was as considerate as possible, but he scared her terribly, and he left feeling she hated him. She did not. She welcomed him on future nights. But it was always without a word. They united in a world that bore no reference to the daily. . . . They ignored the reproductive and the digestive functions. (164)

So temperate an ideal might seem anathema to the poetics of High Heterosexual Romance, but then so temperate an ideal need not be admitted as authentically heterosexual at all. Debrah Raschke, for instance, suggests that “rather than a confirmation of his heterosexuality,” Clive’s marriage “seems more an extension of his Platonism” (160). Curiously, however, Raschke does not extend the same hermeneutic principle to the sexually perverse. Forster’s novel explicitly associates the reading of Plato with an inducement to same-sex desire, yet no one construes Maurice’s homosexuality as the logical extension of his undergraduate education. When homophobic convenience dictates, heterosexuality can always be made to mean its demonized “other.” Homosexuality “proper,” however, is always and only itself.

without a crisis from illicit to licit love” (151). Maurice ultimately pursues a different, a better, happiness.
In “Über die allgemeinste Erniedrigung des Liebeslebens”—alternately translated as “On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love” or “The Most Prevalent Form of Degradation in Erotic Life”—Freud argues that civilized man cannot reconcile “affectionate and sensual impulses” (187). Because the heterosexual finding of a love object is always a re-finding, because the child’s experience at the mother’s breast is the “prototype of every relation of love” (Three Essays 222), normative desire is constitutively incestuous. Yet the family that is a structural incitement to incest also guards against it, which prevents any happy coupling of the “affectional and sensual impulses.” The “refinding” cannot be literal; erotic desire must be directed away from the prohibited object (and/or surrogates that too obviously or palpably invoke it) toward women of an inferior class or ethical status, for whom normative man need not feel any affection. Hence, the schizophrenia: “Where they love they do not desire and where they desire they cannot love” (Universal Tendency 183). And it is schizophrenia till death do they part: “The damage caused by the initial frustration of sexual pleasure is seen in the fact that the freedom later given to that pleasure in marriage does not bring full satisfaction” (187). The incest taboo guarantees exogamy:

Respect for this barrier is essentially a cultural demand made by society. Society must defend against the danger that the interests which it needs for the establishment of higher social units may be swallowed up by the family; and for this reason, in the case of every individual, but in particular of adolescent boys, it seeks by all possible means to loosen their connection with the family. (Three Essays 225)

But it is a minimal exogamy, for by systematically inciting the incestuous desires it nevertheless guards against, the family also guarantees endogamy. Class solidarity is preserved, but at the cost of a massive erotic impoverishment. The most prevalent form of degradation in erotic life is more than just “prevalent,” more than even “universal.” It is, rather, constitutive, to a greater or lesser degree, of “the love of civilized man” as such (Universal Tendency 184). The married Clive is not the exception that proves the rule of heterosexual passion. On the contrary. He becomes what Maurice once was: Mr. Average.

There is no place for Maurice—not even Greece, the classical home of homosexuality, but in Maurice, the paradoxical site of Clive’s conversion to heterosexuality. “Omit: a reference to the unspeakable vice of the Greeks” (51), Mr. Cornwallis famously remarks, but Clive will have none of it: “I
regard it as a point of pure scholarship. The Greeks, or most of them, were that way inclined, and to omit it is to omit the mainstay of Athenian society” (51). Clive is exactly right. The structured, formalized inequalities of classical pederasty sustained the social order, and Maurice is in search of an alternate tradition. There is, then, nothing innately subversive about same-sex desire. As Foucault insists: to say yes to sex—any form of sex, including sex with your gardener or gamekeeper—is not necessarily to say no to power. But if Maurice is thus at an extreme remove from the sublime sexual idiocy of, say, *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, it is hardly an apology for erotic pessimism or the de-politicization of sensuous enjoyment. True, the repercussions of Clive’s and Maurice’s sexless dalliance do not extend beyond a more or less socially irrelevant rejection of the Trinity and Holy Mother Church. Maurice’s night of sex-making with Alec, however, initiates a process that irrevocably exiles the two from the congregation of normal men. The newly heterosexualized Clive returns to the eternal sameness of Penge. The homosexualized Maurice inhabits a greenwood in which he is free to forge relations that do not answer to the kinship or class demands of larger social institutions and agendas. “I have my own notion,” Maurice tells Lasker Jones. “It strikes me there may have been more about the Greeks—Theban Band—and the rest of it. Well, this wasn’t unlike. I don’t see how they could have kept together otherwise—especially when they came from such different classes” (212). Maurice devises an indigenous version of the myth of the Theban Band in the story of Robin Hood and the greenwood, which is also the socially unauthorized work of gay community building. Relations of structured inequality continue to sustain the social order. They are what we call “heterosexual,” the happy coupling of gender inequality and class solidarity that underwrites the social reproduction of the same.

Lukács argues that the historical novel privileges “middle-of-the-road” protagonists: “The relative lack of contour to their personalities, the absence of passions which would cause them to take up major, decisive, one-sided positions, their contact with each of the contending hostile camps, etc., make them specially suited to express adequately, in their own destinies, the complex ramifications of events in a novel” (*Historical Novel* 149). Maurice is manifestly not a historical novel in Lukács’s (or, for that matter, anybody’s) sense of the term, yet it registers its historical insights in precisely the manner suggested above. Forster’s protagonist is aggressively middle-of-the-road, and it is the lack of contour to Maurice’s personality, his want of passionately or consciously held ideological beliefs, that allows the novelist to express the complex ramifications of sexuality, which extend well beyond sexuality proper, in a world grown increasingly Freudian. The premodern world char-
acteristically conducts its political struggles in and through the theological. (Recall Dr. Barry’s judgment on Maurice’s “condition.”) The modern world privileges the sexual. Barry’s theological judgment gives way to Lasker Jones’s quasi-medical advice, and it is finally sexual deviance, not theological apostasy, that severs Maurice from the “congregation” of normal men. (Forster’s diction seems intent on registering the historical transition.) Lytton Strachey, the original of the character of Risley, considered “the Class question . . . rather a red herring,” but he could hardly have been more wrong. In Maurice as in the modern world in general, the Class question is the Sex question, the Sex question is the Class question:

All that night his [Maurice’s] body yearned for Alec’s, despite him. He called it lustful, a word easily uttered, and he opposed it to his work, his family, his friends, his position in society. In that coalition must be included his will. For if the will can overleap class, civilization as we have made it will go to pieces. (207)

Maurice chooses Alec, civilization be damned. Homosexuality heroicizes Mr. Average.

Consider, in this context, Forster’s relation to Austen, an author he is frequently said to resemble. In Pride and Prejudice, the vivacious Elizabeth Bennet nets the sexually and socially desirable Darcy, and their union validates the status quo by promoting the illusion of unlimited mobility within it. In Maurice, however, mobility is downward, and it is bound exclusively to the gender of one’s object choice. The aggressively average Maurice Hall nets the hot, but socially undesirable, Alec, and their relationship costs a moribund social order a citizen who would otherwise have been an efficient cog in it. Forster considered a “happy ending” to be “imperative” (250), but to the extent that the traditional novel admits of homosexuality, it insists on the tragic. (Heterosexual happiness makes for the marriage plot, the novel-as-usual. Homosexual happiness, to judge from the critical reception of Maurice, produces the ideological deformations of “the thesis novel.”) True, both Pride and Prejudice and Maurice are novels of realized desire, and thus eccentric in relation to “the great tradition.” Compromised desire is the order of the day.” Why risk all on the remote prospect of a Darcy or the dangerous

9. From a letter to Forster, 12 Mar. 1915; Forster quotes from the letter in his “Terminal Note” (252).

10. Lukács terms this, interestingly enough, “virile maturity,” by which he means “self-imposed limitation.” The hero abandons his quest for authentic values in a degraded world, but without fully capitulating to things-as-they-are. Lukács has nothing to say about women who
allure of an Alec—or so the traditional novel would have us believe—when, finally, something on the order of a Mr. Collins will do? (Charlotte's husband is, of course, more than usually repulsive, but then Austen is more than usually uncompromising in her critique of the sexual politics of the plot of compromised desire.) Yet if both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Maurice* refuse to celebrate the compromised as the “mature,” desire nevertheless functions differently in each. *Pride and Prejudice* might have taken as its subtitle “Vivacity Rewarded,” and its Cinderella-like marriage finally mystifies, rather than threatens, the social order it thus serves to perpetuate. Maurice and Alec cast their lot with Robin Hood and his men, the agents of the forced redistribution of wealth.

Or consider Forster’s relation to D. H. Lawrence, a novelist he is said to resemble not at all. In *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, Mellors’s politics and Connie’s income (she has an annuity from her mother) make for strange bedfellows, yet wealth proves to be an eminently surmountable barrier (or, perhaps, a remarkably powerful aphrodisiac). The future is uncertain—Clifford has yet to consent to a divorce at the novel’s end—but the lovers remain the beneficiaries of an economic order that the novel purports to condemn. For Mellors and Connie, cross-class desire is without significant economic consequences. Maurice and Alec, however, face a future of economic uncertainty. (Homosexuality is traditionally construed as a vice endemic to the upper classes or culture elites, and even today, white gay men are reputed to participate fully in the economic privileges of their gender and race. No matter that they earn, on the whole, 17 percent less than their straight counterparts. The myth of gay male economic privilege neither requires empirical verification nor brooks empirical correction, my own included.)

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11. Elizabeth reminds Lady Catherine that she is a gentleman’s daughter, and thus Darcy’s equal, but by any standards, her husband is a catch. To be mistress of Pemberley is indeed “something.”

12. The myth of gay male economic privilege is a perfect example of the workings of ideology as defined by Žižek: “An ideology is really ‘holding us’ only when do not feel any opposition between it and the reality—that is, when the ideology succeeds in determining the mode of our everyday experience of reality itself.” See Žižek 49. But if this endnote is thus an exercise in futility—assuming, of course, that I am not simply preaching to the choir—I nevertheless feel compelled to provide it. Gay men earn on the average 17 percent less than their straight counterparts of the same age, race, location, occupation, and educational level; see Badgett 3–4. To the extent that the myth of gay male economic privilege does condescend to justify itself, it tends to make use of surveys designed to produce the expected results. The widely influential Simmons Market Research Bureau Survey, which the *Wall Street Journal* published in 1991, is perhaps the most conspicuous case in point. Gay men were indeed shown to be wealthier than their straight counterparts, but as the survey restricted itself to the readership of a number of “elite” gay magazines and newspapers, the results should not have come as a
cally reduces Forster’s investment in “the Class question” to the biographical, which is to say, the homosexual. (And when the threat to the “social class system” is gay, it goes by the name of “sexual slumming.”) Yet if criticism privileges the homobiographical, *Maurice* insists on the structural. Heterosexuality in its modern form is systematically bound to the reproduction of class hierarchy. Homosexuality, the “weak spot” in the process of human cultural development, is not.

Strachey didn’t have high hopes for Maurice and Alec. He thought their relationship based on “lust and sentiment,” and he predicted “a rupture within six months—chiefly as a lack of common interests owing to class differences” (qtd. in Martland 155). Here he may be right. When there are no external compulsions keeping the lovers tied and true, the future is always in doubt. But so what? Neither Maurice nor Alec ever utters the words “till death do us part,” and the novel ends, it bears emphasizing, not in the greenwood, but with Clive returning to Anne, preparing to conceal the truth from her. Forster positions Maurice within an England “where it was still possible to get lost,” to elude scrutiny (254). Appropriately, the lovers ultimately elude novelistic representation as well. In one sense, *Maurice*—posthumously published, dedicated “to a happier time”—is a novel in search of an audience, the homosexual evermore-about-to-be. (*The Life to Come* is the title of a posthumously published collection of Forster’s stories.) In another sense, however, *Maurice* is a cautionary tale, a remarkably prescient exploration of the conditions under which the modern homosexual did in fact gain access to representation. It is, after all, Lasker Jones who encourages Maurice to commit his “secret life” to paper—he insists that the “confession” be “exhaustive” (213)—and it is Lasker Jones who means to “cure” Maurice of his condition:

> Then he wrote his statement. It took some time, and, though far from imaginative, he went to bed with the jumps. He was convinced that someone had looked over his shoulder while he wrote. He wasn’t alone. Or again, that he hadn’t personally written. Since coming to Penge, he seemed a bundle of voices, not Maurice, and now he could almost hear them quarrelling inside him. (176)

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*surprise to anyone. As Badgett notes, it is rather like surveying straight America on the basis of the readership of the *New York Times* (3). The myth of gay male affluence has, I suspect, a great deal to do with straight resentment of the disposable income gay men are alleged to command, money not mortgaged, as it were, to futurity. But the issue of benefits is, if anything, of greater significance than salary, and many benefits continue to be bound to one’s marital status: “Over a ten-year period, an [unmarried and partnered] worker earning $40,000 a year may earn as much as $55,800 less in benefits than a married co-worker.” A marriage penalty indeed. See Ingraham 69.*
Foucault argues that “the obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points, is now so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us; on the contrary, it seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, ‘demands’ only to surface” (History of Sexuality 60). Confession may be good for the soul, as proverbial wisdom has it, but Maurice experiences the obligation to confess very much as an obligation. “He wasn’t alone” and “he hadn’t personally written”: what “demands only to surface,” what seems to emerge spontaneously from within, is first imposed from without. The so-called right to representation is not an unproblematic good, and it is not easily distinguished from the normalizing project of surveillance.

Foucault argues that our modernity, both literary and political, is constituted by a lowering of the threshold of representation: “And if from the early Middle Ages to the present day the ‘adventure’ is an account of individuality, the passage from the epic to the novel, from the noble deed to the secret singularity, from long exiles to the internal search for childhood, from combats to phantasies, it is also inscribed in the formation of a disciplinary society” (Discipline 155). A secret life “for which there is no external evidence,” to return to the language of Aspects of the Novel, is necessarily violated by its novelization, which renders Forster’s own project, no less than the confession solicited by Lasker Jones, complicit in “the formation of a disciplinary society.” Certainly both are invested in ferreting out the secret, which, in the modern world, is invariably homosexuality. Lasker Jones’s “writing cure,” for instance, is a precursor of the “talking cure,” and the talking cure places sexual deviance in an explanatory relation to everything in need of explanation. (Again, there are no bad heterosexuals. “Anyone who is in any way . . . abnormal mentally is invariably abnormal also in his sexual life.”) Mr. Average, however, reverses the trajectory adumbrated by Foucault. Maurice actively seeks to elude representation; he cannot rely on exclusion from it. Like Freud’s Dora, his “noble deed,” his modest heroism, is to refuse the discourse of “the secret singularity,” which includes the novel that bears his name.

Like Dora and, in a way, like Forster himself. After Passage to India (1924), Forster simply stopped writing novels, for reasons that he was to explain some three decades later: “sex,” he claimed, had prevented him from becoming a more prolific and “famous writer” (qtd. in Kermode 125). This might seem yet another incentive to go a-whoring—would that more novelists had more sex—but Forster cannot be taken straight. The translation of (deviant) sex into discourse is a distinctly modern compulsion, and it would have made Forster (as well he knew) an even more famous author: “Since the eighteenth century, sex has not ceased to produce a kind of generalized discursive erethism. And
these discourses on sex did not multiply apart from or against power, but in the very space and the means of its exercise. Incitements to speak were orchestrated from all quarters . . .” (*History of Sexuality* 32). A disciplinary society construes homosexuality as an “incitement to discourse;” Forster renders it a discursive prophylactic. Like his protagonist, the author of *Maurice* evidently thought it possible, at least in his own lifetime, to elude psychosexual scrutiny, to get lost.

Clive and Anne are not so fortunate. Although the novel originally ended with a chance meeting between one of Maurice's sisters and the two “outlaws,” Forster decided—wisely, in my opinion—to conclude with the couple legally conjoined. The so-called marriage plot of nineteenth-century novelistic fame really isn't: betrothal, not the eternity of having and holding, is the conventional fulfillment. Like the vision granted Adam and Eve at the end of *Paradise Lost*, a seminal moment for nineteenth-century novelistic closure, the prospects seem so vast and various only because they are strategically unspecified. *Maurice*, however, subjects marriage to the indignity of representation—for indignity it is—and the future, which stands in an essentially recuperative or regressive relation to the past, is simply more of the same. Clive and Anne's relation is manifestly innocent of lust, and it will doubtless be till death do they part, chiefly as a result of lack of different interests owing to class similarity. More's the pity.

But all this is predicated, of course, on Clive's snapping straight, and in our culture, snapping straight is an unintelligible concept. Clearly the 1987 James Ivory film considers it as such. Clive suddenly becomes the marrying kind only after his queeny friend Risley is tried, in the expected Oscar Wilde-like fashion, for same-sex, cross-class dalliances. Willed or socially motivated conversions to heteronormativity are a dime a dozen, but in Forster's novel, Clive's about-face is apparently reluctant, nonvolitional: “Against my will I have become normal. I cannot help it” (116). The declaration seems unequivocal, but can it be believed? Should it be believed? Do we have in *Maurice* that rarest of all literary and cultural phenomena, the straight coming-out narrative?

*Three Essays* begins by positing the category of the “absolute invert”: “Persons of the opposite sex are never the object of their sexual desire, but leave them cold, or even arouse sexual aversion in them” (136). Freud admits, however, of no absolute successes, no unimpeachable heterosexuals: “By studying sexual excitations other than those that are manifestly displayed, it [psychoanalysis] has found that all living beings are capable of making a homosexual object-choice, and have in fact made one in their unconscious” (145n1). Why the asymmetry? Why do some of us fail so spectacularly while others succeed
only equivocally? And again, what of Clive? Is he a latent heterosexual during his sexless dalliance with Maurice? Or a repressed homosexual during his passionless marriage to Anne?

That only Clive’s sexuality is subject to speculation is telling. Maurice’s homosexual credentials, even before he has sex with a man, are unimpeachable. Clive’s heterosexual credentials, even after he marries a woman, are dubious. In theory, psychoanalysis holds that all sexual identities (“absolute inverters” excepted) are porous and mutable. In practice, however, certain sexualities prove more mutable than others, and mutability does not, in any case, threaten the regime of compulsory heterosexuality. Alec, to cite the obvious example, is bisexual, but no one, Strachey included, predicts a rupture with Maurice within six months because of a woman. Assertions of heterosexual credentials tend to be received with a fair degree of skepticism; confessions of deviant desire, by contrast, immediately command conviction (or they are met with the smug rejoinder: “I always knew”). Forster, however, orders these things differently. Maurice eventually comes to accept Clive’s sudden conversion to heteronormativity as the truth of his erstwhile friend, and Clive initially receives Maurice’s confession that he too is “that way” as an expression of mere decency or politeness. Even the emotions that attend the subject’s recognition or acknowledgment of its own sexuality seem curiously inverted. Clive cozies up to his newfound heterosexuality only reluctantly; given the apparent anguish that he experiences, one might well think he was coming out queer:

Clive did not give in to the life spirit without a struggle. He believed in the intellect and tried to think himself back to his old state. He averted his eyes from women, and when that failed adopted childish and violent expedients. (120)

Any number of perks and privileges await the newly heterosexualized Clive, but they in no way motivate his emergence into normative desire. Maurice henceforth inspires in him a “physical dislike” (120), and there is apparently no erotic commerce between his pre- and post-conversion selves. Clive’s sense of the absolute division between his homo past and his hetero future is not now the fashion, and the psychoanalytically inclined might well accuse him of protesting too much. Certainly “physical dislike” is easily construed as evidence of an abiding, if now violently repressed, homosexuality. There is a sense, however, in which the sexual politics of Forster’s novel requires us to take Clive at his word. The logical corollary to the contention that same-sex desire casts the pervert out from the congregation of normal men is that the congregation of normal men is cut off from the band of perverts. All this
might seem, of course, tautological, if not downright reactionary. It is Freud's refusal to "separate off" homosexuals as "a group of a special kind," as opposed to Forster's "minoritizing" stance, that is generally considered the progressive position. Yet if one admits of what psychoanalysis does not—there are in fact heterosexuals, pure and simple—the charge of latent or repressed homosexuality can no longer underwrite the ideological innocence of the regime of the norm. Freud makes possible the situation in which homosexuality can mean either nothing or everything, as homophobic convenience dictates. Nothing, when the pervert steps smartly into the niche that the social order has prepared for him or her, and by all accounts, we are headed for the chapel. Adam and Eve, Adam and Steve. So long as gay relations remain ersatz imitations of the norm, the gender of one's object choices is strictly irrelevant. But when the hetero reproduction of the same is threatened with difference, or when the hetero reproduction of the same is exposed for what is, homosexuality magically acquires unlimited explanatory power. A strictly Freudian reading of Clive—which is to say, every reading of Clive that questions the legitimacy of his conversion—diagnoses repressed homosexuality, and homosexuality explains everything from the leaking roof at Penge to the passionless marriage to Anne. (Not to mention, on a different level, the apparent inadequacies of Forster's prose and the didacticism of his novel. Either Forster is not homosexual enough or he is too much given to homosexual special pleading. Damned if you aren't, damned if you are.)

Take Clive at his word, however, and heterosexuality means precisely and only itself. The immobility of Penge, the temperate zone that is Penge, is the authentic site of normativity. The Closet Queen of the Century outs heterosexuality.

Works Cited


13. In one sense, the homosexual of the future to which the novel is dedicated is Forster himself: he had not yet had sex with a man when he began writing it. Hence, the charge that he is not homosexual enough.


