

Beyond Compulsory Heterosexuality: A Reading of E. M. Forster's *Maurice*

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Abstract: This study draws on postmodern critique, particularly Judith Butler's performative accounts of subjectivity, to show how Maurice Hall, in Edward Forster's eponymous novel *Maurice*, challenges and disrupts traditional norms of gender and sexuality. The work reveals that, while resisting heteronormativity, the protagonist Maurice advocates for a plurality of sexual orientations. His homosexual desire directly contradicts the established cultural and religious norms that condemn any sexuality outside of heterosexuality. Maurice is depicted as a character embodying the aspirations of homosexual individuals to deconstruct predefined sexual norms and attain a broader acceptance of sexual diversity.

Keywords: deconstruction, heteronormativity, homosexuality, identity, postmodernism

Résumé : Ce travail s'inscrit dans une approche postmoderne, en particulier le concept de performativité du genre de Judith Butler, pour mettre en lumière la dimension performative de la sexualité. L'objectif est de démontrer comment le personnage principal, Maurice Hall remet en question et déstabilise les normes et conceptions traditionnelles du genre et de la sexualité. Cet article révèle que, tout en rejetant à l'hétéronormativité, le protagoniste Maurice défend la pluralité des orientations sexuelles. Son désir homosexuel contredit directement les normes culturelles et religieuses établies qui condamnent toute sexualité autre que l'hétérosexualité. Maurice incarne les aspirations des homosexuels qui visent à déconstruire les normes sexuelles prédéfinies afin d'atteindre une acceptation plus large de la diversité sexuelle.

Mots-clés : déconstruction, hétéronormativité, homosexualité, identité, postmodernisme

Introduction

Edward Morgan Forster's *Maurice*, published posthumously in 1971, explores sexual identity within a repressive British society. The narrative follows Maurice Hall, a young man from a wealthy family, as he grapples with his homosexual desires, which starkly contrast with the prevailing societal norms of the Edwardian era. Raised in an aristocratic household with stringent expectations, Maurice initially conforms to his family's rigid expectations and demands. However, his attraction to men, particularly in his relationships with Clive and Alec at Cambridge, compels him to confront and ultimately resist these societal constraints.

In this Edwardian era, romantic relationships are strictly defined as heterosexual, leaving little room for the exploration of same-sex attraction. This framework is termed heteronormativity, which is defined as societal norms that promote heterosexual relationships as the default, privileging them over other sexual orientations. Forster's novel *Maurice* challenges these traditional norms. It is not merely a tale of homosexual passion; it serves as a defiant rejection of the rigid norms governing Edwardian England.

Maurice depicts the protagonist's struggle to embrace his homosexuality in a society where such sexual orientation is considered a taboo and criminalised. According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2005), "homosexuality" describes a sexual orientation characterised by attraction to members of the same sex, encompassing emotional and physical dimensions. Raymond Corsini (1994: 151-152) adds that "homosexuality" refers to a psychological identity defined by one's attractions, reflecting minority group membership among individuals who identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. These definitions illustrate the multiplicity of sexual orientations.

Addressing the issue of gender and sexual orientation, Judith Butler (1990) suggests that gender is constructed through repeated behaviours, actions, and societal performances rather than being an inherent quality. By highlighting the performative nature of gender, Butler discusses the complexities of identity and the ways in which societal norms can be subverted or redefined. The subversion of social norms is the context in which we intend to read *Maurice*. In that perspective, this study is grounded in the theoretical framework of postmodernism, and aims at problematising the dominant or normalised sexual presuppositions that frame the traditional Edwardian society.

Critical analyses of *Maurice*¹ often contextualise it within the societal implications of homosexuality. Yulita Widayati (2000) asserts that Forster's work both imitates and reflects societal attitudes towards homosexuality. Philip Toynbee (1973) posits that *Maurice* illustrates the thesis that homosexuality is valid and capable of producing happiness, an idea largely deemed unacceptable in 1914. Today, remnants of this stigma persist, with many in the LGBTQIA+ community still facing fear and shame. Munejah Khan (2013) interprets *Maurice* as an advocacy for homosexuality, suggesting that Forster perceived relationships between men and women as ingenuine due to their differing gender experiences.

This study highlights how Maurice Hall challenges and disrupts conventional understandings of gender and sexuality, prompting several questions: how is heterosexuality made into a compulsory societal norm in the novel? And how does the work challenge traditional ways of viewing sexuality and identity? In other words, what are the strategies used by Forster to subvert heteronormativity? To address these inquiries, the work is organised into two points.

The first point shows the concept of heteronormativity as a dominant sexual standard, as illustrated in *Maurice*. It reveals how British society prioritises heterosexual relationships while pushing alternative sexual identities to the margins. The second point highlights the resistance against heteronormativity within *Maurice*. It demonstrates how the protagonist's life serves as a counter-narrative to the stigma surrounding homosexual identities. This point highlights Forster's call for the recognition of diverse sexual identities.

1- Heteronormativity as Traditional and Oppressive Sexual Norm

E.M. Forster's *Maurice* partly presents an exploration of heteronormativity, a term framed by Michael Warner (1999) to describe the societal privileging of heterosexual relationships while dismissing alternative sexual identities. Heteronormativity, according to Warner (1999), encompasses the societal privileging of heterosexual relationships while relegating other sexual identities to the periphery. This perception manifests in *Maurice* through the rigid expectations imposed on the protagonist. The societal belief that "man, that is born of woman must go with woman" (Ms, 26) reinforces the binary nature of gender and sexuality, dictating not just behaviour but the very essence of identity. This quote

¹ Forster, Edward Morgan. *Maurice*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1971. From this page on, *Maurice* will stand for (Ms.) and further references to this novel will appear in the body of the work followed by the page number of the quotation.

encapsulates the binary nature of gender and sexuality, reinforcing heterosexuality as conventional norm.

As Judith Butler (1990: 43-45) argues, “male and female genders are not voluntary; they are compelled due to regulatory regime of compulsory heterosexuality. This regime constructs the cultural genders...the behaviour of gender must obey the norms, the process of normalisation...” This pressure regulates cultural gender which is just a repetition and must be reproduced to become conventional. The novel reveals how heteronormativity becomes an oppressive societal norm, creating barriers for individuals who deviate from its dictates.

The novel shows that heterosexuality is not simply a personal choice but a dominant social expectation that structures individuals’ lives, relationships, and identities. Therefore, it considers homosexuality as deviant sexual orientation that should be banned. Through *Maurice*, homosexuals are marginalised and people deal with them with cruelty. *Maurice* highlights the realities that homosexuals undergo:

And what's to happen to me? said Maurice with a sudden drop in his voice. He spoke in despair, but Dr. Lasker Jones had an answer to every question...I'm afraid I can only advice you to live in some country that has adopted the Code Napoleon...

I don't understand.

France or Italy, for instance. There homosexuality is no longer criminal.

You mean that a French man could share with a friend and yet not go to prison?

Share? Do you mean unite? If both are of age and avoid public indecency, certainly.

Is the law ever be that in England?

I doubt it. England has always been disinclined to accept human nature.

It comes to this then there always have been people like me and always will be, and generally they have been persecuted

And you must remember that your type was once put to death in England.

Maurice understands. He is an Englishman himself, and only his troubles keep him awake. (Ms, 205-207)

This quote highlights the marginalisation and persecution of homosexuals in England. The “Code Napoleon” refers to the Napoleonic Code, which decriminalises homosexuality in countries such as France or Italy and provides a more accepting legal framework for homosexuals. By suggesting that Maurice should live in a country with such progressive laws, Dr. Lasker Jones underscores the oppressive legal environment in England, where homosexuality is criminalised, reflecting a stark contrast to more liberal societies.

Additionally, the expression “England has always been disinclined to accept human nature” captures the British conservative mindset of the time, which upholds heteronormativity and represses any deviation from traditional sexual norms. This phrase indicates a rigid adherence to societal expectations and an inability to acknowledge the natural

diversity of human sexuality. It suggests that the British legal and social systems are out of touch with the realities of human experiences, leading to the persecution of those who do not conform.

Heterosexuality is portrayed as a compulsory sexual norm. It is presented as the socially expected model of relationships and marriage. Maurice is raised within a society where marriage between a man and a woman is considered the natural and respectable path to adulthood. Family and social conventions all reinforce the idea that a man must eventually marry a woman and build a conventional household. This expectation makes heterosexuality appear not as a choice but as an obligation.

Actually, Dr. Barry embodies this perspective, insisting that “man, that is born of woman must go with woman if the human race is to continue” (Ms, 26). For Dr. Barry, the purpose of sexuality is reproduction, which requires a man with a woman. Any other type of sexual relations which is against that principle is devilish and out of order. When he suspects that Maurice is liable to go against the grain, he talks to him angrily:

Now listen to me, Maurice, never let that evil hallucination, that temptation from the devil, occur to you again...Who put that lie into your head? You whom I see and know to be a descent fellow! We'll never mention it again. No, I'll not discuss. The worst thing I could do for you is to discuss it... Rubbish, (Ms, 154)

Deeply rooted in the heteronormative tradition, Dr. Barry does not wish to engage with the topic of homosexuality. He considers it a dirty and demonic sexual orientation, refusing to allow Maurice to explain or justify his situation because it is inconceivable in Dr. Barry's mind. He uses every possible word and expression to discourage Maurice and compel him to forget his homosexual desire entirely. The fact of rejecting Maurice's sexual desire, is a process of marginalising homosexuals.

The reaction of Dr. Barry, a medical authority, reinforces heterosexuality as the natural norm. When Maurice consults Dr. Barry about his attraction to men, the doctor treats homosexuality as a pathological condition that should be corrected. Such medical discourse reflects the broader societal belief that heterosexuality represents the healthy and natural state of human sexuality, while any deviation from it is considered abnormal. Dr. Barry's refusal to acknowledge homosexuality illustrates the deeply entrenched nature of the heteronormative tradition.

Similarly, Mr. Ducie, Maurice's teacher at Cambridge, equates an ideal man with his love for a noble woman, thus further limiting sexual identity to male-female relations: “an

ideal man who loves a noble woman, who protects and serves her... this is the crown of life” (Ms, 8). Maurice receives a moral and sexual education from Mr Ducie, who explains sexual relations strictly within the framework of marriage between a man and a woman. Mr. Ducie teaches Maurice that a man’s purpose is to marry a woman and protect her, defining honour in such terms. For Mr. Ducie, a relationship between two men is impossible, shameful, and even animalistic, as there is no honour in it. At Cambridge, discussions about sexuality remain moralistic, and same-sex desire is treated as something abnormal or unspeakable. The education system and moral discourse contribute to the normativity of heterosexual norms.

Together, Dr. Barry and Mr. Ducie exemplify the dominance of heterosexuality while marginalising homosexuality, seeking to perpetuate this hierarchy. In British tradition, heterosexuals hold dominance, and “the need for dominance encourages stereotyping”² homosexuals. As Branon (1986: 293) argues, “homosexuality is bad and shameful, to be feared and suppressed.” Dr. Barry and Mr. Ducie effectively limit the possibility of sexual identities to male-female relations. Their idealisation of heterosexual relationships confines sexual identity strictly to male-female. This idea reinforces the hierarchy of heterosexual dominance.

In *Maurice*, the pressure of societal judgement forces characters to hide their sexuality. As soon as Maurice recognises his homosexual feelings, he experiences anxiety and confusion because such desires contradict the moral codes. Maurice reflects on the danger of being negatively judged and rejected. He confesses: “I had always been like other people...now I had become abnormal.” (Ms, 56) The term “abnormal” reflects the internalisation of society’s condemnation of homosexuality. Maurice perceives himself through the judgemental “eyes of society”, much like Dunbar’s speaker who must “wear the mask that grins and lies” (Dunbar, 1896) to avoid scrutiny. Here, Maurice’s confession reflects what E, N’Guessan (2011: 3) describes as a “power relation operating through discourse.” Society produces norms that define what is “natural”, and individuals internalise those norms, often experiencing their own identity as deviant.

Clive Durham chooses to repress his homosexual feelings in order to conform to social expectations. After deciding to marry a woman, he declares: “I shall marry Anne and lead the

² N’Guessan, Koffi Eugene, “The Subversive Power of Stereotype in Ishmael Reed’s *Flight to Canada*,” in *Revue Baobab*, Bouaké, No 9, 2011, p. 8.

normal life...Against my will I have become normal” (Ms,105) Clive’s decision demonstrates the power of compulsory heterosexuality. The pressure of society on homosexuals is such that Clive ultimately gives in and decides to pursue a heterosexual marriage. This assertion encapsulates the performative nature of heterosexuality, as Clive marries not for passion but to avoid societal condemnation. It highlights the transactional nature of heterosexual unions, framed by societal expectations rather than genuine affection. Through marriage, Clive simply wants to fulfil societal expectations.

Marriage becomes a “social mask” that protects him from scandal and legal persecution. The metaphor “mask” symbolises the strategies individuals employ to hide their authentic selves in societies that impose rigid norms of behaviour and sexuality. For E. N’Guessan (2016: 91) “the mask is a survival strategy as well as a metaphor of protection.” Clive constantly hides his sexual orientation to survive and avoid social condemnation, and moral shame. Characters conceal their homosexuality because of the oppressive moral and social gaze of Edwardian society. Clive feels compelled to conceal his sexual identity behind a façade of heterosexual normality. His behaviour shows that individuals must hide their inner truth in order to maintain social acceptance.

The social repression of homosexuality reinforces heterosexuality as the only acceptable form of sexuality. Clive’s fear of social exclusion and legal punishment reinforces this pressure. In the Edwardian context depicted in the novel, homosexual acts are criminalised in Britain, which creates a climate of fear and secrecy. This framework pushes characters like Maurice to seek solutions and to consider conforming to heterosexual life as a means of social survival. Following Clive, Maurice attempts to conform to social norms by engaging in a heterosexual marriage, but his marriage fails.

At this stage, Maurice seeks to cure himself in order to behave like a “normal” individual. In fact, Maurice wants those around him to recognise him as their equal. He consults Dr. Lasker Jones, an expert in “curing” homosexuality through hypnotism. Maurice inquires:

What’s the name of my trouble...Has it one?
Congenital Homosexuality.
Congenital how much? Well, can anything be done?
Oh, certainly if you consent. (Ms, 175)

Dr. Lasker Jones endeavours to cure Maurice through hypnotism. Maurice expresses a desire for change. In fact, Maurice suffers from emotional distress that is why he struggles to

reconcile his authentic desires with social expectations. Maurice's decisions demonstrate that heterosexual orientation functions as the socially approved path that guarantees respectability, and acceptance within society. The fact of trying to change and engaging in heterosexual marriage shows heterosexuality as dominant social order which constructs homosexuality as deviant.

Moreover, Maurice's attempt to "cure" himself through hypnosis illustrates the internal conflict produced by social repression. During a consultation with Dr Lasker Jones, Maurice confesses: "I am an unspeakable of the Oscar Wilde sort." (Ms, 176) This statement refers to the persecution of homosexuals following the Oscar Wilde Trials, which reinforced the need for secrecy. This confession illustrates the split between Maurice's private identity and the identity imposed by society, much like the duality analysed by E. N'Guessan in the case of Lincoln's character. E. N'Guessan (2016: 89) highlights this internal conflict when he writes that the characters in Parks' play oscillate between: "the 'real or true self' and its social 'referent' or external self." Similarly, Maurice must maintain an outward appearance of heterosexual normality while internally recognising his love for Clive Durham and later Alec Scudder. Maurice's confession shows how social stigma forces individuals to perceive their own identity as shameful.

Aside from societal pressures, religion qualifies homosexuality as a sin and firmly condemns it. Religion further compounds repression against homosexuals. In fact, Maurice is educated in a Christian context, affirming that "religion means a lot to me" (Ms, 4). Thus, he believes that a man should marry a woman and beget children. Initially, Maurice feels guilty for betraying his religious beliefs because he is taught that homosexuality is against God's order. "In the beginning, God creates male and female and says... be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth" (Genesis, 1: 28). Furthermore, in the New Testament, Paul affirms:

For this reason, God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error. (Roman, 1: 26-27)

Christians firmly believe that the sexual relationship blessed by God is that between male and female because it leads to procreation. Homosexuality does not lead to procreation; therefore, such relationships are prohibited.

Furthermore, Maurice's mother uses religious values to try to impose heterosexuality to Maurice. As Michel Foucault (1978) argues, institutions such as the state, religion and

family perpetuate heteronormative values. In fact, Maurice's mother attempts to persuade him to stay heterosexual by asking him to return to Christianity: "your poor father always went to church...you have to," but Maurice replies: "I'm not my father...Morrie, Morrie, what a thing to say." (Ms, 51). Maurice finds himself caught between two identities, grappling with the conflict between his former self and his emerging one. He understands that his religion seeks to control him and settle him into a heterosexuality framework.

Biblical interpretations and social norms that depict homosexuality as sinful and criminal contribute to the internal conflict Maurice and Clive experience, ultimately compelling Clive to conform to heterosexual norms, as he marries out of societal pressure rather than love. The reason why "Clive and his wife never see each other naked, or want to" (Ms, 151) further exemplifies this point. This quote emphasizes that Clive is not attracted to women but he desires to be perceived as a normal individual. Matthews Curr (2001: 63) suggests, "Forster exposes with this a marriage, contracted but never truly consummated." Maurice and Clive are fearful because neither religion nor the law permits homosexuality. They get married in order to escape the criticism and judgement of others, rather than out of love or genuine desire. In fact, heterosexuality is portrayed as the natural truth about human relationships. This portrayal demonstrates how social institutions participate in constructing heterosexuality as the norm.

In *Maurice*, heterosexuality functions as a socially enforced norm, maintained through institutions such as family, education, religion and law. Maurice Hall, grapples with the conflict between his sexual desires and societal norms that deem non-heterosexual behaviour as taboo. Maurice's journey emphasises key moments that highlight the emotional and psychological toll of societal rejection. His failure in curing and in a heterosexual bond with Miss Olcott encapsulates this struggle, as the narrator notes, "she knew something was wrong...His touch revolted her. It was a corpse" (Ms, 46). Such moments expose the internalised shame and alienation stemming from a society that considers his sexual identity unacceptable. This emotional turmoil leads Maurice to question the validity of his desires within a society that fails to recognise them, underscoring his inability to conform to heterosexual expectations and emphasising the suffocating nature of societal norms.

2- Challenging Heteronormativity: Beyond Traditional Ways of Viewing Sexuality

According to Lanlan Du (2010: 67), "Judith Butler has committed to rethink the relation between sex and social gender." Accordingly, Butler (1990: 5-7) argues that "gender

identity can be changed; it is completely open...the notion of gender needs to be reconstructed by performativity...gender performativity overturns the heterosexual hegemony of the gender identity model.” Furthermore, Butler (1993: 3-5) asserts that “gender is actually illusory...the breakdown of gender binaries would then open up possibilities...gender is changeable, a variable reality.”

In the same perspective as Judith Butler, *Maurice* emerges as a narrative that actively challenges heteronormative constructs. In *Maurice*, homosexuality is presented not merely as a forbidden practice but as a sexual orientation that reveals the authentic desires of the individual. Through the protagonist’s life, the novel symbolically lifts the veil imposed by society and exposes the artificiality of compulsory heterosexual norms. In this sense, homosexuality functions as a means of discovering the true nature of human desire and demonstrates that sexual orientation is largely shaped by cultural and social pressures rather than by immutable natural laws. Forster’s novel ultimately suggests that authenticity can be achieved once the individual rejects the constraints imposed by society.

To express his homosexuality, Maurice can defy societal prohibitions. It all starts when Clive Durham make a romantic proposition to Maurice. He whispers to Maurice, “I love you.” Maurice is taken aback and exclaims, “Oh, rot! Durham, you’re an Englishman. I’m another. Don’t talk nonsense” (Ms, 50). Fearing his parents’ reactions, initially, Maurice rejects Clive’s proposition before ultimately accepting after careful examination. This acceptance reveals the fact that his true nature prevails over the prescribed societal norm. By accepting Clive’s proposition, Maurice resists societal norms.

Maurice’s interactions with Clive and Alec illustrate his struggle against the heteronormative framework. Maurice’s declaration to Clive, “I have always been like the Greeks and didn’t know” (Ms, 56), signifies his awakening to a world where same-sex love is not only valid but fulfilling. This recognition opens up a narrative space that embraces homosexual identities as legitimate expressions of love, contrary to prevailing stigma. The emotional depth of Maurice’s relationships becomes a counter-narrative to societal constraints. His feelings of genuine connection with Clive are articulated when he states, “I think you’re beautiful, the only beautiful person I’ve ever seen” (Ms, 90). This declaration from Maurice highlights how love between him and Clive goes beyond traditional heteronormativity and shows a possibility of same-sex attraction.

Additionally, Maurice harbours doubt regarding the authenticity of heterosexual marriage. Maurice characterises heterosexual marriage as a mere obligation and not authentic, stating in conversation with Clive: “the need for an heir for Penge. My mother calls it marriage” (Ms, 87). In this perspective, Judith Butler (1990: 44) posits that heterosexuality, as a sexual norm, is merely a matter of repetition lacking authenticity. Homosexuals hide their sexual orientations through false heterosexual marriages in order to be accepted in the society. According to David R. Hodge (2017), homosexuals feel compelled to conceal their identities to attain social acceptance since they are perceived abnormal. In this context, Jeremy Tambling (1995: 110) is right when he argues that while “homosexuality is spiritual; heterosexuality is related to material concerns.”

In fact, Maurice exhibits a lack of sensitivity towards female companions, recognising his inability to maintain relationships with women, while feeling an attraction to men. He states that he cannot “pretend to care about women when the only sex that attracts him is his own...He loves men and always loves them...He longs to embrace them and mingle his being with theirs.” (Ms, 53). Maurice is unable to engage in romantic relationships with women.

In acknowledging his love for men, Maurice intuitively understands that genuine love cannot exist outside same-sex relationships. Maurice and Clive share mutual affection, reflecting their shared feelings and love. He affectionately tells Clive: “Clive, you’re a silly little fool, and since you’ve brought it up, I think you’re beautiful, the only beautiful person I’ve ever seen. I love your voice and everything to do with you, down to your clothes or the room you are sitting in. I adore you.” (Ms, 90) Ultimately, Maurice and Clive come to the conclusion that they must remain together; separation appears impossible. Their love exists because Clive and Maurice are of the same sex. For Maurice, the female sex represents an opposition to his own, presenting a barrier to authentic and natural love. The female sex is viewed as the “other,” symbolising the binary opposite of the male sex. This dynamic elucidates Maurice’s scepticism towards heteronormative orientation.

Maurice’s rejection of heteronormativity is evident in his resistance to traditional marriage between men and women. Mr. Ducie advises Maurice to marry a woman, having observed his preference for male company since boyhood. In the sand, Ducie sketches a diagram to illustrate the importance of relationships between men and women, yet Maurice shows no interest. He simply responds: “I think I shall not marry...Liar,” he thinks. “Liar, coward, he’s told me nothing.” (Ms, 8-11). This quotation indicates that Maurice dismisses

Mr. Ducie's assertions, and acknowledges that he cannot marry a woman, for he is not attracted to the female gender and is distinct from Mr. Ducie. Maurice asserts: "he would not...pretend to care about women when the only sex that attracted him was his own. He loved men and had always loved them." (Ms, 53). Not only does Maurice love men, but he also discovers his true self in the presence of Clive and Alec.

For Maurice, homosexuality constitutes not only his sexual identity but also a pathway to feeling authentic. In Alec, Maurice sees a reflection of himself. With Alec, he feels at ease, affirming: "I have really got to think that natural." (Ms, 206). Thus, Maurice develops feelings for Alec. Prior to encountering his male companions, Maurice was introverted, as his sister admits: "we know even less about Maurice than when you were here...He has become a most mysterious person...He keeps everything so secret...Maurice is a rip really." (Ms, 120-122). Maurice, once a solitary boy, is transformed into a jovial individual in the company of male figures. Initially fearful of societal judgement due to his homosexuality, he finds solace in his friendships and no longer fears the scrutiny of others. With Alec, Maurice is emboldened to confront the world, no longer afraid of his sexual orientation.

Furthermore, the narrator emphasises that Maurice is prepared to challenge cultural and religious dogmas. He is no longer influenced by religious requirements; instead, he embraces allosensibility, leading to the acceptance of his homosexuality. At home, Maurice talks about his friend Clive and his atheism with his family, explaining to his mother that while he respects her beliefs, his conscience now forbids him from attending church. In his own words, Maurice declares: "I knew you would be upset. I cannot help it, mother dearest. I am made that way and it is no good arguing." (Ms, 42-43). Maurice begins to reject the religious dogmas that once constrained him, and asserts his identity over familial expectations. When Maurice declares that to his mother, he embodies a defiance against heteronormative pressures.

Embracing Clive's perspective, Maurice progressively distances himself from the Christian norms that once held significant meaning for him. His thoughts are no longer centred on Christ as he begins exploring alternative sexual realities. In the following conversation with Clive, Maurice rejects his Christian faith:

So, did you go?

Where?

To the church

Durham sprang up. His face was disgusted. Then he bit his lip and began to smile.

No, I didn't go to church, Hall. I thought that was plain. (Ms, 42-43)

Clive smiles, recognising that Maurice shares his ideals and viewpoints regarding religion. Maurice becomes convinced that religious dogmas constrain his freedom of thought and action. He ultimately rejects the *pensée unique* surrounding sexuality. Both Maurice and Clive agree on the necessity of re-evaluating established norms and accepting their differences, which shape their identities.

To fully embrace his homosexuality, Maurice ceases attending church, signifying that being a Christian does not align with his true nature. Beneath the façade of a Christian identity, Maurice emerges as an atheist seeking to express his sexual desires without compromise, with Clive offering him a safe space to articulate his thoughts and feelings. Theism promotes heterosexuality as the sole legitimate expression of love, while atheism fosters plurality in sexual orientation. Maurice perceives Clive's friendship as an opportunity to join the side of the advocates of sexual plurality.

Alongside Maurice and his companions, Edward Carpenter emerges as a figure advocating for homosexuality. Carpenter rejects the notion of heterosexuality as the only truth, asserting that homosexuality is authentic and genuine, in contrast to heterosexuality, which he perceives as a mere imitation. Carpenter "was a believer in the love of comrades, whom he sometimes calls 'Uranians'." (Ms, 235). He believes that homosexuality is free from material compromise and deserves recognition as a legitimate identity.

Maurice's life demonstrates how identity can be trapped between illusion and reality. *Maurice* ultimately explores the possibility of reclaiming authentic identity. E. N'Guessan (2016: 96) describes identity as fluctuating between reality and performance: "What is real might be just imaginary and what is imaginary might be real." In *Maurice*, this tension is resolved when the protagonist finally rejects the social mask imposed by Edwardian morality. Maurice chooses to live authentically with Alec Scudder, abandoning the expectations of class and social respectability. Maurice's struggle transforms the narrative of concealment into a narrative of liberation. His decision symbolises the triumph of the inner self over the socially constructed identity.

By the novel's conclusion, Maurice "leaves everything and stays with Alec in an unknown place where people don't worry about sexual orientation." (Ms, 251). Maurice not only accepts his sexuality but also finds the strength to pursue a genuine and loving relationship with Alec. Their decision to escape together into the countryside symbolises liberation from the restrictive structures of Edwardian society. Despite the pervasive pressure

to conform, *Maurice* ultimately suggests the possibility of removing “the mask”. At the end, Maurice chooses authenticity rather than conformity, even though it means living outside conventional society. In this sense, homosexuality becomes a means of unveiling authentic desire and going beyond socially constructed sexual norms.

Conclusion

Through postmodern lens, this work shows that Maurice Hall challenges the fixed binaries of gender, advocating for a more fluid understanding of identity and plurality in sexual orientation. *Maurice* not only critiques the metanarrative of heteronormativity but also embodies the emerging mininarrative of homosexual identities. *Maurice* remains a contradictory appeal against the one-sided conception of society on sexual orientation and identity. Forster creates a character that sets conflicts both with himself and with the British social norms. Maurice sets in motion his skepticism toward universal thinking.

Thus, in *Maurice*, Forster challenges the assumption that heterosexuality is the natural and universal form of sexuality. By portraying Maurice’s journey from repression to self-acceptance, the novel demonstrates that sexual orientation is deeply influenced by cultural and social contexts. Homosexuality therefore functions as a narrative device that exposes the constraints of compulsory heterosexuality and reveals the possibility of a more authentic understanding of human desire. Butler’s theory of gender performativity resonates with Forster’s depiction of Maurice’s fluid identity. The character's life highlights the complexities and nuances of sexual identity, illustrating that sexual identity is not static but rather a performance shaped by societal expectations

This study exposes different opinions toward LGBTQIA+ and heterosexuality. It finds that all the views about sexual orientations are to be taken into account. Establishing the connection between literary work and the society, one can understand that *Maurice* challenges traditional sexual orientation and highlights LGBTQIA+ relationships. *Maurice* challenges sexual restrictions and promotes the acceptance of diverse sexual orientations. Therefore, the persistent influence of heteronormativity in British social norms necessitates a critical re-evaluation.

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