Gemma Moss, 'Women In and Out: Forster, Social Purity, and Florence Barger' in *Critical Essays on E. M. Forster's Maurice*, ed. Emma Sutton and Tsung-Han Tsai (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press: 2020).Women and contemporary women's movements exerted a considerable influence on *Maurice*, even though admirable or developed female characters are conspicuously absent from the narrative. *Maurice's* apparent disinterest in women has been read as evidence of Forster's misogyny, which was one of the reasons the novel was roundly dismissed when it was posthumously published in 1971, as critics – self-identified feminists included – turned on Forster with highly gendered accusations of childishness and fantasy.[1] Admittedly, *Maurice* is significantly

[1] For Christopher Reed, Phyllis Rose's biography of Virginia Woolf cemented the view of *Maurice* – and male Bloomsbury more broadly – as 'decidedly misogynist'. Rose, *A Woman of Letters: A Life of Virginia Woolf* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 77. See Christopher Reed, 'The Mouse that Roared: Creating a Queer Forster' in *Queer Forster*, ed. by Robert Martin and George Piggford (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1997), pp. 75–88 (p. 84). Cynthia Ozick's review of *Maurice* (originally in *Commentary*) called it 'a disingenuous book, an infantile book, because, while pretending to be about societal injustice, it is really about make-believe, it is about wishing; so it fails even as a tract. Fairy tales, though, are plainly literature; but *Maurice* fails as literature too.' Cynthia Ozick, 'Morgan and Maurice: A Fairy Tale' (1971) in *Art and Ardor* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), p. 64. In the same year Philip Toynbee said '*Maurice* is novelettish, ill-written, humourless and deeply embarrassing'. *E. M. Foster: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Philip Gardner (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 463. For Gilbert Adair, '*Maurice*, complete

different from Forster's previous work, in which narration is often focalised through central female characters – one thinks especially of Lucy Honeychurch in *A Room With A View*, and Margaret Schlegel in *Howards End*. Forster does not need to be entirely exonerated to note that the marginal position of women in *Maurice* stems from more complex issues. The novel rejects not women per say, but the sexual conservatism of the social purity movement, which had a substantial social influence at the time *Maurice* was being written. The historical and social context of the novel's original composition, in 1913-14, is important to appreciate how *Maurice's* characterisation of women – and also its attitude towards sex and the body, which has since been lauded by feminist critics[2] – works against contemporary social purity narratives, which argued for women's innate and superior virtue, and connected morality with sexual restraint.

At the time *Maurice* was first being written, a sexually conservative reform movement broadly termed social purity was promoting chastity, family life, and 'true manliness' as 'a gender identity

---

with deliriously happy ending, is incompetent both as fiction and as wishful thinking'. Gilbert Adair, *The Real Tadzio: Thomas Mann's* Death in Venice *and the Boy who Inspired it* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2003), p. 97.

[2] See Debrah Raschke, 'Breaking the Engagement with Philosophy: Re-envisioning Hetero/Homo Relations in *Maurice*' in *Queer Forster,* ed. by Martin and Piggford, pp. 151–65.

emphasising the virtues of sexual self-control'. [3] In 1913, notable suffragette and purity-feminist Christabel Pankhurst published *The Great Scourge and How to End it*: a book that argued that the 'virtuous woman' ought to play a greater role in the moral guidance of society, because men's sexual misconduct was responsible for social problems. [4] Misconduct included any sexual activity outside the remit of family life – in other words, sex with anyone but their wives, and sex acts that would not produce children. A social conservatism was being endorsed in the pre-War years that elevated women and brought male sexuality under particular scrutiny, making this a difficult time for Forster to be writing about sexuality – especially to be claiming that homosexuality was not morally wrong. Interpreted against this background, *Maurice* can be read, not as a rebellion against attenuated Victorian attitudes or against women, but as a challenge to the contemporary social purity movement.

Awareness of purity discourses gives us new ways of reading women in *Maurice* and Forster's work more broadly: they are sometimes the agents of social purity, characterised as the guardians of tradition, social interaction and the operations of suburban life, policing sexual and domestic behaviour. At other times, *Maurice* discusses the limitations

[3] Katherine Mullin, *James Joyce, Sexuality and Social Purity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 85.
[4] Christabel Pankhurst, *The Great Scourge and How to End it* (London: E. Pankhurst, 1913), p. 48.

placed on women's sexuality by men adhering to puritanical notions of women's innocence. While female characters, especially in *Howards End* and *A Room with a View*, have been read in a variety of ways — social purity is so far absent from work on Forster and women. For Rose Macauley, Margaret Schlegel is a shining example of English femininity, while Goldman points out that female characters have been read as 'gay ciphers' – men disguised as women.[5] Elizabeth Finkelstein carried out a recuperative study after accusations of misogyny when *Maurice* was first published, claiming that 'Forster's greatest characters are women'.[6] *Maurice's* representation of women is considerably less positive than we find in many of his other novels, yet it does not vilify women: it critiques purity-feminism by rejecting narratives of female superiority. Mrs Hall and Mrs Durham are poor moral and intellectual guides for their children because of their limited education and experience outside domestic life. The novel is also critical of male puritans like Mr Ducie, and explores how pressures on men to cultivate sexual ignorance in women harms relationships by preventing sexual fulfilment: something we see in Clive's marriage to Anne Woods. The novel also acknowledges that the high social value of women's innocence limited their opportunities for

[5] Rose Macauley, 'Women in the East' (1924) quoted in *E. M. Forster: The Critical Heritage*, p. 197. Goldman, 'Forster and Women', p. 132.
[6] Bonnie Blumenthal Finkelstein, *Forster's Women: Eternal Differences* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1975), vii.

education and maturation: something that is explored through Kitty in the now abandoned Epilogue to the 1913-14 version of the text.

Although Forster was brought up almost entirely by women and maintained close friendships with them throughout his life, relatively little has been written on Forster and women. Jane Goldman notes that biographical criticism has shown 'contradictions and paradoxes in Forster's relationships and attitudes to women', [7] while Elizabeth Langland warns against the dangers of 'psychobiographies', arguing that these have obscured the radical sexual politics of *Howards End,* which yearns for 'something other than the classical opposition between male and female, masculine and feminine'. [8] Moving away from psychobiography and returning to the context of the novel's original composition, this chapter also argues for the significance of Forster's friendship with Florence Barger – a figure firmly within Forster's closest circle of friends when he was writing and first circulating *Maurice* – to deepen understanding of the different ways that women shaped the novel.

While social purity is an important context to understand the

[7] Jane Goldman, 'Forster and Women' in *The Cambridge Companion to E. M. Forster*, ed. David Bradshaw (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 120–137 (p. 121).
[8] Elizabeth Langland, 'Gesturing Towards an Open Space: Gender, Form and Language in E. M. Forster's *Howards End*' in *Out of Bounds: Male Writers and Gender(ed) Criticism*, ed. by Laura Claridge and Elizabeth Langland (Amherst: University of Massachussets Press, 1990), pp. 252–67 (p. 253).

negative pressures contemporary women's movements exerted on the novel, Florence's influence was positive. She was the wife of Forster's Cambridge friend George Barger, and a part-time school inspector active in feminist causes and Labour Party politics. She became Forster's lifelong confidante, living with him for a time in 1939.[9] He confessed his homosexuality to her in 1912, and showed her the manuscript of *Maurice* after the disappointing reaction of Hugh Meredith: Forster wrote he was 'very badly hit by his [Meredith's] utter indifference to *Maurice'*.[10] By contrast, Florence's positive reaction made her the main person with whom Forster discussed his sexuality. Wendy Moffat's new biography confirms that most of what we know about Forster's relationship with Mohammed el Adl in Alexandria comes from his letters to Florence, which she preserved.[11]

Reading *Maurice* in the context of the social purity movement sheds new light on the importance of Florence's acceptance of Forster's homosexuality, and her reaction to the novel. In *Maurice* Forster was able to write a homosexual character, and about homosexual love, as

---

[9] Evert Barger, 'Memories of Morgan' in *E. M. Forster: Interviews and Recollections*, ed. by J. H. Stape (London: Macmillan, 1993), pp. 209–217 (p. 213).
[10] Forster to Florence Barger, 10th August 1915. E. M. Forster, *Selected Letters of E. M. Forster, Volume I: 1879-1920*, ed. by Mary Lago and P. N. Furbank (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 229.
[11] Wendy Moffat, *E. M. Forster: A New Life* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), pp. 152–168.

something that was 'pure' and positive – a difficult task when non-reproductive sexual behaviour was being widely vilified. *Maurice's* representation of homosexual desire as pure, healthy and virile rejects purity narratives that connected homosexuality with degeneration and disease. In a social context where sexuality was being closely policed, it was not just Edward Carpenter, whose influence on the novel is well known, but also partially Florence Barger, who enabled Forster to think of homosexual relationships in a positive way, and thus to write *Maurice*.[12]

Maurice and social purity

Since its posthumous publication fifty-eight years after it was first drafted, *Maurice* has been publicly judged by readers removed from its immediate context. An account of the social purity movement is necessary to appreciate the discourses around masculinity and sexuality that were well-known, and affected writers and publishers, at the time *Maurice* was written. Katherine Mullin describes social purity as 'a formidable branch of the elaborate network of moral reform which flourished at the close of the nineteenth and the early decades of the twentieth century', consisting of a number of high-profile organisations

[12] E. M. Forster, 'Notes on Maurice' in *Maurice* (London: André Deutsch, 1999), p. 215.

who ‘campaigned for a high standard of “purity” in literature and art by boycotting, intimidating and occasionally even prosecuting the purveyors of sexually explicity material, and agitating for further legislation against “indecent publications”’.[13] When the first draft of *Maurice* was being written, the movement was exerting a substantial social influence, and it is partially because of this context that Forster described *Maurice* to Florence as ‘unpublishable until my death or England’s’.[14] While it is easy to see how the publication of a text that included subject matter considered criminal and obscene was unthinkable to Forster, social purity influences the novel in more subtle ways. Branches of the social purity movement organised by women were putting pressure on masculinity in the pre-WWI years, and this pressure is visible in *Maurice*.

By the start of the twentieth century, social purity had become a thoroughly conservative movement aimed at policing male behaviour, but its early manifestation in Britain grew out of radical women’s movements that attempted to defend the civil liberties of prostitutes. The Contagious Diseases Acts of the 1860s and 1870s aimed to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases by focusing entirely on women working in the sex industry, giving ‘fortnightly gynaecological inspections of women deemed “known prostitutes”, who were confined in “lock hospitals” if

[13] Mullin, *James Joyce, Sexuality and Social Purity*, pp. 4, 5.
[14] Forster to Florence, 26th June 1914. GBR/0272/EMF/18/38/1.

they were found to be contaminated with a sexually transmitted disease.' [15] The Ladies National Association, founded by Josephine Butler, campaigned for the repeal of this Act, outlining the hypocrisy of criminalising prostitutes while overlooking the men who visited them.[16] Judith R. Walkowtiz has shown that the repeal movement was highly organised: it arranged thousands of meetings, lobbied politicians, canvassed widely, and contained members who had connections with Chartists and working-class radicals. [17] Ultimately, however, the movement developed in the direction of religious conservatism, and the 'radical, anti-state sexual politics espoused by Butler and her colleagues' transitioned into 'the more conservative and regulationist ideologies of the mainstream social purity movement'. [18] Writing from Alexandria during the First World War, Forster 'told Carpenter that the commandant at the hospital was a "purity fanatic" who put men with venereal disease

[15] Mullin, *James Joyce, Sexuality and Social Purity*, p. 22.
[16] Mullin, *James Joyce, Sexuality and Social Purity*, p. 22.
[17] Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 129–31. Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London: Virago, 1998), pp. 101, 104.
[18] Mullin, *James Joyce, Sexuality and Social Purity*, p. 23. See also Edward Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance: Purity Movements in Britain since 1700* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1977), pp. 75–93. Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality 1885-1914* (London: Penguin, 1995), pp. 95–123.

in "prison conditions in a wire enclosure".'[19] In Alexandria, then, Forster knew of men who were being subjected to the same kind of degrading treatment that prostitutes had suffered under the Contagious Diseases Act. The surveillance of men's sexual behaviour that Forster noticed among the British community in Alexandria has its history in a shift in the aims of purity-feminists. While early activists had focused on the mistreatment of prostitutes, later groups began to scrutinise men as well.[20] Changes in legislation towards the end of the nineteenth century reflected a turning tide that cast women as victims rather than perpetrators of sexual impropriety. When the Contagious Diseases Act was suspended in 1883 – something welcomed by the repeal movement, including Butler's Ladies National Association [21] – it was replaced by the Criminal Law Amendment Act in 1885, which was subtitled 'An Act to make further provision for the Protection of Women and Girls, the suppression of brothels, and other purposes.' While mainly aimed at safeguarding females, section 11 – the Labouchere Amendment – criminalised 'gross indecency' between men in 'public or private,' and was used to send

[19] Moffat, *E. M. Forster,* p. 140.
[20] Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian* Society, pp. 129-31. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, p. 90. Mullin, *James Joyce, Sexuality and Social Purity,* pp. 85–86.
[21] Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society,* pp. 141–2. Mullin, *James Joyce, Sexuality and Social Purity*, p. 23.

Oscar Wilde to prison in 1895. [22] Edward Bristow writes that 'the Criminal Law Amendment Act was a symbolic and substantial triumph for feminists and puritans. They looked to the events of the year as a turning point in the history of morals and as an example of how women might cleanse society.'[23] The legislation that criminalised homosexual sex is thus intricately bound up with the repeal movement and roots of the social purity movement.

The conservatism of the social purity movement as it existed in the early twentieth century rested on claims about the immorality of men's sexual conduct: instead of arguing that standards of conduct for women should be brought in line with men, purity feminists began to argue that men's moral standards should be raised to that of women. When the first draft of *Maurice* was being written, Christabel Pankhurst was campaigning for 'Votes for women and chastity for men' due to what she believed was women's greater morality and purity. The slogan was used on banners and pamphlets used by the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU).[24] Forster was aware of Pankhurst and had heard her

[22] R. W. Burnie, *The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885: with Introduction, Commentary and Forms of Indictments* (London: Waterlow & Sons Ltd, 1885).
[23] Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance*, p. 114.
[24] Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1989), p. 24.

speak in public, finding her 'very able, very clever and very unpleasant'.[25] In her 1913 book, *The Great Scourge and How to End It*, the 'scourge' was the avarice and immorality of men's sexual appetites, rhetorically framed as an affliction that was punishing society. She claimed of men:

> They want to resort to practices which a wife would not tolerate. Lewdness and obscenity is what these men crave, and what they get in houses of ill-fame. Marriage does not 'satisfy' them. They fly to women who will not resent foul words and acts, and will even permit unnatural abuse of the sex function.[26]

Pankhurst's writing is a cocktail of religious and scientific rhetoric, mobilised to conservative, heteronormative ends. For Pankhurst even sex outside marriage and particular heterosexual acts constitute 'unnatural abuse of the sex function', since the function of sex is the continuation of the species. Pankhurst advocated a social and sexual conservatism that elevated women, promoting family life and, of course, heterosexuality, making this a challenging time to be writing a novel like *Maurice*. The environment in which *Maurice* was written, and the prevalence of ideas about purity and chastity, illuminates the significance of Forster's critique of boys' education in *Maurice*, as an environment in which male teachers reinforce purity narratives.

---

[25] Forster quoted in Furbank, *E. M. Forster,* p. 180.
[26] Pankhurst, *The Great Scourge,* p. 41.

Anxieties about morality and sex are everywhere in the school environment with which *Maurice* opens. The schoolmaster, Mr Abrahams, 'cared neither for work nor games, but fed his boys well and saw that they did not misbehave'.[27] He is concerned principally with bodily health and social behaviour: being well-mannered and sociable is valued more highly than intellectual or physical achievement. The novel opens in an environment in which the importance of social conformity is paramount. These pressures weigh Maurice down, hampering his personal development. Mr Abrahams sees even heterosexual sex as a problem; he is grateful to avoid by dealing only with pre-pubescent boys: 'Celibate and immortal', they are easy to manage 'because they never married and seldom died'.[28] For Mr Ducie, masculinity is dependent on sexual abstinence on spiritual grounds: the 'ideal man', he says, is 'chaste with asceticism'.[29] Male ideas about female purity motivate Mr Ducie's decision to explain sexual intercourse to Maurice, since his father has died and 'It is not a thing that your mother can tell you, and you should not mention it to her nor to any lady'.[30] In *Maurice*, male pedagogues are informed by and work to maintain assumptions about female sexual ignorance.

---

[27] Forster, *Maurice*, p. 1.
[28] Forster, *Maurice*, p. 2.
[29] Forster, *Maurice*, p. 6.
[30] Forster, *Maurice*, p. 5.

The opening of the novel constructs a preoccupation with purity as the product of limited minds. Mr Abrahams's pedagogical style is arrogant and lazy: he declares, "I see no use of books on education".[31] Mr Ducie is no better: he is 'soaked in evolution', which implies an obsession or saturation with an idea, rather than active or critical engagement.[32] To be in the thrall of evolutionary theories is significant: arguments about degeneration – the deviation of the species from 'normal' types in a way that hinders its continued existence – developed out of Darwinian theories, and were used to connect homosexuality with illness and physical inferiority.[33] *Maurice* critiques this position through Mr Ducie, whose ignorance is reinforced when Maurice meets him years later in the British Museum. The narrator declares, 'How like Mr Ducie to get the facts just wrong!' but the teacher is supremely confident in his judgement, claiming it is 'so seldom that I make a mistake'.[34] The novel connects puritanism with an inability to see one's own errors, suggesting that the wrong kind of education can be limiting rather than enlightening.

---

[31] Forster, *Maurice*, p. 2.
[32] Forster, *Maurice*, p. 2.
[33] For discussion of the connection between degeneration and homosexuality, see Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. by Robert Hurley, 2 vols (New York: Vintage, 1990), I, pp. 6–7, 154, and Sander Gilman, 'Sexology, Psychoanalysis and Degeneration: From a Theory of Race to a Race of Theory' in *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress* ed. by J. Edward Chamberlain and Sander Gilman (New York and London: Routledge, 1985), pp. 68–74.
[34] Forster, *Maurice*, p. 194.

Purity advocates were concerned with the chastity of the mind as well as the body, discouraging impure thoughts as well as actions. The permeation of ideas about purity into consciousness can be seen in Maurice's reaction to his two, sexually charged dreams. 'Maurice had two dreams at school' and we are told 'they will interpret him':

> In the first dream […] George headed down the field towards him, naked and jumping over the woodstacks. "I shall go mad if he turns wrong now," said Maurice, and just as they collared this happened, and a brutal disappointment woke him up. He did not connect it with Mr. Ducie's homily, still less with his second dream, but he thought he was going to be ill, and afterwards that it was somehow a punishment for something.[35]

The dreams are devices for exploring Maurice's repressed desire for George, and the effects of Mr Ducie's 'education'. Maurice registers George as 'just a common servant' even though at the memory of him 'Something stirred in the unfathomable depths of his heart.'[36] Maurice is unable to comprehend the sexual longing expressed in the dream, and his response to it – premonitions of impending illness or punishment – shows his internalisation of homosexual desire as obscene and impure: the result of a malfunctioning body, and punishable. This narrative is reinforced at

[35] Forster, *Maurice,* p. 12.
[36] Forster, *Maurice,* p. 10.

his second school, where it is hinted that there has been a sexual scandal: 'just before his arrival there had been a terrific scandal' so that now 'The tone of the school was pure' and literature had been censored: 'the library was immaculate'.[37] The novel's vagueness about the specifics of the scandal replicates the ambiguity that would have accompanied it, since sex and so-called deviant behaviour was not openly discussed. The language of cleanliness and purity is used to explore the way that associations between homosexuality and disease creep into Maurice's consciousness and contribute towards the repression of his desires.

The difficulty of discussing sex and homosexuality is palpable in *Maurice*, and affects the narrative. As Howard J. Booth identifies in one of the first detailed studies of narrative form in *Maurice*, 'Controlling the narrative is a problem when, early on in the novel, it is difficult to imagine opportunities for dialogue; the main character engages only with those who hold homosexuality to be taboo.'[38] Talking is associated with disingenuousness early in the novel. When Mr Ducie attempts to explain sex and marriage, afterwards Maurice feels that 'he has told me nothing'.[39] Real thinking and personal growth happen in moments of

[37] Forster, *Maurice,* p. 13.
[38] Howard J. Booth, '*Maurice*' in *The Cambridge Companion to E. M. Forster*, ed. by David Bradshaw (Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 173–187 (p. 174).
[39] Forster, *Maurice,* p. 6.

silence. When Maurice is about to leave Sunnington, 'A check, a silence, fell upon the complex processes, and very timidly the youth began to look around him.'[40] Maurice only begins to engage with the world when conscious thought expressible in language stops, because the discourses available to him have nothing positive to say about homosexuality. Maurice's realisation that 'the only sex that attracted him was his own' is communicated in metaphorical language, as the result of an internal 'storm' that 'had been working up … for six years'.[41] A lack of public discourse about homosexuality meant that even coming to an understanding of one's own desires was difficult.

In this context – the difficulty of discussing homosexuality, of which the novel explores the effects – Florence Barger's willingness to talk openly with Forster about sexuality needs to be seen as significant. Forster's friendship with Florence developed at a significant time: he was losing respect for his mother, whom he once idolised, but whose character, he believed, changed after the death of Forster's grandmother in 1911.[42] A 1915 letter to Florence shows his frustration: 'I am leading

[40] Forster, *Maurice*, p. 14.
[41] Forster, *Maurice*, pp. 47, 46.
[42] Furbank writes that 'In Forster's view, the death of his grandmother had wrecked his mother's life and permanently altered her character; and their life together was never the same after it.' P. N. Furbank, *E. M. Forster: A Life*, vol. 1 (London: Martin Sucker & Warburg, 1977), pp. 195–6, 197.

the life of a little girl so long as I am tied to home. It isn't even as if I make mother happy by stopping – she is always wanting me to be 5 years old again'.[43] This contains echoes of *Maurice,* in which the narrator tells us that 'Home emasculated everything' during Maurice's University vacation.[44] Forster's relationship with Hugh Meredith, his closest friend since Cambridge, had also been changing: Meredith married in 1906 and moved to Belfast in 1911.[45] Meredith is widely considered to be the source for Clive Durham in *Maurice*. Forster was getting to know Florence particularly well between 1910 and 1912, and she filled an important gap in his life.

Forster visited the Bargers around three times a year after he left Cambridge. Their son, Evert, remembers that Forster 'joined us most summers for a family holiday in some isolated farmhouse on the rainy shores of the Western Highlands.'[46] P. N. Furbank writes that on a visit to the Barger household before Forster's first trip to India, he found that 'Florence was ready, indeed eager, for close friendship, even to the extent of discussing his homosexuality.'[47] His 'locked diary' entry for 9th

[43] Forster to Florence, 10 August 1915. *Selected Letters, Vol. 1,* p. 229.
[44] Forster, *Maurice,* p. 39.
[45] Furbank, *E. M. Forster,* pp. 183, 211–12.
[46] Evert Barger, 'Memories of Morgan' in *E. M. Forster, Interviews and Recollections*, ed. by J. H. Stape (London: Macmillan, 1993), pp. 209–217 (p. 209).
[47] Furbank, *E. M. Forster,* p. 219.

September 1912 recorded his reaction: 'She loves me and I her, and reverence her without feeling ashamed of my uselessness. I had no idea she was so fond of me. Very great happiness, and must try not to impose on her and tout for sympathy.'[48] His concern about 'imposing' shows how conscious Forster was of his need for a sympathetic ear at this time, and – since she was likely to be his sole confidante – his determination not to put too much pressure on the friendship.

Their relationship was also intensely intellectual. His earliest available letter to Florence in 1910 acknowledges her request to see *Howards End*, indicating the interest she took in his work: 'My book,' he wrote to her, 'will not be out till October but I shall have a complete set of proofs before […] I think you said something about wishing to [have] the thing read out loud to you. It is rather long.'[49] In 1918 they were discussing the merits of Pater's *Marius the Epicurean*, parts of which *Maurice* recasts, as J. H. Stape has shown.[50] Florence wrote: 'Indeed I do know the lovely chapter in Marius, "The Will as Vision", ever since I

[48] E. M. Forster, *The Journals and Diaries of E. M. Forster, Volume 2: The 'Locked Diary' (1909-67)*, ed. by Philip Gardner (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011), p. 43.
[49] Forster to Florence, 29 August 1910. Cambridge University, King's College Archive Centre, GBR/0272/EMF/18/38/1.
[50] J. H. Stape, 'Comparing Mythologies: Forster's *Maurice* and Pater's *Marius', English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920,* 33.2 (1990), pp. 141–53.

read it it has been one of my great possessions.'[51] Forster's reply shows the shared intellectual tastes that underpinned their long friendship: 'I didn't know that anyone but myself paid particular heed to the "Will as Vision".'[52] In 1922, he wrote telling her of the significance of sharing his romantic life with her: 'You have followed my love for years and to speak to you of it is a relief and joy.'[53]

The relief from silence provided by the freedom to discuss his sexuality with Florence would have been new to Forster when their close friendship began in 1912. Previously, he had managed only unsatisfactory conversations with Meredith and Syed Ross Masood after he explained his feelings to them. In 1910 Forster wrote a 'confessional letter' to Meredith, who 'kept him on thorns for several days by not replying'.[54] Masood, likewise, responded coolly to Forster's declarations of love, made in person in 1911, and ignored letters in which Forster asked for an acknowledgement and meaningful response. 'My real need,' Forster wrote Masood in the days after his confession, 'is a letter. If you will use your imagination, you will see that I am not having much of a time.'[55] The appeal to the imagination is key. Both Masood and Meredith were

[51] Florence to Forster, 13 March 1918. GBR/0272/EMF/18/38/1.
[52] Forster to Florence, 4 August 1918. GBR/0272/EMF/18/38/1.
[53] Forster to Florence, 25 May 1922. Cambridge University, King's College Archive Centre, GBR/0272/EMF/18/38/2.
[54] Furbank, *E. M. Forster,* p. 182.
[55] Furbank, *E. M. Forster,* p. 195.

unwilling to engage with the issue of sexuality. Their reluctance is unsurprising in a society that criminalised homosexuality and equated it with immorality.

Having Florence as his confidante seemed to become increasingly important during and after Forster's writing of *Maurice*. In a diary entry at the end of 1913, Forster wrote of Carpenter: 'E. C. He too is less important. What I owe him, though!' Forster wrote, too, of his diminishing intimacy with Meredith: 'He will always like me and be very good to me in ways he will select, but I must not hope for any general interest (really Florence alone grants that) or for any help in my work.'[56] As Carpenter's and Meredith's significance waned, Florence became more central. Her acceptance enabled new kinds of conversations that Forster described several times as a 'relief'. 'I have never forgotten,' he wrote to her in 1915, 'that you like me to tell you things and it is the greatest relief.'[57][58] Forster confided in Florence when he had his first sexual experience in Alexandria, using the (now well-known) phrase 'parted with respectability'. He told her:

> Well my dear, this is odd news for a matron to receive, but you've got to receive it because you're the only person in the world I

[56] Forster, *Journals and Diaries, Vol. 2,* p. 52.
[57] Forster to Florence, 10 August 1915. *Selected Letters, Vol. 1,* p. 229.
[58] Forster to Florence, 16 December 1916. GBR/0272/EMF/18/38/1.

> want to tell it to. I don't even want George to know yet. I don't even know it if is important news. You may worry – as you always have – about the conditions that produced the step, but not about the step. That it'll repel you I haven't the least fear.[59]

Here, we can see Forster's unrivalled closeness with and trust in Florence. He acknowledges her 'worry' about his welfare, because of the legal risks of homosexual sex, and reassures her again in a later letter: 'Yes, I'm careful. Any expression of this part of my nature must be dangerous – no avoiding that.'[60] Finally, his reference to repulsion acknowledges how some individuals would respond to homosexual sex, even though he has no fear of this reaction from Florence, which highlights the value of her acceptance and care.

In a deeper sense, what Forster needed – and what Florence offered – was an acknowledgement of the existence and validity of an alternative to the bourgeois masculinity that equated heterosexuality with morality, health, and economic success. Since the development of queer theory, scholars have been interested in how writers were able to codify homosexual tropes in their work when speaking and writing about it was

[59] Forster to Florence. 16 October 1916. *Selected Letters, Vol. 1,* p. 244.
[60] Forster to Florence. 2 August 1917. GBR/0272/EMF/18/38/1.

not socially acceptable.[61] What must happen, even before writing is possible, is the ability to make sense of one's own desires. Ed Cohen coined the term 'Ec-centric' to describe late-Victorian writers who tried to find new ways to express (often homoerotic) subtexts, and uses John Addington Symonds's memoirs as his main example.[62] For Cohen, writing about homosexual desire necessitated an analysis of subjectivity that acknowledged a split: inner thoughts about sex and desire that contrasted with and were thus kept separate from a public persona and social actions that confirmed heterosexual norms. Cohen argues that Symonds's writing 'foregrounds the necessity for splitting open the dominant characterisation of (bourgeois male) subjectivity in order to engineer a narrative affirmation of sexual and emotional intimacies between members of the same sex.'[63] Symonds wrote his memoirs – which he knew to be unpublishable – instead of completing work that would have earned money, which Cohen takes as an indication of the

[61] Ruth Robbins, for example, identifies 'poetic code' in the poetry of Oscar Wilde and A. E. Housman, which she argues was used to express homosexual desire. Ruth Robbins, 'A Very Curious Construction: Masculinity and the Poetry of A. E. Housman and Oscar Wilde' in *Cultural Politics at the Fin De Siècle*, ed. by Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 137–59 (p. 138).

[62] Ed Cohen, 'The Double Lives of Man: Narration and Identification in Late Nineteenth-Century Representation of Ec-Centric Masculinities' in *Cultural Politics at the Fin De Siècle*, ed. by Ledger and McCracken, pp. 85–114 (p. 88).

[63] Cohen, 'The Double Lives of Man', p. 95.

urgency of putting his ideas into writing: 'In order to constitute a subject position from which the (inner) truth he ascribes to his "deepest feelings" can be made to coincide both spatially and temporally with the (outer) values that not only abhorred them but in fact mandated their criminalisation, Symonds must rend the consistency of subjectivity as it had been socially constituted.'[64] Forster, who also experienced dislocation between his internal desires and what he was able to talk about, found in Florence someone who enabled him to close this gap. *Maurice* explores the problems caused by a lack of public discourse around homosexuality, and Forster's ability to discuss anything with Florence must be seen as a significant factor contributing to his ability to write the novel in a social environment where discussions about sexuality were taboo.

Although Forster was writing *Maurice* some twenty years after Symonds' death, a particular conceptualisation of bourgeois male subjectivity was being reinforced at that time by the social purity movement. While Mullin has outlined the 'populist propaganda' writings about 'true manliness' that appeared during the mid- to late nineteenth century – such as Ellice Hopkins's *True Manliness*, which was first published in 1884 and had sold a million copies by 1909[65] – a spate of

[64] Cohen, 'The Double Lives of Man', p. 94.
[65] Lesley Hall, 'Forbidden by God, Despised by Men: Masturbation, Medical Warnings, Moral Panic and Manhood in Great Britain, 1850-

conduct books, all with *True Manliness* in the title, were published by purity organisations in the UK and USA during the second half of the nineteenth century.[66] They are filled with strategies for maintaining chivalry, purity of thought, health of body and mind, and protecting female family members. Men are characterised as in need of moral guidance and sexual restraint, while women are characterised as the pure sex, able to police masculinity simply by existing. The domestic authority of the mother was often invoked as a feminine presence to which most men could be guaranteed to relate; such arguments are seen in *C. E. Walker's True Manliness: A pocket guide for young men and boys* published by the national Purity Association in 1897: a work specifically targeted at school age boys, like Maurice in the early parts of the novel.

The young Maurice makes statements that might come straight from this piece of purity literature: 'I am never to do anything I should be

---

1950' in *Forbidden History*, ed. by John C. Four (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), p. 298. Mullin, *James Joyce, Sexuality and Social Purity*, p. 92. Ellice Hopkins, *True Manliness* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1884).

[66] E. E. Chappell, *Christianity: the perfection of true manliness* (New York: Henry Lyon, 1854). L. C. Tuthill, *True Manliness; or, the Landscape Gardener* (Boston: Crosby and Ainsworth, 1867). Ellice Hopkins, *True Manliness* (London: White Cross Society, 1885). E. E. Brown and Russell Lowell, *True Manliness: from the writings of Thomas Hughes* (Boston: D. Lothrop & Co, 1880). C. E. Waker, *True Manliness: A Pocket Companion for Boys and Young Men* (Chicago: National Purity Association, 1897), p. 54.

ashamed to have mother see me do.'[67] *True Manliness* advocates something very similar, saying that young boys should 'Read no book or paper whose motive and expression are not worthy to be stated in counsel with mother.'[68] The mother's imagined approval or disapproval is the measure by which acceptable behaviour, writing and thought can supposedly be distinguished from the base and inappropriate. When discussing sex, *True Manliness* uses the idea of the mother as a rhetorical device to ensure the tone of the discussion is kept 'chaste': 'Let us approach this study in most respectful, reverent mood, doing our thinking as chastely as though mother were giving the lessons, and we were in the immediate presence of the divine father.'[69] The mother is aligned with God, becoming the earthly agent enforcing his will for pure thinking. Since the manual also recommends that boys take an oath 'to treat every woman as I wish other men to treat my mother, my sister, my wife, my daughter,' the moral agency of women to be the guardians of chastity and purity is extended to all women.[70]

Maurice acknowledges the social and domestic influence women are afforded, but challenges their automatic idealisation. Early in the novel, we are told 'Maurice liked his home, and recognised his mother as

[67] Forster, *Maurice*, p. 3.
[68] Walker, *True Manliness*, p. 84.
[69] Walker, *True Manliness*, p. 54.
[70] Walker, *True Manliness*, p. 62.

its presiding genius. Without her there would be no soft chairs or food or easy games'.[71] He registers his mother's authority, but she provides only material items, while *Maurice* registers the need for meaningful human relationships and sexual fulfilment. Women and religion, which form the bedrock of purity, are placed side-by-side in the two sections of Chapter VIII, where churchgoing and flirting (with Miss Olcott) form a duo of connected and powerful social conventions that Maurice has to navigate. With the designation of homosexuality as a sin firmly rooted in Christian notions of sex, rejecting religion is Maurice's first step towards discarding the association between homosexuality and immorality. As Mr Borenius says in the final pages of the novel, 'Where there is heresy, immorality will sooner or later ensue,' but on the whole *Maurice* undercuts this, showing there to be no definite connection between religious faith and morality.[72] Maurice expects a scandal when he refuses to attend church, 'But no one took any notice, for the suburbs no longer exact Christianity. This disgusted him; it made him look at society with new eyes. Did society, while professing to be so moral and sensitive, really mind anything?' [73] Forster's narrative finds hypocrisy in the religious arguments against homosexuality. Mrs Durham only objects to

[71] Forster, *Maurice*, p. 7.
[72] Forster, *Maurice*, p. 205.
[73] Forster, *Maurice*, p. 40.

Clive's absence from church because it would be socially embarrassing: it 'cut her with shame and stung her into anger'.[74] Christianity is framed as a hollow convention, directing daily life and actions with no positive results: Maurice and Clive are brought up to adhere to empty traditions, and in families who cannot think for themselves. Women, in *Maurice*, are not moral guardians of the faith, but the thoughtless defenders of meaningless traditions.

For Elaine Showalter, although Forster's representation of women is not straightforwardly misogynist, 'we must accept that Forster saw women as part of the enemy camp. Whilst not precisely antagonistic to them, he believed them to be allied with the forces and instruments of repression.'[75] Against the background of the social purity movement, however, we can see that *Maurice* rejects a particular type of feminine and conservative identity, just as it rejects male purity advocates like Mr Ducie. Remarkably, the novel also acknowledges that purity discourses had a considerable impact on women's lives and sexuality. Through Clive and Anne, *Maurice* explores how male ideas about protecting female innocence affected women and heterosexual relationships.

---

[74] Forster, *Maurice*, p. 57.
[75] Elaine Showalter, '*A Passage to India* as "Marriage Fiction"', *Women and Literature*, 5.2 (1997), 3-16 (p. 7).

Anne Woods is a victim of the purity movement's conviction that sex should never be discussed with women. Clive finds that 'When he arrived in her room after marriage, she did not know what he wanted. Despite an elaborate education, no one had told her about sex.'[76] The question of her pleasure or education doesn't enter Clive's mind. In narration focalised through Clive, we are told, 'It was unmentionable. It didn't stand between him and her. She stood between him and it, and on second thoughts he was glad, for though not disgraceful it had been sentimental and deserved oblivion.'[77] The narration becomes vague here, showing Clive's unwillingness to think in straightforward terms about, or even acknowledge the word, 'sex'. He uses the word 'it' instead, which seems to refer specifically to intimate or pleasurable sex. Although it seems Clive had some desire for sexual intimacy, he is glad to have an avoidance strategy and put the idea into 'oblivion'. He advocates duty rather than sentiment, and uses Anne's ignorance as a shield, having internalised ideas about the danger and impurity of lust. Both Clive and Anne are unaware of the limitation this places on their connection: 'They united in a world that bore no reference to the daily, and this secrecy drew after it much else of their lives.'[78] Sex and their daily lives are kept

[76] Forster, *Maurice*, p. 140.
[77] Forster, *Maurice*, p. 140.
[78] Forster, *Maurice*, p. 140.

completely separate, and this, it seems, does something harmful, drawing away 'much else' of their lives.

Always an advocate of platonic love, Clive does nothing to develop satisfying or passionate sex with Anne. He thinks:

> Between men it is inexcusable, between men and women it may be practised since nature and society approve, but never discussed or vaunted. His ideal of marriage was temperate and graceful, like all his ideals, and he found a fit helpmate in Anne, who had refinement itself, and admired it in others.[79]

Clive can be described as a puritan, since he thinks sex is for procreation only. His sexual interactions with Anne are devoid of all intimacy: 'He never saw her naked, nor she him.'[80] He interprets Anne sexual ignorance as a kind of 'refinement' and thinks she admires others who feel the same – even though he has never had a conversation with her about sex, and it seems she knows no alternative. Clive has some awareness of the kind of intimacy he eschews, and gains a sense of superiority for doing so. Anne is, like Maurice, a casualty of purity discourses, but unlike Maurice she will probably remain so forever: with no route to knowledge about sex or sexuality, she appears to have no opportunity to explore her own desires.

---

[79] Forster, *Maurice,* p. 140.
[80] Forster, *Maurice,* p. 140.

If it seems odd to claim a novel that has been called misogynist keeps a space open to acknowledge women's oppression, we should remember that there is a wider context to Forster's rejection of social purity. By this time Forster had already critiqued marriage, and written rebellious female characters. In *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, Lilia Herriton exhibits a sexuality that would be unimaginable to someone like the Anne Woods of *Maurice.* In *Howards End*, when Helen Schlegel gives birth to Leonard Bast's child, she is not killed off to pay for her sins, and Margaret overlooks Mr Wilcox's past encounters with the prostitute Jacky.[81] Forster was not alone in his rebellion against the puritans. Dora Marsden, one of the movement's fiercest critics, resigned her position as an organiser for the Pankhurst-led WSPU on 27 January 1911.[82] The little magazines under Marsden's editorship – *The Freewoman, The New Freewoman* and *The Egoist* – articulated, as Mullin shows, an 'ideological hostility towards the sexual politics of social purity'.[83] James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist* was serialised in *The*

[81] See David Bradshaw, '*Howard's End*' in *The Cambridge Companion to E. M. Forster*, p. 157. Kelly Stultbach, *Ecocriticism in the Modernist Imagination: Forster, Woolf and Auden* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 47–48. S. P. Rosenbaum, *Edwardian Bloomsbury: The Early Literary History of the Bloomsbury Group, vol. 2* (London: Macmillan, 2016), pp. 465–466.
[82] Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866-1928* (London: UCL Press, 1999), p. 380.
[83] Mullin, *James Joyce, Sexuality and Social Purity*, pp. 108–9.

Egoist, having failed to find any other publisher on the grounds of obscenity due to the interventions of purity organisations, and Mullin argues that the novel is closely aligned with a willingness to oppose and debate social purity that characterises Marsden's publications, carrying out 'complex intertextual assault upon social purity' by exploring the intersections between masculinity, sexuality and national and religious identities.[84] We can say something similar about *Maurice*: it critiques social conservatism and heteronormative relationships damaged by purity, like Clive and Anne's marriage.

A greater appreciation of ideas about purity that were circulating at the time sheds new light on the significance of how Forster writes about homosexuality: as a considered rebellion against the connections between vice, weakness, disease, and what was though of as sexual deviance. Maurice's character is healthy, attractive, and thoroughly ordinary. He is a 'plump, pretty lad, not in any way remarkable', acquiring 'strength and physical pluck' to become a 'mediocre member of a mediocre school'. [85] Maurice's homosexuality combined with his virility and mediocrity refutes the idea, perpetuated in *True Manliness*, that 'the perversion of sex through ignorance, wrong teaching and inherited viciousness is a fruitful source of crime, misery, disease and

[84] Mullin, *James Joyce, Sexuality and Social Purity*, pp. 108, 115.
[85] Forster, *Maurice,* p. 11.

degradation, as well as domestic unhappiness, infelicity and premature death.'[86]

Maurice offers a virile and healthy alternative to the characterisation of homosexuality as impure and degenerate. Forster, disinterested in the medicalization of homosexuality, writes Maurice and Alec opting for a physical, outdoor lifestyle in the Epilogue that concludes the 1913-14 version of the text. If, as Martin has argued, Forster's envisioning of the relationship between Maurice and Alec owes much to Carpenter and Whitman, then Whitman's opposition to purity movement in the States becomes resonant with the novel.[87] As Michael Moon has noted, the various editions of *Leaves of Grass* and connected controversies were conducted in opposition to the purity movement in the USA. He notes the public attention given to 'limiting and controlling male sexual activity' in the United States while Whitman was growing up, and his radical 'insistence on the legitimacy of the (male) body and its pleasures in *Leaves of Grass*'.[88] That Forster is working in this tradition is clear in his validation of male sexual pleasure between Maurice and Alec, which is further explored in the Epilogue. Maurice's 'trousers are frayed,

[86] Walker, *True Manliness,* p. 112.
[87] Robert K. Martin, 'Edward Carpenter and the Double Structure of *Maurice*', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 8 (1983), pp. 36-77.
[88] Michael Moon, *Disseminating Whitman* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 21.

his shirt open at the throat,' he has 'hard brown fingers' from working outdoors and is 'formed in a fresh mould, where muscles and sunburn proceed from an inward health'.[89] Kitty notes that 'Maurice looked happy and proud, despite his cheap clothes and the cold'.[90] The tattered clothes combined with the strong body suggests that an eschewal of social trappings is good for one's health: being well-dressed and being well are not the same. It is remarkable that such a novel was written against the background of the social purity movement, which contextualises the novel's promotion of a macho homosexual identity.

As much as Forster reacts against heterosexual normativity, as Matthew Curr has shown,[91] some aspects of the novel's ending appear thoroughly conservative.[92] *Maurice* makes the case for homosexual love partially on the grounds that it can be just as pure and right as heterosexual love. A lifelong commitment akin to marriage is suggested by the statement that 'they must work and stick to each other until death,' which is reinforced by Alec's closing words in the penultimate chapter – '"And now we shan't be parted no more, and that's finished."'[93] Although

[89] Forster, *Maurice,* p. 222.
[90] Forster, *Maurice,* p. 223.
[91] Matthew Curr, 'Recuperating Forster's *Maurice*', *MLQ: Modern Language Quarterly* 62.1 (2001), 53-69 (pp. 57, 60).
[92] Booth, 'Maurice' in *The Cambridge Companion to E. M. Forster,* p. 173.
[93] Forster, *Maurice,* p. 209.

Maurice casts family life and heterosexual relationships as limiting, the novel cannot fully extricate itself from the terms of the debate: narratives of homosexuality as perversion or degeneracy are displaced onto Clive. In the final chapter, we learn that 'Even in his nausea Clive turned to a generalisation – it was part of the mental vagueness induced by his marriage.'[94] Here, Forster recasts the cause of degeneration: reduced physical and mental abilities are produced by an absence of intimate sex, instead of too much sex, in the man who becomes heterosexual, instead of the homosexual men. *Maurice* is a novel that is working in relation to discourses of purity and the medicalization of homosexuality that were its immediate context, and cannot fully offer an alternative for its characters.

It is significant that the novel cannot imagine similar opportunities for happiness or sexual liberation for women. Even so, re-focusing the discussion around women shows that the Epilogue to the 1913-14 version of the text does more than confirm the longevity of Maurice's and Alec's relationship: it registers Kitty's lack of opportunities to explore her own sexuality – which, it is hinted at, is lesbian.[95] The Epilogue is notable for

[94] Forster, *Maurice,* p. 212.

[95] Although the Epilogue is considered a failure, this is largely because the novel is set in 1912, and the First World War would have made the future it dramatises impossible. Forster wrote that the Epilogue 'partly failed because the novel's action-date is about 1912, and "some years later" would plunge it into the transformed England of the First World War.' Forster, 'Notes on Maurice' in *Maurice,* p. 219.

being the only extended part of the novel focalised through a woman, and Kitty has, by this time, been marked several times as unusual. She is 'less foolish' than Ada, and notices more.[96] In one of their exchanges, Maurice momentarily suspects she intuits something about his homosexuality:

> "Little girls don't see a good deal."
>
> "I'm not so sure!"
>
> He glanced at her. But she only said she saw a good deal more than some little boys who thought themselves little men. She was merely maundering, and the fear, tinged with respect, that had arisen in him died down.[97]

Maurice convinces himself she knows nothing, but the text raises the suggestion that she might share an unspoken understanding with her brother. Clive also feels unsettled by Kitty, and thinks 'she was not a true woman'. [98] Clive questions her conformity to acceptable gendered behaviour, and – by extension and in line with inversion theories[99] – brings her sexuality into question. The Epilogue says yet more about Kitty's difference: we learn that she does not marry, and that her friend Miss Tonks's marriage, 'rather than her brother's disgrace had been the

---

[96] Forster, *Maurice,* p. 83.
[97] Forster, *Maurice,* p. 65.
[98] Forster, *Maurice,* p. 102.
[99] Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex: Volume II, Sexual Inversion,* 3rd edn (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis & Company, 1915), p. 2.

crisis'. [100] If Kitty's sexuality is never clearly stated, it is because narrative focalised through her cannot be direct about something of which she is not fully conscious.

Since the narrative cannot address Kitty's desires directly, her 'unconscious' meditations – similar to Maurice's dreams – that begin the Epilogue need to be approached as significant. [101] She thinks:

> "The axe is laid … therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down … But no one wants to be barren", she thought. "No one asks to be cross and sad, or five years older. Some of us might have brought forth fruit if we'd been nourished properly." And sighing she cycled on, while the sound of the chopping grew more distinct.[102]

The sound of chopping wood brings to Kitty's mind Bible verses from Matthew 3:10: 'Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.'[103] Kitty meditates on the nourishment she feels is absent from life and applies these verses to herself, now 'five years older', unhappy and with anxieties about barrenness that could be reproductive, but which also register a lack of fruitfulness in a wider sense: a feeling of having

[100] Forster, *Maurice*, p. 221.
[101] Forster, *Maurice*, p. 221.
[102] Forster, *Maurice*, p. 221.
[103] Matthew 3:10, *Holy Bible*: King James Version.

been starved, and of something fundamentally wrong. Kitty's decline is connected to the loss of Miss Tonks, after which Kitty 'had lost her vigour' and become 'as old as most women at forty',[104] so that similarly to Clive's decline after his break with Maurice, the loss of an intimate same-sex relationship is damaging to her wellbeing and vitality.

Kitty's life has further points of continuity and departure with Maurice's, so that through Kitty we see what Maurice's life might have been like had he been a woman whose movements and education were restricted by social pressures to protect women's innocence. Parts of Kitty's education correspond with Maurice's: her friendship with Miss Tonks is the 'only tangible product' of her education at the Institute, and Maurice's friendship with Clive is the main product of his time at Cambridge, since he leaves without a degree.[105] Maurice benefits from the knowledge he gains from friends – notably Clive and Risley – while Arthur and Clive collude to keep Kitty and Ada ignorant about Maurice's sexuality and disappearance. The sisters are told that "Something too awful" has happened, but 'Beyond that [Kitty] knew nothing, for masculinity had intervened. It was a man's business, Arthur implied: women may weep but must not ask to understand'.[106] The narrative

[104] Forster, *Maurice*, p. 221.
[105] Forster, *Maurice*, p. 123.
[106] Forster, *Maurice*, p. 223.

explores how Kitty's knowledge of the world and herself is limited by men who believe it is their duty to constrain her ideas and movements, and increased when she is able to move around independently. Kitty meets Maurice and Alec during an exceptional moment: a solo holiday when she is bicycling through the greenwood.

Kitty is unable to articulate herself adequately on meeting Maurice in the woods: 'She spoke not what she felt, but what her training ordained'.[107] Her feelings are framed as separate from her mental processes, showing how far her thinking has been conditioned by 'her training' – a vague phrase, suggesting that her social suburban life has been a form of indoctrination, numbing her ability to connect with what is 'felt' rather than known. Despite this, an understanding between the siblings is implied: 'as if he understood this he did not reply, nor look her in the face'.[108] Although nothing positive is said in words, meeting Maurice offers Kitty the possibility of personal development. Forster – whose experience of Edward Carpenter and George Merrill, and whose conversations with Florence brought him to a point where he could write *Maurice* – knew that experiences could help people to imagine different ways of living. In a re-working of Forster's meeting with Carpenter and Merrill, Kitty meets Maurice and Alec in the woods, and thinks, "He must

[107] Forster, *Maurice*, p. 222.
[108] Forster, *Maurice*, p. 222.

be very fond of his mate, he must have given us up on his account, I should imagine they are practically in love".[109] This 'truth' of their relationship is revealed to her 'without the slightest shock', as something she knew all along.[110] The absence of discourse about sexuality and people's self-censoring tendencies are reinforced one final time, when Kitty thinks, 'It seemed a very odd situation, one which she had never heard of and had better not mention'.[111] The Epilogue does much more than confirm that Maurice and Alec's have a future together: it explores the effect on women of the social circles in which sexuality was not discussed at all.

The posthumous publication of *Maurice* meant that the novel was always fated to be received outside its original context. Part of Forster's popular appeal lies in the perception of his novels as having enduring relevance: his dissection of relationships and social conventions are thought to provide insights into the human condition that resonate still with contemporary readers. Yet the original conditions of the novel's production are particularly important for the original draft of *Maurice*. Purity feminists were exerting a considerable social influence in 1913 and 1914, and the extent to which the novel is saturated with the language and

[109] Forster, *Maurice*, p. 223.
[110] Forster, *Maurice*, p. 223.
[111] Forster, *Maurice*, p. 223.

anxieties of social purity can only be appreciated with thorough knowledge of its historical context. The centrality of Florence Barger in Forster's life when he was first writing and circulating the novel among friends, and her importance for helping Forster articulate homosexuality positively, further complicates assertions that *Maurice* heralds the beginning of Forster's increasing misogyny – especially when we consider that nuanced female characters return, in the form of Adela Quested, in Forster's last novel, *A Passage to India.* In *Maurice*, Forster creates a male world that excludes women, but the novel is also at times sensitive to the problems this very separation could cause women who were deprived of knowledge, education, intimacy, and the opportunities for maturation from which Maurice benefits.