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"England belonged to them" Edward Carpenter and Forster's "Utopia" of Masculine Love in *Maurice*

A visit to Carpenter

In the "Terminal Note" to *Maurice,* Forster provides a surprising account of the genesis of the novel, published posthumously in 1971, but composed in a few months between 1913 and 1914:

> [The novel] was the direct result of a visit to Edward Carpenter at Milthorpe. […] It must have been on my second or third visit to the shrine that the spark was kindled and he and his comrade George Merrill combined to make a profound impression on me and to touch a creative spring. George Merrill also touched my backside—gently and just above the buttocks. […] The sensation was unusual and I still remember it […]. It was as much psychological as physical. It seemed to go straight through the small of my back into my ideas, without involving my thoughts. If it really did this, it would have acted in strict accordance with Carpenter's yogified mysticism, and would prove that at that precise moment I had conceived. (*Maurice* 219)

The novel's conception is evoked here in terms that, as John Fletcher rightly observes in one of the most insightful analyses of the text, confront us with a revised version of the Freudian primal scene, where the triangular relationship between mother, father and infantile voyeur is "replaced by a primal scene of masculine love in which by a strange displacement the male partners combine to touch and to inseminate the watching third" (68). The long period of sterility that had followed the great success of *Howards End* (1910) is finally interrupted by a sudden outburst of creative energy and, once back home in Harrogate, Forster sets out to write the first version of a text which over the years would undergo a painstaking labour of revision and rewriting, culmi-

nating in the drafting of the "Terminal Note" in 1960, where the writer reconstructs the circumstances that made the novel possible and pays his tribute to the man that had inspired it.

A pioneer sex reformer and radical thinker—whose utopian socialist idealism laid the basis of social and political change in a radical transformation of everyday life and behaviour, and in a redefinition of personal and sexual relationships—Carpenter was an extremely popular figure in late Victorian and Edwardian radical circles. Forster first met him in 1912, through the office of their common friend Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, but his knowledge of Carpenter's thought certainly dates from some years earlier. Joseph Bristow suggests that it was in the pages of the *Independent Review*, the journal founded by the Cambridge Apostles which ran from 1903 to 1907, that Forster first read some of his writings (117). What is certain is that Carpenter's name figures in a list of authors Forster annotated in the margin of a diary entry for New Year's Eve, 1907.[1] It appears again in the final, grateful invocation that concludes the entry of 31 December 1913 ("Edward Carpenter! Edward Carpenter! Edward Carpenter!", qtd. in Gardner x).With time, Forster would reassess his views on his old friend and his enthusiasm would gradually wane,[2] but the awareness of his debt towards Carpenter for his role in shaping his own homosexual conscience

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1 This list, including highly canonical authors like Shakespeare, Symonds and Butler and reprinted in a footnote of Furbank's biography (159n1), has been interpreted as the expression of Forster's need to come to terms with his own homosexuality through the discovery of a homosexual literary tradition. Moreover, the names of A. E. W. Clarke, Desmond Coke, H. M. Dickinson, Howard Sturgis, added on the same page of the diary (see Martin 39n8), testify to Forster's knowledge of the so-called schoolboy novels whose plots of doomed, platonic relationships between two undergraduates or schoolboys provide a narrative pattern that *Maurice* sets to reverse.

2 The diary entry of 31 December 1914 reads: "E. C. He too is less important. What I owe to him, though!" (qtd. in Gardner xiv). Forster provides a comprehensive portrait in the two BBC talks he broadcast on the occasion of the centenary of Carpenter's birth. Out of these two talks (delivered on 29 August and 25 September 1944) grew the essay on Carpenter that he included in *Two Cheers for Democracy* (1950). Despite some differences in content, both talks and essay share a com-

is reaffirmed in 1960: "For a short time he seemed to hold the key to every trouble. I approached him […] as one approaches a saviour" (219).

A largely negative reception greeted *Maurice* at its publication. The main charge was that of didacticism and lack of formal qualities: the text was considered "simple" and dated in its treatment of homosexuality, or, alternatively, poorly written just because of its theme.[3] Robert K. Martin's path-breaking study "Edward Carpenter and the Double Structure of *Maurice*" (1983) marked a turning point in the critical history of the novel. Setting the text in the cultural context of its first drafting and privileging the Carpenter-Forster connection as a key to the understanding of the formal organization of the narrative, Martin reoriented the critical discourse on the novel and paved the way to more articulated and persuasive readings that have challenged the initial view of *Maurice* as a straightforward and unsophisticated piece of fiction. This has led to a reconsideration of its position in the Forsterian canon. Moving from this perspective, this essay aims at exploring the ways in which Forster's tale of homosexual self-discovery draws on Carpenter's evolutionary progressivism and plays with different narrative models and generic conventions in order to produce its own problematic reworking of Carpenter's utopian vision.

Forster's homosexual Bildungsroman

In his influential account of the novel, Martin detects a "double structure" as the organizing principle of the narrative, with Part I and II centred on Maurice's Platonic relationship with the aristocratic Clive Durham and Part III and IV on the emotion-

mon stance in which a sympathetic tone mingles with subtle ironic detachment. For more on this see Rahman 53-54.

[3] Philip Toynbee's review for *The Observer* provided a significant example of this critical attitude. Toybee judges the novel ill-written and argues that "[Forster] should *not* express his homosexual feelings directly" (qtd. Booth 173). In his view the force and value of Forster's other narratives derive from his channeling his energies through the exclusion of homosexuality.

ally and sexually fulfilling encounter with Alec Scudder, Clive's gamekeeper. The structural opposition between the two sections reflects the oppositions between two kinds of homosexuality, the first "dominated by Plato and, indirectly, by John Addington Symonds and the apologists of 'Greek love';" the second "by Edward Carpenter and his translation of the ideas of Walt Whitman" (30). Later critics, while acknowledging the hermeneutic force of this reading, have partially revised it. John Fletcher sees it as over-polarizing both the novel and its genealogy, and questions the historical correctness of Martin's interpretation of Symonds's view of Greek love arguing that "Symonds as much as Carpenter is concerned to defend the physical expression of homosexual love" (66).[4] Analogously, Howard J. Booth claims that the later Symonds "was much more relaxed about homosexual sex" and observes that Martin "gives a sense of the novel that is too static" (177). Moving along the lines of Martin's analysis, these readings do not impinge on its substantial validity, rather they develop its assumptions and widen its scope, opening up the space for a further investigation of the connection between the formal strategies the novel adopts and its ideological stance.

Maurice displays a peculiar generic hybridism resulting from Forster's skilful and deft adaptation of different modes and con-

[4] Discussing Symonds's conception of "Greek Love" as it emerges from the pages of his *A Problem of Greek Ethics* (1883), Fletcher underlines how Symonds identifies two different models of homosexual relationship in ancient Greece. The first and older one was represented by the non-sexual heroic friendship that united Achilles and Patroclus in *The Iliad,* the second and historically later one coincided with the practice of *paiderastia*, "the love of a man and an adolescent youth, which [Symonds] divides into the noble and the base varieties" (66-67). What Symonds celebrates as the ideal of "Greek Love" is a term of mediation between these opposites, a "mixed form of *paiderastia* which combines the manly ideals of heroic friendship with a cross-generational passion of an older man for a youth, but which 'exhibited a sensuality unknown to Homer'" (67). Moreover, Fletcher recalls Symonds's role as Whitman's main apologist in England and remembers how, in his twenty-year correspondence with the American poet, Symonds tried to "win from him an explicit recognition and acceptance of the sexual feeling between men implied and tacitly imagined in Whitman's poetic celebration of 'the love of the comrades'" (67).

ventions to his narrative project. In its unfolding, the novel's plot mirrors that of the traditional *Bildungsroman*, as it focuses on the process of growth and maturation of its eponymous character from boyhood to adult age. Again, as typical of the traditional *Buildungsroman*, the topographic arrangement of the story is functional to its development, with different places and settings reflecting the different stages of the hero's journey of self-discovery. By inflecting this paradigm to his ends, though, Forster alters it significantly. In narrating Maurice's progress towards homosexual self-awareness, he does not only expand the boundaries of this narrative genre, writing the first and only homosexual *Buildungsroman* produced by a canonical author up to that time. He also makes those boundaries shifting and problematic as becomes evident in the much discussed and controversial "happy" ending of the novel, where the final union of Maurice and Alec can only take place at the expense of their self-exclusion from society, a self-imposed retreat to the "greenwood" that projects the novel's conclusion into the realm of the pastoral idyll and in so doing determines a generic turn charged with significant implications. First and foremost, as we shall see, that of radically questioning the very possibility for the homosexual subject of a concrete and successful integration into the collective social body.

If the *Bildungsroman* provides the basic model of the text, its finely woven imagery and the set of mutually related and recurrent motifs and situations that punctuate the narrative give it its peculiar compactness and contributes to the "particular blend of realism and fantasy" (Grant 193) that characterizes its style and tone from the very first chapters, in which the figure of Maurice is introduced.

Portrayed as "a plump, pretty lad, not in any way remarkable" (*Maurice* 6), Maurice distinguishes himself for his lack of outstanding qualities:

> He was not good at work, though better than he pretended, nor colossally good at games. If people noticed him they liked him, for he had a bright friendly face and responded to attention; but there were so many boys of his type—they formed the backbone of the school and we cannot notice each vertebra. He did the usual things […]. In a word, he was a mediocre member of a mediocre school, and left a faint and favourable impression behind. (15)

The emphasis on averageness as the main attribute of the novel's protagonist should not be a surprise. Maurice's commonness, his uncritical identification with the values of his family, his class and gender contribute to foreground his "emergent homosexual difference" (Fletcher 75) and to call attention to the possibility that homosexuality may provide growth for even the most conventional. By making Maurice and not the aristocratic, intellectual Clive the protagonist of his novel, Forster avoids "the more obvious pitfalls of a simply idealising narrative […] a portrait of the artist as a young invert" (Fletcher 75) and in so doing skillfully exploits and effectively adapts to his own purpose the narrative logic inherent in the *Buildungsroman* as a literary genre, with its capacity to produce "a phenomenology that makes normality interesting and meaningful *as* normality" (Moretti 11).

A seemingly "insipid" hero, Maurice is a typical product of suburban, middle-class Edwardian England and its values—"Maurice is Suburbia" Forster comments in his "Terminal Note" (220). The resemblance to his dead father, of whom he bears the name, acts as a leitmotif of his characterization so that his ordinariness appears as the inevitable outcome of the combined action of biological and social influences. The injuction of his schoolmaster, Mr Abrahams, to "copy" his father (7) finds an echo in his mother's words justifying her choice to send him to Sunnington, his father's old public school, "'in order that [he] may grow up like [his] dear father in every way'" (12). Under the pressure of familiar and social ties, Maurice seems destined to follow a similar path ("[Mr Hall] had passed in the procession twenty-five years before, vanished into a public school, married, begotten a son and two daughters, and recently died of pneumonia. [He] had been a good citizen, but lethargic" [7]) and be submitted to the same range of social duties and obligations. However, right from the start the text confronts us with a dissonant element in his personality, the presence of an emotional surplus that manifests itself in his sudden, boyish fits of tears, what Forster describes as "an ingredient that puzzles him, wakes him up, torments him and finally saves him" (220) and which takes the shape of a dim and perplexing bundle of

indefinite emotions he will gradually learn to know and discern. In the opening chapters of the novel such emotional turmoil finds its emblematic expression in two codified narrative situations centred on the motif of the double. In the first, the boy's night terrors are evoked in a scene that has an antecedent in the Red Room chapter in *Jane Eyre*:

> When Maurice did go to bed, it was reluctantly. That room always frightened him. He had been such a man all the evening, but the old feeling came over him as soon as his mother had kissed him good night. The trouble was the looking-glass. He did not mind seeing his face in it, nor casting a shadow on the ceiling, but he did mind seeing his shadow on the ceiling reflected in the glass. He would arrange the candle so as to avoid the combination, and then dare himself to put it back and be gripped with fear. […] In the end he would dash out the candle and leap into bed. Total darkness he could bear, but this room had the further defect of being opposite a street lamp. On good nights the light would penetrate the curtains unalarmingly, but sometimes blots like skulls fell over the furniture. His heart beat violently, and he lay in terror, with all his household close at hand. (13-14)

The boy's inarticulate perception of his confused desires finds its objective correlative in the nightmarish images produced by the nocturnal lights. Replicating the doubling effect, the spectral reflection of his shadow in the looking glass is frightening, in so much as it seems to assume an autonomous existence and therefore to confirm his precarious sense of identity. Such an uncanny feeling, reinforced by the enigmatic skull-like blots projected over the furniture by the streetlamp, is finally dispelled by the thought of George, the garden boy Maurice had vainly looked for on his return home after the school term, only to find out that he had left the household in search for a better job. His unexpected departure had caused Maurice an inexplicable "great mass of sorrow" (13) but in the nocturnal scene the renewal of that painful sensation has a paradoxically comforting power:

> [H]e remembered George. Something stirred in the unfathomable depths of his heart. He whispered, 'George, George.' Who was George? Nobody—just a common servant. Mother and Ada and Kitty were far more important. But he was too little to argue thus. He did

> not even know that when he yielded to this sorrow he overcame the spectral and fell asleep. (14)

George is dimly perceived by the young boy as alternative and incompatible to the social norm embodied in the world of familiar affections that his mother and sisters represent. In a narrative organized around a carefully woven pattern of symmetries and correspondences, George, the "servant boy," acts as a prefiguration of Alec Scudder and allows the narrator to introduce the theme of cross-class homosexual relationship that the novel will develop. As the first object of Maurice's boyish attachment, George will significantly reappear in one of the two dreams in which Maurice's early fantasies of homosexual desire crystallize in the form of elusive and enigmatic figures:

> In the first dream he felt very cross. He was playing football against a nondescript whose existence he resented. He made an effort and the nondescript turned into George, that garden boy. But he had to be careful or it would reappear. 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. […]
>
> The second dream is more difficult to convey. Nothing happened. He scarcely saw a face, scarcely heard a voice say, 'That is your friend,' and then it was over, having filled him with beauty and taught him tenderness. He could die for such a friend, […] they would make any sacrifice for each other […] neither death nor distance nor crossness could part them, because 'this is my friend.' (16)

In their juxtaposition the two dreams function as a key to the understanding of Maurice and foreshadow the two different trajectories along which his emotional and affective development will take place. If Alec is in the heritage of the naked boy, the second dream becomes a recurrent point of reference throughout the narrative as it condenses and knots together his different experiences: "it bears especially closely, as the support of an idealising function, on his love for Clive, while the fantasy of a mutually self-sacrificing pair of friends against the world is affirmed again with Alec" (Fletcher 84-85).

Different places, different masculinities

In his 1926 essay "Notes on the English Character" Forster's critique of English masculinity is closely connected with his critique of English educational institutions. He diagnoses "the difficulties of the Englishmen abroad" as stemming from the public school system, which sends forth its products "with well-developed bodies, fairly developed minds, and undeveloped hearts" (4-5). Almost two decades earlier Edward Carpenter had developed a similar argument in the chapter "Man, the Ungrown" of his *Love's Coming of Age* (1896). Carpenter's sexual politics was part of a wider political agenda in which the redefinition of personal and gender relations was inscribed within a more comprehensive project of radical transformation of society. His romantic and ethical socialism, based on an original synthesis of Eastern mystic thought, anarchism, Marxism, and 19th century radical thinking, promoted and practiced new and alternative ways of life as essential to the material and spiritual regeneration of society. Within this context must be read his criticism on the models of conventional Victorian masculinity embodied by "the men of the English-speaking well-to-do class" ("Love's Coming of Age" 110). Their qualities and shortcomings are the result of the education received in the public schools, where they learn to get "a tolerably firm and reliable grip on the practical and material side of life—qualities which are of first-rate importance, and which give the English ruling classes a similar mission in the world to the Romans of the early empire" (110). Sports and fresh air shape their bodies, but leave their souls undeveloped: "So it comes about that the men who have the sway of world today are in the most important matters quite ungrown" (111). Such an analysis resonates in Forster's statements of 1926 but, more significantly, bears upon his characterization of Clive and, to a certain extent, of Maurice, and upon the way specific cultural and educational models shape and mould their personalities.

Thus, in the opening chapter of the novel, Maurice's conversation on sexual matters with his schoolteacher, Mr Ducie, foregrounds the latter's hypocrisy in dealing with the subject.

Instead of illustrating his words, the diagrams he traces in the sand appear obscure and incomprehensible to the boy; moreover, Mr Ducie's embarrassment at the thought that someone might find them contrasts with his asserted pedagogical intentions and makes Maurice judge him a liar and a coward. A similar episode occurs in Cambridge, when Clive condemns the Dean's hypocrisy for having omitted a passage containing "a reference to the unspeakable vice of the Greeks" (*Maurice* 42) during his translation class.

Maurice's suburban household in London, the Sunnington public school and old Cambridge university build up the social spaces that dominate the first half of the novel and are the background of the experiences that accompany his passage from adolescence to manhood. Conveyed through the recurrent image of his gradual ascending the "Deep Valley of Shadow"—a leitmotif permeating the whole section—, this process of maturation also coincides with the character's progressive alienation from the set of moral and social standards those spaces represent. The first stage of his development is marked by his transition from his middle-class family to the intellectual milieu of Cambridge. Maurice's perceived antagonism between these two worlds is registered in the opening section of chapter 9 when, once back in Cambridge after having spent the Eastern vacation at home, he remembers this period as a time of mental and spiritual regression under the influence of his family: "Three weeks in their company left him untidy, sloppy, victorious in every item, yet defeated on the whole. He came back thinking, and even speaking, like his mother or Ada" (46). Here and in similar passages, his misogynous attitude to his mother and sisters conflates with his rejection of suburban normality and its falsifying expectations. To the female, suburban universe of his family the novel opposes the intellectual, homosocial space of Cambridge and its values with which Maurice temporarily identifies through his relationship with Clive.

If "Maurice is Suburbia, Clive is Cambridge" (220): his small figure, blonde and delicate, contrasts with Maurice's dark and vigorous beauty so as his "tranquil and orderly" (30) mind is the specular double of Maurice's "torpid brain" (9). In defining him

a "blend of lawyer and squire" (221), Forster makes his intellectuality part of his class identity and represents the relationship between the two young men as the gradual awakening of the mentally torpid bourgeois by the aristocratic intellectual. Thus, Clive's courtship of Maurice in chapter 7 takes the shape of a theological dispute played out on the model of a Socratic dialogue in which he displays all his dialectical ability in order to trigger the maieutic process by which Maurice finally comes to admit the sham of his religious faith. Significantly, the chapter ends with Clive suggesting that Maurice read *The Symposium*, a gesture that inscribes their relationship within the boundaries of a specific discourse and sets the pattern of its unfolding. Shifting the narrative focus on Clive in the long flashback of chapter 12, the narrator recapitulates his process of self-discovery as culminating in the final recognition of Platonic love as an authoritative historical antecedent for legitimizing his own homoerotic desire as an idealising passion that excludes any physical expression. As a consequence, his love for Maurice will be articulated in the language of Platonism:

> The love that Socrates bore Phaedo now lay within his reach, love passionate but temperate, such as only finer natures can understand, and he found in Maurice a nature that was not indeed fine, but charmingly willing. […] He educated Maurice, or rather his spirit educated Maurice's spirit, for they themselves became equal. (85)

Such a language permeates the Clive-Maurice section of the novel, it defines their love as a sexless union of souls and in so doing posits the basis for its final failure. Illuminating in this respect is Forster's use of Platonic images to report Clive's recollection of a side-car ride with Maurice as the climactic moment of their love experience: "Bound in a single motion, they seemed there closer to one another than elsewhere; the machine took on a life of its own, in which they met and realized the unity preached by Plato" (69). The narrator's irony, as Martin acutely observes, lies in "[t]he absurdity of the motorcycle and its side-car as image of the Platonic egg," and "warns us of the inadequacies of this kind of 'poeticizing' idealism as a guide to behavior" (34).

An analogous ironic reversal underscores Forster's account of Clive's journey to Greece as a site of his final "conversion" to heterosexuality. Bareness and sterility characterize the landscape he contemplates while, sitting in the theatre of Dionysus, he writes to Maurice informing him that he has finally "become normal" (101). The negatively connoted images project a dim and sombre light on this conversion and act as a foreshadowing of his future marriage with Anne Woods, the society woman he, ironically again, meets in Greece. His social equal in class terms, she shares the same prudishness about sex so that, as husband and wife "[h]e never saw her naked, nor she him. They ignored the reproductive and digestive functions" because "the actual deed of sex seemed to him unimaginative, and best veiled in night" (144).Within this perspective, as Debra Raschke has pointed out, Clive's marriage "rather than a confirmation of his heterosexuality, seems more an extension of his Platonism" (160), or, we might add, of his interpretation of Platonism, based on the absolute repression of the body and its desires.

Writing on Hellenism as a key theme in Forster's fiction, Ann Ardis argues that, as a major cultural trend in Victorian and Edwardian England, it "served as a crucial means of […] establishing the basis of a homosexual 'counterdiscourse' that was able to justify homosociality in ideal terms during the great age of English university reform in the mid-Victorian period" (64). While consenting with the common critical view of Forster as one of the main representatives of this cultural tradition, she underlines how Forster's narrative, and *Maurice* in particular, is also sharply critical of Hellenism when it becomes "an arid, deadening intellectualism," a form of intellectual inquiry "de-coupled from sensual and emotional experiences," where "a classical Platonic modelling of a continuum between physical and intellectual stimulation is abandoned in favour of the crassest kind of homophobic attachment to class privilege, masked as idealised, disembodied intellectual inquiry" (65). This trajectory is exemplified by Clive, the perfect embodiment of Carpenter's "ungrown" type, and by his interpretation of Platonism.

Roaming the greenwood

Whereas in the first two parts of the novel, Maurice's distancing from social and familiar constraints and from the philistinism of suburban, middle class life is mediated by Clive and Cambridge and homosexuality is experienced as a form of idealised friendship devoid of physical expression, in the second half of the text the encounter with Alec coincides with the protagonist's growing awareness and final acceptance of the social and political consequences of homosexuality.

In the section entitled "Notes on the Three Men" of the "Terminal Note" Forster's statement that "Alec starts as an emanation from Milthorpe, he is the touch on the backside" (221) highlights the direct correlation between the novel and the scene of its genesis. Carpenter's influence, however, goes far beyond this single episode since the Maurice-Alec relationship can be viewed as a narrative transposition of Carpenter's own celebration of cross-class homosexual love as a powerful agent of social and political transformation as articulated in *The Intermediate Sex* (1908):

> Eros is a great leveller. Perhaps the true Democracy rests, more firmly than anywhere else, on a sentiment which easily passes the bounds of class and caste, and unites in the closest affection the most estranged ranks of society. It is noticeable how often Uranians of good position and breeding are drawn to rougher types, as of manual workers, and frequently very permanent alliances grow up in this way, which although not publicly acknowledged have a decided influence on social institutions, customs and political tendencies—and which would have a good deal more influence could they be given a little more scope and recognition. (237)

Thus, the emotional crisis that follows Maurice's separation from Clive prompts him to question his role and place in society—"[w]hat was the use of money-grubbing, eating and playing games? That was all he did or had ever done" (119)—and to perceive himself as "an outlaw in disguise," wondering whether "among those who took to the greenwood in old time there had been two men like himself—two. At times he entertained the dream. Two men can defy the world" (118-19). The closing chapters of the novel are concerned with the final realization of this

dream in the "happy ending" Forster deemed "imperative" (220), but which has been frequently dismissed as an escapist flight into the idealised space of rural England.

If Cambridge is the background of the Maurice-Clive relation, Penge, Clive's family estate, is the site of his encounter with Alec, the gamekeeper, one of Forster's typical rough young men whose characterization has much in common with that of the young working-class men Carpenter sings in his poem *Towards Democracy*[5].

Opposite and contrasting sets of values converge in the representation of Penge and connote it as an ambivalent social space. On Maurice's first visit there, during the time of his liaison with Clive, the house and the estate appear as "marked, not indeed with decay, but with the immobility that precedes it" (74). Maurice's sense of social deference towards his hosts, members of the landed gentry, is expressed in his consideration that: "It was a suburban evening; but with a difference; these people had the air of settling something: they either just had arranged or soon would rearrange England" (77). However, the conditions of the house, ("the gateposts, the roads […] were in bad repair, […] the windows stuck, the boards creaked" [77]) and the visual impressions he gets create a sharp contrast with his naïve faith in the legitimacy of social hierarchies and in the capacity of the social élite to rule the country.

In the Alec section of the novel, the motif of Penge's decay overlaps with Maurice's growing disgust towards its inhabitants ("each human being seemed new, and terrified him: he spoke to a race whose nature and numbers were unknown, and whose very food tasted poisonous" [177]) and becomes a direct objective correlative of their moral and social decadence.

However, Penge, with its park and the surrounding woods, is also part of the English landscape, and the theatre of Maurice's meeting with Alec, the "untamed son of the wood" (195). On the evening of their first love making, the scent of the evening primroses—the flowers Clive had first shown him "but had never told

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[5] Grave and strong and untamed./This is the clear-browed unconstrained tender face, with full lips and bearded/ chin, this is the regardless defiant face I love and trust (44).

him they smelt" (163)—calls Maurice outside, in the park, where he accidentally bumps into Alec. The flowers are the mute sign of the unstated sexual currents between them and a symbol of the Dionysian spirit pervading the whole scene, so that, when Maurice re-enters, Mrs Durham, watching his pollen-covered head, finds him "quite bacchanalian" (166). Maurice's new sense of panic union with nature preludes to the scene of their first love-making in chapter 37—"[…] Penge, instead of numbing, seemed more stimulating than most places. How vivid, if complex, were its impressions, how the tangle of flowers and fruit wreathed his brain!" (169)—and marks the beginning of a new phase in his life.

Mythic overtones echo throughout the conclusive section of the novel in a move characteristic of Forster's fiction and of Modernism, where "the complex present is explored by reference to underlying structures believed to be revealed in ancient myth" (Booth 176), and connote the idealised representation of rural England that provides the background of Maurice and Alec's final union:

> [H]e […] then turned to England. His journey was nearly over. He was bound for his new home. He had brought out the man in Alec, and now it was Alec's turn to bring out the hero in him. […] They must live outside class, without relations or money; they must work and stick to each other till death. But England belonged to them. That, besides companionship, was their reward. Her air and sky were theirs, not the timorous millions' who own stuffy little boxes, but never their own souls. (212)

This generic turn from realism to pastoral fantasy is the necessary premise of the happy ending of the story. A happy ending that Forster considered "imperative," the very reason, deep and non-negotiable, for the writing of the novel. Since, at least in the fictional space of narratable stories, a love between two men had to be conceivable, a love that could clearly last "for the ever and ever that fiction allows" (220).

However, that ending already contained its own negation at multiple levels. First, the assertion of happiness outside the traditional patterns and the absence of a poetic justice able to punish the "sinner" determined the effect—which was anything but "unexpected," if examined carefully—of making the story harder

to be published. When the "freedom" of the narrative was denied the opportunity to translate itself into a printed page—readable for many, reproducible and therefore transmissible—it lost its ideal and imaginative motivation, condemned, as it was for a long time, to the closed, claustrophobic space of the private manuscript.

Even if it was freedom, it looked like exile. The same exile that Maurice and Alec experienced in their rural retreat. Within this perspective, the greenwood of Forster has little or nothing of the "historical" English countryside, nothing of the literary and cultural space described in Austen's novels: the pulsing heart of Britishness, tradition, perfectly codified manners in compliance with a strict division of class, role and gender.

The greenwood of Forster has to do a lot more with the Sherwood Forest, the refuge of outlaws with some stains and many fears, or with the woods close to the property of Chatterley, which seduce with a reminder of wild naturalness. Above all, in my opinion, it has to do with the green world of Arden, although poorer, because it lacks the sharp but concrete spirit of Touchstone, as well as the figurative, melancholy of Jacques.

The greenwood of Forster is *oú-topos*, a non-place: an instance of freedom from conventions, from the constraints imposed by a morality, still Victorian in spirit, to the force of instincts and desires. However, and for this very reason, more than an area of freedom, the greenwood of Forster is an enclosure where there is an amassing of outlaws and outcasts; a Savage Reservation as in *Brave New World*. In the happiness of that "free" ending, a dull and persistent note resonates in which a condemnation is inscribed without appeals, a condemnation that unites the modernity of the metropolis and the staid cadences of the rural province. Whether consciously or not, as implied criticism, the disenchanted and funereal cadence of *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* still resonates.

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