

# Male Bonding in *Maurice* and E. M. Forster's Other Novels<sup>1</sup>

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**Published:** 29 February 2020

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## **Abstract:**

The main concern of this article is a close investigation into the male relationship in E. M. Forster's *Maurice* (1971) and his other novels. Two major issues will be discussed. The first one is to examine Forster's intention in presenting two different modes of male bonding in *Maurice*—the platonic mode between Maurice and Clive and the erotic mode between Maurice and Alec. The second issue then is to trace Forster's struggles embedded in his other novels. The Rickie-Ansell relationship in *The Longest Journey* (1907) and Philip-Gino bond in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905) are two prominent examples that embody special kind of narrative strategy in Forster's portrayals of male bonding. This article aims to show that the homosexual proclamation in *Maurice* is not a rash decision but is achieved through a slow and agonizing process.

**Keywords:** E. M. Forster, male relationship, *Maurice*, *The Longest Journey*, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*

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<sup>1</sup>The article is supported by the Research Project of Nanhua University (Y105000558).

## 1. Introduction

In *Maurice* (written in 1913-14, published posthumously in 1971), E. M. Forster has portrayed, to a quite full extent, a different kind of male bonding which has only been palely sketched in his other novels. *Maurice* is, of course, the novelist's ultimate manifesto of homosexual love and a detailed manifestation of the so-called same-sex desire. A pioneer homosexual literary work written in Edwardian England and still a canonical text in the gay literary tradition, *Maurice* deals openly with then forbidden sexual issues. Because of its explicit homosexual content and the writer's relative reserve in his other novels, there seems to be a huge leap from Forster's other novels to *Maurice* with regard to male-male amorous relationship. However, this kind of bold homosexual profession, rather than appearing suddenly, has been developed gradually. In the novels before *Maurice* or after it, male bonding has always been an unsettling issue among novels focusing on heterosexual love. Therefore, this article aims to look into the nature of this leap to prove that *Maurice* is not coming out of the blue but is resulting from previous futile efforts to suppress it. Therefore, the main concern of this paper is not about homosexuality but the evolvment of masculine same-sex love in Forster's other novels up to *Maurice*. This concern will be dealt with by means of two major issues. This article will start with a thorough research into the two modes of male relationship in *Maurice*—the platonic mode manifested in the relationship between Maurice and Clive and the expressive mode in Alec and Maurice. These two modes are customarily distinguished as the homosocial and the homosexual. I will argue that these two modes are not separated but are derived from the same internal drive reacting differently to social expectations. I will also argue that in juxtaposing the implicit and the explicit in the same novel, Forster intends to summarize and put an end to the process of his struggle and, ultimately, to show his determination to assert his own sexual identity. Once the validity of this argument is established, an intriguing question will need to be resolved next: if the Maurice-Alec mode is the end of a series of struggles, where are the previous struggles and how are they represented? Bold declaration always entails countless failed attempts to conceal it. Therefore, the second issue this article intends to address is to locate those unsuccessful attempts and to find out how they are represented in the writer's other novels. Among them, two cases of male bonding stand out. They are the Phillip-Gino relationship in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905) and Rickie-Ansell relationship in *The Longest Journey*. What catches the reader's attention is that even though these male-male relationships are always paled by male-female relationships, the romantic and sensual dimension they acquire is far more intense and impressive. These out-of-the-way male bonds, as this paper intends to demonstrate, are the evidence of the failed attempts. Thus, the Maurice-Clive relationship will serve as the pivotal model to compare and analyze these male bonds to find out similar narrative tendency and strategy. All these analyses aim to establish a structural discourse that can account for those muffled desires.

## 2. Homosocial Bonds and the Edwardian Public School Ideology

To unveil the mystery of male bonding in Forster's novels, we need first to understand what it means to people, especially the upper-middle class, in Edwardian England. Male bonding is initiated in public schools. At that time, for the male children of the upper-middle-class family, public school education was a crucial period in which they developed the relations between men. In the Edwardian England, as well as other similar male-dominated societies, as Kosofsky Sedgwick argues in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, there is "a special link between *male homosocial (including homosexual) desire and the structures* for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal powers"(25). As Sedgwick further proposes, this special link can take the form of "ideological homophobia, ideological homosexuality, or some high conflicted but intensively structured combination of the two" (25). Homophobia was a generally adopted ideology in Edwardian England because homosexuality was considered a threat to maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power. Practicing homosexuals, as Nigel Messenger observes, were regarded as criminals, liable not only to imprisonment if convicted but also often subject to blackmail (10). However, England in that period was also a strongly homosocial society, in which the patriarchal power formed the pillars of society. Homosocial bonds, especially between young men, were a kind of masculine emotional bonds that were more accepted in Edwardian England than any other countries. The most important centers for building such bonds were the public schools, in which young men developed the so called "healthy" homosocial connections, or, in extreme cases, received homosexual initiation. Therefore, the public schools offered a special environment where, contrary to English conventional ideological homophobia, "high conflicted but intensively structured combination of the two," which means homosocial desire and homophobia, coexisted. Just as the famous Foucauldian theory holds, even though Western discourse tried to repress specific kinds of knowledge about sex, it, however, ended up inducing rather than repressing it. Public schools, which were concentrated sites of power relations, were one of the "saturated" areas for the creation of modern "perversions" (Sedgwick 38). As Angeles Toda in her article "The construction of Male-Male Relationships in the Edwardian Age: E. M. Forster's Maurice, H. A. Vachell's The Hill, and Public School Ideology" similarly argues, "the overt interest in controlling and policing adolescent sexuality in Victorian and Edwardian public schools had long gone together with an implicit assumption of, and tolerance towards schoolboy homosexuality" (137). Therefore, in Forster's time, although public-school young boys were encouraged to form homosocial bond, the line between homosocial and homosexual sentiments was so ambiguous that transgressions happened from time to time.

Public school ideology also encourages the development of masculinity, which is manifested in the amount of team sport in its curriculum. Masculinity is closely connected with power and dominance. R.

W. Connell in *Masculinities* first points out that initially masculinity does not exist except in contrast with femininity. (68) Hegemonic masculinity, for example, refers to a cultural phenomenon in which a group of men “claims and sustains a leading position in social life” (77). Therefore, it is commonly accepted as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy” and “which guarantees . . . the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (77). However, Connell demonstrates the inadequacy of this traditional concept and, furthermore, suggests that the terms ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ “point beyond categorical sex difference to the ways men differ among themselves, and women differ among themselves, in matters of gender” (69). Connell’s argument invites the reader to recognize the existence of multiple masculinities (and femininities as well). In addition to the relation between men and women, there are also specific gender relations of dominance and subordination between groups of men, and, according to Connell, the most important case . . . is “the dominance of heterosexual men and the subordination of homosexual men” (78). However, even though gay masculinity is the most conspicuous, it is not the only subordinated masculinity. Some heterosexual men and boys in whose cases “symbolic blurring with femininity” is obvious are likewise expelled from the circle of legitimacy. (Connell 79)

In Forster’s novels, public school ideology and hegemonic masculinity seem to be paramount. However, rather than being characterized as the dominant value, they are embodied in minor characters and, sometimes, are strongly questioned. The best example is in the characterization of Gerald Dawe in *The Longest Journey*. Coarse, handsome, and athletic, Gerald establishes a powerful presence in the male society of the public school: he is the captain in sports, and he possesses a kind of violent temper, which is considered demonic but heroic at the same time. In his relationship with women, he also resorts to dominance and strength, the most important qualities that comprises masculinity. In a love scene between Gerald and Agnes, Gerald’s fiancée, Rickie Elliot has witnessed a blend of brutalism and heroism in Gerald. First Gerald locked Agnes in his arms, but Agnes resisted. Then after Gerald kissed Agnes’s expressionless face, her face suddenly “shone with mysterious beauty, like some star” (*The Longest Journey* 39)<sup>2</sup>. Such interplay between masculinity and femininity deeply touches Rickie, who considers himself the opposite of a hero: “They invaded his being and lit lamps at unsuspected shrines. . . . Music flowed past him like a river. He stood at the springs of creation and heard the primeval monotony” (*TLJ* 39). In this scene, Gerald is the full embodiment of masculinity: “His wings were infinite, his youth eternal” (*TLJ* 39). On the other hand, Agnes represents the subordinate femininity, and by “the touch of a man,” Agnes “had got into heaven” (*TLJ* 40). A mixed feeling of envy and exhilaration in Rickie is evoked by this scene. While witnessing the birth of love, the “flame of flame,” Rickie is conversely troubled by a deep sense of incompetence, self-doubt, and even crime: “What right had he to

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<sup>2</sup>Henceforward shortened as *TLJ*

pry, even in the spirit, upon their bliss?" (TLJ40). Under the influence of the dominant public school ideology and the advocacy of masculinity, weak and effeminate boys like Rickie could only be a bystander or, even worse, a victim. However, in Forster's depictions of male bonding, it is often on the perspective of the weak and the effeminate that the backbone of these novels is supported.

### 3. Philip and Gino: The Romantic Mode

Philip Herritonin *Where Angels Fear to Tread* represents Forster's typical public-school-trained but weak and effeminate male. Philip characterizes a kind of artist reflector/aesthete-tourist in the novel. His well-educated and upper-middle-class background has cultivated in him a sound and informed aesthetic judgement. Philip shows marked and passionate devotion to the Italian culture and is jokingly referred to as contracting the "Italymania" (*Where Angels Fear to Tread*<sup>3</sup>70). For him, Italy represents "the championship of beauty" (WAF51). However, it is his interaction with Gino—a typical Italian young man, that helps him to gain an extra dimension in his perception of beauty.

While the reader is (mis)led by the writer to anticipate a romantic development between Philip and Miss Abbot, Philip unwittingly has formed a strong and unusual interest in Gino. The Philip-Gino bond is based on contradictions; Gino represents everything that Philip is not. Gino possesses strong personality which is manifested in the coexistence of the two extreme personality traits common in the Italian young males—"a sunny side of immeasurable vigor, charm, ease, and geniality and a dark side of unruly violence, irascibility, and impulsiveness" (Chao 76). For people like Philip, Gino is both "mysterious" and "terrible" (WAF 67). These two personality traits and the lack of them serve to demonstrate how opposites attract. Philip's first impression of Gino is characterized by an ambivalent combination of contempt and exaltation. His initial dislike of Gino is derived from Gino's lack of taste and his impudence to marry Philip's widowed sister-in-law—two transgressions that violate Philip's standard of beauty and decorum. However, this initial hostility is combined with a secret desire of getting closer. Philip dislikes Gino's vulgarity, but he cannot help being captivated by Gino's relaxed and calm features: "Philip had seen the face before in Italy a hundred times—seen it and loved it, for it was not merely beautiful, but had the charm which is the rightful heritage of all who are born on the soil" (WAF25). Every time when Philip judges Gino, negative criticism always ends up with involuntary approbation. Every time Philip tries to detach himself from Gino, Gino lures him back.

Two clashes manifest the conflict between Gino's volatile character and Philip's refined sentiment. Both clashes combined with physical conflicts accentuate rather than mar their bond. The first clash occurs when Philip insultingly offers money to buy Gino off from the marriage. To vent his anger, Gino caught Philip off guard and virtually beat him up. Gino's violence creates such a grave impact upon

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<sup>3</sup>Henceforward shortened as WAF

Philip's comprehension and pride that everything beautiful about Italy is turned up-side down. Philip's immediate reaction is: "She had no power to change men and things who dwelt in her. She, too, could produce avarice, brutality, stupidity—and, what was worse, vulgarity" (WAF51). However, in spite of his contempt for Gino's brutality and profiteering motive, Philip is, at the same time, deeply confounded and thus attracted to the inherent and aggressive masculinity that Gino exhibits and that Philip is unfamiliar with. When Philip returns to Monteriano to meet Gino several months after the first clash, he is preoccupied with a feeling of enthusiasm and anticipation but not aversion: "Philip would have a spasm of horror at the muddle he had made. But the spasm would pass, and again he would be enchanted by the kind, cheerful voices, the laughter that was never vapid, and the light caress of the arm across his back" (WAF88). Forster's descriptions of the turn of Philip's feeling from his uneasiness to expectation are more detailed and sensual than those he devotes to the Gino-Lilian romance.

The second clash is more violent and produces a more profound effect. It happens after Philip inadvertently helps bring about the baby's death. The clash is marked by a combination of roughness and tenderness. First, admitting "acknowledged weakness in his own character," Philip conveys the news to Gino and tries to comfort him by touching him gently on the shoulder (WAF118). However, the explosive Gino takes it in such a maddened way that he almost strangles Philip to death. Instead of being angered, Philip patiently extends his pity and tries to pass his arm around Gino. Having failed to calm Gino down, Philip is again forced into a more intense physical engagement during which Philip is nearly killed by Gino. As two of them vow to take each other's life, the conflict is miraculously resolved by a jug of milk that timely arrives for the baby.

The process from unfolding the news to the final reconciliation discloses the most intense, detailed, and closest physical contact between two males among Forster's novels. It is also the most puzzling one. The inclusion of intermittent tender gestures into men's fight, first of all, characterizes a different mode of male-male conflict unseen between Forster's other English male characters.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the writer's motive to have this kind of conflict take place between an Englishman and an Italian male is not accidental because cross-culture intimate male bond is more tolerable, and it might be a convenient ploy to prevent aversion from general English readers. Furthermore, the destruction of a lamp during this fight also aims to carry some hidden meaning. The lamp, which offers light to the baby, is the only thing that Gino destroys out of his anger. The lamp is symbolic of life and truth. Once the lamp is destroyed, life is gone, but what kind of truth does the writer intend to hide behind darkness? Without light, the two men fight and wrestle in total darkness, leaving only sounds. A new lamp comes timely to terminate the fight, and under the new light, a truce is miraculously reached. First, they share a jug of milk. The milk

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<sup>4</sup>The most violent conflict between English males takes place near the end of *Howards End* when Charles Wilcox accidentally kills Leonard Bast. (230) The motive is pure and simple, just to teach Bast a lesson.

originally prepared for the baby offers them peace and solace. Sharing the milk, a kind of Eucharistic ritual, serves to establish a new Philip-Gino bond at the sacrifice of the lamb/baby.

The death-and-rebirth motif is reflected in the new Philip-Gino bond. After the intense physical engagement, the Philip-Gino relationship has taken a dramatic turn. Philip describes the aftermath of the fight in the following passage:

For his own part, he was bound by ties of *almost alarming intimacy*. Gino had the southern knack of friendship. In the intervals of business *he would pull out Philip's life, turn it inside out, remodel it, and advise him how to use it for the best. The sensation was pleasant, for he was a kind as well as a skillful operator*. But Philip came away feeling that he had not a secret corner left. (WAFT124; italics mine)

The change manifest in the passage is abrupt and extensive. Gino's role is suddenly becoming stronger and more prominent in Philip's life. This new relationship reveals that in their last conflict Philip has not only been physically subdued but also overpowered in other more crucial aspects. For example, a follow-up passage shows how much more supremacy Gino has over Philip: "Ever since you stopped him killing me, it has been a vision of perfect friendship. He nursed me, he lied for me at the inquest, and at the funeral, though he was crying, you would have thought it was my son who had died" (WAFT124). The most intriguing development comes at the final chapter in a conversation between Miss Abbott and Philip about Gino. Just as the reader anticipates a natural development for Philip to confess his love to Miss Abbott, the reader and Philip as well are dumbfounded by Miss Abbott's unexpected confession of her hopeless love for Gino. However, instead of being embarrassed or disappointed, Philip feels for her and shares her agony: "This episode, which she thought so sordid, and which was so tragic for him, remained supremely beautiful. To such a height was he lifted. . ." (WAFT 130). Philip seems to understand Miss Abbot and, consequently, is healed by her pain caused by secret and unrequited love.

A similar scenario that is to find in Forster's later novels is: whenever a man confesses his love for a woman or vice versa, it is mostly carried out in such a rational manner that the validity of the affection is questionable. This can be seen in Miss Abbott's explanation of her love for Gino to Philip, where there is neither passion nor deep affection: "I dare tell you this because I like-and because you're without passion; you look on life as a spectacle; you don't enter it; you only find it funny or beautiful. So I can trust you to cure me" (WAFT128). However, whenever a man's feeling for another man is described, it is always more intense, as is revealed in the interaction between Philip and Gino: "I love him too! When I can forget how he hurt me that evening. Though whenever we shake hands—" (WAFT128). Compared with Miss Abbott's deadpan expression, Philip's confession discloses more sensual details, and the

elision leaves great room for imagination. In a word, the Philip-Gino/male-male bond seems to prevail over the heterosexual/Gino-Abbot and Gino-Lilian bonds. Hiding same-sex passion behind dominant heterosexual romance seems to be a common narrative strategy that Forster uses to tone down same-sex desire in his novels.

#### 4. Rickie and Ansell: The Ambiguous Mode

As mentioned in section 1, masculinity is a strongly advocated quality in English public schools, and it can be further stratified. *The Longest Journey* is a well-suited work to manifest Connell's idea of such "multiple masculinities." The three main male characters are all public-school graduates, and they distinctly demonstrate different types of masculinity. Gerald in *The Longest Journey* represents a full embodiment of this quality; however, Forster gives his exemplary masculine character a short life. Gerald dies suddenly after an impact in a football game. Gerald's death sends a clear message from the writer that hegemonic masculinity is vulnerable, short-lived and is not going to be central issue of the novel. In place of him, Rickie Elliot, the victim and the weaker, takes the central role. Rickie Elliot in *The Longest Journey* characterizes a type of lesser masculinity which is in direct contrast to Gerald Dawe's aggressive type. Partly because of his physical deformity and partly because of his delicate character, Rickie is anything but masculine, and, as a result, has been Gerald target for bullying for years.<sup>5</sup> When Agnes asks Gerald to tell her something about Rickie in public school days, old memories send "a flash of horror" over Rickie's face. In Rickie's reflection, he used to silently accept abuses from Gerald:

He and Gerald had met, as it were, behind the scenes, before our decorous drama opens, and there the elder boy had done things to him—absurd things, not worth chronicling separately. An apple-pie bed is nothing, pinches, kicks, boxed ears, twisted arms, pulled hair, ghosts at night, inky books, befouled photographs, amount to very little by themselves. But let them be united and continuous, and you have a hell that no grown-up devil can devise. (*TLJ*37)

To cope with the situation, he grows to build up his own defense mechanism that justifies both Gerald's despise of him and his acceptance of it. He realizes athletes like Gerald are "simple, straightforward people, cruel and brutal if you like, but never petty" (*TLJ*36). Such mechanism saves him from "the sin of despising the physically strong—a sin against which the physically weak must guard" (*TLJ*37), and, consequently, manifests an opposite type of masculinity from Gerald's which is embodied in patience,

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<sup>5</sup>It is Rickie's father who gave the name to him because he is rickety. Rickie's deformity becomes his most dominant characteristic and also jeopardizes his chance of being masculine.



tolerance, and circumspection.

Stewart Ansell demonstrates another kind of masculinity that combines Gerald's formidability and Rickie's delicacy. Ansell's force lies mainly in his ability to think, to judge, and to criticize. Unlike Rickie who silently accepts abusive treatments from those who despise him, Ansell openly despises those who rely only on body for power, and he asserts that "bodily beauty and strength [are] signs of the soul's damnation" (*TLJ*37). For Rickie and Ansell, public school never succeeds in nurturing hegemonic masculinity in them. On the contrary, it enhances their difference and isolation.

Rickie and Ansell form a special kind of friendship which is seldom seen between males, especially between males from different classes. Ansell characterizes a type a smart loner who is able to categorize a person's personality within short time and contact. Ansell knows and endears Rickie after brief contact. Rickie deems Ansell not only his close friend but also his mentor whose opinion he trusts and admires. Between Rickie and Ansell, Ansell always plays the stronger role while Rickie is comfortable under Ansell's protection in spite of the former's class superiority. Rickie's excessive dependence on Ansell's judgment and opinion demonstrates a kind of male relationship based not on power but on implicit trust. The Rickie-Ansell bond is also characterized by a notable lack of power. The most prominent characteristic they share is deformity—Rickie's physical deformity, his lameness, and Ansell's social deformity, his inferior background. Their deformity binds them into a distinctive but unusual bond that would sometimes appear quite unmanly to their peers. Their closeness is reflected in Rickie's separation anxiety when Cambridge is almost over, which is so great that he even attempts to break social taboos by wishing that he and Ansell could be "labelled," and that there is a "society, a kind of friendship office, where the marriage of true minds could be registered" (*TLJ*57). This dream of being "labelled" and of seeking an alternative "society" could be the novelist's first textual revelation of an ideal state that can satisfy same-sex yearning.

Such dream is still too distant and too fragile to be fulfilled by means of the Rickie-Ansell bond. First of all, it is detrimental to the gentry masculinity that Rickie still endorses in spite of his insufficiency. Gentry masculinity involves women, or more specifically, domestic authority of men over women. According to Connell, women were indispensable in maintaining gentry masculinity, and most of them were "actively involved in making and maintaining the network of alliance that tied the gentry together" (*TLJ*190-91). When Agnes declares that she loves Rickie, Rickie and Ansell's dream is on the verge of disintegrating. He faces the tough decision between either to uphold class value or to break it. Rickie's longing for Agnes is also a serious challenge to the Rickie-Ansell bond. That accepting Agnes means denying Ansell is a difficult dilemma that troubles Rickie, and the impossibility of keeping both turns it into a serious existential problem. Agnes's declaration of love helps Rickie to replace Gerald and makes up for him the kind of masculinity that he lacks: "She was a goddess still. But he had dethroned

the god whom once he had glorified equally” (*TLJ59*). Dethroning Gerald exhilarates Rickie, but a similar degree of crime has also been generated in Rickie. Agnes enthrones Rickie and enables Rickie to be accepted into a society that has always denied him. One major reason why Agnes and Ansell cannot coexist is because Agnes has a fit position in Rickie’s life, but he does not know where to place Ansell. Out of Cambridge, Rickie belongs to a social class that holds marriage the foremost responsibility. Under such tradition, Agnes has a legitimate position as Rickie’s wife, but Rickie’s bond with Ansell is awkward. For Ansell, Agnes represents the enemy to his/their dream society, and for him she is not real, nor is her love. The compatibility between Agnes and Ansell can be seen in Rickie’s self-debate:

He had been tempted to confide in Ansell. But to what purpose? He would say, “I love Miss Pembroke.” and Stewart would reply, “You ass.” And then, “I’m never going to tell her.” “You ass,” again. After all, it was not a practical question; Agnes would never hear of his fall. If his friend had been, as he expressed it, “labelled”; if he had been a father, or still better a brother, one might tell him of the discreditable passion. But why irritate him for no reason? Thinking “I am always angling for sympathy; I must stop myself,” he hurried onward to the Union. (*TLJ59*)

After listening to Ansell’s anger caused by Rickie’s marriage, Tilliard, one of the Cambridge friends, tellingly points out such awkward situation and challenges Ansell’s anger: “I always find him a little effeminate. . . and really, you talk as if you were mixed up in the affair. They paid a civil visit to your rooms, and you see nothing but dark plots and challenges to war” (*TLJ71*). Tilliard’s accusation discloses a rather essential point in the Agnes-Ansell enmity. Ansell’s anger is caused not just by the loss of friendship but also by a kind of jealousy and rivalry commonly found in lovers. Ansell guiltily evades Tilliard’s accusation by locating his anger on an altruistic basis —“I fight this woman not only because she fights me, but because I foresee the most appalling catastrophe. . . . She will only see how thin he is and how lame” (*TLJ 71*). For Ansell, fighting Agnes is not about fighting a woman but for a whole system of life/principle that only he and Rickie can share.

Even though Rickie chooses Agnes, the Rickie-Ansell bond is ironically enhanced. Rickie has formed the habit of relying on Ansell’s judgement and of sharing all his secrets with Ansell. Secret-sharing is common among female friends, but uncommon among males because it is considered too intimate and feminine and, thus, a direct threat to the masculinity the Empire and a capitalistic society demand. The four letters in Chapter IX that separate the two friends reveal the close intimacy that they used to enjoy. In one of the letters, Ansell remonstrates Rickie against his marriage and considers Rickie not a person who ought to marry at all because he is “unfitted in body” and “unfitted in soul” (*TLJ72*). Whereas the “unfitted body” is understandable, the “unfitted soul,” however, refers to a far more complicated existential issue. Ansell’s further argument—“Man wants to love mankind;

woman wants to love one man” (*TLJ* 73)—underlines a fundamental distinction between Agnes and them which, as he predicts, will disembody what they always cherish. Rickie’s response—“I always knew you liked me, but I never knew how much until this letter” and his plea—“Hate her. Can’t I love you both? She will never come between us . . . because our friendship has now passed beyond intervention. No third person could break it. We couldn’t ourselves, I fancy. We may quarrel and argue till one of us dies, but the thing is registered” show his full acceptance and understanding of Ansell’s argument and feelings but still holds on to his decision (*TLJ*73). From the epistolary exchanges, even though it is still very difficult to determine whether the homosocial bond between Ansell and Rickie has gone out of bounds, deep intimacy between them is unquestionably discerned.

Such deep intimacy extends no slight impact on Rickie’s marriage, especially under the challenge of three major crises. Connell’s argument that women were “actively involved in making and maintaining the network of alliance that tied the gentry together” (*TLJ*190-91) is fully illustrated in the role Agnes plays as Rickie’s wife, a role that Ansell detests. As Ansell has predicted, the role she plays to maliciously boost Rickie’s gentry masculinity breaks Rickie’s illusion of her and leads the marriage step by step to irreparable crises. The first crisis takes place when Rickie learns that Stephen Wonham, a country brute that he dislikes, is actually his half brother. While Agnes thinks that Stephen does not have “full human rights” because he is “illicit, abnormal, worse than a man diseased” and, thus, will harm their social image, Rickie insists that their relationship is “a real thing,” a common value held by him and Ansell (*TLJ*119). This crisis reflects the couple’s difference that Ansell has foreseen. Such uncovered difference alienates Rickie and Agnes but serves to accentuate Rickie’s connection with Ansell. The second crisis happens when Rickie has to make a life-changing decision between whether to go on with his writing, which he loves, or to help Herbert Pembroke run Sawston, which will mean the end of his dream. Rickie’s spontaneous reaction is Ansell’s opinion: “I wonder what Ansell would say”; however, Agnes detests “poor Mr. Ansell” (*TLJ*127). The first two crises expose the two opposite forces in Rickie’s marriage that compete to subjugate him. Ansell represents the idealistic, and Agnes represents realistic. Both forces share no common ground in Rick’s marriage.

The final crisis unfolds Rickie’s inability to deal with the real, which is embodied in Stephen Wonham. It takes place at a period before and after Stephen Wonham’s true parentage is revealed—a crisis that leads to Rickie’s disintegration. Against Ansell’s insistence of living up to the idealistic, Rickie chooses to be led by Agnes to live as a hypocrite. “To assure himself of his friend’s grave” Ansell comes to Sawston to tear off Rickie and Agnes’s hypocrisy (*TLJ*169). Unable to face and to deal with the real, Rickie dies in the most horrible way with his leg run over by the train. But Rickie is saved from damnation when he eventually sacrifices himself to save Stephen Wonham (the real), a child born out of class difference,

“the child of poetry and of rebellion” (TLJ193) and, as Ansell claims, “one of the greatest people [he has] ever met” (TLJ185).

Rickie’s death somehow signifies the price he pays for his betrayal of the ideal and his inability to live up to the truth. What remains yet to be answered is what the real nature of this ideal truly is. What kind of ideal does Rickie betray? Rescuing Stephen indicates that Rickie does to some degree obtain his redemption and try his uttermost to save his soul. His death, however, also sends several pessimistic messages. First, the Rickie-Ansell bond, the ambiguous homosocial mode, has no chance for survival, not to mention further development. Moreover, the price for denying the real is exorbitant, including the loss of friendship, marriage, reputation, and even life. However, the novel does not end here but suggests a faint possibility through the bizarre character of Stephen Wonham, which shows that even though the real does exist, it is too complicated to define.

## 5. Maurice and Clive: The Platonic Mode

Whereas the homosocial bond between Rickie and Ansell in *The Longest Journey* is implicit and ambiguous, the bond between Maurice and Clive is more explicit and intense in *Maurice*. Their relationship even develops beyond the limit of homosocial bond. As mentioned above, intimate relationship between boys was somewhat tolerated in public school, even though it would still incur certain degree of punishment if it was made public. However, when boys entered varsity/university, since they were to become the “pillars” of their society, they were supposed and even demanded to outgrow this kind of over-the-limit sentiment. From the interaction between Maurice and Clive, it is not difficult to detect the existence of such over-the-limit intimacy. It is publicly displayed when Maurice and Clive cut classes and refuse Mr. Cornwallis’s warning to stop. The following passage highlights general reaction to their behaviors:

Mr. Cornwallis always suspected such friendships. It was not natural that men of different characters and tastes should be intimate, and although undergraduates, unlike schoolboys, are officially normal, the dons exercised a certain amount of watchfulness, and felt it right to spoil a love affair when they could. (*Maurice* Chapter 14)<sup>6</sup>

To Mr. Cornwallis, whose opinion is authoritative, intimate relationship between male students is not normal for any age. Mr. Cornwallis calls this kind of relationship “intimate friendship.” There is no objective way to define intimate friendship, but obviously it is not something that can be easily tolerated

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<sup>6</sup>The e-text this article uses does not provide page number. Therefore, chapter numbers are used to indicate the location of each quotation.

at Cambridge. Driving out together and ignoring the school routine, in Mr. Cornwallis's opinion, mean committing certain unspeakable moral transgression. And such unspeakable moral transgression has already gone so far as to evoke negative feeling or attitude of homophobia. Dr. Barry's indignant reaction to Maurice's confession of such behavior—"You are a disgrace to chivalry" (*Maurice* Chapter 15)—also shows that this kind of intimate male relationship is considered not only a severe misdemeanor but also a threat to the society.

In the novel, before and after their intimacy is made public, Clive and Maurice both have both undergone certain agonizing phases about their own sexual inclinations. Clive's ordeal comes earlier, and he also recognizes his own sexual inclination sooner. Clive comes from a background that is of some social importance and power: he is the sole heir of a country estate, and he is expected to enter politics sooner or later. However, at the early age of sixteen, he found himself "damned" because he was "directed by other desire towards Sodom" (*Maurice* Chapter 12). Even though he obtained some peace from Plato's *Phaedrus*, he knew that his soul was tainted and decided "not to crush it down, not vainly to wish that it was something else, but to cultivate it in such ways as will not vex either God or Man" (*Maurice* Chapter 12). Clive repressed his desire by being cautious and sane to be friendly with any boy/man who attracted him.

Clive's desire is first directed towards a fellow varsity student named Risley, who behaved "that way" but who Clive did not quite like (*Maurice* Chapter 12). Even though the novelist does not elaborate specifically on what "that way" is, it is not difficult to infer from the context about Risley's peculiarity—he is not a "normal man" as Cornwallis would say. Risley offers Clive certain companionship and solace that he is unable to get from other college males. From Risley, Clive is "stimulated," and he is glad to know that "there were more of his sort about, and their frankness braced him into telling his mother about his agnosticism; it was all he could tell her" (*Maurice* Chapter 12). For Clive's family, agnosticism is a serious sin against God, but it is also the best excuse he can find to cover up his homosexual identity.

While Risley serves as Clive's initiation, Maurice is Clive's true love. It is Clive who actively finds Maurice and takes the initiative to awaken Maurice's homosocial/homosexual awareness. The following passage shows the process of Maurice's awakening: "The rest of him fell asleep, bit by bit, and first of all his brain, his weakest organ. His body followed, then his feet carried him upstairs to escape the dawn. But his heart had lit never to be quenched again, and one thing in him at last was real" (*Maurice* Chapter 6). Here the "real," the main idea in *The Longest Journey* is picked up in this novel again. It seems to be Forster's key phraseology to designate such special male bond. This awakening shows that the Maurice-Clive bond is real, and it is completely different from the Clive-Risley bond.

The development of the Maurice-Clive bond has taken several important turns, which showcase the process of Maurice's struggle to his final confirmation. The first important turn takes place at Cambridge where Clive's confession of his love for Maurice marks a milestone in Maurice's journey to confirm his homosexual identity. It has to be noted that Clive's feeling towards Maurice is always much stronger and more intense. As he admits, the moment he saw Maurice, he had "a rush of emotion that carried him into intimacy" (*Maurice* Chapter 12). He is the one who makes the first move to "fling down all the barriers" for their relationship (*Maurice* Chapter 12). Before Clive's confession, they have already been unusually intimate. Their demonstrative intimacy gives their peers an unwavering impression that they are like a pair of lovers: "They walked arm in arm around shoulder now. When they sat it was nearly always in the same position—Maurice in a chair, and Durham at his feet, leaning against him. . . . Maurice would stroke Durham's hair" (*Maurice* Chapter 6). And such intimate relationship sometimes frightens them both: "They clasped one another. They were lying breast against breast soon, head was on shoulder. However, just as their cheeks met some called 'Hall' from the court. . . . Both started violently, and Durham sprang to the mantelpiece where he leant his head on his arm" (*Maurice* Chapter 9). Such conflicting consciousness of desire and fear to be close looms over their entire friendship, even after they decide to part ways.

Based on their established intimacy, Clive's confession of love is only a natural development. Therefore, though Maurice feels confused at first, it only takes little time for him to confirm his love for Clive, and as the novelist claims, "[after] this crisis Maurice became a man" (*Maurice* Chapter 11). Maurice's final confirmation of his love for Clive elevates him to a new level of ecstasy which is dramatized in his stealthy climb into Clive's room:

As he alighted his name had been called out of dreams. The violence went out of his heart, and a purity that he had never imagined dwelt there instead. His friend had called him. He stood for a moment entranced, then the new emotion found him words, and laying his hand very gently upon the pillows he answered, "Clive!" Afterwards, they kissed, scarcely wishing it. Then Maurice vanished as he had come, through the window. (*Maurice* Chapter 12)

At the time when Maurice embraces Clive, he also becomes fearless and ready to face the hostile world: "He had awoken too late for happiness, but not for strength, and could feel an austere joy, as of a warrior who is homeless but stands fully armed" (*Maurice* Chapter 11). This new relationship also emboldens him and endows him with a kind of masculinity that he had longed for but failed to achieve previously.

However, as the new relationship leads Maurice to total liberation, Clive turns weaker and more conventional. Maurice accepts his first challenge at all risks, but not Clive. Driving out in the side-car,

missing lectures, and ignoring the Dean's order are the strong actions that Maurice takes against the world: "Now we'll go to Hell. . . . They cared for no one, they were outside humanity, and death, had it come, would only have continued their pursuit of a retreating horizon" (*Maurice* Chapter 13). This incident changes Maurice's life but, ironically, exposes their difference and the gap between them. Instead of facing the challenge out together, Clive asks Maurice to succumb so that they could resume their life at the university. While Maurice is ready to challenge his society openly, Clive only wants to limit their relationship in the side-car and at the varsity, that is to say, in places that are relatively safe and protected. More defiant, Maurice refuses to write the letter of apology, and, what's worse, refutes Dr. Barry's accusation of "a disgrace to chivalry." Maurice sees through their hypocrisy and insists on the "real": "If a woman had been in that side-car, if then he had refused to stop at the Dean's bidding, would Dr. Barry have required an apology from him? Surely not" (*Maurice* Chapter 15). It is homophobia that kicks Maurice out of Cambridge, and Maurice's defiance frightens almost everyone on campus, including Clive.

The second challenge comes from family. When Maurice has just come of age, he pays a visit to Penge, the Clive's family estate in the country, where Maurice and Clive are forced to make an either-or decision between conforming to tradition and following true yearning. Mrs. Durham, Clive's mother and the protecting goddess of family tradition, takes a wise action by imploring Maurice, her son's suspicious lover, to dissuade Clive from travelling to Italy and Greece, places that are notorious for excessive passion and liberation, and to encourage him to go to the Colonies, which represent power, tradition, and masculinity. Mrs. Durham's plea—"Impress on him about America anyhow. He needs reality. I noticed *that* last year"—indicates that she knows something weird is going on between Maurice and Clive ("I noticed *that* last year.") and that she intends to prevent it from further development (*Maurice* Chapter 17; italics mine). What makes Maurice's situation worse is Clive's concern about his responsibility for his family, which is the need of an heir for Penge, a need that is incompatible with their tie: "It had not occurred to [Maurice] before that neither he nor his friend would leave life behind them" (*Maurice* Chapter 17). It is not easy to analyze Clive's sudden shift of allegiance. Clive might finally realize that he is not as courageous as Maurice to follow their real feeling so as to sacrifice all that he has. Or, it could also be owing to his mother's influence which is more realistic and safer. In either case, family duty has begun to affect Maurice-Clive bond, but Clive is not ready to give Maurice up.

The third and the greatest crisis comes at a time when Clive discovers that he is also attracted to women. Clive's sudden awareness is dramatized by a breakdown that happens during his visit to Maurice's home in London and enhanced by a visit to Greece. Greece has always been a dreamland for Clive since his troubled sexual orientation began. Visiting Greece, he claims, "is a vow. Every barbarian

must give the Acropolis its chance” (*Maurice* Chapter 22). Instead of representing a haven that protects and justifies his secret bond with Maurice, Greece under Clive’s claim has been turned up-side down and has become a place for the barbarian (meaning his old self). Instead of confirming his bond with Maurice, Clive achieves reformation and a disembodiment of the old self. The breakdown is a prelude to betrayal, and Greece finally helps him to pull it off.

Clive’s journey to Greece eventually alienates him from Maurice. In Greece, Clive is more certain that his breakdown is caused not by his doubt about his love for Maurice but his fear of their future. With regard to his dying hope, Greece offers Clive no solace: “he saw only dying light and a dead land. He uttered no prayer, believed in no deity, and knew that the past was devoid of meaning like the present, and a refuge for cowards” (*Maurice* Chapter 22). Having decided to become a coward, in the theatre of Dionysus, Clive sends Maurice a letter in which he puts down: “Against my will I have become normal. I cannot help it” (*Maurice* Chapter 22). Clive’s paradoxical statement leads to Maurice’s breakdown. Both breakdowns—Clive’s and Maurice’s—carry dire implications. They first verify the close bond that links Clive and Maurice. In addition, they also confirm that Clive’s feelings for Maurice have not changed; he simply decides to deny them because he realizes that he is not brave enough.

## 6. Conclusion

The same scenario that happens again and again in Forster’s novels is that when a man confesses his love to a woman or vice versa, the affection is always handled in such an abrupt or matter-of-fact manner that doubt is often cast on the validity of their feelings. The reader might blame it on the Victorian conservatism. However, whenever a man’s feeling for another man is depicted, it is always full of more meticulous and sensual details as initially manifested in Philip’s confession of his feelings for Gino:

For his own part, he was bound by ties of almost alarming intimacy. Gino had the southern knack of friendship. In the intervals of business he would pull out Philip’s life, turn it inside out, remodel it, and advise him how to use it for the best. The sensation was pleasant, for he was a kind as well as a skillful operator. But Philip came away feeling that he had not a secret corner left. (*WAFT*124)

The Rickie-Ansell and Maurice-Clivebonds exhibit even more perceptible intimacy that is seldom found among “normal” lovers. For example, they like to share their thoughts and feelings. And such behaviors, according to Victor J. Seidler, are considered “unmanly,” and such intimacy “would threaten their male identities” (73). The Rickie-Ansell bond is not portrayed as specifically as the Maurice-Clivebond, but their interactions show that Ansell and Rickie depend on each other so deeply



that they are intensely aware of the special attachment between them. However, their relationship stops at the Platonic mode that struggles to go over the limit but fails. The struggle is embodied in their divergent perceptions of Agnes, a woman Rickie adores but Ansell detests. The woman also triggers the debate on what the real—the paramount value that Ansell affirms—is. In their battle to win Rickie, Ansell's disappointment and possessiveness are more deeply felt than Agnes's, as if Ansell loves Rickie more deeply than Agnes. This kind of ambiguous feeling exhibited in the Rickie-Ansell bond exposes their anxiety and irresolution, and the novelist's as well. Therefore, Rickie's death in the end is compulsory because it is best resolution for irresolution.

The relationship between Maurice and Clive is a logical continuation of the Rickie-Ansell bond, and it furnishes the latter's pale bond with more plausible details, stronger motivation, and fuller development. Moreover, it openly advertizes a vow and physical intimacy. Maurice outgrows Clive's rashness and becomes a tenderer partner. Once he is certain about his feelings, he sticks to his vow. Like Rickie, Clive is timid and vigilant. For him, his vow has limit; it entails the disavowal of the body. Therefore he kisses, embraces, and sleeps with Maurice, but he makes sure that their relationship does not go out of bounds. His aversion to/fear for sexual relationship is revealed in his exasperation when Maurice confesses to him about having it with Alec, Clive's gamekeeper. And Clive's outcry—"The sole excuse for any relationship between men is that it remains purely platonic"—manifests not only his disagreement but his repression of his true desire (*Maurice* Chapter 46). Deviation from the real becomes the key factor that distances Maurice/the emancipated and him/the repressed. Before having Alec and Maurice fulfill their desire, Forster has always been careful in placing his male partners within the boundary of homosocial relationship but, at the same time, having them face the question of what the "real" is. No definite answer has been offered except evasion, anger, and ambiguity. Therefore, prior to the final consummation in the Maurice-Alec bond, ambiguity and repression are the common narrative strategies Forster uses to bypass the sensitive and controversial issues concerning same-sex desire in male bonding.

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