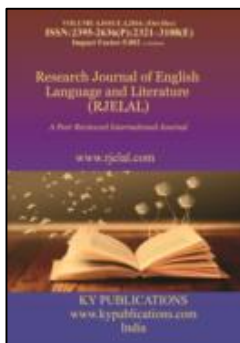




## PROJECTION OF LONDON AS A QUEER SPACE OF 'PERIL' AND 'PLEASURE' IN E.M. FORSTER'S *MAURICE*

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### ABSTRACT

The novel *Maurice* by written by E.M. Forster depicts the life of Maurice who experiences sexual orientation towards the same sex. This experience confuses him to arrive at his own self. Early 20<sup>th</sup> century metropolitan London gives him the opportunity to taste the pleasure of same sex orientation. This queer space in London is perilous as 20<sup>th</sup> century London imposed stringent laws for sexual deviants. Drawing the concept from Matt Houlbrook's detailed book on London named *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957*, this paper intends to investigate how the characters of the novel *Maurice* reacts to the queer space generated by London which accommodates as well as punishes homosexuals.

Keywords: Queer space, London, Peril, Pleasure and necropolitics

The novel *Maurice*, written by E.M. Forster, was published posthumously in 1971. The novel was written during the early part of 20<sup>th</sup> century. The novel was inspired by the real life story of Edward Carpenter and George Marrill. The West has represented queer subjects in literature since the time of Chaucer. Peter Ackroyd in his book *Queer City: Gay London From the Romans to the Present Day* points out that Pardoner and the Summoner were queer subjects. The subjects with deviant behavior were doubted as deceitful. The laws against the sexual deviants were harsh. Though some countries in the West are quite liberal and tolerant of LGBT communities (Countries like Canada) in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, London was the centre of debate in the context of LGBT community during the time of E. M. Forster.

Matt Houlbrook in his book *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* observes that London during the first decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century was a period of "social intolerance, legal repression, and cultural marginalization" (3). Queer, the author observes, has always been the tales of the city. The city served as a cultural space where

cosmopolitanism flourished. People met each other at pubs and established ties with one another. Referring to a letter written by a gay man named Cyril, he says that the transformation of self towards same sex orientation began when he came to the city. The city becomes a space that brings an outlet, though marginal, for sexual expression. The novel *Maurice* too fits as an exemplar of this argument posited by Matt Houlbrook. It is remarkable that writers such as Oscar Wilde, who was a homosexual, lived in the urban metropolis. Whether this space favours the homosexuals to live safely is debatable. Nevertheless, the urban space provides 'anonymity' breaking out of the barriers of rural household bonds, creating a space of autonomy for the same sex relationships (4). The birth of this new space for homosexuals during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was a conflicting space. Drawing from the concept of 'peril' from Matt Houlbrook, the city was not accommodative of queer subjects during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The innumerable laws enacted by London accommodated rules to impose in London. On one hand, E.M. Forster's characters in *Maurice* constantly fears about getting caught and punished

by stringent laws and on the other they almost successfully tries to establish their homosexual relationship. The paper tends to address this dual nature of space that London provides to the characters both peril and pleasure.

The first chapter of Part One sets the tone for the onset of sexual theme when Maurice converses with Mr Ducie. Mr. Ducie is a man who believes in the normalcy of heterosexual relationships and expects the same from other fellow beings surrounding him. The delight, asceticism and coloured up mind of Mr Ducie who is engaged to a woman is quite contrary to what Maurice feels and fancies about. The idea of getting married to a woman does not appeal him. However, the tender age does not allow him to think explicitly about same sex relationships. This is mainly because he was yet to discover his own true identity in relation to his sexual orientation. Among the myriad heated debates and arguments put forward by Maurice, the most striking was:

“I think I shall not marry”(Maurice 15)

E. M. Forster in his novel *Maurice* subtly makes the reader think deeply as many of his ideas about sexuality are put in symbols. The readers are made aware that Maurice fears to go to bed as shadows disturbs his peace. The shadow referred here is not of a ghost or something occult but his own. He allegedly arranges candle in such a manner that his shadow doesn't appear. This shadow is his 'true' self- the 'Maurice' who is inclined sexually towards the same sex. This phobia, which would otherwise appear trivial, is a metaphor of his other self which is always seeking an outlet. The body possessing homosexual inclination is his shadow which seeks outlet. The strong desire to get out of his repressed identity and gain his true self becomes problematic as Maurice fears the law and penalty which might be imposed upon him. The state frightens him not only posing as incarceration but also death.

The repressed desire of Maurice always seeks an outlet. As dreams are the road through which the unconscious can be traced, the narrator makes reference to two prominent dreams- a nondescript which turns out to be George and the other is a voice that refers to a friend. The narrator makes it clear that the dreams shall help the readers in interpreting

him. The first dream is a vague one where the garden boy appears before Maurice and teases with his form. In the second one, however, the reference is to a dear friend for whom Maurice would give his life. His feeling of tenderness is something which he had not experienced till now. He felt as if he is waiting for the touch of that dear friend. The vision of his dear friend is temporary and it fills his mind with unspoken misery. The narrator explains the plight of Maurice by describing as:

“Misery was somehow mixed up with all his happiness” (Maurice 23)

The extent of fear of queer necropolitics comes to limelight when the episode of love affair between Maurice and Durham unfolds. Durham's expression of love towards Maurice exemplifies the scandalized notion against homosexuality. Maurice was “scandalized” and “horrified” when Durham expressed his love for him (58). Maurice says:

“Durham, you're an Englishman. I'm another. Don't talk non-sense. I'm not offended, because I know you don't mean it, but it's the only subject absolutely beyond the limit as you know, it's the worst crime in the calendar, and you must never mention it again. Durham! A rotten notion really” (Maurice 59)

Durham and Maurice's relation blooms into a positive homosexual relationship later in the novel. However, it took considerable amount of time before it bloomed into a beautiful relationship. There were phases where fear psychosis played a vital role in explaining the plight of the homosexuals during the time. Durham blames himself for mentioning a 'criminal morbidity' (60). He also feels relieved that his homosexual identity is open only to Maurice. This implies that had anyone other than Maurice would have known about his sexual inclination, he would have landed in the hands of “the Dean or the Police” (66) In chapter 11 of Part One, Maurice rejoices his true self where he realizes his homosexual identity and feels a strong urge to reciprocate homosexual proposal. Matt says that the laws imposed upon homosexuals were haphazard. He points to the Section 11 of Criminal Law Amendment Act (1898) of the Offences Against the Person Act (1861) and says that 'gross indecency' in public space was treated as an offence (20). The author points out that the laws were favourable to the modern bourgeoisie nuclear

family where consensual sex was allowed in private spheres. This was however not the case with homosexuals. They could be prosecuted or arrested even from their homes if they had sex with the same sex individuals.

The fear of queer necropolitics pervades throughout the novel. This is reflected apparently through a letter written by Maurice to Clive Durham. It shows the fear running through the mind of Maurice on hearing about the outcome of being in same-sex relationships. While addressing the letter to Clive Durham, Maurice writes:

"I have waited to hear from you for a fortnight and now come two sentences, which I suppose mean that you cannot love anyone of your own sex any longer." (Maurice 117)

The queer space confuses Maurice about his sexual orientation. He opts for a medical treatment under Jones. The treatment of his sexual identity as congenital homosexuality baffles the reader of 21<sup>st</sup> century. Nevertheless, there had been numerous experiments done in order to prove homosexuality as a disease during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This, being ruled out, is a picture of how London presented itself to the homosexual subjects. During the time of E.M. Forster, London appears as a city of peril for the homosexuals. The characters express their desires to move to liberal nations. The desire to move to France and Italy proves London to be perilous; though tempting the homosexuals with the taste of desire. This perilous queer space not only remained in London but permeated to the other parts of the world decades later. The treatment same-sex relationship can be exemplified with news that appeared recently. A wildlife photographer named Paul Goldstein captured one male lion mounting the other in a bushy area of Masai Mara game reserve in Kenya. Unlike any other sexual encounter in the wild, this incident grabbed the attention for its 'bizarre' behaviour. An official in Kenya, named Ezekial Mutua, commented that the gay sexual encounter was perhaps the result of the lions witness to a homosexual couple "behaving badly" in the park. He even suggested that there is a need to counsel the lions to avoid such scenes. The interesting facet of the incident was lions are not exposed to TV serials, advertisements or movies that promote same sex. The visibility of the LGBT community has been blurred by the

homophobic perceptions. The heterogeneity of culture makes the world a beautiful place to live in. Sticking oneself to a parochial mindset, harbouring prejudice and bigotry will not lead to an accommodative society. It's important for people to understand and acknowledge that homosexuals are not opposed to heterosexuals. However, it is questionable whether it is true the other way round. The acts of ridicule, scorn, detest limits the potential of anyone who deviates from the 'normal'. They become afraid to come out of their closet either out of shame or prosecution. There have been many cases of suicide due to the non-inclusion of LGBT community.

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