



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Maurice

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

A contemporary review

After the near-perfection of *A Room with a View*, which transformed an only intermittently entertaining piece of writing into a totally successful film, it must have seemed a natural move for Merchant Ivory Productions to adapt another Forster novel. *Howards End* may have been the obvious choice, but instead they chose *Maurice*, the book Forster started in 1913, finished a year later and rewrote at intervals throughout his life, but never dared to publish because of its homosexual theme. Writing the book was a releasing experience for Forster, not least because he saw it as an act of defiance against society's disapproval: this is why he insisted on the happy ending, which made the book still less publishable, still more 'corrupting'. It might be just permissible to show those who suffered from the vice of Oscar Wilde coming to a bad end, but never to suggest they could find fulfilment, and come to regard themselves as natural beings.

The film would, I think, give Forster great pleasure. Everything about it is well done: script, casting, settings, music. It is entirely faithful to the spirit of the book, which is both joyous and painful. It is a shade more humorous, which he would have appreciated, and it diverges from his finely plotted story only where it's necessary to clarify: for instance, we are shown a young aristocrat set up by a soldier, arrested and sentenced to prison – a risk faced by practising homosexuals at the date of the story (1912), which some modern cinemagoers may need to be reminded of.

Maurice is in effect an *education sentimentale*. It combines a deeply romantic element – the notion that true love can cut across all conventional social divisions and rules, and form a basis for a permanent way of life – with a much tougher, more documentary account of the loneliness, misery, incomprehension and lack of self-knowledge of Maurice himself, a young suburban stockbroker brought up (as Forster was) by a widowed mother.

But Maurice's character is nothing like his creator's. He is robust, jolly, with a liking for motorbikes and sport; not an intellectual in the least. James Wilby is perfectly cast, with his healthy shock of hair and his boyish, bumpy cheeks and nose; sometimes his eyes glow with pleasure and confidence, sometimes they register a childlike bewilderment and terror. He is always believable. So is Hugh Grant as his clever friend, Clive Durham, a young man of finely cut features and equally finely cut passions.

Maurice and Clive become friends at Cambridge; from being absorbed in the friendship they fall in love, innocently and devastatingly. Maurice is the more innocent of the two (his public school had been going through a period of savage policing). When Clive declares himself, his immediate reaction is to express horror, because the idea is outside his mental range. Then, almost immediately, he understands that he is also in love. Clive, always dominant, insists that their love must be platonic, however passionate and exclusive. There are hugs, kisses, long looks, intensities, but all within the limit imposed by Clive and accepted by Maurice.

It's not difficult to bring out the idyllic quality of Cambridge on film (getting rid of the tourists must be the hardest part), and James Ivory and Pierre Lhomme (director of photography) make the most of the opportunity, alternating lovely cunning shots of pinnacles, windows and gateways with wide views of courts, chapel and the gorgeously candlelit hall, where Clive speaks a long Latin grace. There is even a punting scene, which may seem to pile it on; but this is undeniably the way in which undergraduate life does remain in the memory, the beauty of the setting forever associated with the short years of intense friendship, endless talk, intellectual and emotional discovery.

In another film it could be an indulgence; here, it is an essential part of the subject, because Cambridge both brings Maurice self-knowledge for the first time, and punishes him for the first time. He is sent down for failing to apologise to the Dean, who has caught him flagrantly cutting lectures for an outing with Clive. Maurice won't apologise, despite his mother's tears; he is prepared to suffer, to become an outlaw.

The rest of the film is devoted to Maurice's increasing awareness of himself as outlaw, while Clive moves gracefully into orthodoxy. He is heir to a country estate; he is expected to go into parliament; his family are eager for him to marry, etc. But deeper than any of these is his own wish to conform. In Forster's book he experiences a genuine change, and begins to desire women rather than men; the film makes Clive's change more willed, but the effect on Maurice is the same. He is out in the wilderness alone now, suffering torments of loneliness as well as unsatisfied lust.

Can one believe in the resolution, with Clive's good-looking young gamekeeper Alec (Rupert Graves) climbing a ladder to seduce Maurice, then overcoming other problems, including his fears of blackmail, and the two lovers agreeing to give up their respective lives and settle somewhere where they can be together forever? Just about, I think, because by then full-blooded romanticism has successfully taken over, allowing a shift towards fantasy. It is not a total shift; Alec is quite substantially established as a character about Clive's house and estate (Penge in Forster, aggrandised in the script to Fendersleigh), and there are sly observations of the servants' conversations which keep up some realism (a particularly admirable performance as the butler, Simcox, from Patrick Godfrey). Besides, romantic love is a reality too, although it's easy to forget or deny it.

The film works as a double love story, in which the supposedly superior man is the betrayer, while the man who is expected to betray becomes the redeemer. But Forster's (and James Ivory's) imagination is of course much richer than this neat summary implies. A good deal of the pleasure lies in the contingent touches: Maurice's sisters practising the bandaging they have learnt at a nursing class on Clive; the two undergraduates grappling with pianola records; a bully of a doctor (Denholm Elliott, superb as ever) giving Maurice a wiggling; a joyous innings at a country cricket match; a conversation beneath a pair of five-legged Assyrian bulls at the British Museum.

Forster enjoyed writing *Maurice*, and his pleasure makes itself felt in the book, which has a confident pace and tone. The film moves swiftly too; its weakest passage, curiously, is the opening section, which has a fruitiness alien to the rest. After this it is subtle, intelligent, moving, and absorbing; also extraordinary, in the way it mixes fear and pleasure, horror and love. It's a stunning success for a team who seem to have mastered all the problems of making literary films.

Claire Tomalin, *Sight & Sound*, Autumn 1987

MAURICE

Directed by: James Ivory
©: Maurice Productions Ltd.
a Merchant Ivory film in association with
Cinecom Pictures *and* Film Four International
Produced by: Ismail Merchant
Associate Producer: Paul Bradley
Production Supervisor: Raymond Day
Production Co-ordinator: Joyce Turner
Production Accountants: William Tyler, Sunil Kirparam
Location Managers: Maggie Parsons, Natasha Grenfell
Location Scout: Joe Friedman
Production Assistants: Nicky Kentish-Barnes, Ben Barker
Producer's Secretary: Arbell Lowther
1st Assistant Directors: Michael Zimbrich, Kevan Barker
2nd Assistant Directors: Lee Cleary, John Phelan
3rd Assistant Director: Simon Moseley
Continuity: Lorely Farley
Casting: Celestia Fox
Screenplay: Kit Hesketh-Harvey, James Ivory
From the novel by: E.M. Forster
Photography: Pierre Lhomme
Camera Operators: Nigel Willoughby, Tony Woodcock
Camera Focus: Tim Dodds
Clapper/Loader: Gerry Altman
Gaffer: Jack Collins
Best Boy: Steve Costello
Grip: Kevin Fraser
Editing: Katherine Wenning
Assistant Editor: Andrew Marcus
Apprentice Picture Editor: Stacia Thompson
Production Design: Brian Ackland-Snow
Art Directors: Peter James, Brian Savegar
Assistant Set Dresser: Amanda Ackland-Snow
Property Master: Dennis Fruin
Stand-by Props: Bill Coggan, Rob Hill
Costumes: Jenny Beavan, John Bright
Co-costume Designer: William Pierce
Wardrobe Master: Raymond Usher Cooper
Wardrobe Assistant: Jane Burton
Make-up: Mary Hillman
Hairdresser: Carol Hemming
Assistant Hairdresser: Paolo Mantini
Title Design: Chris Allies *
Opticals: Peerless Camera Company *
Music: Richard Robbins
Music Associate: Bob Stewart
Music Conducted by: Harry Rabinowitz
Music Editor: Mark Potter Jr
Music Recording: Brian Masterson, Windmill Lane Studios
Sound: Mike Shoring

Boom Operator: Andy Morris
Sound Re-recording: Richard King *at* World Wide Sound Ltd
Sound Editor: Tony Lenny
Assistant Sound Editors: Max Hoskins, Anna Shepherd, Tom Freeman
Dialogue Editor: Alan Killick
Footsteps Editor: Howard Lanning
Stunts: Harvey Kip, Adrian Ffooks

Cast

James Wilby (*Maurice*)
Hugh Grant (*Clive Durham*)
Rupert Graves (*Alec Scudder*)
Denholm Elliott (*Dr Barry*)
Simon Callow (*Mr Ducie*)
Billie Whitelaw (*Mrs Hall*)
Barry Foster (*Dean Cornwallis*)
Judy Parfitt (*Mrs Durham*)
Phoebe Nicholls (*Anne Durham*)
Patrick Godfrey (*Simcox*)
Mark Tandy (*Viscount Risley*)
Ben Kingsley (*Lasker-Jones*)
Kitty Aldridge (*Kitty Hall*)
Helena Michell (*Ada Hall*)
Catherine Rabett (*Pippa Durham*)
Peter Eyre (*Mr Borenius*)
Michael Jenn (*Archie*)
Mark Payton (*Chapman*)
Orlando Wells (*young Maurice*)
Maria Britneva (*Mrs Sheepshanks*)
Olwen Griffiths (*Mrs Scudder*)
John Elmes (*Hill*)
Chris Hunter (*Fred Scudder*)
Alan Foss (*old man on train*)
Gerard McArthur (*3rd undergraduate*)
Philip Fox (*Dr Jowitt*)
Brefni Mckenna (*guardsman*)
Miles Richardson (*1st undergraduate*)
Harriet Thorpe (*barmaid*)
Phillada Sewell (*matron*)
Julian Wadham (*Hull*)
Matthew Sim (*Fetherstonhaugh*)
Richard Warner (*judge*)
Andrew St. Clair (*2nd undergraduate*)
Alan Whybrow (*Mr Scudder*)
Helena Bonham Carter (*lady at cricket match*)*

UK 1987©

140 mins

* Uncredited

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar

Tue 1 Feb 18:20; Fri 25 Feb 20:45

Young Soul Rebels

Wed 2 Feb 18:20 (+ intro by BFI Race Equality Lead Rico Johnson-Sinclair); Thu 17 Feb 20:45

All About My Mother (Todo sobre mi madre)

Wed 2 Feb 20:45; Wed 16 Feb 21:00

Beautiful Thing

Thu 3 Feb 20:45; Mon 14 Feb 20:30

The Handmaiden (Ah-ga-ssi)

Fri 4 Feb 17:50; Sat 12 Feb 20:10; Sun 27 Feb 17:50

Rent

Sat 5 Feb 12:30; Sun 20 Feb 18:10

Maurice

Sun 6 Feb 15:20; Mon 14 Feb 18:00

The Watermelon Woman

Mon 7 Feb 20:45; Sat 26 Feb 20:30

Happy Together (Chun gwong cha sit)

Tue 8 Feb 18:15 (+ intro by Yi Wang, Queer East); Sun 13 Feb 15:20

My Own Private Idaho

Tue 8 Feb 20:45; Wed 23 Feb 18:00 (+ intro by BFI Race Equality Lead Rico Johnson-Sinclair)

Brokeback Mountain

Wed 9 Feb 17:45 (+ intro by BFI Race Equality

Lead Rico Johnson-Sinclair); Mon 21 Feb 20:25

Go Fish

Wed 9 Feb 20:40; Sat 26 Feb 18:20

Rope

Thu 10 Feb 18:30; Tue 22 Feb 14:30

Victim

Thu 10 Feb 20:40; Sun 13 Feb 13:00; Mon 21 Feb 18:00

Desert Hearts

Fri 11 Feb 20:40; Wed 16 Feb 18:20 (+ intro by BFI Head

Librarian Emma Smart)

My Beautiful Laundrette

Sat 12 Feb 18:20; Tue 15 Feb 20:45; Sat 19 Feb 20:45

A Fantastic Woman (Una mujer fantástica)

Sun 13 Feb 18:40; Tue 22 Feb 20:50

Mädchen in Uniform

Fri 18 Feb 20:30; Sat 26 Feb 16:00

Moonlight

Thu 24 Feb 14:30; Mon 28 Feb 20:45

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