

just entertainment

A love story for men

Two views of the story of a quite ordinary young man's journey to happiness.

Men in Love

It's pronounced "Morris," by the way. *Maurice*, James Ivory and Ismail Merchant's film of E.M. Forster's novel of gay love in Edwardian England, will open at the Fifth Avenue Cinema later this month.

Forster intended his novel to be the story of a

Cinema

quite ordinary young man, who happened to be gay, falling happily in love with another young man. If this weren't in itself unique enough a premise for a mainstream film, then ponder also that the film ends happily; that it is beautifully shot at Cambridge and at fine country estates; that it, as in other Merchant/Ivory productions (*Room with a View*, *The Bostonians*), is filmed with an obsessive eye for rich and exact detail; and that director James Ivory is originally from Klamath Falls(!).

The film's faithfulness to the novel is both its strength, and a slight problem. Forster intended his novel to be a warts-and-all look at a rather vain, snobby, and incredibly classist young gay man. This translates brilliantly to film, and provides an insight into the social and sexual contradictions that form the characters. *Maurice* the film, however, does suffer from its faithfulness in that *Maurice* the book is not a very good novel.

The slowness and waywardness of the narrative does allow the claustrophobia of the Edwardian drawing room, and the mire of its sexual hypocrisy, to manifest itself. The love story at the end seems that much more satisfying for a viewer who has endured almost as much (and as long) as Maurice, himself.

Audiences may be surprised and confounded by the pleasure that the ending brings. "They should be rooting for these guys," Ivory told the *New York Times*. "They should be saying, 'I can understand that, I know what's in their hearts, I can feel for them'."

Forster wrote *Maurice* in 1914; it was not published until after his death in 1971. And it

wasn't until 1987 that a major motion picture dared to depict two men happily in love.

— W.C. McRae

It's about time

Seventy-three years ago, in 1914, Edward Morgan Forster completed a novel about a quite ordinary young man who finds happiness with a man he loves and who loves him. The novel, *Maurice*, was published in 1971, after Forster's death. Forster wrote *Maurice* during the time when the fate of Oscar Wilde was still fresh in memory (Wilde died, broken and bitter in 1900). Incidentally, Forster was 35 when he finished *Maurice*, not a callow youth.

And now, in 1987, *Maurice* is a motion picture and it's sure to bring smiles of recognition to a lot of people. Both novel and film are mostly about class differences and snobbery. Forster believed that people of different classes and races should connect with one another, and that within themselves individuals should be imaginative, mystical and sensitive to nature as well as practical. His works, therefore, are studies of prejudice and injustice in English life.

Kit Hesketh-Harvey and James Ivory's screenplay introduces Maurice Hall (James Wilby) as a model product of the rigid conventions, education and snobbery of his class and time. And like Forster himself, whom many suspect Maurice to be, Maurice finds an affirming relationship with a man outside his class. Alec Scudder (Rupert Graves) is the under gamekeeper at a country estate owned by Maurice's first, but platonic lover, Clive Durham (Hugh Grant).

It was Forster's original intent that Maurice and Alec should remain together for a very long time. According to Ivory, Forster wrote an epilogue which takes place many years later when Maurice and Alec are still mates.

Maurice is a good old-fashioned love story, with beautiful people and places beautifully photographed. Romantics will love it. Cynics will love it, too.

— Jay Brown



James Wilby as Maurice (left), Rupert Graves as Alec.

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