

# Reading Forster's Will

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## Abstract

Despite the extensive scholarship about Forster's life and work, his will has largely been overlooked. This article aims to fill this gap and presents a reading of his will which treats it not simply as a functional legal document but as a biographical, sociological and, arguably, a literary text. In doing so it demonstrates the importance for Forster of inheritance as a complex ethical practice. In particular it focuses on how the bequests and extensive individual legacies in the will convey the same political beliefs and personal values which are found in his novels, and are similarly open to contested and contradictory interpretations. In this way and in reading the will against *Maurice*, it is argued that Forster's will is an overlooked posthumous publication.

**Keywords:** E.M. Forster, inheritance, wills

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<sup>1</sup> A longer version of this article appears in Monk (2013).

## Introduction

Forster's life and work have been the subject of extensive analysis and critique. Yet, while both his fiction and non-fiction (including his letters and diaries) have been examined from a variety of perspectives, one text has been overlooked: his will. This is in some ways surprising as inheritance mattered considerably to Forster, as a biographical fact<sup>2</sup> and, most evidently, in *The Longest Journey* and *Howards End*, as a literary convention and ethical practice. Indeed Martin notes that "Forster's abiding love was for that kind of inheritance that could not stand up in a court of law" (1997, 271). That Forster's novels were written before liberalising reforms that protected illegitimate children and dependents partly explains this observation, but he was also interested in spiritual inheritance – as responses to Mrs Wilcox's famous "treacherous and absurd" will makes clear (Forster 2000, 85).

However in the context of his own will, authorship is complicated here, for while expressed in the first person, the "ventriloquist" (Frank 2010, 55) role of lawyers negates the extent to which a will can be said to provide access to the "authentic voice of a testator" (Lafler 1997, 158). Yet despite these considerations, the central premise here is that Forster's will is not simply a formal legal document enabling the transmission of property but, rather, a highly reflective text, within which he expressed his desires, aspirations and values. As a uniquely personal text, it provides insight into the relationship between his more public expressions and his private life. In doing so it brings literary and biographical scholarship into conversation with the particular challenges posed by wills. While revealing no new facts about Forster, the key argument is that Forster's will was written with the same degree of care and consideration as his novels, short stories and other non-fiction and, thus, is deserving of the same attention.

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<sup>2</sup> On the impact of the legacy from his aunt, see Forster (1956, 289); on conflicts about family properties, see Furbank (1977, 202, 290).

## Reading the will

Forster's will was executed on 25th June 1965 and a codicil was added on 7th March 1967. There may have been an earlier will but there is no firm evidence of this.<sup>3</sup> While he was 86 when he executed the will and died a few years later, on 7th June 1970, it is in no sense a 'death-bed-will'. Furbank notes that after a number of strokes in 1964, Forster was, "beginning, quietly, to strip himself of possessions, pressing friends to accept books and pieces of furniture" (1977, 318). Together with the codicil, while frail, this suggests that he had time for reflection.

The will is written in a manner that conforms to the stable, ritualised genre of conventional legal drafting (Sneddon 2011). The will raises no legal questions; what he intended to transfer and to whom is beyond doubt. The codicil reveals no change of mind; it simply added a survivorship clause (which in the event was not engaged) and noted (unnecessarily) that one of the pecuniary legacies had lapsed as the beneficiary had predeceased him. It is not possible to identify who drafted the will, but it is likely to have been a solicitor at the firm of Godden Holme and Co. Based in Belgravia in London, this was the firm that applied for probate and had been the lawyers for Forster's family for many generations.<sup>4</sup>

The grant of probate was issued on 6th November 1970. This provides information about the size of the estate: £68, 298: 11: 0 gross; a considerable amount, equivalent now to well over £1million. But this is not an accurate picture of how rich he was. Biographies of Forster indicate that he made extensive gifts during his life;<sup>5</sup> just as his heroine Margaret advocates in *Howards End*. As Furbank notes: "with age his passion for giving grew.

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<sup>3</sup> Wilkinson states that "he did not even make a will until he was well into his eighties" (1993, 177). But Stape notes that in 1925 Forster decided to cut out Siegfried Sasson from his will and appoint J R Ackerley and Florence Berger as co-literary executors, above (1993, 89). Moreover, King refers to Ackerley receiving £500 (1978, 104); whereas the will refers to £100 and Moffat refers to a gift to Massoud's children who are not in the will (2010, 322). To add to the confusion, Forster refers to arrangements in his will in a letter to Christopher Isherwood dated 15 October 1952 (Zeikowitz 2008, 152–3).

<sup>4</sup> This is evidenced by a deposit to the National Archives made by the firm in 1979 of extensive papers relating to the Thorntons, the maternal family of Forster's father: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=088-iv104&cid=0#0>.

<sup>5</sup> King notes that Forster would write out a cheque to a friend "in order that he should do what was best for himself, not what pleased him most" (1978, 106). See also ANL Munby "Forster's Library" in Stape (1993, 155).

He was continually finding occasions to help friends and protégés, and made several large public benefactions” (1977, 316).

Philanthropy, personal generosity, tax avoidance and protection of privacy all provide plausible explanations for Forster’s life-time gifts. These gifts and motivations complicate readings of the will. Naming someone in a will attests to the symbolic nature of inclusion in a will; that it is not simply a means to transfer wealth but a public as much as a private act of recognition; and all the more so in the case of a public figure. At the same time, a relatively small gift in a will to someone who has received considerable life-time gifts could serve to obscure the importance of the relationship. His testamentary legacies can, consequently, be read as both ‘poetic’ and strategic.

## Property and Place

Forster did not own a home at his death, as Finch notes, he “had a complex history of home-making, often embracing transitory and part-time modes of living” (2011, 14). But two places are referred to in his will: Piney Copse and King’s College, Cambridge. Both, in various ways, feature significantly in his fiction and non-fiction and their inclusion in his will contribute to and complicate an understanding both of his relationship with them and the concept of ‘home’.

### Piney Copse

Piney Copse is a small (4.42 acres) wood in Surrey. Forster purchased it in 1926 for £450 because it was adjacent to West Hackhurst – the home he shared with his mother from 1925 until her death in 1946. His father had designed the house in the 1870s for his aunt, Laura Forster, who subsequently bequeathed her interest in it to Forster on her death in 1924. Furbank notes that in buying the wood Forster “had shown himself independent, not a mere humble continuer of his aunt’s traditions” and that “he felt proud of his wood: even secretly patriotic, as though by means of it he were helping to maintain England” (1977, 202, 199). While Forster owned the freehold of the wood, the house had been built on land purchased under a lease from the neighbouring aristocratic family the Farrers. And Forster only left the house after a bitter and prolonged legal conflict (Furbank 1977, 200–204, 264–268).

Forster's ownership of Piney Copse was intimately linked to West Hackhurst – a 'family home'. But there is a poetic quality to the fact that the only freehold property referred to in his will is a wood, which, at the time of his death, was unconnected to any property. For the mythological 'greenwood' is a recurring theme in his work (Ellem 1976; Nadel 2007; Finch 2011).

In an essay entitled, "My Wood, or the Effects of Property upon Character," published in the *New Leader*, the official journal of the Independent Labour Party, he ruminates that perhaps:

I shall wall in and fence out until I really taste the sweets of property. Enormously stout, endlessly avaricious, pseudo-creative, intensely selfish, I shall weave upon my forehead the quadruple crown of possession. (Finch 2011, 207)

Finch argues that for Forster, "the small – Piney Copse [...] is connected to matters of right and wrong in human conduct: to serious ethical questions." (2011, 208). How he disposed of Piney Copse in his will, a matter overlooked by Finch, can, consequently, provide some insight into how Forster resolved his dilemma of "torn between the commitment that led him to write for a socialist newspaper and the desire to cling onto gentry status in an English county setting" (Finch 2011, 127).

Forster bequeathed the wood to the National Trust, the current owners (National Trust 2011, 42), together with a gift of £100 (clause 6 [a]). In the event of the National Trust not accepting it, the will provided that it should be offered to whoever owned West Hackhurst for the sum of £450, "being the price which I gave for it" (clause 6 [b]).

The National Trust was the ideal beneficiary for Forster; enabling him to express both a progressive commitment to public ownership and free access to the land, alongside a nostalgic desire to protect the countryside against his perception of the damaging effects of modernity. And the alternative provision can be read as a principled refusal to profit from land ownership, even posthumously.

However, these public readings belie more mundane facts. Lord Farrer had made it a condition of his extending the lease over West Hackhurst for the lifetime of Forster's mother that Piney Copse would be sold to him. Reluctant to agree to this, Forster offered to undertake to bequest the wood to the National Trust in his will. Furbank notes that this was "a cunning stratagem" for as a committee member of the trust Lord Farrer could hardly disagree to the offer (Furbank 1977, 202).

## King's College, Cambridge

On leaving West Hackhurst in 1946 Forster moved to King's College, Cambridge. This was to be a home for the rest of his life and it is the address stated in the will. After a life interest in the income, Forster bequeathed to King's the entire residue of his estate (clause 11).

Similar to the gift to the National Trust this philanthropic act combines heritage with a commitment to free thinking. But it can also be read as an act of gratitude, for the College provided his "liberation in youth" and "final spiritual and physical home" (Finch 2011, 303). Bristow notes that:

There is no doubt that his fraternal Cambridge peers provided an intellectual environment in which F was soon able to define his identity as a homosexual writer, one keen to imagine loving relationships that resisted the cultural imperatives to become a conventional married man. (1997, 115)

Cambridge was in this way as much a 'familial' home as Surrey and his legacy to King's can be read as an acknowledgement of this.

The two references to place in Forster's will serve to confirm a widely held public image of him: an Edwardian nostalgic who lived with his mother in Surrey and later an elderly man who lived cloistered at King's. For example, Scott comments that Forster's life "makes dreary reading [...] walled by his sexual inversion into an existence of much loneliness and misery [...] spent most of his 1911/2 years basically marking time" (1984, 9). When *The Times* reported on the contents of the will, an eventuality Forster would have predicted, his gifts to the National Trust and King's attracted the most attention; indeed the latter was the headline news on the front page. By way of contrast, his life-time gift to the Homosexual Law Reform Society remained hidden from public gaze (Wilkinson 1993, 177). In other words, his will ensured that his public image remained intact. Yet alongside Surrey and Cambridge, a third important place for Forster was London.

For most of his life Forster rented a flat in Bloomsbury, which was indeed the scene of sexual encounters for him and for others. And Forster's own work acknowledged the limits of both the romantic idealism of 'the wood' and expresses ambivalence about the apostolic brotherhood of Cambridge.

There is no reason why 'London' should be present in his will; there is no suggestion of intentional subterfuge (and can partly be explained by shifting socio-economic patterns of property rental in the capital). But its absence indicates how wills – like other

texts – produce partial images. Moreover, that ‘place’ functions in a will as it does in literature as “*both* a record of *and* a production or invention of the human experience of place” (Finch 2011, 402).

## Friendship

Forster's will above all else attests to the extent to which “the central preoccupation of his life, it was plain to see, was friendship” (Furbank 1977, 295, see also Bharucha 1995; Fordoński 2017). It can even be linked to the explicit rejection of religion in his funeral wishes. For he observed, in his inimitable fashion – at once cosy and caustic – that: “It can't be nice to believe in God. It would be horrible to think that there was anyone who was closer to one than one's friends” (quoted in Stone 1966, 61).

His executor and the recipient of all his personal chattels and a life interest in the income from the residue of his estate was Walter (,Jack' or ,Sebastian') Sprott, a confidante and close friend for over almost 50 years. A young lover of the economist Keynes, it was said of Sprott that “he demanded to be adopted by someone” (Moffatt 2010, 201). In the context of inheritance this terminology is significant; for adoption is one of the legal mechanisms which gay testators have been advised to consider in places where no other form of explicit legal recognition of relationships exists (Johanson and Bay 1989). The key place of Sprott in Forster's will would, without the benefit of his biographies, lead a reader to possibly identify him as Forster's ‘partner’. Yet they were never lovers, ‘just’ friends; outside of the familial, conjugal model, even one extended by the recognition of same-sex relationships.

Forster considered the status of friendship, almost 60 years prior to writing his will, in *The Longest Journey*: “if we are friends it must be in our spare time [...] he wished there was a society, a kind of friendship office, where the marriage of true minds could be registered” (2006, 64). Alan Bray's towering study identifies wills as long providing a legal mechanism for this task (2003, 111, 114, 281) and Forster's own will demonstrates the legal space they offer for the public recognition of friendship.

In the context of Sprott there are clearly practical concerns too as Forster chose him to manage his affairs.<sup>6</sup> But in his legacies to other friends – between £50 to

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<sup>6</sup> See Zeikowitz (2008, 152–153) for a letter that reveals a private arrangement between Forster, Isherwood and Sprott concerning the income from the US royalties for *Maurice*. See Bray on the traditional connection between ‘Sworn Brothers’ and executors (2003, 114).

£500 – the symbolic, poetic act of naming by inclusion in the will is more explicit, for here the purpose is arguably recognition more than enrichment or recompense.

Alongside Sprott, Forster's two other closest friends – and homosexual confidantes – were the writers William Plomer and Joe Ackerley. Both were bequeathed £100 (cl. 10, 11). The three created a close-knit alliance and Forster's correspondence with them ended up "weaving a pattern of remarkable complexity" (Moffat 2010, 317).

Another key friend acknowledged was Philip Nicholas Furbank (£100, cl. 16). Chosen by Forster to be his official biographer, he was also entrusted with his unpublished erotic short stories (Moffatt 2010, 319). He also bequeathed £500 to his friend and French translator Charles Mauron (cl. 6) and £100 to Eric Fletcher, a King's undergraduate in 1945. Sprott, Ackerley and Furbank had all been to Cambridge and the centrality of 'Kingsmen' in his will attests again to the central role it played in his life. But Forster's will presents, and it is suggested consciously, a picture of a life that moved beyond this privileged circle.

### Social Class

While Forster's public commitment to friendship can be read as challenging conventional boundaries of kinship by going beyond conjugality and blood ties, his will can also be read as troubling the boundaries of social class. And in doing so it mirrors the explicit engagement with class in his fiction.

Forster bequeathed £100 to Reginald Palmer (clause 18) and £50 to Charles Lovatt (clause 14). Both were working-class men who were occasional sexual companions of Forster. Palmer, a bus driver from Weybridge who met Forster while in his twenties, was married and Moffat comments that Forster "managed the delicate feat of remaining her husband's lover without her knowledge for the rest of her life" (Moffatt, 2010, 217; cf Stape 1993, 88). According to Forster their friendship, "was a prank [...] I can think of nothing which has lasted so long and borne such odd fruit" (Moffatt 2010, 302). Lovatt is described by Moffat as an "acquiescent lover from the slums of Nottingham who [...] was genuinely fond of [Forster], and happy to be companionable" (2010, 208). Forster met Lovatt through Sprott (after meeting him in a public toilet Lovatt had followed him home and "never left") (Moffatt 2010, 201). It was with Sprott's knowledge and agreement that he was an occasional weekend sexual companion of Forster in London. Forster recorded in his diary that "reliability was his chief virtue" and called their relationship "an elderly man's love" (Moffatt 2010, 209). Kermode comments that it was part

of Foster's character that: "he enjoyed the companionship, sometimes sexual, of men whose appeal sometimes depended on their being alien to his class, men who he certainly could not entertain at his college" (2010, 114).

In Kermode's account, and in all the biographies other than Moffatt's, these men are unnamed. By including Palmer and Lovatt in his will, Forster does far more than transfer money (something he could easily have done – and did so – in his life, or indeed have requested Sprott to do so after his death). For inclusion in the will renders them visible. Not, as Kermode notes, entertained at his College, but in his will listed as equals alongside relatives and friends from his own class. Echoing themes in *Maurice*, their inclusion can be read as a public acknowledgement of the importance of sex, an embracement of the physical, and a rejection of a romanticized exclusively platonic ideal of friendship (Martin 1983). It is important to emphasise that this 'heroic' reading does not in any way suggest that Forster transcended class. Indeed one of his sexual partners – not loyal and not remembered – accused Forster and Ackerley as behaving like pimps to him and his like; and Moffat notes that there was "some truth to this charge" (Moffat 2010, 219). Undoubtedly these friendships were complicated by and experienced through class but as Heaphy has argued more generally, intimate relationships cannot be reduced to or explained solely by it (2011).

While discretion might explain the invisibility of Palmer and Lovatt from the biographies,<sup>7</sup> the same reason cannot explain the silence about two other working-class beneficiaries. William Burrell was bequeathed £50 (clause 19). In Beauman's biography he does not appear in the index, but he does appear in a photograph, which is annotated "Morgan and Benjamin Britten with Billy Burrell, an Aldeburgh fisherman" (1993, 356); but he is omitted from the index to pictures where only Britten is mentioned. Yet it is Burrell and not Britten who is mentioned in Forster's will. Moffat records that Forster stayed with Burrell and his wife while writing the libretto for the opera *Billy Budd* (2010, 297–99) but does not record the bequest in the will. An acknowledgement of gratitude, it also coheres with Forster's commitment to the possibility of (and desire for) friendships across the class divide.

Moffat does, however, record the bequest of £100 to "his bedmaker, who cleaned his rooms in Kings" (2010, 322). However, the bedmaker remains unnamed. From reading the will alongside all the biographies the only unidentifiable beneficiary is an Alice

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<sup>7</sup> For example Furbank makes no mention of Palmer and Lovett is only mentioned in a footnote and described simply as the friend of Sprott (1977, 283n1)

Buckett from Halstead who was bequeathed £100 (clause 9). It is possible that she is the bedmaker referred to by Moffat. A town called Halstead exists just over 10 miles from Cambridge.

The inability to be certain about this; the fact that she is not named by Moffat and the absence of any references to either a bedmaker or to Alice Buckett in the other biographies, create a powerful silence. In a ground-breaking study of Virginia Woolf and her servants, Light records the intimate nature of the relationship between servants and their employers and notes the silence in the archives about these working-class lives; wills, however, are one place where they are mentioned (2007, 304; cf Lafler 1997; Whittle 2005).

If the aim of this article was to ‘save’ Forster it would be tempting to read his gift to Alice Buckett as a socialist, feminist act: rendering visible female domestic labour and as an acknowledgement of the inevitability of care. But such a ‘heroic’ reading is precisely that. Domestic labour was as ‘invisible’ to Forster as it was to most people of his background. Furbank records that he “was used to maids,” and staying with a friend without servants “would think it odd” that she would “busy herself with housework instead of talking to him” (1977, 320). Moreover, bequests to servants can also be interpreted as an acknowledgement of discretion as much as labour; as Light notes, gossip is “the one weapon all servants have had through the ages” (2007, 295).

Historical research indicates that bequests to servants in earlier periods were not unusual (Willan 1980). Further evidence of this is provided by numerous nineteenth-century cases in which the clarity of general bequests to servants is disputed.<sup>8</sup> By the 1950s, live-in domestic service, “largely disappeared from the vast majority of middle class households” (Light 2007, 313) and with it, perhaps, the custom of such legacies. The newspaper headline, “Bequests to Servants,” on the publication in 1954 of the will of Viscount Simon (a distinguished Lord Chancellor) suggests that it was, by then, at least noteworthy.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, it is possible to read Forster’s modest bequest in 1965, as so much of his life, as traditional, pragmatic or progressive.

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, *Chilcot v Bromley* (1806) 12 Ves 114; *Herbert v Reid* (1810) 16 Ves 481; *Howard v Wilson* (1832) 4 Hag Ecc 107.

<sup>9</sup> *The Glasgow Herald* 17 February 1954. He bequeathed £500 each to his cook and housemaid.

## 'Family' and 'Marriage'

Forster's friendship networks could be described as 'familial'. But in more conventional terms two other groups of individuals included in his will can also collectively be described as Forster's 'family': the Whichelos and the Buckingham's.

Whichelo was his mother's maiden name and the will includes four bequests to first cousins (Laura King, née Whichelo, and Gerald and Philip Whichelo – clauses 17, 2, 3) and one to the widow of a first cousin (Florence Whichelo, clause 1). These are the people – bar the widow of the cousin – who would have been entitled to his entire estate had Forster died intestate. However, his will did not include all his first cousins<sup>10</sup> nor were those included treated equally (Philip and Florence were each left £1000 and both Laura and Gerald the sum of £100). Their inclusion in the will represents an acknowledgement of his biological family but these discriminations suggest that it was one motivated not simply by obligation or convention but by personal considerations of affection and perception of need.

In the will these are the only beneficiaries, together with a god-child discussed below, where Forster's relationship to them is stated in the will; for example, "To my first cousin Gerald Wichelo" (clause 2). The practical and legal argument for such descriptions is that they avoid the possibility of disputes over identification. But the absence of descriptions for the other beneficiaries, the unusual surname, and the fact that the addresses of these beneficiaries are all stated suggest that the reasons are more complex; that the descriptions 'cousin' and 'god-child' do not just identify the person but legitimise or provide a rationalisation of the gift. Moreover, perhaps Forster did not wish, or saw no need, to label the nature of the other relationships. However, descriptions such as, "my friend [...]," noted in studies of wills from earlier periods, become less common when lawyers begin to write wills. Forster must have clearly explained his relationship to those identified to his lawyers, as evidenced in the will, but what passed between them in connection with his relationship with the other beneficiaries can only be guessed at.

There are bequests to four Buckingham's in the will. To Robert Buckingham and to his wife May Buckingham he bequeathed £1000 each (clauses 4, 5), to their daughter-in-law Sylvia Buckingham, described in the will as "the widow of my godson Robert Morgan Buckingham," the sum of £2000 (clause 15), and to Edward Buckingham, Robert's brother, the sum of £100 (clause 7).

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<sup>10</sup> See family trees in Beauman (1993) and Furbank (1977).

There is nothing in the will which identifies the – now well documented – intimate relationship between Bob (Robert) Buckingham and Forster. Indeed the posthumous picture coheres with the family’s own narrative of him as “a kindly grandfather figure” (Moffatt 2010, 322).

While prominent in the will, his larger gifts to them in his life time (he gave them £10,000 in 1964 and paid a monthly allowance to his god-son’s widow after his death in 1962 (Furbank 1977, 316)), his bequest to Bob being made alongside those to his wife, daughter-in-law and brother, and by the omission of explanations, Forster was able to ensure that his will – a public document – presented a narrative that while not in any way dishonest, like so much of his fiction, left clues for alternative meanings only to be understood by a select readership.

### Progeny

Martin observes that a key theme that Forster returned to in his novels was, “the problem of continuity without direct physical begetting” (1997, 255). His novels resolve this problem with spiritual heirs taking the place of genetic ones and with informal adoptions; alternative genealogies that operate outside of those based on codified law, marriage and the traditional family. As Martin notes: “For Forster, begetting removed conception from the body to the mind and proposed a kind of elective inheritance” (1997, 273). Both this concern with continuity and creative forms of resolution are evident in his will.

The bequest to the widow of his god-son has been noted above. Forster also gave his god-son the antique nursery table of his great aunt Marianne Thornton; according to May Buckingham, “The continuity pleased him however vague it may seem to others” (Das and Beer 1979, 183). But it can also be perceived in the legacies of £100 each to Ralph Meredith and Mrs Sidney Stewart (cl 12, 13). The will informs us that they are the son and daughter of “the late Professor Meredith.” Known as “HOM,” Meredith was Forster’s first love, and Moffat and others have suggested the model for Clive in *Maurice* (Moffat 2010, 44, 65, 115). Forster and Meredith drifted apart many decades before Forster wrote his will and there is no indication from the numerous biographies of Forster that he was close to his children; indeed of the 19 legacies they are the only ones where no address is provided. Their presence in the will perhaps served to acknowledge – almost ‘memorialise’ – the significance of the relationship with their father. In other words, it is through the offspring of the father, through the next generation, that he embeds his past relationship.

Many of Forster's contemporaries had, inevitably, pre-deceased him. But his bequests to friends from younger generations, Furbank and Fletcher, and the larger legacy of £1000 to his cousin Philip Whichelo (26 years younger than Forster, he was a set designer and painter of male nudes) can be read not simply as acknowledgments of individual connections but to a certain extent as constructing an alternative to inter-generational genealogies based on children. This interpretation is perhaps clearer still in the context of the gift to King's College. For in this gift Forster positions himself as both the heir to a tradition and shared values and in a relationship with future generations. In this way, the gift presents a form of solution to his concern expressed in *The Longest Journey*, about the fragility and absence of public records of friendship and the fact that, unlike familial relations, they "die out in a generation" (quoted in Martin 1997, 264). *The Longest Journey* was dedicated to the fraternity of Apostles and in a sense through his gift in his will he asserts the extent to which the fraternity represents "a begotten progeny" (Summers 1983, 72).

In developing a concept of "queer temporality," Freeman draws attention to the dominance of 'reprofuturity' or 'straight time'; a world in which "the child is redeemer" (2010, 19, 21) and in which the accumulated cultural and legal ways in which generations are recorded construct genealogies by which groups "make legible not only themselves but also history" (2010, 21). Forster's will, like his novels, attests to a desire to record an alternative history, genealogy and temporality. But it can also be read as highly traditional. Halberstam describes "queer time" as "the potentiality of a life unscripted by the conventions of family, inheritance and child rearing" and refers to wills as a key tool of "middle class logic" (2005, 2, 5). From this perspective, Forster's very attempts at control-after-death, and his concern for continuation, can be read as evidence of his inherent conservatism. As always, Forster's outsider comments are made from within.

It is possible to read these bequests as acknowledgments of distinct roles: god-father, father's lover, an elder cousin. A concept that encapsulates all these roles and provides an analytical tool for reading these bequests is the avuncular. Sedgwick argues that the avuncular "demonstrates the possibility of non-conformity as an essential fact of social life," and exhorts the reader to "Forget the name of the Father. Think of your uncles and your aunts" (1994, 59). Forster implicitly recognised this. In a letter to a friend who had requested him to be the god-father of his son, Forster commented that: "God fathers and god mothers are to tell you about the things that they have liked in life, being alive is so great, that no person can understand it all" (Forster 1983, 110).

Drawing on Sedgwick's analysis, Counter identifies how the avuncular testator played a key role in French nineteenth-century literature: how the ability of the unencumbered uncle to favour "the erotic over the procreative," "election over blood heirs," and "a narrative, and a discourse that he has not, in a sense, been born into" enabled him to function as a provocative metaphor for democratic, liberal values (2010, 102). Whether or not influenced by these novels, Forster's will shares many of the characteristics of these literary avuncular testators.

### Against Maurice

Forster's will was reported on the front page of *The Times* four days after the grant of probate on Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> November 1970. The short notice included the following statement: "His effects included a manuscript of a novel, *Maurice*, which he did not want published until after his death". The novel is not referred to explicitly in the will but the residue is defined as including copyrights and royalties of books "unpublished at the date of my death" (clause 7). *The Times* was clearly reporting information derived from an undisclosed source. But it is fitting that the novel should have been referred to in the context of his will (and not his obituary<sup>11</sup>). For in many respects *Maurice* was his most significant public legacy. Indeed, it arguably overshadowed everything else to the extent that it is *Maurice*, written in 1913/14, and not his will, that is read as his 'last word'; a reading lent weight by the inclusion of the Terminal Note written in 1960. While the autobiographical voice is clear in all his novels, the "personal nature" of *Maurice* has provoked harsh criticisms (Scott 1984; Gillie 1983; Kermode 2010).

In response to such claims Da Silva observes that the "mature demands of great literature" are placed in opposition to the "immature pleasures of homosexuality" (1998, 237). The negative readings of *Maurice* have reinforced the image of Forster as a pre-gay liberation lonely homosexual who lived with only his romantic yearnings for company. His death, just three years after the decriminalisation of homosexual acts by the Sexual Offences Act 1967 – too late – and his very decision to postpone the publication of *Maurice*, merely served to reinforce the image of a man haunted by Wilde.

However, Plomer, who helped Forster gather material to be made available to his biographer recalled that "he wanted it made clear that H[omosexuality] 'had worked'"

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<sup>11</sup> His obituary in *The Times*, written by William Plomer and published four months earlier, makes no mention of it, despite the fact that its existence was well known to him.

(Moffatt 2010, 316). And the argument here is that it is his will, and not *Maurice*, that provides the clues as to the means by which he considered it 'worked'. *Maurice* narrates Forster's move from idealising platonic friendship (in Cambridge), to an embracement of physicality (in the Greenwood) (Martin 1983). And both, as explored above, are evident in his will. But the will goes beyond this and provides a more reflective, more lived and often more ambivalent view.

Most significantly the will goes beyond the utopian exclusive conjugal couple. Forster himself, critically reflecting on *Maurice*, considered the idea of the rescuer from "otherwhere," providing salvation to be "a fake" notion (Moffatt 2010, 304). And his life, as reflected in the complex kinship network painted in his will, speaks of the sustainability of non-monogamous relationships, bisexuality, a ménage à trois, quasi-adoptions, and friendships across ages and class and both equal to and more significant than biological relations.

If Sprott, Forster's executor and main beneficiary, had also been his lover, they would now have been able to enter a civil partnership and he would be recognised and provided for under the laws of intestacy. But the will refuses and unsettles this legal liberal resolution. By presenting a life lived outside of both the romantic and political ideal of the conjugal couple, Forster's will can be read as questioning a type of marriage.

Moreover, the plethora of connections in his will can be read not simply as a call for liberal permissiveness. For, more troubling yet, it might cohere with what Lane reads in his darker posthumous short stories to be an attribution of: "a non-redemptive dimension to human sexuality and social interaction, in which desire gleefully emerges from the manifest failure of ordinary connection" (1997, 189). These readings attest to Trilling's observation in 1967, all the more pertinent now *after* the realisation of extensive reforms, that: "while liberal readers can go a long way with Forster, they can seldom go all the way [...] they suspect that Forster is not quite playing their game, they feel that he is challenging them as well as what they dislike" (1967, 14). Forster's will consequently is an important historical text that complicates the binary of pre- and post-liberation gay history, and provides an empirical source that complements critiques of marriage (and civil partnerships). But one can read too much, or simply what one desires, into a will. And as Heaphy notes, "narratives about lesbian and gay reflexivity sometimes confuse analysis with prescription and actualities with potentialities" (2008, n.p.).

Forster's will, with its emphasis on the recording of relationships, reflects perhaps not so much a commitment to autonomy or self-consciously radical lifestyles but, what Smart refers to as "connectedness." Not to be confused with Forster's normative plea

to ‘only-connect’, the concept provides an explicit counter-balance to the ‘individualization’ thesis by drawing attention to “an awareness of connection, relationship, reciprocal emotion, entwinement, memory” (2007, 189).

## Conclusion

E.M. Forster – a very rich, distinguished author, public intellectual, and recipient of the Companion of Honour and the Order of Merit – was no everyman. His public status had a clear impact on his posthumous deliberations and in many respects his will is impeccably respectable. Indeed, his generous charitable bequests and the ways in which the will can be read as simultaneously acknowledging and masking his motives and relationships arguably demonstrates a sophisticated awareness and negotiation of a public and private readership. That it gave rise to no public rebukes or critical responses attests to this, and, together with the publication of *Maurice*, partly explains why later scholarship has overlooked his will. But perhaps the main reason for the silence is the fact that it was written not by him; for the words are not his but those of a lawyer who drafted it in a strictly conventional, impersonal fashion. In other words, the legal format renders it purely functional.

It is important to acknowledge that the detailed reading here of Forster’s will – legitimising its place within scholarship about Forster – is enabled by the extensive secondary literature about him and informed by his interest in inheritance evidenced in his novels.

But the reading presented here attests to the possibility of the conventional will providing a form of autobiographical self-representation (Horton 2012), and, as such, a text “that performs values, ethics of care” and is “intimately tied to philosophical endeavours” (Mathien and Wright 2006, 14). While this legitimises a deeper reading of wills it also serves to add to the inherent methodological challenges identified here in the reading of wills; for all life writing is simultaneously a form of self-definition and self-deception (Mathien and Wright 2006, 6).

While it is argued here that Forster used his will to express ideas and feelings, the aim has not been to offer one explanation, which is to say, a reading that purports to reveal the authentic ‘truth’ about Forster’s intent. The claims made by the literary critic Barthes in his influential article “The Death of the Author” are pertinent here (but not for the obvious ironic reasons necessitated in a Reading of a Will). Rather, that ‘findings’

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and attempts at meaning-making through testaments are contingent on the perspective and lens through which one reads (Watkins 2012). Far less has the reading here been an attempt to resolve the passionate debates about Forster's inherent values or politics. Rather, to indicate both the ways in which his will, too, can be interpreted in contradictory ways. For it is the very fact that Forster, still, elicits strong reactions and disputes, or as Bredbeck notes, "has long haunted criticism as a figure torn between conflicted modes of existence" (1997, 55), that is perhaps one of his most compelling legacies.

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