

“Old things belonging to the nation”: Forster, Antiquities and the Queer Museum

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Abstract: In an essay of 1920, “The Objects” (later republished as “For the Museum’s Sake”), Forster confronted the colonialist attitudes of the British Museum curator Wallis Budge (1857–1934) as expressed in his memoirs. This paper discusses Forster’s attitude toward national museums and their antiquities in this essay and in *Maurice*, and it suggests that Budge’s memoirs may have influenced the later, 1932, version of the novel. Forster’s nuanced and critical view of heritage has subsequently proved influential for a BM project on LGBTQ+ world history.

Keywords: Maurice, Merchant Ivory films, British Museum, LGBT history, queer museology

For James Ivory

Forster and the British Museum

In May 1920, Forster published “The Objects” in *The Athenaeum*, a review of the memoirs of Sir E. A. Wallis Budge (1857–1934), Keeper of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities at the British Museum. When republished as an essay in *Abinger Harvest* (1936), its title, “For the Museum’s Sake,” foregrounded the role of the national museum. The review focussed on the history of one funerary papyrus in the collections, the famous “Papyrus of Ani” (British Museum EA 10470.1–37). Forster’s own engagement with ancient Egypt was largely Hellenistic. His affair with the Alexandrian tram conductor Mohamed el-Adl had modified his initially hostile reaction to that country (see e.g. Furbank 1978, II, 59–63; Aldrich 2003, 308–19; Forster 2004, 322–46), but he consistently rejected the “sumptuous and exotic” image of Egypt’s pharaonic past in favour of “the little muddles and messes of the modern street” (Spear and Aly 1988, 52, 53). What he termed “the Egypt of the Pharaohs, which still moves tourists and popular novelists, but which means nothing to the resident” (Spear and Aly 1988, 37) is written

out of his works, arguably due to ancient Egypt’s association with the occult, popular adventure yarns and British colonialism (see Parkinson 2020, 203–10). Budge himself is regarded by modern academics as a deeply problematic scholar and collector (e.g. Smith 2004), and his claim in the memoirs to have discovered the papyrus in an intact tomb (Budge 1920, 136–7) is now known to be highly fictionalised (Parkinson 2020, 205–7, 314 n. 68). With striking perception, Forster described Budge’s account as a “yarn,” comparing him to a “Renaissance desperado,” but he also denounced the “vulgarity” of the “system,” with its competitive acquisition of “national possessions,” and “the dreariness and snobbery of the Museum business” that Budge embodied:

it is fine if you think the modern nation is, without qualification, fine; but if you have the least doubts of your colossus, a disgust will creep over you and you will wish that the elderly gentlemen [like Budge] were employed more honestly. After all what is the use of old objects? They breathe their dead words into too dead an ear. (1996, 283)

Forster also noted that the Egyptian “natives” who first found the papyrus turned to Budge “because he paid more ..., although they risked imprisonment and torture” (1996, 282). The fact that the Egyptian el-Adl had been imprisoned by the authorities in May 1919 (see Forster 2004, 340–1) suggests that Forster’s scorn for the Museum was informed by a queer personal perspective (Parkinson 2020, 209–10). His experiences with el-Adl also had an effect on the later versions of *Maurice* (see Gardner in Forster 1999, xxvii–xxix)

The review’s discussion of the papyrus resisted any occult interpretation of Egyptian culture, common at the time. For Forster, the papyrus with its spells was an expression of an entirely human history, and not a magical or spiritual gateway into the past, as in for example E. Nesbit’s *The Story of the Amulet* (1906), that was dedicated to Budge (see Paul 2015; Hoberman 2003): Forster’s Ani acquired it because “his memory was but human; so, buying a strip of papyrus eighty feet long, he had it inscribed with all he would have to say” in the underworld (1996, 281). The same pragmatic attitude to ancient objects is found in the earlier essay “Malconia Shops” (*The Independent Review*, November 1903, republished in Forster 1996, 163–5), where the essayist’s analysis of the fourth century bce Cista Ficoroni (Museo nazionale etrusco di Villa Giulia, Rome 24787

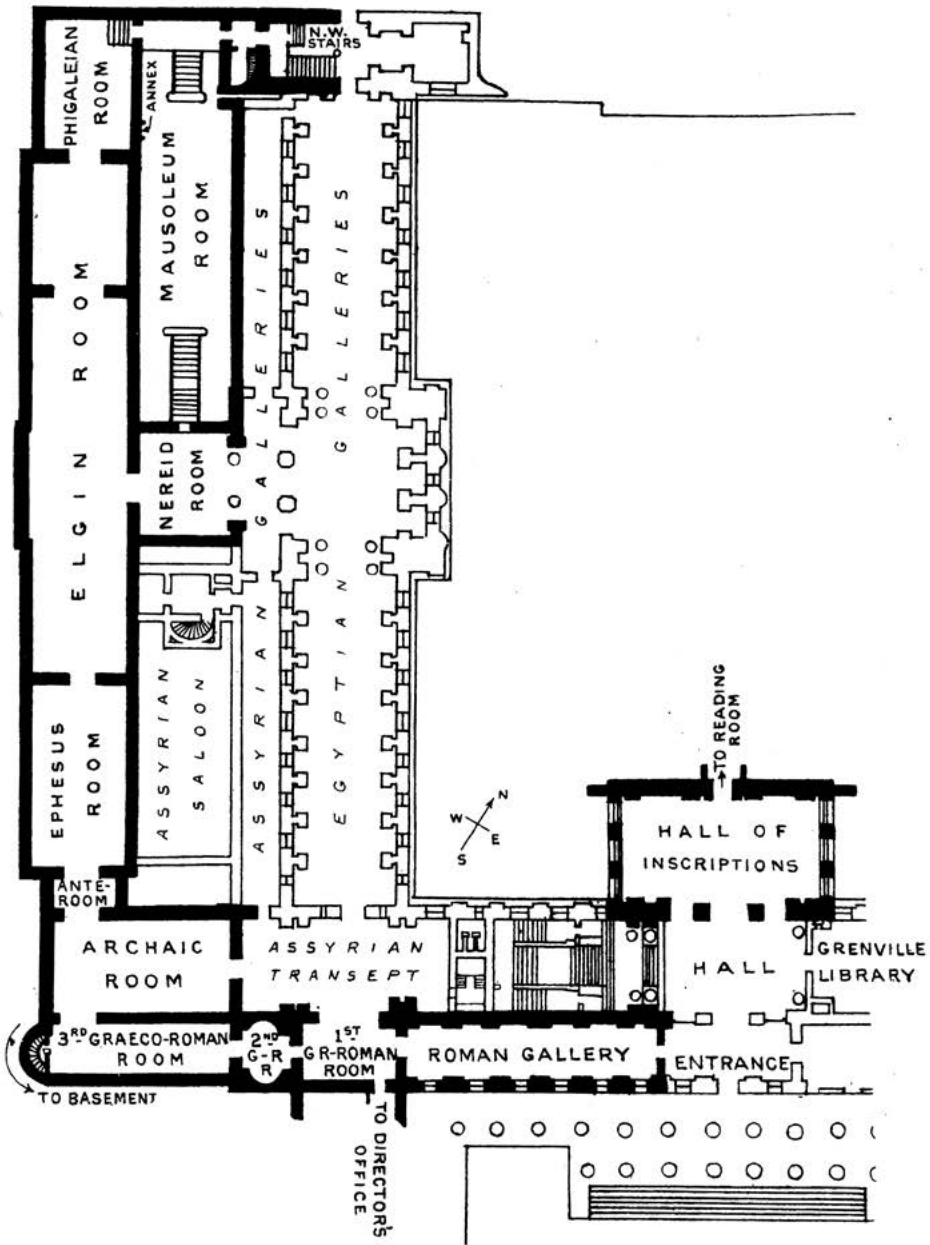
[K] is dismissed by its ancient owner with “I bought the thing because it was pretty” (1996, 165). One notable exception, however, to this attitude is the Demeter of Cnidos (British Museum GR 1859,1226.26), another nineteenth-century acquisition which “we hold in the British Museum now” (1996, 167), according to the essay “Cnidos” in *The Independent Review*, March 1904 (reprinted in Forster 1996, 166–70), and which the essayist considers to be “alive,” uniquely so among the ancient gods. In a contemporaneous notebook journal, he commented that she was “made of flesh like ourselves, though of noble texture” (15 June 1904: 2011, I, 127). The goddess’ location in the Museum is mocked, “with the electric light fizzling above her,” where “she is dusted twice a week” (1996, 167–8; see Radford 2007, 172–223). Later, in 1930–1933, he described a local museum’s classical gallery in similar terms as “stuffy, badly lit, and not too clean” (“The Classical Annex”: 1972, 147). Nevertheless, the statue of Demeter still inspires, and although the goddess is exiled from Cnidos, she “must know that she has come among people who love her” (1996, 168). Similarly, in *The Longest Journey* of 1907, the statue evokes a state of being where “the past not a torn photograph, but Demeter the goddess rejoicing in the spring” (1984, 255); significantly, its symbolic role there is more effectively enabled as a free-hanging photograph, perpetually moving, grey and shimmering in Wiltshire, away from the Museum’s galleries. For Ansell, it and the other classical statues inside the Museum are “powers he could not cope with” (1984, 182): “the comfort of books deserted him among those marble goddesses and gods” making him able to “only think of the vanished incense and deserted temples beside an unfurrowed sea” (1984, 181–2; see Hoberman 2011, 120–3). Ansell says to his companions in the British Museum’s galleries “let us go ... I do not like carved stones,” and is told by Widdrington “you are too particular ... You are always expecting to meet living people. One never does. I am content with the Parthenon frieze” (1984, 182). In all these works, there is a preference for the living over the dead, and for everyday experiences over romantic views of the “sumptuous past” and over institutionalised culture.

Maurice in the Museum

In *Maurice*, the much-revised museum chapter closely parallels “The Objects” in both attitude and phrasing. In both the 1914 and 1932 versions, Maurice describes the institution to Alec as “old things belonging to the Nation” (1999, 282, 191). Both the review and the novel present the Museum as a “symbolic space

of nationalism” (Black 2000, 105), unlike in other, earlier writings; nowhere does Forster explicitly discuss repatriation and the possibility of returning the collections to their source communities (e.g. Parkinson 2020, 209). Maurice is said to choose the British Museum as a place to meet Alec “because they were unlikely to be disturbed there by anyone whom he knew. Poor B. M., solemn and chaste!” (1999, 279, 188). The choice is made “mischievously,” and it implies that the space is a bastion of normative chastity and a “class-encoded repository of knowledge” and culture (Black 2000, 121); its forecourt is patrolled by “police” (1999, 281, 190). The Museum was an urban space for the educated classes (Black 2000, 120), and it is described as a rain-battered building like Clive’s Penge, and as very alien to Alec, the “son of the woods” (1999, 281, 190). The choice of location also stages an opposition between the living possibility of same-sex love and the attitudes exemplified by the “dead ears” of museum curators. Elsewhere in the novel, the Dean perceives “in a dead bloodless way” (1999, 63), Greece is seen as “dead” by the normalised Clive (1999, 97, 102), and suburban life is “dead” (1999, 115). For Booth, the setting “dramatizes the contrast between wholeness and love on the one hand, and mutability, fragmentation and death on the other” (2020, 225).

The visit is described with characteristic “geolocal precision” (Das 2021, 147). Initially, the building is described as a potentially positive meeting place for the lovers: it looks as if it is “miraculously illuminated by spirits of the dead,” due to “some of the lights ... turned on inside” (1999, 281, 190), a feature of the galleries that was also featured and mocked in “Cnidus” (1996, 167). In both versions, Maurice and Alec meet in “the Portico,” enter and pause in “the corridor of Roman emperors” (1999, 281–2, 190–1), which was a long room immediately to the right of the entrance hall with a “gallery of Roman busts” (British Museum 1912, 108–11, now Room 5). They keep “wandering from room to room as if in search of something” (1999, 193; similarly in 1914, 284); these rooms are imagined as classical galleries since they “peer at a goddess or a vase” (1999, 285, 193), before encountering Ducie after “twenty minutes” or “nearly twenty minutes” (1999, 284, 193) in what is clearly the Elgin Room, displaying the Parthenon marbles from Athens. From the layout of the galleries at the start of the twentieth century, they apparently reverse the route taken by Ansell as he left the Museum in *The Longest Journey*, when he moved from the Elgin Room, through the Ephesus Room, and past “the Cnidian Demeter” (1984, 182), whose location is described in “Cnidus” as “that little recess of hers between the Ephesian



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PLAN OF GROUND FLOOR.

Fig. 1 The galleries of the British Museum in the early twentieth century
(British Museum 1912, viii).

Room and the Archaic Room” (1996, 167; see British Museum 1912, 14–15; fig. 1). The “goddess” mentioned in *Maurice* could even be the Demeter, but if so, the narrator does not implicate this inspirational statue in this negative description of the institution. The “something” that the lovers seek in the galleries can be understood as both an understanding of themselves and also a sexual history, such as is evoked by Maurice’s earlier talk with Lasker Jones about “the Theban band” and the Greenwood of “that Robin Hood business,” which is described as being “more than meets the eye” (1999, 276–7, 183). However, the potential of the past remains unfulfilled in this location, just as the liveliness of a roman statue was petrified by the intervention of the Christian heteronormative curator in “The Classical Annexe” (1972, 148–50). Similarly, the review of Budge remarks that “as far as museums breed anything it is a glib familiarity with labels” (1996, 283), as opposed to any potential for reviewing established history, such as was evoked earlier in the novel by Clive’s playfully asking “Maurice, shall we re-write history?” (1999, 237, 75).

The space is oppressive, “enormous and overheated,” and the lovers leave the Museum, re-enacting Ansell’s departure, passing “the library, supposed catholic” (1999, 195), that was presented more positively in *The Longest Journey* (1984, 177). The earlier version of *Maurice* is explicit in criticising the library for “allow[ing] no books on their subject to enter its readers’ hands. Here too they were outlaws” (1999, 288). The choice of the word “catholic” may echo an article by E. S. P. Haynes in *The English Review* of 1913, which denounced the public catalogue’s suppression of books such as Edward Carpenter’s *The Intermediate Sex*: “the claims of the catholic church to monopolise sexual instruction do not justify the British Museum in suppressing knowledge” (1913, 134; see e.g. Cross 1991, 209–10; Houston 2015; Booth 2021, 227 n. 81). Such censorship was also applied to the galleries, and a similar “secretum” existed for sexually charged objects in the collection (e.g. Gaimster 2000; Parkinson 2013, 86–7), but it is unclear if Forster was aware that this.

Those Greek things

Earlier, in chapter 21, Maurice had rejected classical Greece as “well enough for those whose hearts were empty, but no substitute for life,” and it is connected with “morbidity and death” (1999, 92). In the novel as a whole, Forster rejected Hellenism as a model for modern same-sex love (e.g. Black 2000, 122–3;

Fordoński 2020, 166–7; Booth 2020), and this is embodied in the lovers’ conversation with Mr Ducie in the Elgin Room. This location is not named but is indicated by a mention of Maurice looking at a “model of the Acropolis” (1999, 285–6, 193). This model featured in contemporaneous guidebooks among “aids to the study of the Parthenon” in the Elgin Room (British Museum 1912, 20) and is visible at the south end of the Room in an archival photograph from a First World War Photograph Album in the Museum’s Central Archives (Jenkins 1992, 228 fig. 89; BM Image 01613609275). In the 1914 version, Maurice is looking specifically at the model’s “Theatre of Dionysus” (1999, 286), which is where Clive had written his letter to Maurice asserting his normalcy (1999, 239, 97; Booth 2020, 225); this echo reinforced the association of the institutional display of the sculptures with normativity. The school master Ducie is one of the authority figures that Maurice must overcome (e.g. Fordoński 2020, 168, 154–5), and he is described in terms similar to the “elderly gentlemen” of the Museum in the review (1996, 283): a “gentleman,” with “strong spectacles,” who might be taken for an “old fool” (1999, 287, 193–4). He regards the Museum space as an educational tool for social normativity, as a place to inculcate ideas for the “less fortunate,” a “stimulating place – it raised questions even in the minds of boys” (1999, 287, 194). This is a standard attitude of the period (e.g. Black 2000, 100–10), but the earlier narrative of Maurice’s youth suggests to the reader that such “questions” could be more sexually transgressive than Ducie envisages (an echo more clearly implied in the 1914 version: 1999, 287). Similar questionings are envisaged in “The Classical Annexe,” where a pious councilor says of a Roman statue’s nakedness “you never know where young people may not pick up dirty thoughts” (1972, 149; Ingleheart 2015, 156 n. 49).

The narrator contrasts “the heroes” of the Museum’s sculptures with the living Alec (1999, 287, 194), and in 1914 these figures were specified as being “of the Parthenon frieze” (1999, 287). There, Alec was also said to be in the “next room” to Ducie (1999, 287), probably referring to the architecturally distinct northern division of the Elgin Room which also contained parts of the frieze, as is seen in archival photographs.¹ Alec is a man who sneezes as a reaction to being inside the Museum (1999, 191; Booth 2020, 226–7), and who is stated after the muse-

1 These include a 1923 photograph by Donald Macbeth (British Museum P&D 1960,0222.14) and one in the First World War Photograph Album, in the Museum’s Central Archive (Image 01613609272). This northern division was an extension to the main Elgin Room; for the history of the Elgin displays see Jenkins 1992, 90–101, 221–5.

um scene to behave “not as a hero, but as a comrade” (1999, 290, 196), “not a hero or a god but a man embedded in society like himself” (1999, 300, 204). These contrasts echo Maurice’s childhood imagining of an ideal friend as perhaps “a Greek god,” but most probably as “just a man” (1999, 228, 12). Unlike Alec, the Greek figures are “perfect but bloodless” (1999, 287, 194), and the lifeless classical world, so central to English education and imperial rule, provides a backdrop for Maurice’s crucial meeting with his living lover. The Museum allows a climactic criticism of “institutionalised culture” (Black 2000, 121), and a rejection of idealised perfection in favour of the “bewilderment” of humanity (1999, 287, 194), which draws on Forster’s own “hopeless” reaction to “those Greek things in the B.M.” as expressed in his notebook journal in 1904 (13 March: Forster 2011, I, 121; quoted in Furbank 1978, I, 110). In the 1914 version, Maurice dismisses the museum artefacts as “these old carvings” surrounded by “all \ these custodians/ and self-righteous beasts <who don’t understand us>,” and he urges Alec to “come away” out of the building (1999, 288), having realised that he loves him (1999, 286). The negative use of these antiquities as normative is especially striking given the role that classical sculptures in museums had for the formation of LGBTQ identities at the period (e.g. Cook 2003, 33–34, 86), but the comparisons nevertheless draw on the homoerotic beauty of the sculptures, associating Alec with this in the reader’s mind, even while implying that he surpasses them in his living complexity.

The lovers leave the building, “seeking darkness and rain” (1999, 195 [only in 1932]), and in the 1914 version they reach an understanding significantly *outside* the Museum in a “deserted square” (1999, 289; Booth 2020, 228). In the later version, this has a “railing which encircled some trees” (1999, 195), suggesting that it is a substitute for the mythical alternative world of the Greenwood; it is probably the nearby Bedford Square, which still has a green oval space enclosed by railings.

Eastern antiquities

In the revisions of 1932, Forster moved the realisation that Maurice loves Alec earlier and placed it inside the building. The classical galleries are still portrayed in a negative manner: as Maurice declares his realisation of love, “the rows of old statues tottered” (1999, 195), suggesting that even the Parthenon’s pediment sculptures have become – like the “custodians,” Budge and Ducie – upholders

of the heteronormative hegemony (compare Hoberman 2011, 120, who reads differently). However, Forster added a scene of affectionate dialogue in front of two “winged Assyrian bull”s, which is the characters’ only significant interaction with museum objects (1999, 192–3). This replaced a dialogue in the earlier version which took place in the classical galleries: the phrase “we’ve looked about long enough at these headless horsemen” (1999, 284) locates it beside the Parthenon frieze, some of whose riders have damaged heads. Forster’s reading of Budge’s 1920 memoirs after writing the first draft of the novel may have heightened his awareness of these bulls, since Budge curated the Assyrian antiquities and mentioned these sculptures in his memoirs (1920, 75).

In the 1932 version, the lovers move from the “corridor” to view the bulls. There are several pairs of human-headed winged animals (*lamassu*) in the Museum’s collection, but Forster’s are the largest pair, which are bulls from Khorsabad (BM Middle East 1850,1228.3–4). These stood, as noted by Budge’s successor H. R. Hall, “in the Assyrian Transept, [and] herald to the visitor the treasures of Assyrian and Egyptian antiquity he is about to see” (1928, 9; see Jenkins 1992, 165–6, fig. 65–6). The Assyrian Transept was a gallery (Room 6) at the west end of the “corridor.” The bulls evoke “naïf wonder” in Alec because they are “big,” and have five legs (1999, 192–3). Their appeal to the working-class Alec is socially precise: as noted by Stephanie Moser (2006) and Shawn Malley (2012), Budge’s Department contained antiquities that were considered accessible to people who were not classically educated (unlike, for example, Ansell who gravitates to the classical galleries). The animals suggest physicality and rustic masculinity, reinforcing Alec’s claims to virility, and they impress in terms of *human* workmanship and skill, rather than idealised heroism. The statues’ fifth legs are frequently noted in contemporaneous guidebooks (e.g. British Museum 1886, 10; Hall 1928, 12), suggesting that the fifth limb is not necessarily a euphemistically sign of “phallic lust,” as assumed by modern critics (Bristow 2020, 46; also Black 2000, 123). More significantly, this feature is shared by both statues, making the “pair” of bulls a parallel to Maurice and Alec as a pair of distinctive outcasts: the lovers are described as “standing each by his monster” (1999, 193). One can compare Forster’s use of lameness as a coded reference to sexuality in *The Longest Journey* (e.g. Heine in Forster 1984, xviii–xxvi). These two artefacts thus provide the lovers with a sense of recognition. As Hartree notes, “the bulls confirm Maurice’s most radical insight – that there are no norms in nature only diversity and uniqueness” (1996, 135). The bulls are markedly un-Hellenic, and

this contrast is expressed in contemporary guidebooks where they “guard the broad way leading from the clarity of Greece and Rome to the mystery of the Orient” (Hall 1928, 12). Forster’s awareness of this distinction is clear in *Abinger Harvest*, where the review of Budge is placed in the section devoted to “the east” as opposed to “the past,” unlike “Cnidus” or “Malconia Shops” (1996, vi–vii). In 1932, the Museum is not an exclusively classical space.

Love in the Museum

Forster’s final choice of the interior of the national Museum as a backdrop for the climactic realisation and expression of love may be due to simple contrast. Perhaps museum culture in all its hypocrisy and vulgarity evokes through its very absence an awareness of what they are seeking, just as Ducie as an embodiment of normativity is said to supply “a shock from without” that is necessary for the realisation of love (1999, 193; 1932 only: see 285). A similarly negative moment of evocation occurs in “Cnidus,” where the essayist said “the imagination became creative, taking wings because there was nothing to bid it rise, flying impertinently against all archaeology and sense, uttering bird-like cries of ‘Greek! Greek!’ as it flew, declaring that it heard voices because all was so silent and saw faces because it was too dark to see” (1996, 166–7). The Museum “represents the regulated life” (Black 2000, 122) that has no space for such things. As the review of Budge states, modern nationalism has deprived people of a genuine link with the past: “our age is industrial, its interest in the past is mainly faked.” Any engagement with antiquity has been reduced to “a glib familiarity with labels” (1996, 283), a term that can evoke categorisations of class and sexuality. Forster’s question in the review, “what is the use of old objects?” recalls the attitudes of Ducie in the 1914 version who spoke “of the *uses* of the British Museum” in educating visitors (1999, 287), but his own ironic question challenges the reader to resist the normative and nationalistic attitudes of curators such as Budge. The potential of the ancient past to inspire is felt by Maurice, and he still associates “the Theban band” with the Greenwood (1999, 276, 183) even after this rejection of Hellenism, and an engagement with objects has a positive role in the lovers’ movement towards mutual understanding.

For Forster himself, museum objects were not merely “relics” (1999, 287, 194) but could themselves inspire humanistic re-imaginings of their dead owner’s lives, as with Ani and Malconia. Elsewhere, a museum setting could itself have

a positive role for him: in his notebook journal entry for 13 March 1904, he wrote of a “neo-Attic” statue in “the B.M.”:

that wonderful boy with the broken arm ... simply radiates light:
I never saw anything like it. Right across the Assyrian transept
he throbs like something under the sea. He couldn't have done
it in Greece. (2011, I, 121)²

Like the Cnidian Demeter, the museum setting does not negate the appeal of this statue, and here the contrast of the setting almost enhances the statue. The ability of museum antiquities to retain their life despite their setting is also imagined in “The Classical Annex,” where a roman statue engages in same-sex sexual activity despite its museum location and has a deeply transformative effect on one gallery visitor (1972, 150).

In the 1932 version of *Maurice*, classical antiquities are associated with English normativity, while Maurice and Alec benefit from the oriental antiquities. The lovers' visit is narrated with less explicit mention of Greek antiquities than in 1914, as noted above: in the later version, for example, the “heroes” are only implicitly Greek (1999, 194–287). This may be simply part of a less specifically detailed presentation of the museum spaces, including the custodians and the library (see above), but it also resonates with Forster's claim in a letter of 6 March 1915 that with *Maurice* he had “created something absolutely new, even to the Greeks” (1985, 222). The Assyrian antiquities, in contrast, inspire an affectionate moment of self-recognition, and this suggests that “old objects” from “the East” have a potential to speak to the living. This turn to the East in the novel may reflect Forster's own source of love, as well as his increased awareness of the Museum's curatorial involvement there. His overall ambivalence towards the Museum as a space is perhaps seen in the novel's treatment of its light: from outside, it suggests a “tomb” which with its ridiculous electric lighting is “miraculously illuminated by spirits of the dead” (1999, 281, 190). While this proves false in literal terms, the image recalls Maurice's grandfather's belief that the spirits of the dead enter the sun where there is “the light within”: “no electric light can

2 The description suggests that the image is not a relief on a column from Ephesus (British Museum GR 1872,0803.9) as proposed by Herz (1979, 18), but a statue of Apollo from Cyrene (British Museum GR 1861,0725.1). For the location of this statue close to the Assyrian Transept see British Museum 1912, 107; Jenkins 1992, 130, fig. 48.

compare with it” (1999, 242, 118). Although Forster is critical of the institution, the museum scene in the 1932 novel remains a moment of self-realisation for the lovers, and it is often regarded as the novel’s “climax” (Black 2000, 119). Forster’s attitude to the national collection is critical but is also nuanced, and can thus be considered as a characteristically “queer way of being that resist all verities and that is aware of its own implication in the very values that it seeks to explode” (Martin and Piggford 1997, 6). The scene has been described as in effect “queering the museum” (Hoberman 2011, 119–23).

The scene’s emotional power has had consequences for modern museology since the publication of *Maurice* in 1971. In 1986, Merchant Ivory Productions filmed the novel on location in the Museum. The shooting script included the dialogue about “old things belonging to the nation,” in the British Museum scene, specifying the location for this as “Day. Interior. British Museum” (Hesketh-Harvey and Ivory [1986], 22 [scene 146]; on the screenplays see Speidel 2014: 303–5). This exchange was presumably part of a scene of Maurice and Alec walking through the Egyptian sculpture gallery (Room 4); this scene was shot but was later cut in editing due to the film’s length (Ivory, pers. comm. 12.9.2012).³ The dialogue between Maurice and Alec about the bulls was shot in front of the Khorsabad bulls, which were then no longer displayed in the Assyrian Transept but in a gallery close to the Parthenon Duveen gallery (Room 10c, built in 1938: Jenkins 1992, 226–8). Merchant Ivory did not film the conversation with Ducie in the Parthenon displays: they had already used the Duveen gallery for another same-sex couple in *The Bostonians* of 1984 (Ivory, pers. comm. 3.3.2013). Instead, the conversation was staged in a gallery of Assyrian reliefs from the palace of Sennacherib at Nineveh, that is immediately adjacent to the Assyrian bulls (Room 10b). In the film, the living lovers stand against a backdrop of these ancient reliefs, recalling the novel’s contrast between Alec and the heroic sculptures. The film’s use of such historical settings has been described as subversively evoking “the presence of another heritage” (Landy 2007, 248), just as the novel’s presentation of the Museum evoked an alternative view of culture. Subsequently the Museum’s bulls have themselves become a site for fan culture thanks to the film (Monk 2016, 229–31).

3 This scene is not included in the released ‘Deleted scenes’, but there is footage by the BBC of Merchant Ivory filming it; a clip of this was included in the documentary “A Very British Romance with Lucy Worsley” in 2015 (BBC 4, episode 3).

The scene has had further consequences. Both novel and film were integral to the development of a LGBTQ history project by the British Museum from 2007 onwards (e.g. Parkinson 2013b, 2016a–b), and this project has been part of a museological turn towards LGBTQ histories in heritage institutions (e.g. Sandell 2017). For the project, James Ivory generously provided a range of photographs, and an image of filming in the Egyptian sculpture gallery was used to illustrate the Museum’s role as a setting for stories of same-sex love (Parkinson 2013a, 123). A British Museum temporary exhibition celebrating the anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in England (11 May–15 October 2017) included a panel about “Desire in the Museum” with a photograph of the lovers beside an Assyrian bull by Jon Gardey (fig. 2). In such a way, the scene enabled



Fig. 2 Maurice (James Wilby) and Alec (Rupert Graves) in the British Museum in 1986. © Merchant Ivory Productions; photograph by Jon Gardey.

the Museum to thematise its own role in LGBTQ history, and a trail through the galleries in effect addressed Forster’s description of Maurice and Alec searching “for something” (British Museum 2017, n.d.); this trail is now a permanent feature at the Museum (Frost 2018a–b; Google Arts and Culture n.d.). In the fol-

lowing years, a subsequent touring partnership exhibition “Desire, Love, Identity: Exploring LGBTQ Histories” showcased a copy of the film’s shooting script at several venues, including the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford (25 September–2 December 2018), where there was a program of events with James Ivory (Ashmolean 2018; Ivory 2018). At a later venue in Bolton (14 March–26 May 2019), the script was displayed together with local material relating to the Bolton Whitman Fellowship and Edward Carpenter’s life at nearby Millthorpe, Derbyshire (for which see e.g. Gardner in Forster 1999, x–xii).

In such a way, Forster’s characteristically nuanced mode of engagement with the “old objects” has enabled the modern Museum to change its presentation of what he termed the “great unrecorded history” of happy same-sex desire (letter of 25 August 1917: Forster 1985, 269). This history of “the happiness of 1000s of others whose names I shall never hear” was something that his time spent with el-Adl had allowed him to glimpse in Egypt, and the positive presence of oriental antiquities in the later draft of *Maurice* may reflect this time. His simultaneously critical and empathetic description of the visit to the British Museum by Maurice and Alec has proved an effective agent in allowing these histories to be displayed as integral parts of world heritage. His fiction, “insisting that the inner life can pay” (Auden 1991, 195), continues to have a transformative effect on institutionalised public culture as well as on individual readers.

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