

Krzysztof Fordoński, University of Warsaw, Poland
ORCID: 0000-0002-3012-5221

David Greven, 2023. *Maurice*. (Montreal & Kingston, London, Chicago: McGill-Queen's University Press)

Maurice by David Greven was published in the new series Queer Film Classics of McGill-Queen's University Press. The series, which at the moment includes twelve volumes, according to its editors Matthew Hays and Thomas Waugh "emphasizes good writing, rigorous but accessible scholarship, and personal, reflective thinking about the significance of each film - writing that is true to the film, original, and enlightening and enjoyable for film buffs, scholars, and students alike." The description of the series is important as the book is expressly directed to film scholars, literary scholars may find themselves a bit out of depth here although it is a challenge worth accepting.

Greven starts with a very personal introduction, "*Maurice, C'est Moi*", recalling the first time he saw *Maurice* in a New York movie theatre as a young student. The introduction sets the tone of the whole volume, as Greven confesses "almost thirty-five years later, I remain enthralled by *Maurice*." The book sets out to give justice to the movie, defend it against ungenerous reactions of movie critics as well as queer theorists, although it ultimately achieves much more than this.

The book opens with acknowledgements and a concise synopsis. Sufficient as the latter is, I would strongly suggest that any prospective reader should watch (or perhaps rewatch) the movie before reading the book. Greven's meticulous analysis is convincing and coherent, and yet perhaps it is better to judge the movie on one's own before. The Blu-ray 2017 30th Anniversary edition is particularly recommended as Greven refers to various bonus features which are available only there.

The first chapter is dedicated to the creators of the movie - the director James Ivory and the producer Ismail Merchant. It follows their respective and then joint careers from their individual debuts, through their early cooperation (*The Householder*, 1963) which included for the first time their third lifetime artistic partner, Ruth Praver Jhabwala, to the end of their collaboration brought about by the deaths of Jhabwala and Merchant. Greven pays special attention to their role in the development of the so called heritage cinema, particularly

to the queer undertones it introduced.

The presence of these undertones in British and American cinema of the 1980s is discussed against the broader context of the situation of gay people on both sides of the Atlantic during the governments of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. Greven shows how subversive gay film-makers opposed their policies through their work. The chapter draws a picture of the period, discussing briefly the most important queer-themed movies which preceded *Maurice* such as *Another Country* (1984) or *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), which made it possible for such an openly gay movie to be produced.

The second chapter of the book concentrates on the literary source of the movie: E. M. Forster's novel *Maurice* (1971). Greven starts with the history of the creation of the novel, and then moves on to a detailed presentation of its plot. Its successful transition onto the big screen is the subject of the third chapter. Greven recalls the circuitous way and several rather unsuccessful attempts at handling the literary material, starting with the replacement of Jhabvala with a much younger and far less experienced screenwriter Kit Hesketh-Harvey. Greven moves on to praise Merchant and Ivory's "genius for casting". Even though some of the original candidates (such as Julian Sands, the star of their *A Room with a View*) ultimately bowed out of the project, the movie features an impressive cast consisting both of young actors at the beginning of their careers (this applies to Hugh Grant and Rupert Graves, for both of whom it was the second movie in their respective careers) as well as of experienced thespians such as Ben Kingsley and Denholm Elliott.

The second part of the chapter, the longest section of the book, offers an extensive and detailed personal analysis of the movie. Greven meticulously dissects every scene of the film, pointing out various aspects which might be missed by a distracted or unprepared viewer such as the use of music as a commentary to the depicted events, or the deliberately leisurely pace at which the events are presented. The numerous illustrations help keep track of the analysis, although, as I have already mentioned, access to the movie is highly recommended; particularly to the edition including deleted scenes which are discussed in the final part of the chapter. Even if some of the proposed readings might not be fully convincing, there is no doubt that Greven's analysis allows the viewer to experience the movie in a more complete way.

Greven closes his book with a brief account of the reception of the movie. He offers only a general presentation of the contemporaneous reactions

including a review written by Alan Hollinghurst, who, rather ironically, complained that two scenes from the original novel were missing. As it turned out thirty years later, they were both shot but did not make it to the final cut. The reactions apparently can be summed up in the words of James Ivory: “when *Maurice* came out there wasn’t a single English critic who praised it wholeheartedly”. Greven concentrates instead on two later essays, one by D. A. Miller and the other by the novelist David Leavitt, defending the movie quite successfully from their criticism.

If the book can be described with a single word, in this case the word would be “appreciation”. Greven was, as he confesses in the preface, enthralled by *Maurice* and it is quite apparent from his book that the charm has never worn off. It was rather further confirmed by the analyses. Consequently, the study is very personal and, perhaps, not critical enough, but exactly as the editors of the series promised “original, and enlightening and enjoyable”. It is quite certain to attract the attention of film scholars as well as film lovers, it should not be missed by literary scholars and fans of E. M. Forster’s novel either.