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Paper 2 – Final

Crossing Love's Boundaries: *What Was She Thinking?: Notes on a Scandal: A Novel* by Zoë

Heller and *Maurice* by E. M. Forster

Every generation had its own boundaries when thinking of love, including our own now.

*What Was She Thinking?: Notes on a Scandal: A Novel* by Zoë Heller and *Maurice* by E. M.

Forster both point out some of the obvious and unobvious boundaries of their respective decades,

usually by showing us the consequences one faced when those boundaries were crossed.

One of the most obvious boundary crossed in *What Was She Thinking?: Notes on a Scandal: A Novel* was that of statutory rape: “Sheba had been found out having an affair with Steven Connolly, people were saying. There had been a fistfight between her and the boy’s mother. It was possible—even probable—that she had seduced other boys. The police had been called in” (Heller 239). Here Barbara is explaining about the immediate gossip she hears after Connolly’s mother comes to yell at Sheba because she’s found out about the affair. It is clear here that whether Barbara or Sheba think so or not, the rest of the school finds it very inappropriate. Another obvious boundary crossed in *What Was She Thinking?: Notes on a*

*Scandal: A Novel* is the professional sexual boundary. It is an understood rule that it is inappropriate to have sexual relations with someone above us in the professional world, and age aside that is what Sheba is to Connolly. Even if he had been over eighteen and she a college professor at his university, it would still have been wrong and inappropriate because she is a teacher, and he a student.

On the less obvious side, *What Was She Thinking?: Notes on a Scandal: A Novel* also explores the boundaries of love between a human and an animal. When Barbara is told that her cat will die, instead of putting Portia down immediately she decides to hold on to her another night doped up on morphine: “It wouldn’t be fair to keep her hanging on. I know that. I’m just wondering ... the thing is, I don’t want to just, you know ... put her down now. Would it be all right if I took her home for the night? To say good-bye? You could give her something to soothe her and I’d bring her back in tomorrow. Would that be okay” (205-206)? While it’s understandable to not want to put down your pet so easily, choosing to let Portia suffer for one more day was more for Barbara’s own sake, rather than thinking about the cat. Another unobvious boundary crossed in *What Was She Thinking?: Notes on a Scandal: A Novel* is Barbara’s creepy obsession with Sheba: “Sheba and I have spent countless hours together over the last eighteen months, exchanging confidences of every kind. Certainly, there is no other friend or relative of Sheba’s who has been so intimately involved in the day-to-day business of

her affair with Connolly” (8). Here Barbara first shows her sense of importance in Sheba’s life, even though as we find out throughout the novel Sheba doesn’t find her anywhere near as important as Barbara wishes she was. She thoroughly believes that Sheba would be nowhere without Barbara, and that she needs her.

One of the most obvious boundaries crossed in *Maurice* by E. M. Forster is the illegal homosexual love that goes on in the novel. In our current society, it is much more acceptable to be gay, but during this time it was still illegal for a man to show even the slightest interest in a man, making this a huge boundary to be crossed. A good example of this is when Maurice goes to Dr. Barry to try to get rid of his lust: “‘So you’ve never guessed,’ he said, with a touch of scorn in his terror. ‘I’m an unspeakable of the Oscar Wilde sort.’ ... At last the judgement came. He could scarcely believe his ears. It was ‘Rubbish, rubbish’” (Forster 158-159)! Here Dr. Barry judges him for his lust, and makes it very clear that it is unacceptable. He then goes on to claim it is even worse: “‘...never let that evil hallucination, that temptation from the devil, occur to you again.’ ... ‘Who put that lie into your head? You whom I see and know to be a decent fellow! We’ll never mention it again. No—I’ll not discuss. I’ll not discuss. The worst thing I could do for you is to discuss it’” (159). His reaction to Maurice’s confession is dramatic, but accurate for the time. Also obvious in *Maurice* is the class boundary that is crossed when Maurice is with Scudder. Scudder is Clive’s under gamekeeper, putting him far below

Maurice on the class scale, as seen when Maurice tells Clive about their relationship: “Clive had only grasped the minimum. He supposed ‘Scudder’ was a *façon de parler*, as one might say ‘Ganymede,’ for intimacy with any social inferior was unthinkable to him” (242). However, even after Maurice resists him, they come together happily in the end, ignoring the class difference.

An unobvious boundary crossed in *Maurice* is the pretend happiness Clive has with his wife. He marries to please his family and take his place in society, but he doesn't love his wife as a man should. What he does after he finds out that Maurice loves Scudder makes the reader question his relationship and feelings for his wife: “He waited for a little in the alley, then returned to his house, to correct his proofs and to devise some method of concealing the truth from Anne” (246). The fact that he had to “conceal the truth” from his wife suggests that he is concealing more than just Maurice's truth, but rather his own truth as well. Another unobvious boundary crossed in *Maurice* was a boundary of familial love. He made his sister believe that Clive had said horrible things about her, out of anger that he had shown interest in her: “The name on her lips opened Hell. He suffered hideously and before he could stop himself had spoken words that neither ever forgot. He accused his sister of corrupting his friend. He let her suppose that Clive had complained of her conduct and gone back to town to that account” (134). He let his jealousy of Clive's interest in her allow him to hurt his sister emotionally. However he

then tried to resolve the wall he built between them: ““Ada, I behaved so badly to you, dear, after Clive’s visit. I want to say so now and ask you to forgive me. It’s given a lot of pain since. I’m very sorry’” (142). Here he sincerely apologizes for hurting his sister and tries to win her love back.

The boundaries trampled in these two books are (or were) enormous at the times they were written, and some even remain boundaries today. *What Was She Thinking?: Notes on a Scandal: A Novel* by Zoë Heller and *Maurice* by E. M. Forster both point out some of the obvious and unobvious boundaries of their respective decades, and they both show the consequences of those boundaries.