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"No, Not There": The Literary Precarity and Profundity of Queer Spatiality

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Digital Object Identifier: https://doi.org/10.13023/etd.2023.123

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Recommended Citation

Aftel, Samuel James, ""No, Not There": The Literary Precarity and Profundity of Queer Spatiality" (2023). *Theses and Dissertations--English*. 151.
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“NO, NOT THERE”: THE LITERARY PRECARITY AND PROFUNDITY OF QUEER SPATIALITY

THESIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the
College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By

Samuel James Aftel

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Michael Trask, Professor of English

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2023

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

“NO, NOT THERE”: THE LITERARY PRECARITY AND PROFUNDITY OF QUEER SPATIALITY

Love, broadly defined, needs space to grow. For love to materialize and sustain itself (in both literature and society), it must find hospitable geosocial, institutional, and psychic terrain. This is especially true for queer intimacies beyond heteronormative relationality, for the prospect of love’s radical—or reactionary—possibilities is contingent upon the more general sociality in which it develops. Yet love is often a worldmaking and, sometimes, historic mechanism unto itself. Love and its concomitant sexualities must therefore be understood within and without normative structures of hegemony; the workings of (neo)colonialism and capitalism—as well as patriarchy, white supremacy, and heterosexism—dictate to love, and love, at its fiercest, dictates back, or, less ideally, carves out a space for itself within hegemonic social delineations.

Accordingly, this thesis examines homoerotic love’s dizzying relation to colonial, capitalist, and heteronormative worlds through the queer relationships at the heart of E. M. Forster’s *A Passage to India* (1924) and James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room* (1956). I propose that the novels’ landscapes of queer love—*A Passage to India*’s Marabar Caves and *Giovanni’s Room*’s eponymous apartment—offer a historicizing spatiality, articulating queerness’s social exclusion *and* restive generativity. Such spatiality narrativizes not-yet-reachable geographies beyond the colonial, capitalist, and heteronormative regimes of twentieth-century literature and culture. In doing so, the intimate spaces at the heart of *A Passage to India* and *Giovanni’s Room* give us reason to yearn and, occasionally, reason to hope.

KEYWORDS: Queerness, Sexuality, Spatiality, Colonialism, Heteronormativity, Love

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3/24/2023

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Acknowledgements

To Dr. Michael Trask, thank you for your invaluable insights about queer theory and the complexities of writing about gender, sexuality, and power in twentieth-century literature. Your constructive and generative feedback allowed this thesis to take on more nuanced and historically grounded arguments. Your insights have vastly expanded my understanding of the sociohistorical imperatives of gender and sexuality in modern literature.

To Dr. Peter Kalliney, I am so fortunate to have taken your course on anticolonial writings and to have received your unwavering guidance and support throughout my Ph.D.-application process. Your pedagogy and mentorship inspired the postcolonial lens I utilize in this thesis and thoroughly informed my understanding of queer theory's vital intersections with postcolonial worldmaking. Your teaching, advising, and scholarship have rendered visible the multidimensional potentiality of literary-historical approaches to deconstructing coloniality and appreciating anticolonial resistance.

To Dr. Regina Hamilton, your course on Black speculative fiction was the driving force behind my decision to write about James Baldwin and *Giovanni's Room*; your radically generous and incisive pedagogy and openness to various methodological and theoretical approaches are at the heart of this project. Thank you for making your classroom a space where students feel heard, cared for, and excited about the possibilities of academic inquiry. Your pedagogy invigorates my faith in the power of higher education.

To Dr. Jordan Brower, this thesis could not have been written without your relentless mentorship and kindness. Your feedback and encouragement throughout my

M.A. program, as well as my Ph.D.-application process, has truly meant the world. You have pushed me to be a more versatile and attentive student; I have learned so much from you. Thank you for taking a genuine interest in my work and for showing me the way as a young, searching graduate student.

To my fellow M.A. cohort members, Sarah Garrod and Grace Vowels, thank you for your loving and joyous friendship. I will always cherish the laughter, intellectual discussions, and Friday-night dinners! Thank you, also, to my wonderful friends in the Ph.D. cohort, especially Alexis Draut and Anika Jensen, whose friendship and mentorship made me feel welcomed, cared for, and valued in this community.

Needless to say, I owe so much to my family, including my parents, Donna and Larry Aftel, and my three brothers, Max, Charlie, and Nathan.

I would be nowhere fast without the earth-shattering and life-affirming love, generosity, and brilliance of my mom and grandmother, Aline Paul, who make me feel like the luckiest person in the world. From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

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Introduction: (Queer) Love, Where Are You?

> If sexuality is socially dysfunctional in that it brings people together only to plunge them into a self-shattering and solipsistic *jouissance* that drives them apart, it could also be thought of as our primary hygienic practice of nonviolence.
>
> —Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?" (222)

> He talked a lot about the past, and I gathered that he wanted to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy. His life had been confused and disordered since then, but if he could once return to a certain starting place and go over it all slowly, he could find out what that thing was. . . .
>
> —F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (110)

Sexuality approximates geosocial worlds, indexing the spatial contingencies of our desires, namely, the amorphous social geographies and concomitant narratives that (re)constitute desire's lifeworlds.[1] This notion of sexuality, which I will refer to as *erotic spatiality*, delineates the vitally ambiguous socioliterary and structural locations—that is, the worldmaking imperatives—of sexual intimacy. As Lauren Berlant contends, "intimacy builds worlds; it creates spaces and usurps places meant for other kinds of relation" ("Intimacy" 282). Yet we must also attend to the specific "scenes of sexuality" narratively packed into intimacy's self-induced spaces and usurped places (Berlant and

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[1] In establishing this definition, I am deeply informed by Jack Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005) and the landmark essay collection *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities* (1995), edited by David Bell and Gill Valentine.

Warner 547).[2] To think of sexuality in terms of both scenery and location ontologically concretizes the spatial dimensions of sex, as the sexualization of a space conveys not only the presence of sex per se, but the particular erotic interactions—the "types" of sex—that find refuge in such space.

I will refer to intersections of erotic scenery and socioliterary location as "scene spaces," a term I borrow from the anthropologist Charneka Lane, who defines "scene space" in relation to the geographies of Black queer women's cultural expression.[3] The most normative scene space of sex is the marital bedroom, which, until recently, was the domain of the monogamous heterosexual couple. But, of course, queerer and more public-facing examples abound. We must account for—or, more specifically, provide narrative space for—the intimacies that have occurred in bathhouses and clubs, public stalls (i.e., "tearooms"[4]), backseats, rooftops, barracks, locker rooms, mile-high lavatories, urban parks, suburban woods, and, more recently, the virtual platforms of OnlyFans and the like.

These scene spaces have taken on the mystique of sexual radicalism and liberation or, for the less tolerant, perversion and debauchery. The latter attitude motivated the notorious formulation of semi-public queer male sex that Opendra Narayan, a researcher at Johns Hopkins Medical School, articulated on BBC amid the onset of the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Bersani 199). "These people," Narayan claimed, "have sex twenty to thirty times a night. . . . A man comes along and goes from anus to anus and in a single night will act as a mosquito transferring infected cells on his penis. When this is practised for a year, with a man having three thousand sexual intercourses, one can readily understand this massive epidemic that is currently upon us" (qtd. in Bersani 197). The scene space conjured by Narayan was supposed to arouse feelings of disgust (and perhaps excuse the medical-industrial complex for its heartless incompetence). But, if anything, Narayan sketched out a would-be erotic utopia for the BBC audience, a utopia rendered untenable only by the onset of AIDS. Per Narayan's description, this glorious underworld transcends normative social barriers, guaranteeing its participants twenty to thirty orgasms a night without institutional, legal, or emotional complication. The only limiting factor is the virus.

---

[2] Indeed, I take the notion of "scenes of sexuality" from Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner's landmark essay "Sex in Public," published in the winter 1998 issue of *Critical Inquiry* (pp. 547–66).

[3] See Lane's 2015 essay "All the Lesbians are White, All the Villages are Gay, but Some of Us are Brave: Intersectionality, Belonging, and Black Queer Women's Scene Space in Washington, DC," published in *Lesbian Geographies: Gender, Place and Power*, edited by Kath Browne and Eduarda Ferreira (pp. 219–42).

[4] See Laud Humphreys's (in)famous *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places* (1970). See, also, chapter five of Michael Trask's *Camp Sites: Sex, Politics, and Academic Style in Postwar America* (2013): "Deviant Historiographies" (pp. 149–80).

Yet, regardless of their radically liberated appearances, the bathhouse and other orgiastic queer spaces have long been subsumed under—if not destroyed by—the powers that be, including, most recently, by the neoliberal-capitalist regime that materialized in the last decades of the twentieth century.[5] As Samuel Delaney writes in *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (1999),

> Many gay institutions—clubs, bars of several persuasions, baths, tea-room sex, gay porn movie houses (both types), brunches, entertainment, cruising areas, truck stop sex, circuit parties, and many more—have grown up outside the knowledge of much of the straight world. But these institutions have nevertheless grown up very much within our society, not outside it. They have been restrained on every

---

[5] The shuttering of New York City's queer sex institutions is particularly representative of the neoliberal assault. See Berlant and Warner's "Sex in Public," especially pp. 551–52 and 563–64, and Samuel Delaney's *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (1999).

> side. That is how they have attained their current form. They do not propagate insanely in some extrasocial and unconstrained "outside/ beyond," apart from any concept of social responsibility—and that includes what goes on in the orgy rooms at the baths. (193–94)

In other words, institutions of queer sex must operate within, and under, the broader structural conditions of heteronormative life. And naturally, queer scene spaces have long internalized the heteropatriarchal and capitalist logics that undermine their very existence.

As Leo Bersani reminds us, "Anyone who has ever spent one night in a gay bathhouse knows that it is (or was) one of the most ruthlessly ranked, hierarchized, and competitive environments imaginable. Your looks, muscles, hair distribution, size of cock, and shape of ass determined exactly how happy you were going to be during those few hours" (Bersani 206). While Bersani's lamentation may seem archaic to a younger and supposedly more egalitarian—and online and post-bathhouse—generation, anyone who has ever been on Grindr knows that the same ruthless hierarchizing continues unabated and remains thoroughly tethered to "more general patterns of domination and exclusion" (Srinivasan, "Does Anyone").[6] This is all to say: the spaces or "platforms" that historically mediate sex, including queer sex, signify loaded *narratives*—of politics, of power, of social (im)possibility, of literary potentiality.

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[6] So much of the sex fostered through Grindr, as well as heteronormative dating apps, is politically overdetermined, laden with the racialized, gendered, and classed meanings of capitalist valuation, which are often explicitly communicated by the preferences spelled out on users' profiles. In the words of the feminist philosopher Amia Srinivasan: "There is no entitlement to sex, and everyone is entitled to want what they want, but personal preferences—NO DICKS [a slur for "preoperative" trans women], NO FEMS, NO FATS, NO BLACKS, NO ARABS, NO RICE NO SPICE, MASC-FOR-MASC—are rarely just personal" ("Does Anyone").

At the same time, such narratives and the spaces that form them often complexify neat, politically constituted binaries of normativity and queerness, monogamy and "promiscuity," and domesticity and "going out." Describing his time at Manhattan's now-shuttered Club 82, the critic Hilton Als recalls "not the specifics of the nights I spent in that place . . . but the longing I carried into it. I never entered that building on East Fourth Street without hoping that maybe, just maybe, he, the Platonic perfect he, was standing behind that black door, waiting for me" ("Love on the Run"). Als "wanted the complications of intimacy, not just the kind of touch that no one would remember. Not that anyone really asked me to participate in the goings-on at Club 82. Perhaps they could smell the dream of a white picket fence on me." Als's desperation for a scenic-spatial transference—the superimposing of Club 82's liberated eroticism onto "white picket fence" domesticity—gestures toward the universal imaginary of what we may call "love," or, for our purposes, the scene space of love: the where and how of love's happenings.

In the words of Berlant, "love is the embracing dream in which desire is reciprocated: rather than being isolating, love provides an image of an expanded self, the normative version of which is the two-as-one intimacy of the couple form. In the idealized image of their relation, desire will lead to love, which will make a world for desire's endurance" (*Desire/Love* 6–7). Indeed, for many of us romantics (no matter queer or straight), love remains a worlding mechanism, "the embracing dream" of a life made anew by the (often fantastical) scene spaces of love.[7] In theory, the prospect of coming home to someone and waking up next to them and making them coffee—the prospect of being, in some important way, permanently *two* in a world that overwhelmingly makes us feel like *one*—enacts a scene (and a sense) of irresistible wholeness, even happiness.

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[7] Here, I am also informed by Berlant's conceptions of "life-making," "life-building," and "'having a life'"—all in terms of finding relational, psychic, and socioeconomic security (*Cruel Optimism* 98, 117); Berlant sees the "having and building [of] a life" (*Cruel Optimism* 6) as a signifier of ontological and social coherence. More to the point, the achievement of "love" is, for many, vital to the finalization of life-making—to the attainment of "life" itself.

Many of us think of love in the same way that Marxist intellectuals once thought of academia: "as a home space writ large, a hallowed hall safe from the rigors of capital" (Berlant, "'68 or something" 129). The enduring fantasy, if not the occasional reality, of accessing a scene space of love "safe from the rigors of capital" bespeaks the distinct alienations of late capitalism, where "to live means to work," where "the difference between work and nonwork, between life and work" is increasingly obsolete (Beverinotti 264).[8]

It is no coincidence that the rise of marital/coupled love as a hegemonic ideal, in the nineteenth century, correlated with increasingly merciless patterns of industrialization and colonial extraction, which subsumed nearly all spaces of relationality, most notably "the home," into the sphere of (re)production.[9] The appropriation of love for the legitimation of social reproduction has, over the last two centuries, served to pacify workers and (post)colonial subjects by softening global capitalism's edges, by giving the spatial dominion of capital and empire a faux emotional coherence. The field/factory/office worker does it all for his family; the “homemaker” performs “a labor of love” in a home that, in itself, doubles as a field/factory/office. And lest we forget love’s psychological exploitation by a postwar, nihilistic consumerist culture, the other side of the labor-extraction process. In the bracing words of Don Draper (Jon Hamm), the 1960s advertising-executive protagonist of AMC’s *Mad Men*, “love was invented by guys like me to sell nylons. . . . You’re born alone, you die alone, and this world just drops a bunch of rules on top of you to make you forget those facts. But I never forget. I’m living like there’s no tomorrow, because there isn’t one” (“Smoke Gets in Your Eyes”).

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[8] I use the term "late capitalism" intentionally and advisedly. By using "late capitalism," I refer to the distinctness of twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century capitalism, especially post-1945 capitalist conditions: the climatic postwar boom in the West and decolonization process in the Global South all the way through to the stagnation, malaise, inequality, and sporadic populist discontent—as well as the financialized and globalized orientation—of the neoliberal era. For a compelling (and somewhat prophetic) political-economic overview of the concept, see Herbert Marcuse's essay "Protosocialism and Late Capitalism" (1980). Likewise, for an authoritative examination of late capital's psychocultural hegemony, see Fredric Jameson's classic *New Left Review* essay, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" (1984).

[9] See, especially, Stephanie Coontz's *Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage* (2005).

What complicates Don’s anti-futural cynicism, however, is not only the sustained emotional reality of love (which Don himself succumbs to several times throughout the series), but also an enduring paradox of love under capitalism: the desire for love in a world principally organized by loneliness—i.e., the singularization of the human as producer/consumer or, under neoliberalism, as “entrepreneur”—is rational, even as capitalism artificially exploits love to disarticulate this very systematized loneliness. If ideal love offers a lifeworld, a scene space, isolated from capital’s degradations, then its enduring desirability makes sense, or at least no less sense than the decision to go to work every day without rebelling.

Returning to *Mad Men*, an expression of longing by Don’s wife, Betty (January Jones), in another scene aptly captures the paradoxical reality of love under conditions of heteropatriarchal, capitalist domination, inverting Don’s heavy-handed cynicism in the process. As Betty explains to Don in bed right before sex, “It’s all I think about, every day: your car coming down the driveway. I put the kids to bed early. I make a grocery list; I cook butterscotch pudding. I never let my hands idle. Brushing my hair, drinking my milk. And it's all in a kind of fog because I can't stop thinking about this. I want you so badly" ("Babylon"). Betty's longings are spatially delimited but nonetheless nuanced. She recognizes herself as a subordinated midcentury subject (a suburban "housewife" who cooks, shops, and cares for her children and husband), but she imagines that she is *working toward something*, such as the affections of Don at the end of a long day. She yearns for the demoralizing domestic workplace to become, in the marital bedroom at night, a healing erotic sanctuary.

Love, thus, functions for many as an aspirational portal through which systems of alienation give way to something approaching meaningfulness. Love holds out the promise that, by building a microworld of relationality with another person, life may "add up to something" beyond the drudgeries of the everyday (Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* 201). The imaginary of mutual, sustainable, egalitarian love is the scene space where loneliness ends. And even if love almost always underdelivers, it offers erotic and emotional glimmers of what life should feel like all the time. Put differently, on the rare occasion of its genuine materialization, love may invert the scenes of loneliness that are now so familiar to late-capitalist, (post)modern consciousness, providing a home for the otherwise socially displaced.

Of course, loneliness is a transhistorical experience, but its modern form has a distinct, and distinctly brutal, socio-spatial character. As Hannah Arendt writes in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), "Loneliness . . . is closely connected with uprootedness and superfluousness which have been the curse of modern masses since the beginning of the industrial revolution. . . . To be uprooted means to have no place in the world, recognized and guaranteed by others; to be superfluous means not to belong to the world at all" (475). Hence, Arendt continues, "loneliness, once a borderline experience usually suffered in certain marginal social conditions like old age, has become an everyday experience of the evergrowing masses of [the twentieth] century" (478). This trend has continued, if not intensified, in the twenty-first century.[10]

To be sure, the notion of love conquering the dysconnectivity of modern life easily remotivates the very reproductive energies needed to sustain the status quo. Betty Draper, for example, performs soul-deadening labor all day long for the vague promise of her husband's affection—she does it all for love. In turn, she is coerced into reconstituting the very modes of heteropatriarchal and capitalist domination that induce her dissatisfaction and, furthermore, her need for love. But the need should be taken seriously, for the prospect of love remains an important psychopolitical counterbalance to the (post)industrial, depersonalized logics that have increasingly subsumed social life over the last two centuries.[11]

Given its paradoxical social function—its reactionary and radical duality—love, I propose, operates on two discursive and complementary levels in modern culture: love as obsolete, as reconstitutive of older forms of reproduction and relational formation; and, accordingly, love as a haunting specter, evicted from the social world by the atomizing imperatives of twentieth-century capitalism, but still lingering in the contemporary subconscious. On account of the first, I am informed by Herbert Marcuse's concept of *repressive desublimation*, the systemic channeling of primal erotic and emotional energies into advanced-capitalist productivity.[12] "The celebration of the autonomous personality, of humanism, of tragic and romantic love," Marcuse writes in *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), "appears to be the ideal of a backward stage of the development [of advanced-capitalist society]" (56). Love, in this way, as well as other forms of natural, humanistic, transhistorical "higher culture" (Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* 56), is at odds with the hyper-organized and hyper-depersonalized workings of industrialized society over the last century.

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[10] See Jill Lepore, "The History of Loneliness," *The New Yorker*, 30 Mar. 2020; and Anton Jäger, "From Bowling Alone to Posting Alone," *Jacobin*, 5 Dec. 2022.

[11] For a provocative exploration of the psychopolitics of love and sex—vis-à-vis Betty Draper's characterology and, more broadly, trans women's complex relation to heterosexual desire—see Jamie Hood, "Fucking Like a Housewife," *The New Inquiry*, 17 Feb. 2020.

The supposed decline of love as a social organizing principle also relates to Marcuse's broader thesis of erotically alienated labor performativity, or the *performance principle*. "Under the rule of the performance principle," Marcuse argues in *Eros and Civilization* (1955), "body and mind are made into instruments of alienated labor; they can function as such instruments only if they renounce the freedom of the libidinal subject-object which the human organism primarily is and desires" (46). According to Marcuse, advanced capitalism is predicated on the collapsing of carnality—of the most elemental human impulses—into the hegemony of labor. The Lover-Laborer is subtracted into the singularity of the Laborer per se.

And yet, the imaginary of love still inundates our collective (sub)conscious. We continue to desire an increasingly impossible mode of relationality, a mode of relationality drained of transformational potential long ago, and now facing a renunciatory epilogue of sorts. In this vein (the second level of my conceptualization of love's social function), Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx* (1993) and the concomitant theory of *hauntology* are instructive. Derrida claims that a “specter” of Marxism subtly permeates, or haunts, life under unipolar Western capitalism. In the same way, I think a “specter” of an idealized sociality of erotic love, which never truly *was* but was always temporally proximate, stalks the late-capitalist, late-modern landscape. According to Derrida, “the specter is a paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit. . . . For it is flesh and phenomenality that give to the spirit its spectral apparition, but which disappear right away in the apparition, in the very coming of the *revenant* or the return of the specter” (6). Thus, he continues, “*It is* something that one does not know, precisely, and one does not know if precisely it *is*, if it exists. . . . One does not know if it is living or if it is dead” (6). Love under our current sociohistorical conditions embodies the same spectrality.

---

[12] Or, as Matías Beverinotti puts it (in terms of Marcuse's *performance-principle* theory), "Industrial societies redirect energies from sexual activities to work, which makes the metamorphosis of work the process of civilization" (278).

Indeed, the prospect of love is everywhere and nowhere all at once, for “[o]ne does not know if it is living or if it is dead,” or if one should anticipate its “becoming-body,” namely, its “return” to embodiment amid a world predicated on the disembodying, depersonalizing imperatives of globalized capital (Derrida 6). Put simply, we hunger to relocate the type of simplified sociality that the prospect of love appears to promise and orient—and appears to have delivered in a not-so-distant past. We therefore see the enduring aesthetic hegemony and even the queering of the White Picket Fence and the Happily-Ever-After.[13] Moreover, we continue to “chase” or “search” for love because we are haunted by its specter, by what love could *do* but never actually *does* (and never actually did). Perhaps we need love more than ever precisely because its physical unattainability and structural overdetermination have never been more obvious.

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[13] See Greta LaFleur, “Heterosexuality Without Women,” 20 May 2019, *BLARB: Blog of the Los Angeles Review of Books*.

I am curious about how this need asserts itself in a world lacking the geosocial and socio-narrative spaces for love's materialization—but retaining, if not amplifying, the energies that drive us toward love and the people and places signifying the possibility of love. To understand love's increasing spatial and psychosocial precarity over the last century, I will focus on two landmark literary depictions of (queer) love and longing from E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924) and James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* (1956). While far from dispositive, these examples offer a spatial delineation of love's functionality and, more specifically, its potentially non-normative generativity in twentieth-century literature. Forster and Baldwin's texts also articulate new ways to conceptualize the relational culture we currently live under.

In chapter one, I examine queer spatiality and relationality in *A Passage to India*, contemplating the latent homoerotic love between its protagonists, Cyril Fielding and Aziz, under British colonial rule. I center the novel's mythic Marabar Caves, a region adjacent to the novel's main setting, as the one space that could accommodate Fielding and Aziz's consummation. While Fielding and Aziz's relationship is contingent upon the spatial constrictions of colonial life, the Marabar Caves offer an expansive deviation from colonial geography and society. The caves' (in)accessibility raises broader questions of love, sex, space, queerness, and imperialism in the twentieth century's interwar colonial period.

In chapter two, I address the postwar erotic spatiality of 1950s Paris in *Giovanni's Room*. Despite the marked political-economic differences between 1920s colonial India and 1950s Paris (a peripheralized colonial "outpost" versus a "global" metropolis), *Giovanni's Room* maps a constrictive spatiality of its own vis-à-vis its eponymous apartment, where two male expatriates, Giovanni and David, carry out a secret affair on the outskirts of the city. What happens in this apartment has no place in the wider, softly repressive world of midcentury Paris. While the Marabar Caves of *A Passage to India* indicate the extensive terrain of a postcolonial world, the apartment of *Giovanni's Room* conveys a bleaker reality of sustained alienation in the postcolonial, postwar age, where small urban dwellings on the margins of late-capitalist Western cities provide the only refuge for transgressive intimacy.

Chapter 1: Queer Spaces and Colonial Dilemmas in *A Passage to India*

If you could take two strangers
Leaning left and right
At a certain place and time
Like you took these strangers
And our two strange lives
And made us new
And took us through
And woke us up
I believe that no matter what
It can make us new
Take us through it
And wake us up again
What we had won't be the same now
But you will make something new
And it'll take you through this

—Frank Ocean, "Dear April (Side A - Acoustic)"

Depending on who you ask, E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* signifies a nuanced work of anticolonialism and queer intimacy or a crass reconstitution of colonial relationality.[14] Given its decades-long intractability, the relevance of this critical impasse is unclear at best. Indeed, one might wonder if there is anything left to say about Forster's troubled text, or even Forster himself, whose life as a queer man and complexly "liberal" perspective on colonialism are well-documented.[15] Nonetheless, I contend that *A Passage to India* merits renewed critical attention, as the text's contemporary reception captures the increasingly antagonistic relationship between postcolonialism and Euro-American queer theory. In an age when the U.S. ruling class has appropriated queer identity politics to justify imperialism abroad and neoliberalism at home, the radicalism of queer theory appears tenuous.[16] At the heart of the dilemma is queer spatiality—the politics and geographies of queer sociorelational settings—and a question of ideological heterogeneity.[17] Can queerness, anticolonialism, and other radical sensibilities occupy the same terrain, socially and narratively? Or is contemporary queer identity, and the classical queer theory that shaped it, too subsumed under normative family structures, mainstream commercialism, and identitarian nationalism to serve a post- or anticolonial function?

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[14] For a representative account of the former, see pp. 157–74 of Stuart Christie's *Worlding Foster: The Passage from Pastoral* (2005). For a representative account of the latter, see pp. 132–48 of Sara Suleri's *The Rhetoric of English India* (1992).

Amid these uncertainties, we would do right by reassessing *A Passage to India*, which compels an ambivalent reading of queer space and love in the colonial domain. The novel chronicles the homoerotic relationship of Cyril Fielding, a colonial schoolmaster, and Aziz, an Indian medical doctor. Fielding and Aziz meet each other in the fictional Indian city of Chandrapore, through their mutual acquaintance with Mrs. Moore and Adela Quested, two British tourists who are "desirous of seeing the real India" (26). The topic Aziz debates over dinner with several peers, at the start of chapter two, conveys the ostensible crux of the text: “whether or no[t] it is possible [for an Indian] to be friends with an Englishman” (10). At first, Aziz’s erotically charged friendship with Fielding invigorates his faith in British-Indian togetherness. Though their (ultimately unconsummated) relationship succumbs to a colonial sociality that remains inhospitable to interracial, homoerotic love, I want to suggest that their interactions, which teeter on the brink of foreplay, tease the possibility of an anticolonial—more precisely, as I will argue, a *counter-colonial*—congress.

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[15] See, for example, *Queer Forster* (1997), edited by Robert K. Martin and George Piggford, and Alberto Fernández Carbajal's *Compromise and Resistance in Postcolonial Writing: E. M. Forster's Legacy* (2014).

[16] See, for example, Michael Warner's *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (1999); Lisa Duggan's *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (2003); Jasbir Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (2007); and James Penney's *After Queer Theory: The Limits of Sexual Politics* (2013).

[17] As I indicated in the Introduction, my conception of (queer) sexuality as a spatiotemporal entity is especially indebted to Jack Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005).

Forster metaphysically delineates this possibility at the outer limits of the novel’s social world, where the mysterious “Marabar Caves” stand adjacent to greater Chandrapore. Despite their geographic proximity, the caves are ontologically displaced from Chandrapore’s deadening colonial center. They are a potent, not-so-distant alternative, teeming with an uninitiated erotic potential, oriented against the heteronormative sterility of everyday colonial life. Aziz and Fielding’s failure to experience the caves together—the most consequential (non)event of the novel—decisively renders their love implausible in the social world they find themselves in. If their consummation was going to happen anywhere, it would have been *there*, at the Marabar Caves, the singular queer space of *A Passage to India*. Through such limited but decidedly queer spatiality, the novel restricts, complexifies, and paradoxically expands the representational possibilities of queerness in the colonial zone.

The Offerings of the (Colonial) Erotic

To be sure, Forster’s centering of private relations in marginal spaces risks obfuscating the more concrete structures of British colonialism. As Edward Said laments in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), “The sense that India and Britain are opposed nations

. . . is played down, muffled, frittered away" in *A Passage to India*, because the "novel . . . deals with personal, not official or national, histories" (204). According to this line of criticism, the novel whitewashes the historical reality of colonialism and its innumerable violent conflicts. It chooses, rather, to emphasize the limited power of a British-Indian friendship that exists mostly outside of geopolitics. Yet the seemingly mundane essence of Fielding and Aziz's relationship conveys a queer relationality whose very extrapolitical nature subverts, or at least unsettles, colonial separatisms—and, in turn, the social logic of colonialism itself.

It is these intimacies that are most vulnerable to erasure at the hands of a purely historicist examination of colonial life. As Shun Yin Kiang argues, "Forster's privileging of an everydayness of proximate relations . . . should not be seen as naïve escapism . . . but as a commitment to understanding colonial encounters whose lived experience and affective impact are always at risk of being erased or reified" (126–27). At the same time, we might consider Aziz and Fielding's friendship, and Forster's decision to narratively center it, as "juxtapolitical," a term conceived by Lauren Berlant in the context of feminist literary criticism. Berlant outlines the theory in *The Female Complaint* (2008):

> I call women's culture "juxtapolitical" because, like most mass-mediated nondominant communities, that of feminine realist-sentimentality thrives in proximity to the political, occasionally crossing over in political alliance, even more occasionally doing some politics, but most often not, acting as a critical chorus that sees the expression of emotional response and conceptual recalibration as achievement enough. (x)

Similarly, we could say that an *anticolonial* "realist-sentimentality thrives in proximity to the political" by embracing radical affective-relational arrangements "as achievement enough." Illicit intimacies across oppressive boundaries—intimacies enacted by the "mass-mediated," subversively intercultural, and often disarticulated "communities" of anticolonial sociality—deserve literary emphasis precisely for their ability to exist outside, or around the edges, of normative politics.

Berlant and Michael Warner's landmark 1998 essay "Sex in Public" outlines the generativity of these intimacies and conceptually expands the "communities" and social geographies that undergird them. While their analysis is grounded in queer theory, I think it is equally germane to colonial and postcolonial relationality. Berlant and Warner seek to "promote [the] radical aspirations of queer culture building: not just a safe zone for queer sex but the changed possibilities of identity, intelligibility, publics, culture, and sex that appear when the heterosexual couple is no longer the referent or the privileged example of sex" (548). They do so in part by contemplating "the inventiveness of queer world making and of the queer world's fragility" in "necessary relation to a counterpublic—an indefinitely accessible world conscious of its subordinate relation" (558). And despite its subordination, despite its marginalization by both the state and capitalist private sphere, this counterpublic queer world contains "incommensurate geographies" (558) and, thus, incommensurate political and erotic potentiality.

Aziz and Fielding's intimacies materialize within a particular queer counterpublic, at once subsumed and effectively operationalized under the colonial order. Their erotic interactions occur in spaces neither public nor private per se, but rather located along the margins of mainstream social life: at the start of a party, before the other guests arrive; in a river, during a chance encounter, when others are distracted, when the wider world looks away for a moment. Their encounters rely on the "unsystematized lines of acquaintance" and "alternate routes" of affection that Berlant and Warner identify as essential features of a "queer world" or counterpublic (558). Hence, Aziz and Fielding's love brings us into another dimension of historicity, a dimension that renders visible the extra-systemic realities and sexual complexities concealed by imperialist narratives of colonialism. Aziz and Fielding's counter-colonial, counterpublic love articulates, microcosmically, a swelling anticolonial affect among the masses—something unpoliceable and quietly resistant to the terms of reality institutionalized by Western imperialism.

While queer (and anticolonial) counterpublics are not singularly reliant on sexual practices, as Berlant and Warner indicate, the fundamental *erotics* of Aziz and Fielding's bond should not be deemphasized. It is the erotic foundation of their love that leads them to realize, as Fielding holds Aziz in a river at the end of the novel, that their friendship, so to speak, is untenable. The prospect of interracial, homoerotic sex is the "problem" here––as well as the only thing that truly radicalizes their intimacy against colonial oppression. We therefore must emphasize the power of queer sex as such; we must embrace the revolutionary potential of Fielding and Aziz's consummation. To do so requires the centering of the erotic as the mode through which broader literary, queer-theoretical, and postcolonial dilemmas can be reconceptualized.

On this front, Audre Lorde's 1978 essay "Uses of the Erotic" constitutes essential reading. Through erotic pleasure, Lorde proposes, a "deep and irreplaceable knowledge of my capacity for joy comes to demand from all of my life that it be lived within the knowledge that such satisfaction is possible" (280). "Our erotic knowledge," Lorde continues, "empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives" (280). For Lorde, erotic knowledge empowers us to translate our private ecstasies into demands for political and aesthetic pleasure—the pleasure of justice and its artistic renderings—perhaps especially when erotic knowledge originates from intimacies that are homophobically, racially, and imperially forbidden.

In *Black Gay Man* (2001), the social theorist Robert Reid-Pharr specifies the epistemic import of this unruly eroticism. As he establishes the ideological commitments of the text, Reid-Pharr discusses, in consciously indelicate fashion, his experience with "one of my favorite sex partners, Rick, an ugly, poor, white trash southerner, with a scandalously thick Kentucky accent" (9). His and Rick's interracial intimacy clarifies that "for me . . . there is no real disconnection in my mind among the political, the sexual, and the discursive" (10). Reid-Pharr then offers the following provocation, which captures much of what is at stake, for me and other queer readers, in *A Passage to India*:

> As I come to understand that there is no easy distinction among my sex, my writing, and my politics, I find it easier to trust my intuition, to believe that when Rick, poor white, ugly, southern, hot Rick fucks me, something powerful happens. When we are together, we imagine, if only for a moment, a world transformed, a world so incredibly sexy and hot that the stupid, banal, and costly structures of racism, homophobia, poverty, and disease that work to keep us apart become nothing more than dully painful memories from the past. (12)

Reid-Pharr's utopian sentiment motivates an expansive socio-narrative appreciation for the (queer) erotic zone: the ephemeral collapsing of formal structures of oppression during sex previews what a full-fledged restructuring of political relations may look, and feel, like.

A cursory reading of *A Passage to India* could advance the impression that Fielding and Aziz's relationship remains outside of the erotic realm, as defined by Lorde and Reid-Pharr, since the two label themselves "friends," or, more accurately, possible friends. In fact, one of the most memorable lines of the novel involves Fielding asking Aziz, longingly, "Why can't we be friends now?" (322). Beyond considering what Forster himself "actually" meant by using "friends" here, the term alone, in the homosocial context, can communicate a distinct eroticism. In a 1981 interview with the French magazine *Gai Pied*, entitled "Friendship as a Way of Life," Michel Foucault proposes that a truly liberated male homosexuality would manifest as a friendship, which he defines as "the sum of everything through which [two men] can give each other pleasure" (136). Foucault deconstructs the distinction between the homosocial and the homoerotic by conceptualizing "[h]omosexuality [as] a historic occasion to reopen affective and relational virtualities"—imprecise, metaphysical intimacies—through the informality of friendship (138).

In other words, "[t]he development toward which the problem of homosexuality tends," Foucault claims, "is the one of friendship" (136). By contextualizing homosexuality as a "problem," Foucault suggests the difficulty of finding a sustainable mode of male-male togetherness in a society that only officially recognizes (marital) heterosexuality (136). Therefore, he asks,

> . . . how is it possible for men to be together? To live together, to share their time, their meals, their room, their leisure, their grief, their knowledge, their confidences? What is it to be "naked" among men, outside of institutional relations, family, profession, and obligatory camaraderie? It's a desire, an uneasiness, a desire-in-uneasiness that exists among a lot of people. (136)

This "desire" for robust queer relationality in a society whose institutions offer nothing of the sort is, according to Foucault, best understood and satisfied within the expansive boundaries and definitional flexibility of friendship. For Foucault, friendship bespeaks the extra-institutional, amorphous connections at the heart of queer male desire. Notwithstanding Foucault's reductively androcentric lens, his theory helps clarify the erotic imperatives that motivate Aziz and Fielding's friendship. But, given its colonial and interracial context, their relationship complexifies queer kinship models. The affections of Aziz and Fielding require us to nuance Foucault's friendship inquiry: how is it possible for men *across colonial and racial boundaries* to be together? Even more specifically, how is it possible for men across colonial and racial boundaries to be together and *occupy the same space,* geographically and socially?

Finding Space for Anticolonial Queerness

The physical and societal terrains of colonialism circumscribe Aziz and Fielding's intimacy, as the representation of their friendship is contingent upon the novel's exhibition of British India's landscape, which Forster at once banalizes and mythologizes. At the periphery of this landscape is its most consequential feature, the Marabar Caves. We learn from the opening line that "[e]xcept for the Marabar Caves—and they are twenty miles off—the city of Chandrapore presents nothing extraordinary" (7). The immediate othering and distancing of the Marabar Caves from their insipid surroundings signifies the caves' metaphoric import. If queerness is a disruption of the bland whole of heteronormative life, then the caves are thoroughly queer. In fact, they are sites of not only queer disruption, but also a more totalizing annihilation of a world predicated on colonial and sexual oppression. Through their vast unknowability based on, but not wholly reducible to, their structural deviation, the caves form a queer space that conveys the prospect of something beyond the deadening here and now.

Indeed, the caves stand against a vapid, stagnant environment. "The very wood" of Chandrapore, the novel's third-person narrator explains,

> seems made of mud, the inhabitants of mud moving. So abased, so monotonous is everything that meets the eye, that when the Ganges [River] comes down it might be expected to wash the excrescence back into the soil. Houses do fall, people are drowned and left rotting, but the general outline of the town persists, swelling here, shrinking there, like some low but indestructible form of life. (7)

Chandrapore, according to the narrator, resembles nothing so much as a fungus or mold; it is fetid, minimally persistent, asexually reproduced, and anti-erotic. Thus, the novel's characters express consistent disappointment with this environment, yearning for spaces of emotive stimulation. The thematization of disappointment inverts the typical Orientalism of Anglo-Indian narratives, exemplifying *A Passage to India*'s deviation from the more unidimensional fetishism of traditional imperial literature. As Sara Suleri asserts in her influential reading of the novel in *The Rhetoric of English India* (1992), "If the narratives of English India can roughly be said to have veered between sublime and picturesque representations of the colonial encounter, then *A Passage to India* collapses both modes into a reconfiguration of what disappointment may signify to divergent apprehensions of colonialism" (144). Adela, Mrs. Moore, and Aziz's frustrations with the geographic and social landscape of Chandrapore distinctly capture such "divergent apprehensions of colonialism" that motivate disappointment.

Adela and Mrs. Moore's search for the mythic "real India" quickly succumbs to a humdrum, not-so-otherworldly reality. "We aren't even seeing the other side of the world; that's our complaint," Adela laments (25). Aziz's disappointment is no less acute, but it is rooted in the coercive heteronormativity of colonialism, which, to be sure, parallels the aesthetic sterility that demoralizes Adela and Mrs. Moore. Aziz blames the heterosexual trappings of British India on English women, and women in general. "Granted the exceptions," the narrator explains, "[Aziz] agreed that all Englishwomen are haughty and venal" (13). From Aziz's vantage point, "Mrs. Moore was so old and Miss Quested so plain," and, regarding Adela in particular, "he wondered how God could have been so unkind to any female form" (68). We also learn that he was attracted to his late wife only insofar as she was the mother of his child: "She had died soon after he had fallen in love with her; he had not loved her at first. . . . The change began after [their child's] birth" (55). Part of his emotional aversion to his wife, whom he met through a blind, arranged marriage, was influenced by British romantic customs. "Touched by Western feeling," the narrator tells us, "[Aziz] disliked union with a woman whom he had never seen; moreover, when he did see her, she disappointed him, and he begat his first child in mere animality" (55). The line embodies a Western-inspired misogyny that compensates for a Western-imposed heteronormativity, both of which orient Aziz's existential disappointment. Aziz's contempt for women is inseparable from a Western sexual culture—a culture of romantic courtship paired with chauvinistic entitlement and heterosexual presumption—forced upon him.

Aziz's frustration is both mitigated and reaffirmed by the erotic tension between him and Fielding. Tragically, their intimacy is, from the start, delimited by heterosexual encroachment. The two meet at a tea party at Fielding's house, which Mrs. Moore and Adela also attend. Here, Aziz and Fielding's initial encounter is unmistakably carnal. When Aziz enters the tony residence, before the other guests arrive, Fielding is dressing in his bedroom and tells Aziz to "make yourself at home" (63). The instruction serves a radical function, allowing space for homoerotic intimacy within the colonizer's domain. The stately Anglo-Indian home becomes, for a moment, a racially de-essentialized, queer space. Aziz detects the remarkable nature of Fielding's comment, believing "it had a very definite meaning" (63). "I like unconventional behaviour so extremely," Aziz responds, as "[h]is spirits flared up" (63). The "unconventional" homoeroticism of the interaction becomes more explicit when Aziz offers Fielding a collar stud and then enters Fielding's bedroom. "Come in with it if you don't mind the unconventionality," Fielding says, a loaded speech act that phallicizes the stud (65). Yet, as soon as Aziz secures the stud in Fielding's collar—an interaction mirroring the start of anal intercourse—the newly arrived Mrs. Moore and Adela interrupt the men, dismaying Aziz. "He was disappointed that other guests were coming," the narrator asserts, "for he preferred to be alone with his new friend" (66). The space is re-heterosexualized and further colonized by the presence of British women, which smacks of both misogyny and a queer, albeit masculinist, anticolonial frustration.

Now the continuation of Aziz and Fielding's intimacy requires a spatial reorientation. During the party, after Adela takes Aziz's casual invitation to his home at face value, he performs this reorientation out of desperation, and too inclusively for his liking. "I invite you all to see me in the Marabar Caves," he tells everyone at Fielding's party, including Adela and Mrs. Moore (74). The significance of the invitation is a source of critical contention. Many have discerned through the invitation a reinforcement of Aziz's subjugation. Sara Suleri, for instance, argues that

> . . . Aziz chooses the cultural anonymity of geography in order to keep concealed the privacy of his home, and the moment is illustrative of Forster's meticulous revision of a colonialist-as-heterosexual paradigm. Rather than the male seeking to possess a feminized territory, the female [Adela] seeks to enter the habitat of colonized domesticity, thereby forcing the "little Indian" to retreat into the exotic but empty space of an unvisited cave. (139)

In Suleri's reading, the get-together at Fielding's house conveys an erotic segregation at the heart of *A Passage to India* and colonialism itself. She claims that "[a] scene that opens with the anticipation of new modes of cultural contact is evacuated into an emblem of erotic isolation," as "Fielding's tea party . . . represents a dispersal of sexual promise" (139). Yet Suleri mislocates, I think, the characters' "erotic isolation" and misrepresents the actual narrative potentiality of the Marabar Caves. Far from reconstituting erotic isolation, the caves contain the ultimate erotic promise for everyone involved, namely, a promised obliteration of a sociality fueled by sexual alienation (and much worse).

Perhaps the reason for Suleri's reading of the caves as erotically vacuous can be found in the first line of her essay about the novel: "Whether *A Passage to India* is read as an icon of the liberal imagination or as an allegory in which the category of 'Marabar Cave' roughly translates into *the anus of imperialism*, the novel remains one of English India's most troubling engagements in the fiction of cultural self-examination" (132; emphasis added). The attempted bridging of "the liberal imagination" and the scatological abhorrence of colonialism would be compelling in other contexts, but Suleri's pairing of the Marabar Caves' anality with "the anus of imperialism," whose excrement metaphorizes the sewage of colonial violence, disarticulates the caves' queer disruptiveness. Stuart Christie regards Suleri's characterization of the caves as part of her broader rejection of "the complex representations of sexual difference across cultures that Forster's text enjoys" (162). "Suleri, rather than Forster," Christie proposes, "writes the geography of India problematically—initially as a male anus . . . and consequently as the grave of masculine desire" (162). As the phrase suggests, he finds in Suleri's argument an echo of the logic explicated by Leo Bersani in his polemical 1987 essay "Is the Rectum a Grave?": "In a chilling evocation of Leo Bersani's work," Christie writes, "Suleri expresses traveling gay identity as nullity, as the killing field of representation" (162). One might take issue with this ungenerous reading of Suleri. More to the point, however, Christie himself misreads Bersani, and in doing so both misidentifies the problem of Suleri's argument and further obscures the queerness of the caves.

A more careful assessment of Bersani's "Is the Rectum a Grave?" does, indeed, shed light on the caves' import. Writing amid the onslaught of HIV/AIDS, Bersani considers the rectum as a site of ontological self-annihilation, where gay men, through anal penetration, finally liberate themselves from heteromasculine repression. He declares, "if the rectum is the grave in which the masculine ideal . . . of proud subjectivity is buried, then it should be celebrated for its very potential for death" (222). In terms of Bersani's framework and the narrative imperatives of *A Passage to India*, the anality of the Marabar Caves conveys various annihilatory possibilities. It is only in the caves, whose opaque depths and unknowability disrupt imperial stagnation, that the oppressions of colonialism give way to a queer and postcolonial consciousness. Aziz's haphazard invitation to the caves offers everyone the opportunity to occupy a space outside of the dispiriting colonial world of greater Chandrapore, which, by the time of the invitation, has been rendered irredeemably "disappointing."

The Revelations of the Caves

As the characters' trip approaches, we learn about the ephemerality and opacity, as well as the explosive generativity, of the caves' natural processes:

> They are dark caves. Even when they open towards the sun, very little light penetrates down the entrance tunnel into the circular chamber. There is little to see, and no eye to see it, until the visitor arrives for his five minutes, and strikes a match. Immediately another flame rises in the depths of the rock and moves towards the surface like an imprisoned spirit. . . . The two flames approach and strive to unite, but cannot, because one of them breathes air, the other stone. A mirror inlaid with lovely colours divides the lovers, delicate stars of pink and grey interpose, exquisite nebulae, shadings fainter than the tail of a comet or the midday moon, all the evanescent life of the granite, only here visible. . . . The radiance increases, the flames touch one another, kiss, expire. (125)

The caves provide a space for interactions that are impermanent but potent. The movement of the caves' "flames" clarifies the landscape's erotic affect: at once unitive, climatic, and fleeting ("the flames touch one another, kiss, expire"). Given Forster's personification of the flames as "lovers," their energy—overwhelmingly explosive yet spatiotemporally constrained—foreshadows the caves' psychological impact on their human visitors.

What actually happens in the caves when the characters encounter them? Curiously, on the day of the trip, Fielding misses his train, excluding him from the expedition and leaving Aziz alone with Adela and Mrs. Moore, save for their tour guide. In turn, the presumption of heteronormativity, epitomized by Adela and Mrs. Moore, supplants the potential for homoerotic consummation. But the displacement of Aziz and Fielding's eroticism and the centering of Adela and Mrs. Moore's affective experiences allow the caves' disruptive spatiality to be genuinely tested. Lest we forget, "Mrs. Moore and Miss Quested [Adela] had felt nothing acutely for a fortnight," as their trip to see the "real India" had proved underwhelming (133). At the caves, though, they both feel something *too* acutely, something they cannot handle.

Mrs. Moore exits one of the caves after she succumbs to a violent intercultural claustrophobia. The cave was "[c]rammed with villagers and servants," we learn, and then "[Mrs. Moore] lost Aziz and Adela in the dark, didn't know who touched her, couldn't breathe, and some vile naked thing struck her face and settled on her mouth like a pad" (147). In addition, she hears an echo ("'bou-oum,' or 'ou-boum'") that is at once "monotonous" and, to her, "terrifying" (147). The echo "quivers up and down the walls [of the cave] until it is absorbed into the roof" (147). Both the "vile naked thing" that assaults Mrs. Moore and the echo correspond with the behavior of the metaphysical "flames" (the "lovers"), which come together and then "expire" (125). The flames, then, represent a broader erotic matrix around and within the caves, replete with forces whose aggressively sexual movements—the phallic face-striking of the “naked thing,” the orgasmic quivering of the echo—disorient their human subjects. Of course, on the surface, there is nothing inherently “queer” about this erotic matrix. Rather, the matrix has a *queering effect*, evidenced most overtly by Aziz and Adela’s experience in the caves after Mrs. Moore departs.

As Adela contemplates her engagement to a man, Ronny, she does not truly love, she and Aziz continue exploring the terrain together. But after Adela offends Aziz by asking him if he has “one wife or more than one,” believing Muslim men practice polygamy, the two explore separate caves (153). Simultaneously, Adela is “thinking with half her mind [that] ‘sight-seeing bores me,’ and wondering with the other half about marriage” (153). The caves provoke a reckoning for Adela, whose realizations about her impending marriage, and misplaced interest in Aziz’s personal life, disturb her socialized complacency. Yet, abruptly, Adela departs from the caves without telling Aziz, somehow receiving a car ride back to town. She then inexplicably accuses him of raping her in the caves, and Aziz is arrested upon his return to the mainland. But during her court testimony, Adela rescinds her allegation after “[s]omething that she did not understand took hold of” her, and she realizes the assault never occurred (230).

Right before she retracts her rape allegation on the stand, she achieves a newfound clarity by reexamining her time at the caves. Accordingly, she disentangles her unsettling self-realizations from traumatic violation. As the narrator reports,

> [Adela] had thought of love just before she went in [the cave], and had innocently asked Aziz what marriage was like, and she supposed that her question had roused

> evil in him. . . . She didn't think what had happened or even remember in the ordinary way of memory, but she returned to the Marabar Hills, and spoke from them across a sort of darkness to [the prosecuting Superintendent] Mr. McBryde. . . . Now the sun rose again, . . . the pale masses of the rock flowed round her and presented the first cave; she entered, and a match was reflected in the polished walls—all beautiful and significant, though she had been blind to it at the time. (227)

Through delayed recollection, Adela comprehends the revelatory magnitude of the caves. There, she questions the efficacy of her prospective marriage to Ronny, a colonial administrator, a union that would enable both heteronormative and colonial reproductivity. By entering one of the caves alone, as she reckons with the consequences of marriage, Adela submits herself to an abyss through which the heteronormative and colonial imperatives of her existence, her very selfhood, come to die.

The abyss, physicalized by the caves, functions as the type of death-dealing, regenerative "anus" that Leo Bersani embraces, and that Sara Suleri and many other theorists misinterpret as a sewer of eroticized political nihilism. Adela herself initially misidentifies her experience as one of sexual violence; in hindsight, though, Adela sees the light ("the sun rose again") through the caves' ostensible vacuity. The caves ultimately symbolize an alternative, if unsustainable, sociality of natural harmony, motivating Adela's transcendence of the heteronormativity that long dictated her lifepath (in fact, Adela and Ronny eventually call off their engagement). It is through the caves that Adela is queered, embracing existential possibilities beyond the overdeterminations of her aristocratic, heteropatriarchal socialization.

Adela's transcendent trip to the caves represents, in the words of Homi Bhabha, "the momentous, if momentary, extinction of the recognizable object of culture" (179–80). This "extinction" of cultural understanding exists, according to Bhabha, "at the edge of experience" (180). More precisely, Adela's time at the caves connotes a transformational "limit experience." "The *limit experience*," Dave Holmes et al. theorize, "is an experience of the edge, of the margin, an experience that is actively involved in the *becoming process*," that is, the construction and, more so, the reconstruction of the self (325). The caves, therefore, constitute "the edge, the margin" of Adela's present self-knowledge. It is the space where she endures what Foucault terms "de-subjectivation," the logical endpoint of a limit experience. "The idea of a limit experience," Foucault claims, "functions to uproot the individual from himself, [to position him] where he is no longer himself, and where he will be carried to his own annihilation or dissolution. This is an activity/work of de-subjectification" (qtd. in Holmes et al. 325–26).[18] Such a process is, for Adela and countless others, indivisible from the whirlwind of queer eroticism.

A deviant geography destabilizes Adela's original, heterosexual sense of self, bringing her to the edge of an inexact queerness—the end of heteronormative complacency. It is an experience that defies vocalization and specificity, not to mention explication. At the caves, as Bhabha contends, *A Passage to India* "articulate[s] the enunciatory disorder of the colonial present" (180). The disorder "lies in the staging of the colonial signifier in the narrative uncertainty of culture's in-between: between sign and signifier, neither one nor the other, neither sexuality nor race, neither, simply, memory nor desire" (180). The inarticulable in-betweenness that Bhabha discerns through the caves is principally queer because, above all else, it compels Adela to see herself between heterosexual futurity and *something else*, however ill-defined.

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[18] Holmes et al. provide the French-to-English translation of Foucault's statement, which they found in volume four of Foucault's posthumous *Dits et Écrits* (1994), on p. 43. (As of this writing, it appears *Dits et Écrits* has yet to be published in English.)

The Dilemma of Not-Thereness

While Adela's revolutionary experience solidifies the caves' queer power, the prospect of Aziz and Fielding's erotic consummation remains unresolved. Fielding's conspicuous absence from the caves, a space conducive to consummation, inverts his narrative position vis-à-vis Adela. As the latter finds herself at the geographic, sexual, and ontological periphery, Fielding remains trapped in the colonized center. Fielding's absence also exposes Aziz to the queer potentiality of the caves alone, and to Adela and Mrs. Moore's reaction to this potentiality. Hence, Aziz, upon his return from the caves and before his arrest, is aroused by the reappearance of Fielding, who is socializing with Mrs. Moore and others. "Fielding!" Aziz exclaims, "Oh, I have so wanted you!" (155). Aziz's articulation of desire in the past participle ("Oh, I have so wanted you!") suggests his erotic hangover, the product of thwarted consummation at the caves. But the "Oh" also communicates a sense of relief. After spending hours in a queer space without a queer partner, in the imperialist company of Mrs. Moore and Adela, Aziz can breathe at last, if only for a moment.

Following Aziz's arrest, his and Fielding's relationship markedly changes. While Fielding believes Aziz is innocent, he, after Aziz's exoneration, befriends Adela, and Aziz soon believes the two are lovers. A jealous Aziz succumbs to cynicism, losing faith in British-Indian friendship. Yet, several years after this turbulent episode, Aziz is relieved to discover that Fielding has actually married one of Mrs. Moore's daughters. The narrative reaches an emotional impasse here, which is finally resolved during an exchange between Aziz and Fielding in the novel's closing scene, an exchange that reinforces the ephemeral queer spatiality that anchors the narrative—and the two men's love.

In a cosmic coincidence, Aziz and Fielding crash into each other while boating separately in a swampy river outside of Mau, an Indian city. The reuniting collision symbolizes a semi-erotic zenith, delimited by colonial realities. "That was the climax," the narrator claims, "as far as India admits of one" (315). Following the crash, the two strike up a conversation and agree to be "[f]riends again, yet aware that they could meet no more," accepting the untenability of their illicit love (316). Aziz and Fielding's "good-bye" (318) reconfirms their environment's resistance to decolonized togetherness. "Socially they had no meeting-place," that is, a space to consummate their friendship (319). The narrator's phrasing reconstitutes the caves as the singular queer space of the novel—the one true queer "meeting-place" to which Aziz and Fielding are, thus far, denied collective access. Fielding could not join Aziz at the caves earlier in the novel, and now the two find themselves in a stagnant river, fully displaced from the queer fluidity of the caves.

The (in)famous final passage of the text illuminates how the natural environment rejects the prospect of their love/friendship. At the same time, the very last words leave open the possibility of a different world, one resembling the liberation of the caves more so than the stagnation of the swamp and the larger colonial system:

> "Why can't we be friends now?" said [Fielding], holding [Aziz] affectionately. "It's what I want. It's what you want."
>
> But the horses didn't want it—they swerved apart; the earth didn't want it, sending up rocks through which riders must pass single file; the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace, the birds, the carrion, the Guest House, that came into view as they issued from the gap and saw Mau beneath: they didn't want it, they said in their hundred voices, "No, not yet," and the sky said, "No, not there." (322)

At this point, the disconnect between the desire of the two men and nature—the "natural" elements that, in this context, embody a constructed colonial sociality—is nearly absolute. But the caves, the most central natural entities of the novel, go unmentioned in the long list of elements that rebuff Aziz and Fielding's friendship. As a result, the narrative's spatiality is not *wholly* in opposition to the men's intimacy, because the queerness of the caves holds firm.

The striking absence of the caves clarifies the bifurcated time-space negativism ("No, not yet" and "No, not there") that ends the novel. Landed nature, excluding the caves, rejects Aziz and Fielding's bond on temporal grounds: it is "not yet" *time* for such intimacy. But the sky, privileged with an overarching view, voices opposition spatially, indicating that Aziz and Fielding are in the wrong *place*. While many critics read "not yet" and "not there" as parallel signifiers of spatiotemporal restriction, the two phrases can also be read as conflictual. Perhaps the sky's "not there" combatively responds to landed nature's "not yet," given the disruptive clarification of the sky's subjectivity ("and the sky said"). The sky gestures towards other spaces—namely, the caves—that can, in the current temporality of the narrative, accommodate Aziz and Fielding's love, or, more ambitiously, serve as the bedrock for the building of a new world.

On the surface, the not-thereness of Aziz and Fielding's intimacy typifies an unresolvable cliffhanger, as we are left yearning for a circumstantial change that would enable their consummation. Yet the ending is generative in itself, irrespective of what could (or should) come next. "Not there" embodies a radical optimism. It signals the ongoing existence of spaces where queer and anticolonial liberation are plausible. But not-thereness also conveys political caution. It demands that we look *elsewhere* for sustainable queer spatiality, to refrain from seeking queer love in places rooted in modes of domination, colonial or otherwise. Not-thereness urges us to (re)discover the Marabar Caves and their equivalents: peripheral spaces in which the annihilation of oppressive lifepaths and the construction of other ways of being can take root.

Losing and Grieving—and Searching

A queerness that embraces the imperatives of "not there" is a forward-looking expression of grief. More specifically, it is an ideological heartbrokenness spurred by the ruination of current worldmaking frameworks. As the sociologist Gargi Bhattacharyya writes in a 2020 essay, "Heartbreak is at the heart of all revolutionary consciousness. How can it not be? Who can imagine another world unless they already have been broken apart by the world we are in?" ("We, the Heartbroken"). In the same way, heartbreak need not symbolize defeatism, but rather excitement for new worlds within reach but not yet grasped. Bhattacharyya nearly invokes *A Passage of India*, and reconciles "not there" with "not yet," when she clarifies how "in the world we are dreaming and making, there is no me and you, there is only us. Just us forever. And it feels like nothing on earth.

Nothing on earth yet" ("We, the Heartbroken"). This world seems supernatural, but it is actually viable within the world we inhabit now. It is a world we are dreaming of *and* actively "making," or searching for. This world is ever-present and transcendent of time, but we are not *there yet*. We know what it looks like and feels like, but its exact coordinates still elude us.

Perhaps an anticolonial queerness, and its concomitant forms of love, is at its most potent when it embraces an unlocatable orientation—a positive not-thereness and not-yetness—that requires representational ambivalence. In a conversation with *Public Books*, the philosopher Amia Srinivasan identifies ambivalence as "a radical practice" (Kliger, "Desire"). "There's something unsatisfying about where we are," Srinivasan continues, "so we're going to hold open a space for another possibility." This space, though, may never be filled or within our reach, and that is precisely the point; utopia is "nowhere," but there is something profound and humane about seeking it with the knowledge of its unreachability. As Srinivasan explains on another occasion, "I think it's an extraordinary and striking fact that Moses doesn't live to see the promised land, and he's destined *not* to" (Maier, "Philosophy"). "[A]s a metaphor," she continues, "I think that's right." Earnest searchers of the queer and anticolonial "promised land" are doing something right if the words "not there" and "not yet" are at the forefront of their vocabularies.

In his canonical text *Cruising Utopia* (2009), José Esteban Muñoz lays the theoretical groundwork for such an imaginary queer promised land. "Queerness," he declares at the very onset, "is not yet here. . . . We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality" (1). In *A Passage* *to India*, the Marabar Caves capture this “warm illumination,” repositioning us toward a “horizon” that remains untouchable and *not there*. On a larger scale, the spatial imprecision of anticolonial queerness—its metaphysicality—enacts an invigorating existential restlessness. As Muñoz goes on to write, “Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing” (1). At its finest, then, queerness is a state of longing, a refusal to accept the world as it is, and a willingness to look beyond—to peer into the caves.

Chapter 2: *Giovanni's Room* and Love in Foreclosure

Dear Diary:

I was thinking of our bench in Central Park today,
The one across from the dirt-patch field that seemed to catch each gust of wind.
The one where we said that very sorry goodbye
That floated in the air,
Joining the other goodbyes
On that very bench
In that very park
In this very city.

—Diana Sanchez, "Thinking of Our Bench"

We'll always have Paris.

—Rick Blaine (Humphrey Bogart), *Casablanca*

While *A Passage to India* reckons with the expansiveness of queer spatiality through the Marabar Caves, James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* offers a sexual landscape defined by constriction, singularity, and isolation. *Giovanni's Room* is a claustrophobic text, narrowly delineating the queer love affair between its two protagonists, the American expat and heterosexually engaged David and the Parisian bartender Giovanni. The text is also thoroughly depressing: if *A Passage to India* inspires a sense of hope for the world(s) to come, *Giovanni's Room* forebodes an alienated and atomized sociality, culminating in David and Giovanni's breakup and the latter's execution for the murder of his boss, Guillaume—a crime committed in a fit of rage after Guillaume sexually exploits him. While *Giovanni's Room* is more erotically explicit than *A Passage to India*, the sex between David and Giovanni, which occurs in the latter's cramped apartment, reaffirms both the hegemony of the queer "closet" and the general angst of postwar Western life. One comes away with the feeling that the closeting and repression of homosexuality is part and parcel with a larger closeting, or foreclosing, of social joy and possibility. The primacy of the closet predicates the universe of *Giovanni's Room* on the act of *staying in*, on an isolation from the social and the communitarian.[19]

Setting the (Circumscribed) Scene

To understand the spatial and socioerotic orientation of *Giovanni's Room*, it is crucial to historicize and expand the conceptual parameters of the closet. At the time of the novel's release, in 1956, homosexuality, as well as other forms of "sodomy" (including heterosexual oral sex), was formally criminalized and widely stigmatized in much of the United States, resulting in the loss of employment, denial of public benefits and medical care, police harassment, and even arrest and incarceration.[20] As a young, seemingly bisexual American man, David would have been socialized under this homophobic regime, amplified by the McCarthyite anti-communist witch hunt of the early Cold War period, which conflated communism with sexual "deviance."[21] Perhaps the most consequential everyday effect of this institutionalized homophobia was the careful concealment of one's queer identity in public, if not private, life. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick put it in 1990, "The closet is the defining structure for gay oppression in this century" (71).

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[19] For a discussion of the (racialized and queer) logics of "staying in," see Summer Kim Lee's essay "Staying In: Mitski, Ocean Vuong, and Asian American Asociality," published in the March 2019 issue of *Social Text* (pp. 27–50). Lee "consider[s] how the seemingly passive, antisocial act of staying in can shift and reconstellate one's relations to others, to the socialities with which one is entangled, but from the momentary position of being alone, as *a*social" (27). Likewise, *Giovanni's Room* offers a decidedly asocial—if not *antisocial*—narrative.

[20] See Margot Canaday's *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (2009).

[21] See David K. Johnson's *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (2004).

The conditions for queer people in France were, relatively speaking, more promising. By 1956, homosexuality had been decriminalized in France for over a century and a half, since 1791 (Sibalis 302); it was not until 2003 that homosexuality was fully decriminalized across the United States (Brinkley, "Supreme Court"). Yet, in August 1942, France's Nazi-aligned Vichy government made it a crime, punishable by up to three years in prison, for a person to perform "one or several shameless or unnatural acts with a minor *of his own sex* under the age of twenty-one," per an amendment to the penal code (qtd. in Sibalis 302; emphasis added). In essence, the new law set the age of consent for homosexuality to 21, while the age of consent for heterosexual relations remained 13 (Sibalis 302). Given this disparity—as well as the basic fact that the age of consent for heterosexuality was only 13—Vichy officials had clearly little interest in combatting sexual violence and pedophilic abuse. Instead, they sought to stigmatize homosexuality writ large. While the Vichy regime was toppled in 1944 and the age of consent for straight sex was raised to 15 in 1945, it was not until August 1982 that French lawmakers equalized the age of consent, setting it to 15 for homosexuality, as well (Sibalis 302–03).[22]

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[22] And yet, it was not until 2021 that France deemed sex with a minor under 15 as automatic rape (Darmanin, "France sets age of consent at 15"). For a harrowing personal account of the sexualization of French minors, see Vanessa Springora's *Consent: A Memoir* (published in France in 2020). See, also, the following illuminating review: Elsa Court, "On the Limits of Sexual Freedom: Vanessa Springora's 'Consent: A Memoir,'" *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 17 Feb. 2021.

In general, postwar France, reeling from the catastrophe (and moral embarrassment) of Nazi-French collaboration and facing the loss of its colonial empire, remained a hub for European queerness *and* a place of growing homophobic paranoia, politically and institutionally. "Paris was still the capital of European homosexuality in the 1950s and 1960s," the historian Michael D. Sibalis explains, "but the government, the medical establishment, and the media preached the values of social conformity and family life, which many homosexuals themselves internalized" (314). He continues:

> The number of prosecutions for the new "crime of homosexuality" (i.e., sexual relations with a minor) rose year after year. Moreover, on 30 July 1960 Parliament passed a law (the "Mirguet amendment") that declared homosexuality itself, along with alcoholism and tuberculosis, a "social scourge" and that authorized the government to take measures to fight its spread. On 25 November 1960 the government used this authority to double the existing penalties for acts of gross public indecency when homosexuals were involved. Whatever Vichy's actual intentions, 6 August 1942 marked a sea change. The gay liberation movement that developed in France from 1971 would not reverse the trend until 1982. (314)

These homophobic pressures, as well as the simultaneous sexual openness of French society, enacted what the cultural theorist Scott Gunther calls an "elastic closet" in midcentury queer French life.[23] The elasticity of the French closet bespeaks, I think, both the amorphousness and the constrictive precariousness of *Giovanni's Room*'s queer spatiality.

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[23] See Gunther's *The Elastic Closet: A History of Homosexuality in France, 1942-Present* (2008).

Fittingly, David and Giovanni's very first conversation centers on geography, space/place, and their ontological consequences. After Giovanni learns of David's American nationality, the two discuss the psychological and cultural differences between American and European life. As David proposes with a whiff of condescension, "We [Americans] have led different lives than you; things have happened to us there which have never happened here. Surely you can understand that this would make us a different people?" (33). Giovanni counters this self-certitude by chiding Americans' wishful "sense of time": it is "as though with enough time and all that fearful energy and virtue you people have, everything will be settled, solved, put in its place. And when I say everything . . . I mean all the serious, dreadful things, like pain and death and love, in which you Americans do not believe" (34). Put another way, it is "pain and death and love"—with "love" notably ordered *after* death—that, according to Giovanni, distorts the American claim to universal domination, to putting the world "in its place."

Love, especially, is impervious to full U.S. penetration. Given its emotional lawlessness, love is out of *place*, resistant to the spatiotemporal teleology of Total American Power, despite the ruling class's intense regulation of love's relational manifestations. Americans, like David, fail to precisely locate and, therefore, tame love, for love cannot be bombed into submission by the Pentagon or fiscally starved by the Treasury Department. Of course, David is not only an American, but an American in Paris who is stumbling upon love in a foreign land. Giovanni, for his part, is a Parisian expat, having emigrated from Italy. For both men, France functions as a liminal space, with an ambiguous erotic culture, increasingly vulnerable to Americanization.

David's narration of Giovanni's discontent with the French—and, tacitly, with Americans—is telling: "'They are not like the people I knew when I was younger. In Italy we are friendly, we dance and sing and make love—but these people,' and he looked out over the bar, and then at me, and finished his Coca-Cola, 'these people, they are cold, I do not understand them'" (36). Here, according to David, Giovanni contrasts the free spiritedness of Italian culture with a French culture increasingly subsumed by American cynicism and antisociality. As he chugs Coca-Cola, a quintessential U.S. product, Giovanni makes no distinction between the American in front of him and his French patrons, judging them as a culturally sterile, Americanized collective ("he looked out over the bar, and then at me, and finished his Coca-Cola"). Giovanni's world is increasingly narrow, both culturally and spatially.

A Relationality of Tightness

The historical and geographic backdrop of the novel helps motivate its broader thematization of spatial constriction. The characters' affective "awareness" of themselves and pursuit of desire fall victim to "tight, only contingently lifted, restrictions" of an unaccommodating social environment (Figlerowicz 84); the only place where the restrictions are consistently, if not always wholly, lifted is Giovanni's extrasocietal apartment. In *Spaces of Feeling* (2017), the literary theorist Marta Figlerowicz illuminates how David's sexual awakening and self-realization, much like the true selfhoods of the characters of Baldwin's other novels, cannot be "narrated in public, for fear of derision or even of violence" (Figlerowicz 84). Naturally, then, much of the novel itself cannot be narrated in public, as the very sociality of the plot is confined to the select few spaces where David and Giovanni can engage in erotic, relational, and self-discovery.

In this way, *Giovanni's Room* is a tragedy of unachieved sociality, of unrealized queer relational publicness; the novel centers the nearness to and ultimate foreclosure of the dream of unadulterated, publicized love. As Figlerowicz explains, in terms of space and affectivity,

> When David and Giovanni live together, David believes that Giovanni wants him to express his affection by "destroy[ing]," and thus opening up, this shared space. . . . the rooms David inhabits seem like temporary stages in the expression of an affect that, ideally, would be much more flexible and expansive. The clarity with which Baldwin's characters experience their affects in such enclosures inspires them to imagine these affects as potentially expressible and intelligible anywhere. (87)

The aspiration of anywhereness—the generalization of relational, sexual, and self-understanding from the bedroom to the social world—recalls Audre Lorde's aforementioned formulation about the prospective and, in the case of *Giovanni's Room*, ever-thwarted expansivity of the erotic zone. Lorde writes, "Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives" (280). In *Giovanni's Room*, erotic knowledge and its affective stances are denied a far-reaching public life, as per the uncompromising constrictiveness of the novel's primary space of action: Giovanni's apartment.

This constrictiveness distorts and depresses the supposed vitality of love. In a society of otherwise sterile capitalist relations, "successful" love induces both a private and public dreamscape, where one's intersubjective legitimacy is reconstituted through the overtness of the social and the mystique of the domestic/private.[24] There is something vaguely radical about society's awareness that, given your coupling, you are normatively lovable, that your worth extends beyond the individuating imperatives of the streets and the workplace. To be loved, in this sense, is to be recognized outside of standardized social organization. This recognition is predicated on the physical publicity of your love (i.e., handholding, kissing, fondling) and the psychosocial assumption of others that, "in private," your love is maximized in the bedroom through sex, bringing the performative erotics of the public sphere into the realm of climatic erotic sincerity. By asserting the veracity of your love beyond the performative tasks of the social, you talk back to the social's general sterility by realizing a world outside of the economistic monotony of the everyday. You go to work, but you come home to make love. And everyone knows it.

The scenario of a newly married (and usually straight) couple, surrounded by friends, expressing affection at a party before heading home "early" is a paradigmatic scene-space of the love I am considering here. Through the couple's consumable public affection, signifying erotic capital and social confidence, everyone knows what they are about to do when they get back home. In terms of the outsiders' subjectivity and, more complexly, the subjective evaluation of the outsiders' subjectivity by the couple itself, this scene collapses the public into the private, spatially hegemonizing the couple's love against the superstructural forces of the social. The couple's love becomes, in other words, an alternative social imaginary, previewed publicly and fully realized privately. Alas, David and Giovanni's coupledom is denied such dualistic public-private affirmation, as it fails to breach the constrictions of the private and form a publicized lifeworld unto itself—one that is autonomous from *and* consistently recognized by the heteronormative order.

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[24] Berlant and Warner's "Sex in Public" (1998) is, once again, essential reading here; the essay offers a robust counterpoint to heteronormative publicness, offering a queer-theoretical reading of social space.

(Anti)Futurity and the Lingering of Lovers Past

Early on, we learn of David's experience, pre-Giovanni, with spatially and temporally constrained queer sex—with the type of sex denied public entry. In chapter one of the novel, David narrates a one-night stand he had with an adolescent friend, Joey. David explains how the sex was profound, evoking a sense of affective-temporal limitlessness: "It seemed . . . that a lifetime would not be long enough for me to act with Joey the act of love" (8). Thereafter, however, their intimacy evaporates, as "that lifetime was short, was bounded by that night—it ended in the morning" (8). The morning's arrival compels the boys to leave the bedroom, and in doing so the boys, or at least David, realize the fundamental dislocation of what happened the night before. The wider world, reinaugurated by the morning, has no space for David and Joey's (re)enactment of love.

Similarly, by realizing the completion of their love would take over a "lifetime," David expresses the perpetual yearning inherent to a form of prospective love so vast that not even a lifetime could induce its full actualization. For it to be wholly realized, David and Joey's love needs *more* than life itself, or access to something beyond the social and its normative spatiotemporal constraints. There is an anarchic and otherworldly quality to David and Joey's intimacy, but the world as such prohibits its endurance. There is also something revelatory about the very notion of "act[ing] with Joey the act of love." David's formulation bespeaks the effortful performativity of love: the *attempt* at making love and making it last. It also raises the paradox of mourning a love that never was fully actualized, but whose enactment was earnestly, if briefly, attempted.

The nature of David and Giovanni's breakup, foreboded by David and Joey's abrupt parting, conveys the painful endpoint of this paradox. In their climatic, relationship-ending fight, as David leaves Giovanni to return to his fiancée, Giovanni addresses David's supposed habit of making love without being in love, asking rhetorically, "do you think I did not know when you made love to me, you were making love to no one? *No one!* Or everyone—but not me, certainly" (137). David is perpetually *elsewhere*, never fully occupying the same psychic terrain as Giovanni, even during sex, which induces yet another paradox: the constrictive spacing of David and Giovanni's sex gives way to the vastness of David's psychosexual disorientation. David externalizes his lovemaking with Giovanni to either "*No one!*" (and, thus, an infinitely spacious void) or to "everyone—but not [Giovanni]."

We may consider David's breakups with Joey and Giovanni as incoherently dissolved attachments, or what Wendy Brown terms, in the context of political relationality, "ungrievable losses—ungrievable because they are not fully avowed as attachments and hence are unable to be claimed as losses" (21). In *Giovanni's Room*, the failure to avow homoerotic attachment expresses the novel's broader social context, which denies adequate space for the full development of avowable queerness. From the start, David seems to recognize the untenability of his and Giovanni's intimacy in a world hostile to homoerotic love; nonetheless, David can neither resist nor fully commit to Giovanni. As David recalls upon his first visit to Giovanni's apartment,

> I thought, if I do not open the door at once and get out of here, I am lost. But I knew I could not open the door, I knew it was too late; soon it was too late to do anything but moan. He pulled me against him, putting himself into my arms as though he were giving me himself to carry, and slowly pulled me down with him to that bed. With everything in me screaming *No!* yet the sum of me sighed *Yes*. (64)

The insularity of the apartment displaces David from a more navigable outer world, as the erotic constrictiveness of the apartment forces David into an abyss of unknowability. It is this very constrictiveness and vast unknowability that draw David into Giovanni's arms. David cannot tolerate the coherence of an outer world that denies the legitimacy of his and Giovanni's bond, electing, in turn, the ambivalent and amorphous ecstasy of bedding Giovanni over the sterile neatness of heteronormative sociality.

At the same time, David's attachment to Giovanni is retrospectively avowed and concretized, vaguely compensating for the precariousness of their actual relationship. And it is avowed, more specifically, in the space between life and death. As David explains in a heart-wrenching passage about the "last" time he saw Giovanni,

> Until I die there will be those moments, moments seeming to rise up out of the ground like Macbeth's witches, when his face will come before me, that face in all its changes, when the exact timbre of his voice and tricks of his speech will nearly burst my ears, when his smell will overpower my nostrils. Sometimes, in the days which are coming—God grant me the grace to live them—in the glare of the grey

> morning, sour-mouthed, eyelids raw and red, hair tangled and damp from my stormy sleep, facing, over coffee and cigarette smoke, last night's impenetrable, meaningless boy who will shortly rise and vanish like the smoke, I will see Giovanni again, as he was that night, so vivid, so winning, all of the light of that gloomy tunnel trapped around his head. (42–3)

The specter of Giovanni will haunt David in the moments that most affirm the latter's psychosexual lostness, when, "in the glare of the grey morning," with "last night's impenetrable, meaningless boy," David's world is at its smallest. David will therefore grieve Giovanni as he ghost-walks through the half-baked erotic landscape that forms his world after Giovanni's death.

David's existential demoralization bespeaks the historian Achille Mbembe's concept of "raw life," that is, "a place where life and death are so entangled that it is no longer possible to distinguish them, or to say what is on the side of the shadow or its obverse: 'Is that man still alive, or dead?'" (197). The analogy operates on two levels in the context of David's anticipated mourning of Giovanni. First, Giovanni takes on a posthumous raw life through his spectral reincarnations in David's mind—by his presence "on the side of the shadow" of David's vacuous existence. Yet David himself more closely embodies raw life in an ontological sense, because his physical aliveness is undercut by his erotic malaise, which he can only escape by encountering the specter of Giovanni. David and Giovanni will meet each other through the definitional liminality of their shared raw life, "where life and death are so entangled that it is no longer possible to distinguish them." In moments steeped in relational nihilism for David—say, the morning after pointless sex—Giovanni returns from a conditional deadness, while David descents from an increasingly questionable aliveness to a space of near-death. In doing so, the two meet each other in an existential middle ground, outside the normative social realm and its binary construction of life and death.

Giovanni's sustained spectral occupation of David's psyche recalls what the literary theorist Sarah Chihaya terms—in an analysis of Derrida's *Specters of Marx* vis-à-vis Peter Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor* (1985), Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* (1997), and Christos Tsiolkas's *Dead Europe* (2005)—"perpetual presentness" (2). She writes, "the dead in these texts do not merely have a spectral life—they have a physical life that is, in some ways, even more vibrant than that of the living. . . . the very active specters that populate these novels may have died, but they have not departed" (2). Chihaya aptly compares the literary significance of Derrida's specters to Friedrich Nietzsche's notion of "eternal recurrence" (Chihaya iv, 9), which also resonates with Giovanni's spectrality. Nietzsche outlines the concept in *The Gay Science* (1882):

> What if some day or night a demon were to steal into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: 'This life as you now live it and have lived it you will have to live once again and innumerable times again; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unspeakably small or great in your life must return to you, all in the same succession and sequence. . . .' (Nietzsche 194)

Giovanni is the central object of David's trauma in those moments of "loneliest loneliness." After an alienating one-night stand, David "will see Giovanni *again*," cyclically confronting the specter of lost love (Baldwin 42–3; emphasis added).

Giovanni's posthumous presence reflects the novel's spatiotemporal imperatives. Giovanni weaves between the past, present, and the future within the circumscribed (but repeatedly staged) scene space of sex and, especially, sexual regret—the eternally recurrent morning after. David's entrapment within this scene space, which induces a sustained encounter with Giovanni's specter, and his concomitant demoralization beg the following question, originally posed by Chihaya: "what is the difference between the living who are already dead and the dead who continue to live?" (2). In a general sense, the question recalls, once again, Mbembe's concept of "raw life," the stage between life and death. But, on a spatiotemporal level, the very dichotomy between life and death becomes obsolete when one encounters the other, i.e., when Giovanni, the living dead, visits David, alive but deadened. If the normatively "dead" consistently encounter the ostensibly "living," we may need to complexify the categories of life and death some more for any real differentiation to materialize.

Indeed, David's proximity to death is remarkable for a man who is still, technically, breathing. After Giovanni's execution, David's body is, as he narrates, "under a sentence of death" (168). "It is lean, hard, and cold, the incarnation of a mystery," David continues. "And I do not know what moves in this body, what this body is searching. It is trapped in my mirror as it is trapped in time and it hurries toward revelation" (168). His sense of death is also inseparable from a sexual ontology transcending corporeality. "I look at my sex, my troubling sex," David continues, "and wonder how it can be redeemed, how I can save it from the knife. The journey to the grave is already begun. . . . Yet, the key to my salvation, which cannot save my body, is hidden in my flesh" (168). David, here, looks beyond his physicality for redemption, conceptualizing himself primarily through an extragenital sexuality “hidden in my flesh” and (re)awakened and (re)queered by Giovanni.

Eric Stanley’s concept of queer “near life” specifies, even more so than the notion of raw life, David’s—and, ultimately, Giovanni’s—disembodiment.[25] “Besieged,” Stanley, a social theorist, writes of his own experience as a queer person, “I feel in the fleshiness of the everyday like a kind of near life or a death-in-waiting” (1). On a theoretical level, Stanley continues, “Near life is a kind of ontocorporal (non)sociality that necessarily throws into crisis the category of life by orientation and iteration” (13).[26] The description underscores David’s tenuous relationship with life and death, ontologically and physically. Of course, Stanley’s formulation of queer near life bespeaks the *real-life* structures of heterosexism that endanger the life chances and physical bodies of queer people, and many others. While David is not subjected to institutional or interpersonal violence per se, his proximity to such violence and its death-dealing machinations is part and parcel of near life.

Yet, beyond David’s abstract near-life liminality, it is Giovanni’s execution at the hands of the state that most concretely approximates the novel to death itself, the logical endpoint of near life. In legalistic terms, Giovanni is guillotined for the murder of his boss, Guillaume. But in reality, Giovanni’s execution is an administration of *queer death*. Giovanni kills Guillaume after a recently fired Giovanni submits to Guillaume’s sexual demands “in the private quarters above his bar” (148), hoping to retain his bartender position. Despite Giovanni's provision of sex, Guillaume refuses to rehire him post-coitus, provoking his homicidal fury. More broadly, Giovanni's murderous fit articulates a repressed sexual energy, a longing for queer sex outside of the strictures of shame and exploitation. David's narration of the murder is telling:

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[25] Unsurprisingly, Stanley’s conceptualization is partly informed by Mbembe’s work (Stanley 1, 9).

[26] Frantz Fanon’s conception of Blackness’s ontological vulnerability heavily informs Stanley’s notion of near life. “Struggling with the phenomenology of black life under colonization,” Stanley writes, “Fanon opens up critical ground for understanding a kind of near life that is made through violence to exist as nonexistence” (13). See, especially, Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952).

> Giovanni certainly did not mean to do it. But he grabbed [Guillaume], he struck him. And with that touch, and with each blow, the intolerable weight at the bottom of his heart began to lift: now it was Giovanni's turn to be delighted. The room was overturned, the fabrics were shredded, the odor of perfume was thick. Guillaume struggled to get out of the room, but Giovanni followed him everywhere: now it was Guillaume's turn to be surrounded. . . . Giovanni lunged after him and caught him by the sash of the dressing gown and wrapped the sash around his neck. Then he simply held on, sobbing, becoming lighter every moment as Guillaume grew heavier, tightening the sash and cursing. Then Guillaume fell. And Giovanni fell—back into the streets, the world, into the presence and the shadow of death. (156–57)

Such homicidality enables Giovanni's sadistic conquest of a space that, minutes before, was the site of his sexual abuse. As David narrates, "it was Giovanni's turn to be delighted," and "Guillaume's turn to be surrounded," as "[t]he room was overturned," decolonized from Guillaume's predatory grip. The scene constitutes a rape-revenge fantasy of sorts, a defensive (albeit murderous) reoccupation of a terrain that just hosted Giovanni's degradation.

But the retaliatory violence proves futile and wanting, as Giovanni's degradation extends far beyond the confines of Guillaume's private quarters. Giovanni's entire social world, including David, has failed and exploited him. While his murder of Guillaume provides immediate relief, avenging the most proximate and abject violation he endures, Giovanni is quickly forced "back into the streets, the world, into the presence and the shadow of death." He is, in other words, reassimilated into a near-life sociality, "a kind of ontocorporal (non)sociality" (Stanley 13). And shortly thereafter, Giovanni faces—and David bears indirect witness to—near life's final chapter: a state-sanctioned liquidation that literalizes "the presence and the shadow of death" (Baldwin 157) that stalks both lovers.

Space for Race?

At this point in my analysis, it feels strange, if not irresponsible, to continue to discuss the near life of queerness in *Giovanni's Room* without considering the interlocking near life of Blackness—for the novel's author is, needless to say, one of the foremost writers of racism and racist violence in twentieth-century American literature. Many scholars and critics have long found the contemplation of race in *Giovanni's Room* unnecessary or even wrongheaded, given the novel's ostensible lack of Black characters (Armengol 671). Yet, for one thing, Baldwin himself explicitly rejected the severing of race from sexuality, noting, in a 1989 interview, how "[t]he sexual question and the racial question have always been entwined" (qtd. in Armengol 671). But the notion that *Giovanni's Room* is "Baldwin's anomaly," in light of its supposed deprioritization of race, has proved difficult to shake (Reid-Pharr 125). The following assertion by Hilton Als is a case in point:

> "Giovanni's Room" is Baldwin's "white" novel in more ways than one. It's the book that the self-described "abnormally ambitious, abnormally intelligent, and

> hungry black cat" *had* to write, less as a way of discussing his sexuality than as a way of discussing what America had *done* to his sexuality, along with his capacity for intimacy and, indeed, the whole notion of masculinity that his contemporaries and others wrestled with. Of course, Baldwin wanted to prove in this book what he had left America to prove: that he was not "merely" a Negro writer, that he would not let his talent be defined by racial subjects, that he was important enough and as bad as any white boy artist out there. ("'Giovanni's Room' Revisited")

Als's characterization strikes me as not wrong per se, but rather overly modest about Baldwin's ability to incorporate race into a queer narrative that never transparently foregrounds race (much less takes place in the United States).

If anything, *Giovanni's Room* depicts racialization and queer desire symbiotically, especially in the context of the novel's geography and eroticized spatiality, which both thematize the intersection of whiteness, Blackness, and queerness. On this front, I am heavily informed by Robert Reid-Pharr's essay "Tearing the Goat's Flesh," originally published in 1996.[27] The essay examines *Giovanni's Room* in relation to the gendered, racial, and sexual complexity and violence of Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul On Ice* (1968) and Piri Thomas's *Down These Mean Streets* (1967). More to the point, Reid-Pharr claims the "apparent absence" of Blackness in Baldwin's novel reflects—or, rather, is complicated by—Giovanni's subjective dislocation (125–26). "I suggest," Reid-Pharr writes, "that

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[27] I will be drawing upon the republished and revised version of this essay found in Reid-Pharr's aforementioned *Black Gay Man: Essays* (2001), pp. 99–134. (The 1996 version was published in vol. 28, no. 3, of *Studies in the Novel*, pp. 372–94.) Moreover, for additional overviews of race's function in *Giovanni's Room*, see Josep M. Armengol's "In the Dark Room: Homosexuality and/as Blackness in James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*" (*Signs*, 2012) and Jürgen E. Grandt's "Into a Darker Past: James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* and the Anxiety of Authenticity" (*CLA Journal*, 2011).

Baldwin's explication of Giovanni's ghost-like nonpresence, his nonsubjectivity, parallels the absence of the black from Western notions of rationality and humanity while at the same time it points to the possibility of escape from this same black-exclusive system of logic" (126). The novel's articulation of Blackness's *disarticulation* from humanity—in other words, the near life of Blackness—in Western culture is, as Reid-Pharr demonstrates, indivisible from the novel's narrativization of geography and space: its European setting and its eponymous apartment, respectively.

Reid-Pharr spotlights David's musings about his genealogical relation to an amorphous "Europe" in the novel's very first paragraph. While en route to Paris via train, David recalls how "[m]y ancestors conquered a continent, pushing across death-laden plains, until they came to an ocean which faced away from Europe into a darker past" (3). According to Reid-Pharr, the line captures how "[David himself] faces away from Europe, away from whiteness, and from received notions of masculinity and sexuality to a nebulous darker past" as he falls in love with Giovanni (126). In a literal sense, David, an American expat living in France indefinitely, has turned his face *toward* Europe and toward "white" culture. "Europe," however, functions not so much as a continental landmass here, but rather as a set of white-supremacist and masculinist scripts that have been thoroughly appropriated and maximized in the United States, the new and ultimate "Europe," which David turns his back to. It is in cosmopolitan Paris that David will finally experience an interracial, queer sociality.

Equally important, Giovanni—a marginalized, working-class Italian—signifies "Blackness" through his lack of unimpeachable "whiteness" and his subjection to otherizing fetishization and exploitation. "Giovanni's nominally white, southern Italian body," Reid-Pharr writes, "is bought and sold in the course of the novel. Giovanni becomes simply a creature of his body, a creature of sex and desire, by which other men are able to gauge their own humanity" (127). Giovanni attempts to counter his racializing commodification by carving out space for himself and his desires, by "creat[ing] a universe of his own making" (Reid-Pharr 127–28). By falling for Giovanni, David briefly enters this microworld and provides the lens through which we witness its secluded and alienated composition. "With Giovanni," Reid-Pharr writes, "David can exist only in the shadowy and confined spaces of back[-]alley cafes, late-night bars, and, most especially, Giovanni's cramped, suffocating, and disheveled room. It is this room . . . that acts as the marker of Giovanni's gallant, if quixotic, effort to construct a space for himself" (130). While the "effort" is noble (or "gallant"), it is decidedly aspirational, as the novel's sociality prohibits Giovanni from occupying a space of genuinely recognized humanity. Giovanni, therefore, faces a type of dehumanization overfamiliar to Black people in the Euro-American world, performing essential labor and enduring fetishistic desire, while being denied true citizenship and social protection: a racialized *and* eroticized near life of sorts.

Giovanni's racial oppression complicates the overarching dilemma of erotic spatiality in the novel. The prime site of David and Giovanni's intimacy, the latter's "cramped, suffocating, and disheveled room," not only houses homoerotic sex, but also communicates the restorative hope, pleasure, futurity, and radical reworldings of interracialism (Reid-Pharr 130–31). The interracialized queerness of Giovanni's apartment also clarifies the surreality and untenably utopian yearnings of the space. What interracializes David and Giovanni's queerness—what metaphorizes Blackness into their queerness—is Giovanni's denial of full-fledged social recognition and humanity. Giovanni's apartment doubles as a delimited dreamscape, containing the mere imaginary, rather than the concrete structures, of an interracial, queer sociality.

Still, I cannot help but embrace David's nostalgia as he exits the apartment once and for all:

> I will not forget the last time he looked at me. The morning light filled the room, reminding me of so many mornings and of the morning I had first come there. Giovanni sat on the bed, completely naked, holding a glass of cognac between his hands. His body was dead white, his face was wet and grey. I was at the door with my suitcase. With my hand on the knob, I looked at him. Then I wanted to beg him to forgive me. But this would have been too great a confession; any yielding at that moment would have locked me forever in that room with him. And in a way this was exactly what I wanted. (143–44)

The scene exemplifies a morning after imbued with tragic finality. Giovanni's "dead white," naked form signals his racial and sexual undoing. The morning sun invades, sterilizes, and whitewashes the one space where he found subjective affirmation and queer, interracial communion. For the departing David, the scene is imbued with the dream of futurity, of an eternal stay in Giovanni's room. In this moment, despite his emotional disorientation, David seeks "a world for desire's endurance" (Berlant, *Desire/Love* 7) with Giovanni, a world previewed by what happened, and what can no longer happen, in Giovanni's apartment. For David, love is not only "the embracing dream in which desire is reciprocated," as Lauren Berlant proposes (*Desire/Love* 6), but also the embracing dream in which he *stays*, in which the circumscribed intimacy of

Giovanni's room is sustained and protected from the violence of the outside world. It is the dream of the morning after's inversion, a morning that signifies the possibilities of the night to come rather than the ephemerality of the night before. It is the dream of the perpetual morning after, of waking up in a Garden of Eden, in which the sun rises to inaugurate another day of coupled ecstasy rather than the alienating and atomizing cruelties of modern life. What a dream, indeed.

Coda

It is fitting how Robert Reid-Pharr gets the final theoretical word in this thesis, for it would not have been written if I had not encountered Reid-Pharr's 2001 essay collection *Black Gay Man* (which includes his work on *Giovanni's Room*, reckoned with above). What first caught my attention was Reid-Pharr's lamentation, in the collection's introduction, of the "sort of dull, heavy silence [that] falls most often around the politics—and the pleasure—of what we are doing, the humdrum perversities of our existence, the way we fuck" (12). As I referenced in chapter one, Reid-Pharr argues "that there is no easy distinction among my sex, my writing, and my politics," alluding to interracial sex with a remarkable lover ("poor white, ugly, southern, hot Rick") as a case in point (12). Reid-Pharr, I take it, wants intellectuals and other "political" people to come to terms with their desires, instead of disarticulating them, and to transparently consider how "the way [they] fuck" inescapably motivates their intellectual and ideological commitments. Indeed, Reid-Pharr's provocations have motivated my literary exploration of (queer) sex, culture, and power in the above pages, an exploration that I hope signifies, however minimally and passively, the efficacy of theorizing the literary, the erotic, and the political at the same time.

I continue to find Reid-Pharr's argument riveting and compelling, yet, in hindsight, I think it evades another essential dilemma: the impact of *loneliness* and relational *dissatisfaction* on our work and politics. I sense that Reid-Pharr overestimates the number of people satisfied by their intimate lives to the extent that it naturally invigorates their scholarship and political engagements. And regardless, the question remains: what are we to do with the other side of the orgasmic coin—our sexual, social, and ontological estrangements? What if the acknowledgement of these estrangements equals (or even surpasses) the generativity of erotic openness? I think if we—those of us who "do" queer theory and/or center sexuality in our work—are being honest, it is often the *lack* of relational fulfillment that drives us, and perhaps that is okay. Perhaps desire is at its most intellectually potent when it remains uninitiated or incomplete, as it does in so much of the "queer literature" we embrace, including *A Passage to India* and *Giovanni's Room*. In my experience, writing *through* longing and confusion allows space for their transcendence, or at least positivizes universal experiences of non-relationality that are so often marked as individual failings.

In fact, what principally draws me to *A Passage to India* and *Giovanni's Room* is their proud commitment to a certain type of immovable loneliness and emotional ignorance, expressed most acutely through erotic yearning and disorientation. To me, the novels exalt a self-alienating and unknowing form of love—love at its most radically sincere and insatiable. As the late queer theorist Sam See writes, "Love is the pleasure of ignorance: the pleasure of renouncing our desire to fill the hole of knowledge, to make knowledge whole, to master those to whom we bear relation" (196). Forster and Baldwin's characters take compromised pleasure in such renunciation, in the maddening contradiction of wanting someone in ways illegible to one's broader social world and, in turn, to one's very sense of self. Moreover, love, especially queer love, forms a contested liminal space. It is the zone between the dizzying intoxication of desire and the counteracting forcefield of sociopolitical reality, which often exploits the ambivalence, humbling ignorance, and abject chaos of love as evidence of its illegitimacy. The ultimate loneliness of the novels is a testament to their refusal to resolve this dilemma, to make love harmonious with an unworthy world.

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Vita

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