Failures that Connect; or, Colonial Friendships in

E. M. Forster’s *A Passage to India*

E. M. Forster dedicated *A Passage to India* (1924) to his life-long friend Syed Ross Masood, who, at seventeen and in need of a Latin tutor for his entrance exams to Oxford, was introduced to Forster in 1906. The timing was perfect: Forster was going through a period of solitude, writing *The Longest Journey* (1907). This interim of single-minded productivity, “[a] narrow suburban life that would stretch out interminably, unchangingly into the future . . . [was disrupted by a] wonderful dark-skinned boy” (Moffat 88), whose grandfather had risked his life protecting the Anglo-Indian community during the Indian revolt of 1857. The friendship between Forster and Masood, born out of a working relationship between tutor and pupil, would eventually outlast Forster’s other romantic relations, including his romance with Ali Mohammed, an Arabic Egyptian whose premature death in 1922 slowed down and much complicated the completion of *Passage*. “‘When I began the book I thought of it as a little bridge of sympathy between East and West, but this conception has had to go,’” Forster later told Masood, “‘my sense of truth forbids anything so comfortable’” (qtd. in Moffat, 190). Where invocations of interracial romance are caught in the impasse of identity and ideological differences, friendship offers itself as a narrative thread with which the writer sutures together cross-cultural affinities. The “little bridge of sympathy between East and West” that was initially supported by a fantasy of cross-cultural—and primarily homosocial—romance would ultimately rest on an unfolding ethos of friendship, something far less definitive or purposeful than romance.

Indeed, friendship would inspire Forster as an enduring force, informing not only his views on subjectivity and sociality, but also matters concerning the British Empire. In a BBC recording studio on August 15, 1947, a decade after Masood’s death, Forster would find himself being asked to comment on the birth and partition of India and Pakistan. Instead of politics, however, Forster invoked once more his friendship with Masood, as he spoke over the microphone radio to listeners at home and abroad:

Today, the country I have known as India enters the past and becomes part of history. A new period opens, and my various Indian friends are now citizens of the new India or of Pakistan. You must excuse me if I begin with my friends. They are much in my mind on this momentous occasion. It is nearly forty years since I met, here in England, the late Syed Ross Masood. But for Masood I should never have come to your part of the world. (qtd. in Lago et al. 394)

In real life as in fiction, Forster’s insistence on placing friendship ahead of political concerns or historical events reflects a *considered* ignorance of a subjective life whose importance bears the shape of a recognizable cultural and national identity, in favor of a life whose subjectivity and the spaces in which it apprehends/articulates itself are bound up with those of others, as experienced by the characters in *Passage*.

In employing friendship as a lens through which to read the different modes of meaningful contact in *Passage*, I reexamine Forster’s notions of intimate encounter and collective belonging to challenge certain analytic frames and Manichean logic (that of homosexuality or anticolonial nationalism, for example) within and through which critics have studied the novel.1 Rather than assessing Forster’s representations of friendship in *Passage* as effective or ineffective responses to the uneven material conditions of colonial India, or to forms of binary resistance that would coalesce into a subaltern subject/identity or an anticolonial nationalism, I read friendship as it is *collectively* represented in the novel—as a way of life—to show the extent to which *Passage* creates moments and spaces in which to imagine alternative ways of being oneself and belonging to others that undercut the colonial taxonomies of gender, race, and class. In this essay, I explore a dimension of friendship that is more experiential than epistemological, arguing that friendship carries the potential to foster non-identitarian ways of being and belonging with others, within a world dominated by contractual modes of affiliation and affection. For what gives friendship a radical potential, according to Leela Gandhi, is that in collecting individuals as “singularities,” friendship “form[s] community without affirming an identity . . . [and in a way to] co-belong without any representable condition of belonging” (26). A “shared estrangement [that] is also a communal invention,” friendship, Tom Roach likewise argues, brings with it a pre-condition of shared frustration towards stasis, and a potential of redefining life—singular and multiple—afresh as a collective impulse, however tenuous or unattainable it may be (2). What Gandhi and Roach call attention to is a shared sense of belonging that is also a collective effort to invent new conditions of possibility in which friendship is to take place and thrive. This “achieving” of friendship outside the “representable condition of belonging,” I argue, hinges upon an ethics of non-recognition that does not reinforce the affective and spatial arrangements of sameness and difference, as it bears witness to an everydayness of close encounters and proximate relations between bodies and groups—individual or collective—that is too often being written outside the purview of normative belonging.

In representing friendship in *Passage* as an affective force that binds together bodies and social groups, I want to bear out moments and spaces that escape hegemonic epistemologies of sameness and difference. The sense of possibility and on-going nature of friendship, I argue, help resituate discussions of being and belonging with others at a human scale, and in ways that dissociate colonial and postcolonial realities from a historiography sustained by Manichean reasoning. *Passage* challenges colonial biopolitics and its attendant taxonomies (i.e., race and sexuality) by downplaying the dialectical tension between the colonizer and the colonized, in order to recuperate a possibility of achieving cross-cultural affinity and intimacy as a thinkable past, one that will in turn shape the contours of the present and the future. By invoking friendship in unlikely social situations—and involving unlikely bodies therein—Forsterrecuperates rather than reduces the complexity of colonial lived experiences that were often rendered as non-events, immature or invisible in the face of grand narratives of colonialism that are favored by “official” accounts of history.2 Foster’s privileging of an everydayness of proximate relations over a reality of anticolonial struggle in Chandrapore, I argue, should not be seen as a naïve escapism, as critics have consistently argued along the lines of sexuality and nationalism, but as a commitment to getting nearer to an understanding of colonial encounters whose lived experience and affective impact are always already at risk of being erased or reified.

Queer Affects and Colonial Friendships

Small yet enigmatic gestures and interactions abound in *Passage*: Mrs. Moore’s removal of her shoes in a Muslim temple; Aziz’s outpours of emotion—first surprised anger, followed by feelings of gratitude and camaraderie—at the presence of Mrs. Moore; Aziz playing impromptu polo with a British solider; Mr. Fielding’s unorthodox tea party, for which Aziz shows up unfashionably early and offers his collar stud to the host; Aziz’s spontaneously inviting the English to the Marabar Caves (little does he know what is to come), Mr. Fielding feeling compelled to visit the sick Aziz; Miss Quested fainting in one of the Marabar Caves, the list goes on. These everyday interactions between Mr. Fielding, Aziz, Mrs. Moore, and Adela Quested are confusing and spastic rather than meaningful and steady, however. At first glance, they lack coherence; they seem like exceptions rather than the norms of colonial relations. Suggestive rather substantive, the intermingled lives of these characters resist being translated into a series of events, into a history of successes or failures of colonial relations. The social web thus formed by the crisscrossing of these characters, who are strangers to each other, is akin to a colonial microcosm comprising small-scale lived experiences between the colonizers, the colonized, and the in-between whose daily interactions with one another reveals something different from the ones traced by larger, and less experiential, narratives of colonial history. The encounters between the characters in *Passage*, uneventful and seemingly lacking purposes, bring a sense of particularity to colonial relations: "particularity is not necessarily to assume the other [as] graspable . . . [but to] move our attention . . . to the particularity of modes of encounteringothers . . . [that] move beyond the dialectic of self-other” (Ahmed 144).

I argue that the “non-events”—along with their affective and spatial irregularities—between Aziz, Mrs. Moore, Adela and Fielding are integral to an ethos of friendship that is the corner stone of the novel. *Passage*, in many ways, exemplifies what Judith Halberstam refers to as “[an] imaginative ethnograph[y],” an approach to observing and writing about lived experiences that begins *not* “with a goal, with an object of research and a set of presumptions” (12). The accidental aspects of colonial friendship in *A Passage to India* point to interstices of everyday colonial relations that cannot be explained by established—or borrowed—epistemologies that seek to label and confine them.

Instead of bringing to surface a legibility of identity crisis or sexual desire, and its relation to neocolonialism or anticolonialism, my reading of the novel is more aligned with what Stuart Christie refers to as a “queer illegibility,” a reading that privileges “the ‘prophetic’ . . . [and its] creative pressure on representation” (157). In *Queer Forster*, Robert K. Martin and George Piggford likewise see in queerness a potential of prying open texts, of “find[ing] and analyz[ing] . . . aporias often invisible to . . . gay readings” (7), which, I argue, tend to reinforce—not refute—assumptions underpinning identity politics or the identitarian logic.

Taking a queer stance on friendship, I seek to highlight moments of *Passage* where cross-cultural affinity and affection is presented as a way of life, an end in itself and not a means to something else.3 What Sedgwick has apprehended so articulately is a queer mode of knowing that opens up places that are prescribed and contained by established hermeneutics. José Muñoz, in *Cruising Utopia*, brings out the future orientation and expansive range of queerness, envisioning queerness as “a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present” (1). Taking a cue from contemporary queer theory, I want to bring focus to the areas where much of queer theory and friendship intersect or complement one another.

Previous readings of Forster’s representations of friendship in *Passage* are heavy on the alleged failures or unsustainability of cross-cultural friendship, which they attribute to Forster’s obsession with a class-specific homosexuality trapped within the binary of self and other, or of nation and empire.4 My reading does not seek to repeat previous claims made about Forster’s notions of friendship, especially those filtered through a psychoanalytic frame that, in privileging sexuality, or homosexuality, as a site of knowledge, neglect nascent structures of feeling colonial friendship may invoke in non-teleological ways. Instead, I want to recuperate moments of arrested potentiality, of emergent forms of intimacy, in a host of places within *Passage* that point toward present and future moments of meaningful contact, to spaces beyond a cyclical epistemology of violence that is colonial history. Foster’s novel, I insist, should not be read as a failed attempt at representing cross-cultural affinities that inadvertently reinforces the dictates of colonial history. Rather, in dedicating itself to the everyday interaction between racialized and gendered bodies and their attendant social groups, the novel is an active imagining of the present-future of meaningful contact between identities and categories whose orientation toward the not-yet-known disrupts the Manichean logic of colonial historicity. As a narrative of colonial friendships, *Passage* reimagines the colony as a policed state that nonetheless contains individuals with spontaneous emotions that cannot be predicted or pre-empted.

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Against the backdrop of the slow decline of the Raj, and before India’s eventual independence in 1947, *Passage* is haunted by memories and representations of colonial violence—namely the Indian Mutiny of 1857.5 Interestingly, however, the novel chooses not to dwell on those collective memories but begins its tale with a conundrum: the possibility of a sustaining friendship between Indians and the British. The novel’s distancing from the documented trauma of colonial relations is not an act of irresponsibility (as critics in the past have called it), but an attempt to preserve literature’s autonomy from a historiography that pre-empts the possibilities of thinking otherwise, of reconstructing the past differently. Critics such as Ian Baucom have attributed this distancing from colonial violence in *Passage* to Forster’s escapist, orientalist fantasies with empire, “manufactur[ing] the India he encountered in 1912-1913 as a space of tourism . . . [ignoring] the Mutiny . . . [for] a vision of a reified, precious India threatening always to collapse into a souvenir of itself” (121). But if, as Dipesh Chakrabarty argues, that “[s]ubaltern pasts [are] like stubborn knots that stand out and break up the otherwise evenly woven surface of the fabric” (106), Forster’s reticence regarding the persistent memory of the Indian Mutiny, I argue, is a deliberate gesture of failure that allows for alternative possibilities and ways to fill the gaps of history.

Opening the novel with musings over the possibility of cross-cultural friendship between the English and the Indians, Forster bypasses larger debates over colonial subjugation and subaltern resistance to enter into a complex social sphere made up of small-scale, everyday colonial relations that are more fluid and difficult to define. In Chapter II, the reader is introduced to three Indian characters—Mahmoud Ali, Hamidullah, and Aziz—whose dinner gathering becomes an occasion for a discussion “as to whether or no it is possible to be friends with an Englishman” (7). While Mahmoud Ali rejects the idea of colonial friendship altogether, Hamidullah, who has been to England before, partially agrees with his friend but complicates the verdict by saying, “I only contend that it is possible in England” (7). This opening exchange between Mahmoud Ali and Hamidullah over colonial friendship is significant, for it complicates the question of colonial friendship from one of relationality—personally and socially speaking—to one of spatiality as well. In other words, this spatial turn of friendship brings into focus everyday entanglements of sensation and space that inform the perception and performance of colonial relations. Indeed, a reconceptualization of friendship in terms of physical encounter, emotional proximity, and their correlation is key to understanding Forster’s representations of friendship in the novel. Moving away from epistemology, and closer to experientiality—a word I take to describe a self-orientation and relation to others that is primarily informed by the sensorium—I approach Foster’s representations of colonial friendship less as an ideological stance against a racialized, bourgeois identity politics that helps secure British rule over India, and more as a pliable way to capture and amass inchoate meaning out of a range of lived experiences between the putative agents and subjects of empire, between insiders and outsiders, that often go unnoticed or are downplayed. This conscious moving away from epistemology to experience does not suggest that the two registers are always already mutually exclusive, but promotes an emphasis on the affective dimensions of friendship as represented—or failed to be represented—in various colonial locations in *Passage*.

Bearing out the affective potential of colonial friendship in various places in the novel is, I believe, one way out of an ideological impasse colonial and postcolonial studies sometimes run into, what Sara Suleri identifies as “a conceptual impoverishment . . . the fiction of complete empowerment both claimed by and accorded to colonial domination [being] repeated by the fallacy of the totality of otherness” (13). The extent to which categories like “the colonizer” and “the colonized” have become convenient short-hands for complex identities and ideological leanings is problematic, for it oversimplifies the highly fragmented and hybrid realities of colonialism.6 In highlighting the lived experiences of colonial friendship, I attend to the lineaments of colonial relations whose affinity and sociality in the realm of the everyday, as a body of non-knowledge, is in fact strongly felt in, and intimately bound up with, the reparable histories of colonialism.

Unlikely Colonial Encounters; Unscripted Structures of Feeling

The initial musings over the possibility of cross-cultural friendship in Chandrapore, British India that fill the pages of Chapter II will, like a succession of waves, continue its ebbs and flows in subsequent chapters, bringing together Aziz, Mrs. Moore, Fielding, and Adela in accidental and unscripted ways that confound unfamiliar structures of feeling through which they perceive themselves and others, but lead them to places where available expressions of self and belonging—racial and cultural stereotypes, patriotic feelings, gender divisions, class-specific expectations, etc.—fall short in apprehending or defining what it is they will be experiencing throughout the novel. One such accidental encounter between Mrs. Moore and Aziz takes place in a mosque near the English club, immediately following Mahmoud and Hamidullah’s debate over the locatability of colonial friendship. Unfamiliar with the cultures and customs of Chandrapore, Mrs. Moore walks about as she would in London, blithely unaware of the spatial dynamics of the colonial state as she walks toward a nearby temple. Little does she know that Aziz, after having dinner with his friends, would take refuge in the same temple, to avoid the British quarter of Chandrapore, with streets “named after victorious generals and intersecting at right angles . . . symbolic of the net Great Britain had thrown over India” (12). This and other crisscrossing of characters, and the resulting emotional effects of these spontaneous encounters, form the very structure the novel, through which Forster imagines the affective and spatial dynamics of colonial friendship.

Mrs. Moore and Aziz’s first encounter is an accident, to say the least. The physical layout and social sphere of Chandrapore—a fictional city in India—leave little room for genuine contact between Indians and the English. As Alan Johnson writes, “The interest in spatiality . . . was especially powerful under colonialism because the tools behind Europe’s global conquest . . . were precisely those geared to geographical acquisition and control” (29). Read in this context, then, Mrs. Moore’s decision to leave the English club for fresh air, when the colonial officers and their families are at their seats watching *Cousin Kate*, a comedy on English middle-class romance, and her subsequent entry into a temple are radical movements. Mrs. Moore’s moving away from a familiar site of solidarity and to a holy place for the Muslims, a colonial space to which she does not belong by virtue of her race and faith, is just the kind of spontaneity that colonial spatial regimes seek to pre-empt. If as Kevin Booker argues, that *Cousin Kate* “conveys a complacent sense of security and stability that differs dramatically from the air of crisis that permeates in Foster’s novel” (72), Mrs. Moore, by distancing herself from the English club and *Cousin Kate*, suggests her intuitive awareness of an internal crisis among the English from which she wishes to extricate herself.

 In hearing Mrs. Moore enter the mosque, Aziz, as if being hailed by the history of colonial violence, shouts: “Madam! Madam! Madam! . . . this is a mosque, you have no right here at all; you should have taken off your shoes; this is a holy place for Moslems” (18). Upon learning that Mrs. Moore has taken off her shoes at the entrance, Aziz promptly adjusts his tone from an *insulted* colonial subject to an amicable local, saying to Mrs. Moore “I think you ought not to walk at night alone, Mrs. Moore. There are bad characters about and leopards may come across from the Marabar Hills. Snakes also” (19). As Mrs. Moore and Aziz continue to go off-script, the two begin talking about matters that are personal and intimate, so much so that, without knowing it, “[t]he flame that not even beauty can nourish was springing up . . . [and Aziz’s] heart began to glow secretly” (21). When Mrs. Moore says to him suddenly, “‘I don't think I understand people very well. I only know whether I like them or dislike them,’” Aziz responds with an air of absolute certainty, “‘Then you are an Oriental’” (21). The process of identification taking place here, if inaccurate, is genuine, and out of this comes the beginning of their friendship. Mrs. Moore’s evolving status from being an intruder to having become “an Oriental,” in short, indicates not only Aziz’s changing attitude toward her, or Mrs. Moore’s attitude toward him, but the extent to which the emotional experience of colonial encounter often confounds the terminologies of bourgeois subjectivity and racialized otherness that are mapped onto different bodies and places.

 The good will invoked between Aziz and Mrs. Moore, more spontaneous and accidental than logical, is something that the colonial machinery cannot easily predict or preempt. This good will, for one, temporarily dulls, if not nullifies, the subtle snubs and blatant contempt directed at the colonized: reading the sign that reads “Indians are not allowed into the Chandrapore Club even as guests,” Aziz is unperturbed: “[a]s he strolled downhill beneath the lovely moon, and again saw the lovely mosque, he seemed to own the land as much as anyone owned it. What did it matter if a few flabby Hindus had preceded him there, and a few chilly English succeeded” (22). This change in Aziz’s emotional state, from calling Mrs. Moore “an Oriental” when she (technically) is not and (epistemologically) should not, to making light of the invidious colonial divide and the exile of his people, is not an exercise of wishful thinking on Forster’s part, whose utopic visions of colonial harmony have been subject to criticism. Rather, I see this particular encounter as a kind of historical retrieval of emotional and cross-cultural amities that were previously erased or papered over in the production of an official colonialism. The palimpsestic and unpredictable nature of colonial encounter, good or bad, is subject to present and future unfoldings, not just the dictates of an artificially-made-unvaried past, as the novel suggests.

One particular significance of this friendly colonial encounter between Aziz and Mrs. Moore is that it gives space within the novel to cultivate intimacy that is informed by past events, but whose narrative trajectory need not be predestined. As Sara Ahmed writes, “emotions are performative . . . and they involve speech acts . . . which depend on past histories, at the same time as they generate effects” (13). Their mutual feelings of good will, unstructured and ephemeral, perform a retrieval or revisiting of previously-damaged conditions on which cross-cultural intimacy and sociality were thought to depend. These encounters and emotions of colonial friendship, then, are of a temporal and spatial order that challenges any straightforwardly chronological account of colonialism that seeks to compress its uneven histories into the emptied, homogenous time of the modern nation-state.

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Accidental encounters and their complex emotional impact on the major characters in *Passage* also serve to highlight the artificiality of the colonial social sphere, as well as various kinds of spatial partitioning of race, gender, and class in place to reinforce, not always successfully, Britain’s rule over India: “The colonial population in India tended to define itself in terms of a very narrow class and income range: they adopted the way of life and norms of behaviour appropriate to upper-middle-class or upper-class British people” (Mills 45). But bourgeois cultivations of subject-formation and collective belonging in the colonies were never a secure project; as Ann Stoler argues, “[the] subjacent histories [are] wedged in the folds of dominant ones . . . in the proximities of socialization . . . and caught in the interstices of elaborate state inspection systems . . . that . . . could not manage desire—much less sex (7). In agreeing with Stoler’s general position on the subversive potential lodged within the micro-sites and “interstices” of empire, however, I am hesitant to place too much emphasis on sexuality as a site of resistance or counter-knowledge.7 My reading of *Passage* thus far has examined the accidental and experiential qualities of friendship to reimagine alternative colonial relations that are less subject to the reproduction of knowledge/hegemonic epistemologies. The radical nature of colonial friendship lies not in its ability to pose a direct challenge to colonial power; rather, colonial friendship supplies an indirect influence over the everyday maintenance of personal and social relations, introducing unfamiliar structures of feeling and modes of belonging to a carefully stratified society that seeks to dictate every aspect of subject-formation and affiliation. Illegible and nonthreatening in the eyes of the law, colonial friendship can more easily enter into the zone of cross-cultural intimacy than can interracial sexual and familial relations.

Traveling from England to Chandrapore to meet her future husband Ronny Heaslop, a city magistrate who is also the eldest son of Mrs. Moore, Adela’s desire to see the “real” India has been stymied consistently by those in her community. Her frustration with the British circle—for their conservative jingoism and for purposefully obfuscating her vision of India—is first articulated the same evening that Mrs. Moore first encounters Aziz. “‘It’ll end in an elephant ride, it always does,’” Adela complains to the elderly woman, “‘Look at this evening. *Cousin Kate*! Imagine, *Cousin Kate*! But where have you been off to? Did you succeed in catching the moon in the Ganges?’” (22). Adela’s anxiety to see the real India stems from her ambivalence toward what her life would become, should she decide to marry a colonial officer and be labeled an Anglo-English wife, a stereotype Adela tries not to embody.8 Her earnest wishes to see the real India, however, are interpreted as signs of innocence and nuisance among the Anglo-Indian circle. When pressed by Adela’s pleas—“‘I’m tired of seeing picturesque figures pass before me as a frieze . . . I only want those Indians whom you come across socially—as your friends’”—Mr. Turton, the collector, responds offhandedly, “‘Well, we don’t come across them socially . . . They’re full of virtues, but we don’t and it’s now eleven-thirty, and too late to go into the reasons’” (26).

The bridge party—a planned event—given by the Turtons in honor of Mrs. Moore and Adela is a complete failure, further impressing upon Adela that any attempt at extending friendship outside one’s designated community of belonging is a doomed project from the start. “The Bridge Party was not a success,” the narrator tells us, “at least it was not what Mrs. Moore and Miss Quested were accustomed to consider a successful party” (39). Despite Adela’s wish to meet “those Indians whom [the Turtons] come across socially as friends,” the hosts re-enact the impossibility of genuine exchange between the English and Indians within the different spaces of the Bridge party. For example, the tennis courts reinforce colonial authority and its attendant divisions, rather than serving as a neutral playground: “when tennis began, the barrier grew impenetrable. It had been hoped to have some sets between East and West, but this was forgotten, and the courts were monopolized by the usual club couples” (47). Small talk is proven difficult for the ladies as well. Among the few Indian women in attendance, none sees the party as an opportunity to bridge the social gap between the two camps. As the narrator says,

Indeed, all the [Indian] ladies were uncertain, cowering, recovering, giggling, making tiny gestures of atonement or despair at all that was said . . . Miss Quested . . . tried to make them talk, but she failed, she strove in vain against the echoing walls of their civility. Whatever she said produced a murmur of deprecation, varying into a murmur of concern when she dropped her pocket-handkerchief. (43)

However Adela tries to break the ice, however earnest her attempts to reach out to the other side of Chandrapore, her friendly gestures cannot penetrate the cold barriers of sociality the bridge party have erected. The party fails miserably, in Adela’s point of view, and she is ashamed of it. But for the Turtons and other British officials, the party’s failure to create the condition of possibility in which cross-cultural affinity may engender is, ironically, a sign of success. The party at the Turtons, I argue, is the antithesis of a cross-cultural friendship that Forster actively imagines in the novel. To the extent that both parties—the British and the Indians—are retreating back to what they think they understand of the other, to a place of race-based and culturally-specific belonging, to which the other has no access or recourse, both the colonizers and the colonized in Chandrapore are performing in front of Adela and Mrs. Moore a proximate distancing that, as Sara Ahmed argues, establishes “a national imaginary [through] . . . the proximity of those who are already recognisable as strangers” (95). This pre-emptive gesture that prohibits cross-cultural affinities from gravitating toward the non-identitarian, uneventful spaces of friendship, brings to light the reactionary impulses of normative belonging that must take place through a production of otherness, that must take away the potential spaces in which friendship might, by virtue of its affective presence, unsettle the foundation of a prescriptive and policed community.

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The afternoon tea party at Fielding’s is a turning point for Adela. An unprecedented invitation, it is cosmopolitan rather than bourgeois, confounding rather than confirming the genteel ritual of Englishness. In bringing together Fielding, Aziz, Mrs. Moore, Adela Quested, and Professor Godbole, a Brahman, the otherwise familiar routines of afternoon tea become strange and foreign, something to be experienced for the first time by the host and his English and Indian guests. Similar to the colonial encounter at the mosque, this social exchange between different cultures—English and India—and beliefs—Christian, Hinduism, and Islam—is an aberration. As the novel tells us, “[a]s a rule no English woman entered the College except for official functions” (66). By virtue of his position as “the Principal of the little Government College,” Fielding should be classified as an agent of empire. Surprisingly, however, Fielding has “no racial feeling” and is without “the herd instinct” (65). This deposition of his, in many ways, creates the condition of possibility in which host and guests can experiment with new social dynamics that confound the distinctions of “colonizer” and “colonized.” The afternoon tea at Fielding’s residence, though a place within the colony, is in fact developing a spatiality—a feel of place—whose function and purpose is not tied to the reproduction of colonial power dynamics. More of a social space that is open to sensory experience and play, and less of a place that invokes colonial governance, the afternoon tea at Fielding’s calls for what Yi-Fu Tuan describes as “spatial skill,” which, “[i]n a broad sense . . . is manifest in our degree of freedom from the tie to place, in the range and speed of our mobility” (75). Since this space of a bachelor pad is within, but not of, the colony, the host and his invited guests enact a sociality that flouts the dictates of the Victorian home. For the English gentleman’s house is a carefully prescribed space whose material comforts appeal to the ideal of bourgeois domesticity.9

The domestic setting and “spatial logic” of Fielding’s house, however, is anything but exacting or “rigorous.” For example, having shown up early, Aziz is invited right into Fielding’s bedroom, where the host is “dressing after a bath,” with his gentlemanly outfit incomplete without Aziz’s collar stud. Surprised by the simple tastes and carefree nature of Fielding’s house, Aziz exclaims, “‘I always thought that Englishmen kept their rooms so tidy. It seems that this is not so. I need not be ashamed’” (68). The intimate proximity between the English host and his Indian guest, and the absence of colonial authority within the house, reveal the everyday nuances of colonial encounter to which the novel attends. Indeed, as the afternoon tea goes on, the sociality that it has invoked takes an unexpected turn, whose spontaneity and unbounded-ness, as the novel later reveals, is both the harbinger of friendship and identity crisis. A new social space carved out of an otherwise Manichean colonial society, the afternoon tea brings closer together Aziz, Fielding, Mrs. Moore, and Adela; the meeting, with no objectives or expectations on the agenda, is a stretch of time in space more experiential, with many unexpected turns in this conversation or that, than a script playing out the colonialist logic. “How fortunate that it was an ‘unconventional’ party, where formalities are ruled out,” (71) Aziz thinks to himself, for example, as he lets his guard down and approaches the English party with increasing ease and zeal.

 Perhaps one of the most extraordinary things achieved at the afternoon tea at Fielding’s is that it serves no clear purposes at all. It is extraordinary not in an ironical sense, but in the sense that the afternoon tea gathering, having occupied an official colonial site (the university), is able to disregard a duty to produce knowledge through bodily and social etiquette on which colonial power depends. That the physical closeness and social exchange of the afternoon tea does not overtly endorse racialized notions of proximity and distance, too, is a radical gesture that should not be ignored. With so diverse a group of people in terms of experience and taste, of history and religion, their conversations move in every direction, follow no particular track or order, and prove nothing important. From a brief mentioning of post-impressionism, Aziz’s rendition of the Mogul Emperors, Professor Godbole’s eating habits as a Hindu, to an Urdu proverb about happiness following a conversation about mangoes, the party of five unlikely strangers manage to get along well. The sociality of these five friendly figures, sustained by good will and a kind of historical insensitivity or inaccuracy, represents an affective force—if nebulous and vague—aimed at proximity, a shared feeling of togetherness in the present. This stranger-oriented sociality, invoked within a colonial education institution, is more radical than what meets the eye, for in bypassing formality, the group, conscious or not, is also doing away with the colonial authority felt through one’s behavior toward another. In trading politics for pleasure, the afternoon tea party opts for a strategic forgetfulness of the past in favor of things to come. What anchors the structure of feelings of the afternoon tea gathering is not so much historical or cultural specificity, but the improvisational performance of colonial encounter in the absence of knowledge and authority. If as Sara Ahmed tells us, “[e]motions . . . are not only about movement . . . [but] also about attachments . . . that which holds us in place . . . connects bodies to other bodies,” the friendly emotions infused at Fielding’s—though unspecific in nature—successfully turn an official place—the Government College of which Fielding is principal—into an experiential space (11).

Failures and the (Intimate) Spaces of Non-Representation

In Chapter VII, Forster takes the afternoon tea to an unscripted space, flouting conventions for the possibilities of closeness. This unexpected turn of the afternoon tea, for better or for worse, is what decontextualizes—and disorients—many fundamental beliefs and understandings of life and intimacy that have hitherto anchored Aziz and Adela. From the “Mosque” section of the novel to that of “Caves,” Aziz and Adela are inching closer to an India that “is . . . older than anything in the world. No water has ever covered them . . . [and that] There is something unspeakable in [it]” (136). It is *this* India, therein lies the Marabar Caves, where the characters will lose their bearings, where Adela will faint. The “Caves” section of *Passage*, I argue, covers a vast expanse of the “unspeakable” and the non-representational, in which the characters flounder about in searching of meaning and significance.

This section of *Passage* also witnesses the disorienting and dangerous impact of friendship. Adela’s “collapse” in the Marabar Caves, for example, can be interpreted as a physical succumbing to an epistemological crisis. But especially, I want to argue that Adela’s collapse is an affective response to an India that is devoid of meaning. I also want to read the “collapse” as a bodily assertion of letting go, a shift of register from the epistemological to the experiential. Adela’s temporary succumbing to India is, as Charu Malik argues, a moment “that the text refuses to master, disrupting the plentitude of representation . . . [and offering a] critique of the discourse of colonial authority” (224).

Adela’s desire to visit the Marabar Caves is evidence of her increasing resistance to impositions of western epistemologies—personal, cultural, and legal—that have been pressed upon Adela’s mind and body. Incredibly bored, by the Anglo-Indian community (unlike Elizabeth Lackersteen in *Burmese Days*), Adela is eager to trade her ennui and feelings of nothingness for an enlightened, if physically demanding, journey to the Marabar Caves:

Most of life is so dull that there is nothing to be said about it, and the books and talk that would describe it as interesting are obliged to exaggerate, in the hope of justifying their own existence. . . . It so happened that Mrs. Moore and Miss Quested had felt nothing acutely for a fortnight. Ever since Professor Goodbole had sung his queer little song [at the afternoon tea at Fielding’s], they had lived more or less inside cocoons. (146)

That India must reveal its subaltern knowledge to her in some profound way, is what drives her expedition to the caves. Adela’s intellect, single-minded and empirically-inclined, is at odds with an aura of mysticism that India seems to project: “She was particularly vexed now because she was in India and engaged to be married, which . . . should have made every instant sublime” (146-147).

The experience of the “sublime,” which Adela hopes the trip will provide, will not come to her, for there is nothing particularly special for her to look at: the caves, one after another, look identical from afar, and up close they feel the same. At this critical juncture when friendly conversations are most needed, both Adela and Aziz cannot find a way to communicate or connect with one another. The pleasant conversations about India that they had at Fielding’s house two weeks ago over tea seem to take a serious turn, and Aziz and Adela find themselves disagreeing on the notion of universality and the role it might play in India’s future:

“Miss Quested . . . You keep your religion, and I mine. That is the best. Nothing embraces the whole of India, nothing, nothing . . .” “Oh, do you feel that, Dr. Aziz?” she said thoughtfully. “I hope you’re not right. There will have to be something universal in this country—I don’t say religion, for I’m not religious, but something, or how else are barriers to be broken down?” (160)

What neither of them realizes at that moment, is that miles and miles away from Chandrapore, the Marabar Caves decontextualize their attempt to define the human experience in historical or philosophical terms as they know them. “The echo in a Marabar cave is . . . entirely devoid of distinction,” the narrator tells us, “‘Boum’ is the sound as far as the human alphabet can express it . . . utterly dull” (163). And inside one of these caves Adela gets disoriented, experiences an epistemic crisis, and faints.

If “the making of ‘the Orient’ is an exercise of power,” as Sara Ahmed argues, Adela’s collapse signals an affective resistance to an exhausting ethnographic gaze that seeks to impose meaning onto India where there is none, rendering the continent knowable and conquerable (114). What Adela says to Aziz right before they venture into another cave—“‘I can’t avoid the label. What I do hope to avoid is its mentality. . . . some women are so—well, ungenerous and snobby about Indians, and I should feel ashamed for words if I turned like them’”—is an important context that critics seem to miss or downplay when analyzing Adela’s collapse and her deteriorating friendship with Aziz. This exchange between Aziz and Adela, before they are made to face each other again as defendant and plaintiff in court, holds significant weight. It helps Adela to later question her identity as a European woman in the colony, and the designated places to which her body—as a sign of bourgeois domesticity and racial superiority—is bound. In many ways, Adela’s wish to untangle herself from an Anglo-Indian community that seeks to control her is similar to Mrs. Moore’s intuitive grasp of a self-knowledge and intimacy with others that bears no name or legibility, as she thinks to herself, “that . . . though people are important, the relations between them are not, and that in particular too much fuss has been made over marriage” (149). The feelings of disorientation that contribute to Adela’s fainting, I argue, are in no small part inspired by her belief in cross-cultural friendship. However difficult and counter-intuitive it may seem, Adela’s new orientation of selfhood and community suggests her attempt to break away from Oriental fantasies of India for something more real, if un-representable.

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The “collapse” in the Marabar Caves marks a serious turn in the novel—it moves from friendly bantering between strangers to evidence of the heavy price one pays for entering into such an unpredictable sociality. The final parting scene between Fielding and Aziz, where the “echoes” of the caves are replaced by “the hundred voices” of India, offers little closure or relief. The reunion of old friends, complicated by a rising anticolonialism in India to which Aziz subscribes (or retreats), and by Fielding’s new status as a married man, is now fraught with tension, lacking the luster and good will of their first encounter. Their terse conversation during “their last ride in the Mau jungles” suggests as much:

“[W]e shall drive every blasted Englishman into the sea, and then”—he [Aziz] rode against him furiously—“and then,” he concluded, half kissing him, “you and I shall be friend.” “Why can’t we be friends now?” said the other, holding him affectionately. “It’s what I want. It’s what you want.” (361-362)

The “failure” suggested in this scene, Ian Baucom argues, is “due . . . to [Forster’s] incapacity to locate friendship outside of [the] moment of crisis in which intimacy is offered as war’s alternative. Friendship atrophies in this text because it cannot survive the encroachments of the mundane” (132). Judging by the affective gestures of Fielding and Aziz, and the tone of their conversation, however, the scene allows hope or future reconciliation as well. Indeed, I argue that though Aziz and Fielding fail to communicate with each other in nationalistic terms, the failure itself nonetheless brings them closer together physically.

Fielding’s gestures towards Aziz—whispering into his ears, “half kissing” and “holding him affectionately”—evince an intimacy, a lived experience of closeness that cannot be ignored or explained away. For despite its spastic and agitated nature, this final scene takes us closer to the inarticulate friendship between Fielding and Aziz that, since the beginning of the novel, has exercised itself not in words but through everyday acts of epistemological failure. These failures, in vexing larger narratives of meaning and signification, draw the two men closer to each other physically and emotionally. An intimacy that feels the other but cannot articulate itself fully—such is the shared bond of Aziz and Fielding I argue—is at odds with what Elizabeth Povinelli refers to as “the intimacy grid” that places intimacy squarely in the sphere and narratives of legibility and legitimacy, into “[a] regulatory ideal [that] renders actual life irrelevant” (208). In failing to acquire meaning or evidence of their intimate friendship beyond the purview of a colonial, hegemonic epistemology, Fielding and Aziz’s relationship remain in the field of potentiality. The seeming unintelligibility of their friendship, I argue, is what keeps it un-coopted by the contents and contexts of colonialism and anticolonial nationalism. While their everyday moments with one another—such as Aziz’s offering his collar stud to Fielding or Fielding visiting the sick Aziz—do not rise to the level of an event, they do express a closeness, a comforting presence, on which their friendship is based. Aziz and Fielding’s gestures of closeness are akin to what Muñoz refers to as “ephemera”—an affective presence that “stands against the harsh lights of mainstream visibility and the . . . tyranny of the fact” (65). In short, these acts embody an everydayness of friendship that fails to acknowledge or adhere to the importance of larger narratives of self and other, in terms of culture, politics, or sexuality, that are of a teleological nature. The affective presence of their friendship, instead, speaks to a desire of nearing one another that, in reaching one another, brings into motion a certain surrendering to non-rational thinking—and to spaces of non-representation—that is key to its future unfolding.

If Adela’s entrance into the Marabar Caves exhausts her epistemological faculty, making her faint amidst the echoes of non-representation, Aziz and Fielding’s riding into “the Mau jungles” frustrates rather than facilitates any attempt to understand or put a label on their friendship. In the penultimate chapter, Aziz unexpectedly reunites with Fielding, along with his wife and Mrs. Moore’s younger son (the three are touring Mau, where Aziz now practices medicine). A rigid coolness and formality permeates this reunion, as neither Fielding nor Aziz feels compelled or capable to ameliorate the situation; instead, they retreat from each other, choosing to play the parts of the colonizer and the colonized.

In the space of “[t]he European Guest House stood two hundred feet above the water, on the crest of a rocky and wooded spur that jutted from the [Mau] jungle,” where ties of affection and affiliation are clearly marked, and where European guests do not usually mix with the locals, Aziz finds himself reluctant to bring closure to his former life in Chandrapore—neither can he forget Mrs. Moore nor can he easily forgive Adela. And Fielding, “giving up his slight effort to recapture their intimacy,” seems “more official . . . older and sterner” (337). All this preceding the final scene in the Mau jungles, I argue, is what prompts Aziz and Fielding subliminally to reanimate their friendship *elsewhere*; as if by instinct, both understand that they need to invent a new social space where there is none, to find home for an intimacy, theirs, that has rejected all places and prefixes representational. Even if Fielding’s “half-kissing” and holding Aziz is met with the rising landscape of India, which responds to these affects—“in their hundred voices,”—“‘No, not yet . . . No, not there,’” the lived experience of their intimate friendship is felt, and Aziz does not say a word (362). No celebration, no contradiction, not unlike the indistinguishable echoes in the Marabar Caves, is where their friendship takes root. Failure or not, Aziz and Fielding’s reunion is reminiscent of the debate between Mahmoud Ali and Hamidullah over the possibility of friendship, for here the two friends once again return to the now-or-then, or here-or-there, of friendship. The final scene does not question the existence of friendship so much as it quibbles over the timing and possible location of its present and future.

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In folding friendship—as an affective persistence in time and space—into the reading of *Passage*, I have in this essay envisioned friendship less as a direct resistance to colonialism or normative sexuality, than as an exploration of how bodies, embodied lives, and their spatial relations exercise self-orientation and disorientation in ways that deviate from patterns of the past, deferring rather to the optimism of the not-yet-known, and without always having to conform to established modes of intimacy and sociality imposed upon them. Looking at the cross-cultural friendships in the novel as a network of intimacies sustained by the strangers of empire, I have illustrated that the emotions and lived experiences born out of everyday colonial encounters, and the places that bear witness to them, are far less amenable to the maintenance of colonial power than official accounts of colonialism would have it. If the goal of historicizing the colonial past is not so much to study chronology or causes and their effects, but to better recognize the changing faces and sites of power, we must take into account affects and social relations through which power regenerates itself as the real and the normative.

That friendship is patient and sensitive to the emergence and everyday care of potential affective ties, and that friendship allows for small-scale and context-specific analyses of colonial relations, are important claims I have made in my reading of *Passage*. Or, as Mrs. Moore puts it, “though people are important, the relations between them are not . . . centuries of carnal embracement, yet man is no nearer to understanding man” (149). The idea that friendship both gives and takes time away from colonial relations is a concept that I begin to bear out in this essay. The time *given* to Mrs. Moore, Aziz, Adela, and Mr. Fielding to cultivate friendship with others, for instance, is time *taken away* from performing normative colonial relations. If events, as Elizabeth Povinelli calls them, “are things that we can say happened such that they have a certain object being” (13), the colonial friendships in *Passage* occupy the liminal space between the eventful and the uneventful. It is in this middle range of affects and spatial dynamics where Forster allows cross-cultural affinities to accrue their inchoate meaning.

**Notes**

See Suleri’s “Forster’s Imperial Erotic” in *The Rhetoric of English India* (1992) and Baucom’s “The Path from War to Friendship” in *Out of Place* (1999) for critiques of Forster’s colonial or flawed representations of cross-cultural relations.

See Chakrabarty’s *Provincializing Europe*, particularly Chapter 4 “Minority Histories, Subaltern Pasts,” for his distinctions “between historians’ histories and other constructions of the past” (106).

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick uses queer friendship as an example to describe the “deroutinized . . . temporality” associated with those deemed not normal or failing to adhere to common sense. Reparative reading, according to Sedgwick, is more attuned to the question, “[W]hat it means to identify with each other[?]” and to the “barely recognized and little explored” (148). For more detail, see Sedgwick’s “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You” in *Touching Feeling*.

See, for example, Christopher Lane’s “Managing ‘The White Man’s Burden’: The Racial Imaginary of Forster’s Colonial Narratives” in *The Ruling Passion* (1995).

In *Colonial Power, Colonial Text*, M. Keith Booker argues, “The use of . . . violence by the British is . . . an important subtext in almost all British fictions about India, ranging from early post-Mutiny visions of deranged murderous Indians (and concomitant British retribution) to . . . retrospective accounts of the Mutiny as the result of a failure of epistemological and theatrical techniques of power that rendered military intervention necessary” (11).

Studying the psychodynamics of empire reveals “a false sense of cultural homogeneity in Britain,” Ashis Nandy writes, which was achieved by “discouraging the basic cultural criticism that might have come from growing intellectual sensitivity to the rigid British social classes and subnational divisions” (33). “This [intended] underdevelopment . . . of [the] isolation of cognition from affect . . . of a new pathological fit between ideas and feelings”—as Nandy observes—is a knowledge production colonial and postcolonial scholarship should be aware of, if not completely avoid, as my paper will later argue.

See Michel Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Vol. I* for his discussion of sexuality, power, and their regeneration through incited proliferations of knowledge on their behalf.

See Collingham for her discussion of the figure of the burra memsahib, “a pleasure-seeking, superficial and unrefined atmosphere of Anglo-Indian society . . . separated from their husbands during the hot weather and thrown together with young military men on leave in the Hills, gained a reputation for indulging in affairs” (179-180).

See Chase and Levenson for their discussion of the gentleman’s house, especially the idea that “the gentleman’s house [serves as] a disciplined squad of modern domestics [with] its own rigorous spatial logic. (165)

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