

## Crossing Desire and Drive in *A Passage to India*: The Subversion of the British Colonial Law in the “Twilight Zone of Double Vision”

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The Marabar Caves, occupying the center of Forster’s novel, are the place where all human speech is reduced to one monotonous “boum,” where the Western concept of sense is mocked by a nonsensical echo, and where, eventually, the law of the British colonial court is subverted by the “law” of the Indian Caves. Upon a first reading, it may look as though the echo’s destruction of the critical distinctions between goodness and evil, piety and filth marks the ascendancy of the drive over desire. However, it is my argument that Part II of the novel, “Caves,” is the “twilight zone of double vision” where drive and desire cross each other. It is in this ambiguous space that both the subject and the object of colonial discourse become split, that the contradictory structure and irreconcilable logic of the fetish of colonialism are revealed.<sup>1</sup> The identity of both the colonizer and colonized thus become destabilized—a process culminating in the reversal of the trial of the slave by the master in the British colonial court.

Following the Western narrator’s viewpoint, one cannot help, upon first encountering *A Passage to India*, being struck by the nihilism and lawlessness associated with the Caves. While British Justice finds itself on the rational discrimination

between guilt and innocence, evil and goodness, slave and master, the echo in the caves destroys all such distinctions with its definitively undifferentiating, nonsensical "boum." Amidst the undifferentiated mass of echoes, all meanings are reduced to the same nonsense, in which the lowly and the dignified, the wrong and the right, amount to the same idle prattle:

The echo in a Marabar cave is . . . entirely devoid of distinction. Whatever is said, the same monotonous noise replies, and quivers up and down the walls until it is absorbed into the roof. "Boum" is the sound as far as the human alphabet can express it, or "bou-oum," or "ou-boum,"—utterly dull. Hope, politeness, the blowing of a nose, the squeak of a boot, all produce "boum." Even the striking of a match starts a little worm coiling, which is too small to complete a circle but is eternally watchful. And if several people talk at once, an overlapping howling noise begins, echoes generate echoes, and the cave is stuffed with a snake composed of small snakes, which writhe independently. (163; emphasis added)

Rendering ineffectual every attempt to make any kind of differentiation, the malignance of the echo seems evident in the damages it does to Mrs. Moore and Adela. The echo, which makes it impossible for one to affirm any value, "[begins] in some indescribable way to undermine her [Mrs. Moore's] hold on life" (165) as supported by the Western idea of humanity:

Coming at a moment when she chanced to be fatigued, it [the echo] had managed to murmur, "Pathos, piety, courage—they exist, but are identical, and so is filth. Everything exists, nothing has value." If one had spoken vileness in that place, or quoted lofty poetry, the comment would have been the same—"ou-boum." If one had spoken with the tongue of angels and pleaded for all the unhappiness and misunderstanding in the world, past, present, and to come, for

all the misery men must undergo whatever their opinion and position, and however much they dodge or bluff—it would amount to the same, the serpent would descend and return to the ceiling. (165)

Without critical distinctions, no law can be established. Without law saying “No” to “wrongness,” “rightness” cannot emerge. In fact, without law, no action, particularly of the performative kind,<sup>2</sup> can arise. Above all, no subject can even exist without law, since the subject is a product of law. The “voidance of law” in the caves is thus absolutely destructive of humanity. Its destruction of a thinking, acting, or speaking subject is definitive, as is Mrs. Moore’s experience in the cave:

[Mrs. Moore] had come to the state where the horror of the universe and its smallness are both visible at the same time—the twilight of the double vision in which so many elderly people are involved. If this world is not to our taste, well, at all events there is Heaven, Hell, Annihilation—one or other of those large things, that huge scenic background of stars, fires, blue or black air. All heroic endeavor, and all that is known as art, assumes that there is such a background, just as all practical endeavor, when the world is to our taste, assumes that the world is all. But in the twilight of the double vision, a spiritual muddledom is set up for which no high-sounding words can be found; we can neither act nor refrain from action, we can neither ignore nor respect Infinity. (230-31)

In other words, the absence of prohibition and critical differentiation becomes the abyss of nihilism in which the fact that “everything exists” turns, paradoxically, into the proposition that “nothing has value” (165). In Lacanian terms, this easy drift from “vileness” to “lofty poetry,” from “piety” to “filth,” resulting from a foreclosure of the cut of the symbolic order, is an indication of the positivization of the *objet a*, and of the emergence of the drive.

In fact, the lack of depth one experiences in the Marabar Caves does seem to suggest the ascendancy of the drive. Even the hills oppress one with their "spiritual silence"—an absence of depth allowing no dimensions of the future in the forms of "consequences" or "echoes." Nor is there any room for the past to ground the "roots" of anything. Cut off from both the future and the past, the world is robbed of any sense of having a solid foundation; at the same time, this illusory quality is inimical to "romance," for romance requires the transcendent act of imagination—a transcendence which, unfortunately, is stifled into a "spiritual silence":

As the elephant moved towards the hills...a new quality occurred, a *spiritual silence* which invaded more senses than the ear. Life went on as usual, but had *no consequences*, that is to say, *sounds did not echo or thoughts develop*. Everything seemed *cut off at its root*, and therefore infected with *illusion*....Again, there was a confusion about a snake which was never caught up....Nothing was explained, and yet there was *no romance*. (155; emphasis added)

No doubt, romance and romanticization function by furnishing the illusion of an idealism that promises a higher reality behind the veil of existing reality. However, in the Marabar Caves, even infinity and eternity are squashed into a dull flatness, the consequence of which is the positivization of the *objet a*—that is, the emergence of the inhuman<sup>3</sup>—as Mrs. Moore's thoughts about the echo reveal to us:

Devils are of the North, and poems can be written about them, *but no one can romanticize the Marabar because it robbed infinity and eternity of their vastness, the only quality that accommodates them to mankind*. (165; emphasis added)

This flatness is frighteningly nihilistic in that it permits no space for a "Truth" to "hide" behind appearances, and no accommodation for a "Presence of Reality" behind representations.<sup>4</sup> To bor-

row Elizabeth Weber's term, the "fig leaf" (comparable to the conventional metaphor of the veil) creating the illusion of depth "was the product of a greater expression of *reason* than the discovery of the imaginary infinite substitutability of the objects of satisfaction of hunger" (2; emphasis added):

For if the first stage [hunger] introduced something like metonymy and metaphor, the second phase, which in fact must be thought of as strictly contemporaneous to the first, introduced not only ruse, a trick, but a ruse that *referred to the Other as the guarantor that behind the fig leaf there was the promise of something else*. In other words, if the first phase introduced the structure of a signifying chain, the second . . . anchors this chain in the "locus of the Other, the Other witness, the witness Other than any of the partners" (Lacan, *Écrits* 305). (E. Weber 2)

The Other, the third term of the symbolic order, is, in Elizabeth Weber's terms, the "Angel of the Sword" that protects us from that "violation of a distance"—from that "crossing of the limit" beyond which a human being cannot stay for too long.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the idea of representation pertaining to idealism, and for that matter, to representational jurisprudence<sup>6</sup> in operation in the British court, is built precisely upon this definitive "No"-to-*jouissance*<sup>7</sup>—this "Angel of the Sword"—this *point de capiton* of negation, that retroactively brings into being the idea of "Presence" in the forms of Truth, Justice, etc. In other words, it is this "No" that makes possible a deep Truth, a full Presence. To adopt a (Max) Weberian term, the "legal rational"—the No/Name-of-the-Father—is supposed to protect humankind from the horror of a direct confrontation with the Lacanian object—that is to say, with the senselessness of the "mad, sadistic law."<sup>8</sup> Seen in this light, this "politics of the veil"—the politics that *forbids* access to *jouissance*—appears to be a politics of desire.<sup>9</sup>

In other words, the "No"-of-the-Father, far from being annihilative, is productive and generative of "Presence," and is so only through this initial negation. Its asymmetrical, yet similarly paradoxical, counterpart—namely, nihilism—is the anal father

which says "NO" to the "No" of prohibition. The "NO" of the anal father—that is to say, the "NO" of the drive—is nihilistic in that it is the "ultimate NO" that undoes all other "No's/Names"-of-the-Father, and in so doing destroys the idyllic "Presence" hinted at, and made possible, by the distancing established by representations. While the prohibiting "No" transforms an impossible object into a desirable one by creating an illusion of an ideal object behind a veil of concealment, the drive does away with this veil that deters access to the impossible object.<sup>10</sup> Devoid of any distance—that is, without the depth created by the father's prohibition of direct access to the object—the flatness associated with the drive is devastating to humanity inasmuch as the destruction of representations brings forth the presencing, not of a desirable object, but of an impossible world.

The "Bride Party"<sup>11</sup> at the Marabar Caves, then, brings about a confrontation between two laws—a Western symbolic law and an Indian law<sup>12</sup> of the Real. At this point, it *looks as though* Western representational jurisprudence might be of the order of desire, in that this system operates on the promise of an ideal "Truth" supporting the whole hierarchy of representations. The Indian law, on the other hand, is of the order of the Real. Instead of *re-presenting* the object (a) as the desirable, it *presents* the full import of the *impossible*—which means that behind various representations of the *objet a*—for example, by calling it "pathos," "piety," "filth"—there emerges the presence, not of an ideal Truth, but of the supreme "evil" (307) of a seamless mass of empty echoes. Indiscriminately receptive to every kind of representation, the echo absorbs both piety and filth, both the sacred and the profane, only to cut them off from their "roots"—that is, from an ideal "reality" or their respective "signifieds" in which they are supposed to be grounded. "Everything exists, nothing has value" (165). The critical distinctions between good and bad supposedly installed by representations are all annihilated by this big "boum" in the Caves. Drifting from signifiers to signifiers, from representations to representations, the various messages of "sense" sent by the Western visitors into the Caves are all sucked into, and are captivated by, one enormous "boum"—that impossible object, that definitive stumbling block to sense, which retroactively converts all representations into one piece of

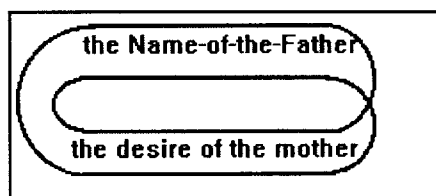
nonsense, and all forms of human speech into an inarticulate babble.

Along the Kantian-Lacanian line, one can refer to the "evil" of the echoes (307) as radical evil.<sup>13</sup> Unlike petty offenses, which are still committed with reference to the symbolic order, radical evil is transgression of an ultimate kind, the kind that shatters altogether the Establishment or Institution of good and evil—or, for that matter, the very possibility of "transgression" so very closely related to the humanist idea of "transcendence," and thus to the human being as a free being. To borrow Bersani's analysis of the radical evil practiced by Genet,

evil (to continue using Genet's term) [is] not . . . a crime against socially defined good but as a turning away from the entire theater of the good and its transgressions, that is, as a kind of meta-transgressive *dépassement* of the field of transgressive possibility itself. (10)

As in the Nazism of *Funeral Rites* described by Bersani, there runs rampant inside the Marabar caves a violent betrayal of all oppositions between right and wrong, between just and unjust. It is "a betrayal opposed to nothing because it consists merely in a movement out of everything" (12). Similarly, as in the case of the horror examined in "The Gay Outlaw," the echo is "a horrific figure for a will to be no longer defined, in good or evil, as human" (12).<sup>14</sup>

The movement from Part I of *A Passage to India*—where the law and order of British colonial officialdom predominates—to Part II, where the echo of the Caves reigns supreme, seems to suggest a split of the novel into 2 parts—namely, into desire and drive. Borrowing Žižek's reading of Hitchcock's *Psycho*, the split can be laid out in the following chart:



To appropriate Žižek's wording, the first part of *A Passage to India* "stands under the sign of the Father—that is, of the symbolic desire constituted by the name-of-the-Father" ("Bold Gaze" 228). This is the segment of the novel where the Indian "chaos" is well-managed and controlled by British law and order. As one enters the Caves in the second part of the novel, however, one finds oneself "entrapped into the mother's desire not yet submitted to the paternal law (and as such not yet a desire *stricto sensu*, but rather a pre-symbolic drive)" ("Bold Gaze" 228). This is the realm of "the twilight of the double vision" in which both Mrs. Moore and Adela "lose their sanity."

Indeed, a first reading of the novel can easily yield an interpretation in which the trauma experienced by Mrs. Moore and Adela in the caves is mistaken for the devastation of reason by lawlessness, and of desire by the drive. I argue a different reading. My contention is that if one reads the chart carefully, one notices that, while the narrative is divided into two parts, these parts are in fact related to one another through a moebius strip. *Drive is always already implicated in desire, as much as drive itself can also become desire. It is this moebius strip that makes possible the dramatic reversal occurring in the plot. Moreover, one can see by tracing the trajectory of the moebius strip that the reversal of the trial is far from indicating the overpowering of law by lawlessness. Instead, the reversal reveals the injustice residing at the center of British justice and, by this revelation, it prevents the reification of colonial mastery. In other words, this ambivalent in-between-drive-and-desire opens up a space for the colonized to speak back at, and interpellate, the colonizer. The crossing between desire and drive on the moebius strip is an indeterminate space where the "oriental" "not-quite-subject" can strategically assume agency, and submit the white "full subject" to trial.*

The mutual implications of desire and the drive on the moebius strip allow the colonized to interpellate the lawlessness existing within the law of the Master. In fact, even though a casual reading would suggest that the evil of the echo can be attributed to the drive—or to the utter destruction of the law for which it stands—a diligent examination of the text will reveal that the real source of the nightmarish atmosphere engulfing this part of the novel might lie not so much in the drive associated with the Indian Cave, as in the realization that the drive of the slave might be the master's truthful message returned to him by his other in



its inverted form. What I mean is that the rational Western mind is shattered not so much by the lawlessness of the other, as by the fact that it—this rational mind—is forced to confront in the monstrosity of the other the monstrous truth about itself. As I will turn to examine in a moment, *the echo, seemingly confounding in a most lawless manner right and wrong, actually reveals the truth about colonial representational jurisprudence, whose claim to justice is founded on unjust practices, and whose "law" is often motivated by a certain ob-scene jouissance.* To say it another way, drive has always already inhabited the core of the colonizer's legal system. To appropriate Žižek's term, the master's law and order have always contained within themselves this "nightly law."<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, if the echo reduces all talk about piety and justice to an empty "boum," this reduction can well be a mere exposure of the emptiness inherent in representational jurisprudence. In other words, there is never any plenitude of Truth behind all its noble words and high-sounding signifiers. In fact, even before her trip to Marabar, Mrs. Moore was troubled by the "silence" she senses behind the representation of God in the Name-of-the-Father:

She must needs pronounce his [God's] *name* frequently, as the greatest she knew, yet she had never found it less efficacious. Outside the arch there seemed always an arch, beyond the remotest echo a *silence*. (54; emphasis added)

Interestingly, Mrs. Moore experiences this dejection shortly after she tries to change her son's attitude to the Indians by appealing to the love of God and the Christian's duty to love his neighbors. Ronny must treat the natives more graciously, she demands, "because India is part of the earth. And God has put us on earth in order to be pleasant to each other":

God . . . is . . . love. . . . God has put us on earth to love our neighbours, and to show it. (53)

However, after preaching to her son in this manner, "Mrs. Moore felt that she had made a mistake in mentioning God" (54). Indeed, it unsettles her to have appealed to the love of God as her

reason and ground for demanding that the British "love their neighbors." As for Ronnie, he basically "approved of religion as long as it endorsed the National Anthem, but he objected when it attempted to influence his life" (54). Since God's name can be used or spurned at will by the colonial officials, it seems obvious, therefore, that God is "inefficacious." The Name-of-the-God/Father is no more than an empty "boum," a puppet at the mercy of his "representers."<sup>16</sup> Indeed, it is likely that this very non-existence of an entity making good the name "God" compels Mrs. Moore to feel that "She must needs pronounce his name frequently." By the same token, it is precisely the absence of justice in the institution of colonial law that obliges the colonial officials to invoke repeatedly the names of "God" and "Justice."

But the "boum" does much more than merely to undermine the authority of representational jurisprudence. Far more disturbingly, by revealing the hollow at the core of this legal structure, it shows that the God who enjoins us to "love thy neighbor as thyself" is also the God who "endorse[s] the National Anthem" (54).<sup>17</sup> Certainly, human beings should be agents representing God's love on earth. Yet it is also as representatives of the loving Christian God and as representatives of the Christian doctrine of "Love thy neighbor as thyself," that the colonizers subject their neighbors—that is to say, the Indians—in the first place. The white (man's) God who loves his neighbor is also the God who lusts for power. His "love" cannot achieve "full Presence"—that is, cannot be fully realized—without violence. Nor can his "justice" be perfectly implemented without the force of law to which Derrida has drawn our attention.

This violence is not, of course, confined to the colonial officials. Liberal humanists like Adela and the novel's narrator have their own share of this secret *jouissance*. For instance, on her trip to the Marabar, Adela despairs over her inability to apprehend India by means of her intellect. "How can the mind take hold of such a country?" she reflects (150). Likewise, the narrator feels threatened by the fact that the reputation of the Marabar Caves "does not depend upon human speech" (137). In their attempt to "understand" India, both are trying to master India and colonize it with their Western "sense." The narrator is frustrated by the Caves, because they resist being grasped and evaluated by means of human description. In other words, the liberal human-

ists' "good will" toward their neighbors is no more free of violence than is the will-to-power of the colonizers. It is not surprising, then, that certain liberal humanist ideas (such as "Be understanding and loving toward our neighbors") should—despite their frequently voiced disapproval of colonial methods—have been used to support colonialist causes.

Thus the drive is intrinsic to the law of representational jurisprudence. If the God-commanded charity that makes us love our neighbor also legitimizes our aggressivity toward him/her, if the humanism that claims to encourage resistance to colonial brutality is itself deeply implicated in imperialism, if liberal humanism is complicitous with the violence of conquest—then the prohibition based on critical differentiations associated with desire does not really operate in colonial representational jurisprudence. This being the case, the drive associated with the echo emerges as the brutal but honest truth about representational jurisprudence being returned to "British Justice" from its other. In other words, colonial law is no less nihilistic than the echo. For both, "Everything exists, nothing has value" (165). This stark truth, which paralyzes and enslaves humanity to the extent that "we can neither act nor refrain from action, we can neither ignore nor respect infinity" (231), is also the positivized *objet a* that terrorizes Adela and incapacitates her wits.

The echo in the caves makes possible that "twilight of the double vision" (230) in which the "spiritual muddledom" (231) of representational jurisprudence is revealed. It is this twilight of the double vision that disenchant Mrs. Moore concerning the "critical differentiations" between law and lawlessness, between "love in a church" and "love in a cave" (224). This stark truth makes Mrs. Moore withdraw from humanity. "The horror! The horror!" she confronts is not merely the darkness of Indian lawlessness. It is the horror of encountering the heart of darkness in one's own soul—the darkness inhabiting the core of the "enlightened" and civilized system which the white man/woman inhabits and within which s/he breathes. Mrs. Moore is not like Adela, whose rational ego has projected onto the Other her own obscene "enjoyment," thereby allowing her to dodge facing her own secret *jouissance*, which—in turn—makes possible her recovery of her "senses" at a later point. Like Sophocles's Antigone and Joseph Conrad's Kurtz, Mrs. Moore has gone beyond the

"limit" beyond which none can live too long.<sup>18</sup> While Adela is safe within the "rational boundaries," outside of which the darkness in her soul can be exiled, Mrs. Moore, Antigone, and Kurtz have all confronted the *limitations*<sup>19</sup> internal to both the Subject and the Other.<sup>20</sup> Mrs. Moore's melancholic contemplation that "There is no sorrow like my sorrow" (231) expresses that ultimate vision beyond the limit of which she can find neither human companionship nor human understanding. Disobeying the Kantian injunction not to ask the origin of the law because one cannot,<sup>21</sup> Mrs. Moore has stared into the stark horror of the obscene lawlessness that resides within rational and humanist law itself.

The Caves are thus the zone in which the desire associated with British colonial law reveals its intimate tie to the drive. It is the Caves that give the lie to "the White Man's Burden"—the colonial master's sloganized claim of sacrifice—which construes the European as the hero who exiles himself in order to help the natives give up their "Thing"<sup>22</sup> or their so-called "secret enjoyment," so that the natives, too, will be able to enter "civilization." The echo in the caves shatters this self-righteous pose by reducing it to definitive meaninglessness—that is, to the *impossibility* of meaning. As such, the echo sacrifices the colonial law's rhetoric of sacrifice, and British colonial Justice which seeks to totalize itself into a big Other is blocked by the impossibility of the Real emerging in the Indian Caves. This is to say, the echo which has hitherto been associated with the drive due to its apparent obliviousness to the principle of negation, suddenly takes on at this point the function and shape of desire, which cuts a deep gash into the hypostatized big Other of representational jurisprudence. *The Caves, then, are the zone where the "twilight of the double vision" is lit at the point where desire and drive cross over into each other via the twist on the moebius strip.*

In this twilight zone, the law of representation is discovered to be "non-representational" of any ultimate Truth. It loses its structure of depth, and is revealed to be representing nothing more than its own structure of representation—an arbitrary play of signifiers. The hierarchy of representations, while at first it resembled a structure of depth preventing the "violation of distance," begins to act like an endless drift of signifiers without a cut: "Outside the arch there seemed always an arch" (54), beyond

a representation one finds merely more representations. In other words, law becomes nothing more than a mere play of arbitrary forces. Just as one cave can be substituted for another cave without making any difference (137), compassion and violence, courage and cowardice, justice and injustice, are absolutely interchangeable without incurring any difference whatever. There is no more sense or reason to the *logos* of British colonial representational jurisprudence, or to the "talkative" Christianity (166), than there is to the "boum" in the caves. "Justice" and "lawlessness" amount to the same thing. The whole structure turns into an endless play of signifiers without check. The indiscriminate and arbitrary substitution of one signifier for another is a sign that the "symbolic order"—that is, the order of representations—has been hypostatized into a big Other without a bar. As such, it is psychotic.

This is the twilight zone, the twist on the moebius strip, where the Western law of desire turns out to be the law of the drive, and the Indian law of the drive turns into desire. No doubt, the haunting force inside the caves can be labelled the force of the drive. Be that as it may, it is this dark force thrust in the face of the colonizers that compels the latter to reckon with the same dark force inside themselves. This detour through the Other, no doubt, *turns the drive in the caves into desire*—a desire which says "No" to colonialism by forcing the latter to confront its own injustice. Thus, the "psychotic chain of random substitutions of one signifier by another" inside the Caves is not without its subversive effect. Appropriating Derrida's analysis of the substitution of *Ra* by *Thoth*, one can witness the spectacle of this "mad" or "psychotic" play of signifiers giving rise to the overthrow of the father by the sons, or, for our purpose, to the overthrow of the master by the slaves:

[the process of substitution] operates within the order of the *pure signifier which no reality, no absolutely external reference, no transcendental signified*, can come to limit, bound, or control; this substitution, which could be judged "*mad*" since it can go on infinitely in the element of the linguistic permutation of substitutes, of substitutes for substitutes; this unleashed chain is neverthe-

less not lacking in violence. . . . *He helps the sons do away with the father*" (Derrida, *Dissemination* 89; emphasis added).

To adopt this passage for our context, it is only necessary to point out that the "madness" inside the caves reveals the mad, sadistic superego intrinsic to representational jurisprudence.<sup>23</sup>

Interestingly enough, the twilight zone of the double vision opening up a space for resistance to colonialism is not confined to, and indeed cannot be located in, the Caves only. In fact, the novel suggests that the law reigning supreme in the Indian landscape—a law which to the colonizer is mere lawlessness owing to the fact that it totally eludes Western rational understanding—becomes desire as well, when it provides resistance to, and thus makes a cut in, the hypostatized big Other of representational jurisprudence. In fact, the psychotic chain of colonial representational jurisprudence would have reigned complete had it not been for the "impossibility" of the "Indian Real" which says "NO" to the "No" imposed by the colonizers upon the natives. No matter how vigorously the colonizer tries to assert his mental mastery over India, India absolutely resists his cognition. And no matter how avidly the colonizer *re-presents* the Indians as inferior, his attempt to do so is inevitably thwarted by the law of the Real, which is totally *un-re-presentable*. The Real presiding in India completely defeats any critical analysis or human judgment. Western humanism cannot (re-)cognize it, cannot represent it. A good example of this impossibility can be found in Adela's bewilderment at the landscape of the country on her way to the Caves:

Unfortunately, India has few important towns. India is the country, fields, fields, then hills, jungle, hills, and more fields. The branch line stops, the road is only practicable for cars to a point, the bullock-carts lumber down the side tracks, paths fray out into the cultivation, and disappear near a splash of red paint. *How can the mind take hold of such a country?* Generations of invaders have tried, but they remain in exile. The important towns they build are only retreats,

their quarrels the malaise of men who *cannot find their way home*. India knows of their trouble. She knows of the whole world's trouble, to its uttermost depth. She calls "Come" through her hundred mouths, through objects ridiculous and august. But come to what? She has never defined. She is not a promise, only an appeal. (150; emphasis added)

To the Western mind, India has "fallen behind civilization," and its fields, hills, and jungle demonstrate no marks of human consciousness. However, such absence of "consciousness"—that is, such absence of the hallmark of humanity according to Western idealism, needless to say—is actually a space of dangerous heterogeneity. Used by the master as a reason for condemning the slave, India's lack of "consciousness" also renders ultimately futile any real invasion of India. Try as the intruders might, India is unrecognizable and unrecognizing. The country simply refuses to acknowledge the master as master, or itself as slave. And, of course, without such recognition from the slave, the master is not the master. This is why the colonizers, having set themselves up as rulers of India, ironically act there like slaves in perpetual exile, as is indeed the situation of the Anglo-Indians, who are constantly harboring the rancor that "he or she [is] British and in exile" (24). In fact, no institution of the master-slave relationship can be properly established, since a site that recognizes no dialectical law of reason certainly does not recognize the differences between master and slave.<sup>24</sup>

Lawless as India may be in British eyes, it is precisely this lawlessness that prevents the British from making their other's land their inferior "home." This resistance to the imperialistic ideology of a "home" parallels India's rejection of the imperialistic ideology of dialectical sublation. The otherness of the other cannot be sublated into a "common" home—this being, of course, the home of the master. That the project of sublation should be in exile in India is only part of the failure of imperialistic temporal schema and colonial historiography in that land of lawlessness. "Older than anything in the world" (135), the Indian landscape is before Reason and before the culture of imperialism. In its lack of consciousness, India cannot be coerced into a

future- and teleology-oriented schema of "promises." The invaders are baffled by what they are "coming into," because India will not grant a "definition" that would give a concrete reality to the invasions launched by the Master-minds of Reason.

Reason, whose drive is to make itself manifest in every existence by means of clear and distinct forms, fails to do so in "formless" and "lawless" India. Condemned to being the inhuman, India in turn cannot be made to conform to the "Reason" of Western humanism. The Real, which presides over India, does not recognize the symbolic order. It therefore gives dominion neither to the rhetoric, nor to the propaganda, of representational jurisprudence. The "depersonalized, dislocated colonial subject" emerges at this point as an "incalculable object, quite literally, difficult to place."<sup>25</sup> The light of Western Justice simply fails to penetrate India, the "heart of darkness," just as Western Reason fails to illumine its own heart of darkness. Put briefly, one can say that the heart of darkness—the (non-)locus of the *objet a*—belongs to the realm of the impossible, where the light of Reason fears to tread and is powerless to do so.

To say it another way: at the twilight of the double vision, or through the twist on the moebius strip, the drive puts a check on a symbolic order that is [or has been] hypostatized as an unbarred big Other. In this way, *the drive becomes desire*. In fact, *it is precisely this undecidable space of the moebius twist, the radical indeterminacy of desire and the drive, that makes possible the ethics of psychoanalysis and the politics of resistance to colonialism*. "Ne pas céder sur son désir," Lacan tells us. *And this ethic can be maintained only if desire and drive are themselves kept as radically indeterminate and open as is this ambiguity between "to give way on" and "to give way to" one's desire.*<sup>26</sup> In order not to cede one's desire, in order to make good the empty space of desiring from the act of the barring (of the Subject and the Other), desire itself must also be subject to checks by its other; or else desire, in being totalized, will become the drive.<sup>27</sup> This is how Antigone's death drive becomes for Lacan the prime example for the law of desire.<sup>28</sup> This is also how the echo in the Indian caves emerges as the law of desire in its confrontation with the British law of representation, and this happens precisely at the point where the law of representation itself has become a totalizing and totalized force of the drive. The Real (or the "impossible") in the Indian caves, therefore, opens



up a powerful ethical and political space for resistance to a colonialism implemented through representational jurisprudence.

In other words, what happens in the Caves is a challenge and a disruption of the Western law of representation by *the law of desire at its ultimate*.

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Notes

<sup>1</sup> My formulation here is influenced by Homi Bhabha's focus on the ambivalence in colonial discourse. See especially his "Of Mimicry and Man" and "The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism" in *The Location of Culture*.

<sup>2</sup> The total absence of law makes any kind of performative act impossible, since the performative depends upon a set of pre-established conventions even in the very enactment of its inaugurative force. The relationship borne by the performative act to law has in fact become a much discussed notion among the deconstructionists and the Lacanians over the past decade. For an excellent explication of this notion—especially that of the very subversive version of it put forth by deconstruction—see J. Hillis Miller's *Tropes, Parables, Performatives*, and his forthcoming "History, Narrative, and Responsibility in Henry James's 'The Aspern Papers.'"

<sup>3</sup> The inhumanity of the object can be set in opposition to the humanism present in both idealism and existentialism. "Transcendence," regarded as the hallmark of humanity by the latter two traditions, is totally liquidated by the object. In the drive, the subject is replaced by the object. Along with this, depth, the "being-for-itself," teleology, etc., are all supplanted by the "being-in-itself." That is why, in "rob[bing] infinity and eternity of their vastness," the Marabar Caves also become a threat to "mankind"—that is, the Western Man.

Note that in being anti-teleological, the object is not susceptible to the "sway" of both "the judgment of history" and "narrative as judgment." "Older than anything in the world" (135), the inhuman object sentences the *Maßstab* of History into an eternal exile, nor can any precise and definite narrative be formed about it, not by Adela, and not even quite successfully by the narrator. It resists absolutely the hegemony of the *logos*.

<sup>4</sup> One of the most definitive expressions of this idea can be found in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

<sup>5</sup> See the "Antigone" chapters in Lacan's *Ethics Seminar*.

<sup>6</sup> Representational jurisprudence, or the law of representation, exercises its power in the Name of an Absolute it claims to represent. Originating in the Christian doctrine of man's fall from an immediate into a mediated form of existence, where man can only be redeemed by acting in representation of, rather than deviation from, the lost Truth, the law of representation has been dominating Western political structures from early times, although its sway is most strongly felt in the post-Enlightenment period. Modern bureaucracy, for example, can be called a negative realization of the law of representation framing Hegel's philosophy of law.

Articulated spatially, the law of representation manifests itself in a hierarchy of signifiers, each of which derives its identity and power from being the representative of a higher signifier, until finally, all signifiers on the chain refer back to an Absolute posited as the *telos* of the sequence of representations. This bureaucratic structure reduces individuals to mere representations of representations of the Absolute. At one extreme, it leaves no room for individual decisions; while at the other, it allows individual figures in the hierarchy to freely abuse their power by claiming to be acting merely as representatives of the highest good.

<sup>7</sup> The "*jouissance*" here is not so much the pleasure of trivial misconduct as the "bliss" of full Presentation (as opposed to re-presentation) or complete *jouissance*, even though the law of representation always disguises itself as a prohibition of the former rather than the latter. The truth is that petty offenses are still committed with references to the big Other, and as such they serve to reinforce more than undermine the law of representation. By contrast, the "enjoyment of the Real," if made known, would destroy the law completely, and this is the shattering effect of the Marabar echo.

<sup>8</sup> This seems to be an obsessive theme in Slavoj Žižek's works. For his extensive study of this topic, see specifically *The Metastases of Enjoyment*.

<sup>9</sup> In a later section, I shall analyze how this so-called "politics of desire" is actually the "politics of the drive" in disguise. As such, it is quite close to the case of Creon's law in *Antigone*.

<sup>10</sup> For an explanation of the difference between the "inaccessible" associated with desire and the "impossible" associated with the drive, see Joan Copjec's "The Sartorial Superego," in which she explains that "it is because the good object is *already* lost, desire has *already* been repressed, that the law forbids access to it" (79). I further elaborate on this notion in Chapter I of my book manuscript "Resisting the Law of Representation: The Ethics and Politics of Desire in Nineteenth- and

Twentieth-Century British Literature." This chapter is entitled "Byron as a Teacher of the Split Subject and the Barred Other: *Manfred* and the Law of Desire."

<sup>11</sup> While the Collector refers to the social function he hosts for the Indians and the British as the "Bridge Party," the picnic organized by Aziz can be called the second "Bridge Party" in the novel—which is an Indian counterpart to the British version, or, to adopt a term from Homi Bhabha, the slave's "mimicry" of the British Bridge Party. The significance of the second Bridge Party extends far beyond the first, since it is the occasion of the meeting between not only the East and the West, but also of the encounter between drive and desire.

<sup>12</sup> This "Indian law" of course, is much more Hindu than Islam. The incomprehensibility of the Marabar Caves, for example, is rather like the enigmatic character Godbole—his songs, his philosophy, etc. Aziz, on the other hand, is, by and large, a much more "human" being than Godbole.

<sup>13</sup> In his depiction of the caves, Forster does seem to have the "devil" in mind. A biographical approach to *A Passage to India* would reveal his experience with the "devil" in the Indian caves, which seems to have become the basis of his portrait of the Marabar Caves in his novel. His delineation of the Marabar Caves in his long journal-letter to his mother is full of circumstantial detail, although he does not seem to have experienced anything extraordinary there: "The caves are cut out of solid granite: A small square doorway and an oval hall inside. This sounds dull, but the granite has been so splendidly polished that they rank very high among caves for cheerfulness" (Hill 188). However, the elaborately decorated Buddhist Caves at Ellora, which he visited near the end of his stay, struck him in a very different manner: "Supporting cornice of blackened monsters—elephants, griffons, tigers who rend. The great mild face of a goddess, doing cruelty, fades into the pit-wall." A few days later he adds, "Their impression is already fading, I think because there is no beauty and I do not believe in the *devil*, whose palace they are. They are Satanic masterpieces to terrify others" (Hill 225, 227; emphasis added).

<sup>14</sup> Perhaps the most interesting appropriation one can make of Bersani's study is the erasure of history by radical evil. Modifying Bersani's description, I would describe the Marabar echo as the "apocalyptic appearance in history of an [impetus] to erase history" (12). That is to say, the Western rationalist attempt to assimilate the echo into an idealist historical schema immediately brings about the destruction of "history" itself. *The attempt to put the Indian law on trial by history results in the total obliteration of the enterprise of history and its judicial "authority."* This is an issue I discuss at length in a section in my book manuscript

"Resisting the Law of Representation: The Ethics and Politics of Desire in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Literature."

<sup>15</sup> See especially Žižek's *Metastases of Enjoyment*. For a telling analysis of the intimate relationship between violence and law, see also Derrida's "Force of Law" which, of course, discusses Benjamin's "Critique of Violence"—another absolutely unneglectable piece in discussions about this issue.

<sup>16</sup> The ironic truth is that God, far from being the Perfection presiding over the hierarchy of representational jurisprudence, is himself a mere "representative"—a mere puppet representing the will of those who pull his strings.

<sup>17</sup> Regarding the ob-scene *jouissance* intrinsic to the Christian doctrine of "Love thy neighbor as thyself," see Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents* and Lacan's ingenious remaking of that argument in his *Ethics Seminar* and "Kant avec Sade." See also "The Sartorial Superego" in Joan Copjec's *Read My Desire*, Juliet MacCannell's "Facing Fascism" and "Fascism's Object," and Kenneth Reinhard's "Kant with Sade, Lacan with Levinas."

<sup>18</sup> See the *Antigone* chapters in Lacan's *Seminar VII*. Antigone, Kurtz, and Mrs. Moore share the same fate for crossing the limit. All three undergo radical separations from human society—a stage soon to be followed by their deaths.

<sup>19</sup> See the explanation given by Žižek concerning the differences between boundary and limitation as defined by Hegel:

*boundary* is the external limitation of an object, its qualitative confines which confer upon it its identity (an object is "itself" only within these confines, in so far as it fulfils a set of qualitative conditions); whereas *limit* results from a "reflection-into-itself" of the boundary: it emerges when the determinateness which defines the identity of an object is reflected into this object itself and assumes the shape of its own unattainable limit, of what the object can never fully become, of what it can only approach into (bad) infinity . . . (109-10)

<sup>20</sup> Note that Lacan is not unambiguous toward Antigone and the drive with which she is associated. For Lacan, this figure who exemplifies the ethics of desire is also the obnoxious young punk. By the same token, Forster holds an ambivalent attitude toward "irrational" India, and in particular, the mystical force associated with the Caves and Mrs. Moore after her shock. In fact, some critics find Mrs. Moore to be quite nasty and perverse after her "psychological breakdown" brought about

by the echo, as no doubt Ronny also finds her to be (220-29). The following passage, for instance, has attracted some scholars' criticism of the "transformed" Mrs. Moore:

her [Mrs. Moore's] constant thought was: "Less attention should be paid to my future daughter-in-law and more to me, there is no sorrow like my sorrow . . ." (231)

<sup>21</sup> In his *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant forbids the questioning of the origins of legal power. In Žižek's terms, Kant "forbids (*interdit*) something which is at the same time given as *impossible*" ("Limits" 94), the rationale of which Žižek explains in the following terms: "Through precisely such questioning the stain of this illegitimate violence would appear which always soils, like original sin, the purity of the reign of the law" ("Limits" 94). The relevant text in Kant goes as follows:

The origin of supreme power is for the people, who are submitted to it, unfathomable (*insondable*) practically speaking, in other words the subject must not discuss (*ne doit pas discuter*) actively this origin. . . . It is for the people, already submitted to civil law, ratiocinations totally empty and yet dangerous for the state. . . .

It is in *vain* to seek the historical origins (*origines historiques*) of this mechanism, in other words one cannot go back to the very beginning of civil society. . . . But it is a thing that deserves to be punished to undertake this research. (*Metaphysik der Sitten*, para. 49 and 52; trans. Žižek, "Limits" 95)

Žižek's comments are: "Well, one cannot (*ne peut pas*) go back to the origin of law because one must (*doit*) not do it. One knows the Kantian formula of duty: "You can because you must" ("*Du kannst, denn du sollst*"). The so-called prohibition is an exact inversion of this famous formula: "You cannot because you must not" (95).

<sup>22</sup> I am referring here to Lacan's "*Das Ding*."

<sup>23</sup> In my paper titled "*A Passage to India* as a Postcolonial Text: Adela Quested, the British Colonial Court, and the Secret *Jouissance* of the Other," I move on to the concrete case of Adela as a specific demonstration of the Lacanian theory about the subject getting the truth of its own message returned from the Other in its inverted form. Adela's accusation against Aziz's "sexual advances" turns out to be a projection of her secret *jouissance*—including her scrutiny of the "handsome little Orien-

tal" and her anxiety about her upcoming marriage—onto the Other. The dramatic reversal at the trial confronts the colonizers with the brute fact that the "jouissance" they accused of the natives actually pertains to themselves rather than their Other.

<sup>24</sup> Indeed, in the novel, the struggle of the Indians against the British provoked by the trial does not resolve itself into a triumph of the Slave over the Master. *A Passage to India* does not bear out the straight and clear-cut Hegelian reversal, nor does it subscribe to the colonialist economy of dialectical synthesis. The book's ending—England and India remain divided—testifies to the failure of Hegelian historiography. When the Hegelian dialectic is put on trial by the law of desire, it cannot prevail.

<sup>25</sup> This is a statement expropriated from Bhabha's "Foreword: Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition," in Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, xxii; reprinted in Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*.

<sup>26</sup> Samuel Weber gives an ingenious reading of this "giving way on to desire" in his "Breaching the Gap: On Lacan's *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*."

<sup>27</sup> Since drive and desire are mutually implicated, one should say that there is always already a law to the echo in the caves and to the "echoing walls of civility" (43)—a law of the other and a law of the other's convention which the British, with its own hypostatized judicial structure, simply fail to, and would not, recognize. The echo seems lawless to the British ears, not only because the British would not recognize another *kind* of law—that is, the law of the drive—but also because they cannot even recognize the other form to the *law* of desire.

<sup>28</sup> The same demand for the mutual checking of two forces is at work in Benjamin's "Critique of Violence." Beginning his essay with a seeming promotion of positive law above the "mythical" natural law, he keeps switching to the other side as soon as one kind of law is about to overpower the other. Basically, the hypostatization of one kind of force over the other—be it positive law or natural law, desire or drive—will always result in the dictatorship of a totalized big Other. Finally, Benjamin resorts to divine violence—that pure violence, or in Lacanian term, pure Desire (which, unlike particular cases of desire, is always left empty and open)—as the absolute Other who would *always put the Subject—be it positive law or natural law—in check, or, in Lacanian terms, "under the bar."*

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