

Thinking Queerness and Forming Intimacies: Understanding Identity, Relationships, and  
Queerness in South Asian Diasporic Contemporary Literature, 1981–2022

Thesis by

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## ABSTRACT

Reading intimacy in South Asian diasporic texts requires a nuanced framework to understand the impersonality of sex, and blurrings within relationships and intimacies. Intimacy, both emotional and physical, depends on vulnerability to connect with others. I use a queer diasporic framework to analyze a selection of scenes from different contemporary South Asian diasporic texts, from 1981–2022. Specifically, I analyze their portrayals of intimacy and relationships to disrupt binaries invoked on how we might view intimacy. Such a framework also affords insights into how the diaspora and queerness both influence identity and disrupt heterosexual readings of texts to allow for deeper emotional intimacies. The framework is grounded in queer theory, history of the LGBTQ+ community and the queer body, and history of the diaspora to allow for nuanced readings of the texts. Through exploring the queer diaspora in these contemporary texts, I challenge binaries of both the queer and diasporic frameworks in ways that encompass the complexities of the relationships we find ourselves in.

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“Understanding this discomfort or displacement is rooted in the perpetual identity crisis of being queer, and Asian, and South Asian, and a woman, and a not-man, and in being a queer South Asian woman not-man, and everything in between. I’ve found it between those defined spaces and within the deconstruction of language in understanding each of these separate and together. At this point, I feel both more queer and more Asian than ever, in the sense of feeling different, or being faced with the physical reality of a hyphenated identity and the meaning of ‘Indian-American.’ With these realities comes the discovery of how to make a home, or multiple homes, within myself each time I wake up and avoid looking at myself in the mirror. It’s easy to be at home with the familiar, but a lot harder to make one for myself, even if I can choose exactly how it’s built.”

—Ankita Nandi, *Passionfruit Zine*

## 1. Introduction

This thesis, to describe with one word, is about love. It is about how we understand love with others and more importantly within ourselves. I explore this understanding by examining intimacy and how we engage with others, and how we find commonalities with others through these themes regardless of our sexuality, community, and other identity factors that inherently shape our views and way of life. In my own identity as a queer South Asian woman, these commonalities become a source of both tension and community. As scholar Christian Klesse discusses in his analysis of the queer diaspora space for British South Asian gay men, “Community has provided a powerful language for self-identification, belonging and solidarity. At the same time, it is evoked to legitimize social regulation (through appeals to morality),

political censorship (for the sake of the common good) and exclusion (in the name of authenticity).” Furthermore, because “the term ‘community’ suggests shared interest and close affinity, it has a tendency to obscure antagonism, conflict, internal divisions, hierarchies and hegemonic domination” (Klesse 141). The queer diasporic space forces intersectional understanding and complications in traditional heteronormative relationships.

Queer is often used as an umbrella term for different non-heterosexual and/or non-cisgender identities. For the purposes of this thesis, I follow Indo-Caribbean scholar Suzanne Persard’s methodology to avoid using “‘queer’ as a totalizing catchall for all non-heteronormative sexualities and gender identities,” and instead use “queerness as a potential methodology for disrupting paradigms of heteronormative scholarly analysis” (26). However, I expand beyond this definition of queer to encompass the challenging of heteronormativity beyond simply sexuality and gender. Similarly, I expand beyond the definition of “sexuality” as “a term used to describe the state of being sexual and sexual activity and as an expression of sexual interest, especially when it is seen as excessive” and sexual orientation and preference to explore how our relationships impact our identity (Mitra 202). Extending beyond these definitions allows for a more textured understanding and the consideration of multiple perspectives and narratives.

I understand queerness to mean love, care, and compassion. In existing outside heteronormative structures, queerness challenges notions of acceptance and intimacy. Understanding intimacy as emotional or physical connection afforded by vulnerability, intimacy is present in all our relationships. Therefore, just as intimacy is not only present in romantic relationships, queer relationships are not restricted to romantic or sexual relationships. Homosociality and homonormativity challenge binaries and boundaries between relationships



and require vulnerability. At the core of this thesis is beginning to understand what it means to be vulnerable and trust others.

My thesis combines queer theory and South Asian studies to form a queer diasporic framework that allows for challenging binaries in our understandings of relationships. By focusing on elements of intimacy, I draw conclusions and see elements of queerness that extend beyond just queer relationships. This queer diasporic framework also incorporates historical and societal contexts of LGBTQ+ communities and lives through the South Asian diaspora to help inform our understanding of these portrayals of queerness. The chosen texts span the diaspora, from South Asia to diasporic communities in the United Kingdom and the Americas, including the Caribbean. Personally, I am of Indian origin residing in the United States, and so my own diasporic identity leads to more Western informed readings of these texts and their portrayals of relationships and queerness. However, I use the historical contexts to have a more informed diasporic reading that, combined with the queer theoretical scholarship, allows for a nuanced framework that extends past my own diasporic identity to allow for analysis into texts from other parts of the diaspora.

Beginning with an understanding of the queer diasporic framework, I first establish how intimacies in both South Asian diasporic literature and societal customs encourage blurrings of our understanding of queerness to encourage recognition and challenges of the fabricated binaries that emphasize the homosociality present in South Asian cultures. This is extended to contextualize how queerness lives in India, how the Indo-Caribbean diaspora further challenges how we might understand the diaspora and identity formation, and the queer body as it exists both in South Asia and in the diaspora. Queerness and diaspora in conjunction challenge the

traditional backwards facing readings of diaspora and force consideration of the blurrings of strict definitions of intimacy.

Finally, I commence my textual analysis with a diasporic reading of *Cobalt Blue* by Sachin Kundalkar, presenting two sides of two siblings' love stories with a tenant living in their family home and focusing on presentations of intimacy and sex. Next, "Blame" by Harichandras Khemjar presents another forbidden relationship placed within the new colonial landscape of the Caribbean. Both these texts focus on the physical aspects of intimacy and connection, and the intimacies allowed in the public versus private spheres. "Blame" particularly addresses female sexuality, similar to Yasmin in the third text, *Love Marriage* by Monica Ali, which portrays a dysfunctional Indian-British family in London. By focusing on female sexuality, I analyze the power dynamics at play in Yasmin's relationships and in particular, how they influence impersonality within sexual relationships. Then, *She of the Mountains* by Vivek Shraya reflects on the meaning and importance of a queer diasporic identity, especially in the entanglements of boundaries and strict definitions. "This Is What Love Is" by Sheena Patel then presents a reflection on different relationships that have shaped Patel's expressions of intimacy and vulnerability to exemplify the difficulty of expressing and accepting emotionality across all texts, and the uncertainties within these relationships. The last text, Neema Avashia's memoir *Another Appalachia*, provides a concluding perspective towards seeing queerness and intimacy outside these strict boundaries and how we gain intimacy, nuance, community, and empathy in Avashia's imagination of a fluid and queered space.

## 2. A Queer Diasporic Framework

“Thinking Queerness and Forming Intimacies” is about recognizing how queerness presents itself in what would typically be deemed non-queer settings, and how queerness functions in non-romantic and non-sexual relationships. Thus, “queer” is not a term but a framework to challenge heteronormativity and restrictions in sexuality and sexual expression. While sex and queerness are inherently tied to power dynamics, they do not have to fit into heteronormative expressions of power and relationships. Furthermore, queerness is not exclusive from diaspora, and I use diaspora as a concept to analyze and understand the nuances in queer identity, and argue against singular understandings of either. Additionally, I examine influences on queerness and intimacy as they relate to our cultural factors such as diaspora. For this thesis, I use diaspora as a term to encompass those who have a common ethnic origin, in this case South Asian, and have emigrated from this ethnic origin. These individuals may form diasporic communities that carry customs and practices from South Asia. A last crucial aspect to my conception of diaspora is how such individuals engage with those outside the diaspora in their new locationality, thus facing cultural boundaries towards complete understanding of relationships, power dynamics, and other societal functions that result from cultural roots.

Just as queerness is not exclusive from diaspora, diaspora is not exclusive from queerness. Specifically, I use diaspora to unpack restrictions placed on queer expressions and livelihoods that subsequently constrict our relationships and identities within the diaspora. Scholar Gayatri Gopinath establishes in the “Epilogue” of *Impossible Desires* an, “alternative construction of diaspora organized around queer lives, desires, bodies, cultures, and collectivities, which remains utterly unintelligible and unimaginable within dominant state and diasporic nationalist frameworks” (“Epilogue: Queer Homes in Diaspora” 194). I use and

formulate a similar framework to examine sexual and partner dynamics in homosexual and heterosexual relations in the texts. Although I focus on non-familial relationships, familial relationships may still impact acceptance of relationships and thus result in shame or pride between individuals and their partners. A non-restrictive queer diasporic framework, that accounts for different expressions and different relationships between individuals and with queerness and diaspora, addresses the nuances within both queerness and diaspora to examine them together. Furthermore, it decentralizes traditional discussions to acknowledge the commonalities amongst different relationships and how we might perceive a queer and diasporic identity. Martin Manalasan, while focusing on Filipino studies, similarly challenges heteronormativity and relates his work towards understanding migration. As diaspora is formed from migration, such an understanding lends itself towards creating a framework that addresses both queerhood and diaspora that can be used to analyze the novels selected given the shared experience of othering. Manalasan defines “queer,” “both as an anti-normative signifier as well as a social category produced through the ‘intersectionality’ of identities, practices, and institutions” (Manalasan 225). Klesse also establishes that, “sexual diversity unsettles the heteronormative orientation of many diaspora formations” (Klesse 136). Thus, this thesis uses the simultaneous disruption of diaspora and heteronormativity to challenge oppositions between diaspora and queerness.

Scholar Naisargi Dave directly tackles the question of intimacy in relationships and the existence of South Asian queer lives in their review article, “Abundance and Loss: Queer Intimacies in South Asia.” Specifically, the review references books by scholars such as Anjali Arondekar and other South Asian queer studies in history (Dave 18). While several of the discussed texts focus on discuss openly queer relationships, the scholars also recognized how

intimacy is not restricted to the erotic, though the distinction should be made between social and erotic intimacy (25). The most obvious distinction between the two is physical intimacy, but a lack of differentiation in other ways suggests a de-eroticization of same-sex love. Considering same-sex friendships as a blurring of the erotic therefore becomes a way of recognizing queer intimacies, even if not formally recognized or labelled. Such relationships reject heteronormativity and challenge rejections of homonormativity. The entanglement of platonic and erotic intimacy means we can bend these strict relationship definitions and boundaries to allow different presentations of intimacy and closeness.

The queer body becomes a way through which to connect the physicality of queerness and diaspora to directly connect relationships with sex to the queer diasporic framework, especially for non-queer narratives and identities. Policies in India directly challenge the existence of queer bodies and communities. Specifically, they disregard recognized and honored communities of hijras, while also disregarding the existence of other queer communities and lives. Hijras are not singularly defined, but do not exist within the typical gender binary, serve purposes within both Hindu and Muslim communities, and generally challenge the classifications that were imposed from Western traditions and are now part of the nation-state (Lal 122). To connect the queer diasporic framework to the physicality of the queer body, Gopinath establishes, “queer diasporic cultural forms and practices point to submerged histories of racist and colonialist violence that continue to resonate in the present and that make themselves felt through bodily desire” (Gopinath, “Impossible Desires” 3). Furthermore, in using the different localities of the diaspora to destabilize centralized queerness, Gopinath establishes that, “these various battles in disparate national locations speak to the ways in which queer desires, bodies, and subjectivities become dense sites of meaning in the production and reproduction of notions

of ‘culture,’ ‘tradition,’ and communal belonging both in South Asia and in the diaspora” (2). Recognizing the queer body and diasporic body as one disrupts these postcolonial productions of thought. Scholar Roksana Badruddoja focuses on the genderqueer body in particular, starting with the “remix” of the diasporic body by Indian-American women and men, establishing the lack of “totalizing identity” (61). The queer body breaks an assumption of queerness as a singular identity existing outside of other influences such as diaspora, community, and culture. Therefore, the queer diasporic body serves to both acknowledge these histories and identities while transforming the colonialist violence and legacies through intimacy and desire (Gopinath, “Impossible Desires” 3). Examining the role of intimacy uses the body, queer or otherwise, to analyze the impact of diaspora and queer expressions.

As a basis for how the diaspora alters the existing framework, and providing additional context for attitudes towards queer individuals and how they may be impacted by the law, again, it is also important to acknowledge current LGBTQ-related legislation and attitudes in India. Policies in India enforce heteronormative relationships and thus challenge the “livelihood and cohabitation of queer communities” (Sinha 282). The state places an emphasis on the heteronormative body that challenges the validity of the queer body, and relegates it to the private and home spheres (291). However, the law proceeds to challenge that privacy through surveillance of the queer home, thus challenging queer identity and community formations, and preventing protections (292). Yet, when queer communities do exist, they become sites of “queer care, affect, desire and socio-economic freedoms” that “[transmute] as communitarian ideations of endurance, survival, and resistance against the apathy and cruelty of the state” (297). Furthermore, the attempt to dissolve or assimilate queer identities into the heteronormative standard “argues on a heteropatriarchal mode that renders queer relationships of dependency

ineligible” (303). Sinha posits that queerness is a form of resistance to oppression placed by the state, it creates safe communities for other queer individuals despite attempted erasure.

Queerness becomes a disruptive mode of creating community and encourages non-heteronormative forms of care that protest the binaries imposed by legislation, patriarchy, and diasporic communities.

Queer intimacies in South Asia are exemplified through a strong nature of homosociality that defies traditional notions of intimacies as restricted to the romantic or sexual (Dave 25). By acknowledging queerness in other intimate relationships, I defy Western and heteronormative understandings of queer. “Thinking Queerness” can be decentralized from only romantic and sexual relationships to allow for additional readings within only heterosexual relationships. Such challenges and subversions of traditional queer frameworks are found in Gayatri Gopinath’s analysis of the photograph “Southhall Market” by Parminder Sekhon (taken in London, United Kingdom). As Gopinath discusses heteronormative and patriarchal power structures visible within South Asian visual texts, conventional queer diasporic frameworks situate queerness “within a familiar binary structure that equates queerness with modernity, visibility, sexual liberation, and revelation (embodied by Sekhon), over and against the tropes of ‘tradition,’ concealment, secrecy, and modesty (embodied by her mother).” However, Gopinath goes on to describe a queer reading of the photograph working “against this neocolonial logic and allows us to identify the ways in which Sekhon evokes this series of binary oppositions...only to overturn and disrupt them” (“Epilogue: Queer Homes in Diaspora” 194). Just as Sekhon achieves in her photograph, I challenge binaries presented in diasporic and queer analyses to allow for a more open and nuanced understanding of how to read queerness in South Asian diasporic literature. Specifically, challenging these binaries and applying a queer diasporic framework to disrupt

heteronormativity highlights queer elements present in non-romantic or sexual relationships and the power structures that still play a role in these heterosexual relationships.

In the case of the Caribbean, indentured South Asian workers, predominantly Indian, were transported to various islands in the Caribbean, resulting in prominent South Asian communities in countries like Guyana and Trinidad & Tobago. These workers were termed “jahaji/jahaji-bhai,” ship-brothers, and refers specifically to the first generation of migrants to the Caribbean (Mehta 179–80). Mehta challenges readings of the jahaji-bhai model as “the framework for the development of heteromasculinist nationalist framings of Indo-Caribbean identity that marginalised both women and indentured queers in the post-indenture period” by addressing the “sexualized violence against women and the imposition of patriarchal gender norms of female subservience” as community and identity formation on the ships (182). Furthermore, she introduces a feminist reading that becomes the framework towards understanding the homosociality of the jahaji-bhai ideology. The journey to the Caribbean became the mode of creating new intimate relationships as a way of healing from the violence on the ship and of being transported. These intimate relationships are the result of the dissolution of relationships through a physical displacement of the female body. The physical displacement then becomes a forced deconstruction of ethnic identity to force creation of a diasporic identity.

Although I am of Indian origin, I incorporate works by multiple South Asian diasporic authors to address similarities and understand the nuance in claiming to be a part of the “South Asian” diaspora. Ignoring the differences in historical contexts between different diasporic groups would superimpose one context, again, likely Indian given my background, over the others and not properly create a shared identity, if there is one. As author and scholar Mariam Pirbhai states, “Without a comparative look at South Asian diasporic writing, then, the



historically specific and simultaneously intertextual landscapes of the diasporic imagination are systematically levelled or, at the very least, glossed over” (Pirbhai). The queer diasporic framework embraces these nuances to disrupt our traditional modes of thought. With the histories of how queerness and non-heteronormativity have presented throughout the South Asian diaspora, I challenge heteronormative readings of intimacy throughout the selected narratives. I highlight not just the nuances in queerness and queer identity but how we conceive queerness in heterosexual relationships and understand impersonality within relationships and intimacy. Furthermore, I use the forced expressions of pride and shame from these histories to engage with the differences in intimacy we see between the different narratives and characters within each.

### 3. Intimacy and Impersonality in *Cobalt Blue*

*Cobalt Blue* (2013) by Sachin Kundalkar demonstrates the limitations of queer identity, and simultaneously the similarities between homosexual and heterosexual intimacies, by presenting an understanding of intimacy that blurs the line between the two to prevent a singular conception of either. *Cobalt Blue* tells the stories of the unnamed tenant of the Joshi family and his two relationships with brother and sister, Tanay and Anuja, from the perspectives of the Joshi siblings. The novel is split into two parts: the first is a letter from Tanay to the tenant, and the second is a series of diary entries from Anuja after she returns from running away with the tenant. Both relationships primarily exist in the private sphere but provide a comparison between reading homosexual and heterosexual relationships, behaviors, and perceptions in Indian society. By focusing on the locationality of the two relationships, and language surrounding their

physical and emotional intimacy, I present the similarities and complications of elements between the two relationships. These commonalities highlight the nuances of queer expressions to discourage singular expressions. Furthermore, I focus on how privacy and intimacy are replicated in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships, thus challenging perpetuation of a contrasting binary between the two. Although *Cobalt Blue* takes place in India, I read the novel through a diasporic lens because, as Gopinath states, “queer desire reorients the traditionally backward-looking glance of diaspora” (“Impossible Desires” 3). Using a diasporic lens to read *Cobalt Blue* therefore uses this reoriented “backward-looking glance” to challenge queerness and queer elements as non-normative and connect *Cobalt Blue* to the other diasporic texts. The focus on queer desire, both as physical lust and emotional yearning, becomes a way to rethink perceptions of intimacies and boundaries between physical and emotional desire and relationships.

An important aspect to both Anuja and Tanay’s relationships is physical intimacy. To gain insight into perceptions of homosexual versus heterosexual sex, I compare Anuja’s and Tanay’s first times having sex, both generally and with the tenant. Tanay’s experiences before meeting the tenant were marked by an impersonality and emotional distance. He states that he had sex to “satisfy the hungers of my body” (Kundalakar 33). Additionally, Tanay used pseudonyms when meeting the random men, and never took them to the Joshi home (34). He prevented this impersonal sex and these impersonal relationships from entering the private space of his house. Thus, his relationship with the tenant immediately violated this physical boundary and allowed emotion to enter their intimacies. Their sex was no longer simply focused on physicality, but rather it was a part of their relationship. Furthermore, Tanay felt less shame with the tenant than with the anonymous men he slept with. After meeting the random men, Tanay

would “scrub himself clean” before returning home (134). As he was already at home when being with the tenant, there were no performances of shame, only acceptance. Considering the surveillance of queer lives and homes in India, the ability to be with the tenant in the Joshi home became a way for Tanay to explore intimacy in a way that he was not allowed to before. Further adding to the upheld intimacy that Tanay had with the tenant compared to his previous relations, Tanay says, “you said that the only name that had any meaning was the one that someone used when they wanted to call out to you” (41). As Jerry Pinto, the English translator, points out in his note at the end of the novel, elements of the translation were lost from the original Marathi, which featured “re,” an affectionate name that cannot be properly translated into English while maintaining the intensity the name invokes (225). In the original language, Tanay refers to the tenant exclusively by “re,” which is lost in the translation. However, Tanay’s lack of usage of the tenant’s first name is noteworthy, because it indicates how he only saw the tenant in a personal setting. Tanay’s perspective indicated no shame of his sexuality, but an acceptance that it would not be accepted otherwise outside of the private sphere.

Of his other relations, Tanay’s relationship with the tenant is a sharp departure from the impersonality. Their relationship only existed in privacy and at night, and his perspective notes how most of their time together was spent in the tenant’s room. Furthermore, although the relationship took place in the Joshi home, no one suspected the two men of having any relationship. As Dave establishes, “intensely loving friendships between women, and between men, are accepted forms of intimacy and sociality in India . . . it is the treatment of friendship as virtuous that keeps same-sex lovers quietly captured in its handsome frame” (25). The privacy and lack of scrutiny of the men’s relationship highlights the vulnerability and cherishment of their relationship. Despite this pseudo-acceptance, Tanay also directly acknowledges the taboo

nature of their relationship, asking if they would be “social outcasts” because they are two men who love each other (Kundalkar 24). However, as much as he craved a private life with the visitor, he also wished it was formalized like their friends (24). As their relationship was not expected to be romantic or sexual, the blurrings between social and erotic intimacy becomes a way for the men to hide their relationship from the rest of the Joshi family. However, these same complications also acknowledge the shame they expected to face.

In contrast, Anuja felt no shame about potential inexperience or her body when sleeping with the tenant for the first time due to her previous sexual experience (Kundalakar 174). When she first had sex with her friend Anubhav, she actively resisted romance and additional intimacy outside of sex. She sought the experience for curiosity rather than emotion, leading to temporary resentment of her relationship with Anubhav as he had the opposite intent (132–33). In comparison, when she first slept with the tenant, the physical intimacy was enhanced by the emotion and she felt, “deeper, fuller” (174). However, the language surrounding their first time had false notions of intimacy highlighting impersonality despite the emotion involved. They had sex for the first time outside on the beach, actively moving from the private sphere of home in which their romance existed before to now be actively in the public. This public behavior is a direct contrast to Tanay’s relationship which was actively restricted to the private sphere. However, while the tenant and Anuja were outside and in public, it was during the transitional time of sunset. Going from light to darkness returned some semblance of privacy to their relationship. After they finished, Anuja noted they fell asleep and their “bodies drifted away” (175). This suggests false intimacy, or an intimacy that is only possible in privacy and dark. The false intimacy is furthered by the lack of change to their behaviors and actions despite a theoretically more intimate relationship (175).

Both Joshi siblings had very impersonal relationships to sex before meeting the tenant. Their relationships with the tenant introduced emotion and challenged them to adapt to navigating the boundaries between the public and private spheres. Specifically, we can see the similar difficulties presented in homosexual versus heterosexual relationships. Although Anuja's relationship may have been more accepted and respected, she still had similar notions of impersonality in sex that presented themselves in queer relationships such as Tanay's. The physical intimacy within both relationships presented itself as private, resulting in a disruption of the binary of queerness being private, when both homo- and heterosexuality are hidden. In considering the intimacy of both format and letter, Tanay's use of "re" and his entire perspective being a letter addressed to the tenant created a more intimate narrative than that of Anuja's, which was focused on herself through the diary entries. The dichotomy of perspectives leads to a nuanced understanding of what it means to be intimate in a relationship, challenging our notions of intimacy as it exists with acceptance, shame, and privacy.

#### 4. Limitations and Foci of Sexual Expression in "Blame" by Harischandra Khemraj

"Blame" (2000) presents the limitations of young love and the extent to which expressions of sexuality are allowed. The title refers to the meditations of blame by the various characters in the story, combining "sexual suggestiveness, Freudian hints, the unreliable workings of memory, and an isolated colonial setting" to result in a reflection on the guilt of living (Birbalsingh xxx–xxxix). Harischandra Khemraj is a Guyanese author and son of two sugar workers, most well-known for his novel *Cosmic Dance* that won the 1994 Guyana Prize for Literature. Currently, Khemraj lives in the United States, and his later works focus on "political

and racial divisions during the 1960s and 1970s in post-independent Guyana” (Budhu 8). In the “isolated colonial setting,” “Blame” presents a narrative impossible to divorce from its colonial background and being part of the Indo-Caribbean diaspora, with the perpetuation of the colonial violences this implies. Starting with a reflection by the narrator Hiradas, Haridas narrates the love story between his mother Ma, or Savitri, and her lover Jai-Jai, or Jaiprakash Jaimangal. The story blurs the relationships between Ma, Jai-Jai, and Hiradas through Freudian psychology and a focus on Ma’s sexuality to complicate reading the story as a simple love story.

Unlike *Cobalt Blue*, which embodied impersonality towards sex as a mode of emotional distance, “Blame” blurs the boundaries between sexualities and uses Freudian psychology, specifically the Oedipal Complex, to similarly complicate our understanding of the main characters. Regarding the relationship between Savitri and Jai-Jai, it is limited both sexually and romantically. It starts when she is underage, fifteen to Jai-Jai’s eighteen, and thus inherently creates a power imbalance between the two. However, Ma does have agency within their relationship and the hints of her physical sexuality emphasize both the physicality of their relationship rather than emotionality. Their relationship is also disconnected, with the temporal blurring from Haridas’ narration adding to the lack of emotional intimacy we see between Savitri and Jai-Jai. Haridas introduced the relationship between Savitri and Jai-Jai by saying, “You’ve had men after him, but you still love that boy, don’t you? There had not been time enough between you for habit and use to mould him into settled forms in your mind and you are free to create and recreate him however suits your fancy” (Khemraj 90). With such an introduction, Haridas suggests that Ma altered her memory of Jai-Jai to be more intimate than actuality and to prevent later emotionally intense relationships. As I will discuss when examining the relationship between Pepperdine and Yasmin in *Love Marriage*, the construction of relationships, and the

limitation in vulnerability, is a form of control and way of erasing shame that would otherwise be present.

Savitri's body, as a site of production of sexuality, is impacted by the male gaze by both Jai-Jai and Haridas. When Jai-Jai first meets Savitri, he initially disregarded her by asking if anyone was home to her face, although she answered the door. Furthermore, Savitri attempts to draw attention to her body by running her hands alongside herself (Khemraj 91), and Haridas confirms that "Jai-Jai of the wavy hair might never have returned to the farmhouse had it not been for soon-to-be fifteen Savitri, who was big for her age. He was attracted by the size of her breasts and wanted to nestle his head between them" (95). This focus on Savitri's body is echoed by Haridas who has "nestled on that ample bosom myself, and found it a comfortable place to be and maybe, despite my disclaimers, I do consider Jai-Jai a rival for your affections, Ma, and don't like the thought of his deriving similar comfort from you" (95). Haridas directly acknowledges both the mutual desire for Savitri by himself and Jai-Jai and the unusualness of his relationship with his mother, stating, "I'm unable to pinpoint a time or place [when she told me this] and besides, it's not the kind of thing a mother would tell her son" (95). The blurring of boundaries disrupts relational binaries we would expect between parent and son, or between partners. Furthermore, Jai-Jai's behavior when first meeting Savitri and asking if anybody, specifically any man, was home (91) and the focus on preserving social conventions through their courtship indicate the social constrictions through which the two operated (94). Although not breaking heteronormativity, the non-singular nature of Haridas, Ma, and Jai-Jai's relationship forces a non-singular understanding of how we might read expressions of desire as they operate within a post-colonial and diasporic landscape.

## 5. Intimacy in *Love Marriage* by Monica Ali

Subversions of power dynamics emphasize the impersonality of sex, and one's ability to use sex to enforce power, while reclaiming emotional distance and removing vulnerability.

Monica Ali is a Bangladeshi-British author who also wrote *Brick Lane* about the London Bengali community. The London Bengali community is also unique in that there is a large Bengali population forming a strong diasporic community. Ali's novel, *Love Marriage* (2008), tells the story of Yasmin Ghorami, a young Indian-British resident doctor engaged to another resident doctor, Joe, in contemporary London. Whilst balancing her wedding planning between Joe's single mother and her own Bengali Muslim family, in the wake of Joe's cheating, Yasmin starts an affair with her supervising doctor, Dr. Pepperdine.

Just as in *Cobalt Blue*, the prevalence of impersonality in sex is also present in Yasmin's affair with Dr. Pepperdine in *Love Marriage*. When she starts her affair, it is fueled by physical desire, not an emotional connection. As she continues the affair, Yasmin's emotional detachment from Pepperdine becomes a way for Yasmin to exert power and express powerful sexuality and directly subverts the supervisor-supervisee power dynamic from their workplace. Yasmin and Pepperdine's affair starts after Yasmin's fiancé, Joe, confesses to cheating on Yasmin. This occurs while Joe is in treatment for sex addiction, of which Yasmin is unaware. The two have fundamentally different relationships with sex, and this direct contrast in their relationships with each other and other partners is explored throughout the novel and Yasmin's affair. Specifically, Yasmin has a perceived and acknowledged power in her body, leading to a sense of control, whereas Joe's relationship with sex is a direct foil to this control that Yasmin has found.



Yasmin's sex with Pepperdine is a form of autonomy that subverts the sexual power dynamics she has in her relationship with Joe after the cheating comes to light. After leaving after sleeping with Pepperdine for the first time, she thinks about Joe's cheating, and her other relationships, concluding that "she wasn't frigid" (Ali 177). Thus, corresponding with the chapter title of "Haram," translating to "shame," the autonomy she explores is juxtaposed with shame. When Yasmin and Pepperdine meet in Pepperdine's office soon after this first encounter, Yasmin reflects, "She knows it is wrong, that what they are doing is bad, and it feels so good to behave badly with no excuses and just take whatever you want. She is free. She is disgraced, corrupted, debauched" (207). The simultaneous shame and freedom create a complication of sexuality and whether sexuality in all forms is permissible. Furthermore, Yasmin asserts her limitations in the relationship by defining it as "just sex," enforcing an emotional boundary (175). Yasmin continues to explore this perceived power when she and Pepperdine meet in Pepperdine's office. Yasmin reflects on her power and control, stating, "In this moment she is powerful. She is controlling everything" (206). Yet, this control is subverted once she opens herself up for judgement to Pepperdine and the narrative then changes to, "She is not in control of anything, not even herself" (206). Such a focus on the physicality of sex was also seen in Anuja's relationship with the tenant in *Cobalt Blue* and Jai-Jai and Savitri's relationship in "Blame," and so we see the extension of physical desire as a form of control extended throughout the diaspora.

In considering how sex itself is described in the scene when Pepperdine and Yasmin are in his office, it is impersonal and enveloped into the story. Although there is dialogue when they meet, it is not distinguished by quotation marks, as done in other chapters. This differentiation changes their actions from something noteworthy and meaningful to something more focused on

the actions themselves. In other words, the lack of dialogue marks adds to the emotional distance of their relationship. Furthermore, there is no emotion involved in the act itself, aside from wanting to be desired, and the associated freedom Yasmin has come to anticipate. For instance, Yasmin shies away from Pepperdine's kisses but when he brings up another meeting he must attend to, Yasmin describes how "the back of her neck was ticklish: excitement or sweat or fear. No, not fear. She was fearless in this moment" (206). Their following meeting, Pepperdine and Yasmin both do not engage with the emotions that typically come with intimacy, as "she doesn't waste time with questions and he asks nothing of her except to move her body this way or that" (207). The lack of emotional connection subverts the traditional expectation of emotions with intimacy and challenges the concept that free sexuality is not allowed or must be policed in relationships. The impersonality becomes a mode of freedom and Yasmin exploits it to use sex as a release rather than emotional connection. Yasmin actively resists further emotional connection with Pepperdine, and he acknowledges this when they are discussing other partners and he says to her, while he has been called emotionally unavailable, "I thought it was you who was unavailable" (234). The direct challenge to Yasmin places her distance from Pepperdine at the forefront and forces an acknowledgement of how the distance became her mode of liberation. Both Pepperdine and Yasmin acknowledge this emotional detachment at the end of their affair, with Yasmin noting, "If she pressed her lips on his it wouldn't make him feel anything," and reaffirming that all she wanted from their relationship was sex (375-76). The navigation of desire and emotional distance serve to both highlight negotiations of intimacy, but also how the body is used to challenge binaries of sexual expression and expected behaviors in our relationships.

## 6. *She of the Mountains* and Queer Relationships

*She of the Mountains* (2014) challenges strict definitions of queerness, and actively enforces a fluid conception of queerness. In telling the story of an Indian-Canadian boy as he grows and understands his sexuality, and interweaving his story with the love stories of Shiv and Parvati in her various forms, Vivek Shraya wrote a reflective novel that helps deconstruct boundaries to move towards a fluid definition of queer. Shraya is an Indian-Canadian artist of music, performance, literature and film. Although Shraya used he/him pronouns at the time of publication of *She Loves Mountains*, Shraya identifies as a transgender bisexual woman using she/her pronouns. Shraya's unique perspective extends the breaking of these seemingly rigid boundaries to one's own life and in their relationships.

Throughout the book, although the protagonist, only referred to by the third person "he," is called gay and has relationships with men, his most intimate relationship is with "her." He initially suppressed his attraction to her by relying on his queerness (referred to as "gayness" initially) to prevent their getting together, but they do eventually enter a relationship with each other (Shraya 59). However, he is constantly challenged by his queerness to accept their relationship and says at the start of their dating, "this is not going to be a conventional relationship" (61). Despite its being a heterosexual relationship, he acknowledged how their relationship would still be influenced by his queerness and previous homosexual identification.

Their relationship goes through various periods, including breaking up and getting back together, but he constantly compares his other relationships to his relationship with her, and they do not immediately stop being intimate with each other upon breaking up nor do they close contact with each other (Shraya 90). After breaking up the first time, he says that having sex with

a man is not better than having sex with her, simply different (99). The blurring between his heterosexual and same-gender relationships leads to a blurring between the distinctions of sexuality. Furthermore, the queer desire and identity bring to the forefront histories of deconstruction of the diasporic identity and queer erasure, such as noting racial differences with his white partner (97) and invalidation of bi- or pansexual identities, such as when “his” friend says, “the Bi Highway always lead to Gaytown” (35). By acknowledging these erasures and deconstructions, Shraya challenges these boundaries to result in a reorientation of expressed intimacies and relationships. As such, “he” in *She of the Mountains* constructed his own queer identity that defied those other restrictions as placed by the Canadian queer community.

The novel emphasizes a lack of strictly defined queerness and sexuality. Furthermore, queerness becomes a concept that pervades into other aspects of our lives and relationships, creating questions around binaries and lack of fluid sexuality. When he starts identifying as “queer,” it becomes a relief for his partner as well, and another way to validate their relationship. Specifically, he says, “Hearing her say those words, he realized that she too needed the word *queer*, especially in that sentence, if only to be able to counter the Duped Victim narrative that had been projected onto her” (Shraya 126). Especially given his previous identification as gay, “queer” serves as the anti-normative signifier established by Mansalan to highlight the nuances in how the two characters operate within their relationship and challenge impositions of a societal norm rather than reality. Furthermore, it defies definitions of heterosexual and queer relationships to be dependent on each partner’s relationship to the other’s gender to extend into each partner’s sexual identity.

The extension of queerness into their otherwise heterosexual relationship supersedes the societal restrictions placed on them as a heterosexual couple. However, this fluid definition of

queer led to ostracization and opposition from the straight and gay communities alike, as they both desire uniform and singular versions of themselves (Shraya 128). Despite the objection to their relationship, the transition from their platonic intimacies into romantic and sexual highlight the relational blurrings as a mode of queerness permeating into their friendship and allowing for additional vulnerabilities. The use of “queer” inherently defies singularity, so the emphasis on fluid and not strictly defined sexuality is employed to, by contrast, reiterate the harms of gatekeeping and exclusion.

#### 7. Engaging with the Diaspora: “Sexy” and Intimacy Outside the Diaspora

As defined in the introduction, “diaspora” refers to individuals with some common ethnic and/or geographic locality, but a crucial part of the diasporic individual’s identity is engagement with those outside the diaspora. “Sexy” is a short story from Jhumpa Lahiri’s collection *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999). Lahiri herself is Bengali-American, and thus much of her bibliography consists of stories with Indian and/or Indian-diasporic, specifically Bengali, characters. While the remaining stories in *Interpreter of Maladies* primarily feature such protagonists and characters, “Sexy” is unique as it features a white protagonist, Miranda. Miranda starts an affair with a married Indian man, Dev, whilst his wife goes to India. She proceeds to transition from being a pseudo-relationship with Dev into being his mistress when his wife returns. Miranda’s story parallels her coworker’s sister’s marriage, when said sister’s husband leaves her for another woman. By featuring a white protagonist, Lahiri thus presents a story exhibiting the nuances in relationships with those outside the diaspora.

While Miranda and Dev's relationship initially started as a romantic relationship, Miranda has no claim or legitimacy to attempting to learn about Dev's culture. When the two come across a map of India, Dev points out Bengal. However, he tells her, "Nothing you'll ever need to worry about" when she tries to learn more and ask him more questions, and Dev promptly throw the map away (84). After he leaves to return home, she retrieves the map from the trash and attempts to comprehend something from an otherwise meaningless piece of paper. This scene highlights just how little the two know about each other, and how much their relationship is centered on sex and physical intimacy rather than emotional.

Dev perpetuates a focus on physical intimacy the first time he visits Miranda after his wife returns from India. The two only meet on Sundays as Dev gives his wife the excuse he is going running and then goes to Miranda's apartment. When Miranda attempts to add some additional emotion and effort to their sex by wearing a nice robe, "Dev didn't even notice it; he carried her over to the bed, wearing sweatpants and sneakers, and entered her without a word. Later, she slipped on the robe...but he complained that she was depriving him of the sight of her long legs, and demanded that she remove it" (Lahiri 93). Dev's complete focus on Miranda's physical body both objectifies her and removes any sense of emotionality to their relationship. Given this lackluster reaction to what was meant to be a romantic surprise, Miranda similarly puts in minimal effort as the two continue only meeting on Sundays for sex, conversation, and for Dev to take a quick nap (94).

Miranda only confronts her knowledge of the lack of a real relationship and intimacy once Roshin, her Indian coworker's friend's young son, Roshin, calls her sexy. Dev similarly called her "sexy" at the beginning of the relationship, and spoke it as a whisper, both keeping the moment private but also alluding to the inherent privacy of the affair (Lahiri 91). Roshin's

definition of “sexy” was, “loving someone you don’t know” (107), based on how his own father left his mother for a stranger he connected with on a plane. Roshin calling Miranda “sexy” forced her to acknowledge how her relationship with Dev is superficial and relies on such false intimacies to justify how she is only allowed to occupy very few spaces in Dev’s life. Although not speaking to Miranda and Dev’s relationship, Roshin’s comment directly acknowledges the distance Dev enforces, and Miranda’s compliance with these boundaries. Furthermore, as Dev and Miranda’s relationship is purely dependent on physical desire rather than emotional connection or attachment, there is no obligation from Dev’s perspective to put in that additional effort to connect with Miranda on a deeper level, just as Yasmin prevented Pepperdine from getting closer to her emotionally in *Love Marriage*.

Miranda’s restriction in space is partially due to how she is outside the diaspora. For instance, she attempts to learn Bengali script, but fails (Lahiri 97). Her inability to be an active and real component of Dev’s life parallels her inability to engage with Bengali culture. Although Miranda and Dev are in a heterosexual relationship, we can apply Gopinath’s analysis regarding cross-ethnic relationships to their affair as well. Gopinath discussed the interracial queer relationship present in the film *My Beautiful Laundrette*, connecting it to postcolonialism scholarship, stating “the queer racialized body becomes a historical archive for both individuals and communities, one that is excavated through the very act of desiring the racial Other” (“Impossible Desires” 1). This “historical archive” is present in how Miranda views Dev’s body as an archive for Bengali history, and only seeks to learn more due to Dev’s identity as a Bengali man. However, she faces difficulty in doing so. She creates excuses for not engaging in Bengali culture, similar to how Dev does not believe her seriousness to learn Bengali culture and only tells her, “Nothing you’ll ever need to worry about” (Lahiri 84). Once Miranda rejects his offer

to come over once, their relationship gradually fizzles out. This reflects the lack of legitimate intimacy and interest, and additionally, the only instance in which Miranda exerts her agency in the relationship is once her role is reduced.

#### 8. “This Is What Love Is”: Intimacy and Emotional Distance

As Sheena Patel describes in “This Is What Love Is,” emotional and physical vulnerability and intimacy are fragile, requiring trust and power changes. Sheena Patel is part of the 4 BROWN GIRLS WHO WRITE collective, of which the poetic prose “This Is What Love Is” is included. The poem details a year in her life, navigating different relationships with different lovers, and focusing on physical intimacy. Although there is a blatant focus on sex and sexuality, there is a simultaneous focus on love and the ways it may present itself or play a role in different relationships. Told nonlinearly, Patel crafts a poem that allows us to see the nuances in her relationships, and how they influence each other long after she has left one partner. The blurring of temporal boundaries between these intimacies and relationships reorients both the “backwards gaze of diaspora” and the limitations of intimate expressions. Furthermore, with these temporal complications, we see elements of queer intimacies emerging through these challenges of intimacy boundaries and how we cannot view relationships or intimacy through a singular lens. This blurring of time similarly disrupts how we can view intimacy as a time-dependent phenomenon, and how these relationships extend beyond their time to still impart influences. Just as *She of the Mountains* blurred relational boundaries and influences of queerness, *This Is What Love Is* blurs the singularity of time to demonstrate how intimacy



transcends our traditional perception of relationships, creating a dialogue about the fluidity of desire and vulnerability.

Patel does not refer to any of her partners by name, only by a letter. She opens and ends the poem describing her ingesting of the psychedelic peyote before describing her breakup with her recurrent and most intimate lover, H. Although the poem begins with their breakup, details of their relationship are shared throughout the poem and Patel frequently references attempted emotional intimacy and vulnerability. The breakup at the beginning of the poem, which was at the end of their relationship, was because H “can see a future with me, only he’s not sure he can commit, he needs more time to think.” Similar to *Cobalt Blue*, where Tanay and Anuja are unclear on the true and allowed extents of their relationships of the tenant, and Miranda and Dev’s emotionally distant relationship in “Sexy,” Patel is placed into an emotional limbo with H. This distance and reluctance to fully connect is present from the start of their relationship as he “tells me very early on not to fall in love with him,” and continues to see his former/current partner. The reluctance for emotional intimacy hurts Patel, who refuted his initial direction to not fall in love, because she thought she could be special and different, “not realising this is pig-headed and dangerous.”

In the first third of the book, Patel describes her relationship as H as an “arid desert” due to this lack of emotional intimacy, and so her next lover C “is a deep drink of water to slake my thirst.” Their relationship was built on physical attraction, and Patel refrains from engaging in emotional intimacy with C. She states, “we were only a few weeks in when C accidentally tells me he loves me. H is a jinn haunting my heart and I can’t say it back.” However, it was not just her own emotional unavailability and remaining feelings over H, but also C’s lack of understanding regarding Patel’s ethnic identity. Patel’s first indication that their relationship will

fail is when he prevents Patel from engaging with racially insensitive/racist patrons of his local bar, which Patel describes as “defending his whiteness.” However, she “can’t bear to give up the sex,” and so their relationship is further reduced to not consider the emotional at all. Patel’s emotional distance results from both her own inability to connect and C’s ignorance, therefore placing the diasporic identity at the forefront of their relationship’s failures.

Additional examples of this emotional distance, and the difficulty of expressing vulnerability with those other than H, presents itself when Patel learned she was pregnant in the middle third of the book. Although she still had not told C, her partner at the time, she calls H and tells him, “if it was his, I’d keep it which doesn’t make sense because we haven’t slept together in two years.” Although Patel and H’s relationship is emotionally taut, she still questions, “how much I enjoy it really, I am performing my desire for him.” The distinctions between performative love and desire are blurred as she continues on to say, “my heart is mired in unspeakable grief.” The performances of love and desire creates connections between impersonality and intimacy. Specifically, Patel’s reflections on emotional performance are similar to Yasmin’s reflection on her sexual autonomy after she starts her affair with Pepperdine in *Love Marriage*, and the connections between power, desire, and impersonality.

The last sexual partner Patel describes is the woman E, her friend that went to the bar with Patel in the last third of the poem. However, as she narrates their encounter, Patel describes her power in the situation as making her sick, and furthermore without control. Patel immediately follows this section of the poem with a critique of the binaries present in British society. The power imbalances between Patel’s various relationships, whether toxic, co-dependent, or outside the traditional heterosexual framework reflect on the imposition of such boundaries. In considering Patel and E, the two still kissed after attempting sex, although it

eventually became another performance of desire rather than genuine interest. These performances of sexual intimacy emphasize the disconnectedness Patel faced from being a member of the diaspora and failing to fit within these imposed binaries, highlighting the emotional distance she maintains.

## 9. Conclusion: *Another Appalachia* as an Example of Healing and Empathy

This thesis has explored the ways that queer diasporic identities and queer intimacies allow for blurrings of relationship boundaries. By analyzing the roles of desire and self-imposed limitations of vulnerability, I established how desire reorients our understanding of relationships within the diaspora, and specifically how it creates commonalities between queer and not queer identities to operate within a cohesive queer diasporic framework. Thus, there is an integrated South Asian queer diasporic identity that operates within the diaspora and is present even when not evident.

Neema Avashia's experiences in *Another Appalachia: Coming Up Queer and Indian in a Mountain Place* (2022) presents the memoir as a form of reading how queer intimacies and the queer diaspora present themselves through our lived experiences. *Another Appalachia* is a series of her essays about her experiences as a queer Indian woman, both during her upbringing, after, and as she navigates her relationship with her wife. Specifically, and perhaps more importantly, Avashia's experiences demonstrate how the queer diaspora becomes a way of creating community and empathy even when that community and empathy must be created and is not inherently found. This empathy is a form of healing from the inherent violence of the diaspora, as "diasporic identities and desires emerge through fragile links established across uneven

terrains shaped by power, violence and displacement” (Klesse 150). The challenging of the heteronormative narrative in our relationship formation is crucial as we seek to form new relationships and intimacies with those around us. Neema Avashia is a middle school teacher in Boston, born and raised in southern West Virginia to Indian immigrant parents.

Evident from the different ways in which intimacy and sex were explored throughout the thesis, there is no one clear way in which we navigate these within queerness and the diaspora. Along with forming empathy, queer intimacies create opportunities for community and specifically for creating space for queer diasporic identities. Avashia juxtaposed writing her thesis about her upbringing with her cousin’s behavior online where she publicly uses profanity, and discusses her parents’ relationship and recreational drug use. As Avashia said, if her cousin could do those things, “then surely it is acceptable for me to write my essays about growing up Indian in West Virginia; about navigating intersectional race, class, and gender dynamics; about the relationships that have both nourished and starved me” (120). However, she received backlash from her family years later when they found her thesis on Google, with the shaming spearheaded by the parents of the aforementioned cousin. Avashia’s mother said this toxicity was because, “They’re worried that your thesis could hurt their daughter’s marriage prospects,” although the daughter is also not behaving in ways that follow preventing shame being brought upon the family (Avashia 121). This confusing mix of shame and acceptance necessities spaces for community and healing, which texts such as Avashia’s create.

Avashia fights against this experience of shame automatically put against those who defy the expected customs of the diaspora. She related the story of her great-grandfather who went to study law in London rather than stay in India with his wife to raise their children. She said he “died alone, the first bringer of shame,” and his life was “a cautionary tale for the generations

that followed: fealty to family at all costs, even if it meant suffocating your own passions.”

However, rather than following this cautionary tale, Avashia instead views her great-grandfather as “a reminder that there are, in fact, other ways to live besides in fear of shame” (124). This “suffocating of passion” is common in South Asian diasporas, with studies showing self-sacrifice as a common expression of love because of a sense of duty towards family (Sharif et al. 5). Fighting against this expected self-sacrifice to instead speak the truth about her experiences, Avashia forced an acknowledgment of her identity, even if multiple members of her family shamed this expression.

Along with discussing her family’s relationship dynamics, Avashia’s essays on queerness as an Indian woman challenged her role in the diaspora. Non-heterosexuality automatically challenges the diaspora (Klesse 136). The diaspora’s impressions of desire are scripted by both those inside and outside the diaspora. In this case, Avashia described her experiences in high school, and the contradictions between the diaspora dictating that she desire a man, those outside the diaspora saying that she should specifically desire a brown man, and society telling her she is meant to desire the stereotypical white jock (147). Avashia did not fit into any script, and especially when she was thinking about bringing her white female partner, Laura, home to meet her family and community, she was “still calculating risk” and the couple opted to stay with white community members instead, who had adult children in queer relationships. However, she said her “Indian aunties and uncles consistently proved me wrong and showed me how I’d underestimated them. They poured down their love on us in quantities I could never have imagined.” Furthermore, they invited them home after dinner to drink chai and stay with them, which “was the truest expression of unconditional love I could have asked for” (Avashia 58–59). Nonverbal communication is common amongst South Asian diasporic communities, and is an

implicit form of care (Sharif et al. 5). Thus, when Avashia's family accepted her and her partner, they were helping form those communities of care and empathy. Although it did not exist outwardly before, Avashia cultivated an intersectional space where she and her partner were safe and welcomed.

I started this thesis by saying queerness is about love. Love is care, and empathy, and working to form these in our relationships. In diasporic communities, such as the South Asian diaspora, focusing on love and empathy are healing practices towards the inherent violence and displacement that resulted in the diaspora's formation. Furthermore, it ensures nuance in how we might approach our relationships so that we can have space for empathy. Queerness was a way for me to explore these intimacies in the texts and challenge the boundaries we fall into with heteronormativity, while highlighting the presence of queer intimacies even when not in queer relationships. These intimacies, both physical and emotional, are only a basis for how we can start to perceive how we use connection and vulnerability, and transcend a singular understanding of how we might operate within the constraints of identity.

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