Distribution Agreement

In presenting this thesis as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for a degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter know, including display on the World Wide Web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis.

Kevin Hatcher 7/26/2011

I Was There: Tracing Homosexuality and Subjectivity in Andre Gide and James Baldwin

By

Kevin Hatcher

Dalia Judovitz

Adviser

Department of French and Italian Studies

Dalia Judovitz

Adviser

Rudolph Byrd

Committee Member

Valerie Loichot

Committee Member

08/02/11

I Was There: Tracing Homosexuality and Subjectivity in Andre Gide and James Baldwin

By

Kevin Hatcher

Dalia Judovitz

Adviser

An abstract of a thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences of Emory University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Department of French and Italian Studies

2011

Abstract

I Was There: Tracing Homosexuality and Subjectivity in Andre Gide and James Baldwin

By Kevin Hatcher

This thesis interfaces two of the most important figures in gay literature, Andre Gide and James Baldwin to engage questions of subjectivity, identity and outness. Though both men openly treat the issue of homosexuality in their texts, their methods are drastically different. For Gide and Baldwin "coming out" was not simply a matter of stating their positions as homosexuals. Rather, it meant a series of calculated and complex encounters between the self and its (homo)sexuality. These encounters reveal each author's aim in engaging homosexuality. In this thesis I explore the undemocratic nature of outness, and illustrate how it must be negotiated differently for each author. I call upon several of their works in order to trace the complex shapes, detours and movements that make up their outness.

I Was There: Tracing Homosexuality and Subjectivity in Andre Gide and James Baldwin

By

Kevin Hatcher

Dalia Judovitz

Adviser

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences of Emory University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Department of French and Italian Studies

2011

Acknowledgements

To Dalia Judovitz for your support

To James Baldwin for your inspiration

To Black Gay Men for your resilience

I Was There

Tracing Homosexuality and Subjectivity in Andre Gide and James Baldwin

Kevin Hatcher

7/26/2011

Table of Contents

Chapter **Page**

Introduction....1

Chapter 1 – Enunciation and Nomenclature....7

Chapter 2 – Détours and Distance....17

Chapter 3 – Searching for Home and Making Room....28

Conclusion – Questions of Subjectivity....50

Works Cited....52

Introduction:
Writing Out of the Literary Closet

One of most overlooked and, in my opinion, most interesting essays in the Baldwinian cannon is “The Male Prison.” James Baldwin wrote this essay in 1954, and it was later published in his 1961 collection *Nobody Knows My Name*. The five page essay is certainly not Baldwin’s most substantial work, nor is it his most impactful. However, its uniqueness lies in the fact that it is one of the few texts in which Baldwin directly addresses homosexuality. Furthermore, it is the only text in his cannon in which Baldwin takes up the writing and traditions of Andre Gide. Both Gide and Baldwin occupy crucial seats in the pantheon of great influential and important literaries. Gide is one of the most prominent writers of the 20th century. He is often credited with being the first “out” modern writer to openly address male homosexuality. Likewise, Baldwin’s prominence and influence have earned him the title of an “American Master.”[1] His critiques and analysis of race, identity and sexuality helped to shape political and cultural discourses in America. Thus, given their prominence, it is puzzling that these two figures are rarely interfaced by scholars.

On the surface the need for such an association may not seem particularly acute. After all, the differences between the two writers are quite apparent. Gide was a white 19th century French writer whose text was rooted in Greek tradition and concerned the bourgeoisie. Baldwin, a black man from a poor family in 1920s’ Harlem, wrote mostly of race relations and was quintessentially American. However, there are also commonalities. Gide was French and

[1] In November 2006 Baldwin was profiled as a part of PBS’ iconic series “American Masters.”

Baldwin spent most of his life in France. Gide spent a great deal of time in North Africa and abroad, as did Baldwin. And of course both, at some point in their literary careers, wrote openly as homosexual men.[2] Though these intersections may seem superficial, they are reason enough to explore more profound relationships between Gide and Baldwin. This thesis primarily concerns this last point of commonality.

The goal of this thesis is to move beyond simple comparison and contrast of Andre Gide and James Baldwin. It is not enough to simply illustrate that both men were "out." Rather I am more interested in examining the complex shapes, detours and movements that make up this outness. For Gide and Baldwin "coming out" was not simply a matter of stating their positions as homosexuals. Rather, it meant a series of calculated and complex encounters between the self and its (homo)sexuality. Furthermore, I intend to complicate the notion of outness altogether by demonstrating that there exists no universal form of outness that comfortably fits everyone. Thus, being "out" for Baldwin did not mean the same as it did for Gide. Likewise, outness for Gide did not come at the same cost as it did for Baldwin who had to navigate race, class and sexual politics in a way that Gide never had to. Also, because both writers were very much invested in the politics of their respective societies, it is certain that their texts harbored political agendas. Therefore, it is appropriate—if not necessary— to question their aims in engaging homosexuality. In other words, in addition to examining the methods Baldwin and Gide used to engage homosexuality in their texts, one must interrogate their motives as well. One must ask of the authors; What is your agenda? What are you attempting to reveal or change?

---

[2] I use the term homosexual because this is the term that Baldwin and Gide most frequently used. Though, Gide preferred the term pederast to articulate his own identity.

"The Male Prison" is a scathing critique of Gide in which Baldwin makes no attempt to mask his distaste for his predecessor. He refers to Gide as "a writer whose elaborately graceful fiction very often impressed me as simply cold, solemn and irritatingly pious, and whose precise memoirs made me accuse him of the most exasperating egocentricity."[3] In addition to his annoyance with Gide's style of writing, Baldwin also takes issue with the way in which Gide treats homosexuality. He says, "his homosexuality, I felt, was his own affair which he ought to have kept hidden from us, or if he needed to be so explicit, he ought at least to have managed to be a little more scientific…less illogical, less romantic." (Baldwin, *Collected Essays,* 231) Baldwin's suggestion that Gide would have been better to remain in the literary closet is not due to internalized homophobia on his part. Rather, Baldwin felt that Gide unfairly romanticized and idealized homosexuality in an attempt to make it more digestible to heterosexuals.

Gide's primary goal is to illustrate that homosexuality is "natural." He claims that homosexuality represents the "natural" element in humans, whereas heterosexuality represents the "artifice" constructed by society. In order to lend credence to his argument for homosexuality Gide points to past civilizations such as Ancient Greece, Renaissance Italy and Elizabethan England. Baldwin finds this argument to be superfluous and futile. In "The Male Prison" of Gide's argument he writes: "…as to whether or not homosexuality is natural seems to me completely pointless…" and furthermore "[i]t does not seem to me that nature helps us very much when we need illumination in human affairs." (Baldwin, *Collected Essays*, 232) Baldwin knows that heterosexuals will never accept homosexuality as normal, because doing so would destabilize the position of heterosexual identity in the binary structure.

---

[3] James Baldwin. "The Male Prison", *Baldwin Collected Essays*. (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc, 1998), 231.

The explicitness that Baldwin identifies in Gide's text is but a literary device. Gide's texts seem to vacillate between reticence and explicitness when engaging questions of homosexuality. Many scholars and many of Gide's contemporaries fault him for either revealing too much or not revealing enough. However, Gide knew exactly what he was doing and the "simplicity," "frankness" and "truth" with which he claims to write is a pretense. His texts are characterized by their *détours* and *pièges littéraires*. His dance between explicitness and reticence is a carefully calculated maneuver. Gide is always in full control of what he reveals and nothing about his texts is "simple."

Through his texts Gide sets out to shape the discourse of male homosexuality. He pays an inordinate amount of attention to names and categories. For example, in his journals he offers a detailed description and categorization of what he sees to be different types of homosexuals—pederasts, inverts and sodomites. Gide does so because his goal is to subvert the discourse surrounding homosexuality by taking these terms and endowing them with new meaning. He knows that to name something is to reveal it, to define it and to find a special place for it in the world. Anchoring his argument in the Greek tradition, of which he sees himself an heir, Gide attempts to demonstrate that homosexuality— and more specifically pederasty— is a noble act undeserving of the disgust and distain with which it is treated in his society. In the preface of *Corydon* Gide declares his intention by proclaiming that "however subversive this book may seem to be, it is only meant to attack lies."[4] Gide, attempts to redraw identity categories and to codify homosexuality on his own terms in order to create a new genealogy freed from 19th century discourse of condemnation and pathology. In his essay on Gide, Jerome de Romanet

[4]Andre Gide. *Corydon* (New York: Ferrar Straus, 1983) 11.

notes that "as early as the Platonic dialogues in *Corydon*, Gide set out to become a 'homosexual moralist' or at least to establish the ethics of homosexuality."[5]

Baldwin too has an aim in writing about homosexuality, and that aim is just as ambitious. One of my favorite Baldwin quotes, which reveals his revolutionary ambitions, is one in which he reminds us that "[t]he world is before you, and you need not take it or leave is as it was when you came in." Like Gide, Baldwin finds himself displaced within the discourse of homosexuality, and therefore has a stake in reshaping it. However, his methodology is quite different. Whereas Gide's interest is in creating new identity categories, Baldwin prefers instead to scramble these categories. Romanet writes: "As he often does in his discussion of racial issues, Baldwin takes on the voice of the Other –the whites, the heterosexuals—'to blur distinctions between self and the other, heterosexual and homosexual…[In doing so], Baldwin shocks his readers into identifying with an otherwise objectionable subject or voice." (Romanet, 8) Thus, instead of emphasizing the differences in identity categories and restructuring the hierarchy, Baldwin appeals to the reader to place himself in the position of the other. He isn't interested in dichotomizing homosexuality and heterosexuality. He finds binary oppositions to be problematic. This ultimately leads Baldwin to proclaim that, "we are all androgynous."[6]

As a writer, Baldwin saw himself as the literary heir of other famous American expatriates such as Richard Wright and Henry James. He also located himself in another tradition: the tradition of male authors of homosexual or bisexual persuasion who have contributed to American literature and often have been expatriates at one point or another such as Walt Whitman, Countee Cullen, Claude McKay Langston Hughes etc. However, whether or not

---

[5] Jerome de Romanet. "Revisiting *Madeleine* and 'The Outing': James Baldwin's Revision of Gide's Sexual Politics" *MELUS,* 22, 1, 1997, pp.3-12

[6] James Baldwin, "Freaks and The American Ideal of Manhood", *Collected Essays* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc, 1998) 828.

Baldwin recognizes it, he is also a part of Gide's posterity. He is the continuation of a tradition that Gide made possible. Due to the inaugural nature of his discourse, Gide becomes *the* example of the openly gay and literarily "out" male writer. Whether those who follow in Gide's wake chose to imitate, refute or criticize his legacy does not compromise his position. Nonetheless, Baldwin manages to create new spaces in this tradition other than what Gide has opened up for him.

This thesis is presented in three chapters. The first chapter examines Gide's aims in engaging homosexuality and identifies some of the *enjeux littéraires* that he uses to put forth his agenda. In this chapter I focus on reticence and explicitness as literary tools in several of his works including *Corydon, L'immoraliste* and *Si le Grain ne Meurt*. Chapter 2 takes a look at Baldwin the historical figure and author to highlight his tactics and objectives in addressing homosexuality. In this chapter I mainly focus on Baldwin's novels and one of his non-fiction essays "Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood." Lastly, in Chapter 3 I offer a close reading of Baldwin's most explicitly homosexual work of fiction, *Giovanni's Room*¸ in order to investigate Baldwin's method of structuring the relationship between the self and its sexuality.

Chapter 1

Enunciation and Nomenclature: Configuring the First Person and Same-Sex Sexuality in Gide

Much has been said, written and theorized about Andre Gide, one of the most prominent literary figures of the 20th century. He is often characterized as one of the first "out" modern writers. Indeed many of his oeuvres, especially those of the 1920s and 1930s openly explore homosexual male desire. Gide's 1920 novel *Corydon,* which he published despite the discouragement of his literary counterparts, was said to be so "explicit" regarding the subject of homosexuality, that its publication nearly caused a rift between he and his friends. Gide says of the account: "The disapproval of some friends was so violent that I nearly broke with them…"[7] Not only did Gide write about homosexuality, but he also wrote about his *own* homosexuality. His memoirs *Si le grain ne meurt*, which he hesitated for two years to publish (and did so despite the urging of his good friend Roger Martin du Gard), explore his own struggles with his sexuality.

In his memoirs he recounts two occasions where two of his contemporaries, who were also, according to Gide, "practicing homosexuals," encourage him to "never say I" in his works. Quoting Oscar Wilde he writes:

> "Listen, dear, now you must make me a promise. Your *Nourritures Terrestres* is fine…very fine even…But dear, from now on never again write I". And as if I didn't seem to understand him fully enough, he went on: "In art, you see, there is no *first* person." (Lucey, 9)

[7] Michael Lucey, *Gide's Bent* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) 15.

This advice to “never again write ‘I’” is reiterated by Marcel Proust. Gide takes Proust a copy of *Corydon* “of which he promises to speak to no one.” After reading *Corydon* Proust advises Gide: “you can relate anything, but on condition that you never say I.” (Lucey, 9) The obvious question is why Proust and Wilde would so vehemently discourage Gide from using the first person in his texts.

Wilde’s advice concerns aesthetics and literary sophistication. However Gide, though very much interested in literary style and bourgeois ideals of art, was not simply making art for art’s sake. He was engaged in a type of subject-making the details of which I will explore shortly. But for now I’d like to return to Proust’s advice to “…relate anything, but on condition that you never say I.” (Lucey, 9)

In the first chapter of his essay “Problems in General Linguistics” Benveniste highlights the unique function of the pronoun “I”. According to Benveniste, “I” marks the transformation of language into discourse. It permits the speaker to set himself up as the subject. By stating “I” the individual establishes himself as the speaker and is allowed to “take over all the resources of language for his own behalf,” says Benveniste.[8] By establishing himself or herself as the subject the author enters an intimate relationship with what he/she produces. He/she assumes responsibility for it. Gide ultimately rejects Wilde’s and Proust’s advice writing in his journal: “But this won’t suit me.” (Lucey, 14) In rejecting his counterparts’ advice Gide commits himself to a certain form of literary outness that both Proust and Wilde find unwise.

Although Gide decides to use the first person in his texts, the relationship between the first person and its sexuality is complex, subtle and often illusive. Much of Gide’s work is filled

---

[8] Emile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics* Translated by Mary Elizabeth Meek (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1971) 225.

with *délices* and *détours* that perform an abstraction on the first-person. An example of a Gidean détour is his use of the first person in *L'Immoraliste* which is narrated in the first person by the protagonist Michael. That first person account is framed by another first-person text written by a friend of Michael's, and that first-person account is further framed by a preface by Gide. Here Gide uses three first person accounts; three "I"s. This multiplication of subjects blurs the relationship between the protagonist and his sexuality. It becomes difficult to follow exactly who is the subject and which "I" is speaking. It is these types of staging of the first person that frustrate many of his critics and yet fascinate others. For example, Rachides, novelist, literary critic and Gide's contemporary criticized his détours as "the trickiest kinds of cerebral traps that can be laid for feeble modern minds."[9] She scolds him for not being explicit enough about the homosexual desire expressed in his literature. Martin du Gard found fault with Gide for not being revelatory enough in his memoirs. He writes to Gide: "The more I think of your memoirs the less I am satisfied with them. I have read three hundred pages, and I have yet to have encountered you…Now is the time to open fully the secret door, to enter there and to take us with you, in a stream of light…" (Lucey, *Never Say I*, 171) Meanwhile other critics of the time, such as Lucie Delarue-Mardrus, praise Gide precisely *for* his reticence. In her review of Gide's *L'immoraliste* she writes, "I am pleased that he only barely cracks open the egg…It is this reticence, Reticence! to which I am attached…Michael [the protagonist] must remain a slave if Gide is to continue to be of interest to us." (Lucey, *Never Say I*, 84) Therefore, to simply say that Gide was "out" fails to recognize the complexity of the encounters between the self and its sexuality in his writings.

If Gide continually performs a calculated balancing act between reticence and explicitness it is because he is struggling to create an appropriate homosexual male subject. By

[9] Michael Lucey, *Never Say I* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) 79.

"appropriate" I do not mean what was deemed as proper or correct for the time. In fact, according to the accepted literary norms of the time, Gide could have, should he'd wished, written very overtly and plainly about homosexual desire. During Gide's literary career there was an incitement to speak about sex, especially in literature. Describing the literary environment of the 20th century Foucault says "…in our society, literature has become an institution in which transgressions impossible anywhere else become possible. This is why bourgeois society shows itself to be so tolerant of what happens in literature." (Lucey, *Never Say I*, 11) Several of Gide's contemporaries namely Lorrain and Collette, wrote much more explicitly about same-sex sexuality. However he despised Lorrain and had little regard for Collette. Moreover, he did not see himself as being a part of the same lineage or milieu as they. In a 1936 journal entry he described their society as "artificial, tainted, hideous". Given lack of regard for these figures, it is reasonable to assume that a part of his desire for subtlety was to set himself apart from more "commercial" authors who wrote of same-sex sexuality. Gide wished to establish himself first and foremost as an artist. Nonetheless, in addition to concerns for literary sophistication and artistry, Gide's writing reflects a political undertaking on his behalf. This undertaking is an attempt to enunciate, to categorize and to legitimate male same-sex sexuality. To use Pierre Bourdieu's term, it is an attempt at "worldmaking."

In *Qu'est-ce que la Literature* Sartre defends the theory of *literature engagé*. This idea of "engaged literature" is based on the imagining of an intimate relationship between the author and the reader. Writing, argues Sartre, is necessarily a dialogical, intersubjective process where the writer and the reader must recognize each other. This relationship necessitates a mutual respect. The author does not write for himself. He writes for a reader. Indeed, his writing is an appeal to a reader, for it is up to the reader to "lead into objective existence the revelation which

[the author] has undertaken by means of language."[10] The author does not simply write to write. He writes to be read. For this reason, the idea "art for art's sake" is offensive to Sartre. He criticizes bourgeois writers such as Proust for their obsession with perfectionist art and their obligation to their craft rather than to their audience. The author writes because he has something to say. He writes to affect change. Political neutrality is an impossibility. The prose-writer has a deliberately constructed agenda for "[i]f words are assembled into sentences, with a concern for clarity, a decision foreign to the intuition, to the language itself, must intervene, the decision of confiding to others the results obtained." (Sartre, 36)

According to Sartre literature is a form of action; a method by which to describe, to reveal and ultimately to change. It is a "secondary method of action which we may call action by disclosure," posits Sartre. (Sartre, 37) Particularly it seeks to change by revealing or naming. The very act of naming is a speech act. As Sartre explains:

> If you name the behavior of an individual, you reveal it to him; he sees himself. And since you are at the same time naming it to all others, he knows that he is *seen* at the moment he *sees* himself…Thus by speaking, I reveal the situation by my very intention of changing it; I reveal it to myself and to others *in order* to change it. I strike at its very heart, I transfix it, and I display it in full view; at present I dispose of it… (Sartre, 36)

In this sense all literature is performative. All literature is political. It is not simply an art, but a vehicle through which to act on the world.

[10] Jean-Paul Sartre, *"What is Literature?" And Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988)

Accepting Sartre's analysis of the place of literature as a medium for action and the role of the author as "a *speaker* [who] designates demonstrates, orders, refuses, interpolates, begs, insults, persuades [and] insinuates" enables us to question the intentions of the writer. (Sartre, 34) Sartre tells us that "one has the right to ask the prose-writer from the very start, 'what is your aim in writing?' 'What undertaking are you engaged in, and why does it require you to have recourse to writing?'" Furthermore, "[i]t is therefore permissible to ask him this second question: 'What aspect of the world do you want to disclose?' 'What change do you want to bring into the world by this disclosure?' 'Why have you spoken of this rather than that, and since you speak in order to bring about change-why do you want to change this rather than that?'" (Sartre, 37)

I now turn these questions onto Gide. Gide, like the prose-writer described by Sartre, undoubtedly "knows that words are action. He knows that to reveal is to change and that one can reveal only by planning to change." (Sartre, 37) What then is Gide attempting to reveal and consequently change? He is attempting to change the discourse surrounding male homosexuality that pre-existed him. The words *péderaste* and *péderastie* had been current in the French language since at least the 16th century. The words *homosexuel* and *homosexualité* entered the language in the early 1890s, and *uranisme* and *uraniste* followed a few years later. These words inhabited literary, scientific, medical and criminological discourses. They were used to describe the different kind of relations between men and were often considered interchangeable. Here heterosexuals attempt to name, to categorize and to capture in discourse sexual relations between men. For example, many "experts" used the term *péderaste* as an umbrella term to identify groups of people who may have perceived social distinctions among themselves. In *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1* Foucault devotes a great deal of attention to revealing how mechanisms of power function to categorize and specify sexuality—specifically homosexuality— in an attempt

to impose order and logic. He writes that "this new persecution of the peripheral sexualities entailed an *incorporation of perversions* and a new *specification of individuals*."[11] In the late 19th century sexuality begins to pervade and saturate medical discourse. Through medical examination, psychiatric evaluation and other forms of surveillance "peculiar" sexual behaviors such as homosexuality were medicalized and locked firmly into scientific discourse. Institutions encase homosexuality in the discourse of pathology, and the homosexual becomes a species to be studied. Foucault explains: "The machinery of power that focused on this whole alien strain did not aim to suppress it, but rather to give it an analytical, visible and permanent reality: it was implanted in bodies, slipped in beneath modes of conduct, made into a principle of classification and intelligibility, established as a *raison d'être* and a natural order of disorder." (Foucault, 44)

Gide is greatly disturbed by this lumping together and pathologization of what he sees as separate and distinct groups. He attempts to intervene, by redefining these terms and redrawing the distinctions between the groups that they name. This desire to name, to define and to *redefine* is clearly demonstrated in Gide's journals. In a passage from 1918 Gide writes the following:

> I call a pederast, the man who, as the word indicates, falls in love with young boys. I call a sodomite…the man whose desire is addressed to mature men.
>
> I call an invert the man who, in the comedy of love, assumes the role of a woman and desires to be possessed.
>
> These three types of homosexuals are not always clearly distinct; there are possible transferences from one to another; but most often the difference among them is such that they experience a profound disgust for one another, a disgust accompanied by a reprobation that in no way yields to that which you (heterosexuals) fiercely show toward all three.

---

[11] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1 An Introduction* (New York: Random House Inc. 1990) 42.

> The pederasts, of whom I am one (why cannot I say this quite simply , without your immediate claiming to see a brag in my confession?), are much rarer, and the sodomites much more numerous, than I first thought.
>
> ….As to the inverts, whom I hardly frequented at all, it has always seemed to me that they alone deserved the reproach of moral or intellectual deformation and were subject to some of the accusations that are commonly addressed to all homosexuals (Lucey, *Never Say I*, 39)

Here we see Gide attempting to subvert the discourse into which he came to being. He is also establishing a social hierarchy in which his group, the "noble" and morally correct pederasts, is distanced from the dishonorable inverts. Of course what is at stake here is not simply nomenclature. These identities and divisions are themselves unstable and up for negotiation.

In her essay *Critically Queer* Judith Butler elaborates on Foucault's claims that discourse is a form of power. She argues that "the power of discourse to produce that which it names is thus essentially linked with the question of performativity. The performative is thus one domain in which power *acts* as discourse."[12] Discourse precedes the subject; just as the discourse on homosexuality preceded Gide. Indeed it calls the subject into being. As Butler explains: "…the "I" only comes into being through being called, named, interpellated (to use the Althusserian term), and this discursive constitution takes place prior to the "I"." (Butler, 18) The discourse anticipates the subject; names it, codifies it and locks it into a scripted existence. There is no escaping this discursive power. There is no outside to which the subject can retreat. Butler explains: "there is no "I" who stands *behind* discourse and executes its volition or will *through* discourse." (Butler, 18) The subject can only exist as a part of the discourses made possible by institutional power. Thus, liberation is but a ruse of power.

[12] Judith Butler, "Critically Queer," *GLQ: Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies,* 1, 1993, 17-32.

However, where there is power there is always the possibility of subversion within it. To subvert the structure is to work from within to turn it onto itself. One cannot merely create new names or a new discourse, because discourse is something over which no one person has control. Butler reminds us that "the expectation of self-determination that self-naming arouses in us is paradoxically contested by the historicity of the name itself; by the history of the usages that one never controlled, but that constrain the very usage that emblematizes autonomy…" (Butler, 19) In fact, it is the preexistence of the discourse and of the name that allows one to be recognized as a subject. If I am to be recognized I must take up the "name that precedes and exceeds me but, without which I cannot speak." (Butler, 19) I must appropriate these terms, question their authority and redirect them. This is precisely what Gide attempts to do in his writing.

Gide is attempting to negotiate the terms by which these groups will be identified and represented. Surely, Proust, Wilde, Lorrain and others wrote of homosexual desire and same-sex sexuality in their texts. However, Gide believed that these authors "greatly contributed, I fear to our current confusion." At stake, for Gide, is whose version of the story will be told. He believed himself and his practices (pederasty) to be different from the *urnaiste* or the *invert*. Thus, he attempts to enunciate those differences. In his book *Language and symbolic power,* Bordieu tells us that this "labour of enunciation" is necessary to "externalize the inwardness, to name the unnamed and to give the beginnings of objectification to pre-verbal and pre-reflexive dispositions and ineffable and unobservable experiences." (Lucey, *Never Say I*, 41) Or to use Sartre's terms: "to speak is to act; anything which one names is already no longer quite the same..." (Sartre, 36) Thus, Gide's struggle to intervene in nomenclature and in discourse is one of self-representation and self-expression. Looking back on his efforts Gide writes, "I have tried so far as I could to make a distinction between pederasts in the Greek sense of the word and

inverts, but no one deigned to see anything in this but a rather groundless discrimination, and I had to give it up." (Lucey, *Never Say I*, 41)

Like his contemporaries and those who will follow, Gide experiments with ways to create and perpetuate a certain type of queer identity. He attempts to invent for himself, within language, a way to speak and write about and for a homosexual subject. While Gide's arrangement of the relationship between the self and its sexuality is interesting, it is certainly not the only figuration possible.

In the next chapter I will explore how another "out" gay author, James Baldwin, constructs the relationship between the first person self and its sexuality in his texts. Though both authors, speaking as homosexual men, chose to say "I" in their texts, there are many ways of saying "I." In fact, no two ways of saying "I" are the same. As Benveniste puts it: "the instances of the use of 'I' do not constitute a class of reference since there is no 'object' definable as I to which these instances can refer in identical fashion. Each has its own reference and corresponds each time to a unique being that is set up as such." (Benveniste, 218)

Chapter 2:
Détour and Distance: Baldwin's Exploration of Sexuality and Race

> The Sexual question and the racial question have always been entwined, you know. If Americans can mature on the level of racism, then they have to mature on the level of sexuality. – James Baldwin[13]

In 1956 James Baldwin perplexed critics and readers, by publishing the novel *Giovanni's Room.* His earlier works *Go Tell It On The Mountain* and *Notes of a Native Son* offered his keen perspective and insight on the "race issue" in America. Later works such as *The Fire Next Time* not only cemented his role as a public intellectual and literary figure, but positioned him as the voice of Black America. In his essay *The Fire Last Time* Henry Louis Gates Jr. reflects on Baldwin's exalted position writing that "perhaps not since Booker T. Washington had one man been taken to embody the voice of 'the Negro.' By the early '60s his authority seemed nearly unchallengeable. What did the Negro want? Ask James Baldwin."[14] Given the space that Baldwin occupied, on the surface it does seem somewhat of a departure that he would author *Giovanni's Room*; a novel that was to become a central text in gay literature. After all, why would a black man (even a gay black man) — and not just any black man but the foremost black intellectual and racial spokesman—choose to write about white homosexual desire?

While the reception of the novel was "cautiously positive," many critics treated (and continue to treat) the text as a "curious little detour" in the Baldwinian cannon. [15] For instance,

---

[13] James Baldwin, in Richard Goldstein, "Go the Way Your Heart Beats: An Interview with James Baldwin,' *James Baldwin: The Legacy*, ed. Troupe, 178.
[14] Henry Louis Gates Jr "The Fire Last Time: What James Baldwin Can and Can't Teach America", *The New Republic*, 206, 22, pp 37-43.
[15] Marlon B. Ross "White Fantasies of Desire: Baldwin and the Racial Identities of Sexuality", *James Baldwin Now* (New York: New York University Press, 1999) 17.

Nathan A. Scott refers to *Giovanni's Room* as "a book that strikes us as a kind of deflection, a kind of detour." (Ross 19) Critics and scholars are correct to note that *Giovanni's Room* occupies a peculiar and unexpected spot in Baldwin's body of work. However, the novel is not a detour in the sense that it is a departure or deviation from Baldwin's bent. Rather it is a part of the bent itself. The novel functions as a *detour littéraire*; a calculated literary device that forces readers to traverse (in addition to the hilly landscape of race) the bumpy terrains of desire and sexuality, but ultimately leads us right back to the political aspirations and identity politics that characterize Baldwin.

Implicit in the idea of a detour is distance. The indirect path is always longer and curvier than the direct one. Thus, taking a detour means putting more distance between oneself and one's destination. Baldwin was an expert at this technique. Tracing same-sex desire through Baldwin's novels, it becomes clear that *Giovanni's Room* is a part of Baldwin's methodical and progressive engagement of race and homosexuality rather than a misplaced step by a "race writer." Baldwin starts his overt exploration of homosexuality in *Giovanni's Room* in which he places homosexuality in an all-white world. Then, in his 1968 novel *Another Country* he begins to interface black identity and homosexual desire by creating a black protagonist who engages in interracial same-sex relationships. In *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* Baldwin continues to narrow the distance between black identity and homosexuality by depicting same sex relations between two black men. Finally, in his last novel *Just Above My Head* Baldwin positions homosexual desire firmly within black identity. In contrast to Baldwin's earlier bisexual protagonists such as Rufus and Leo Proudhammer, in the *Just Above My Head* Arthur and Jimmy engage *exclusively* in same-sex relations. Not only are these black men the object of one another's sexual desire, but they are also the subject of one another's *love*. At this point

homosexuality becomes more than an engagement in sexual acts. It becomes an integral part of these black men's constitutions and by extension an integral part of black identity. Stepping back, the trajectory becomes clear. Over the course of 23 years, we see a continuous progression in Baldwin's fiction in which he moves from situating overt homosexual desire in an all-white context seemingly removed from any notion of blackness, to illustrating same-gender desire and love as a fundamental characteristic of blackness.

If, as I suggested above, detours are used to create distance; then one cannot help but ask why Baldwin would chose to construct a so much distance between the (black) self and homosexuality in his texts. Why not simply write openly and freely about same-sex desire among black men? Why not commit himself and his characters, from the very beginning, to an explicit form of outness? What did he hope to achieve by structuring his literary outness in such a protracted movement? Before I attempt to answer these questions I turn my attention to Judith Butler who reminds us of the complexity of coming out. She writes:

> …as much as outness is to be affirmed, these same notions must become subject of a critique of the exclusionary operations of power through their own production; for whom is outness a historically available and affordable option? Is there an unmarked class character to the demand for universal "outness"? Who is represented by which use of the term, and who is excluded? For whom does the term represent an impossible conflict between racial, ethnic or religious affiliation and sexual politics? (Butler, 19)

By problematizing the notion of outness Butler reveals its undemocratic nature. There is no universal form of outness that transcends race, class, gender and all other identity categories.

Instead, any form of outness is automatically shaped through the interaction between sexuality the other identity categories that one might navigate. Moreover, outness comes with a cost, and that cost is not the same for everyone. For example, while being out for Gide certainly carried risks it never meant hazarding his literary authority or his legitimacy as a white Frenchman. Even as a homosexual, Gide's position and privilege as a white man was never up for debate. In contrast, for Baldwin coming out of the literary closet meant potentially losing his authority as the "Negro voice." It also meant jeopardizing his credibility as a Black man altogether.

From the beginning, credibility and authority were of chief concern for Baldwin and his publishers. It is said that the homosexual theme had initially frightened Baldwin. (Ross, 19) This fear was likely due to Baldwin's own struggle to reconcile his (homo) sexuality and to his concerns that, even after having reconciled his own identity, America would not be willing to embrace him as both a black man deeply invested in racial politics and as a homosexual man engaging questions of same-sex desire. His fear was very much warranted.

In his essay 1985 "Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood"[16] Baldwin offers his reflections on his own sexuality and the sexual conventions of America leading up to his departure. He begins the essay with an acute critique of America's sexual culture. It is a culture of rigidity, labels, and unattainable ideals of masculinity. In this "particular and peculiar time and place," says Baldwin, there exists a rabid attempt to capture, domesticate, civilize and order sexuality into a rigid and limited framework based on gender ideals. The discursive construction of sexuality, according to Foucault is an attempt to establish a "natural order of disorder." (Foucault, 44) This thirst for order manifests in a system of dichotomies and discourses that

[16] James Baldwin, "Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood", *Collected Essays* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1998) 814.

shape how one experiences and expresses pleasure and sexuality. These binary oppositions, which establish certain groups and identities as good, normal and ideal while relegating others to the status of perversion, are a desperate attempt to enforce order and stability on identities which are complex and often fluid.

Baldwin also understood that certain individuals were not *allowed* to take up certain identities. This meant that for a black man, homosexuality was not seen as a viable option. Homosexuality was a *white* thing and thus no *real* black man would ever claim it. In the essay he describes the homophobia he experienced growing up in a black community. As a child he was called "sissy" and "faggot." He recalls: "boys and men chased me, saying I was a danger to their sisters. I was thrown out of cafeterias and rooming houses because I was bad for the neighborhood." (Baldwin, *Collected Essays,* 819) This sense of rejection also pervaded his immediate home. During this time he remembers that he "was getting on very badly at home and delayed going home after work as long as possible" preferring instead to wander the streets. (Baldwin, *Collected Essays,* 819) This was in no small part due to his extremely pious mother and preacher father, both of whom wanted young Baldwin to continue his ministry as a young preacher. Yet, despite the trauma that he experienced at home he admits: "I might never have been able to reconcile myself without [my family]."[17] (Baldwin, *Collected Essays,* 826) Baldwin's ambivalence towards his family is often shared by many members of black communities who are made to believe that they must choose between being black and being gay. Such a choice, though absurd, reveals the perceived rigidity of identity categories.

Having to reconcile his life as a child evangelist and a homosexual at an early age helped him to see beyond the normative labels and confines of race, religion, gender and sexuality. "For

[17] By home I mean both the house and familial network in which he grew as well as black community.

what this really means is that all of the American categories of male and female, straight or not, black or white, were shattered, thank heaven, very early in my life," reveals Baldwin. (Baldwin, *Collected Essays,* 819) However, he very quickly realized that "[his] existence was the punch line of a dirty joke." (Baldwin, *Collected Essays,* 819) The dirty joke was that though he had the insight to envision a space for himself that existed in-between and across identity categories; those around him were intent on imprisoning him firmly within these categories. Like Gide, Baldwin finds himself caught in a flurry of terms that preexist him and over which he has no control (black, gay, queer, nigger, faggot, sissy etc). However, unlike Gide, Baldwin has to reconcile identities that society configures as incongruent. In America he did not have at his disposal a structure or language in which to navigate or negotiate his own identity. He also did not have the Greco-Roman tradition as a reference as did Gide. Given these conditions, Baldwin's detour can be seen as an attempt to navigate what Rudolph Byrd calls "the ideological traps"[18] which have been set for him.

When Baldwin was finally ready to publish *Giovanni's Room* he had difficulty finding publishers willing to support his endeavor. They warned him that writing about such a taboo topic would alienate his audience and end his career. Fern Marja Eckman captured Baldwin's lamentations:

> "They said I would— I was a *Negro* writer and I would reach a very special audience," Baldwin says now. "And I would be *dead* if I alienated that audience. That, in effect, nobody would accept that book—coming from *me*" His eyes smolder. "My agent told me to burn it." (Ross, 15)

[18] Rudolph Byrd, "The Tradition of John", *Trap: African American Men on Gender and Sexuality"* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001) 8.

At the heart of this paternalistic concern is the question of authority. Who has the authority to engage in discourse about homosexuality? The answer for Baldwin's publishers is clear; not a black man. Baldwin's forte, the arena in which he established his legitimacy, was race. White America had a vested interest in containing him in this arena because he served as a translator to interpret the needs of what they assumed to be a monolithic black community. Blacks were also invested in confining him to this position because they felt that the community needed a representative to articulate their plight. That homosexuality could be an integral part of black identity was not entertained. The possibility that Baldwin could effectively engage questions of race and sexuality seemed unfathomable.

Ultimately, both Baldwin's and his publisher's fears came into fruition. Eventually, some of his black readership, especially black nationalists, began to question his legitimacy as a black man and his authority as a representative of black community. The backlash that Baldwin received from some members of black community is most poignantly illustrated in a homophobic attack mounted by Eldridge Cleaver in his book *Soul On Ice*. In the text Cleaver compares homo-sexuality to "baby rape" and accuses Baldwin of being a part of "a despicable underground guerrilla war, waged on paper, against black masculinity." (Gates, 38) He goes on to write:

> Many Negro homosexuals acquiescing in this racial death-wish, are outraged and frustrated because in their sickness they are unable to have a baby by a white man. The cross they have to bear is that, already bending over and touching their toes for the white man, the fruit of their miscegenation is not the little half-white

> offspring of their dreams but an increase in the unwinding of their nerves—
> though they redouble their efforts and intake of the white man's sperm (Ross, 17)

In this homophobic rant Cleaver equates Baldwin's homosexuality with a fantastic desire to attain and reproduce whiteness. According Cleaver's (il)logic, same-sex desire in black men means submitting to the white man and allowing oneself to be inseminated by his ideology, norms and culture. According to Cleaver, miscegenation, be it in the context of hetero or homo relations, is a "sickness" because it does not reproduce blackness. The resulting offspring is a mixed-race child. Even in the case of homosexuals where copulation does not lead to "little half-white offspring," miscegenation poses a dangerous threat. In Cleaver's imagination the black man is automatically positioned as the receptive partner. Though sodomy may be taboo the true sin here, the target of Cleaver's condemnation, is *cultural penetration*. The perceived danger of miscegenation is that it allows black identity to be penetrated, inseminated, corrupted and diluted by white sperm. For Cleaver, and those who thought like him, this was an unforgiveable affront to black masculinity and ultimately amounted to "racial suicide." That one could be a gay man and firmly rooted in one's black identity seems impossible. Since Cleaver is so invested in maintaining sharp demarcations between identities, his virulent homophobia is an extension of this investment. Foucault argues that "homosexuality… was transformed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul." (Foucault, 43) Cleaver's attack on homosexuality is not simply a condemnation of anal sex between men, but rather a denunciation of androgyny which is a blurring of gender. The obvious question here is

why Cleaver, and black nationalists who thought like him, were so invested in the separation of identities.[19]

In his book *Traps: African American Men on Gender and Sexuality* Rudolph Byrd contextualizes the impact of Cleaver's comments. He notes that "Cleaver's vicious attacks of Baldwin's sexuality marked a dramatic shift in the Black freedom struggle in that they legitimized homophobia in black public discourse…" (Byrd, 16) Furthermore, as Henry Louis Gates Jr. explains, black nationalists needed to equate homosexuality with white identity because it provided them with a weapon by which to attack white norms. He describes this phenomenon as a "newly sexualized black nationalism that could stigmatize homosexuality as a capitulation to alien white norms, and in that way accredit homophobia as a progressive political act." (Gates, 40) Therefore, for those who sought to fashion a black identity apart from and in opposition to white identity it was imperative to maintain the distinctions and boundaries between the categories. For many, identity categories were rigid and impermeable. Given that variance was impossible, one ultimately had to choose.

In addition to the aforementioned social conditions that offer explanations for Baldwin's *détour*, his maneuver also harbors political aspirations. Unlike Gide, Baldwin was uninterested in proving the naturalness of homosexuality or the nobility of the homosexual subject. Baldwin believed that it is not possible to use nature to gauge human behavior since humans spend so much energy developing and enforcing structures and norms in an attempt to *not* be natural. Additionally, he realized that heterosexuals could never accept homosexuality as natural because

[19] It is important to point out that not all black nationalist followed Cleaver's train of thought. Huey Newton, Supreme Commander of the Black Panther Party, offers a progressive critique of Cleaver's attacks on newton in his 1970 essay "A letter from Huey to the Revolutionary Brothers and Sisters about the Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation Movements" (A copy of this essay can be found on page 26 of *Traps*)

their own identity necessitated that it not be so. He addresses this issue in *The Male Prison* in which he says:

> …as to whether or not homosexuality is natural seems to me completely pointless – pointless because I really do not see what difference the answer makes. It seems clear, in any case, at least in the world we know, that no matter what encyclopedias of physiological and scientific knowledge are brought to bear the answer never can be Yes. And one of the reasons for this is that it would rob the normal – who are simply the many – of their very necessary sense of security and order… (Baldwin, *The Male Prison*, 232)

The question of naturalness is irrelevant because there is nothing "natural" in the way in which identities are constructed despite what we are led to believe. Unlike Gide who focuses on nature, Baldwin emphasizes the role of culture in shaping our understanding of identity. Identity categories are structured by cultural discourses which shape the way we create meaning. These structures are usually constructed as binary oppositions in which one category is set off against the other. One identity in the pair (white, heterosexual, male, masculine) occupies a dominant position and the other identity (black, homosexual, woman, feminine) is defined as lacking the characteristics of the dominant term.

Baldwin's goal was not to restructure, rename and redefine sexual identity categories; rather he was invested in scrambling these categories and exposing the vagaries of identity. His identity politics are eloquently summed up in the following quote:

> We are all androgynous, not only because we are all born of a woman impregnated by the seed of a man but because each of us, helplessly and forever,

> contains the other -- male in female, female in male, white in black and black in white. We are a part of each other. (Baldwin, *Collected Essays*, 828)

Baldwin clearly recognizes the cultural construction of these identities. He endeavors to show America that "the sexual question and racial question have always been entwined…" (Ross, 27) What Baldwin articulates here is that various socially and culturally constructed categories interact on multiple levels. He realizes that the same mechanisms that enable racial oppression also perpetuate homophobia. Moreover, he realizes that we are constituted of multiple identities that cannot be separated or sectioned off from one another. Baldwin's true legacy then is that he "…demonstrated in words, deeds and texts that homosexuality is not incompatible with Black self-assertion in politics or any other arena." (Byrd, 17) In short, Baldwin began to author a black gay identity that was unbroken and whole. He articulates a black homosexual subject and in doing so becomes a progenitor of authors like Joseph Beam and Essex Hemphill who push the assertion of a black gay identity even further. The way in which accomplishes this is by systematically and progressively closing the distance between black identity and homosexuality in his texts.

Chapter 3
Searching for Home and Making Room

> When I speak of home, I mean not only the familial constellation from which I grew, but the entire Black community: the Black press, the Black church, Black academicians, the Black literati, and the Black left. Where is my reflection? I am most often rendered invisible, perceived as a threat to the family, or am tolerated if I am silent or inconspicuous. I cannot go home as who I am and that hurts me deeply. –Joseph Beam[20]

The above words were written by Joseph Beam, black gay activist and author, in his powerful essay "Brother to Brother: Words from the Heart." This essay was a part of a larger undertaking of Beam's; a collection of black gay male writings entitled *In the Life: A Black Gay Anthology* published in 1986. The book, which featured the works of 29 openly black gay men, was the first of its kind. It marked the beginning of an articulation of a collective black gay identity. *In The Life* brought together brilliant voices from disciplines as various as academia, the arts, activism, entertainment and politics to contemplate black gay man as an identity and as a subject. It allowed a new generation of openly gay black writers to place footholds on cultural and political landscapes across the country. This collection made possible a number of others such as *Brother to Brother*[21], *Ceremonies, Tongues Untied*[22], and *Freedom in this Village.* At the center of the anthology is the assertion of the existence of black gay *community* and *culture*. In other words, *In The Life* and its progeny not only affirmed the existence of a black gay male

[20] Joseph Beam "Brother to Brother Words from the Heart", *In The Life* (New York: Redbone Press, 2008)
[21] This project started by Beam, but due to his untimely death in 1988 from AIDS-related complications in 1988, was completed by his dear friend and contemporary, poet and activist Essex Hemphill.
[22] Though not a written text, *Tongues Untied* is visual collection that includes many recitations of writings from earlier anthologies.

subject, but they positioned that subject in a fraternal network bonded by history, trauma, sex, love, desire and marginalization. In his poem also titled "In the Life," Esssex Hemphill writes:

> I learned
> there is no tender mercy
> for men of color,
> for sons who love men
> like me
> ……………………….
> I chose this tribe
> of warriors and outlaws
> ………………………..
> If one of these thick-lipped
> wet black nights
> while I'm out walking,
> I find freedom in this village.
> If I can take it with my tribe
> I'll bring you here.
> And you will never notice
> the absence of rice
> and bridesmaids.[23]

Challenging the dominance of heterosexual cultural myths, Hemphill's "tribe" or "village" serves as an alternate space for those who have been excommunicated from their familial, social and national contexts.

The idea of home figures prominently in each of these texts—particularly those of Beam and Hemphill. They struggle to identity a safe productive space for gay men. They also grapple with the circumstances and consequences of leaving one's home either willingly or by force. Many of the texts in these collections also reflect on a triumphant return to home. For example, Beam insists that "We are coming home with our heads held up high." (Beam. *Freedom in this Village*, 466) Likewise, in the essay "Does Your Mama Know About Me?" published in *Ceremonies,* Hemphill asks "Does she *really* know what I am?...I hope so because I *am* coming

[23] Essex Hemphill, "In the Life" *Freedom in This Village* (New York: Carroll &Graf, 2008) iii.

home." Indeed this idea of leaving, seeking and returning home is a central trope in gay literature. The prominent figuration of home in gay men's literature is an extension of the critical role that home plays in the lives of gay men. As James Baldwin himself notes, "one writes of one thing only—one's own experience. Everything depends on how relentlessly one forces from this experience the last drop, sweet or bitter, it can possibly give."(Baldwin, *Collected Essays*, 8) For those of us who's lives, love and desire seem to affront the rules of heteronormativity and normative masculinity, the home is often a place of trauma and violence. Under such conditions the creation of an alternate home space becomes critical. Literature provides such a space.

In this chapter I will explore the ways in which Baldwin configures the home and its relation to sexual identity in his canonical text *Giovanni's Room*. Though the concept of home has been much explored in gay literature, Baldwin posits this trope with unique and complex movements. Firstly, just as the title indicates, room, space and place are important concepts related to identity and sexuality in the novel. The protagonist's relationships to physical dwellings, geography and territory reveal important details about the relationship between the self and its sexuality. Secondly, Baldwin performs an abstraction on the notion of the home. Instead of keeping it chained to physical space he expands the home beyond place and past geographical boundaries. In *Giovanni's Room* the body itself becomes a home—though often an inhospitable one. In the novel, home takes on an ethereal nature and becomes what the protagonist calls "an irrevocable condition." Lastly, Baldwin assigns an ambiguous nature to home. In *Giovanni's Room* home represents both the reason for an epic flight and the object of a tireless quest. In this way, Baldwin creates a home that occupies a double, seemingly contradictory, space as both the locus of rejection and judgment and the key to redemption and reconciliation.

In 1956 Baldwin published *Giovanni's Room* which was one of the earliest American novels that overtly explored the complexities of homosexual desire. Since its publishing it has become a literary artifact of gay culture and gay and lesbian studies. Scholar Jerome de Romanet calls *Giovanni's Room* "the first novel in American literature to deal successfully with the issue of homosexuality."(Romanet, 3) The novel, which Baldwin wrote while himself an expatriate in Paris, orbits around David a white American in Paris in the twentieth century. The novel traces David's tumultuous relationship with his sexuality and his journey for refuge and acceptance. At the center of the novel is David's flight from his home and his search for a new home.

When the reader meets David, on what he calls "…the most terrible morning of my life." (3) His fiancé Hella has left him to return to America and his lover, an Italian bartender named Giovanni, is on his way to the guillotine. As David stands alone in the great house he stares at his reflection in the window and recalls "…the many lies [he's] told, lived and believed," (6) throughout his epic struggle with his sexuality. He also recounts the events that brought him to this sobering moment. David calls to mind "the days before anything awful irrevocable had happened to [him]." (5) In David's mind this awful and irrevocable thing is the discovery of his homosexual desire. However, the true tragedy of the novel is not the desire itself, but David's inability to stop running long enough to reconcile his sexuality. Though there are rare moments of calm and stillness, David's nomadic life is characterized by a perpetual fear of being trapped by his desire and being seen as an outsider by society. These fears propel him to constant movement.

David is an American expat in Paris for whom expatriation is a sort of self-imposed exile. The word expatriate comes from expatrier in French which means to banish. Therefore, David has not simply left his home country, but in a sense he has banished himself. This is a subtle yet

important distinction. To leave implies the possibility of return at will. However, to be banished implies that a return is impossible. This distinction is particularly critical in the novel because it means that for David, a return home is not as simple as boarding an airplane, as I will later illustrate. He has fled his family, friends and country in hopes of finding refuge from their gaze and judgment. It is important to emphasize that David does not go to Paris in order to, as the cliché goes, "find himself." In fact, his motivation is quite the opposite. He went to Paris because he hoped to leave a part of himself in America—namely his sexual ambivalence. For a moment, expatriation does allow David some relief from the mores and sexual categories that haunt him in America. Paris has its own rules and norms regulating sex and sexuality. However, as an American living in Paris David is not bound by these norms in the same way. Kathleen Drowne writes: "Of course, David is a foreigner, a cultural outsider but in spite of his status as an interloper he feels safer in France than he does in America, where the pain of his past and the expectations of his future (and his father) await him." (Drowne, 76) For David, living outside the social norms at home in America means being seen as a deviant or a freak. However, being a cultural outsider in Paris enables him to fly under the radar and to move more freely through identity categories. However, he soon finds out that "Paris is no cure for sexual ambivalence." (Drowne, 80) This feeling of freedom and safety is undermined because David brings with him to Paris the very same fear and judgment that promoted him to leave America.

In an uncharacteristic display of self-awareness, after years of self-delusion, David admits that:

> There is something fantastic in the spectacle I now present to myself of having run so far, so hard, across the ocean even, only to find myself brought up short

> once more before the bulldog in my own backyard—the yard, in the meantime, having grown smaller and the bulldog bigger. (6)

David's need to escape his fatherland is so dire that he is willing to run across the ocean—an impossible and presumably exhausting feat. This "bulldog" of which David speaks is a loaded image. The bulldog in many ways symbolizes the ideal masculinity. It is strong, virile, alert, confident, assertive and industrious. It's a constant reminder to David of what he is expected to be. One can imagine this bulldog— an *American* bulldog no doubt—sitting there staring in judgment of David and shaming him. It's also quite fitting that the American bulldog was bred to be a fierce guard dog. David's bulldog stands watch, guarding and enforcing the mores and norms that label, codify and categorize his sexuality. However, this bulldog does not simply sit and stare, but, like most dogs, he barks.

Throughout the novel David is preoccupied with the judgment of others. For David this judgment is most manifest through verbal condemnation or "dirty words." During an argument with Giovanni he reveals this paranoia by saying: "people have very dirty words for—for this situation." (81) The fact that David can't even name his actions with Giovanni betrays his angst. Giovanni responds to David's anxiety by telling him that "If dirty words frighten you, I really do not know how you have managed to live so long. People are of full of dirty words. The only time they do not use them…is when they are describing something dirty." (81) Giovanni knows that it is not so much the words themselves that are dirty. When uttered differently or by someone else these same words may take on several different meanings. This is not to suggest that David's fear is baseless. Indeed, when intended to do violence words become weapons. However, David's obsession with words and rumor is more reflective of his inward condition than of his environment. Nowhere in the novel does anyone actually use dirty words to insult or condemn

David. The words are dirty because *he* believes that his desires are dirty. The bulldog in David's head barks these condemnations loudly and aggressively. For David, this canine is certainly not man's best friend.

Until this moment of reflection David had spent much of his life running and seeking a place and identity that is secure and comfortable; however, as he stares out the large window in the South of France, he finds himself finally still. In an interesting twist, David's movement to distance himself from home has undermined any possibility of finding sanctuary elsewhere. The problem, the bulldog, has actually gotten bigger and takes up more space. David is able to run across oceans, but he is unable to leave his back yard. Baldwin gives an explanation to this conundrum in his 1952 essay "Many Thousands Gone". He says: "We cannot escape our origins, however hard we try, those origins which contain the key—could we but find it—to all that we later become."[24] We cannot escape who we are or where we have come from. We must not turn our backs to the past, but instead we must face it, dig into it, and find the proverbial key that will allow us to make peace with it. This is the only way to truly move forward. Unfortunately, Baldwin did not endow his protagonist with his wisdom. Though having run as fast and as hard as he could, David finds himself right back in his own back yard and his own home (where there is a backyard there is almost invariably a house). However, now the yard has grown smaller and there is less space to run. The backyard is a representation of David's psychological landscape. Early on in his life David "had decided to allow no room in the universe for something that shamed and frightened [him]." (9) He was determined to force any troublesome desires out. However, his plan has backfired. His universe has shrunk, but these desires have not been forced out. They are still present within him and they occupy more space than ever.

---

[24] James Baldwin, "Many Thousands Gone", *Collected Essays* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc, 1998) 21.

The entire city of Paris seems to mirror David's tortured mental state. Paris is supposed to serve as an alternate home for David. Author Melvin Dixon was especially perceptive to the importance of alternate spaces in Baldwin's works. In *Ride Out the Wilderness,* he wrote:

> Baldwin's male protagonists are usually bisexual or homosexual. And as such they are forever outside the realm of redemption offered by the church or by society at large. They must come to different terms as best they can with the spatial and spiritual dimensions sanctioned by church and society…Within this perspective, the need for alternate space, refuge or shelter looms paramount." (Drowne, 76)

Paris is supposed to provide David with the protection, comfort and acceptance that his father's house lacks. However, far from the romance and beauty that one usually associates with La Ville-Lumière, David's Paris is dirty, grimy, dark and sordid. Though David claims that "*no* city is more beautiful than Paris," (32) the descriptions that he provides of the places he frequents exhibit very little of this beauty. For example, the description of Les Halles reeks of dirt and decay. He says: "the pavements were slick with leavings…and the walls and corners were combed with *pissoirs*, dull, burning, make-shift braziers, cafes, restaurants and smoky yellow bistros." (48) His description of Guillaume's bar is just as uncomfortable. He describes it as a "noisy, crowded, ill-lit sort of tunnel." (38) In fact, most of the places that David inhabits in Paris are small, cramped and characterized by feeling of claustrophobia and the constant threat of suffocation. Even its wide boulevards become "choked" and "impassable." (47) If our protagonist offers a distorted image of Paris, it is a reflection of his own distorted mental state. David notices the filth and dirt of the places he inhabits because he himself feels dirty and ashamed of his own desires. Likewise, his descriptions of tiny, airless closed-in spaces reflect his

own perpetual fear of being trapped. Thus, Paris cannot serve as an alternate home place for David because he experiences it through a confused and disordered perspective.

No physical place of the novel is more endowed with notions of home than Giovanni's room. When asked where he lives Giovanni tells David that his room is "out. Far out…almost not in Paris." (46) Situated on the outskirts of the city "in the back, on the ground floor of the last building on this street," (63) the room is removed from the commotion of the "hostile city." (63) Tucked away from the outside world, the room with its hidden location offers a sense of security and intimacy. Here David and Giovanni can explore their desires without the threat of being seen. Being seen is a concern at the forefront of both David and Giovanni's minds. So much so that "…to ensure privacy [Giovanni] obscured the window panes with a heavy, white cleaning polish." (85) The goal is to allow no possibility of being seen by someone who occupies the position of spectator. In "Ways of Seeing" John Berger explains that "…shame is not so much in relation to one another as to the spectator."[25] Thus the spectator introduces the element of judgment and shame, of being scrutinized, found lacking and objectified by the look of the other. This certainly holds true for David and Giovanni which is why they work so diligently to prevent the outside from encroaching into the room. For a moment this tactic works, since as David recalls "in the beginning, our life together held a joy and amazement which was newborn every day." (75) At one point in the novel David even refers to the room as he and Giovanni's "home" (78)

However, the room soon takes on the qualities of its inhabitants' psychological struggle. It begins to mirror the chaos and filth of David's inner condition. As Drowne notes, the room "becomes the dumping ground for dirt both literal and metaphoric." (Drowne, 79) When David

[25] John Berger *Ways of Seeing* (New York: Penguin, 1990) 49.

first encounters the room he "only made out the outlines of clutter and disorder" (64) but as he spends time in the room he notices the extent of the mess. The room is littered with a "fantastic accumulation of trash" (88) including tools, paint brushes, empty bottles, innumerable boxes, yellowing newspapers, spilled wine and other remnants of "Giovanni's regurgitated life." (87) However, Giovanni cannot claim sole ownership over all the the confusion in the room. David tells us that, "on the floor lay our dirty laundry…our suitcases teetered on top of something, so that we dreaded ever having to open them and sometimes went without some minor necessity, such as clean socks, for days." (86) Thus, David adds his confusion and baggage—both literal and metaphorical—to the room. The physical disorder of the room increases as the characters' inner conditions become more confused.

The disarray of the room is but a physical manifestation of David and Giovanni's *paysage intérieur*. It suggests the ambivalence that characterizes both men. David admits to being "in a terrible confusion." (88) He desperately wants to flee from this room and from Giovanni. He says: "I thought, if I do not open the door at once and get out of here, I am lost." (87) However, he is in love with Giovanni. He alternates between happiness and anxiety. The room becomes the site of both safety and "mortal and unavoidable danger." (87) The room is dangerous to David because it threatens his own sense of identity. While in that room he has no choice but to confront his sexuality. While inside, there is nowhere to run for the room is much too small. David once again begins to feel trapped. He reveals that both he and Giovanni were "furious with the unstated desire to escape the room." (83) Like the other spaces that David inhabits, the room becomes "claustrophobic." (71) Instead of reconciling this sexual ambivalence David once again runs and ultimately abandons Giovanni to the guillotine.

Though physical space and place are, as I have demonstrated, important aspects of home, they are not the only aspects. In *Giovanni's Room* one of the most interesting sites of conflict and disconnection is the body. A large part of David's struggle is that he is neither at home in his own body nor with the desires which dwell within it. Kathleen Drowne offers a particularly keen reading of the role of the male body in *Giovanni's Room*. In her essay "An Irrevocable Condition." She writes: "The male body, of course, also functions as an important place in Giovanni's Room. For it is both the idea of the body as location of heterosexual masculinity and his own actual body which defies heterosexual norms that form the core of David's anxieties about his sexuality."(Drowne, 85) David is well aware of the gap that exists between his own body and this idealized body—or what Norman Bryson calls "the higher imago of the body which constitutes the masculine ideal."[26] According to Bryson, this imago is something to which the male subject aspires but cannot attain. At one point, David gazes in the mirror and stares at his own "troubling sex" which he perceives to be both the locus of his masculinity and the source of his troubles. It is this troubling sex that betrays David's will to exist within the defined boundaries of heterosexuality. Because David experiences such anxiety around his body, it cannot serve as a comfortable and safe abode.

A vivid example of this struggle can be found in David's recollection of his suppressed memory of his first homosexual encounter with his boyhood friend Joey. The text reads:

> […] this time when I touched him something happened in him and in me which made this touch different from any touch either of us had ever known […] And I realized that my heart was beating in an awful way and that Joey was trembling

[26] Norman Bryson "Gericault and Masculinity" *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994) 234.

> against me and the light in the room was very bright and hot…we kissed, as it were, by accident. Then, for the first time in my life, I was really aware of another person's body, of another person's smell. We had our arms around each other. It was like holding in my hand some, rare, exhausted, nearly doomed which I had miraculously happened to find. I was very frightened; I am sure he was frightened too, and we shut our eyes. (8)

Here David is present not only in his own body, but in Joey's as well. He explains in beautifully poetic detail the rhythms, beats, trembles, smell and feel of their bodies during their encounter. David will not experience this level of intimacy again for many years until he meets Giovanni who, for a moment at least, halts David's flight and bridges this disjuncture. Author Lorena Russell is correct when pointing out in her essay in the collection *Human Sexuality* that "fear is never far from intimacy in *Giovanni's Room*." However, though fear is ever present, the fear described above is the natural fear that accompanies excitement when exploring the unknown. It is not a fear that paralyzes, rather it is one that, coupled with nervousness and anticipation, propels one forward. But, David is soon struck by a different type of fear.

When David awakes the next morning he notices Joey's naked body entangled in bed sheets and folded around his own. He wants to touch Joey but, "something in [him] stopped [him]", and "[he] was suddenly afraid." (10) Something has changed. Joey's body, which a few moments earlier David had described as "the most beautiful creation I had ever seen until then," is transformed into "the black opening of a cavern in which I would be tortured until madness came in which I would lose my manhood." (9) Far from the imago, he perceives his own body as "gross and crushing," and he experiences "…the desire which was rising in [him] [as]

monstrous". (9) This is an obvious and extreme shift. Here society—the regard of others—affects how he see's himself.

Though his family and friends are thousands of miles away and cannot see him, David see's himself. He occupies the double role as both the surveyor and the surveyed discussed by Berger. At the moment in which he see's himself he remembers that there is the possibility of being seen. He begins to see himself from the perspective of the other. He sees himself as his father or as society as a whole might see him. During the "act of love" categories of gender, sexuality and identity were kept at bay. However, as David suddenly recalls that "Joey is a boy," he is inundated with the norms of the sexual culture in which he exists. (9) He becomes intensely aware that his desires and actions lay outside of the realm of what's considered normal. Immediately he feels the weight of judgment. "I wondered what Joey's mother would say," recounts David. "Then I thought of my father," he adds. The intimacy and tenderness between David and Joey suddenly becomes dirty and shameful as thoughts of "rumor," "suggestion," and "dirty words" inundate David's head. (9) It is here were David's exile and sense of homelessness begins. In an attempt to reconcile his homoerotic desire with societal norms David decides to run. He treats Joey cruelly and attempts to bury the experience in the catacombs of his memory. He structures the rest of his life and decisions in an attempt to evade his homosexual desires. He says, "I began, perhaps, to be lonely that summer and began, that summer, the flight which has brought me to this darkening window." (10)

It should be noted that one of the first figures that enters into David's consciousness during encounter with Joey is his father ("Then I thought of my father"). David's father embodies the masculine ideal that David both desires for himself and loathes because it is unattainable. During David's childhood his father drinks heavily and frequents many women.

When Ellen, David's aunt, tells him that he is setting a bad example for David he replies: "All I want for David is that he grow up to be a man. And when I say man, Ellen, I don't mean a Sunday school teacher." (15) David spends the rest of his life trying to attain the manhood that his father wishes for him. He mistakenly believes that if he could somehow attain this ideal that he can cleanse himself of his homosexual desires. However, what David does not realize is that, by its very nature, this ideal is unattainable and inaccessible.

In her book *XY: On Masculine Identity* Elisabeth Badinter describes the process and the costs of attaining this *illlusio*[27] of manhood.[28] She posits that "being a man implies a labor, an effort that does not seem to be demanded of women." (2) Additionally, men are constantly required to show proof of this masculinity. She says: "the man himself and those who surround him are so unsure of his sexual identity that proofs of his manliness are required." (2) David attempts to prove his manliness by imitating the person who most embodies masculinity— his father. Like his father he drinks heavily and sleeps with many women. That one has to continually prove his manhood by force of effort suggests the ever-present possibility or fear of failing at the performance of manhood. This is a perpetual fear of David's. Because he is afraid of losing his manhood he tries to cling as closely to it as possible. His acquaintance Jacques notices this and teases him: "I am not suggesting that you jeopardize, even for a moment that immaculate manhood which is your pride and joy." (28)

However, Butler[29] argues that one can never fully succeed in the construction of one's gender. She emphasizes that gender is a performative in that it requires the compulsory repetition

---

[27] This is a term that Badinter borrows from Bourdieu.
[28] Elisabeth Badinter, *XY: On Masculine Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press 1995) 2.
[29] While Butler's theories are in many ways indebted to Foucault, my own reading relies on Butler's interpretation which builds on Foucault but emphasizes the performative construction of gender and the troubling or scrambling of gender categories.

of norms that preexist the subject. She says: “The practicing by which gender occurs, the embodying of norms, is a compulsory practice, a forcible production, but not for that reason fully determining. To the extent that gender is an assignment, it is an assignment which is never quite carried out according to expectation, whose addressee never quite inhabits the ideal s/he is compelled to approximate.” (Butler, 22) If masculinity is David’s “pride and joy,” it is because he knows that if he does not perform his gender well he will be punished. However, what he does not understand is that he will never be able to completely embody the ideal. This is the dual role that masculinity occupies. On the one hand this idealized masculinity becomes a coveted object of David’s desire. On the other, because it is so unattainable, it becomes the bane of David’s existence.

In Latin the word *patria*, the root of expatriate and its derivatives, means “one’s native country.” However, patria comes from the word *pater* or “father.” Therefore, to expatriate not only means to leave one’s home country, but it also means to leave one’s father. This is certainly the case with our protagonist. Ultimately, David flees his father’s house and his father altogether. He admits: “I was in full flight from him, I did not *want* him to know me.” (16) In addition to being a representation of this onerous inheritance of manhood, his father is also the arbiter of its expression. In other words, in David’s eyes, his father both embodies this masculine ideal and is the judge of his masculinity. However, the role that his father occupies is the prescribed role of the father in society. As the father, it is his duty to ensure that his son becomes a man. Baldwin tells us that “We all react to and, to whatever extent, become what the eye sees. This judgment begins in the eyes of one’s parents (the crucial, the definitive, the all-but-everlasting judgment)…” (Baldwin, *Collected Essays*, 817) This is certainly the case for David. Realizing this and not wanting his façade to be penetrated David is careful to maintain a safe distance

between himself and his father. He says: “I wanted the merciful distance of father and son, which would have permitted me to love him.” (17)

Just as masculinity figures promently in David’s psychodrama, so does femininity. Embedded within the construction of home itself are notions of femininity. The home, the domestic sphere, is traditionally seen as the province of the mother. It is, ideally, the center of nurturing, love, and development which are responsibilities culturally and historically assigned to the woman. In this way, motherless and homelessness are inextricably linked. Thus, it is understandable that the absence of a maternal figure contributes to David’s ambiguous relationship to any construction of home. David’s mother died when he was very young. Though he has no real memory of her, her absence is continually felt and is a prominent part of his childhood. In place of a mother, David has only second hand memories and an old painting. He recalls: “I remember when I was very young how in the big living room of the house in San Francisco my mother’s photograph which stood all by itself of the mantle seemed to rule the room.” (11) Perched high on the mantel David’s mother is immortalized. She will always remain young, beautiful, and perfect. Looking up at the great portrait of the beautiful young woman he remarks, “I felt I had no right to be the son of such a mother.” (13) This photo, along with his aunt Ellen’s stories remind David not only of the greatness of his mother, but also of the magnitude of his loss. As a child David’s father and Aunt Ellen fear that his grieving for his mother is having an unsettling effect on him. As an adult looking back, David acknowledges this possibility and adds, “…if that is so, then I am still grieving.” (21) Even as an adult David has not yet found a way to effectively cope with his mother’s death. His bereavement contributes greatly to his sense of homelessness and affects his sexuality in complex ways.

One of these effects is David's association of the female body with death, which can be seen in his gruesome account of maternal love and proximity of the feminine body in his childhood nightmares:

> "..she figured in my nightmares, blind with worms , her hair as dry as metal and brittle as a twig, straining to press me against her body, that body so putrescent, so sickening soft, that it opened, as I clawed and cried, into a breach so enormous as to swallow me alive"(11)

The association between the femininity and death is not itself a novel concept. Freud likened female sexuality to the "dark continent," a space that is murky, deep, beyond comprehension and therefore dangerous. In her essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" Helene Cixous writes: "Men say there are two unrepresentable things; death and the feminine sex. That's because they need femininity to be associated with death; it's the jitters that gives them a hard-on for themselves."[30] However, what is interesting in David's case is the role of distance in the construction of his relationship to femininity. When the mother is confined to the portrait at a safe distance on the mantel David is able to see her as an image beautiful and ethereal. However, in his nightmares the child's sense of distance and distinctness from the mother is threatened and swallowed up. Her proximity which would usually signify the closeness of maternal love engenders an irrational fear of being consumed. Whereas closeness with his father carries the possibility of being revealed as a failed man, intimacy with the feminine carries the threat of cannibalism.

[30] Helene Cixous "The Laugh of the Medusa" *Signs*, 1, 4, 1976, pp. 875-893

The descriptions of Ellen, David's aunt and childhood maternal figure, are also explicitly characterized by fear and death. David describes Ellen as overbearing and domineering. Of her he says:

> dressed as they say, to kill, with her mouth redder than any blood, dressed in something which was either the wrong color, or too tight, or too young the cocktail glass in her hand threatening, at any instant, to be reduced to shards, to splinters, and that voice going on and on like a razor blade on glass… she frightened me. (12)

This menacing description is more of a *femme fatale* than of a maternal figure. The reference to the too tight clothing and bright red mouth highlight her threatening sexuality. David experiences both visual discomfort from her appearance and verbal discomfort from her menacing voice. Both the mother's love and Ellen's sexuality carry promises of death.

David will carry this fear of intimacy into his adulthood. His sexual experiences, especially those with women, are marked by fear of getting too close. Though David has had many sexual encounters with women, they have been devoid of sentiment and empty of meaning. Concerning his fiancé Hella, David certainly enjoys being with her; however, she too cannot calm the quaking of his inner landscape. Of their relationship David says: "I thought she would be fun to have fun with. That was how it began, that was all it meant to me: I am not sure now, in spite of everything, that it ever really meant more than that to me." (4) Furthermore, David does not find security or connection within her body. He describes their nights in bed, not in the same poetic language that he uses to describe his "act of love" with Joey or Giovanni, but simply as

his “mechanical responsibility” which requires no intimacy. This sentiment characterizes all of his sexual encounters with women in the novel.

After receiving confirmation that Hella will be returning to Paris soon David heads to Montparnesse “to find a girl, any girl.” (95) He does not want to face the imminent danger of Hellas return so instead he roams the streets in search of a girl. In a café, he picks up Sue, returns to her dark apartment and has sex. The imagery of this passage is a stark contrast to the beautifully poetic language that was used to describe David’s lovemaking with Joey and Giovanni. He describes their sex as a “grisly act of love.” (100) While having sex with her, David’s mind wanders. Hey says: “I thought of many things lying coupled with Sue in that dark place… I wondered if her blue jeans had been thrown on top of the cigarettes she had been smoking, I wondered if anyone else had a key to her apartment, if we could be heard through the inadequate walls, how much, in a few, we would hate each other.” (100) This moment of intercourse— if it can even be described as such seeing as though David is mentally and emotionally absent— is anything but intimate. Though inside her, David tries to think of anything other than this fact. He treats Sue “as though she were a job of work…”(101) For David, this is arduous work that cannot end too soon. Ironically, though initially looking for shelter, he finds himself entangled in Sue’s thighs where he feels trapped and constricted. Trying to envision a way out, he thinks to himself: “The end is coming soon…Well, let her have it for Christ sake, get it over with.” (100) Neither refuge nor escape is to be found inside Sue. David enters her because he hopes that she will help him forget his own terror. He hopes that she will be able to draw the turmoil from deep inside him, drag it through his entrails, out through the shaft of his sex and into her own where she will carry it safely. However, Sue cannot carry David’s grief. She cannot make everything alright. Nor can Hella. Nor can any woman.

The idea of home occupies an ambiguous place for David. Though he ran so far so fast to get away from America he still laments that, “nothing here [in Paris] reminds me of home.”(91) Likewise, though he clearly wants to put as much distance between his family and himself as possible he misses them. A part of him longs for “those places, those people which I would always, helplessly, and in whatever bitterness of spirit, love above all else.”(91) It is as if he loves these places and people despite his own volition. Though he wants to detach himself as completely as possible from those things, places and people that remind him of his painful past and confused future, he cannot. Such is the nature of home. It is often a place of nurturing, fond memories and first-experiences as well as a place of pain and shame. For David, home signifies both the locus of judgment and trauma and the possibility of refuge and reckoning. Though he is able to put physical distance between himself and his geographical home, memories of home still follow him. Paradoxically, being close to home arouses a desire for distance, yet being far brings him closer.[31]

Throughout the novel David slowly begins to realize that home is not simply a place but a condition. During a disagreement Giovanni tells David, “*Chez toi* everything sounds extremely feverish and complicated.” (81) When Giovanni references David’s home (*chez toi*) he is not referring to David’s physical dwelling but his psychological state. In French *chez toi* means both a physical abode and the qualities and condition of a person. This double entendre perfectly illustrates the dual nature of the home. David’s sense of homelessness results not simply from the fact that he has left his friends and family in America, but from his inability to find an identity that is safe and secure. Throughout the novel he struggles to find a position for himself

[31] Interestingly, the same is true for Baldwin the historical figure who left America for Paris in 1948 at the age of 24, see his 1959 essay “The Discovery of What It Means to Be an American”, *Baldwin Collected Essays*. (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1998) 137.

other than what his father has opened up for him. In essence, his journey is all about finding room and space. It is about finding a space with enough breathing room to move about freely without the constant fear of being suffocated by an oppressive masculinity or being consumed by femininity. In this way David's struggle is like that of any other queer person. One of the difficulties of being queer is trying to move away from regimented binaries of masculinity and femininity in order to find other ways of being. David's task is not to escape discursive power (since, as Foucault argues, there is no escaping discourse), but to find a space within it that offers him room negotiate his identity. The key lies, as Baldwin suggests, in configuring and scrambling identity categories in a way in which allows much more room to move. At times David is able to create such a space for himself. When with Joey and Giovanni his sexuality alerts him to other possibilities of being. For example, during his love-making with Joey and Giovanni he is able to suspend gender categories. He completely forgets that "Joey is a boy." However, he is unable to sustain this state, and he ultimately finds himself trapped by the discursive power that structures these identity categories.

Through his expatriation Baldwin learned what his protagonist failed to understand—that geographical distance does not sever the ties that bind us to our origins. It it's true that distance can offer wider clearer perspectives. For example, Baldwin writes: "In Paris I began to see the sky for what seemed to be the first time."(Baldwin, *Collected Essays*, 140) Paris provided him a fresh lens through which to view the social problems in America. However, in order to acquire such sharp vision we must struggle to reconcile ourselves with the issues at home— both the home we leave behind and our inner home. For Baldwin this meant, though he would never again permanently live in his native country preferring instead life as an expatriate, remaining

politically and personally engaged through his literature and activism. If we simply run we are doomed to find ourselves, like David, right back in our own back yard.

Conclusion:
Questions of Subjectivity

The questions that I have explored in these texts are the same questions that we as gay men must engage in our own lives. Their function is not simply that of intellectual inquiry, but of our survival. How do we as gay/queer/homosexual men break away from the traditions of heterormativity and "emasculating forms of masculinity" to open up for ourselves an alternate space in which to exist? (Byrd, 21) How do we shatter dominant discourses and author our own subjectivity? How do we invent for ourselves, within language, a way to speak and write about a homosexual subject? In an attempt to answer these questions I have dedicated this thesis to engaging the texts of two of the most prolific and prominent figures of the 19th and 20th centuries. Driving this engagement is my own belief that literature is a form of action and a space for revolutionary thought.

Chief among the many lessons to be learned from the works of Andre Gide and James Baldwin is that there is no single way to write about or on behalf of a homosexual subject. Gide sets out to shape the discourse of male homosexuality through the powers of nomenclature and enunciation. He pays a great deal of attention to names and categories because he understands the discursive power that dwells within naming. His subversion lies not in the proliferation of new names, but in taking the very same terms that oppress him and endowing them with new meaning in order to redraw identity categories and to codify homosexuality on his own terms.

Whereas Gide has to answer the intricate question of what it means to be a gay man in society, Baldwin has the additional burden of figuring out how to navigate identities that society deems incompatible. Baldwin understood that identifying as a gay man meant jeopardizing his

legitimacy and authority as a black public intellectual and as a *real* black man altogether. In order to articulate a black homosexual subject Baldwin had to carefully and methodically close the distance between homosexual desire and black identity. His goal was not to redraw identity categories, but to scramble them, and to expose the permeability and contingency of identity.

Gide and Baldwin represent two distinct philosophies and two different ways of constructing literary outness. Nonetheless, the fact that both authors chose to write as openly gay men and chose to "say I" illustrates that they understood the importance of interjecting in discourse. Writing allows us to negotiate our identities within language. Cixous reminds us that if we are to incite change we must write because "writing is precisely the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures." (Cixous, 90) While speaking constitutes no guarantee freedom, silence precludes any possibility of self-affirmation. Joseph Beam warns us that there is no legacy to be found in silence. If we as gay/queer/homosexual men are to incite change we must write. Be it with tongue or pen we must write ourselves into history. It is the only way to unequivocally affirm that we were there.

Works Cited

Badinter, Elisabeth. XY: On Masculine Identity. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.

Baldwin, James. Baldwin Collected Essays. New York: Literary Classics of The United States, 1998.

Baldwin, James. "Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood." Baldwin, James. Baldwin Collected Essays. New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1998. 814-829.

—. Giovanni's Room. Delta Trade Paperbacks, 1956.

Benveniste, Emile. Problems in General Linguistics. Trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek. Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1971.

Berger, John. Ways of Seeing. New York: Penguin, 1990.

Butler, Judith. "Critically Queer." GLQ: A Journal Of Lesbian and Gay Studies (1993): 17-32.

Byrd, Rudolph. "The Tradition of John." Traps: African American men on gender and sexuality . Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001. 1-17.

Cixous, Helene. "The Laugh of the Medusa." Signs 1.4 (1976): 875-893.

Drowne, Kathleene. ""An Irrevocable Condition": Constructions of Home and the Writing of Place in Giovanni's Room." Re-Viewing James Baldwin: Things Not Seen. Ed. Quentin Miller. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000. 72-88.

Gates, Henry Louis. "The Fire Last Time: What James Baldwin Can and Can't Teach America." The New Repubic 206.22 (1992): 37-43.

Gide, Andre. Corydon. New York: Farrar Straus, 1983.

Goldstein, Richard. James Baldwin: The Legacy. Ed. Quincy Troupe. Touchstone, 1989.

Lucey, Micahel. Never Say I. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.

Lucey, Michael. Gide's Bent. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Romanet, Jerome de. "Revisiting Madeleine and 'The Outing': James Baldwin's Revision of Gide's Sexual Politics." MELUS (1997): 3-12.

Ross, Marlon B. "White Fantasies of Desire: Baldwin and the Racial Identities of Sexuality." James Baldwin Now. Ed. Dwight McBride. New York: New York University Press, 1999. 13-55.

Sartre, Jean Paul. "What is Literature" and Other Essays. Cambrige: Harvard University Press, 1988.