Notes

Introduction

2. Ibid., 441 (my emphasis).
3. José Esteban Muñoz, Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity, 1.
5. See Jack Halberstam’s study of queer temporalities and postmodern geographies, In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives, for a related exploration of the contradictory, messy ways queerness and norms are imbricated.
8. See, for example, Jonathan Dollimore’s seminal Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault, which posits a process of “transgressive reinscription” that relies on a relationship of proximity between dominant and subordinate to effect both a displacement (i.e., a construction of the marginal “other”) and a recuperation of difference (a “tracking back of the ‘other’ into the same”) (33).
12. It was only quite late in the process of writing this book that I came to understand its place within queer theoretical discussions of reparative reading practices versus critique. Robyn Wiegman, whose work has been important to me in a number of ways, helpfully refuses to oppose (or temporally distinguish) these interpretive traditions of hope and suspicion. In her talk, “Affective Atmospheres,” at the Queer Methods conference, organized by Heather Love and hosted by the University of Pennsylvania (October
Wiegman suggested the necessity of both queer methods of reading, especially as together they can help us understand and intervene in our own painful histories of traumatic interpretation.

If Baldwin’s scholarly reception has reflected two oddly divergent paths, his presence within literary anthologies, which act as gatekeepers of the canon, continues to be quite singular. Baldwin’s sexuality is rarely discussed in the introductory biographical remarks typical of the genre, so that the anthologized Baldwin has been the raced, not sexed, Baldwin.

Magdalena Zaborowska, James Baldwin’s Turkish Decade: Erotics of Exile, 19 (my emphasis).


The introduction to the indispensable Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology, edited by E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson, offers a brief history of the ways African American studies and queer studies have avoided each other. Marlon Ross’s “White Fantasies of Desire,” in that same volume, presents a more thorough discussion of the reception of Giovanni’s Room in African American literary and cultural studies.

Ross, 16.

Ibid., 22.

Dwight A. McBride, James Baldwin Now, 2.

James Baldwin, “Here Be Dragons,” 690.


See Baldwin’s famous query, “Who is the Nigger?,” in his 1963 interview for Take This Hammer.


Ibid., 362.

James Baldwin, The Evidence of Things Not Seen, 6.

D. H. Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature, 1. Lawrence’s distinction between the “blood-self” and the “nerve-brain self” implicitly hovers over much of Baldwin’s work, particularly the novel I take up in my second chapter, Giovanni’s Room.

Ibid., 171.

David A. Gerstner, Queer Pollen: White Seduction, Black Male Homosexuality, and the Cinematic, 14. Gerstner brings the conceptual tool of “the cinematic” to bear on the works of Richard Bruce Nugent and Marlon Riggs as well as Baldwin.

Ibid., 94 (quoting from Jacques Derrida, Aporias, 70).

Ibid., 95.


35. Richard Hall’s “The Language Animal,” collected in his Fidelities, is the perhaps perfectly named short story inspired by Baldwin’s life and work.

36. Baldwin makes a similar point about what is owed to the absent subject of one’s inquiry in a comparison of Billie Holiday’s autobiography, Lady Sings the Blues, to the film adaptation of that book. He privileges the former because it contains “her testimony, for that is what we are compelled to deal with, and respect, and whatever others may imagine themselves to know of these matters cannot compare with the testimony of the person who was there” (Devil Finds Work, 131).


38. Ibid., 3.

39. However, Baldwin’s social vision diverges from Edelman’s. In contrast to Baldwin’s vision of the hard-won but positive social gains to be made from the nearly impossible work of queer imagination, Edelman proposes a “queer negativity” that “refuses to reinforce some positive social value,” specifically “futurism’s unquestioned good” (ibid., 6–7).

40. See Robyn Wiegman’s “Queering the Academy,” “Un-remembering Monique Wittig,” “Interchanges: Heteronormativity and the Desire for Gender,” and the introduction to Women’s Studies on Its Own.


43. Wiegman, “Interchanges,” 100.


45. Ibid., 515.


47. Ibid., 33.

48. Ibid., 25.

49. Thomas Piontek’s Queering Gay and Lesbian Studies offers an accessible jumping-off point for further research into this debate.


51. E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson, Black Queer Studies, 1.

52. Ibid., 1.

53. See, in particular, ibid., 3–6, for a discussion of this disciplinary relationship.


55. E. Patrick Johnson, “Quare’ Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know about Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother,” 126.

Chapter 1

2. Ibid.
4. Sharon Patricia Holland, Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity, 115.
5. Ibid., 110.
6. Ibid., 104–5.
7. Ibid., 107.
8. Ibid., 104.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., 118 (my emphasis).
11. Ibid., 111.
12. Ibid., 104.
13. Though I will address it more fully in this book’s conclusion, I want to foreshadow here that I am thinking in particular about the place of women in the black gay male literary tradition over which Baldwin looms so large.
16. John Keene, “This Week, Pt1: Als on Baldwin + Reading @ Temple,” accessed August 10, 2011.
18. Essex Hemphill’s Brother to Brother has recently been given new life, having been republished by Lisa C. Moore at RedBone Press in 2007. Subsequent page references in this chapter are to that more recent edition.
20. Ibid., xliii.
21. Beam’s introduction to In the Life is titled “Leaving the Shadows Behind.”
24. Hemphill, xlix.
26. Ibid., 336.
27. Carry the Word: A Bibliography of Black LGBTQ Books is a seminal reference work edited by Steven G. Fullwood, Reginald Harris, and Lisa C. Moore, featuring titles by
and about black same-gender-loving (SGL) and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer-identified (LGBTQ) writers and culture, as well as interviews and articles about black SGL authors.

29. Steven Fullwood, personal conversation, March 5, 2009. Fullwood adds that “[c]ontemporary writers are adapting new language as a way, often, of not saying ‘gay.’”
31. Ibid., 15–16.
35. James Baldwin, Go Tell It on the Mountain, back cover.
36. Miller, 3.
37. Steven Seidman, Difference Troubles: Queering Social Theory and Sexual Politics, 135.
41. Ibid., 175.
42. Ibid., 173.
43. Ibid., 179.
44. Glave, 39.
45. I borrow this phrase from the title of A. B. Christa Schwarz’s important study Gay Voices of the Harlem Renaissance.
46. Herb Boyd, Baldwin’s Harlem, especially 23–46 (for an account of Baldwin’s relationship with Cullen and Hughes).
49. Discussions of the “agon” between Baldwin and Wright are well rehearsed. My key point here is that none of Baldwin’s major literary influences occupy the racial and sexual intersection that he does.
51. Ibid., 185.
56. This description comes from D. Quentin Miller, “James Baldwin’s Critical Reception,” 95.
59. Ibid., x.
61. Robert F. Reid-Pharr, Once You Go Black: Desire, Choice, and Black Masculinity in Post-War America, 15
63. James Baldwin, Go Tell It on the Mountain, 3. Subsequent page references in this chapter appear parenthetically in the text.
65. Quoted in Scott Bravmann, Queer Fictions of the Past: History, Culture, and Difference, 3.
70. Ibid., 423.
71. Ibid., 427.
72. Ibid., 437.
73. Ibid., 432.
74. Ibid., 440.
75. Ibid., 439.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid.
78. Ibid., 432.
80. Ibid., 621.
81. He also has the potential to signify as racially different, insofar as male homosexuality can be interpreted within African American communities as a rejection of a masculine-overdetermined black identity.

Chapter 2

1. Donald Hall’s hermeneutic ethics in Reading Sexualities: Hermeneutic Theory and the Future of Queer Studies elaborates just such a journey to self-knowledge, one neces-
narily routed through the very self/other interrelationships that David has spent a lifetime avoiding. See Hall’s Gadamerian reading of Giovanni’s Room in Reading Sexualities (66–71).

2. I here use the term “queer studies” to refer to a broad academic enterprise that engages diverse perspectives and interests, including gay and transgender studies. My use of the term “queer theory” in this chapter refers to a more discrete approach within queer studies.


5. We should note, however, that these are not equal and opposite forces.


10. Donald Hall, Queer Theories, 156.

11. Ibid., 160.


13. Though Baldwin does not explicitly state it, David’s dilemma must be set against the backdrop, identified by Max Weber, of the Protestant ethic in which the work of self-denial and the value of cleanliness contribute to the rigorous pursuit of a secular vocation and, consequently, worldly success.


15. See Kathryn Bond Stockton’s Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame: Where “Black” Meets “Queer” for a fascinating study of the ways tropes of decomposition and decay operate in queer black narratives.


19. Ibid., 197.


22. Ibid., 104.


25. For a trenchant critique of this trend, see Valerie Traub’s “The New Unhistoricism in Queer Studies.”
28. Ibid.
29. The counterpoint to Baldwin’s perspective in this regard is that of his exact contemporary Jean Genet.
33. Ibid., 336.
36. Ibid., 80.
41. Ibid., 82.
42. I will here be using “transgender” or “trans” as broadly inclusive terms, differentiating between “transgender” and “transsexual” where that distinction holds. However, as I will argue, part of the power of trans critique is its applicability to interpretive situations that might not be considered “properly” transgender or transsexual.
43. Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality*, 58. Prosser offers a thorough push back against what he considers the appropriative uses that queer theory has made of transgender as a figure or trope, a move that allows queer academics to pursue a poststructuralist project of producing the body as a discursive construct rather than as material substance, effectively disembodying, deliteralizing, and fictionalizing trans bodies that Prosser takes to be irreducible. In this chapter, I follow Prosser in turning back to the materiality of the body.
45. Prosser, 138.
46. Ibid., 150.
47. Ibid., 151.
49. Genny Beemyn and Susan Rankin’s groundbreaking study *The Lives of Transgender People* (2011) describes not only the myriad ways that those who transgress choose to gender identify (27) but also the complex dynamics of how transgender identity relates to sexual orientation (22–35). I want to reiterate Halberstam’s point that this relationship must increasingly be thought of as multidirectional, as proliferating transgender identities inform and inflect the sexual identities of people who identify as non-trans.
50. In his article “Folles, Swells, Effeminates, and Homophiles in Saint-Germain-des-Prés of the 1950s: A New ‘Precious’ Society?,” Georges Sidéris attributes David’s read of les folles to Baldwin himself: “Baldwin subscribed here to a ‘virile’ vision of homosexuality and of human love in general, a vision that might today be qualified as ‘hetero-centric.’ He could not imagine that the folles could be attractive to other men, either heterosexual or homosexual” (221).

51. Leslie Feinberg, Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue, 7.


54. Ibid., 11.

55. Ibid., 13.


58. Quoted in ibid., 220.

59. Ibid., 220.

60. Ibid., 226.

61. Ibid., 222–27.

62. In his 1983 book Les Amies de Place Blanche, Swedish photographer Christer Strömholm alludes to the women with whom he lived and worked in Paris from the late 1950s to the late 1960s as “transsexuals.” The term would have been current, for some at least, during that decade. Strömholm, of course, simply called these women “friends.”

63. Sidéris, 227.


65. Prosser, 17.


67. Ibid., 316.

68. Ibid., 300.

69. See Judith Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination.”

70. Henderson, 300.

71. Ibid., 319.

72. Prosser makes the important point that people often read surgical refashioning or “resexing” of the body as removal or “desexing” and thus misconceive of sex reassignment surgery as mutilation or loss.

73. Prosser, 73.

74. Stryker and Whittle, 12.

75. Prosser, 167.

76. Judith Halberstam, Female Masculinity, 151.
77. Prosser, 4.
78. Ibid., 7.
79. Of course, framing these questions in the singular for clarity, I have drastically oversimplified them.
80. My point here is that the postreassignment transsexual’s body may not simply recover the individual’s real body but may also allow that body to align with a previously sensed but disembodied sexual identity.
81. Prosser, 84.
82. Ibid., 85.
83. As George Chauncey notes in *Gay New York*, the invention in the 1960s of the isolating metaphor of the closet, which makes coming out an individual responsibility, also turned gay men away from an understanding of coming out as an initiation into the gay world (6–8). One wonders if the de-materialized gay body might be linked to the increasingly individualized gay coming out experience.
84. I want to add here the important qualifications that not all gay people identify as such based on desire, that not all gay people desire bodies, that not all desire stems from or can be reduced to bodily desire, and that not all gay bodies are desiring bodies. My theory of gay embodiment is meant to relate, not confine, gay identity to bodies.

Chapter 3

1. See Marjorie Garber’s *Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life* for a detailed discussion of the various models and myths of bisexuality that are current in culture.
4. Throughout “White Fantasies of Desire: Baldwin and the Racial Identities of Sexuality,” Marlon Ross persuasively cautions against readings of Baldwin in which race and sexuality are made to displace one another rather than exist in more complex relation. In my reading, sexuality and race are integral to each other, yet I argue they must be treated in their specificity as well.
6. The precursors Reid-Pharr points to include David R. Roediger, Alexander Saxton, Richard Dyer, Toni Morrison, and Eric Lott.
8. Ibid., 94.
10. For excellent introductions to the liberatory potential of queer theory, see Annamarie Jagose’s *Queer Theory: An Introduction*, William Turner’s *A Genealogy of Queer Theory*, Nikki Sullivan’s *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, Donald Hall’s *Queer*
Theories, and the essays collected in Fear of a Queer Planet, especially editor Michael Warner’s introduction to that volume.

15. Ross reminds us that while Cleaver’s early homophobic position is often taken as representative of Black Power movements’ attitudes toward gay people, the picture was actually far more complex (47–48). For example, Huey P. Newton’s 1970 essay “The Women’s Liberation and Gay Liberation Movements,” collected in his To Die for the People: The Writings of Huey P. Newton, argues for the necessary linkages among those fighting race, gender, and sexual oppression.
16. Reid-Pharr, Black Gay Man, 104.
17. Ibid., 98.
18. Ibid., 97.
20. Rufus’s suicide is modeled after that of Baldwin’s early love interest, Eugene Worth, who jumped from the George Washington Bridge in 1946.
23. Jeffrey Hole (“Select Bibliography of Works by and on James Baldwin,” 394–95) attributes this critical focus to the rise of postmodernism and cultural studies in the mid-1980s, as does Dwight A. McBride (James Baldwin Now).
27. Dievler, 179.
29. Ibid., 204.
30. For commentary on and critique of the notion of transcendent identity in Another Country, see Kevin Ohi, “I’m Not the Boy You Want: Sexuality, Race, and Thwarted Revelation in Baldwin’s Another Country.” See also Michael F. Lynch, “Beyond Guilt and Innocence: Redemptive Suffering and Love in Baldwin’s Another Country”; Emmanuel Nelson, “Critical Deviance: Homophobia and the Reception of James Baldwin’s Fiction.” It should be noted that Baldwin’s race lesson is learned only through male same-sex exploration.
31. While most critics have agreed on the absence of a gay black man in *Another Country*, that LeRoy shares both Ida/Rufus’s racial perspective and Eric’s revelatory sexuality would seem to situate him as the unexpected gay black figure for which *Another Country* longs.


33. Ibid., 111, 137.

34. Ibid., 50.

35. Ohi, 274.

36. Ibid., 279.

37. Ibid., 280.

38. Quinn, 58.

39. Ibid., 55.


41. Ibid., 67–68.

42. Ibid., 87.

43. Ibid., 56.

44. Ibid., 38.

45. Ibid., 87.

46. Ibid., 172.

47. Ibid., 92.

48. Ibid., 91.

49. Ibid., 88.

50. Eribon, 9.


52. Rowden, “A Play of Abstractions.”


54. Dievler, 178.

55. In Paris, Eric falls in love with and rescues the young French prostitute Yves, who recounts how, thanks to Eric, he has come to the realization of his own self-worth: “I have not to be a whore just because I come from whores. I am better than that. . . . I learned that from you” (208). Yet Baldwin did not understand the optimism with which critics read Yves’s salvation: “What is going to happen to Yves when he gets [to America]? Something terrible is going to happen to him. Yves comes and he is not prepared. . . . I was bitter. I could not understand how [the critics] could see that as a happy ending. But I am not responsible for my critics if they don’t pick up on my messages” (quoted in Tuhkanen, 575). Unlike gay love given to straight white people, gay love between gay men thus contains no emancipatory vision.


57. Dievler, 163.


59. Quoted in Quinn, 51.
60. Rowden, “A Play of Abstractions.”
61. Leeming, 201.
63. Leeming, 76.
64. Quoted in Leeming, 74–75.
65. Gerstner, 6.

67. David Kurnick, in *Empty Houses: Theatrical Failure and the Novel*, offers a fascinating reading of the representational obstacles Baldwin faced in *Another Country* and his other novels. Kurnick links the novel form, typically associated with interiority, to Baldwin’s theatrical ambitions in order to theorize the yearning toward radical collectivity that marks Baldwin’s novels: “Baldwin’s vision of collective existence, and that of the novel of interiority more generally, may seem sentimental, doomed to failure by virtue of its abstraction from the details of social and political struggle. But the failure, and that provocation, are those of the literary itself” (206).

**Chapter 4**

4. Ibid., 76.
6. Spillers, 73.
7. I find it fascinating that, at every stage of this project, readers have questioned the correctness of my use of “papas’ baby.” In fact, the logic of the possessive form of the plural noun, “papas,” is quite clear and unambiguous: the baby belongs to the papas. The confusion points back, obviously enough, to a tacit connection between parenthood and biological reproduction, such that it doesn’t quite yet make sense to think of a two-papa parentage. The grammar betrays a breach: the clarity of the rules of possession is pierced by a failure of the queer imagination.
8. As a practical measure and unless otherwise noted, I will use the title of the entire collection, *Going to Meet the Man*, to reference the three stories exclusively under consideration here.
9. “The Rockpile” was probably written in the late 1940s but was unpublished prior to the 1965 collection.
14. Ibid., 137.
15. Ibid., 138.
17. Ibid., 179.
20. Ibid., 80.
27. Ibid., 33.
28. Ibid., 38.
30. Robyn Wiegman, American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender, 12.
31. Ibid., 14.
32. Susan Gubar, Racechanges: White Skin, Black Face in American Culture, 175.
33. Pinar, 11.
34. Gubar, 180.
36. Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph Blotner, Faulkner in the University, 118.
37. Williamson, 2.

Conclusion

4. Ibid., 176.

5. In arguing for the sustained, paradoxical presence of queer successes and failures, I diverge from Judith Halberstam’s reconceptualization of failure as a “queer art” that “embrace[s] a truly political negativity” (The Queer Art of Failure, 110). While I agree that failure can be its own kind of success, I do wonder whether queer theory, when it cedes success to total, unadulterated failure—effectively making a success of failure—misses the opportunity to theorize the perplexing simultaneities of failure and success.


7. Ibid., 5.

8. Trudier Harris, Black Women in the Fiction of James Baldwin, 5.

9. Ibid., 206.

10. Ibid., 206.

11. Ibid., 10, 11.

12. Ibid., 207. Ultimately, Harris suggests that Baldwin moves toward a resolution between male and female characters to the extent that he privileges “the extended family, the communal family” over the “repressive nuclear family” (211). It is in Baldwin’s larger “familial” context that Harris believes “one kind of black woman” in Baldwin’s fiction “has escaped from the limitations of . . . [the black man’s] desire for mastery over black women” (211).

13. Ibid., 209.


15. Ibid., 49.

16. Ibid., 53.

17. Ibid., 50.

18. Harris notes this same erasure: “As lovers, Baldwin’s women are always engaged in heterosexual affairs; lesbianism as a concept does not surface in his books. In their roles as lovers, therefore, the women are to be evaluated on the basis of how well they complement, satisfy, and work toward the happiness of the men in their lives—or, in the case of the fanatical lovers of the (masculine) Lord, the extent to which they are committed to Him” (8).

19. Ibid., 205–6.

20. Ibid., 189.


22. Ibid., 73.

23. Ibid., 133.

24. Ibid., 130.

25. Ibid., 133.

26. Ibid., 74
27. Ibid., 130.
29. Ibid., 27.
30. Ibid., 37.
31. The Baldwin-Lorde dialogue of 1984 replays, to a great extent, Lorde’s exchange with Robert Staples in *The Black Scholar* in 1979. The Staples essay to which Lorde responded was titled “The Myth of Black Macho: A Response to Angry Black Feminists.” Lorde’s original response was republished in 1984 under its more recognizable title, “Sexism: An American Disease in Blackface,” in Lorde’s *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. It seems unlikely that Baldwin had read the exchange or remembered its details, as his arguments mirror those that were made by Staples and that were so effectively undercut by Lorde in the earlier interaction.
33. Ibid., 43.
34. Ibid., 55.
35. Ibid., 45.
36. Ibid., 55.
37. Later in the dialogue, in a discussion about her father, Giovanni once more positions herself outside the ideals of heteronormativity. “Jones Giovanni,” she says, “is a groovy cat, and he’s lived with my mother for thirty-five years in holy wedlock. I think that’s good for them. . . . I think he’s a gas. I just don’t want to marry him” (68–69).
38. Ibid., 55.
39. Ibid., 43–44.
40. Ibid., 44.
41. Ibid., 56–57.
42. Ibid., 57.
43. I thank Sarah Schulman for introducing me to this phrase.
45. Ibid., 27.
47. Lisbeth Lipari also makes this connection, in “The Rhetoric of Intersectionality: Lorraine Hansberry’s 1957 Letters to the *Ladder*.”
49. Ibid., 111.
50. I borrow this phrase from Lipari.
51. Lipari suggests that Hansberry’s critique, because it stops short of this further analysis, “raise[s] questions both about Hansberry’s experiences with gay and lesbian communities of color as well as her imagined audiences of the *Ladder and One*” (240).
52. In choosing to “escape” to St. Paul en Vence, an ancient medieval commune on the
French Riviera, Baldwin also undoubtedly bolstered his social and professional status, as the town was well known as a haven for world-famous artists and celebrities.

53. See D. Quentin Miller’s “James Baldwin’s Critical Reception.”
58. Ibid., 237.
59. Ibid., 238.
60. Bersani, 71.