Hemingway and the Black Renaissance

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European cities have long served Americans not only as practical, but symbolic loci of expatriate literary work. Going “back east,” and more specifically having a connection with Europe, has often meant having confusing and uncomfortable ties to Americans’ own past—hereditary or personal, real or psychic. American literary representations of European cities recurrently describe the psychological states of individuals who have been drawn from home either to seek what America cannot provide, or to escape what it enforces, presenting a symbolically charged landscape often only half understood, misinterpreted, or apprehended too late by fictional expatriates. Freed from their most familiar cultural associations of place and meaning, expatriate writers may more clearly project their own inner struggles onto a foreign geography—making their descriptions of foreign places and scenes perhaps more symbolically charged than descriptions of more familiar terrain might be. In expatriate fiction and writings set abroad, the cataloging of characters’ movements through geographic space may even serve as shorthand for narrative in itself.

Few openings in American literature underscore the links between landscape, foreignness, and identity as clearly as that of James Baldwin’s 1956 novel, Giovanni’s Room. Baldwin’s protagonist David opens his tale at a window overlooking the south of France, explaining how, as the sun sets outside and the lamp goes on in the room behind him, the scene before him fades in the glass to become his own reflection. David’s dilemma, he
says, “is somewhere before me, locked in the reflection that I am watching in the window as the night comes down outside. It is trapped in the room with me . . . and it is yet more foreign to me than those foreign hills outside” (15). His “dilemma,” of course, even as he describes it as being connected to the view framed in the window, is less geographic than psychological. Here the narrator himself seems to be telling us that the landscape serves him as a psychological mirror.

The projection of psychological dilemmas onto foreign landscapes was an experience American writers came by with growing ease in the twentieth century, as war took its toll on the European economy, the dollar rose, and increasing numbers of passenger ships plied the Atlantic. By 1918, war itself had already brought two hundred thousand African American servicemen to France, and with this wave of visitors, the first permanent expatriate African American community was established in Paris, composed of about thirty expatriates, most male, who settled in the area of Montmartre, then a working-class suburb. Meanwhile, soldiers returned from Paris to the United States with tales of a city where interracial dating hardly raised eyebrows and where people of any color were accepted in restaurants, theaters, and public transportation. In 1919, Paris hosted the Pan-African Congress, which had been opposed by the US Department of State. That same year, seventy-eight lynchings were recorded in the United States (Tuttle 1996, 22).

By the 1950s, around five hundred African American veterans were studying in French universities on the GI Bill, many of them treated by residents as seekers of political asylum. Free from physical and psychological harassment, they could sit where they wanted on buses, eat in the restaurants they chose, date whom they liked, sleep in hotels, and rent the apartments they wanted in whichever neighborhoods suited them. They lived in a world where they could, in many essential ways, become “white” (Parker 2005). Certainly this new landscape served many writers as a social counterpoint, holding up a mirror to America. Yet the move to Paris led Baldwin to hold up a more personal mirror. As the “outsider-ness” of being black disappeared, it allowed him to experience more fully the foreignness of being an American among Europeans, and of being a homosexual among heterosexuals. This shift from a focus on racial difference to one that highlights national and sexual difference is perhaps what led him to rely so heavily on the traditional white American literary mapping of Paris as his model. The geography of Paris has served as a landscape onto which generations of expatriate writers have projected their own personal struggles. By the time Baldwin was writing *Giovanni’s*
Room, over a hundred years of these personal struggles projected onto the landscape of Paris had built up into a sort of collective, symbolic literary code of place in the city. This ready-made code of place was something Hemingway followed but also tailored to his own needs. Baldwin, in turn, took Hemingway’s model and adapted it only slightly—in fact significantly less than one might expect.

In his extensive study of American fiction set in Paris, Jean Méral writes of *Giovanni’s Room* that “every description of the quays, with their bookstalls and their anglers, or of the American Express office with its waiting tourists seems to have come straight from the pages of Wolfe, Hemingway, or other 1920s writers” (234). Méral describes the main interest of *Giovanni’s Room* as being of a documentary nature, illustrating the lives of young American expatriates and homosexual life in the French capital. The setting, he finds, however, “one of extreme banality” (234), relying heavily on imagery already established by the previous generation of writers. Writers of the 1950s and 1960s, with their preoccupation with homosexuality and racial conflict and the exile that Paris afforded black and homosexual Americans during a period of an oppressive regime at home, “often place themselves under the aegis of James, Hemingway, and Miller, in order to justify similarities in their works or give more authority to what they say,” writes Méral (235). In promoting new social ideologies to American readers, postwar expatriate writers often subversively play all the more heavily on their role as part of a venerable tradition of canonical works: “William Gardner Smith talks of a ‘New Lost Generation’ . . . Harold Fender remembers Henry James . . . James Jones tries to come up with a name for the generation of McCarthyite victims and overloads his writing with references to Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Gertrude Stein, and Sylvia Beach” (235–36).

Baldwin was born in 1924, eleven months before Hemingway (then vacationing in Spain) began work on *The Sun Also Rises*. Aside from their being Americans in Paris, Baldwin’s David would seem to have little in common with Hemingway’s Jake Barnes. Barnes is a midwesterner, a veteran and confirmed bachelor, well integrated into Parisian expatriate society, comfortably and contentedly employed as a newspaper editor. David, a good deal younger, a New Yorker having come to Paris with no clear direction, finds himself unemployed and virtually friendless in a difficult financial situation, and begins experimenting sexually. Each narrator, however, builds a city of words while describing the irremediable impediment to his sexual relations with an Anglo woman. And each, as model for this city, chose Paris.
Baldwin, of course, had the advantage of Hemingway’s model of the city—a model he sometimes followed closely, sometimes intentionally reversed. Hemingway’s characters live in the Paris of 1925, straddling a Right Bank of newspaper offices, hotels, and expatriate families, and a Left Bank Montparnasse of cafés and bars. By the time Baldwin arrived in Paris, its expatriate center was shifting northward to St. Germain-des-Prés, away from the Dome and the Select to the Flore and the Deux Magots—and into what was also by that time, as Gore Vidal’s 1952 Judgment of Paris had already depicted, the city’s nexus of homosexual life. Baldwin’s centering of his novel on St. Germain-des-Prés may have been guided by historical fact, but his pushing of the scene eastward, into marginal territories of Paris left unexplored by other American writers, more likely reflects his treatment of a marginalized homosexual society.

For both Baldwin and Hemingway, Paris came to symbolize not only a rite of passage, but also, particularly for the latter, a locus amoenus and enchanted place of lost innocence. David’s first conversation in Giovanni’s Room, with the older, more mature Belgian-American Jacques, revolves around a reference to Eden. Life, muses David, “only offers the choice of remembering the garden or forgetting it. . . . People who remember court madness through pain, the pain of the perpetually recurring death of their innocence; people who forget court another kind of madness, the madness of the denial of pain and the hatred of innocence” (29). This description of two responses to lost innocence becomes more poignant when we recall that around the same period Baldwin was writing these lines, Hemingway was composing his last, unfinished novel, The Garden of Eden, which he was to work on periodically into the late 1950s. Baldwin’s description of the loss of Eden and how remembering brings “the pain of perpetually recurring death of [. . . ] innocence” could easily have been describing Hemingway’s own struggle with his early memories of an early, innocent life in Paris he had lost (Kennedy 1993, 121–41). Although the outcomes of these two attempts at recovering something irretrievable are quite different for the authors’ two protagonists, the illusions of paradise that Paris mocks and the attempts to describe them are surprisingly similar.

In Hemingway’s descriptions of Paris, both in the Sun Also Rises and in later writings, there is a meticulous detailing of street, restaurant, and café names as the narrator moves from place to place—a journalistic habit that it is difficult not to read as a sort of geographic name-dropping, but which is nearly absent in Baldwin’s work. Hemingway’s writing, at the same time, hints at a second type of use of place names, a more symbolic use, which Baldwin also favors and develops more significantly. Would it
be reading too much into Hemingway’s choice of locales for setting to note that, making up after a disagreement that nearly ends in an early falling-out, Jake Barnes and Robert Cohn go for coffee at the Café de la Paix? Or that, as Jake unknowingly prepares to make his entrance on a scene where he, Brett, and her soon-to-be lover first meet together as a trio, he approaches the impending meeting via the rue des Pyramides? In Baldwin, these hints of symbolism turn more concrete as his place names, if less copiously dished out, seem more carefully selected: David reads of Hella’s impending return in the midst of his affair with Giovanni in the Place des Pyramides, where he watches “absurd Paris, which was as cluttered now, under the scalding sun, as the landscape of my heart” (90). Meanwhile, on Hella’s return, walking to her hotel means climbing uphill from St. Germain-des-Prés facing the Senate, a place of judgment whose imposing clock tower stands between the narrator and the Edenic Luxembourg Garden so extolled by Hemingway in his reminiscences of a more innocent Paris.1

While Baldwin name-drops the location of action in the story with perhaps more symbolic care than Hemingway, one wonders if Hemingway’s exaggerated mentions of street names isn’t an extravagant indication (to the reader, but perhaps also to himself) of his being a Parisian insider. His narrator certainly bills himself as such, as much as Baldwin’s narrator repeatedly represents himself as an outsider—both to heterosexuality and to homosexuality, both to America and to Paris, to both of his lovers, and certainly to the lives of the other characters in the novel. The key event that triggers the initial plot of David’s story—his being put out of his room when he finds himself unable to pay his concierge—underlines his state of being an outsider. And again, when he does find a room, it is, as Giovanni says, “Far out. It is almost not Paris” (48). Put out of one home, David finds himself welcomed into another that is itself outside. Barnes’s concierge, on the contrary, acts as an overbearing gatekeeper, keeping out unwanted visitors (although she too, like David’s, is concerned with money, and can be convinced toward laxity by those who want in badly enough to pay). Even the wounds of the characters in both novels seem to serve opposite purposes. The “troubling sex” David sees when he examines himself in the mirror excludes him from society as Giovanni’s beheading excludes him from the world of the living. Meanwhile, Jake’s own “beheading,” while excluding him from the sexual activity going on around him, is also linked to a kind of ritual initiation scarring and compared to Count Mippipopolous’s arrow scars, just as Robert Cohn’s sense of being an outsider as a Jew is actually lessened by his broken nose.
If David’s initial concerns revolve around his finding a place to get into to live, Barnes meanwhile describes his daily preoccupation with getting distracting visitors out of his office. Doorways take on a special significance in both novels, whether the “dark doorway” Barnes and Georgette pass through on their way toward Montparnasse, or the “endlessly swinging doors” of Baldwin’s American Express office (86), at which David, notably, stations himself outside. And while Barnes seems to be continually watching the city from inside taxis, sees his guests arrive and leave his home as he looks out his window, or watches the fiesta outside in Pamplona from the balcony doorway of the Hotel Montoya, making of foreignness something familiar and yet excluded from his personal sphere even as it forms the cities he moves through, David’s position as an outsider leaves him excluded from a Parisian environment with which he is intimately familiar. This is perhaps most clear in a broad description of the city toward the end of the novel:

There seemed to be almost no one on the streets . . . beneath me—along the river bank, beneath the bridges, in the shadow of the walls, I could almost hear the collective, shivering sigh—were lovers and ruins, sleeping, embracing, coupling, drinking, staring out at the descending night. Behind the walls of the houses I passed, the French nation was clearing away the dishes, putting little Pierre and Marie to bed, scowling over the eternal problems of the sou, the shop, the church, the unsteady State. Those walls, those shuttered windows, held them in and protected them against the darkness and the long moan of this long night. Ten years hence, little Jean Pierre and Marie might find themselves out here beside the river and wonder, like me, how they had fallen out of the web of safety. (99–100)

Like the boulevard terraces where characters continually station themselves to watch its crowds go by and the doors through which they pass or at which they hesitate to pass, Paris itself is described as a site of passage—a place to move through. As much as Brett, Hella, or Bill rave on returning to Paris after an absence, they are soon enough off again—or, like Cohn and David, dream incessantly of leaving for the south.

Hemingway’s decision to include Paris in The Sun Also Rises was an afterthought in 1925 (Kennedy 1993). He originally imagined the Parisian scenes simply an introduction to the action in Spain. For Baldwin too, Paris would seem to represent an introduction in Giovanni’s Room—or at least the experiences it provides would seem to be an introduction to the
life of its protagonist, whose slow progression eastward across the western hemisphere leads him to this city.

David, who takes care in the opening of the novel to tell us he was born in San Francisco, “graduates” with his parents to Connecticut and New York before boarding the ship that takes him further east again to Paris. Robert Cohn, meanwhile, Barnes’s foil in *The Sun Also Rises*, moves first from New Jersey to California, where he makes his “literary” transformation, before moving back east to Massachusetts, and from there continuing eastward to Paris, then returning to New York, and finally going back to Paris. David’s movements form an almost perfect west-to-east trajectory, while Cohn goes back and forth, first across North America, then swinging again like a pendulum across the Atlantic. Both characters express a repeated desire to get away from Paris—Cohn dreams of South America, David of Spain or Italy. Both leave Paris to travel south. And both, as preludes to the romantic encounters that form the centerpieces of their stories, either send away or are complicit in their abandonment by American fiancées whose motives for marriage are largely politic.

Both narrators’ tales approach the city from the same geographic direction, entering their plots with meetings with compatriots on the far western edge of their stories’ geographic circumferences. Barnes meets the Americans Cohn and his fiancée Francis near the Gare Montparnasse for dinner before walking eastward with them for a drink, then going further east alone to his apartment. David, meanwhile, meets the half-American Jacques on the rue de Grenelle before the two of them move east to the bar where he will meet his lover and provider of his future domestic situation, which lies further eastward still. Both thus open their stories in the company of fellow Americans in a western space before moving eastward into the main setting.

This initial west-east division, seemingly representing movement from America into France, is immediately thereafter transferred onto a strong Right Bank/Left Bank polarization. This setting up of Paris with the Right Bank as a “phantom America” has a long tradition in expatriate literature (James 1957, 18). Much as James’s Strether shuttles back and forth between banks to the Gallic, old-fashioned lair of Madame de Vionnet and the modern Huysmanized boulevards of the Right Bank, the hotel of Waymarsh and apartment of Chad Newsome, or Fitzgerald’s Dick Diver tastes the unsettling shock of lesbianism on the Left Bank when he leaves the Right Bank where his wife shops and he indulges himself in his marble hotel, Baldwin and Hemingway both play strongly on the division of
the city into two zones. One is a zone of safe, Americanized bars, hotels, and businesses, a zone that represents a surrogate United States within Paris and is the source of income that makes life there possible (Barnes’s through his work, Baldwin’s through wire from his father), the other of the dangerous Left Bank that symbolizes the foreign. The expatriate Paris of *The Sun Also Rises* is a city where crossing the Seine has an especially strong significance, and means going between a Chicagoesque daytime Right Bank, where men go to work and meet in hotels afterward for cocktails before returning home to their families, and a night-time leisure-oriented Left Bank of clubs and bars much more clearly frequented by the French and other foreigners. Hemingway’s touristic, working-world Right Bank is so close to the world of the *Toledo Star* or the *Herald Tribune* that it hardly requires description. If we know the Palmer House in Chicago we can already imagine the Hotel Crillon. Hemingway’s rue de Rivoli or Champs-Élysées might as well be Michigan Avenue or Lakeshore Drive, his Tuileries might as well be Grant Park, and so he describes neither. Only when he moves his narrator toward the Seine does he begin to give us visual images of Paris, and the closer he gets to the Left Bank the more detailed descriptions the narrator gives. Like James’s later Paris, like Poe’s and Hawthorne’s, Hemingway’s Paris is polarized not by *quartier*, class, or “inside city/ outside city,” but by Left and Right Bank. And, like the previous generation, this polarity, the two banks of a body of water, allows him to project onto the city’s geography the essential polarity felt by expatriates—between two countries and two cultures separated by an ocean. And while previous writers like James and even later writers like Mavis Gallant often use the Left Bank to symbolize the dangers of sex and assimilation for visiting North Americans, for both Hemingway and Baldwin sex and assimilation are already a fact, and yet their Left Bank is no less sinister than in *The Ambassadors* or “Babylon Revisited,” and their Right no less blandly luxurious. The goal for Hemingway and Baldwin’s protagonists is less the avoidance of corruption and assimilation, but an attempt to find someone from the Left Bank to take home to the Right—not the search for pleasure, but for domesticity—to take a piece of the foreign and to bring it within a safe, modern sphere. Jake, thwarted in his attempts, meets Brett on the Left Bank and though they set a meeting for the Hôtel de Crillon the next day, she doesn’t show up. In Baldwin, the couple does go to the Right Bank—and their relationship moves beyond the sexual and becomes domestic—but from there the movement veers east to the edge of Paris, into territory as uncharted in previous American literary descriptions of the city as their relationship itself.
A clear overreaching view of the city is absent from both novels, and conspicuously so compared to earlier literary descriptions of the city. Unlike James’s Paris, which “lies spread before” Longmore in James’s early short story “Madame de Mauves,” “in dusky vastness, domed and fortified, glittering here and there through her light vapors, and girdled with her silver Seine” (211), like a prostrate woman ready-made for puritan Americans to project their own sexuality onto, or Zola’s Paris, viewed from the hill of Belleville, a vast commercial enterprise onto which a provincial Frenchman might project his own fantastic mercantile glory, Baldwin and Hemingway are both reluctant to grant the reader the grand view of the city common to so many novels set there. They are instead more likely to give them views from the boulevards or the riverbanks, when a view is not totally limited to underground, tunnel-like clubs, “box[es] to sweat in” (Hemingway 2004, 6).

The first panoramic description of an urban view in The Sun Also Rises comes near the end of the book: “I looked around at the bay, the old town, the casino, the line of trees along the promenade, and the big hotels with their white porches and gold-lettered names. Off on the right, almost closing the harbour, was a green hill with a castle” (208). This description comes as Barnes lies on a wooden raft to which he has swum from the shore of San Sebastian. More limited views of urban space come almost as often as Hemingway’s characters stand or move over water, and scenes that take place overlooking the Seine tend to be especially symbolically significant for the novel, while at the same time removed from the main plot—symbolic breathing spaces, at it were, where nothing happens to advance the plot directly, but subtexts of the plot are underlined or mirrored. Hemingway’s narrator rarely misses a chance to describe or mention crossing the Seine. “Crossing the Seine I saw a string of barges being towed empty down the current,” says Barnes early on in the novel, “Riding high, the bargemen at the sweeps as they came toward the bridge. The river looked nice. It was always pleasant crossing bridges in Paris” (36). Kennedy has noted the symbolism of the barges, calling attention mainly to their significant emptiness (99). One might go on to note the position of the bargemen “at the sweeps”—part of the machinery of the boats, but also suggesting “sweep,” a circular course or line, mimicking Barnes’s repeated circling through the city in search of Brett.

The two other most notable mentions of bridge crossings in the novel have important literary links not only with similar crossings in Giovanni’s Room, but also with their literary precursors. Kennedy supposes that Jake and Georgette, in the famous preamble to the introduction of Brett
to the novel, pass over the Pont du Carrousel (again, a fitting name to an entrance to Jake’s circular movements). It seems as likely, though, coming in a straight trajectory across the Tuileries from the rue des Pyramides, that they cross the Pont Royal, the same bridge Strether crosses to get to Mme. de Vionnet’s. The switch between two worlds on the crossing of the bridge, in either case, is clear. On the Right Bank, Jake sits at an outdoor terrace and watches the people passing on the street, notes the New York Herald office windows, showing the hour all over America on the Right Bank, and makes a long passage past rows of locked storefronts, passing through the boulevards of the Right Bank as an outsider, but once on the Left immediately moves inside, first to a restaurant, then to its inner room where writers congregate.

In Giovanni’s Room, this movement from being an outsider to finding an interior space is marked by movement across a bridge in the opposite direction, from the Left Bank, where David has been turned out of his room, to the Right, where he finds new lodgings, crossing the bridge not at sunset, as in Hemingway’s novel, but at sunrise, and not with Georgette but with Giovanni. Both bridge crossings mark the first signs of sexual tension in each novel—as Georgette famously touches Jake in the cab, and as Giovanni and David are jostled together in theirs, coming into physical contact for the first time as Giovanni takes David’s hand. Both couples are on their way to eat—Jake to dinner, and David to breakfast. A series of opposites here seems joined around a central theme of sexual encounter and displacement into the foreign.

A second highly symbolic scene involving crossing the Seine comes in Hemingway’s novel as Jake and Bill return from eating on the Île de la Cité. Standing on a footbridge, Jake notes the black, silent water, and the façade of Notre Dame, described, as in Giovanni’s Room, as weighty and dark. Their original crossing of the bridge from the Left Bank leads them to a restaurant crowded with American “compatriots,” a slight hint at the same theme of Right Bank as a stand-in for the United States, and the Left as France, with the river as a metaphor for the Atlantic.

The Seine was certainly already established even in early stories by Washington Irving as a metaphor for the Atlantic. James repeated this theme, and it was taken up as well by Fitzgerald, and finds echoes even among writers as contemporary as Mavis Gallant, Diane Johnson, Luanne Rice, and Jesse Lee Kercheval. Expatriates, naturally, need some local metaphor for home in the very landscape that removes them from home, and the Seine works not only as a metaphor for the Atlantic, but also for the divide of sexual, erotic, and cultural boundaries—namely, between the
bourgeois and the exotic and perverse. Bridges, time and again in American literature describing Paris, work as metaphorical bridges of this divide, as means to stand above the water and what it represents without being submerged. To stand on a bridge is to share the geographic position of a natural force pushing toward the sea, to stand in the same space as this force, but removed from it above, an observer—not of the water, but reflected in the water, the reflection and the bridge itself together forming a circle—standing still above the current, protected and outside, untouched by its flow while, reflected, forming a coherent unit with its reflection. Bridges in Paris at this time had arches, which made crossing them an uphill then downhill affair, though by the time Baldwin was writing, the city of Paris began lowering the humps of the bridges to smooth car traffic. Hemingway’s Jake uses bridges to observe the city, but while he crosses over them, Baldwin’s David and Giovanni spend more time going under the bridges of Paris as they walk along the river’s quays. Only Giovanni, finally, puts himself on the level of the river itself, hiding out in one of the same “empty barges” Jake notes on the Seine, before being carried away toward death, if not by his own nature, then by the corruption of the city itself.

Meanwhile, both for Hemingway and for Baldwin, this river at the center of the city, while dividing it, is described as a place not quite of the city, but almost outside it. In Giovanni’s Room, crossing the river, or following it (which, in the novel, invariably means going upstream—getting closer to the water’s source, but also going against the current) are essential in much of the story’s movement as Giovanni and David are repeatedly described as trekking along its bank from the center of the city to the room “almost not in Paris.” Baldwin’s Seine is dirty, yellow, and swollen, a place where men fish but catch nothing, a place where the homeless find a place to sleep, and also a place where the changes of the seasons are most evident. David finds a place to live with Giovanni on the north side of the bridge they cross together, then stays with Hella on the other side after crossing it again (with an increasing frequency of reference to the Seine just prior to Hella’s return to the city and his move to her hotel—perhaps most significantly while he is re-experimenting with his heterosexuality with another American). Finally, as if to seal and solidify his relationship with Hella, the couple moves significantly further south of the river, to the coast of France.

Hemingway’s story opens with a crossing to the Left Bank from the Right. Baldwin’s begins with a crossing to the Right. For Baldwin, the Right Bank is the location of a domestic homosexual partnership as
opposed to the homosexual or heterosexual polygamy of the Left Bank—but also the center of connection to David’s father, the repressed love object, whose only contact with David is through the American Express office there. Hella sends him mail there too, but it is her letter—and notably not his father’s (which is read as he watches a sailor cross the street)—that sends him to the Left Bank, first to reread her letter, then to find a woman.

Other indications of Baldwin’s inversion of Hemingway’s story movements include both writers’ references to the Boulevard Raspail. Barnes enters it going toward Montparnasse from the Right Bank, and notes the discomfort it causes him: “The Boulevard Raspail always made dull riding. . . . There are other streets in Paris as ugly as the Boulevard Raspail. It is a street I do not mind walking down at all. But I cannot stand to ride along it” (Hemingway 2004, 36). Paradoxically, Barnes’s route from the very night before, returning to Montparnasse from the southeast, takes him along this same boulevard in the opposite direction, this time with Brett on their return from a gay nightclub. David, meanwhile, also using the boulevard as a means to reaching Montparnasse from the Right Bank, feels “elated” (Baldwin 1990, 91) as he goes down it. But for both, this same route leads away from both the “phantom America” of the Right Bank, and from homosexuality, to the neighborhood which is the nexus of their unfulfilling relationships with Anglo women.

The gay nightclub is another space common to both novels—Hemingway’s near the Pantheon (Kennedy 1993, 104–6), at the far eastern side of the Paris his novel inscribes, and Baldwin’s in St. Germain-des-Prés, north of Montparnasse, but still south of Giovanni’s apartment. Kennedy has noted the rather virulently homophobic sections of the original draft of The Sun Also Rises, removed before publication, yet even what remains in the final version of Barnes’s overt revulsion to gay night life in Paris indicates his discomfort, and is eerily echoed in the opening sections of Giovanni’s Room through David.

Below is the conversation between Jake Barnes and the writer Robert Prentiss, the only conversation with a homosexual Jake engages in, in the gay “dancing-club” of the rue de la Montagne Ste Geneviève:

I asked him to have a drink.

“Thanks so much,” he said, “I’ve just had one.”

“Have another.”

“Thanks, I will then.”
“You’re from Kansas City, they tell me,” he said.
“Yes.”
“Do you find Paris amusing?”
“Yes.”
“Really?”
I was a little drunk. Not drunk in any positive sense but just enough to be careless.
“For God’s sake,” I said, “yes. Don’t you?”
“Oh, how charmingly you get angry,” he said. “I wish I had that capacity.” (18)

Baldwin’s David also starts his conversation with the homosexual barman Giovanni by offering him a drink, making conversation about his hometown, then about Paris, and also ends with his partner amused at the anger that arises at his questioning of Paris’s qualities:

“I think you offered me a drink,” he said.
“Yes,” I said. “I offered you a drink.”

“You are an American?” he asked at last.
“Yes,” I said. “From New York.”
“Ah! I am told that New York is very beautiful. Is it more beautiful than Paris?”
“Oh, no,” I said, “no city is more beautiful than Paris—”
“It seems the very suggestion that one could be is enough to make you very angry,” grinned Giovanni. (35)

While both narrators become easily angered in their conversations defending Paris, prior to this both also confide their understanding that a tolerance toward homosexuality is called for in Paris. “Somehow they always made me angry,” explains Jake. “I know they are supposed to be amusing and you should be tolerant, but I wanted to swing on one, anyone, anything” (16). Meanwhile, David’s is “a tolerance which placed me, I believe, above suspicion” (26), his tolerance itself a shield to protect him from others’ questioning of his sexual identity. When this tolerance wears thin, however, on his first narrated visit to a gay nightclub, David too struggles with his anger, but manages to overcome it: “It seemed impossible to hit him, it seemed impossible to get angry” (42). And yet the urge arises again: “I wanted to do something to his cheerful, hideous, worldly
face which would make it impossible for him ever again to smile at anyone the way he was smiling at me” (43). Both narrators also describe the physical symptoms of their revulsion to the homosexuals they meet in terms of nausea, Jake’s “I just thought perhaps I was going to throw up. . . . This whole show makes me sick” (18) being more understated than David’s “I confess that his utter grotesqueness made me uneasy; perhaps in the same way that the sight of monkeys eating their own excrement turns some people’s stomachs. They might not mind so much if monkeys did not—so grotesquely—resemble human beings” (30).

With two American narrators, one a repressed homosexual who becomes unrepressed in Paris, the other a heterosexual partially modeled on a lesbian as Kenneth Lynn would have it (Lynn 1987, 324), both given to homophobic posturing, with striking similarities between their conversations and the same sore points and symptoms of disgust, one wonders if Baldwin doesn’t ironically mimic Hemingway’s own (repressive) repugnance in his character David, and if the similarities between the narrators’ conversations, feelings, and revulsions isn’t Baldwin’s mockery of the disgust in which Hemingway indulged.

While for Hemingway, the recrossing to the Right Bank leads Jake to an exclusively male (if not overtly homoerotic) world, David’s Right Bank is likewise an exclusively male center—we never see Hella here. And while David moves across the bridge to the Right Bank after meeting Giovanni, Baldwin also uses the East as a locus of homosexual life—but this time domestic. Moving east for David means engaging in an adult, domestic, homosexual relationship. Both David and Jake live farther east than most of the action in the story, with Jake’s apartment sitting just where the projecting phallus-shaped park of the Avenue de l’Observatoire, coming out of the Luxembourg Gardens (a recurrent symbol of childhood innocence in American literature), is cut off midway on its stretch toward the Observatoire by the Boulevard Montparnasse.

Certainly Hemingway’s work gave Baldwin the freedom to leave out much description Hemingway felt obliged to give his unfamiliar American readers. Was some of Baldwin’s liberty in writing about homosexual characters achieved thanks to Hemingway’s earlier derisive description of homosexual characters? Certainly he played on the literary history of a Paris, carried down to him from James and Hemingway, where relationships with women, for whatever reasons, don’t work out, or men are, for whatever reason, impotent with women. While Hemingway avoided discussing any latent homosexuality in his characters by displacing this interest onto voyeuristic heterosexual polygamy, Baldwin perhaps used
homosexuality as a means to avoid discussing race. But both these personal issues that came out of their initial projections onto the Parisian landscape were in real life major issues that would shape who the two writers were to become.

Aside from their symbolic place names, fate-changing, panoramically described bridge crossings, and their east-west allotting of the loci of the city, a final parallel in the two novels might be found in the movement south out of Paris, and when specifically it takes place in the plots. For Hemingway’s characters, the move out of the city takes place in high summer. For Baldwin’s it comes at the onset of winter. David and Hella depart for the Mediterranean coast as soon as money comes from David’s father, while Brett Ashley and Mike Campbell wait to join their friends in Spain until Mike receives money from Scotland. In both stories, the female protagonist has already traveled south alone in an occluded scene prior to the narrator’s departure with her. Brett writes to Jake from San Sebastian, and Hella writes to David from Spain and Mallorca, on which her comments on aging English women drinking and chasing eighteen-year-old men casts a curious reflection back on the older, alcoholic Brett’s pursuit of a nineteen-year-old bullfighter in Spain.

Why are the final and perhaps main dramas of novels so avid to describe Paris enacted outside of the city? And is the action that takes place outside Paris really so different from what happens inside? In reality, the same scenarios are being played out outside the city as well as within, as Hemingway’s characters, even when they leave Paris, “carry along with them the neuroses of Montparnasse” (Baker 1952, 85). Why, from a dramaturgical standpoint, enact the same scenarios, once within, then again outside the city? Perhaps what was first projected by the protagonists onto the landscape has at last become accepted as internal, identified with, and must re-express itself now as the self.

Both stories ultimately end with male betrayals of a male European’s love, David’s betrayal of his relationship with Giovanni, and Jake’s betrayal of his and Montoya’s shared passion for bullfighting and bullfighters. Both betray a passion shared with a European man for an impossible relationship with an Anglo woman that held no real hope and was ill-fated from the start, symbolic perhaps of both writers’ conflicted relationships with “Mother America,” much like Strether’s relationship with Chad’s mother.

Once removed from the city in the south, the final movements of both protagonists read again like name-dropped lists made up by avid tourists planning excursions: for David, from Nice east to Monte Carlo, farther
west again to Cannes, then east again to Antibes. The conclusion of Jake’s narrative includes an illogical route from Pamplona, north to Bayonne, west to Biarritz, south to St. Jean de Luz, northwest again to Bayonne, and southwest again to San Sebastian, before he heads farther southwest to Madrid. Hemingway’s citation of Ecclesiastes as a prologue to the novel is apt enough to describe the movements of its ending: “The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits . . . all the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.” David, as the wind blows the bits of a torn telegram back on him, returns to Paris. Another telegram, meanwhile, keeps Jake from calmly returning northeast to Paris, and keeps him also from enjoying the calm of San Sebastian (curiously, the unofficial patron saint of homosexuals) to continue his endless, impotent, circular relationship with a woman. David, meanwhile, seems at least to have escaped this circle; he sends his woman packing and back across the ocean, and heads toward Paris.

At the end of the novel, David, in a scene remarkably similar to Hemingway’s description of Jake before his bedroom mirror, also examines himself naked in a mirror. Yet David does more than mourn his loss. Instead he wonders how his “troubling sex . . . can be redeemed, how [he] can save it from the knife” (158). For Jake, rejection of the woman and saving his sex from the knife is already too late. As Leonard Lutwack writes, “The circular journey, consisting of a trip out to a number of places and a return to the starting place, suggests a closed universe of limited possibilities. The linear journey, on the other hand, originates in the hope that some foreign place harbors a truth that the familiar home place cannot supply” (60). The sun sets on David, alone in his room, watching his own reflection in the window. But as he leaves the great house in the south of France to catch a train for Paris, it rises.

Baldwin, using Hemingway’s map of Paris, reversed it to mark the “opposite” tale of an “opposite” sexuality. But he also added what could be considered an African American Renaissance twist—the social message. Not the message Richard Wright or other black compatriots would have had him write—but a more daring message that would not find its audience in a social movement for another twenty years. As the sun rises outside David’s room, the “countryside reflected through my image in the pane” (10), having taken on his own form and features, changes back once again from a mirror to a landscape as he prepares to walk out into it, transformed, and finally able to accept his transformation, headed for
Paris to begin the rest of his life. “It was always Paris and you changed as it changed,” Hemingway would write in the memoir he published eight years later (Hemingway 1964, 208–9). He might as easily have written, “You were always yourself—and Paris changed as you did.”

**Notes**

1. Examples of the Luxembourg Gardens as a place of childhood and innocence proliferate throughout expatriate literature, from James to Jean Rhys, and reappear frequently in contemporary literary depictions of the city.

2. The Boulevard de Grenelle, meanwhile, farther west, is near the Pont de Grenelle, where a bronze scale model of Bartholdi’s Statue of Liberty stands facing west (originally placed facing east, this was corrected for the international exposition of 1937). The bridge was rebuilt in 1968.

3. The bridge is perhaps most famous historically for its use in a nautical festival celebrating the marriage of Élisabeth of France and the Infante Philip of Spain.

**Works Cited**


