

ESSAY

# *Chagrin d'amour*: Intimacy, Shame, and the Closet in James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*

Monica B. Pearl University of Manchester

## Abstract

This essay's close interrogation of James Baldwin's 1956 novel *Giovanni's Room* allows us to see one aspect of how sexual shame functions: it shows how shame exposes anxiety not only about the feminizing force of homosexuality, but about how being the object of the gaze is feminizing—and therefore shameful. It also shows that the paradigm of the closet is not the metaphor of privacy and enclosure on one hand and openness and liberation on the other that it is commonly thought to be, but instead is a site of illusory control over whether one is available to be seen and therefore humiliated by being feminized. Further, the essay reveals the paradox of denial, where one must first know the thing that is at the same time being disavowed or denied. The narrative requirements of fictions such as *Giovanni's Room* demonstrate this, as it requires that the narrator both know, in order to narrate, and not know something at the same time.

**Keywords:** Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Silvan Tompkins, queer literature, gay literature, effeminacy, masculinity, Freud

James Baldwin's novel *Giovanni's Room*, published in 1956, is in American letters an unusually early, frank, fictional depiction of homosexuality between men. Its frankness does not, however, mitigate how riven it is with shame. Disgust and shame are its principal attitudes toward the homosexuality that gives the novel its plot. Judith Butler tells us that the term "queer" "has operated as one linguistic practice whose purpose has been the shaming of the subject it names or, rather, the producing of a subject *through* the shaming interpellation."<sup>1</sup> "Queer" is not the epithet in operation in *Giovanni's Room*; however, the risk of being seen to be queer—in the landscape of this book it is effeminacy that is at stake, and the term used to interpellate that effeminacy is "fairy"—is anathema. One can avoid it through vigilance and denial, a paradox of exigencies. The novel describes and

enacts a crucial and disturbing lesson about what might feel and look like paradoxical intertwined connections between desire and shame. While this seems especially applicable to homosexuals, and even more so to homosexuals in the United States and Europe in the 1950s, in fact this is a collocation, this essay argues, that is operative for everyone.

If shame is an anxiety over “visibility and spectacle,” as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick suggests, or, as Silvan Tomkins puts it, an “ambivalence about looking and being looked at,” then the antidote to shame is control over how and whether one is seen.<sup>2</sup> It is a practice that David, the novel’s protagonist and narrator, deploys in his attempts to convince himself of his heterosexuality: he confirms that there are queers who are a far worse kind of queer than he might be; indeed, in his thinking, maybe the only kind. If other men—the “fairies”—are *really* queer, this thinking goes, then he cannot be. He despises them and describes them—effeminate men who cannot hide or disguise, or resist, their desire for men—with utter disgust and dismissiveness. For example, Guillaume, the owner of the bar where Giovanni works, is referred to many times as “such a disgusting old fairy,” and the conclusion is that “he should be ashamed.”<sup>3</sup>

*Giovanni’s Room* begins at its denouement. David has escaped to a house in the South of France to avoid, but also to wait out, the execution of his erstwhile lover, Giovanni, in Paris. He is extremely unhappy, enduring a terrible night, “a drink in my hand ... a bottle at my elbow,” anticipating “the most terrible morning of my life.”<sup>4</sup> In his dark night of the soul, David admits to himself that he treats people “lightly” and that he is “too various to be trusted”: “If this were not so I would not be alone in this house tonight. Hella would not be on the high seas. And Giovanni would not be about to perish, sometime between this night and this morning, on the guillotine.”<sup>5</sup> Hella is his fiancée and one of the women to whom David attaches himself as one way to persuade himself that he wants women, not men; his rationale for becoming engaged to Hella is that he “thought she would be fun to have fun with ... that was all it meant to me.”<sup>6</sup>

Upon receiving a letter that informs him that Hella is coming back to Paris from Spain—where she has gone to decide if she wants to marry David—he is desperate to confirm his sexual preference for women, as he has been living for a long time in her absence with Giovanni. He “felt elated,” he narrates, “yet, as I walked down Raspail toward the cafes of Montparnasse, I could not fail to remember that Hella and I had walked here, Giovanni and I had walked here.”<sup>7</sup> And although it seems for a moment that he might be equally torn between Hella and Giovanni in his reflections and affection, “with each step, the face that glowed insistently before me was not her face, but his.”<sup>8</sup> Suddenly, he thinks, “I wanted to find a girl, any girl at all.”<sup>9</sup> Many have suggested that *Giovanni’s Room* is a portrait of bisexuality because David is sexually involved with both men and women, but David’s sex with women is always desperate, and always a way of disavowing his desire for men. Upon Hella’s return from Spain, David describes their physical intimacy in this way: “I kept kissing her and holding her, trying to find my way in her again, as though she were a familiar, darkened room in which I fumbled to find the light ... I hoped to burn out, through Hella, my image of Giovanni and the reality of his touch.”<sup>10</sup>

In this search for “any girl at all” David encounters a former acquaintance, Sue, who immediately becomes his target for conquest. With her he experiences what is thematic in the novel: ambivalence—an ambivalence that is evident not only in the content of his thoughts but in the syntax of his expression. He encounters Sue and recognizes her desirability—she has “the quality ... of the girls who are selected each year to be Miss Rheingold”—yet “she was not pretty.”<sup>11</sup> He is “both dismayed and relieved to see her.”<sup>12</sup> Here we have in the prose a concomitant to the ambivalence conveyed in the novel, and this is something that is already a mark of Baldwin’s style: a capacity to contain multitudes within accounts of feelings—that no feeling or affect is ever one thing, it contains gradations and it also often contains the paradox of opposites. These paradoxes and contradictions are the template for the core contradiction in the novel: David’s denial and desire—he wants Giovanni, and other men, but cannot bear the implications of his desires, and so he must quash them, often syntactically, of which more below. This creates an impossible amalgamation: that he must know and feel something at the same time that he must deny it, and therefore not know it and not feel it.

With Sue, David denies his relationship with Giovanni. “No,” he replies to Sue’s question about his living arrangements, he does not live alone in “the maid’s room ... very cheap ... out at the end of Paris, near the zoo”; he does not even mention Giovanni by name, but describes “this French kid I know, he lives with his mistress, but they fight a lot and it’s really *his* room so sometimes, when his mistress throws him out, he bunks with me for a couple of days.”<sup>13</sup> It seems he is able to get Sue to express the very heartbreak he is experiencing in forcing himself to flee from Giovanni, but transposed onto this fabricated couple—Giovanni and an invented mistress—when she sighs in response “Ah! ... *Chagrin d’amour!*”<sup>14</sup> This is a small example of something David does in a larger sense elsewhere in the novel with men; that is, he projects onto them his own anxieties and feelings so that they are enacting a noxious affect in order that he then does not have to. He knows that by seducing Sue to rid himself of thoughts of Giovanni and reinstate his heterosexuality, he “was doing something very cruel”;<sup>15</sup> and in fact he cannot banish thoughts of Giovanni: every single moment with Sue makes him think of him. The waiter’s surly subservience: “I thought of Giovanni and of how many times in an evening the phrase, *Oui monsieur* fell from his lips.”<sup>16</sup> And even when he “tried not to think,” he nevertheless attempts to make a moral bargain that exalts his homosexual desire over this debased enactment of heterosexual performance; he compares what he is doing with Sue with what he has done with Giovanni: “I was thinking that what I did with Giovanni could not possibly be more immoral than what I was about to do with Sue.”<sup>17</sup>

With a woman—a woman he is with for the most instrumental of purposes: “I ... approached Sue as if she were a job of work”—he has compassion for Giovanni, and, also, a recollection of their intimacy: “With this fleeting thought there came another, equally fleeting: a new sense of Giovanni, his private life and pain, and all that moved like a flood in him when we lay together at night.”<sup>18</sup> He attempts to fabricate intimacy with Sue, but as soon as he is back in her room, and takes her in

his arms, he thinks of Giovanni “for some reason”: “For some reason I was terribly aware that it was after seven in the evening, that soon the sun would have disappeared from the river, that all the Paris night was about to begin, and that Giovanni was now at work.”<sup>19</sup> During sex with Sue he has further oppositional thoughts, this time on a theme that is among the main preoccupations of the novel: inside/outside, entrapment/freedom; in worrying over whether Sue has “done anything to prevent herself from becoming pregnant,” he is able to see the irony of his “being trapped in that way—in the very act ... of trying to escape.”<sup>20</sup> He is enacting here the persistent syntactical viscera of the novel, his knowing exactly what he is doing even while he is pursuing his denial of it. His “realizations” are constant: “I realized that I was doing something awful to her”; “I realized that my fears had been excessive and groundless and, in effect, a lie: it had nothing to do with my body. Sue was not Hella and she did not lessen my terror of what would happen when Hella came.”<sup>21</sup> “At the same time,” his narration continues, “I realized that my performance with Sue was succeeding even too well.”<sup>22</sup> The novel is full of this kind of simultaneous knowing and not knowing. David’s assignation with Sue is successful insofar as he accomplishes the task of engaging in a heterosexual union despite his longing for Giovanni; it also is meant to underwrite his masculinity in an equation that the narrative cannot let go of.

It is not a peculiarity of Baldwin’s or of his protagonist to equate masculinity, or—in the parlance of the novel—manliness, with heterosexuality, and therefore femininity with homosexuality. This was a conception of the 1950s and one that persists—that homosexuality is a failure of masculinity and is evidenced in acute effeminacy.<sup>23</sup> The novel makes these delineations, and the attendant disgust with any failure of masculinity, very clear. When David first walks to Montparnasse looking for female company, he rejects “a couple of girls,” who he decides are “French whores,” who anyway “were not very attractive”; he tells himself, vehemently, “I could do better than *that*.”<sup>24</sup> His syntax here is identical to when he reveals his disdain for gay men, with its final pronoun spat out. Of the effeminate homosexuals he encounters in the bar where he is about to meet and fall in love with Giovanni, David thinks: “I always found it difficult to believe that they ever went to bed with anybody for a man who wanted a woman would certainly have rather had a real one and a man who wanted a man would certainly not want one of *them*.”<sup>25</sup>

Though this misogynist dismissal is not exceptional in Baldwin’s books, here it takes the form of disgust for men who are too much like women: this is the substance of David’s loathing. It is not enough to refer to them derogatorily as women—and as mad women: *les folles*—but he further compares them to animals: “There were, of course, *les folles*, always dressed in the most improbable combinations, screaming like parrots the details of their latest love-affairs” and “they looked like a peacock garden and sounded like a barnyard.”<sup>26</sup> David’s language exposes the extremity of his horror when the equation of effeminate men with animals takes this turn to “utter grotesqueness”; of a young man “who came out at night wearing makeup and earrings and with his heavy blond hair piled high” and who “sometimes ... actually wore a skirt and high heels,” David remarks: “People

said he was very nice but 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."<sup>27</sup> The misogyny here is not incidental, for it is precisely the effeminacy of homosexuality that so disgusts him.

David's concern about his "manhood" first arises the morning after a sexual encounter with his boyhood friend Joey. "I was suddenly afraid," he recalls. "The power and the promise and the mystery of that body made me suddenly afraid," he repeats. He and Joey have sex after they kiss "as it were, by accident," a night of—in the paradoxical way that is the undercurrent of the novel—"astounding intolerable pain" out of which "came joy."<sup>28</sup> It is worth quoting the whole passage of his post-coital terror, for the repetitions—the refrain of being "suddenly afraid," for example, is stated three times—are telling:

I was suddenly afraid. Perhaps it was because he looked so innocent lying there, with such perfect trust; perhaps it was because he was so much smaller than me; my own body suddenly seemed gross and crushing and the desire which was rising in me seemed monstrous. But, above all, I was suddenly afraid. It was borne in on me: *But Joey is a boy*, I saw suddenly the power in his thighs, in his arms, and in his loosely curled fists. The power and the promise and the mystery of that body made me suddenly afraid. That body suddenly seemed the black opening of a cavern in which I would be tortured till madness came, in which I would lose my manhood.<sup>29</sup>

Slightly later in the novel we learn of some of the circumstances of his childhood which we might understand as the basis of these terrible anxieties about masculinity. For example, David overhears an argument his father has with his aunt, with whom he is raising David following the death of David's mother. David's aunt accuses his father of dereliction: "Do you really think it's a good idea for David to see you staggering home drunk all the time? And don't fool yourself ... that he doesn't know where you're coming from, don't think he doesn't know about your women!"<sup>30</sup> To which David's father replies: "all I want is for David is that he grow up to be a man. And when I say a man, Ellen, I don't mean a Sunday school teacher."<sup>31</sup>

So by the time David is measuring his heterosexuality not only against his own masculinity but against the imputed effeminacy of homosexuals, we are well mired in complicated notions of manhood: all that being a white man at a certain moment in American history includes, and the weight it has to carry. Late in the novel, when David's father is writing letters to David exhorting him to return home, we discover that his nickname for David is "Butch": "*Dear Butch*," my father said, "*aren't you ever coming home?*"<sup>32</sup> We see the efforts of interpellation at work here: be the name I call you. In fact, the question he imagines his father is not asking is "*Is it a woman, David? Bring her on home. I don't care who she is. Bring her on home and I'll help you get set up.*"<sup>33</sup> David believes his father "could not risk the question because he could not have endured the answer in the negative."<sup>34</sup>

In the paragraph after the astonishment or disgust he imagines his father might feel if he knew that the reason David stayed in Paris was the "negative" of a woman,

he cruises a sailor—and admires his masculinity: “I was staring at him ... he wore his masculinity as unequivocally as he wore his skin.”<sup>35</sup> Even Jacques, the friend who first introduces David to Giovanni—though inadvertently, as he is trying to get David, and subsequently Giovanni, for himself—recognizes that it is the presentation of masculinity that is at issue for David: “I am not suggesting that you jeopardize, even for a moment, that’—he paused—‘*immaculate* manhood which is your pride and joy.”<sup>36</sup> David’s ultimate fantasy of “light and safety” is one in which his “manhood [is] unquestioned.”<sup>37</sup>

This arduous effort of scaffolding his masculinity is built on the foundation of disavowing his homosexuality. This in turn is built on vilifying femininity in men—of doing to other men precisely what the sailor in this scene is doing to David: “We came abreast and ... he gave me a look contemptuously lewd and knowing; just such a look as he might have given to [a] nymphomaniac or trollop who was trying to make him believe she was a lady.”<sup>38</sup> David feels his “face flame” and worriedly wonders “what he had seen in me to elicit such instantaneous contempt,” imagining it had something to do with his “walk or the way I held my hands,” or, even though “he had not heard” it, “my voice.”<sup>39</sup> And while his worrying suggests that he does not know why the sailor is looking at him with contempt, he also “knew that what the sailor had seen in my unguarded eyes was envy and desire.”<sup>40</sup> His worst worry—that he is the effeminate, desiring man—is realized here in this complicated amalgam of his desire for the sailor and the contempt for his femininity he imagines the sailor must therefore have for him.

It is, of course, paradoxical that David not only refuses his homosexuality through disgust with homosexuals—those he designates far further gone than himself—but that he also knows he is doing it. He recognizes the parallel of what he sees in Jacques and what the sailor has seen in him: “my reaction [to Jacques] and the sailor’s had been the same.”<sup>41</sup> In the most profound scorn that he can express, his contempt for homosexuals is that they are not men, not real men, not manly enough. What he envies in the sailor is his masculinity, at least partially evinced by the sailor’s projected contempt for David.

Paradox is a signal theme and feature of *Giovanni’s Room*. Often it takes the form of denial. Exhaustively, David tries to hide and deny his homosexuality from others and from himself. As a young man, this takes the form of whistling at girls who he knows do not believe him or believe in his interest in them. In a youthful prefiguring of his adult assignation with Sue:

I think we had been lying around the beach, swimming a little and watching the near-naked girls pass, whistling at them, and laughing. I am sure that if any of the girls we whistled at that day had shown any signs of responding the ocean would not have been deep enough to drown our shame and terror.<sup>42</sup>

It is at this point in the novel that David recollects his youthful affair with his best friend, Joey, one night of “[g]reat thirsty heat, and trembling, and tenderness so painful I thought my heart would burst.”<sup>43</sup> And although it “seemed, then, that a

lifetime would not be long enough for me to act with Joey the act of love ... that lifetime was short.”<sup>44</sup> Immediately David commences the distancing that he is invested in believing will protect him from “proof of some horrifying taint in me.”<sup>45</sup> In the morning, “the sweat on my back grew cold. I was ashamed. The very bed, in its sweet disorder, testified to vileness.”<sup>46</sup> This recollection comes early in the novel and exposes already the paradox, contradiction, and shame that are thematic; and it is tied to his lament for the loss of Giovanni: “I began, perhaps, to be lonely that summer and began, that summer, the flight which has brought me to this darkening window,” where he waits out Giovanni’s execution.<sup>47</sup>

Although one way to disavow homosexuality as an identity or predilection is to foreclose the wider wish to sleep with men by deciding that it is just this one man whom one wants—David has fallen for Giovanni but does not care for men generally—David nevertheless reveals the ways that his desire is wider and more indiscriminate than that, and always more than he feels comfortable with. He discloses that he does not admit to Giovanni that he has been with men before—and to us, the reader, he confides the story of only one, Joey—but he nevertheless cryptically reveals several other moments of desire. One is an actual sexual encounter when he was in the army “which involved a fairy who was later court-martialed out.”<sup>48</sup> As is his desperate wont, it is the other who is the fairy and the other who is punished.

Yet he admits that being with Giovanni was not about wanting only Giovanni: “Giovanni had awakened an itch, had released a gnaw in me.”<sup>49</sup> In this regard there are two revealing moments of happiness in the novel, and both are stories of walking in the open air with the man who is his lover. Both are quashed almost as soon as they are indulged. He narrates a story of pleasure with Giovanni, of openness, guilelessness, and happiness:

I realized it one afternoon, when I was taking him to work via the boulevard Montparnasse. We had bought a kilo of cherries and we were eating them as we walked along. We were both insufferably childish and high-spirited that afternoon and the spectacle we presented, two grown men, jostling each other on the wide sidewalk, and aiming the cherry-pips, as though they were spitballs, into each other’s faces, must have been outrageous. And I realized that such childishness was fantastic at my age and the happiness out of which it sprang yet more so; for that moment I really loved Giovanni, who had never seemed more beautiful than he was that afternoon. And, watching his face, I realized that it meant much to me that I could make his face so bright. I saw that I might be willing to give a great deal not to lose that power. And I felt myself flow toward him, as a river rushes when the ice breaks up.<sup>50</sup>

David indulges an uncharacteristic ebullience in this passage, yet it marks a rupture: the intimacy he and Giovanni share in the confines of their room has now leaked out onto the street. It recalls a nearly identical moment with Joey, the easy camaraderie and intimacy of walking down the street together: “We were walking along and Joey was making dirty wisecracks and we were laughing. Odd to remember, for the first time in so long, how good I felt that night, how fond of Joey.”<sup>51</sup>

The aperture created by this openness, however, exposes David's desires not just for the particular other he is walking with, but for men more generally; in the perambulation episode with Giovanni he refers to his homosexuality, to this wide-ranging desire, as a "beast":

Yet, at that very moment, there passed between us on the pavement another boy, a stranger, and I invested him at once with Giovanni's beauty and what I felt for Giovanni I also felt for him. Giovanni saw this and saw my face and it made him laugh the more. I blushed and he kept laughing and then the boulevard, the light, the sound of his laughter turned into a scene from a nightmare. I kept looking at the trees, the light falling through the leaves. I felt sorrow and shame and panic and great bitterness. At the same time—it was part of my turmoil and also outside it—I felt the muscles of my neck tighten with the effort I was making not to turn my head and watch that boy diminish down the bright avenue. The beast which Giovanni had awakened in me would never go to sleep again; but one day I would not be with Giovanni any more. And would I then, like all the others, find myself turning and following all kinds of boys down God knows what dark avenues, into what dark places?<sup>52</sup>

"The beast" is his homosexuality, for now he is not only delighting in being with Giovanni but he is cruising other boys. Even in the past it was not just the one other: after Joey is abandoned, we learn obliquely that "there were a number of those, all drunken, all sordid."<sup>53</sup> In all these encounters, the other must always be not only the gay one, the fairy, but the one who is punished. Of his encounter in the army, David confesses that the "panic his punishment caused in me was as close as I ever came to facing in myself the terrors I sometimes saw clouding another man's eyes."<sup>54</sup>

This candid moment on the street with Giovanni is threatening because it suggests that David's desire and happiness are not momentary lapses with one man—he likes *men*. And—this is important—he also sees that Giovanni observes this in him. Giovanni notices it and laughs at him: "Giovanni saw this and saw my face and it made him laugh the more."<sup>55</sup> It is the moment of humiliation. David is at his happiest, behaving like a child, and that is when he is helpless: his desires show something true about him that he cannot conceal. For a moment he has stopped being paranoid, stopped being vigilant. And that exposes him. His desire is seen by Giovanni. This is the paradox of intimacy: vulnerability has to be not only known to oneself, but witnessed by another. And one has to live with that person having seen one be vulnerable. The paradox is that this is also the structure of the dynamic of shame.

In his initial encounter with Joey we see that David imagines Joey's body as "the black opening of a cavern."<sup>56</sup> Later on that page, within the same reverie, he again mentions a cavern: "A cavern opened in my mind, black, full of rumor, suggestion, of half-heard, half-forgotten, half-understood stories, full of dirty words."<sup>57</sup> Here is the first instance when David enters a room for its homosexual pleasures and then flees it out of the shame that he experiences there. These rooms are spaces that he continually leaves, only to find—or indeed to construct—others wherever he has



managed to escape to. The routes and the destinations are not thoughtful but desperate. “My flight may, indeed, have begun that summer [of his encounter with Joey]—which does not tell me where to find the germ of the dilemma which resolved itself, that summer, into flight.”<sup>58</sup> And again when he imagines what is in store for him: “I thought I saw my future in that cavern. I was afraid. I could have cried, cried for shame and terror, cried for not understanding how this could have happened to me, how this could have happened *in me*.”<sup>59</sup> Given the themes in this novel of homosexuality and its disavowals, it is easy to think of this cavern as a closet.

In *Giovanni's Room* the closets are both literal enclosures and metaphorical descriptions; they take shape in the world and also in David's own mind: “when one begins to search for the crucial, the definitive moment, the moment which changed all others, one finds oneself pressing, in great pain, through a maze of false signals and abruptly locking doors.”<sup>60</sup> “Of course,” he comments knowingly, “it is somewhere before me, locked in that reflection I am watching in the window as the night comes down outside. It is trapped in the room with me, always has been, and always will be.”<sup>61</sup> Colm Tóibín tells us that the

idea of concealment and disclosure is central to *Giovanni's Room*, as the narrator moves from being or seeming straight to being or seeming homosexual to being or seeming both, all the time both prepared and unprepared to reveal himself or his confusion by a look, a stare, a moment of pure recognition.<sup>62</sup>

*Giovanni's Room* announces its preoccupation with enclosed spaces that we might read as closets from the outset: the “room” of the title. And throughout, the novel is riven with references to small spaces—that room and myriad other enclosures. Giovanni throws this knowledge at David when he exclaims: “the world is full of rooms—big rooms, little rooms, round rooms, square ones, rooms high up, rooms low down—all kinds of rooms!”<sup>63</sup> Even at the very beginning of the novel David anticipates a negotiation over a small space, an enclosure, a compartment on the train: “At each stop, recruits in their baggy brown uniforms and colored hats will open the compartment door to ask *Compleat?*”<sup>64</sup> This is immediately attached to a question of sexuality and David's insufficiently heterosexual enactment of it. He is projecting all of this, imagining himself the next morning after Giovanni's execution on the train back to Paris, when he continues his imagined story: “There will be a girl sitting opposite me who will wonder why I haven't been flirting with her.”<sup>65</sup>

A colloquial term, the closet has come to be understood as the metaphorical space in which one might hide to protect one's secrets, and from which one might step out when one is ready for those secrets to become known. Although the closet and the emergence from it has become a metaphor for many secrets and disclosures, the closet and its apertures are still primarily a homosexual discourse. “Vibrantly resonant as the image of the closet is for many modern oppressions,” Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick tells us, “it is indicative for homophobia in a way it cannot be for other oppressions.”<sup>66</sup> And while the closet is a trope that usually refers to a mechanism for hiding one's privately acknowledged homosexuality from other

people, it does not always work this way. The metaphor allows that one can be in the closet even to oneself.

David often behaves as though he does not know he harbors desires for men. But at the same time he always knows. For example, he lies to Giovanni that he "had never slept with a boy before";<sup>67</sup> about this he comments that the lie emerged out of a wishful conclusion: "I had decided that I never would again."<sup>68</sup> Here is where he shows that he knows he has gone to Europe in order to flee that very knowledge; he knows he has lied, at the same time that he lies, and he knows he has attempted to escape, even though the escape demands that he not know it:

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.<sup>69</sup>

He has fled one closet in order to find another. He says it with precise self-awareness several pages later: "I think now that if I had had any intimation that the self I was going to find would turn out to be only the same self from which I had spent so much time in flight, I would have stayed at home."<sup>70</sup> This is one of the primary paradoxes of the novel: that in order to hide something from oneself one has first to know it. It happens again when David first accompanies Giovanni to his room:

We passed the vestibule and the elevator into a short, dark corridor which led to his room. The room was small ... He locked the door behind us, and then for a moment, in the gloom, we simply stared at each other—with dismay, with relief, and breathing hard. I was trembling. I thought, if I do not open the door at once and get out of here, I am lost. But I knew I could not open the door, I knew it was too late.<sup>71</sup>

The closet is both an obvious and a limited metaphor for what is happening in this novel, not least because it not only suggests but seems to require the possibility of escape and for that escape to equal liberation. As Marlon B. Ross suggests, the metaphor of the closet, particularly in Western white usage, insists on exactly this "evolutionary" logic of "progress."<sup>72</sup> Although *Giovanni's Room* is riven with rooms and dark crevices that can be read as closets, these small quarters and their thresholds offer only more anguish, and not actual control but anxiety over control. The closet is exposed as itself paradoxical, on several levels: it is a putative place in which one can keep secret one's private self, yet it is also a place of utmost pleasure and intimacy; it is the place without which one is not safe. But because it contains pleasure as well as privacy, it can never stay safe, or private, for long.

Both *Giovanni's Room* and the closet have been designated as "raceless," "Baldwin's so-called raceless novel," because, exceptionally for Baldwin, it contains no obviously Black characters, and the closet, as a discursive paradigm, according to Ross and others, does not take race sufficiently into account.<sup>73</sup> It may therefore seem as though, even for Baldwin, homosexuality has to exist outside of the

discourse of race. However, there is reason to read *Giovanni's Room* as nevertheless concerned with race and racial difference, not least in the ways that David's lovers are denoted as "dark." As Kathryn Bond Stockton observes, "Giovanni's darkness (as was Joey's darkness) is also a metaphorical blackness."<sup>74</sup> She notes that in this formulation, with David described from the beginning as blond, in *Giovanni's Room*, "Baldwin shows a white man thinking obsessively about a dark man, from whom he is now strikingly severed."<sup>75</sup>

Further, even though *Giovanni's Room* was only Baldwin's second novel, it is, if not impossible, then a challenge to read anything of Baldwin's as "raceless," given his preeminence as the great spokesperson on matters of race during his lifetime.<sup>76</sup> Finally, even though the closet metaphor suggests "sexual identity as a threshold experience in which one side of the door harbors deprivation and dispossession, while the other side reveals the potential for psychosexual fulfillment, and cultural belonging," that is decidedly not what the closet is doing here in the novel.<sup>77</sup> Here the closet does not present the possibility of, in Ross's words, a "progress narrative," which, he argues, places it into a certain white Western conception of liberation ideology; on the contrary, my argument exposes the closet as not a threshold of liberation after all, but, instead, as a trope that allows for an investment in the illusion of control over how one is known or seen. Here I am reading closets into the enclosures and apertures of the novel as a way of understanding the protagonist's evasion of homosexuality—and therefore his evasion of shame. Because the closet metaphors in this novel, as elsewhere, promise control but never deliver it, these evasions do not work.

In *Giovanni's Room* we see such paradoxes and contradictions not only on the level of plot but on the level also, and even especially, of syntax and structure, and of narration. In this syntactical exertion of control is legible the battle between safety and privacy on the one hand, and indulgence and capitulation to pleasure on the other. For example, David says of Giovanni: "I was guilty and irritated and full of love and pain," and a page later: "I wanted to kick him and I wanted to take him in my arms."<sup>78</sup> Similarly, the following two sentiments are expressed separated only by a semicolon: "His touch could never fail to make me feel desire; yet his hot sweet breath also made me want to vomit."<sup>79</sup> These syntactical parallels—"I wanted . . . I wanted . . ."—convey the paradox of feeling always one thing and its other—in and out, safe and exposed, contained and released—and the control required to convey them as nuanced contradictions.

Baldwin foreshadowed this syntactical paradoxical treatment of homosexuality in an essay published only two years before *Giovanni's Room* in 1954: "The Male Prison," a critique of a book by André Gide—although the original title of the essay, "Gide as Husband and Homosexual," suggests that this is a disquisition not solely on Gide's writing. In this extraordinary essay, Baldwin insists that it is not Gide's homosexuality that causes Baldwin unease, but his *Protestantism*. Yet the very paragraph in which he dismisses Gide's homosexuality as insignificant—really Gide's "own affair"—is filled with admonitory injunctions in the repetition of the reproachful "he ought":

And 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—whatever, in the domain of morals, that word may mean—less illogical, less romantic. He ought to have leaned less heavily on the examples of dead, great men, of vanished cultures, and he ought certainly to have known that the examples provided by natural history do not go far toward illuminating the physical, psychological, and moral complexities faced by men. If he were going to talk about homosexuality at all, he ought, in a word, to have sounded a little less *disturbed*.<sup>80</sup>

The essay ends with a wisdom that eludes David in *Giovanni's Room*: that masculinity itself is a prison. In the essay Baldwin suggests that the “door of hope” for Gide was the possibility, represented by his wife Madeleine, of “entering into communion with another sex”; the real danger for “the unlucky deviate” is “where the possibility of genuine human involvement has altogether ceased,” universalizing, one might even say heterosexualizing, the problem of homosexuality.<sup>81</sup> *Giovanni's Room* also places much hope on the threshold—the *door*—as we have seen and shall see further.

What the novel shows is that the closet is not a simple binary of a safe but captive place, the leaving of which enclosure is liberation—but that the trap of the closet is the tyranny of the door: of ingress and egress. Of knowing where the room is and where one is in relation to it. Of needing to know that one can enter and exit at will, and often doing so for the sake of it—and not for what succor one will find inside or what freedom outside. In *Giovanni's Room* it is suggested early on that David is somehow aware of this:

It was after Joey. The incident with Joey had shaken me profoundly and its effect was to make me secretive and cruel. I could not discuss what had happened to me with anyone. I could not even admit it to myself; and, while I never thought about it, it remained, nevertheless, at the bottom of my mind, as still and as awful as a decomposing corpse. And it changed, it thickened, it soured the atmosphere of my mind.<sup>82</sup>

Here the protagonist who is also the narrator knows something and knows that he cannot admit it to himself. He knows that the encounter with Joey makes him “secretive” and he knows not only that he cannot talk about it, but that he cannot “admit it” even to himself. This is a kind of narrative splitting that allows a character to know what he is suppressing; although this is an epistemological contradiction, it suggests a paradigm of knowing and denying that is perhaps common not only to the dynamics of, especially, first-person literary narration, but also to the very dynamics of what we call denial and therefore sexual shame and humiliation.

David has a method, a mechanism, of a functioning door into and out of the closet. It is not pleasant, it does not make him happy, as control is hardly ever about happiness, but it allows him his homosexual relationships without being homosexual. It is perpetually humiliating but the reward is that he controls the threshold of humiliation. What matters is not that he keep himself from sex with men—though he does tell himself that this is what is at stake—but that in no way should it be said or recognized. He must not be *seen* to have homosexual desires.

And this is the important point about the closet in this book and about homosexuality and femininity: it is not shameful merely to be homosexual or effeminate, but to be seen to be. The closet has always been about what can be seen or hidden or denied. Here it is doing that same work but on the level of the ocular: at least, the ocular as the reigning metaphor. Writing about shame, Silvan Tomkins refers to this “interocular experience.”<sup>83</sup> Shame is private; humiliation is public. Humiliation is the experience of the exposure of one’s shame. Shame itself, however, can feel exposing, can feel visible. In fact, without the fantasy of exposure, shame has no currency. All of our responses to feeling shame, says Tomkins, involve a turning away of the head or lowering of the eyes that has the effect of reducing our exposure: the “shame response is an act which reduces facial communication”; shame produces a need “to cover” the body “from the stare of the other.”<sup>84</sup>

Shame exists in the capacity to imagine that one is available to humiliation: that one’s vulnerabilities can be exposed, seen. There are several examples in the novel, anticipating the carefree stroll in the streets with Giovanni, that suggest David’s acute awareness of the exposure, the visibility, of his shame. When he has sex with Joey, he oedipally imagines the surveillance of Joey’s mother: in bed with Joey, he “was ashamed. The very bed, in its sweet disorder, testified to vileness. I wondered what Joey’s mother would say when she saw the sheets. Then I thought of my father, who had no one in the world but me, my mother having died when I was little.”<sup>85</sup> He then thinks also of his own mother from the grave: “no matter what was happening in that room, my mother was watching it. She looked out of the photograph frame.”<sup>86</sup> Desire is shameful; sex is humiliating. Yet somehow the humiliation does not have the sting that shame imagines it will—so shame is the sharper, deeper agony. At least in this novel, David is never ashamed of his actual sexual relations, only about how he imagines he is perceived.

When he first enters the bar where he will meet Giovanni, David concedes that the “bar was practically in my *quartier*”; and then that “I had many times had breakfast in the nearby working man’s café”; and finally that “I had been in this bar, too, two or three times”; and then he recalls that, “once very drunk,” he “had been accused of causing a minor sensation by flirting with a soldier.”<sup>87</sup> Of course he barely remembers it—“my memory of that night was, happily, very dim,” and he continues to insist that “no matter how drunk I may have been I could not possibly have done such a thing”—but nevertheless he has to admit that “my face was known and I had the feeling that people were taking bets about me.”<sup>88</sup> In fact, he is sure he is being stared at: “it was as though they were the elders of some strange and austere holy order and were watching me in order to discover, by means of signs I made but which only they could read, whether or not I had a true vocation.”<sup>89</sup> In this passage we can discern not only that the bar in which David meets Giovanni is probably a gay bar, for he admits only sheepishly that he has been there before, but also that what is unbearable to him in his dim memory of the night is that he is *known* as someone who flirts with men because he has been *seen* doing so.

Upon meeting Giovanni, David is able to declare that he is “glad ... utterly, hopelessly, horribly glad,” and although he drinks copiously “in the faint hope that ... the

ferocious excitement that had burst in me like a storm” might “spend itself,” he declares again: “But I was glad.” His qualm, however, is that his desire has been seen: “I was only sorry that Jacques had been a witness.” He adds that this “made me ashamed.”<sup>90</sup> This is the epistemology of the closet: that one might go to a lot of trouble to keep oneself hidden—keep one’s “manhood” “immaculate”—but that one anyway, very drunk or not, might be *seen* to enact that hidden nature and therefore be *known* to have that nature, to be that thing. Although Sedgwick did not, as far as I can find, make a direct link between her writing on the closet and her later writing on paranoia, the continuity between these thought processes is that the closet is not only sustained by vigilance but that the name of that perpetual vigilance is paranoia.

The objective of paranoia is that there should be no bad surprises.<sup>91</sup> Humiliation is the price of failed paranoia—of not being paranoid *enough*—and therefore of being exposed. Shame underwrites a perpetual anxiety that one has something disgusting in oneself; humiliation comes when it is seen. “Thus,” Tomkins tells us:

in the paranoid and others who have been terrorized rather than simply shamed, the eyes may blink in fear at the direct gaze of the other or be rolled to the side away from the confrontation at the gaze of the other. Although there is a universal taboo on interocular intimacy this taboo is radically heightened in the paranoid condition so that there is an exaggerated awareness of both being looked at and the terrifying and humiliating consequences of such visibility.<sup>92</sup>

This is precisely what is mobilized in the scene where David “accidentally” cruises the sailor on the street. Upon the certainty that “he had seen some all-revealing panic in my eyes,” and after the sailor “gave me a look contemptuously lewd and knowing,” he narrates with unusually vague ascription: “And in another second, had our contact lasted, I was certain that there would erupt into speech, out of all that light and beauty, some brutal variation of *Look, baby. I know you.*”<sup>93</sup> It is not clear *who* would utter those words, for the suggestion is that they are recognizable to each other, that even though the contempt implies there is one who is looking and the other who is seen, the element here of cruising is that there is mutual recognition.

James Baldwin famously eschewed psychoanalysis; nevertheless it provides us with the insight that wrestling with a closet, as it were, is not a homosexual struggle but a far more common one, and *Giovanni’s Room* is a lens through which this is especially evident. In Sedgwick’s invocation of the thinking of mid-twentieth-century psychoanalyst Melanie Klein, the alternative to paranoia is reparation. In reparation, the position, or attitude, is not surveillant but depressive, that is, receptive.<sup>94</sup> Cruising seems to require both; perhaps Tomkins’s use of the word “ambivalence” is useful here when he writes of the “ambivalence about looking and being looked at,”<sup>95</sup> for there is oscillation not only about who is looking and who is being seen, but about the fear and anticipation involved: the likelihood of bad surprises but also of good pleasures.

The closet is a trope of control—of inside/outside, knowledge/ignorance, revealing/keeping—and is in this way also a trope of shame and liberation.

However, while the closet and its breaches offer metaphors of shame and anxious control over the threshold of the closet, this dominion can also be understood as a kind of pleasure. There is said to be liberation in bursting out of the closet's enclosures, but this does not take into account the pleasures of staying in, or the mastery in deciding how far, how long, when, or whether. At the beginning of the novel, David proclaims, "for nothing is more unbearable, once one has it, than freedom."<sup>96</sup> Like an infant refusing food—the only control he or she might have in a household of adult rules and constraints—control over the threshold of the closet is its own puny satisfaction. Even though David is not happy, and does not get to claim his desires for men, what he does get is control. And like the infant who can only refuse food, the toddler gains agency by controlling what stays in and what goes out, under the jurisdiction of what Freud termed the anal stage of development.

In this regard, it turns out that everyone starts out with a closet and attempts to achieve mastery over it. Even before Klein, psychoanalysis gives us insight into the concomitance of this anxiety and pleasure. At 18 months to 3 years, the child, Freud tells us, in "producing ... the contents of the bowels ... can express his active compliance with his environment and, by withholding them, his disobedience."<sup>97</sup> So there is a prohibition not just over excretion but over exactly this control. "Educators are once more right," says Freud, "when they describe children who keep the process back as 'naughty.'"<sup>98</sup> Even before we are made to feel ashamed of sexual desires, "the first prohibition which a child comes across—the prohibition from getting pleasure from anal activity and its products—has a decisive effect on his whole development."<sup>99</sup> In fact, continues Freud, since "[s]mall children are essentially without shame,"<sup>100</sup> this early anal prohibition is fundamental to the very development of shame:

This must be the first occasion on which the infant has a glimpse of an environment hostile to his instinctual impulses, on which he learns to separate his own entity from this alien one and on which he carries out the first 'repression' of his possibilities for pleasure.<sup>101</sup>

It is precisely these habits and exercises that become shameful as one gets older, as one becomes sexual in fact. And it is precisely this shame over the pleasure of mastery of withholding and releasing that governs the construction—the need for—the closet: "Further, the whole significance of the anal zone is reflected in the fact that few neurotics are to be found without their special scatological practices, ceremonies, and so on, *which they carefully keep secret.*"<sup>102</sup> The pleasure of this control at the anal stage is caught up ultimately in the shame of exposure, even if that exposure is completely decided upon and under one's control; and the shame, of course, over the prospect of losing control, whether that ever even happens. And so the pleasure—and paranoia—of the closet is itself sexual.

Baldwin refused to call *Giovanni's Room* a homosexual novel. "While the novel is held up as a pioneering work of homosexual literature," Douglas Field tells us,

“Baldwin disavowed this interpretation, claiming it was about love.”<sup>103</sup> We might say that just as the protagonist is disavowing homosexual desire throughout the novel, so is the author disavowing it as well. While Matt Brim refers to the “near-total failure of David’s queer imagination”<sup>104</sup>—“gay, closeted David,” Brim writes, “cannot *live* as a gay man”<sup>105</sup>—it seems rather that David’s queer imagination is all too successful, all too vivid. At every point he knows exactly what he is disavowing. For in order to disavow something one must also recognize it on some level. He needs to want it and therefore to recognize it in order to refuse it.

The question of whether *Giovanni’s Room* is a raceless novel re-emerges here at the site of shame. In a gesture of reverse engineering, we can understand C. Riley’s Snorton’s concept of the “glass closet,” a “space [he] define[s] as marked by hyper-visibility and confinement, spectacle, and speculation” as applying particularly, he argues, to Black sexuality.<sup>106</sup> In defining “the down low,” a kind of racialized, closeted, AIDS-era homosexuality practiced particularly by African-American men who live heterosexual lives yet also engage in homosexual sex, Snorton claims that the media hype around this phenomenon not only renders Black sexuality a magnet for surveillance, but indeed “might actually characterize the condition for black sexual representation.”<sup>107</sup>

Further, from similar premises, Darieck Scott suggests that Black sexuality is always already queer, given that Black bodies as sites historically of sexualization, sexualized violence, and surveillance are always already abject. Scott’s use of abjection overlaps with the concept of shame as I am using it here: “for black people in general, but black men in particular, the abject is like the feminine, or is definitively feminine—that is, to be abject is to be feminized.”<sup>108</sup>

Even through such readings that allow us to see *Giovanni’s Room* as more racialized than is typically imagined, it nevertheless amplifies my point that sexual shame is projected onto those who are seen to be or who are willing to call themselves homosexual. It extends my argument by suggesting that the idea that there are bodies onto which queerness can be psychically displaced is a fantasy of being actually rid of it. Baldwin himself, in the last essay he published, in what we might see as a pose of ennui, dismisses sex itself and the breach of that closet door: “There is nothing more boring, anyway,” he writes, “than sexual activity as an end in itself, and a great many people who came out of the closet should reconsider.”<sup>109</sup>

*Giovanni’s Room* exposes some fundamental anxieties over shame and exposure in the realm of sexuality. While the metaphor of the closet is particular to homosexual discourse, we are reminded by Sedgwick that the “epistemology of the closet has ... been ... inexhaustibly productive of modern Western culture and history at large.”<sup>110</sup> In other words, as I have argued here, although the closet has become the ruling metaphor for the enclosure where homosexuals could hide their shameful desires, every sexual being is potentially at the mercy of and invested in the operation of a closet: if shame has to do with anxiety over exposure and “operates only after interest or enjoyment has been activated,”<sup>111</sup> then the closet is where anyone might hide. The closet functions not only in relation to deviant or obscure desires but to—desire. Paranoia ensures vigilance over the



threshold of the closet and promises that there might always already be a “they” who must suffer shame so that there might be an imagined “we” who have less shame or—as David fantastically wishes—none.

## Notes

- 1 Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London, Routledge, 1993), p. 226, italics in original.
- 2 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2003), p. 36; Silvan Tomkins, “Shame-Humiliation and Contempt-Disgust,” in *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader*, ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 1995), p. 142.
- 3 James Baldwin, *Giovanni’s Room* (1956) (New York, Penguin, 2001), p. 102.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 11.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 10.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 91.
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 116.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 91.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 92.
- 13 *Ibid.*, italics in original.
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 93.
- 16 *Ibid.*
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 95.
- 18 *Ibid.*, pp. 96, 93.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 95.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 96.
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 *Ibid.*
- 23 See, for example, David M. Halperin, who writes “Effeminacy has often functioned as a marker of so-called sexual inversion in men, of transgenderism or sexual role reversal, and thus of homosexual desire”; “How to Do the History of Male Homosexuality,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 6:1 (2000), p. 92.
- 24 Baldwin, *Giovanni’s Room*, p. 91, italics in original.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 30, italics in original.
- 26 *Ibid.*
- 27 *Ibid.*
- 28 *Ibid.*, pp. 13–14.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 14, italics in original.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 20.
- 31 *Ibid.*
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 87, italics in original.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p. 88, italics in original.

- 34 *Ibid.*
- 35 *Ibid.*
- 36 *Ibid.*, p. 33, italics in original.
- 37 *Ibid.*, p. 100.
- 38 *Ibid.*, p. 88.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 89.
- 40 *Ibid.*
- 41 *Ibid.*
- 42 *Ibid.*, p. 12.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 13.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 12.
- 46 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- 47 *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- 48 *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- 49 *Ibid.*, p. 80.
- 50 *Ibid.*, pp. 80–1.
- 51 *Ibid.*, p. 12.
- 52 *Ibid.*, p. 81.
- 53 *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- 54 *Ibid.*
- 55 *Ibid.*, p. 81.
- 56 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- 57 *Ibid.*
- 58 *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- 59 *Ibid.*, p. 14, italics in original.
- 60 *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- 61 *Ibid.*
- 62 Colm Tóibín, “The Unsparing Confessions of ‘Giovanni’s Room,’” *The New Yorker*, 26 February 2016, [www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-unsparing-confessions-of-giovanis-room](http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-unsparing-confessions-of-giovanis-room) (accessed 15 June 2020).
- 63 Baldwin, *Giovanni’s Room*, p. 112.
- 64 *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- 65 *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.
- 66 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1990), p. 75.
- 67 Baldwin, *Giovanni’s Room*, p. 11.
- 68 *Ibid.*
- 69 *Ibid.*
- 70 *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- 71 *Ibid.*, p. 64.
- 72 Marlon B. Ross, “Beyond the Closet as a Raceless Paradigm,” in E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson (eds.), *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 163.
- 73 Trudier Harris-Lopez, “Slanting the Truth: Homosexuality, Manhood, and Race in James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room*,” in Trudier Harris-Lopez (ed.), *South of Tradition: Essays on African American Literature* (Athens, GA, University of Georgia Press, 2002), p. 18; and see Ross, “Beyond the Closet.”

- 74 Kathryn Bond Stockton, *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame: Where "Black" Meets "Queer"* (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2006), p. 172.
- 75 *Ibid.*, p. 168.
- 76 See, for example, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "The Fire Last Time," in Harold Bloom (ed.), *James Baldwin: Bloom's Modern Critical Views* (New York, Chelsea House, 2007), who writes, "Perhaps not since Booker T. Washington had one man been taken to embody the voice of 'The Negro'" (p. 13).
- 77 E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson, "Introduction: Queering Black Studies/'Quaring' Queer Studies," in Johnson and Henderson (eds.), *Black Queer Studies*, p. 11.
- 78 Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, pp. 110, 111.
- 79 *Ibid.*, p. 101.
- 80 James Baldwin, "The Male Prison" (1954), in *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction 1948–1985* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), p. 102, italics in original.
- 81 *Ibid.*, pp. 104, 105.
- 82 Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, pp. 20–1.
- 83 Tomkins, "Shame-Humiliation and Contempt-Disgust," p. 144.
- 84 *Ibid.*, p. 134.
- 85 Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, p. 14.
- 86 *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- 87 *Ibid.*, pp. 30, 31.
- 88 *Ibid.*, p. 31.
- 89 *Ibid.*
- 90 *Ibid.*, p. 44.
- 91 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2003), p. 130.
- 92 Tomkins, "Shame-Humiliation and Contempt-Disgust," p. 148.
- 93 Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, p. 88, italics in original
- 94 Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading."
- 95 Tomkins, "Shame-Humiliation and Contempt-Disgust," p. 142.
- 96 Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, p. 11.
- 97 Sigmund Freud, "Infantile Sexuality," in *On Sexuality: Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works* (1905), Volume 7 of *The Penguin Freud Library*, ed. Angela Richards, trans. James Strachey (London, Penguin, 1977), pp. 103–4.
- 98 *Ibid.*, p. 103.
- 99 *Ibid.*, p. 104.
- 100 *Ibid.*, p. 110.
- 101 *Ibid.*, p. 104.
- 102 *Ibid.*, italics added.
- 103 Douglas Field, *All Those Strangers: The Art and Lives of James Baldwin* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 2.
- 104 Matt Brim, *James Baldwin and the Queer Imagination* (Ann Arbor, MI, University of Michigan Press, 2014), p. 56.
- 105 *Ibid.*, pp. 63, 75, italics in original.
- 106 C. Riley Snorton, *Nobody's Supposed to Know: Black Sexuality On the Down Low* (Minneapolis, MN, University of Minnesota Press, 2014), p. 4.
- 107 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- 108 Darieck Scott, *Extravagant Abjection: Blackness, Power, and Sexuality in the African American Literary Imagination* (New York, New York University Press, 2010), p. 29.

- 109 James Baldwin, "Here Be Dragons," in *The Price of the Ticket*, pp. 688–9.
- 110 Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, p. 68.
- 111 Tomkins, quoted in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick with Adam Frank, "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Sylvan Tomkins," in Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, p. 97.

## Works Cited

- Baldwin, James, *Giovanni's Room* (1956) (New York, Penguin, 2001).
- "Here Be Dragons" (1985), in *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction 1948–1985* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1985), pp. 677–90.
- "The Male Prison" (1954), in *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction 1948–1985* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1985), pp. 101–6.
- Brim, Matt, *James Baldwin and the Queer Imagination* (Ann Arbor, MI, University of Michigan Press, 2014).
- Butler, Judith, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London, Routledge, 1993).
- Freud, Sigmund, "Infantile Sexuality," in *On Sexuality: Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works* (1905), Volume 7 of *The Penguin Freud Library*, ed. Angela Richards, trans. James Strachey (London, Penguin, 1977), pp. 39–72.
- Gates, Jr., Henry Louis, "The Fire Last Time," in Harold Bloom (ed.), *James Baldwin: Bloom's Modern Critical Views* (New York, Chelsea House, 2007), pp. 11–22.
- Halperin, David M., "How to Do the History of Male Homosexuality," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 6:1 (2000), pp. 87–123.
- Harris-Lopez, Trudier, "Slanting the Truth: Homosexuality, Manhood, and Race in James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*," in Trudier Harris-Lopez (ed.), *South of Tradition: Essays on African American Literature* (Athens, GA, University of Georgia Press, 2002), pp. 18–30.
- Johnson, E. Patrick, and Mae G. Henderson (eds.), *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology* (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2005).
- Ross, Marlon B., "Beyond the Closet as a Raceless Paradigm," in E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson (eds.), *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology* (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2005), pp. 161–89.
- Scott, Darieck, *Extravagant Abjection: Blackness, Power, and Sexuality in the African American Literary Imagination* (New York, New York University Press, 2010).
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1990).
- "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 123–52.
- *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2003).
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, with Adam Frank, "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Sylvan Tomkins," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 93–122.
- Snorton, C. Riley, *Nobody's Supposed to Know: Black Sexuality On the Down Low* (Minneapolis, MN, University of Minnesota Press, 2014).
- Stockton, Katherine Bond, *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame: Where "Black" Meets "Queer"* (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2006).

Tóibín, Colm, “The Unsparing Confessions of ‘Giovanni’s Room,’” *The New Yorker*, 26 February 2016, [www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-unsparing-confessions-of-giovanis-room](http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-unsparing-confessions-of-giovanis-room) (accessed 15 June 2020).

Tomkins, Silvan, “Shame-Humiliation and Contempt-Disgust,” in *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader*, ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 133–78.

### Contributor’s Biography

**Monica B. Pearl** is Lecturer in Twentieth Century American Literature at the University of Manchester. She has written extensively on AIDS and AIDS representation, including her book *AIDS Literature and Gay Identity: The Literature of Loss* (Routledge, 2013) and essays on *Angels in America*, *Philadelphia*, *Zero Patience*, the photograph *Felix, June 5, 1994* by AA Bronson, and the AIDS Memorial Quilt. She has also published essays on Alison Bechdel’s graphic memoir *Fun Home*, Audre Lorde’s *Zami*, Janet Flanner’s letters, Eve Sedgwick’s essay “White Glasses” and another—“Queer Therapy”—on Sedgwick’s account of her psychotherapy *A Dialogue on Love*, the writing of W. G. Sebald (“The Peripatetic Paragraph”), and two essays on opera: “The Opera Closet” and “Bliss: Opera’s Untenable Pleasures.”