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Oh, How The Mighty Have Fallen:
Unpacking the American Situation in James
Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* and *Another*
***Country* Through the Lens of Postlapsarian**
Anxiety.



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Term: 2021b

*Cocaine and drinkin' with your friends
You live in the dark, boy, I cannot pretend
I'm not fazed, only here to sin
If Eve ain't in your garden, you know that you can
Call me when you want, call me when you need
Call me in the morning, I'll be on the way
Call me when you want, call me when you need
Call me out by your name, I'll be on the way like
Oh, call me by your name (mmm, mmm, mmm)
Tell me you love me in private
Call me by your name (mmm, mmm, mmm)
I do not care if you lyin'*

-Lil Nas X

Chapter One

Introduction

In discussing the complex illusion of what most people understand as the ‘American Dream’, James Baldwin writes “the strain is made a good deal more unbearable by the fact that Americans passionately believe in their avowed ideals, amorphous as they are, and are terrified of waking from a radiant dream” (Baldwin 591). The American Dream, rather than liberating the American citizen, entraps them in a national illusion. Namely, an ignorance of the American past and continual fabrication of the present and future. At the beginning of Baldwin’s 1956 *Giovanni’s Room*, he marks David’s white American identity as being implicated in a “darker past” (Baldwin 3). Baldwin identifies this ‘darker past’ as the gratuitous and racially-targeted violence that the American identity was built upon (Baldwin 124). Despite the white American’s attempt to ignore these racial realities, this ‘darker past’, as Baldwin ultimately suggests by way of the interplay between race and national identity in *Giovanni’s Room* and his 1962 novel *Another Country*, is inextricable from American society and therefore unavoidable. Western society, as Baldwin argues, “rests simply on the fact that white men are the creators of civilizations... and are therefore civilization’s guardians and defenders. Thus it was impossible for Americans to accept the black man as one of themselves, for to do so was to jeopardize their status as white men” (Baldwin 127). White Americans are placed in the unique position of denying humanity to black people as a means of affirming their whiteness while simultaneously being confronted with the undeniable reality of black human existence. This, Baldwin explains, is the root of the American Negro problem. The white American must “find a way of living with the Negro in order to be able to live with himself” (Baldwin 127).

The rejection of this ‘darker past’ acts as a shield not only against the reality of black human existence but against the measures Americans have and continue to take to deny this reality. What the white American is most concerned with is their innocence. They believe in “the

illusion that there is some means of recovering the European innocence of returning to a state in which black men do not exist” (Baldwin 128). In other words, Americans harbor the hope that they can still be like the people in the tiny Swiss village described in Baldwin’s essay “Stranger In The Village”, who look upon the black person with confusion and wonderment as if a phantasmic object had suddenly been placed before them. The American way of life or “American vision of the world... owes a great deal to the battle waged by Americans to maintain between themselves and black men a human separation which could not be bridged” (Baldwin 128). By virtue of denying black existence, the American identity is able to maintain its validity while simultaneously distancing itself from the dark past that produced it. Yet, the upholding of such an identity comes at a price that outweighs the immediate benefits it produces: the rejection of reality. Anyone who denies reality, as Baldwin argues, invites “their own destruction” (Baldwin 129).

Confronting the reality of this darker past, therefore, becomes the only means by which Americans can save themselves from the illusory storyline they have spent the last four hundred years pioneering. The search for the realities underneath the fabricated lifestyles in American society is a subject that Baldwin presents in a number of his novels. At the beginning of Baldwin’s novel *Another Country*, the characters are immersed in a series of illusions and disingenuous relationships. As the novel progresses, the characters slowly awaken to the consequences of these illusions and are made to confront the subject standing between them and reality, namely, their white innocence. Baldwin unpacks this notion of white innocence in his essay “The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy.” He writes, “the thing that most white people imagine that they can salvage from the storm of life is really, in sum, their innocence” (Baldwin 270). This innocence not only allows the white American to disregard their racial past, but it also

facilitates a certain distance between themselves and the racial other and enables them to return to a condition of existence where the black person is still regarded as the 'stranger in the village'. Yet, as Baldwin seems to suggest in his essay "On Being 'White'... and Other Lies", this innocence and or denial of one's 'darker past' is fugitive and ultimately leads to the debasement of the white identity (Baldwin 180).

In addition to exploring the implicit realities of America's past and present identities, Baldwin's work fixates largely on unpacking the very ambiguous nature of, what he refers to as, the American situation. That is the incoherencies between the image and reality of America. In his essay "The Discovery of What It Means to Be an American," Baldwin writes, "the time has come, God knows, for us to examine ourselves, but we can only do this if we are willing to free ourselves of the myth of America and try to find out what is really happening here" (Baldwin 142). He explains that America, like any other society, is "governed by hidden laws, by unspoken but profound assumptions on the part of the people" (Baldwin 142) and that it is the job of the American writer to reveal them. In other words, the American writer is tasked with elucidating the incoherencies of their situation and freeing themselves and others from the illusions that have shaped the trajectory of American history. Baldwin's own writing attempts to do so by examining American culture and society through the lens of the expatriate. For the American writer to have a breakthrough, they "very often have to leave this country" (Baldwin 139). In Europe, the American expatriate comes to realize that no society can live up to its idealization, but that "society is never anything less than a perfect labyrinth of limitations" (Baldwin 99). Each society comes with its own complexity and ties to the past. One's identity is not created by volition alone but is guided largely by the national circumstances which have affected their past and continue to affect their present. He argues,

One had, in short, to come into contact with an alien culture in order to understand that a culture was not a community basket-weaving project, nor an act of God... being nothing more than the recorded and visible effects on a body of people of the vicissitudes with which they had been forced to deal (Baldwin 103).

The American in Europe cannot insert themselves into society as if they were born there, nor can they divorce themselves from their nationality. The expatriate discovers their own country “from the vantage point of Europe” (Baldwin 100). Baldwin’s focus on the American expatriotism in his writing becomes a way in which he invites his American audience to view their society from a perspective that had, up until then, been inaccessible to them. The American identity is unique in that it requires not only an understanding of the American past but of its European roots as well. There was a day, as Baldwin argues, “when Americans were scarcely Americans at all but discounted Europeans” (Baldwin 124). In attempting to understand American society, one must also look towards “the heritage of the West, the idea of white supremacy” (Baldwin 126).

Therefore, to understand the gratuitous and racially targeted violence of America’s past as well as the incoherences produced by way of it in our present condition, one must establish a familiarity with where it originated. Namely, in the legacy and ideas put forth by the Old World.

The expatriate characters in Baldwin’s work were influenced, in part, by his own expatriotism. Starting in 1948, Baldwin followed the course of many American creatives and traveled to Paris to seek artistic refuge. David Leeming, Baldwin’s longtime friend, and secretary writes in *James Baldwin: A Biography* that Baldwin

Maintained that he needed distance from the racial realities at home so that he could become the writer he wanted to be. But an equally compelling reason for the move was the need to confront in a new context the personal problems that, since the days in the Harlem pulpit, had undermined his role as a witness (Leeming 56).

In fleeing America, Baldwin sought not only to escape the racial violence that had plagued his life, but also to find an answer to the very weighted question of his own identity and inquire into

the complexities of his race, sexuality, and personal relations. In navigating his identity, Baldwin had also discovered realities that he describes as “peculiarly American” (Leeming 64). He argues that “this depthless alienation from oneself and one’s people is, in sum, the American experience” (Leeming 64). The vantage point by which Baldwin saw American society when he was abroad worked to inform many of the themes in his novels *Another Country* and *Giovanni’s Room*. Both of these novels utilize the American expatriate along with the interplay between European and American identities to elucidate the unique situation that Americans have found themselves in. These characters, like Baldwin himself, are made to traverse the boundaries of their own identity and challenge the white hetero-patriarchal expectations of their homeland. Following his philosophy in “The Discovery of What It Means to be an American”, Baldwin set out to excavate the hidden laws and unspoken assumptions of American society in these two novels and enable his American audience to free themselves from the myth that has permeated their lives. The artist’s job, according to Baldwin,

Is to absorb and re-create not only the deeds of humanity but the motivations for those deeds, which spring from human ambiguity, human complexity: Only within this web of ambiguity, paradox, this hunger, danger, darkness, can we find at once ourselves and the power that will free us from ourselves (Leeming 65).

In highlighting the implicit realities of American society in *Another Country* and *Giovanni’s Room*, Baldwin also sought to explore the basis behind these realities and the conflicting natures that are situated at the heart of human existence. That is the private desires which, for the most part, do not correspond with public belief and action. Baldwin expresses how the blood relationship between blacks and whites “is perhaps the most profound reality of the American experience, a relationship that we cannot possibly understand until we accept how very much it contains of the force and anger and terror of love” (Leeming 66). This theme became one of the focal points of *Another Country* where characters both black and white grappled with the

complexities of their relationships with one another and the irreversible violence embedded in their national history.

Similarly, *Giovanni's Room*, despite its focus on an “all-white” cast in Paris, examines themes of race relations in the U.S. and the consequences of ignoring one’s national past. Baldwin uses the character “Giovanni as a metaphorical or symbolic vehicle for his and black America’s confrontation with the white world” (Leeming 123). The queer relationship between the American ex-patriate David and the foreign outsider Giovanni becomes a way in which Baldwin expresses the disconnect between the private desire of white Americans to understand and love black people and their public action of refusing to do so. Giovanni is “a dark-skinned man who contains the traces of that “darker past” that Americans wish to forget (Leeming 125). In denying his love for Giovanni, David not only fails to accept his queerness but the gratuitous and racially targeted violence that is integral to his national history. At the center of this novel is the issue of American self-denial. The American, so to speak, wishes to maintain their purity and does so at the expense of their personal relationships. Rather than yielding to their private desires, they perpetuate a facade that allows them to conform to the white hetero-patriarchy of their country.

In addition to illuminating the complexities surrounding race in the U.S., *Giovanni's Room* and *Another Country* explore notions of sexual ambivalence and fluidity, gender, and the imposition of labels. What these two novels reveal is that the darker past of America is not just a reference to gratuitous violence we have done and proceed to do to black people, but also how Americans have constructed and policed gender and sexuality and the ways in which these subjects intersect with and inform the realities of race in the U.S. The American situation, in this sense, becomes a multidimensional topic that requires an analysis that engages with multiple

focuses. In unearthing what Baldwin calls the hidden laws and unspoken assumptions of American society, the American writer must be cognizant of the relationships between race, gender, and sexuality and how they have shaped each other's trajectories.

Moreover, Baldwin's writing was largely influenced by his religious upbringing and the years he spent as a preacher. Baldwin's stepfather, David Baldwin was a "preacher, stressing, in the tradition of the pentecostal black church, the hope for a better life after the "crossing over" (Leeming 5). Despite the religiosity Baldwin was immersed in growing up, he, during adolescence, developed an aversion to the church. Baldwin describes his stepfather as a victim of both a "morally bankrupt religion" and society (Leeming 8). While Baldwin had drifted away from the church, "his experience in the pulpit was a precursor of what he would later feel as a writer and speechmaker" (Leeming 25). Baldwin's familiarity with the black church informed the ways in which he understood himself and the society that he was writing in. Many of the themes centered around 'Americanness' in *Giovanni's Room* and *Another Country* are connected to or deployed through biblical allusions or imagery. Baldwin's religiosity influenced not only how he saw the incoherences of American society, but also the ways in which he navigated this 'darker past' and the topic of blackness in his texts.

Baldwin, by way of his expatriotism and familiarity with the black church, was granted a unique lens into American society and its relationship to Europe. In both *Giovanni's Room* and *Another Country*, he highlights two major themes that become important in understanding the American situation: The prelapsarian and postlapsarian. The prelapsarian refers to the world before man's Fall from the Garden of Eden and the postlapsarian refers to the world that ensued the Fall. Baldwin depicts European society as being largely prelapsarian whereas he shows American society to be emblematic of life after the Fall. American citizens, so to speak, become

an embodiment of those who have fallen from the Garden of Eden. By virtue of this, Baldwin not only highlights the connection between America and Europe but illuminates the structural elements of American society. Through the vantage point of the pre and postlapsarian, Baldwin unpacks this 'darker past' and elucidates the distinct and overlapping realities of race, gender, and sexuality in American society.

My argument, in unpacking the American situation, will draw upon what I am calling postlapsarian anxiety. Namely, the specific societal trajectories, imperatives, and conundrums that were elicited by man's Fall from the Garden of Eden. However, while postlapsarian anxiety provides insight into the incoherences that are integral to American society and identity, it is not a complete answer to the American situation. The American situation, by virtue of its convoluted nature, is a matter that cannot be entirely captured or mastered. Rather, it is a matter subject to change and nuance and so my argument must lend itself to a space of unknowability. Moreover, given my positionality as a cis white man writing about James Baldwin, I want to acknowledge the gaps and or violence that my identity may produce when discussing overlapping matters such as race, gender, and sexuality. Saidiya Hartman in her essay "Venus in Two Acts" attempts to reconcile with how her "own narrative does not operate outside the economy of statements that it subjects to critique" (Hartman 13) while trying to re-narrativize how black life and death are seen. Hartman recognizes the friction produced by the historically harmful and violent grammatical and academic parameters she is working in and the project respective to blackness that she is undertaking. She asks how to "retrieve what remains dormant... without committing further violence in [her] own act of narration" (Hartman 2). To mitigate some of the violence and respect black life, she proposes narrative restraint which refuses "to fill in the gaps and provide closure" (Hartman 12). This, she argues, "is imperative to respect black noise" (Hartman 12). While my

project is completely different from Hartman's, I too want to acknowledge the tension that will occur between my positionality, the parameters of academia—a historically colonial and racialized space—, and the subject of black life I will be discussing. My argument, by way of showing the American situation as that which is partially unknowable and forever incomplete, will attempt to deploy what Hartman identifies as narrative restraint.

Chapter Two (A)

The Ephemerality of the Garden: Themes of
Slippage and Fluidity in the Space of Europe

In the next two chapters, I will argue how *Giovanni's Room* and *Another Country* present Europe as the prelapsarian world and America as the postlapsarian world. In doing so, I intend to set the groundwork for unpacking, what I refer to as, the postlapsarian anxiety that has influenced the trajectory and incoherencies of American society. I aim to provide a framework for understanding the creation of American society and thereby establish a basis for navigating the American situation. Yet, I also wish to highlight the ways in which the prelapsarian and the postlapsarian worlds are not mutually exclusive. Baldwin does not show Europe as entirely prelapsarian, nor does he show America as entirely postlapsarian. Rather, he includes moments of intersection that gesture towards prelapsarian and postlapsarian worlds existing within the same space. In doing so, Baldwin undermines the rigidity and binaristic nature presented by the separation of these two worlds in the biblical story of Adam and Eve and points to what I will identify later in my argument as the 'prelapsarian crevices' in American society.

To supplement my close readings of Baldwin's texts, I will draw upon his 1949 essay "The Preservation of Innocence" where he discusses sexual identity, gender, and labels in the context of the prelapsarian and postlapsarian worlds. Baldwin's essay presents heterosexuality not as a natural identity, but as a habit naturalized by the religious theology that occurred after the supposed Fall of Man from the Garden of Eden. In the book of Genesis, Adam was created and tasked with taking care of the Garden of Eden. God decided to create a suitable helper for Adam and, when Adam was in a deep sleep, formed a being out of one of his ribs called 'woman'—later named Eve (Adam and Eve 23, Genesis). The only restriction Adam and Eve were given was to not eat from the tree containing the knowledge of good and evil. Yet, Eve was persuaded by a serpent to eat from the tree and then told Adam to do so as well (The Fall 6, Genesis). God condemned the two of them to a mortal existence and positioned Eve in

subservience to Adam since she incited the act which led to original sin. (The Fall 16, Genesis). In the “Preservation of Innocence”, Baldwin writes, “before we were banished from Eden and the curse was uttered, ‘I will put enmity between thee and the woman,’ the homosexual did not exist; nor, properly speaking, did the heterosexual” (Baldwin 596). In situating humans on an antagonistic male/female binary, we create definitive labels to which we understand one’s sexual preferences. The postlapsarian world becomes a space where, rather than being attracted to humans, one becomes attracted either to men or women and is thus positioned as either homosexual or heterosexual.

In addition to discussing the limitations imposed by Christian theology on queer identity, Baldwin’s essay also examines the fluidity and innate quality of queerness. Following his discussion of the postlapsarian world, he questions whether we should embrace the murderer. He claims, “a human characteristic, surely. But the question must be put another way: is it possible not to embrace him? For he is in us and of us. We may not be free until we understand him” (596). By incorporating the question of the murderer into his larger discussion of queer limitations, Baldwin highlights the connection between these two identities; specifically, their perceived deviance and unnatural quality in society and the limited capacities imposed upon them by Christianity “thou shalt not kill” (Fifth Commandment) and “you shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination” (Leviticus 18:22). In this way, Baldwin shows the queer and the murderer to be interchangeable with one another and ultimately implies that the queer, like the murderer, “is in us and of us” (Baldwin 596). The example of the murderer becomes a covert way in which Baldwin advocates for an understanding of the human condition where queerness is inherent. In doing so, he situates humanity on a spectrum of sexuality that rejects the standard conception of one’s self as purely heterosexual.

Baldwin presents this spectrum of sexuality again towards the end of his essay where, following his analysis of queerness in select novels, he concludes “a novel insistently demands the presence and passion of human beings, who cannot be labeled... without this passion we may all smother to death, locked in those airless, labeled cells, which isolate us from each other and separate us from ourselves” (Baldwin 600). Here, Baldwin suggests that human passion is neither definitive nor singular but is a diverse subject interconnected with the greater human experience. In this sense, gay and straight merge to form a conceptualization of sexuality where binaries are left unenforced. Queerness becomes an inherent feature of humanity. Upon labeling one’s self, we eradicate this human passion and disallow connectivity not only between one another but within ourselves.

With Baldwin’s argument in mind, the postlapsarian world becomes interpretable as a space in which gender and sexuality are policed, whereas the prelapsarian world allows for what Baldwin refers to as the “passion of human beings” (600). Namely, a form of human connectivity that is devoid of labels and exists outside of the hegemonic binaries demarcated by the postlapsarian world. In this way, the prelapsarian world enables a more fluid and uncharted mode of existence in which individuals are granted the space for unbordered desire. Taking the biblical account of the Fall into consideration as well, the prelapsarian world can be understood as a space defined by slippage, innocence, and the constant threat of sin. The prelapsarian world, through characters like David and Eric, is allotted a sense of power and attraction by way of its taboo and permissibility of fluidity and borderlessness. The prelapsarian world is situated transitionally between heavenly permanence and the predestined Fall. The postlapsarian world, on the other hand, is rooted in stability and ruin. Europe functions as a haven in both *Giovanni’s Room* and *Another Country* where queer expatriates David and Eric can access a more

provisional way of living and indulge in Baldwin's notion of unrestricted passion without the tyrannical surveillance of their home country. However, these European havens, as is shown through the recurring themes of instability and slippage, are always on the precipice of falling.

Giovanni's Room begins retrospectively, with expatriate David contemplating his identity and the events that unfolded with Giovanni. He narrates,

My reflection is tall, perhaps rather like an arrow, my blonde hair gleams. My face is like a face you have seen many times. My ancestors conquered a continent, pushing across death-laden plains, until they came to an ocean which faced away from Europe into a darker past (Baldwin 3).

The connection that David draws between his face with that of his colonial ancestors reifies his American settler-colonial identity while also highlighting his constant self-surveillance. His reflected image becomes an isolated and depersonalized subject that he carefully examines. Moreover, by describing his country's colonial expeditions as extending to the reaches of the Pacific and away from Europe, David distinguishes America from its Old World roots and emphasizes the polarization between these continental identities. The implied commonality between David and his colonial ancestry, along with this binarized conception of American and European identities, foreshadows David's later conquests, specifically of other characters, and the dissonance between European realities and his own.

Despite David's attempts at establishing his imperial dominance and 'settling' on the Parisian soil, he is continually subjected to moments of extreme disorientation and instability. Paris, more broadly, becomes the world in which David is caught liminally between his innocence and inevitable ruin. Upon driving past various bistros and cafes, David notices "men, young, old, middle-aged, powerful, powerful even in the various fashions in which they had met, or were meeting, their various ruin" (Baldwin 48). David's observation marks the beginning of his own descent into impurity. Following this scene, David is advised by Jacques to give in to his

passion for Giovanni and “love him and let him love you” (Baldwin 57). Jacques continues, “do you think anything else under heaven really matters? And how long, at the best, can it last?... you can give each other something which will make both of you better—forever—if you will not be ashamed, if you will only not play it safe” (Baldwin 57). Jacques’ advice is reminiscent of the last paragraph in Baldwin’s “Preservation of Innocence” where he advocates for a type of passion that is unbinarized and exceeds the limits of hetero-patriarchal order. Jacques, like Baldwin, is a proponent of queer expression and fluidity. By advising David to openly indulge in this type of passion, Jacques signals the prelapsarian world in which gender antagonisms and labels indicating one’s sexual preferences had not yet been constructed.

In addition to Jacques’ advocacy for queer expression and fluidity, the prelapsarian world is evoked by way of the space known as Giovanni’s room. David, upon entering Giovanni’s room for the first time, says “if I do not open the door at once and get out of here, I am lost” (Baldwin 64). Giovanni’s room becomes a transitional locality in that it destabilizes the rootedness of David’s masculine and sexual identity and forces him to teeter between euphoric passion and sinful ruin. This idea is reinforced by the water imagery Baldwin uses to describe Giovanni’s room in part two. He writes, “I remember that life in that room seemed to be occurring beneath the sea” (Baldwin 75). The tempo-spatiality of Giovanni’s room is neither stable nor mappable, but, as David’s reference to the sea implies, fluid and elusive. Their relationship functions similarly to a tide in that it fluctuates between periods of lows and highs. David says “beneath the joy, of course, was anguish and beneath the amazement was fear... by then anguish and fear had become the surface on which we slipped and slid, losing balance, dignity, and pride” (Baldwin 75). Giovanni’s room, in addition to eliciting moments of fluidity and unchartability, acts as a site of erosion where boundaries and binaries are constantly

reordered and adapted. Both David and Giovanni are subjected to moments of submersion in which they lose sight of themselves and are threatened with a fall of sorts.

David's fall from purity is again alluded to through themes of transformation. The signs of David's queerness begin to manifest on Giovanni's body. He describes how

Giovanni's face, which I had memorized so many mornings, noons, and nights, hardened before my eyes, began to give in secret places, began to crack. The light in the eyes became a glitter; the wide and beautiful brow began to suggest the skull beneath (Baldwin 75).

Rather than existing abstractly in David's mind, Giovanni and the queerness of their relationship begin to materialize, cracking the illusory veil David had put in place. The reality of Giovanni and his room becomes unavoidable for David. David remarks how "not all my memorizing had prepared me for the metamorphosis which my memorizing had helped to bring about" (Baldwin 75-76). David's memory of Giovanni's corporeality becomes a way in which David gains proximity to his queerness and enables himself to go beyond the heteropatriarchal boundaries of his country. Their relationship undergoes a transformation in that it gradually solidifies into not just an emotional reality, but a physical one as well. Yet, as is shown by David's relapse into performative heterosexuality when his fiance Hela returns, their metamorphosis remains incomplete. In this way, their relationship is situated liminally between inexistence and birth. This motif is reinforced by David's later observation of how "every day the bookstall keepers seemed to have taken off another garment, so that the shape of their bodies appeared to be undergoing a most striking and continual metamorphosis. One began to wonder what the final shape would be" (Baldwin 77). David and Giovanni, like the shape of the bookstall keepers, continually shed the layers of their outward guise and slowly reveal one another's true form. However, their 'final shape', so to speak, is left unrealized.

The transformative and liminal condition of Giovanni and David's relationship is again suggested by the time frame in which it occurred. David narrates, "I did not really stay there very long—we met before the springs began and I left there during the summer—but it still seems to me that I spent a lifetime there" (Baldwin 85). By having the majority of their love affair play out in the season of spring, Baldwin points to their relationship as a site of emergence and fluctuation. While their affection buds, it never comes to fruition. Rather, their relationship inhabits a stage of pregnancy that is aborted before it reaches any sort of tangible existence. David continues, "life in that room seemed to be occurring underwater, as I say, and it is certain that I underwent a sea change there" (Baldwin 85). The water imagery David evokes in this instance reinforces both the fluidity and transformative quality of his relationship with Giovanni.

The themes of transformation and liminality that Baldwin deploys within Giovanni and David's relationship elicit a sense of destabilization and teetering that ultimately gestures towards the slippage prior to the Fall. This sense of teetering reaches a climax in one of the final moments before David abandons Giovanni for his fiancée Hella. In describing the contents in Giovanni's room, David notes how "before and beside me and all over the room, towering like a wall, were boxes of cardboard and leather, some tied with string, some locked, some bursting, and out of the topmost box before me spilled down sheets of violin music" (Baldwin 87). The unbalanced stacks of boxes become allegorical for the impending Fall or doom presented by David and Giovanni's relationship. The brevity of their love affair is reminiscent of the ephemerality of the Garden of Eden in that it presents something that is known to end even before the audience's/reader's first encounter with it. The towers of boxes scattered throughout Giovanni's room can be read as the accumulated action which led to the original sin precipitating

Adam and Eve's exile. These themes of instability and impending doom are again suggested by way of David's description of the walls and ceiling:

the silent walls of the room with its distant, archaic lovers trapped in an interminable rose garden, and the staring like two great eyes of ice and fire and the ceiling which lowered like those clouds out of which fiends have sometimes spoken and which obscured but failed to soften its malevolence behind the yellow light which hung like a diseased and undefinable sex in its center (Baldwin 87-88).

David's reference to the "archaic lovers" not only draws upon the image of Adam or Eve in the Garden of Eden but also reinforces the timelessness that occurs in Giovanni's room. David and Giovanni adopt the roles of these biblical figures in that they too are subjected to an imprisonment defined by extratemporality and slippage. This notion is supported by David's usage of the words "fire" and "ice" along with his description of the lowered ceiling which emphasizes the two extremes they are situated between—death and birth—and their impending fall. Moreover, David's mention of the "undefinable sex" in the latter part of his description signals the lack of categorization in the prelapsarian world.

Similar to how he portrays Paris in *Giovanni's Room*, Baldwin's description in *Another Country* of Eric and Yves' residence in southern France deploys themes of transience and slippage which ultimately allude to Europe as prelapsarian. However, Baldwin's depiction of this world in *Another Country* is complicated by the fact that expatriate Eric, unlike David, returns to the postlapsarian world—namely, America. While *Another Country* and *Giovanni's Room* were published six years apart, their narratives overlap in that they both offer "a commentary on love and the cost of the failure to love, on the relationship between racism and sexuality, on the necessity of honor and the dangers of safety" (Leeming 201). In this way, Eric's character in *Another Country* can be seen as a continuation of David's character in *Giovanni's Room*. That is to say, Eric's character enables Baldwin to modify his discourses on the pre and postlapsarian

worlds and re-examine their relationship to one another. Eric becomes the connecting figure between these two spaces and allows for a more thorough transcontinental dialogue to occur.

Part Two of *Another Country* begins with Eric “naked in his rented garden” (Baldwin 183) located in the south of France. Already, Baldwin elicits an image reminiscent of the various depictions of Adam and Eve naked in the Garden of Eden. Baldwin’s use of the term ‘rented’ reinforces the ephemerality of this Garden and gestures towards Eric’s inevitable departure. In the next paragraph, Baldwin deploys water imagery similar to that in *Giovanni’s Room*. He writes,

The house and the garden overlooked the sea... Yves’ head went under, reappeared, went under again. He vanished entirely. Eric stood up, looking out over the sea, almost poised to run. Yves liked to hold his breath under water for as long as possible, a test of endurance which Eric found pointless and, in Yves’ case, frightening (Baldwin 183)

Yves’ test of endurance in the sea is again suggestive of the fluidity and slippage inherent in the prelapsarian world. Additionally, his movement between submersion and reappearance in the water highlights the transitional nature of their residence in France and complicates the binary between the seen and unseen. Yves neither conforms to a state of aquatic fluidity nor terrestrial permanence, but fluctuates between the two and becomes unchartable. Yves’ subversion of the binaristic conceptions of land/water, visible/invisible, and stable/unstable within this instance draws upon the liminal and unlabeled nature of the prelapsarian world. This notion is augmented by Eric’s fear towards Yves’ test of endurance in that it points to the threat looming beyond this unchartability and fluctuation. That is, the fall that this space will inexorably produce.

Baldwin’s depiction of Europe as the prelapsarian world in *Another Country* is again suggested through themes of purity and religious sin. In describing the beginning of Eric and Yves’ relationship in France, Baldwin notes how “Eric had waited, attentive and utterly chaste” (Baldwin 214). Baldwin’s reference to Eric’s chastity evokes the innocence initially allotted to

Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. This idea is further enforced when Baldwin, in describing their residence in the south of France, writes “[Eric] did what he alone could do, purified, as well as he could, his house, and opened his doors; established a precarious order in the heart of his chaos; and waited for his guest” (Baldwin 215). Eric’s attempt to purify the rented house functions as a way to preserve the sanctity and serenity of this European haven and delay the coming of the fall if not forestall its arrival altogether. Yet, as the latter part of Baldwin’s description implies, Eric’s identity remains troubled by uncertainty.

The threat of the fall becomes an all-encompassing reality that neither Eric nor Yves can avoid. While in the commune of Chartres—famed for its massive Cathédrale Notre-Dame—Eric notices how “everywhere the cathedral pursued them” (Baldwin 218). The cathedral, as Eric recalls, seemed as if it

Demanded, and received a perpetual living sacrifice. It towered over the town, more like an affliction than a blessing, and made everything, by comparison with itself, wretched and makeshift indeed... The great shadow which lay over them revealed them as mere doomed bits of wood and mineral set down in the path of a hurricane which, presently, would blow them into eternity (Baldwin 219).

The image of the Cathedral in Eric’s flashback becomes allegorical for the impending threat imposed by religiosity onto the pre-fall world. Eric, similar to Adam and Eve, is forced to endure a state of surveillance in which the temptation of sin and the punishment for its commission are constantly looming. The great shadow that has ‘doomed’ those under it alludes to the predestination of the Fall described in Genesis. Moreover, Baldwin’s depiction of the Cathedral foreshadows the friction and messiness that will occur following Eric’s return to America. The Cathedral not only allows Eric a glimpse into his future, but also enables him to be cognizant of his vulnerability.

In addition to the image of the Cathedral, the prelapsarian world is implied by way of Baldwin's allusions to the Orient. He writes, "the thought of the Oriental opulence which overtook Yves each time he bathed caused Eric to smile" (Baldwin 201). In Magdalena Zaborowska's book *James Baldwin's Turkish Decade: Erotics of Exile*, she argues how within this scene "male nakedness and bathing are linked with the hammams, the famed Turkish baths that have stirred the Western homoerotic imagination for centuries" (Zaborowska 121-22). This 'Oriental opulence' that Yves displays allow Eric to escape to an imaginary location where homoerotic tendencies are not subject to punitive action. This notion is reinforced by Baldwin's description of Yves' penis: "his sex gleaming and bobbing in the soapy water like a limp, cylindrical fish" (Baldwin 201). In comparing Yves' penis to a fish, Baldwin highlights the erotic fluidity and expansiveness of Yves' character. He is granted the space and mobility to explore his erotic tendencies and live unconstrained by terrestrial boundaries. In this way, Yves's penis becomes representative of a locality similar to that of the Turkish hammam where homoeroticism is permitted. Through Yves, Eric is granted access to another world in which his erotic possibilities are augmented. Zaborowska claims how homosexuality, in the context of *Another Country*,

Is clearly another country, foreign and remote, but attainable. The stereotyped homoerotic Orient in this instance serves as a space of fantasy escape for queer desire, the space away from the closet of the home country, and one through which it is possible to see one's home and origins anew (Zaborowska 122-23).

The fantasy escape that Eric is offered through Yves' exoticism becomes another means by which the prelapsarian world is evoked in that it enables Eric to inhabit a space devoid of heteronormative boundaries or fixed identities—where "the homosexual did not exist; nor, properly speaking, did the heterosexual" (Baldwin 596).

Up until the scene between Eric and Yves in the bathroom, Baldwin's depiction of the prelapsarian world is localized to Western Europe. However, by alluding to western fantasies of the Orient—a space reminiscent of prelapsarian borderlessness and sexual agency—through a character of Western European descent, Baldwin not only situates Eastern Europe in a prelapsarian context, but he also blurs the boundaries separating the East and the West. Yves becomes a vehicle for Baldwin to highlight the interplay between Eastern and Western Europe. Namely, their cohabitation of the pre-fall world and space for queer desire.

In addition to Eastern Europe, the American South becomes implicated as a prelapsarian setting. Following his depiction of Yves' penis, Baldwin writes “and from his memory, to which his image was somehow the gateway, of that moment, nearly fifteen years ago, when the blow had inexorably fallen and his shame and his battle and his exile had begun” (Baldwin 201). The image of Yves' penis initiates a flashback into Eric's southern past and his first male lover, LeRoy. Leroy, as Eric recalls, “was tall and very black” (Baldwin 201). Eric's recollection of the event—his lovemaking with LeRoy—that had led to his exile provides another instance that is reminiscent of the biblical fall. Prior to their lovemaking, Eric describes how he “felt himself falling. Falling where?” (Baldwin 205). LeRoy says to Eric “I guess you know, now... what they saying about us in this town” (Baldwin 205). Eric, like Adam and Eve, is made aware of his transgressive condition—namely, his lack of coverage to the public—and forced to leave the haven of his innocence. Eric's moment of exile marks his entrance into the postlapsarian world. Moreover, this flashback, by virtue of being initiated through Yves, is connected to a type of Western Orientalism. Zaborowska, in commenting on Eric's recollection, argues “Eric focuses on Yves's penis specifically, and in his mind this vision is linked to Yves's penchant for “Oriental opulence” (201)” (Zaborowska 122). In this way, Eric's remembrance of his former lover LeRoy

is positioned in an erotic context similar to that of Yves. The two of them are linked to an Orientalist fantasy of homoerotic play and thereby become modes of escape for Eric.

While Baldwin depicts Europe primarily as a prelapsarian space, he also intersperses moments or notions of the postlapsarian into Europe. In describing the Cathedral in Chartres, Baldwin, by way of Eric's perspective, describes how "all of the power and dignity of the people seemed to have been sucked out of them by the cathedral" (Baldwin 219). Eric and those around him are stripped of their proclaimed stature and are reduced to a condition of nakedness. Eric's cognizance of his nudity and or vulnerability in this instance becomes reminiscent of the moment in which Adam and Eve transition into this postlapsarian mode of self-awareness and knowledge of good and evil—"then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves" (The Fall 7, Genesis). In this way, Baldwin combines the pre and postlapsarian worlds and highlights the heterogeneity that exists between them.

This heterogeneity is reinforced when, following the description of the Cathedral, Baldwin writes,

It was a town like some towns in the American South, frozen in its history as Lot's wife was trapped in salt, and doomed, therefore, as its history, that overwhelming, omnipresent gift of God, could not be questioned, to be the property of the gray, unquestioning mediocre (Baldwin 219).

Here, Baldwin draws upon the biblical story of Lot's wife as a way to analyze both the American South and the town of Chartres and thereby troubles this conception of these two localities as prelapsarian. In Genesis 19, the Lord is said to have destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and Lot's wife, in looking back towards the destruction, "became a pillar of salt" (Sodom and Gomorrah Destroyed 26, Genesis 19). This tale, in addition to being situated after the Fall, gestures towards the postlapsarian element of stabilization and entrapment. Therefore,

Baldwin, by virtue of utilizing this tale as a simile for towns in the American South and Chartres, implicates them in the postlapsarian world. Moreover, Baldwin's analogy, specifically in regards to the American South, emphasizes the threat directed towards those who look too far into the 'darker past' of American society. That is, what Baldwin describes as, the past which Americans have "turned [their] faces so resolutely away from" for fear of acknowledging the dark history on which the American identity rests (Baldwin 100). In alluding to the prelapsarian and the postlapsarian within the same context, Baldwin recognizes the complexity and intermixed realities that exist in these two worlds. In this way, Baldwin not only subverts the binary presented by the biblical interpretation of the pre and postlapsarian, but advocates for an understanding of space or society that is multifaceted and flexible.

Chapter 2 (B)

Oh, How The Mighty Have Fallen: Analyzing
the Postlapsarian Qualities of American Society

In this section of the chapter, I intend to highlight the areas in *Another Country* and *Giovanni's Room* that gesture towards America as the postlapsarian world. Yet, I also intend to stay cognizant of the instances in which Baldwin complicates this notion through his allusions to the prelapsarian world via the American South. In doing so, I also hope to refute the conception of America as a nation devoid of European influences, as is suggested by David's reflections at the beginning of *Giovanni's Room*, and revisualize it as a nation inextricably linked to its Old World roots. Given that *Giovanni's Room* takes place primarily in Paris, my analysis will be rooted entirely in close readings of *Another Country*.

Although the plot of *Another Country* is set mainly in New York City, this urban setting becomes emblematic of the larger image of America in that it depicts an eclectic range of characters whose regional, racial, and ancestral backgrounds function as a scale model of the varying realities/identities that exist within the broader framework of American society. Rufus, a black man from Harlem, and Leona, a white woman from the South, for instance, exemplify the specific realities that exist in the North and the South and their frictional interplay. When Rufus rides "his weapon between her thighs" (Baldwin 22), prompting Leona to cry, he signals towards a mode of retributive violence and evokes the generational trauma inflicted onto blacks by Southern whites. The New York landscape depicted in *Another Country* not only presents a larger perspective of American society, but also allows for moments where racial and sexual binaries are reconsidered, ruptured, and blended. These instances are imperative to consider when discussing the postlapsarian qualities of American society because they provide additional insight into the ways in which the prelapsarian world bleeds onto this scene and the exchange that occurs between these two worlds.

One way in which the American landscape in *Another Country* evokes an image of the postlapsarian world is through the repeated mention of ‘falling’ and those who have ‘fallen’ The first chapter of *Another Country* begins with the character Rufus awaking in a movie theatre. Baldwin writes, “he was so tired, he had fallen so low, that he scarcely had the energy to be angry; nothing of his belonged to him anymore” (Baldwin 3). In addition to Baldwin’s labeling of Rufus as a character who’s fallen, the postlapsarian world is suggested by way of his dispossession. Rufus’ lack of ownership in this instance is similar to the moment when the Lord revokes Adam and Eve’s access to the tree of life and banishes them from the Garden of Eden. “He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever” (The Fall 22, Genesis 3). Yet, Baldwin nuances this biblical instance of dispossession through Rufus’ racial positionality. Later on in the novel, Ida remarks to Cass “Vivaldo didn’t want to know my brother was dying because he doesn’t want to know that my brother would still be alive if he hadn’t been born black” (Baldwin 351). Rufus’ lack of tangible ownership along with his later death are direct products of the systemic racism that pervades American society. His dispossession, in this sense, can be attributed to the conception of American whiteness which polices his social and existential mobility. In Baldwin’s essay “On Being ‘White’ ... and Other Lies”, he argues “America became white—the people who, as they claim, “settled” the country became white—because of the necessity of denying the Black presence and justifying the Black subjugation” (Baldwin 178). Whiteness, in order to sustain its conceptual existence, requires black fungibility and thereby delineates a structure of social and political governance which not only denies black lives of tangible ownership but violates their corporeal livelihood. In this way, Rufus’ dispossession can be read as a variation of the biblical dispossession where white

Americans appropriate the role of God and disallow the sustained existence of black lives in their world.

Another way in which the postlapsarian world is signaled is via Eric's fear upon returning to New York. Towards the beginning of the second chapter in Book Two, Eric thinks "but now, superbly, like a diver coming to the surface, his terror bobbed, naked, to the surface of his mind: he would lose Yves, here" (Baldwin 239). The image of the diver that Baldwin utilizes to describe Eric's terror gestures back to the scene in the South of France where Yves tests how long he can hold his breath underwater—tarrying between the aquatic and terrestrial limits before him. In addition to this scene, the image of Yves' penis in the bathtub is recalled by way of the words 'bobbed' and 'naked.' Yet, Baldwin revisualizes these two moments from Eric's past through the action of surfacing. Yves' image in Eric's mind approaches a more terrestrial existence and leaves behind the fluidity he had initially been submerged in. This transition reaffirms Eric's entrance into the postlapsarian world in that it evokes a more permanent mode of being instead of the interstitiality of his and Yves' residence in France. Eric's transition is further suggested by his premonition of losing Yves in the latter part of the quote. Yves, by way of Baldwin's earlier depictions of him as transient and unbound, is emblematic of an existence/setting that is uncategorical and mobile and thereby incompatible with the bordered and restricted lifestyles of those in America.

Eric becomes re-condemned to a state of postlapsarian exile. He, along with the other characters living in New York, are subjected to a sense of scarcity similar to that of Adam and Eve upon being banished from the Garden of Eden. Yet, Eric's situatedness in the postlapsarian world is nuanced from that of his fellow New Yorkers due to the fact that he, unlike the other characters, experiences a second Fall of sorts. Eric's perspective is troubled both by his exile

from the American South and France. Eric's shiftability between the prelapsarian and postlapsarian worlds draws upon the biblical tale of Noah's Ark: God, upon recognizing the corrupt state of Earth, engenders a flood to wipe out all that inhabit it. Prior to doing so, God instructs Noah, whom he deems the most righteous of all men, to build an ark and carry his family along with "two of all living creatures, male and female," (Noah and the Flood 19, Genesis 6). The Tale of Noah's Ark functions as a second coming of the Fall in that it elicits a worldly recreation of sorts precipitated by sin. Noah, like Adam and Eve, is dislocated from his previous mode of living and tasked with generating a new earthly population. In this way, the biblical tale comes to instate another reference point for the prelapsarian and postlapsarian worlds. Namely, where all that existed prior to Noah's Ark becomes situated as the pre-fall world, and all that came after becomes recognizable as the post-fall world. This notion further enforces the heterogeneity of these two worlds due to the fact that it combines the postlapsarian setting respective to the Fall of Adam and Eve with the prelapsarian setting respective to Noah's Ark. Noah and Eric become akin to one another in the sense that they both fluctuate between these two worlds while also experiencing pockets of overlap and discontinuity.

In addition to Noah's Ark providing another lens by which Eric's position in the post/prelapsarian world(s) can be elucidated, this tale also augments and reinforces how the postlapsarian world appears in Baldwin's work. Towards the end of Noah's Ark, God, upon halting the floods and permitting Noah, his family, and the livestock onto dry land again, makes a covenant with Noah—"Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth" (God's Covenant with Noah 15-16, Genesis 9). Baldwin prefaces his work, *The Fire Next Time* with the verse "God gave

Noah the rainbow sign, No more water, the fire next time!” (Baldwin 287). Both the biblical covenant and Baldwin’s prefatory verse point towards the postlapsarian world respective to Noah’s Ark as terrestrial and non-fluid. Not only does this idea reinforce the reading of the post-fall as categorically situated and immobile, but it also shows the extent to which aquatic/fluid modes of existence are weaponized by religion. That is, how queerness—or that which deviates from the categorical boundaries set forth by religion and moves fluidly—is considered an affliction punitively placed onto someone by God.

Baldwin draws upon this postlapsarian image of dryness and terrestriality when describing the seasonal shift into summer in New York. He juxtaposes the sense of comfort and replenishment that was afforded to Eric in Paris with the harsh and discontented reality of New York. New York,

Was a city without oases, run entirely, insofar, at least, as human perception could tell, for money; and its citizens seemed to have lost entirely any sense of their right to renew themselves. Whoever, in New York, attempted to cling to this right, lived in New York in exile—in exile from the life around him; and this, paradoxically, had the effect of placing him in perpetual danger of being forever banished from any real sense of himself (Baldwin 316)

Not only does this quote evoke themes of banishment and paucity reminiscent of the lifestyle Adam and Eve were forced to adopt following the Fall, but it, by virtue of Baldwin’s draught imagery, becomes entangled with the story of Noah’s Ark as well. New York, as Baldwin suggests, lacks any sense of tangible replenishment and delimits its inhabitants to an existence fueled by capital gain. In this way, New Yorkers are reduced to a numerical output devoid of any fluid mobility. They, so to speak, are confined to a terrestrial mode of living categorized by dryness and stagnancy. Baldwin’s depiction of New York as postlapsarian becomes multifaceted in that it intertwines the post-fall elements respective to both the story of Adam and Eve and Noah’s Ark.

Baldwin makes a final allusion to the heterogeneity between the prelapsarian and postlapsarian worlds by way of describing Yves' arrival in New York on the last page of the novel. He writes, "then even his luggage belonged to him again, and he strode through the barriers more high-hearted than he had ever been as a child, into that city which the people from heaven made their home" (Baldwin 436). Baldwin's description, by drawing upon the biblical image of Adam and Eve leaving the Garden of Eden and positioning the city of New York as their new home, reinforces the postlapsarian element of American society. However, Baldwin also blends the pre and postlapsarian in this instance through Yves' barrier crossing. Counter to the rigidity of postlapsarian America, Yves penetrates the borders separating him from America and invites a more flexible mode of existence in which individuals can move freely between categories. This notion is further enforced by virtue of Yves' described optimism which gestures towards an existence or futurity outside of this postlapsarian rigidity where his and Eric's unbordered love, previously confined to the space of Europe, can continue untroubled.

The close readings I have done which are suggestive of Europe as the prelapsarian world and America as the postlapsarian world will serve as a foundational basis for my next chapter in which I unpack the incoherences of American society through the lens of, what I call, 'postlapsarian anxiety.' The themes of fluidity, slippage, and innocence that I have identified to be constituent of the prelapsarian world, along with the themes of territoriality, ruin, and rigidity that Baldwin deploys within the space of the postlapsarian world will guide my discussion regarding the specificities/structural factors which make up postlapsarian anxiety. Moreover, the moments/characters I have identified as representing the overlap between or heterogeneity of the prelapsarian and postlapsarian worlds will allow me to better identify the incompatibilities within

American society as well as aid my later discussions of the prelapsarian crevices and futurity that Baldwin presents within *Giovanni's Room* and *Another Country*.

Chapter Three

The American Situation: Unpacking

Postlapsarian Anxiety

In this chapter, I seek to elucidate postlapsarian anxiety by drawing upon the themes brought forth in the previous chapter. Given my previous analyses, I will use the prelapsarian and the postlapsarian as metaphorical vehicles to talk about European and American society, their overlap, and the futurities Baldwin presents. My argument will draw up the postlapsarian and the American almost interchangeably, however, I do not want to suggest that by doing so, I am gesturing towards American society as exclusively postlapsarian. Rather, the use of these two terms interchangeably is intended to reinforce the outward rigidity and fixed nature of American society.

Postlapsarian anxiety, defined more broadly, is the postlapsarian world's response to their exile from the Garden of Eden. The tree of knowledge that Adam and Eve ate from endowed the fallen with a sense of awareness that gave way to a shame and villainization of their prior condition. By virtue of this, the fallen live in retaliation of the customs, or lack thereof, that are constitutive of the prelapsarian world for fear of relapsing into the state of fluidity/slippage that became the catalyst for their initial condemnation. Instances of postlapsarian anxiety are identifiable by way of the transitions from a mobile or dynamic mode of living into more fixed and rigid structures. Postlapsarian anxiety will become the allegorical vehicle for understanding the creation of the white American identity and the society that ensued. In my discussion, I will use this notion of postlapsarian anxiety to show how American society is structured and the incompatibilities and conundrums elicited by this structure. The first example of postlapsarian anxiety that I will examine is the notion of linear time.

Time

A: the measured or measurable period during which an action, process, or condition exists or continues : DURATION

B: a nonspatial continuum that is measured in terms of events which succeed one another from past through present to future

(Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary)

Time, as is shown by definitions A and B in Merriam Webster, is considered to follow a linear progression and presuppose future conditions. Baldwin, through his deployment of temporal disorientation and cyclicity within the space of Europe, presents a notion of time counter to the linearity proposed by online definitions such as Merriam-Webster. In doing so, Baldwin reinforces the extra-temporality of the prelapsarian world and provides a reference point for postlapsarian anxiety. That is, the villainization of cyclical/non-categorical time in the postlapsarian world and consequent prioritization of the linear narrative. Baldwin puts these notions of time, linear and nonlinear, in conversation with one another by way of one of the first conversations had between David and Giovanni in *Giovanni's Room*. Giovanni is suspicious of American time, remarking,

The Americans are funny. You have a funny sense of time—or perhaps you have no sense of time at all... as though with enough time and all that fearful energy and virtue you people have, everything will be settled, solved, put in its place. And when I say everything,” he added, grimly, “I mean all the serious, dreadful things, like pain and death and love, in which you Americans do not believe (Baldwin 34).

Time, as Giovanni suggests, is a subject utilized by Americans to categorically situate indescribable notions such as pain, death, and love in a way that minimizes them to the point where they are no longer perceivable. Giovanni's description of American time gestures back to Baldwin's previous discussion of human passion and labels in "Preservation of Innocence" in that it presents the categorical placement of certain notions, specifically love, as both reductive and counterintuitive to its understanding. Additionally, Giovanni, in suggesting that the conception of American time isn't a measure of time at all, subverts and challenges the linear conception of time propagated by the American society

Conversely, Giovanni proposes a notion of time that is relative and multiple:

I don't believe in this nonsense about time. Time is just common, it's like water for a fish. Everybody's in this water, nobody gets out of it, or if he does the same thing happens to him that happens to the fish, he dies. And you know what happens in this water, time? The big fish eat the little fish. That's all. The big fish eat the little fish and the ocean doesn't care (Baldwin 34-35).

In comparing our situatedness in time to fish in water, Giovanni suggests that time is not only ubiquitous to our everyday existence but essential to our survival as well. His sense of time stands in contrast to American time in that it is neither isolated from humanity nor utilized to police it. Rather, Giovanni's time allows for an unmediated perception of life and becomes a platform through which the complexities of human passion, namely fluid modes of existence, become expressible. His time does not conform to the categorical boundaries—i.e. Past, present, future—delimited by linear narratives but functions similarly to the varied states of aquatic flow: Unmappable, pulled in multiple directions, blended, and frictional.

In this way, Giovanni's sense of time becomes an example of what Christina Sharpe refers to as 'the wake' and 'wake work' in her book *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. In the first chapter of this book, Sharpe identifies the wake as a multiplicitous conception that holds together its various definitions (i.e. wake as the track left on the water's surface by a ship; wake as a watch or vigil held beside the body of someone who has died; wake as grief, celebration, and memory; wake as a state of consciousness, etc.). Being in the wake, as Sharpe argues, is "to occupy and to be occupied by the continuous and changing present of slavery's as yet unresolved unfolding" (Sharpe 13-14). The wake and one's existence in it stand to juxtapose, reassemble, and challenge. Giovanni's time, like Sharpe's notion of the wake, is inescapable. They are confined to a structure of antagonisms in which, as Giovanni claims, the "big fish eat the little fish and the ocean doesn't care" (Baldwin 35). Giovanni's analogy is reminiscent of what Sharpe notes as the "the immanence of [black] death as "a predictable and constitutive aspect of

[American] democracy” (James and Costa Vargas 2012, 193, emphasis mine)” (Sharpe 15). In order to sustain its existence, the American democracy, similar to the oceanic flow, necessitates a structure of power that situates the big fish, whites, above the little fish, blacks, and treats violence directed towards the little fish indifferently. Yet, Giovanni’s time, while being situated in an oppressive and hierarchical flow of events, presents a disruption of sorts where it pushes against the dominant narrative of time and advocates for a reorientation of the linear archive. In that way, his character parallels the character Zabou in the film *Timbuktu* who Sharpe notes as not believing “in time, at least not linear time” (Sharpe 128). Rather, Zabou “lives in trans*Atlantic time, in an oceanic time that does not pass, a time in which the past and present verge. “Time doesn’t matter,” Zabou says again” (Sharpe 128). Colonial optics, as Sharpe elucidates, “occupy and reproduce the retinal detachment that, then, reproduces the hold as location and destination” (Sharpe 124). In other words, the mode of visibility that colonial powers such as America engage with prioritizes the ‘to be’ over the ‘has been’ and or ‘never been.’ Colonial visualities engender a perception that aligns with linear movement and rationality. However, Sharpe’s claim, by virtue of referring to it as a ‘detachment’ of sorts, refutes the rationality and or mastery of colonial optics and instead suggests that this mode of visibility contains obscurations and gaps. What colonial optics don’t see are also “what the archives don’t record” (Sharpe 126). Namely, the gratuitous violence directed towards the un/lives of slavery’s past and present. The notion of time as uncategorical and cyclical rejects colonial optics and provides a space for the unknowable and the misremembered. Thus, Giovanni’s time, by virtue of its deviation from linearity, functions as an instance of what Sharpe calls “wake work” in that it works within “a mode of inhabiting and rupturing this episteme [of slavery and its afterlives]” (Sharpe 18) and the colonial optics that re/produce it.

This idea is further supported by Leeming's argument in *James Baldwin: A Biography* which, in commenting on the paragraph where Giovanni expresses his critique on American time, claims

This is an attack on the white American myth embodied in such terms as the "American Dream," "upward mobility," the "melting pot," the "middle of the road," "Manifest Destiny," and the "work ethic." It will be echoed by any number of black American characters in the later segments of Baldwin's parable (Leeming 126).

The American myth along with the terms Leeming identifies to be constitutive of it, by way of their forward-minded thinking and themes of expansion, are imbued with a sense of linearity and work within the parameters of colonial optics. Therefore, Giovanni's critique of American time and his alternative temporality work to dismantle the forward mode of thinking perpetuated by the American myth and other colonial projects. Moreover, the fact that Giovanni's critique is revoiced in the black characters in Baldwin's later works reinforces the project of nonlinearity as a rupturing force within the condition of the wake that black Americans are made to endure.

With both Sharpe's and Leeming's arguments in mind, Giovanni's time becomes interpretable not only as an example of nonlinear time but also as a subversive force against the racial antagonisms that exist in American society. Following Giovanni's notion of time, David describes the way in which he conceptualizes time. He says, "I don't believe that. Time's hot water and we're not fish and you can choose to be eaten and also not to eat—not to eat." I added quickly, turning a little red before his delight and sardonic smile "the little fish, of course" (Baldwin 35). David's time, in contrast to Giovanni's, follows a more rigid and linear path of movement. Time, as is suggested by the analogy David makes between it and hot water, is hostile and inhabitable only for a short period. Our situatedness in time is neither permanent nor ubiquitous. Furthermore, David's time is reminiscent of the terms Leeming mentions in regards to the American myth—i.e. Manifest Destiny, Upward Mobility—in that it alludes to a condition

of freedom where we have complete control over our future. We, so to speak, have the right to choose and “pull ourselves up by our bootstraps.” The rhetoric that David’s notion of time engages with is similar to that of more conservative presidential administrations—i.e. Ronald Reagan, George Bush, Donald Trump—where the individual is faulted rather than the systems of inequity and oppression that created and sustain their specific condition. Not only are we free to choose our own fate, but our engagement and or complicity in other people's fate as well. We, as David explains, can choose “not to eat” (Baldwin 35). In this way, David’s time comes to resemble the distance created by white Americans between themselves and the condition of blackness in the post-Civil war U.S. and the modes by which they deny their complicity in American systematic racism that Baldwin identifies through this notion of ‘white innocence.’

David’s time becomes an example of postlapsarian anxiety in that it marks a transition from the fluid and boundaryless state of the prelapsarian world into a more stagnant and fixed mode of inhabitation. The linearity propagated by David’s time is both a retaliation against and villainization of the non-linear and disruptive mode of temporality proposed by Giovanni. David’s notion of time actively rejects our situatedness in a pervasive temporality and instead positions our relationship to time as a matter that we can control and extricate ourselves from. Linear time as a form of postlapsarian anxiety not only highlights the linearity of the American societal structure but also gestures towards the imperative for mastery and fixed categories within American society. Namely, the sense of ownership and exertion of power Americans impose both over their own situatedness and on their surrounding environments/relationships that are expressed in many of the terms Leeming identifies such as “Manifest Destiny”, “Upward Mobility”, “Work Ethic.” In this way, David’s time bleeds into the broader colonial and capitalist framework of American society.

Additionally, David's time highlights the racially antagonistic and oppressive nature of temporality held within the linear narrative. By virtue of retaliating against Giovanni's temporal fluidity and disruption, David's time also becomes emblematic of a mode of silencing/defending against Sharpe's notion of 'wake work' and upholding the systemic inequity that gives way to the condition of the wake. David's temporality functions as a form of colonial optics in that it delineates a linear trajectory and follows a narrative of mastery. Yet, as Sharpe suggests in her argument, conceptions of time such as David's are also subject to the unknowable and contain archival gaps. For those like the character Zabou in *Timbuktu* who are living in the wake, time in a linear sense does not matter. Time for those living the wake is anti-directional, fluid, and disruptive. Sharpe offers one definition of the wake as "the track left on the water's surface by a ship; the disturbance caused by a body swimming or moved, in water; it is the air currents behind a body in flight; a region of disturbed flow" (Sharpe 3). Not only does wake time work to disrupt the dominant trajectory or flow, but it also functions as a reinscription of what is on the surface of the archive. Linear time stands only to serve whiteness. In that way, linear time respective to postlapsarian anxiety becomes inextricable from racial categorization and white supremacy. The postlapsarian world, in being structured by this notion of linearity, is the white world.

The linear conquest narrative that David expresses is strongly connected to the next aspect of postlapsarian anxiety that I will discuss: The imperative to categorize. Linearity, by means of situating the past, present, and future as categorically distinct and successive, engenders a fixed placement of humans, events, and relations. That is to say, one cannot exist in the past, present, and future simultaneously, but must be rooted in either one or the other; one cannot, in other words, live dynamically. In this way, linearity provides the foundational structure for categorical identities pertaining to race, gender, and sexuality. These categories which

definitively label one's identity become another instance of postlapsarian anxiety in that they highlight as a move away or defense against the prelapsarian fluidity and borderlessness of the Garden of Eden. The imperative to categorize and the fixed/immobilized identities that those living in the postlapsarian world are forced to adopt will be the next aspect of postlapsarian anxiety that I will examine.

In both *Giovanni's Room* and *Another Country*, Baldwin intersperses moments of fixed and rigid identification with more flexible modes of expression. In the scene following David and Giovanni's first encounter with one another, David is approached by an androgynous figure:

Now someone whom I had never seen before came out of the shadows towards me. It looked like a mummy or a zombie—this was the first, overwhelming impression—of something walking after it had been put to death... It carried a glass... it seemed to make no sounds... It glittered... it stank of powder... He wore buckles on his shoes... he stopped before me... he had been eating garlic and his teeth were very bad (Baldwin 38-39).

Here, Baldwin makes a clear transition from using the identificatory marker "it" to the pronoun "he." In doing so, he presents both a point of intersection and tension between the prelapsarian ambiguity and postlapsarian categorization. Through David's American lens, this figure loses its original ambivalence and is situated as a fixed gender identity. In addition to emphasizing this imperative to categorize in American society, David's recollection of this figure gestures towards the American aversion to the prelapsarian condition of fluidity. Baldwin, by way of comparing this figure to a mummy or zombie, evokes themes of putrefaction and the revitalized dead that are suggestive of this threat posed by America's 'dead' past or origins. That is the supposedly forgotten era of prelapsarian borderlessness or fluidity vis a vis Europe. By that means, the androgynous figure becomes an embodiment of postlapsarian anxiety and highlights American society's attempt to distance itself from its Old World roots.

Similar to David's affinity to categorize the androgynous figure in *Giovanni's Room*, Cass, a middle-aged white woman in *Another Country*, becomes encased by racial categorization and the omnipresence of blackness during the character Rufus' funeral in Harlem. Baldwin writes, "then she dropped her head and twisted a white handkerchief, the whitest handkerchief Cass had ever seen, between her two dark hands" (Baldwin 119). The juxtaposition of black and white in this instance highlights both the ubiquity and inescapability of racialized differences for the white American. Along with the social categorization of race in America, the physical identification of race, as Cass's perspective implies, is inextricable from American modes of visibility. Cass, like David, engages with the colonial optics that re/produce what Ashton Crawley in *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* refers to as "theological-philosophical thought" (Crawley 12). Theological-philosophical thought emerges "from the desire for pure thought, thought that is purely different from other modalities of cognition" (Crawley 12). This desire, Crawley argues, produces a way of thinking that is racially categorized (Crawley 12). Cass's inability to extricate herself from the racial binary, black/white, is suggestive of her own complicity in this theological-philosophical thought. Prior to Rufus' funeral Cass looks for a shawl to wear:

One small, lone, white woman hurrying along 125th Street was a very common sight, for no one looked at her at all... A Negro girl came toward her, a girl with red, loosely waved hair, who wore a violently green dress... The girl, whose smile had clearly been taught her by masters (Baldwin 117-118).

Cass identifies herself in opposition to the black community around her. Not only is her optical perception limited to the white/black dichotomy, but the master/slave dichotomy as well.

Baldwin, by way of alluding to images of ownership and violence in the black girl's appearance, shows Cass to reinforce what Sharpe refers to as slavery's ever-changing present.

For Cass and the other white characters in the novel, racial categorization becomes not only unavoidable but optically imperative in the sense that it provides white Americans with a basis for their identity. Returning to Baldwin's argument in "On Being 'White'... And Other Lies", whiteness is predicated on the non/lives and or fungibility of Black people and the continual ownership over the Black body (178). The white identity necessitates the extension of "state capture and subjection in as many legal and extralegal ways as possible, into the present" (Sharpe 12). Baldwin expresses this conception of whiteness through both Rufus and Leona's relationship and Vivaldo and Ida's relationship. Throughout the text, the white characters attempt to attain ownership over the black characters either through sexual conquest or social relationships. When Rufus, a black man, asks Leona, a white woman, if she sees anything she wants while looking at his profile against the Manhattan skyline, she says "I want it all!" (Baldwin 19). Leona's reply gestures towards western expansion and colonialism and ultimately positions Rufus as interchangeable with any material object or structure included within her scope of the city. After Vivaldo, a white man has sex with Ida, a black woman, Baldwin writes "he watched the tall, dusty body, which now belonged to him disappear" (179). Ida, through the act of sexual conquest, is placed under Vivaldo's dominion. The descriptor 'dusty' reinforces her objectification in that alludes to her body as a household item.

Vivaldo's ownership over Ida is further suggested when Baldwin describes the two of them walking down the street. He writes, "now, as she walked beside him, trim and oddly elegant in a heavy, dark blue coat, and with her head covered by an old-fashioned theatrical shawl, he saw that both her vanity and her contempt were being swollen by the glances which rested in her as briefly and unforgettably as the touch of a whip" (Baldwin 144). In comparing the glances directed towards Ida to the touch of a whip, Baldwin positions her body in accordance with

chattel slavery. Ida's existence is reduced to a commodity in the perspective of white society. Baldwin reinforces the sense of white ownership over Ida's body later on when he describes the glances Ida receives as accusing her of being a "back-alley conquest" or no better "than a whore" (144). Furthermore, Baldwin's usage of the word 'theatrical' to describe Ida's head covering suggests that the outward presentation of Ida and Vivaldo's relationship, too, is a performative guise for these racial antagonisms by which the master/slave relationship is perpetuated. The performativity of their relationship is reinforced at the end of the paragraph when Baldwin remarks how, "the eyes of the white men sought him, inviting a wet complicity" (144). While Vivaldo's glances and mannerisms towards Ida at that moment might not overtly convey his ownership over her, Baldwin's description alludes to the fact that he, too, is implicated in these white male glances which position Ida as a conquerable object.

In this way, the imperative to categorize becomes complicated and nuanced from how David identifies gender and sexuality in *Giovanni's Room*. In addition to providing a sense of distance from the prelapsarian condition of fluidity, racial categorization gives way to the theological-philosophical thought by which whiteness and the structure of postlapsarian society—i.e. The 'white world'—is created and maintained. The racial binary and methods of sustaining Black fungibility and ownership that American society and the white identity are situated upon can, from the lens of postlapsarian anxiety, be read as the Manichean mode of thought following the Fall. Namely, the distinct categorization of good and evil that ensued once Adam and Eve had eaten from the tree of knowledge. Good is measured by the presence of evil and thereby necessitates that there be evil in order to create and maintain the validity of what is good. In the postlapsarian/American world, the good is white and the evil is Black. The postlapsarian world is reliant on a fungible subject (Black non/lives) to which it can locate itself.

Despite the difference between the racial and sexual/gender categorization in *Another Country* and *Giovanni's Room*, there are moments in which these categories overlap with one another and provide points of absence/incommunicability. These moments of absence/incommunicability will be the first area of the American situation, i.e. the societal incoherences, that I will examine. Both of Baldwin's novels show how queerness, when paired with the category of blackness, becomes an irreconcilable notion. One area in Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* that alludes to the incompatibility between queer labels and blackness is at the beginning of *Giovanni's Room* when David is describing his first queer encounter with his friend Joey: "Joey's body was brown, was sweaty, the most beautiful creation I had ever seen till then" (Baldwin 8). By marking Joey's body as brown, as opposed to black, Baldwin makes him racially ambiguous. In the U.S., describing someone as black indicates that they are African-American, whereas describing someone as brown alludes to a multitude of racial identities. Joey's racial ambiguity is reinforced a couple of lines later when David says, "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" (Baldwin 9). Here, Baldwin both indirectly shows Joey's blackness through the metaphor of the cavern and positions his body as an unknowable entity. In this way, Joey's blackness becomes indefinite, it is neither affirmed nor denied. While Joey is made to be racially ambiguous within the context of this queer encounter, prior to this moment, Joey is described as "quick and dark" (Baldwin 6), which more concretely suggests that he is black. The ambiguity of Joey's blackness within this encounter ultimately implies that David cannot conceptualize Joey as both queer and black. In thinking to himself "but Joey is a boy"

(Baldwin 9), David identifies their moment of intimacy as a queer one and thereby negates the possibility of Joey's blackness.

The irreconcilability between blackness and queer identification is supported again in Baldwin's *Another Country* during a conversation between Rufus and Vivaldo:

"Have you ever wished you were queer?" Rufus asked, suddenly.

Vivaldo smiled, looking into his glass. "I used to think maybe I was. Hell, I think I even wished I was." He laughed. "But I'm not. So I'm stuck."

Rufus walked to Vivaldo's window. "So you been all up and down that street, too," he said.

"We've all been up the same streets. There aren't a hell of a lot of streets. Only, we've been taught to lie so much about so many things, that we hardly ever know where we are."

Rufus said nothing. He walked up and down (Baldwin 51-52).

Here, the possibility of queer identification is ascribed only to Vivaldo. He can definitively label himself as one thing or the other, queer or straight, whereas Rufus can only tangentially refer to his queerness. For Rufus, queerness becomes not an identificatory marker, but a condition similar to walking up and down a street. It is neither stationed at one end nor the other but fluctuates in between. While Vivaldo categorizes his sexuality as something fixed, his expansion on Rufus' street analogy and allusion to the ambiguity of our location suggests that sexuality is not confined to a single position. Rufus's subsequent silence and motion of walking up and down reinforce this sexual fluidity and again gestures towards his inability to verbalize his queerness.

Both the incompatibility of queer labels coupled with blackness and the more fluid realities of sexuality presented by Vivaldo's and Rufus' conversation highlight the incoherences that exist within the structure of American/postlapsarian society. The queer black, for example, provides a point of ontological disruption where the imperative to categorize is shown to contradict itself. By virtue of combining a subject denied of life with a label indicating life, the black queer produces an irreconcilable message. In Calvin Warren's essay "Onticide:

Afro-pessimism, Gay N*gger #1, and Surplus Violence” he examines the antagonistic relationship between the terms ‘gay’ and ‘n*gger’ that were carved onto the skull of a dead black man, arguing how

The term Gay indexes human identity, and N*gger is the “thing” void of human ontology—ontology’s mystery. It brings these two crises into juxtaposition, creating somewhat of a theoretical fatality, a devastating crime scene (Warren 392).

Put differently, Warren, through the lens of Afro-pessimist thought, points to blackness as an absence of life and thus incompatible with any identificatory marker that suggests life. Baldwin’s texts, albeit he was not an Afro-pessimist, seem to mimic Warren’s argument where he too shows an incompatibility/problem space within the notion/presence of the queer black. This problem space presented by the black queer highlights the lapse and often contradictory nature of this imperative to categorize within American society. In creating fixed categories and norms to structure and define society, Americans are unknowingly challenging the episteme of racial thought on which their identity rests. That is to say, in situating individuals in accordance to a male/female, gay/straight binary—identities which, as Warren argues, presuppose life—while simultaneously identifying them as either white/black, colored/non-colored they are potentiating the event of an ontological conundrum: That is, the interspersing of an identificatory marker which suggests life and of one that implies non/life.

In addition to the possibility/presence of the black queer, the incoherences within the postlapsarian structure of American society are presented via what I am calling a prelapsarian crevice. That is the moments of heterogeneity in the text, like Baldwin’s depiction of the American South, that gesture towards the prelapsarian world/condition of fluidity within the space of the postlapsarian world. These crevices, so to speak, provide a site of rupture where the postlapsarian world is subverted and rendered incompatible insofar that it shows two conflicting

realities. By means of Rufus and Vivaldo's conversation regarding whether or not they wish to be queer, Baldwin presents a notion of sexuality that is ambiguous and unfixed. In doing so, he evokes the prelapsarian fluidity and lack of categorization and effectively disrupts the rigidity and categorically ordered structure of American society. Furthermore, Baldwin is suggestive of an inherent fluidity where individuals, rather than adhering to a fixed identity, are dynamic and undefinable.

Baldwin's notion of inherent fluidity is highlighted in the areas of his texts where sexuality, gender, and race are shown to exist more flexibly and unconstrained. Hella, David's fiance, upon arriving in Paris, is described as "wide-legged" with a "boyish stance" (Baldwin 119). David's perception of Hella in this instance alludes to her being more androgynous and less fixed in a specific gender category. Hella's androgyny is reminiscent of Baldwin's presentation of gender in his 1985 essay "Here Be Dragons" in which he proposes an understanding of one's gender and sexual identity as fluid and undefinable. Baldwin argues "but love between a man and a woman, or love between any two human beings, would not be possible did we not have available to us the spiritual resources of both sexes" (Baldwin 1985). In other words, our sexual attraction and romantic potentiality are rooted in this masculine/feminine duality within what Baldwin refers to as our 'spiritual resources.' That is, our spiritual capacity to entertain various identities, roles, and concepts. We are all, according to Baldwin, androgynous in that our un/conscious beings are formulated by way both of masculine and feminine components. Hella comes to embody this duality where her 'spiritual resources' are expressive of overlapping masculine and feminine features.

Along with Hella's androgyny, Baldwin alludes to this inherent fluidity through Vivaldo's lovemaking with Eric towards the end of *Another Country*. While Vivaldo expresses a previous

desire to be queer, his queer potentiality and acceptance of his sexual ambiguity do not come to fruition until this moment. Prior to their lovemaking, Vivaldo awakes from a dream which, as Baldwin describes,

Teetered on the edge of nightmare: how old was this rite, this act of love, how deep? In impersonal time, in the actors? He felt that he had stepped off a precipice into an air which held him inexorably up, as the salt sea holds the swimmer: and seemed to see, vastly and horribly down, into the bottom of his heart, that heart which contained all the possibilities that he could name and yet others that he could not name (Baldwin 386).

Vivaldo's dream evokes the prelapsarian imagery of teetering and the purgatorial suspension between the Garden of Eden and Man's banishment. His dream provides another point of relapse into the prelapsarian condition of fluidity initially expressed by Yves' test of endurance in the French sea. Vivaldo, similar to Yves, is caught in a flow that traverses the boundaries of terrestriality and oceanic mobility. Moreover, by means of using the image of the swimmer as an analogy for the unspoken and unnamed desires/possibilities of his heart, Vivaldo's dream connects this condition of fluidity to his queer potentialities and or sexual ambiguity and thereby reinforces the inherent fluidity within one's sexual preferences.

Both Hella's androgyny and Vivaldo's sexual ambiguity function as prelapsarian crevices in that they signal the pre-Fall world and rupture the linearity and categories that exist within their American identity or the postlapsarian spaces they inhabit. Additionally, the inherent fluidity that both of their characters suggest highlights the inescapability and or ubiquity of these prelapsarian crevices and the perpetual incoherences that are produced by way of the postlapsarian structure of America in juxtaposition to these crevices. The structure of American society is a denial of this fluidity and thereby a denial of human existence or, what Baldwin would call human passion. Albeit the subject of race in the context of this inherent fluidity is nuanced from that of gender and sexuality in that one cannot fluctuate between or hold within

their ‘spiritual resources’ multiple racial identities—at least not in the case of the American white, Baldwin deploys various moments in his texts where the racial binary of white/black is subverted. Racial description, particularly in *Another Country*, becomes a matter that is more nuanced and multiplicitous. While Cass is out at a bar with Ida, she notices a couple dancing:

She watched one large, ginger colored boy dancing with a tall, much darker girl. They danced with concentration at once effortless and tremendous, sometimes very close to one another, sometimes swinging far apart, but always joined, each body making way for, responding to, and commenting on the other (Baldwin 354).

Cass’s observation, instead of classifying this couple by way of the white/black binary, is privy to the varying skin tones and subtleties within racial appearance. Cass engages with racial categorization in a way that is less fixed and rigid. In this way, Cass distances herself from the colonial optics she had previously occupied and challenges the Manichaeism respective to race in American/postlapsarian society. Additionally, Cass’ mention of the simultaneous distance and intimacy achieved by the couple is suggestive of the heterogeneity and fluctuation that exists within the topic of race. That is to say, the spectrum of racial identity or background that stands outside of the white/black binary and offers a more dynamic conception of race.

Similar to Baldwin’s advocacy for inherent fluidity via the various modes in which gender, sexual, and racial identity are expressed in *Giovanni’s Room* and *Another Country*, the conception of American innocence also functions as a prelapsarian crevice. Baldwin unpacks American innocence, or more specifically white American innocence, in his essay “The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy” by way of comparing himself to Norman Mailer. He writes,

There is a difference, though, between Norman and myself in that I think he still imagines that he has something to save, whereas I have never had anything to lose. Or, perhaps I ought to put it another way: the thing that most white people imagine that they can salvage from the storm of life is really, in sum, their innocence (Baldwin 217).

For white Americans, the preservation of their innocence, so to speak, becomes, like categorical boundaries, imperative. The root of this imperative can be attributed to postlapsarian anxiety.

The original sin that precipitated Man's exile from the Garden of Eden had instilled an antagonism not just within the relationship between sexes, but within the knowledge that Adam and Eve attained by way of eating the forbidden fruit. Their knowledge and or awareness in this instance was villainized and turned punitive. By that means, knowledge was positioned as a taboo and evoked a sense of anxiety within the citizens of the postlapsarian world that catalyzed a return to prelapsarian innocence and or ignorance. However, knowledge, by virtue of creating the identity/condition of the postlapsarian world, is inescapable.

Likewise, this 'something to save' becomes a way in which American whites deny what Baldwin identifies as the 'darker past' on which their identity rests. Namely, the genocidal history of American society and the perpetuation of black containment and fungibility in the present via legal and extralegal measures. As Baldwin argues in "Stranger in a Village", "American white men still nourish the illusion that there are some means of recovering the European innocence of returning to a state in which black men do not exist" (Baldwin 128). In the episteme of thought that was produced through Man's awareness of good and evil, blacks are positioned as the Manichean Other to which whiteness was and is realized. The tree of knowledge, therefore, is emblematic of the white American's cognizance of themselves in relation to the black non/being. At the root of American society is this racial difference that the white American refuses to acknowledge. Rather, they, as Baldwin elucidates, try, in vain, to return to a state of ignorance reminiscent of the European/prelapsarian environment in which the presence of the black non/being was not yet a tangible reality. However, despite their willed ignorance, the black person, "in America, even as a slave he was an inescapable part of the

general social fabric and no American could escape having an attitude toward him” (Baldwin 125).

In both *Giovanni's Room* and *Another Country*, Baldwin uses the white American characters, specifically, David and Vivaldo, as a vehicle to unpack this ‘something to save’ and the modes by which this prelapsarian innocence is expressed. Expatriate David, for example, flees his home country in an attempt, as he claims, to find himself. In retrospect, he remarks,

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. But, again, I think I knew, at the very bottom of my heart, exactly what I was doing when I took the boat for France (Baldwin 21)

Prior to David’s reflection on his ex-patriate motives is the scene in which he describes his first queer encounter with the racially ambiguous character Joey. His flight, in this way, can be interpreted as an escape not just from his queerness, but from the ontological conundrum seen through Joey and produced by way of David’s whiteness. David cannot confront the “darker past” (Baldwin 3) that he identifies on the first page of the novel as facing “away from Europe” (Baldwin 3). While David utilizes Europe as a way in which he can sustain and or regain this prelapsarian innocence—facing away from his country’s “darker past”, it also becomes a space in which his innocence is tested and momentarily breached.

The limits and potential rupture of David’s innocence regarding the “darker past” of his country are exemplified most in his relationship with Giovanni. To quote Leeming, Giovanni is an “outsider, a dark skinned man who contains the traces of that “darker past” (Leeming 125). When the reader is first introduced to Giovanni, he is described as “insolent and dark and leonine... It was as though his station were a promontory and we were the sea” (Baldwin 28). Baldwin’s description, in addition to gesturing towards Giovanni as having a darker and more racially ambiguous complexion, is reminiscent of Sharpe’s notion of the wake in that situates

Giovanni as a disruptive force in the aquatic flow around him. He, so to speak, presents a jut or potentiality for collision in the flow of events around him. Giovanni's sameness to Sharpe's notion of the wake further enforces Leeming's point regarding his representation of a darker past—or what Sharpe would identify as slavery's ever-changing present—and “black America's confrontation with the white world” (Leeming 123). Therefore, David's relationship with Giovanni presents a kind of breach of his ignorance where he reconciles with the darkness on which his white American identity was built. However, David's later abandonment of Giovanni signals his relapse into his former state of unawareness and illusion. In this way, David's conformity to the heteropatriarchal order can be seen as another mode in which his innocence in regard to racial difference and his whiteness are preserved.

Vivaldo, similar to David, is in a relationship with someone who is suggestive of America's darker past. Yet, Ida—Vivaldo's partner—unlike Giovanni, is explicitly categorized as black and more vocal about the violence produced by Vivaldo's whiteness. Vivaldo attempts to salvage his innocence and convince Ida otherwise of his whiteness. While Vivaldo and Cass are on their way back from Rufus' funeral, Vivaldo remarks “I'd like to prove to [Ida]—one day... I'd like to make her know that the world's not as black as she thinks it is” to which Cass replies “or... as white” (Baldwin 125). This exchange between Cass and Vivaldo highlights not only the ignorance regarding the racial difference and binaristic ordering of society in postlapsarian/American society but also the erasure of this difference and or one's complicity in perpetuating it through one's ‘innocence.’ This idea is further supported by way of Vivaldo's denial of racial antagonisms in the scenes prior to his conversation with Cass. While on the way to Rufus' funeral, Vivaldo says to Cass “they're colored and I'm white but the same things have happened, really the same things, and how can I make them know that” (Baldwin 113). Vivaldo's

refusal to acknowledge the racism that pervades and dictates the social order and flow of events in American society is another instance of this white innocence. He manipulates the societal narrative to the liking of his [white] countrymen and erases the structural antagonisms that are constituent both of his identity and American socio-political governance.

These instances of white American innocence function as prelapsarian crevices in that they create an incoherence at the core of American society and identity. Given that this mode of ignorance, respective to postlapsarian anxiety, is a retaliation against the Original Sin—namely, eating from the tree of knowledge—and constitutive in the identity of white Americans and their forms of governance, the incoherences that it produces is what I am calling the Original Conundrum. The Original Conundrum is rooted in a juxtaposition: That is, the desire and persistence to return to this condition of prelapsarian ignorance/innocence while simultaneously structuring society and one's mode of social governance against the prelapsarian. In other words, it is a way of formulating and maintaining a national/racial identity in accordance with this prelapsarian unawareness—namely, rooting their identity in a denial, both of the black non/being and their complicity in perpetuating black fungibility and thereby attempting to salvage the condition of existence Baldwin describes in “Stranger in a Village”—while also situating their societal structure—linear time and the imperative to categorize—in accordance with these instances of postlapsarian anxiety where one creates more fixed and forward notions of livability. The white American/postlapsarian identity, so to speak, creates an existence for and against itself.

In that way, the white Americans condition their existences on a notion that is not only fabricated, but that is in direct conflict with the nature of their society. To quote Baldwin at length:

And have brought humanity to the edge of oblivion: because they think they are white. Because they think they are white, they do not dare confront the ravage and the lie of their history. Because they think they are white, they cannot allow themselves to be tormented by the suspicion that all men are brothers. Because they think they are white, they are looking for, or bombing into existence, stable populations, cheerful natives and cheap labor. Because they think they are white, they believe, as even no child believes, in the dream of safety. Because they think they are white, however vociferous they may be and however multitudinous, they are as speechless as Lot's wife— looking backward, changed into a pillar of salt (Baldwin 180).

Whiteness is indeed a plague that permeates the entire world, however, it is of a different strain in America. The white American, as the final sentence of Baldwin's quote suggests, are caught up in the illusion that they can still return to this prelapsarian condition of innocence. They, in order to nourish this illusion and their identity, are perpetually looking backward and are in that way imprisoned and contradicted by their own innocence.

Chapter Four

**‘Conclusion’: Un/mapping the American
Situation and Marking a Dis/trajectory into an
Otherwise Inhabitation**

How then can we constitute the American situation? Given my presentation of the incoherences of American society by way of both postlapsarian anxiety and the prelapsarian crevices that emerge within the postlapsarian, how can we conceptualize what Baldwin refers to as the hidden beliefs and unspoken assumptions of America? The short answer is, we can't, at least not in its entirety. These incoherences vis a vis postlapsarian anxiety are only partial and are neither definitive nor whole. The American situation, in light of my analysis, becomes a series of incompatibilities. Namely, incompatibilities between prelapsarian expression and postlapsarian expression. The self, as Baldwin suggests, is inherently prelapsarian in that it adheres to a natural fluidity where gender, sexuality, and race are dynamic and multiplicitous. Yet, it is by means of postlapsarian categorization and linearity that America rejects itself and suffocates human passion. This sentiment is exemplified in Baldwin's description of the character Sue in *Giovanni's Room*. He writes, "she was very big and she was disquietingly fluid—fluid without, however, being able to flow" (Baldwin 99). Despite Sue's inherent fluidity, she, in essence of being an American, is constricted. Her fluid immobility becomes emblematic of the postlapsarian condition of existence in that it highlights the inherent contradiction within postlapsarian society: the repression of one's natural fluidity.

My analyses in the chapter prior had attempted to unpack postlapsarian anxiety and the American situation in a way that was not contingent on the linear narrative. The series of postlapsarian anxieties that occurred following the Fall—the Original Conundrum, linearity, and fixed categories—were not analyzed in the order in which the linear narrative would place them. Rather, linearity and the imperative to categorize, as features of postlapsarian anxiety, were discussed prior to the Original Conundrum—the occurrence/condition that I identified as providing the formative structure for the American situation to which all other incoherences

stem. In doing so, my argument in the chapter prior intended to 1) disrupt the linear and or white narrative propagated by the postlapsarian world, 2) provide an argumentative incoherence or rupture to what is considered ‘cohesive’ by academia, and 3) offer, on a smaller scale, a structural incompatibility reminiscent of those discussed. However, I am also cognizant that this argument, my thesis, is being written for and within the parameters of academia and therefore must, to a certain extent, provide a cohesive or mappable way of thinking about the American situation¹. In this next section, my argument will offer a recap of what was previously discussed in relation to postlapsarian anxiety and the American situation/structure of society in a way that is what one might categorize as ‘linear’² as well as augment my discussion by way of drawing upon Sharpe’s notion of the ‘wake.’

The first aspect of postlapsarian anxiety that I will map out is the Original Conundrum³ that was produced by way of the postlapsarian recognition of good and evil. The human attainment of knowledge, in the biblical sense, had created the original categories of good and evil which, in turn, necessitated an understanding of the possibilities of good and evil. Good became known in relation to evil and in that way, the postlapsarian world was dependent upon an ‘evil’ in order to locate goodness. This ‘evil’, as I previously stated, in the context of postlapsarian/American society, is the fungible black non/subject, whereas this ‘good’ is

¹ This is a matter that I have been struggling with throughout my thesis. How do you subvert hierarchical/racial thought while working within the boundaries of academia—a structure/apparatus that is contingent on and expectant of the linear/white/colonial narrative? How do we disrupt the episteme of theological-philosophical thought while also inevitably reproducing it?

² While my argument is adhering to a linear narrative in this instance, I am also coming to realize that in interspersing the linear within the nonlinear, my argument is holding together a friction similar to that presented by the incompatibilities and prelapsarian crevices that emerge within the postlapsarian world.

³ Author’s note: For every section prior to this one, I have been annotating certain words or phrases with other ideas that came to mind during that moment. For the most part, these annotations have been disparate and jumbled; making ‘sense’ only to me. Throughout the writing of my thesis I have struggled to view anything I have completed as finished nor do I think my argument itself, given the convoluted nature surrounding the American situation, can ever be finished. In an attempt to refute mastery and show the unfinished aspect to my work—or of all academic work that is—I will leave my annotations in my argument by way of these footnotes starting with this one: This conundrum/incompatibility has given way to the structure of postlapsarian society and by that means American is predicated upon it.

interpretable as the conception of whiteness. By virtue of this, the good/evil, white/black dichotomization that came after the Fall became the structural basis for postlapsarian/white American identity. However, humanity's recognition of good and evil and their subsequent banishment from the Garden of Eden had, in turn, elicited a postlapsarian aversion to knowledge. This aversion became recognizable through what Baldwin identifies as this 'something to save' or white innocence. The white American's affinity to return to this condition of prelapsarian innocence is what constitutes the Original Conundrum in that it contradicts the postlapsarian structure of categorization and linearity. Thus, the white American subverts both the founding principles of their identity and society. These incompatibilities produced by way of the Original Conundrum can be understood as the genesis of the American situation due to the fact that they provide the un/structure for different modes of postlapsarian anxiety that followed. It enabled white Americans to create an identity and society structured off violence and continual suffering while simultaneously offering them an escape from the horror of their identity and their complicity in such violence. In other words, the Original Conundrum, while proving to be inherently contradictory, provides white Americans with a sense of identity and sanity.

This white ignorance coupled with the dichotomization of good/evil and white/black led to a duality of distance: A distance away from the prelapsarian by means of advancing and further categorizing the good/white and a distance from the knowledge by which this categorization and or binary is produced. These two modes of distance, by virtue of traveling towards opposing conditions of existence, give way to a friction at the core of the postlapsarian identity. The distance away from the prelapsarian condition of fluidity, along with the advancement of the white/good in juxtaposition to the evil/black⁴, necessitated both the notion of

⁴ Baldwin poses an understanding of human complexity as opposed to this good/evil dichotomy; Baldwin's work is a mediation on human complexity.

linearity⁵ and fixed categories⁶. In order for the good/white to understand itself in relation to the evil/black, it needed categories and or specific modes of identity by which whiteness could be assigned and positioned in opposition to blackness. And, in order for this fixed categorization to occur, it required a continuous graph, i.e. linearity, to, as I stated previously, place someone or something in a definitive location. The culmination of these fixed identities/categories in accordance with linearity—past, present, and future—had, in effect, achieved an upward trend by which the postlapsarian world attained distance from its prelapsarian origins. Yet, these fixed categories highlight another incoherence in that they give way to the irreconcilable potentiality of the black non/life situated in conjunction with the queer labels that affirm life.

The prelapsarian/American world had, therefore, been born both out of an incoherence and a structural racial antagonism that created an identity by way of denying a different one. This had, in turn, created the condition Sharpe identifies as the wake: The pervasive climate of anti-blackness and modes of legal and extralegal containment and capture of the black non/being in the U.S. However, the condition of the wake, by means of condensing one's present identity, namely, blackness, into a condition defined by the past, presents another inconsistency within the linear narrative. Sharpe argues, "in the wake, the past is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present" (Sharpe 9). That is to say, the past, in structuring the present condition of blackness, is not just what has passed but a disruptive condition that is interspersed with the present. In this way, the wake ruptures this notion of linearity and creates a temporality outside of the context of postlapsarian time.

⁵ This notion also required innocence by way of the wake; structural antagonisms inextricable from American society.

⁶ Always a structural incoherence.

While Sharpe's notion of the wake is presented as a condition and consequence specific to blackness⁷, Baldwin's presentation of the wake—namely, his argument respective to the world created by and for whiteness and against blackness—differs in that he, by essence of arguing how the conception of whiteness and the world elicited by it are led to their own demise, positions white Americans in the wake as well. Baldwin, in “On Being ‘White’... and Other Lies”, remarks how white Americans, “in [their] debasement and definition of Black people, they debased and defamed themselves” (Baldwin 180). They, similar to their black countrymen, are caught, albeit in a more gradual and nuanced way, in the destruction produced by their national/racial identity. However, that is not to say that white Americans experience similar modes of oppression and or conditions of fungibility, but rather that they too are subject to the consequences produced by their whiteness. By virtue of existing in this Baldwinian wake, white Americans are exposed to the same nonlinearity and or temporal disruption that are constituent of the disturbance counter to the flow of events presented by Sharpe's wake. Their genocidal past, so to speak, is inextricably linked to the present in that it is what conditions and will eventually rupture their current existence.

The nonlinearity that haunts the white American is shown through the moments in *Another Country* where the white characters experience moments of temporal confusion and breakage. Cass, the day after admitting to her husband that she has been having an affair, says to Eric “now I don't know what's real” (Baldwin 404). Cass's destabilized sense of reality in this instance ruptures the normative flow, namely, the performative and idealized image of hetero-patriarchal marriage, she's grown accustomed to and in that way, escapes, momentarily, from the oppressive system of linearity and categorization which has thus far policed her

⁷ Reframe: consequences of blackness

lifestyle. Moments after she says this, Baldwin describes the setting they are in “this labyrinth [that] was eternal” (Baldwin 404). Baldwin’s description alludes to the postlapsarian environment Cass and Eric are in as that which exceeds the limits of time and further enforces Cass’s atemporal and or nonlinear mode of being within this instance. Cass, so to speak, is caught in a disruptive current that has challenged and subverted the ways in which she had previously organized her life. This moment of temporal confusion or being in the wake provides another example of the modes by which white Americans are subject to an incompatibility within the structure of linearity in postlapsarian/American society.

In addition to the incompatibilities presented via the Original Conundrum and the contradiction between linearity and one’s situatedness in the wake, the American situation can be understood by way of the American’s contradictory status: That is, the denial of their inherent fluidity. The prelapsarian crevices which I identified earlier act as signals towards the prelapsarian world and one’s natural mobility between gender, sexual, and racial boundaries. Thereby, the Americans’ biggest⁸ opponent is their own society. Here marks another contradiction of (white) America: In attempting to create a society curated towards themselves (whiteness), Americans unknowingly restrict their human nature (fluidity) by way of the imperative to categorize/identify and this notion of linear time by which these categories are fixed upon.

Yet, the irreconcilable condition to which American society has found itself in, as Baldwin’s texts seems to suggest, is not without an alternative. Similar to Sharpe, Baldwin delineates a sort of ‘wake work’ where he presents a way of disrupting the episteme of whiteness and the racial antagonisms that American society is predicated upon. In addition to highlighting

⁸ Contradictory nature

the incompatibilities within the American society, these prelapsarian crevices that Baldwin presents gesture towards a generative possibility. This generative possibility is what I refer to as an ‘otherwise inhabitation’— i.e. Another Country—where one can embrace this prelapsarian fluidity while remaining cognizant of the postlapsarian realities, namely, this ‘darker past’, and thereby losing one’s (white) innocence. This otherwise inhabitation calls for an epistemological rupture of America’s foundational good/evil, white/black dichotomization. Within the un/parameters of this otherwise inhabitation, Baldwin proposes an understanding of humanity that is complex and outside of these Manichean binaries. Individuals, instead of being situated according to a fixed identity or categorical boundary, are seen as multifaceted and unlabeled. For the rest of this section, I will present various characters and instances which gesture towards this otherwise inhabitation and highlight modes by which we might be able to achieve it.

I will preface my discussion with a quote from *Giovanni’s Room*:

Everyone, after all, goes the same dark road—a trick of being most dark, most treacherous, when it seems most bright—and it’s true that nobody stays in the garden of Eden... Perhaps everybody has a Garden of Eden, I don’t know; but they have scarcely seen their garden before they see the flaming sword. Then, perhaps, life only offers the choice of remembering the garden or forgetting it. Either, or: it takes strength to remember, it takes another kind of strength to forget, it takes a hero to do both (Baldwin 25).

While everyone’s garden of Eden is nuanced, they are also all similar in that they are fugitive. However, for the majority, their garden exists entirely in the realm of fantasy. The differentiation that Baldwin presents between those who remember and those who forget can be applied to American and European societies. American society, by virtue of its postlapsarian structure, can be interpreted as those who forget or distance themselves from their Garden of Eden—on the surface that is—whereas European society, by way of its prelapsarian structure, can be read as those who remember. The interspersing of these two, namely, those who remember and forget,

are presented through the expatriate figures in Baldwin's texts who traverse national boundaries. They are the ones who enter, exit, and re-enter the postlapsarian and prelapsarian society alike. These figures offer a glimpse if not partial admittance into this otherwise inhabitation.

The first figure I will focus on is David in *Giovanni's Room*. *Giovanni's Room* begins with David describing his reflection as an estranged and disembodied identity that faces a 'darker past.' This instance, by virtue of being retrospective and capturing a moment to come later in the plot, alludes to David's impending fall. Despite David's relapse into performative heterosexuality with his fiancée Hella, the final scenes in the novel are suggestive of him losing his innocence. David imagines the moments leading up to Giovanni's execution: "He knows that beyond the door which comes so deliberately closer, the knife is waiting. That door is the gateway he has sought so long out of this dirty world, this dirty body" (Baldwin 168). David's imaginative scene signals Giovanni's own fall from the prelapsarian world and subsequent departure from the amorality and ignorance of the Garden. Yet, Giovanni's fall is complicated by his racial ambiguity and embodiment of this 'darker past.' The world Giovanni⁹ enters is not the postlapsarian world—namely, the white world—but it's undercurrent: The world of black social death.

Through this imaginative scene, David is able to reconcile with the 'darker past' and shed the layers of his innocence. In the moment after this, David returns to his reflected image:

The body in the mirror forces me to turn and face it. And I look at my body which is under sentence of death. It is lean, hard, and cold, the incarnation of mystery. And I do not know what moves in this body, what this body is searching. It is trapped in my mirror as it is trapped in time¹⁰ and it hurried toward revelation¹¹ (Baldwin 168)

⁹ Through this David sees into this other world and loses his innocence?

¹⁰ Forces himself outside of time; while David cannot gain access into this world or fully extricate himself from his identity, he marks a dis/trajectory to do so

¹¹ Generative force of losing one's innocence

David's image within this instance gestures back to his initial description of his reflection at the start of the novel. However, now David is forced to confront the disembodied national/colonial/racial identity that contains remnants of this 'darker past.' The image of his identity, as his description here suggests, has been led to its own debasement or end. Moreover, David lends himself to the unknowable in regards to this identity and in that way subverts the imperative for conquest and mastery embodied by American myths such as "Manifest Destiny" or "Upward Mobility." He "long[s] to crack that mirror and be free" (Baldwin 168). Despite David's inability to free himself from the imprisonment of his own identity, he marks a sort of dis/trajectory into the otherwise inhabitance. He says,

I look at my sex, my troubling sex, and wonder how it can be redeemed, how I can save it from the knife. The journey to the grave is already begun, the journey to corruption is, always, already, half over. Yet, the key to my salvation, which cannot save my body, is hidden in my flesh (Baldwin 168).

While David recognizes that there can be no return to his innocence, so to speak, he offers another form of redemption by way of inquiring into the roots of one's identity. His salvation, as he identifies, can be found in the depths or basis of existence. That is this conception of whiteness in America predicated upon black fungibility. David advocates that in reconciling with this truth and thereby losing one's innocence, the white American might be able to attain a true understanding of themselves.

After reflecting upon this track to salvation, David narrates,

"I move at last from the mirror and begin to cover that nakedness which I must hold sacred, though it be never so vile, which must be scoured perpetually with the salt of my life. I must believe, I must believe, that the heavy grace of God, which had brought me to this place, is all that can carry me out of it" (Baldwin 169)

Here, David begins to break away from the abstracted image of his identity and holds together the prelapsarian and postlapsarian in a unified space. While the action of covering his naked

body gestures towards the awareness Adam and Even attained and the postlapsarian condition of shame that ensued upon realizing their nudity, he also recognizes the sanctity of his nakedness and in that way grants himself access to a freer or more fluid mode of existence while recognizing the realities and norms produced by the Fall. In doing so, David creates a moment of generative friction where the pre and postlapsarian are combined in a way that allows for a condition of existence in which one is aware of the realities respective to the postlapsarian world while also enabling this inherent fluidity of humanity to flourish. This mode of existence that Baldwin conveys through David's character in the final scenes of the novel becomes what will mark this otherwise inhabitation. Namely, a space localized to neither the pre nor postlapsarian world, where one can embrace their innate humanity while also recognizing the truths that constitute this 'darker past'. In this way, American society can enter into an otherwise era of existence where the individuals are not confined to or suffocated by a fixed category and work to mitigate, if not eradicate, the violence of their identity.

This dis/trajectory into this otherwise inhabitation is again shown through Eric's characters in *Another Country*. While Rufus' character is the "christ figure—the sacrificial victim—" (Leeming 201) in *Another Country*, Eric becomes a second sort of christ or salvation figure in that he productively troubles the lives of those around him and allows them to embrace their inherent fluidity and become disillusioned from the American myths and fabricated lifestyles. Through his affair with Cass, he not only complicates this image of himself as a homosexual, but he also enables Cass¹² to become disentangled from the performativity of her marriage to Richard. Upon telling Richard about her affair, he asks "why did you go to him?" (Baldwin 374). She responds, "he has something—something I needed very badly... A sense of

¹² Yves is more fluid

himself“ (Baldwin 374). Eric, a queer ex-patriate who has transgressed and interspersed racial, sexual, and international boundaries, is in touch with his inherent fluidity and thereby allows Cass a momentary escape from the rigidity and stagnant condition of her own life. He presents her with this otherwise inhabitation where one can embrace their human nature.

Moreover, Eric allows Vivaldo to recognize and accept his queerness and breakthrough sexual and racial barriers in America. As Leeming points out, “since Eric had once made love with Rufus, Vivaldo’s night with Eric was for Vivaldo a love act, by proxy, with Rufus” (Leeming 203). Not only is Vivaldo granted an understanding of his fluidity by way of dismissing his essential heterosexuality, but also through coupling this moment of queerness with an image of Rufus. In this way, Vivaldo is able to reconcile his lack of ‘being there’ for Rufus and penetrate the racial boundaries which had separated them. Through Eric’s help, both Cass and Vivaldo are able to, in a sense, become disillusioned from the mythicity and structure of American/postlapsarian society and embrace a more fluid mode of living.

Eric’s role as a generative and integral figure in mapping out this otherwise inhabitation is further enforced in the final scene of the novel when he picks Yves up from the airport in New York. His relationship with Yves’, as was stated previously, is emblematic of a type of international and sexual mobility. While this mobility seemed possible only within the realm of their ‘garden’ in southern France, their joint entrance into the postlapsarian world in the final scene of the novel can be interpreted as a way in which they are marking a dis/trajectory into an otherwise inhabitation. That is to say, they are creating a space in which elements from both the prelapsarian and postlapsarian are held in unity. Eric and Yves’ joyful reconciliation along with Yves’ high-hearted spirits as “he strode through the barriers” gesture towards a more optimistic future in which the multifaceted and fluid condition of their relationship can persist.

Circling back to Giovanni's notion of time, nonlinearity becomes another important feature of this otherwise inhabitation in that it recognizes the various modes of livability within America. Given everyone's situatedness in this wake and the temporal confusion produced by it, nonlinearity becomes essential for understanding the condition of one's existence and the fluidity by which they are bound. Furthermore, nonlinear time poses a rupture within the episteme of racialized thought and separation in white American society and thereby works to enable human connectivity. In dismantling linear temporality, one is also subverting the basis on which fixed identities and categories are built and giving way to more fluid conceptions of the self. Nonlinearity, by virtue of presenting this condition of the wake and holding it in conjunction with modes of dynamic livability, leads us, pushes us back, and re-orient us into this otherwise inhabitation.

Together, David, Eric, and Giovanni's time delineate a dis/trajectory in Baldwin's parable that marks a world counter to both the pre and postlapsarian. A world in which the American situation might be mitigated, if not eradicated, by way of losing one's innocence and returning to a state of natural fluidity. A world that is devoid of categorical boundaries and allows for an understanding of the human condition that is complex and adaptable. A world where the national identity is not predicated on the denial of black life. However, whether or not this world can or will ever become a tangible reality has yet to be discovered.

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