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Another Style of Love:
Self-Exploration by Detour in James Baldwin's Another Country

Introduction

James Baldwin’s third novel, Another Country, was published in 1962. In hindsight, it has a felicitous title for a novel published in a decade when, in the words of Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “national identity became sexualized […] in such a way as to engender a curious subterraneous connection between homophobia and nationalism” (234). Indeed, this connection is evident in the heterosexism of the black power movement that became prominent by the late 1960s. It is no mere incident, then, that Another Country became an easy target for the severe criticism being launched by black power advocates. The most telling instance of such an attack can be found in the Black Panther potentate Eldridge Cleaver’s Soul on Ice (1968):

Rufus Scott, a pathetic wretch who indulged in the white man’s pastime of committing suicide, who let a white bisexual homosexual fuck him in his ass, and who took a Southern Jezebel for his woman […] was the epitome of a black eunuch who has completely submitted to the white man. (132)

Here Cleaver’s resentment is directed toward Baldwin’s depiction of one of the chief characters in Another Country, the African American musician Rufus Scott, who indulges in acts of interracial intercourse that are both hetero- and homosexual. This is an apparent violation of Cleaver’s code of conduct policing aberrant desire, the worst of which takes the form of “miscegenation and homosexual

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desire,” for they are, according to Amy Abugo Ongiri, “actions that are conceived of as highly individual and solely self-profiting enactments of power, acts that threaten the dissolution of [not only] the individual black body but also the bonds of the imagined nation” (235–36).

Of course, black nationalism was not an invention of the black power movement. Its rise in the United States can be traced back in the 19th century to Martin Delaney and then to the pompous Marcus Garvey in the early 20th century, the latter proclaiming in 1924, “[the UNIA] is against miscegenation and race suicide” (qtd. in Ongiri 233), the echo of which we can hear in Cleaver’s attack against Baldwin. However, as Marlon B. Ross points out, in the 1960s, in the aftermath of McCarthyism, which branded homosexuals as communist betrayers of the nation, black nationalists had legitimate reason to renew and consolidate their anti-homosexual bias toward the black community as well as the white mainstream oppressing them (30). Consequently, Ross argues, Baldwin’s works, including Another Country, are conceived to be a challenge to the social and cultural norms in the United States such those related to race, gender, and sexuality (36). Ongiri, Ross, and other scholars respectively show that in the tension between Another Country and the black nationalist critiques of it are found not only the most intriguing readings of the novel but also valuable insights into the African American male body politics discoursed through the era of social and cultural turbulence beginning with the civil rights movement and succeeded by the black power and gay liberation movements.¹

Perhaps less noted in readings of Baldwin in relation to contemporary black nationalism, then, is his own nationalist inclination. In August 1961, Baldwin was invited to the mansion of Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the Nation of Islam, who had acquired a nation-wide recognition as one of the foremost orators of black nationalism. Later Baldwin reminisces about this visit in an essay “Down at the Cross.” Even before confronting Muhammad in person, Baldwin was impressed by the degree of success this charismatic leader had achieved: “He had done all these things, which our Christian church has spectacularly failed to do” (316).

While thus acknowledging the popular appeal of the Nation of Islam to the African American people, Baldwin did disagree with their core belief in a separate nation. He rebukes, for instance: “I dismissed the Nation of Islam’s demand for a separate black economy in America, which I had also heard before, as willful, and
even mischievous, nonsense" ("Down at the Cross" 314). Baldwin here intimates that their claim for a separate black economy in the United States was not particularly an original idea. The problem of their claim, however, had more to do with their childish conception of the economic system of the nation. Baldwin wonders: "What happens when the Negro is no longer a part of this economy? [. . .] The American Negro's spending power will obviously no longer be the same. On what, then, will the economy of this separate nation be based?" (332) In addition to their blindness to economic reality, Baldwin finds that the Nation of Islam's claim for a separate nation is akin to what he calls "innocence," or ignorance, on the part of the mainstream white American, which Ross paraphrases as "a destructive arrogance embedded in white privilege as a condition that encourages a person to deny the historical, political, bodily, and natural limitations of human mortality" (31). Baldwin suggests that a black nationalist demand for a separate nation is no less benighted than the white America's unwillingness to learn from history.

Therefore Baldwin presents his own nationalist idea based on a moral responsibility to redeem the past. He asserts:

[I]n order to change a situation one has first to see it for what it is: in the present case, to accept the fact [. . .] that the Negro has been formed by this nation [. . .] and does not belong to any other—not to Africa, and certainly not to Islam. The paradox [. . .] is that the American Negro can have no future anywhere, on any continent, as long as he is unwilling to accept his past. To accept one's past—one's history is not the same thing as drowning in it; it is learning how to use it. ("Down at the Cross" 333)

He further develops this idea in the same essay, completely negating a black nationalist demand for a separate nation: "In short, we, the black and the white, deeply need each other here if we are really to become a nation—if we are really, that is, to achieve our identity, our maturity, as men and women" (342). Baldwin's claim is twofold: first, it is imperative to learn from history that America has been made on the tremendous sacrifice of African Americans; then, Americans—white and black alike—need to recognize their indebtedness to one another so that they can grow to create a better nation.

In this context, Another Country bears new significance as a case in which
Baldwin begins to imagine an ideal nation, one completely different from the separate nation proposed by the black nationalist movement. The intent of this Baldwinian form of nationalism is to reinvent a space where one can be released from the current patterns in order to look back upon and learn from history, a space where one can secure a position in the surge of the varying demands coming from black nationalism at the time. In a sense Baldwin’s nationalism is more diasporic than nationalistic, according to the definition of the term by Paul Gilroy:

The idea of diaspora might itself be understood as [...] a utopian eruption of space into the linear temporal order of modern black politics which enforces the obligation that space and time must be considered relationally in their interarticulation with racialised being. (198)

Just as Gilroy’s diaspora does, the title, Another Country, suggests such an alternative (trans-)national space. There the flow of time is temporarily rearranged so that the teleological historicity of black nationalism is kept at bay and the individual is no longer sacrificed to communal or nationalist demands. There, personal memories have the same significance as national or communal history and one can grow mature through their experiences with someone else, a process Baldwin often calls “love”: love “not merely in the personal sense but as a state of being, or a state of grace—not in the infantile American sense of being made happy but in the tough and universal sense of quest and daring and growth” (“Down at the Cross” 341). In this way Another Country is more properly read as “a utopian eruption of space” in which the issues of race, gender, and sexuality are signified more on an individual basis in relation to one’s identity than as problematics of a black nationalist community. Here emerges another country as an alternative to a black nationalist hetero-normative nation.

What follows is an exploration of Baldwin’s projection of a new nation in Another Country. This essay most seriously focuses on his rendering of that space by following the lead of Richard Poirier who names such an enactment as the “style” of American literature:

The classic American writers try through style temporarily to free the hero (and the reader) from systems, to free them from the pressures of time, biology, economics, and from the social forces which are ultimately the
undoing of American heroes and quite often of their creators. (5)

Although Poirier's choice of writers for his examination is typically white, male and canonical, his attention to writers who "struggle with already existing literary, social, and historical organizations for power [. . .] over language itself" (ix) resonates with our evaluation of James Baldwin. For like those writers, Baldwin too strenuously fights against the racial and sexual oppressions of his mother country with energetic cadence and, in fiction, gives voice to the convoluted consciousness of characters suffering from their overwhelming libidos with a distinct style. Most of all, in Poirier's designation, such style requires of the reader an "intense involvement" in order to appreciate "the extraordinary dislocations of our fixed ideas of reality," or "the suspension and then the redirection of our way of seeing things and of feeling them through language" (84). Baldwin's style has a tenacious grip on us, cajoling us into "bearing witness."2 The practice of writing, for Baldwin, is an act of love, by which he urges a reader to jointly explore the world and to grow mature, that is, to be responsible—to respond to his call and to meet our obligations at the same time. Another Country not only thematizes love in its most Baldwinian sense but also becomes a medium through which the author makes love to the reader.3

1. Self-Exploration by Detour

As is clear from the title, a strange land is of special importance in Another Country. This seems too apparent because Baldwin himself notes its importance in the formation of his identity from time to time. For example, he announces: "I became an American in a foreign country because I was not anything else. [. . .] I had to leave my country in order to realize that I was a part of it, or that it was a part of me" (Mead and Baldwin 85–86). Here Baldwin, who had never felt at home in his home country, delineates the ironical moment of his self-discovery abroad, the acknowledging of his Americanness through a detour.

In this light, there is merit in following the trajectory through which Baldwin moves the settings in his works, beginning with his earlier novels and going up to Another Country. In his first novel published in 1953, Go Tell It on the Mountain, Baldwin gives a vivid description of an African American male adolescent with an awakening homosexual desire, who suffers from a smothering sense of helplessness and estrangement both in his family and community in Harlem. In
his second novel, *Giovanni’s Room* (1956), Baldwin makes a radical shift: he not only transfers the setting of the novel to Paris, he sets a white bisexual American as the chief character of the story. His decision to choose Paris for the setting of *Giovanni’s Room* seems to have coincided with his move to Paris in 1948, with *Go Tell It on the Mountain* still in progress. This semi-autobiographical novel was to be completed in Paris and we need only recall Baldwin’s quote above retelling the moment he became an American in another country to be assured that what Baldwin needed to face his wretched adolescence and sublime it in *Go Tell It on the Mountain* was both a physical and a psychological distance from his most familiar setting. Although Baldwin thought of his departure for Paris as a matter of survival, Baldwin the writer was to find that the perspective on his native land, which he acquired abroad—a perspective through a detour—was indispensable to his exploration of what it meant to be an African American.4

Of course, the vantage point Baldwin gained in a foreign country plays no small part in the creation of *Giovanni’s Room* and *Another Country*. In the former, Baldwin would have never dared to make a white male the protagonist of his narrative without the freedom and comfort he enjoyed in a foreign country. In fact, this new perspective allowed him to confront the theme of homosexuality from a completely different angle than what he had employed in *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. This transgressive exercise of imagination notwithstanding, however, *Giovanni’s Room* illustrates how desperately introverted a man can become through the figure of a white male American who cannot admit his own homosexuality and finally allows his former lover, Giovanni, to be executed without any attempt to save him.

Almost as a reaction to *Giovanni’s Room*, *Another Country* again takes New York as its main setting and portrays an interracial group of men and women, who seek varying types of bonds with each other—friendship, both hetero-/homosexual relationships, parent-sibling relationship, brotherhood, and so on—in a world full of cunning, antagonism, racism, and sexism. For instance, Rufus loses himself in an unhappy relationship with a poor white woman from the South and kills himself early in the novel. His best friend, the white would-be writer Vivaldo Moore, feels remorse for not having been able to save Rufus. Vivaldo at the same time is attracted to Rufus’s sister Ida and they begin courting. In contrast, Vivaldo’s mentor at high school, Richard Silenski, has difficulty in maintaining his marital life with his wife, Cass. Worse still, Ida has an affair with the authoritative
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white TV producer Steve Ellis, while living with Vivaldo. Twisting further these already entangled relationships is the arrival of the white gay actor Eric Jones who has just come home from France.

What is interesting in reviewing Baldwin's first three novels in this way is the correspondence between the trajectory of the settings of these novels and Baldwin’s self-exploration by virtue of a detour, both of which take a transatlantic circuitous route. Furthermore, this larger detour back home via the other side of the Atlantic is microcosmically replicated in Another Country by Eric’s return to New York. His repatriation brings a slight change to the relationships among characters there: although New York remains a place full of hatred, racism, violence, and sexism, which is epitomized by Rufus’s death, there seems to be growing a bud of love between Vivaldo and Ida, love not just as a romantic consummation but as relentless self-examination through the eyes of the lover. This unfolding of the story offers an important lesson: just as Baldwin’s self-exploration took the form of a transatlantic detour, the exploration of the self, which Another Country reaffirms in us, is best performed through a confrontation, struggle and negotiation with the other.

2. Foreign Space and Style

To corroborate a statement that foreign space has special significance in Baldwin’s literature, a closer look at the way France is represented in Another Country is due now. In Another Country, France serves as a refuge for Eric who has fled from New York and found the younger French lover Yves there. In stark contrast to New York where the Silenskis have difficulty in adjusting to a new life after the huge success of Richard’s published novel or where Vivaldo and Ida have just begun their relationship more or less clumsily, Southern France under the Mediterranean sun emerges as a utopian resort where Eric enjoys an idle and hedonistic stay with Yves just before his return home. In fact, the following description of a sea-coast villa in Southern France is characterized by its almost prelapsarian voluptuousness:

Eric sat naked in his rented garden. Flies buzzed and boomed in the brilliant heat, and a yellow bee circled his head. Eric remained very still, then reached for the cigarettes beside him and lit one, hoping that the smoke would drive the bee away. Yves’ tiny black-and-white kitten stalked the garden as though
it were Africa, crouching beneath the mimosas like a panther and leaping into air. (183)

As can be seen here, the word “garden” is repeated, evoking the inevitable association. This Edenic paradise intoxicates Eric and Yves/Eve with the scent of mimosa and its archetypal image redolent of Africa.

This last resort, however, does not stay forever; its purpose lies not so much in itself but in its influence on the reconfiguration of New York in the story. This Eden is just a “rented garden” and Eric and Yves have to leave it in due course. In fact, Eric has learned that his future as an actor is limited in France and has decided to return to the States. Things have also been arranged so that Yves can follow him to New York after a short while. Against this backdrop, the two men have come to this resort to commemorate Eric’s stay in France and with his imminent departure from it, the garden redoubles in value for Eric.

However, for Yves, as much as he has enjoyed this sojourn in a garden resort, France, his native country, has been far from the haven Eric has experienced. An expatriate, Eric has come to enjoy comfort and (homo) sexual freedom in France, compared to his miserable and frustrating experiences in his hometown in Alabama or in New York. Yves, conversely, views France as a “wretched mausoleum of a country” (185). Just like the United States for Eric, France for Yves has its history with varying problems. It may not be too surprising then that what France is to Eric, the United States is to Yves. Yves’s fascination with New York is emphasized at the end of the novel when the plane carrying him approaches the city. The sun-struck metropolis beckons Yves, filling him with a mixture of hope and anxiety. This scene intimates that the United States could be “another country” if seen from a different point of view.

While it is clear that France is not presented here simply as an example of an exceptionally free country, it is nonetheless apparent that the sequence depicting Eric’s stay there and his romance with Yves inserted in the middle of the story is significant in our consideration of this transformative detour. Here two points are worthy of examination. First, as is the case with Baldwin’s other works, the presence of a foreign space in Another Country potentially liquidizes the categories of race, gender and sexuality. Perhaps it is worth reviewing Magdalena Zaborowska’s analysis of Istanbul as the center of Baldwin’s literary enterprise:
Baldwin uses Turkey as a location and lens—a place to write from and one through which to see and reassess American culture. Although set in New York and centering on American characters, Another Country was revised in Istanbul, on the “erotic margin” of Asia and Europe, and articulated a turning point in Baldwin’s views on race and sexuality in a transnational context. (93)

Admittedly, Zaborowska pays attention to Turkey as the locus of imagining and creating the novel. Yet, the south of France as is represented in Another Country has the same effect as Turkey, serving as a place that can objectify the categories of race, gender and sexuality in the United States “in a transnational context” and to potentially unmoor the walls of those categories hitherto thought of as fixed and stable. Indeed, the scene quoted earlier in this section contains such a transgression of categorical boundaries. The garden where Eric and Yves enjoy staying is redolent of the Garden of Eden; however, a couple inhabiting it is not heterosexual as Adam and Eve are, but rather homosexual. This adroit recasting of conventions illustrates the way a transnational space can transfigure sexual norms in a different setting. The episodic insertion of Eric’s stay in France into the novel is indeed an indispensable hinge on which the New York scenes are connected, giving them flexibility and room for changes.

Secondly, the representation of a foreign space in Another Country works at a more fundamental level in Baldwin’s undertaking of a literary world. That is, the creation of a foreign space in Another Country strengthens the language he employs by denaturalizing it: testing it in a transnational setting to the extent of interrogating its de facto status as the mother tongue and thus making it somewhat unfamiliar. It is pertinent to evoke another great theorist of stylitics here. In Extraterritorial, George Steiner astutely states that “the multilingual, cross-linguistic situation is both the matter and form of Nabokov’s work” (7), thereby offering an explanation for the fact that he and other modernist writers such as Samuel Beckett and James Joyce were “able to keep words and phrases in a charged, unstable mode of vitality” (10). In Another Country, the section set in France portrays such a “multilingual, cross-linguistic situation” due to its setting in a foreign country where Eric and Yves often converse in French. This is not to say that Baldwin engages in writing in a foreign tongue with the same intensity as Nabokov. The presence of French in Another Country rather seems to highlight the exotic eroticism of the Eric-Yves relationship. Nonetheless, the encounter with
a foreign language urges one to probe his/her connection with the mother tongue at a deeper level, which Baldwin himself experienced in France:

The necessity of mastering a foreign language forced me into a new relationship to my own. [...] My quarrel with the English language had been that the language reflected none of my experience. But now I began to see the matter in quite another way. If the language was not my own, it might be the fault of the language; but it might also be my fault. Perhaps the language was not my own because I had never attempted to use it, had only learned to imitate it. If this were so, then it might be made to bear the burden of my experience if I could find the stamina to challenge it, and me, to such a test. ("This Nettle, Danger..." 690)

Here we can see a variation of Baldwin's self-exploration by detour on a different plane. Baldwin had thought of the English language as more of an imitation. Later, then, in confronting the difficulty of mastering a new language abroad, he realized that he needs to approach the language by himself. Only after this strenuous effort on his part does the language become strong enough to "bear the burden of his experience." So the effect of such a multi-lingual space as is enacted in this representation of a foreign land is to show us that self-exploration is both "the matter and form" of Another Country. That is, Another Country thematizes a self-exploration and performs self-exploration on the level of Baldwin's creation of its world. Exactly in this sense, the style of Another Country deserves close attention.

3. Body, Memory, Sex

This self-exploration by detour on a thematic level is best seen in both Vivaldo's and Cass's relationships with their partners after having sex with Eric. They both need him as an interlocutor and a special agent who can possibly help them overcome the impasse of their relationships with the partners—Richard for Cass and Ida for Vivaldo. However, the outcome makes for a clear contrast. While Vivaldo and Ida appear to struggle forward, Cass and Richard expect an impending separation. This contrast derives from the difference in the acceptance of the confession by the partner. While Richard does not try to understand Cass's revelation that she has had an affair with the homosexual Eric, Vivaldo tries to
hear Ida out when she awkwardly starts to talk about her affair with Ellis. In reviewing relationships that center around Eric, we will witness that someone else's body, just like a foreign land, becomes a terra incognita for the self-exploration by detour, especially at the moment of the most intimate contact.

Naturally, it is not easy for Vivaldo to confront Ida's confession, but to do so enables him to confront himself at last. First, he feels that "[a] kind of wind of terror shook him for an instant" (411). Yet, he demands, "We'll talk about it now" (411) and encourages her to continue. Hearing Ida recount the affair, he gradually feels he is "being locked in" (415). However, he forces himself into her position: "He listened, seeing, or trying to see, what she saw, and feeling something of what she felt" (415). After she confesses her affair, he is first "afraid to touch her [. . .] as though she had told him that she had been infected with the plague" (426). Yet, Vivaldo feels even closer to Ida at the same time: "as he stood helpless and stupid in the kitchen which had abruptly become immortal, or which, in any case, would surely live as long as he lived, and follow him everywhere, his heart began to beat with a newer, stonier anguish, which destroyed the distance called pity and placed him, very nearly in her body, beside that table, on the dirty floor" (426). This moment of unity, however, does not stand for a romantic consummation; rather, it is the moment when he dares to see his own past: "He thought, unwillingly, of all the whores, black whores, with whom he had coupled, and what he had hoped for from them, and he was gripped in a kind of retrospective nausea" (426–27). Vivaldo now realizes that a person is an accumulation of his/her experiences as he faces Ida's story and he urges himself to do the same thing: to see the things from which he has long averted his eyes. This is the precise moment when he encounters the uncanny in a Freudian sense: "He had the spinning sensation of having been through all this before" (427). What he sees has been always there. It is too familiar to recognize, but when he sees it, it emerges anew with a strong sensation.

Ida helps Vivaldo confront himself through her body, by letting him "place himself very nearly in her body," which he has experienced more or less literally through sex with Eric. In fact, not only Vivaldo but also Cass remembers her past when she has sex with Eric. What they remember is things they would rather repress. In Cass's case, it is her innocence prior to her encounter with Richard, who has been her first man and her only sexual partner prior to her experience with Eric:
Like children, with that very same joy and trembling, they [Cass and Eric] undressed and uncovered and gazed on each other; and she felt herself carried back to an unremembered, unimaginable time and state when she had not been Cass, as she was now, but the plain, mild, arrogant, waiting Clarissa, when she had not been weary, when love was on the road but not yet at the gates. (291)

For Vivaldo, his interaction with Eric prompts in him the feeling that he is "now involved in another mystery, at once blacker and more pure" (384):

He pulled Eric up and kissed him on the mouth, kneading Eric's buttocks and stroking his sex. How strange it felt, this violent muscle, stretching and throbbing, so like his own, but belonging to another! And this chest, this belly, these legs, were like his, and the tremor of Eric's breath echoed his own earthquake. Oh, what was it that he could not remember? (384)

They are both remembering or on the verge of remembering their past, facing or touching Eric's body. On the moment most likely to be absorbed in self-oblivious sensation, they are actually recalling things all too familiar to them such as their own past or their lost friends. These instances bolster Robert Reid-Pharr's insight in his reading Another Country with a shocking yet provocative question, "What do we think when we fuck?":

I am fully suspicious, in fact, of the notion of transcendence, of seamless connection with the rest of existence, precisely because it looks so much like the imagined transparence that [...] defines whiteness. We do not escape race and racism when we fuck. On the contrary, this fantasy of escape is precisely that which marks the sexual act as deeply implicated in the ideological processes by which difference is constructed and maintained. (84)

Reid-Pharr negates the romantic unity we often envision in sexual intercourse and contends that sex involves the creation of difference between the self and the other. He implies, in other words, that this most intimate moment with the other in fact entails relentless introspection along with the creation and reinforcement of difference.
In Another Country, Eric is most conscious of this. For instance, on the last night of his stay in southern France, he takes a shower. Recalling that Yves prefers "long, scalding baths" to showers, Eric visualizes "the Oriental opulence which overtook Yves each time he bathed" (201). This whimsical fancy, however, leads Eric to his past: the image of Yves’s body becomes a "gateway" to the memory of his sexual awakening:

And as he [Eric] put on his bathrobe, his body tingled less from the effect of the towel and the toilet water than from his image, abruptly overwhelming, of Yves leaning back in the bathtub, whistling, the washrag in his hand, a peaceful, abstracted look on his face and his sex gleaming and bobbing in the soapy water like a limp, cylindrical fish; and from his memory, to which his image was somehow the gateway, of the moment, nearly fifteen years ago, when the blow had inexorably fallen and his shame and his battle and his exile had begun. (201)

Eric’s train of thought clearly illustrates the process in which the body of the other becomes a door to one’s past. There, the closer one gets to that body physically or imaginarily, the more relentlessly one has to face the most vulnerable part of oneself. As Baldwin writes elsewhere, "[o]ne can only face in others what one can face in oneself" (Introduction 136). Perhaps Vivaldo also has learned this through sex with Eric.

Conclusion: Love, Expression, and Writing

Vivaldo thus acquires the strength to confront both his own and Ida’s past. This maturing involves another change: Vivaldo finally discovers "a detail that he needed for his novel" (427). He had been searching for that detail "for months" and then "[it] fell, neatly and vividly, like the tumblers of a lock, into place in his mind" (427). Most plausibly, it had been too familiar to notice: "It seemed impossible that he should not have thought of it before: it illuminated, justified, clarified everything" (427). Indeed, as he has just "had the spinning sensation of having been through all this before" (427), it would not be too far-fetched to surmise that the detail Vivaldo finds is something very close to him, or more plausibly, it is a part of himself.

This revelation toward the end of the story highlights one important aspect of
Another Country: in a sense, as Washington puts it, it is "a novel about writing novels" (134). An important subplot of the narrative delineates the successful debut of Richard who has kept writing while teaching at high school. One of his students has greatly admired him and followed his path by aspiring to be a writer—Vivaldo. Ten years later, as Another Country unfolds itself, Richard is busy completing his novel. As it turns out, the published novel becomes an instant best-seller and Richard is plunged into the midst of a circle of Ellis and admen. Ironically, however, Cass and Vivaldo find the novel unsatisfactory. They often present critiques of it, the vehemence of which suggests the presence of Baldwin himself behind those remarks. For example, hearing Vivaldo's childhood reminiscence of having harshly beaten an African American boy with his white friends, Cass thinks how hard it is to express things sincerely:

No. It was not expressed. She wondered why. Perhaps it was because Vivaldo's recollections in no sense freed him from the things recalled. He had not gone back into it—that time, that boy; he regarded it with a fascinated, even romantic horror, and he was looking for a way to deny it.

Perhaps such secrets, the secrets of everyone, were only expressed when the person laboriously dragged them into the light of the world, imposed them on the world, and made them a part of the world's experience. Without this effort, the secret place was merely a dungeon in which the person perished; without this effort, indeed, the entire world would be an uninhabitable darkness; and she saw, with a dreadful reluctance, why this effort was so rare. Reluctantly, because she then realized that Richard had bitterly disappointed her by writing a book in which he did not believe. [...] [The book] had been written because he was afraid, afraid of things dark, strange, dangerous, difficult, and deep. (112)

The secrets buried deep inside oneself have to be expressed with great effort so that they can be shared with the rest of the world. This kind of expression in fact fills Another Country: jazz and the blues performed live or played from the records of Billie Holiday or Bessie Smith. For Baldwin, "the language of jazz, spirituals, the blues" is almost the same as "the language of testifying and signifying" (qtd. in Coles 24). If Vivaldo could learn to express himself with relentless self-scrutiny just as seen in the language of testifying and signifying,
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then this would parallel his maturing as a creative artist.

Finally, while Another Country follows Vivaldo's growth as a writer, it embodies a literature which should be written by the mature Vivaldo. Perhaps one of the most powerful moments of Another Country occurs earlier in the narrative when a saxophone player improvises "a terrific solo" in a session in which Rufus participates:

He was a kid of about the same age as Rufus, from some insane place [. . .], but somewhere along the line he had discovered that he could say it with a saxophone. He had a lot to say. He stood there, wide-legged, humping the air, filling his barrel chest, shivering in the rags of his twenty-odd years, and screaming through the horn Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me? And, again, Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me? This, anyway, was the question Rufus heard, the same phrase, unbearably, endlessly, and variously repeated, with all of the force the boy had. [. . .] the question was terrible and real; the boy was blowing with his lungs and guts out of his own short past [. . .]. (8–9)

This intense and aggressive interrogation Rufus hears in the solo of the sax player interpellates us by making us be there and by demanding us to know and love him (Baldwin himself). This performance of the text is an enactment of Baldwin's belief that writing or expression is the act of love: love that involves unfaltering self-exploration—"To encounter oneself is to encounter the other: and this is love" (The Devil Finds Work 571). Another Country entices us with an arrogant and yet erotic beckoning and demands us to know us as well as itself, without flinching from the collision that such a relationship would involve. "Love is a battle, love is a war; love is a growing up" ("In Search of a Majority" 220). This almost violent closeness seems to be the attraction and the nature of Baldwin's style.

While telling about her affair with Ellis to Vivaldo, Ida recalls the change in her father after Rufus's death: "He just sits there, he doesn't even drink any more. Sometimes he goes out and listens to those fellows who make speeches on 125th Street and Seventh Avenue. He says he just wants to live long enough—long enough—" (416–17). A minor remark, but Ida is referring to Black Muslims
here. In this context, however, simply listening to the speeches of black nationalists equals a state of apathy; the implication is that they are just providing fantasies instead of encouraging people to face their past and the history of their country. As Baldwin himself observes, "The New York of Another Country never really existed except in Another Country" ("Words of a Native Son" 710). This statement on one hand suggests Baldwin's intention to create an alternative space as its title denotes; on the other hand, it accounts for the more or less ahistorical nature of the novel, except some minor indications of its historical background including Ida's recollection above.

And yet, there is an unmistakable coincidence associated with this essay: Another Country, Poirier's A World Elsewhere, and Steiner's Extraterritorial were all published within a short span of ten years—1962, 1966, and 1971, respectively. This contemporaneity indicates that their shared interest in style is somehow linked to their reconfiguration or reimagining of a national space and that this connection is likely to correspond to the social, cultural, and political realities of the 1960s. Of course, a more detailed examination will be necessary to confirm this link between the historical background and the prominent interest in style that is also evident in Poirier's and Steiner's criticism. This is precisely where a more careful exploration of Another Country will prove invaluable.

Notes

* An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 50th General Meeting of the American Literature Society of Japan on October 8, 2011, at Kansai University, Osaka.

1 See also Bell.

2 Kevin Birmingham contends that “bearing witness” has special meaning for Baldwin: “Seeing something, after all, already implies being there, but what he means when he says that he ‘bears witness’ is that the past is a full presence—it is not an observed event, but an experienced environment” (144).

3 In an interview, Baldwin says: “the only reason to try to become a writer is not to tell the world how I’ve suffered because who cares, but it’s an act of ‘I love you’” (Gresham 162). See also Leeming (347).

4 One of Baldwin's friends in the Village, Eugene Worth, committed suicide by
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falling off the George Washington Bridge in 1946 just like Rufus. Baldwin could not help but despair that if he remained in New York, he would end up in “a similar fate” (Leeming 56).

5 See also “Of the Sorrow Songs” and “The Uses of the Blues.”

6 Baldwin recalls in “Down at the Cross”: “I sometimes found myself in Harlem on Saturday nights, and I stood in the crowds, at 125th Street and Seventh Avenue, and listened to the Muslim speakers” (314).

Works Cited


