ADAM T. JERNIGAN

James Baldwin's Post-Sentimental Fiction: From "Previous Condition" to *Another Country*

ONE OF THE IRONIES OF MODERN-DAY LITERARY CRITicism is that the scholars who identify with the sensibility found in James Baldwin's essays frequently distance themselves from the author's fiction. The most recent enactment of this irony comes from Henry Louis Gates, Jr., who uses his editorial introduction in *The Annotated Uncle Tom's Cabin* (2006) to undertake a "reassessment both of the novel and of James Baldwin's critique, itself now part of the canon" ("Introduction" xiii). Although Gates states that his objective is to establish the transcendence of Stowe's novel over Baldwin's critique, his method is not, as might be expected, to refute the critique itself. Instead, he turns from Baldwin's essays to his literary output, and seeks to show that Stowe's sentimental opus profoundly influenced Baldwin's fiction. Focusing on the "novels about race" that Baldwin wrote in the 1960s (xxviii), Gates argues that the "Manichean simplicity" which Baldwin diagnosed in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) would become the "central flaw" in works like *Another Country* (1962) and *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* (1968) (xxvi). Alleging that the characters in these novels "seem to exist as set pieces for ideological diatribes rather than nuanced explorations of their full humanity," he determines that Baldwin was never able "to extricate himself from sentimentality" (xxvi, xxx). Ultimately, then, it is a "reassessment" of Baldwin's fiction that enables Gates to affirm the resilience of Stowe's novel. Gates closes with the provocative suggestion that the essayist who was Stowe's most acute critical executor would also become the novelist who was her

"twentieth-century literary heir"—amounting to little more than "Stowe in blackface" (xxx).[1]

Of course, Gates was not the first critic to offer up Baldwin's fiction at the altar of his essays. As early as 1963, Irving Howe determined that while Baldwin had "secured his place as one of the two or three greatest essayists this country has ever produced," he had "not yet succeeded . . . in composing the kind of novel he counterposed to the work of Richard Wright" (362). In 1970, Albert Murray lamented that Baldwin's fiction had not lived up to the "assumed promise" of his early essays on aesthetics, and concluded that *Another Country* did not reflect the "sensibility of the novelist" any more than the "polemical essay, *The Fire Next Time*" (145, 148). Indeed, several years before Gates weighed in with his critique, Lawrie Balfour observed that "much of the critical attention generated by 'Everybody's Protest Novel' has focused on whether or not Baldwin's own novels escape his complaints about protest fiction" ("Finding" 75).

Despite being exposed to such negative assessments fairly early in his writing career, however, Baldwin persisted in thinking of himself primarily as a fiction writer. Baldwin's commitment to his artistic medium seems to have been motivated by his belief that it was not essays and speeches but novels and short stories that had the capacity to improve race relations in the United States. During the early 1960s, when he was frequently asked to speak on behalf of the Civil Rights Movement, Baldwin resisted being hailed as a spokesperson, observing that "it is impossible to be a writer and be a public spokesman, too, because the line which you have to use, really, in polemics, is to my point of view, just a little . . . too simple" ("James Baldwin, as Interviewed" 13). By the late 1960s, when his nuanced approach to race relations was being drowned out by polarized integrationist and separatist positions, Baldwin would have cause to reaffirm his fidelity to fiction: "I am *not* a public speaker. I *am* an artist." ("Disturber" 81). If Baldwin was optimistic about the prospect of improving U.S. race relations, it was because he believed in the transformative potential of a certain literary aesthetic.[2]

My aim in the present essay is not to adjudicate whether Baldwin's fiction can be found guilty of sentimentality, but rather to illuminate aspects of his fiction that have been occluded by the critical fixation with that question. More specifically, my aim is to inquire into what Baldwin's fiction might reveal about the forms and functions of a post-

sentimental literary aesthetic. A close analysis of Baldwin's early stories and novels reveals that his critique of sentimentalism enabled him to rework the formal dimensions of his fiction, and in particular to develop new kinds of characters, scenes, and plots. Writing in an intellectual climate that Eric Porter has referred to as "the first post-racial moment" (3), Baldwin seems to have been hopeful that a post-sentimental aesthetic might light a path toward a post-racial society.[3] But what would a post-sentimental literary text look like? And what might such a text do? How would it operate on the world? What might it change?

Understanding how and why Baldwin sought to pioneer a post-sentimental aesthetic will require examination of not just his assessment of literary sentimentality but, more important, his analysis of the widespread cultural formation that we might call "sentimentalism." In early essays like "Everybody's Protest Novel" (1949), Baldwin argued that sentimentalism amounted to a dominant structure of feeling that was being reinforced by sentimental and anti-sentimental fiction alike. Marlon Ross was the first scholar to use Raymond Williams's concept of "structures of feeling" when discussing Baldwin's analysis of U.S. race relations. Writing about the construction of whiteness in *Giovanni's Room* (1956), Ross explains that Baldwin reframed the "race problem" as a problem inhering in the structure of feeling that sustains white security: "Baldwin makes the central problem of the twentieth century the strange meaning of being white, as a structure of feeling within the self and within history—a structure of felt experience that motivates and is motivated by other denials" (25). Building on Ross's analysis, the present essay examines how Baldwin used his fiction to interrogate the emotion system that underpins hegemonic whiteness in both its conservative and liberal manifestations.

On one level, then, Baldwin's early essays focused on how efforts to depart from literary sentimentality had bound novelists like Richard Wright ever more tightly to a moral-sentimental structure of feeling.[4] Yet Baldwin's larger purpose seems to have been to shed light on how his contemporaries might surpass the deadlock between the sentimental and the anti-sentimental—and begin to dissolve the dominant feeling structure. Indeed, I would venture that what has sustained scholarly interest in Baldwin's reassessment of Wright—and what differentiates it from Gates's reassessment of Baldwin—is that Baldwin rounded out his critique with a conceptual reformulation of sentimentality intended to

light a path toward a post-sentimental literary aesthetic. In short, where Baldwin diagnosed an unwitting inheritance, he strove to create the conditions for a mindful departure.

Although most scholars have assumed that Baldwin's critique of sentimentalism was first elaborated in the essays just mentioned, I will show that Baldwin's critique was actually launched in his first published short story, "Previous Condition" (1948). By focusing the first section of this essay on "Previous Condition," I hope to clarify why Baldwin thought it was so important to foster a post-sentimental literary tradition. Written when he was just twenty-four, Baldwin's semiautobiographical story offers a compelling account of how a sentimental structure of feeling could keep Americans invested both in the practice of racial ascription and in the enforcement of ascriptive hierarchies. The story interrogates how white Americans are able to generate a felt sense of security and self-possession by projecting economic and bodily insecurity onto black Americans. As its title suggests, "Previous Condition" constitutes both an homage to literary predecessors like Stowe and Wright and an explanation of why Baldwin found it necessary to renounce their aesthetic strategies.

In the second section of this essay, I will turn to Baldwin's third novel, *Another Country*, which I take to be the clearest example of the author's post-sentimental aesthetic. My claim in the second section will be that Baldwin's insights about sentimentalism motivated his attempts, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, to forge a post-sentimental literary mode that I refer to as "affective realism." In Baldwin's view, the best way to liberate Americans from their reliance on racial stereotypes was to help them confront and accept the disquieting sides of their affective lives. In novels like *Another Country*, I argue, Baldwin reworked the formal dimensions of his fiction in hopes of encouraging a closer attention to the reverberations of affect within and between bodies. Whereas some critics have dismissed Baldwin's fiction for its dalliance with polemics, I aim to uncover the understated, antipolemical, connective side of the author's aesthetic.

I. THE SAFETY OF SENTIMENTAL SCRIPTS: 'PREVIOUS CONDITION'

Published in *Commentary* in October of 1948, "Previous Condition" could almost be described as a work of literary criticism. As the story opens, readers learn that the narrator-protagonist, a twenty-five-

year-old black actor named Peter, has just returned to New York City
from a theatrical production in which he starred as "a kind of intellec-
tual Uncle Tom, a young college student working for his race" ("Previ-
ous" 83). Toward the end of the story, Peter will joke with his white
girlfriend, Ida, that his casting agency has just landed him "the lead in
Native Son" (95). These allusions to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Native Son*
set the stage for Baldwin to explore how a repertoire of familiar charac-
ter types could impact the lives of black Americans like Peter. On the
most obvious level, Baldwin's story constitutes a critique of the state of
national theater in the 1940s, when talented black actors could only
find work in a limited number of conventional roles. On a deeper level,
however, the story offers an analysis of why, outside the theater, white
Americans persisted in attributing certain character traits to black
Americans. As we will see, the plot of "Previous Condition" turns on its
protagonist's epiphany about the psychological forces underpinning
such attributions. Because "Previous Condition" is semiautobiographi-
cal, I will suggest that a similar revelation may have been what pro-
pelled Baldwin to devote the greater part of his writing career to
elaborating a mode of post-sentimental fiction.

Although "Previous Condition" opens as its protagonist is waking
up in his Greenwich Village apartment, the first few pages serve primar-
ily to apprise readers of significant events in the protagonist's child-
hood. Peter tells of being raised by his mother in the black section of a
racially segregated town in New Jersey. Feeling hemmed in by the "old
shack" in which his mother resided, he spent many afternoons "wander-
ing by [him]self" through the rest of the town (85). "I hated my mother
for living there," Peter recalls. "I hated all the people in my neighbor-
hood. . . . When the landlord came around they paid him and took his
crap" (85). Several years later, he and his friends "formed gangs" and
continued to wander through town, occasionally meeting with "white
boys and their friends" to throw "rocks and tin cans at each other" from
"the opposite sides of fences" (87). As a teenager, however, Peter began
to notice that, despite their adolescent rebelliousness, his friends were
about to capitulate to the same system that had exploited the members
of their parents' generation. In Peter's memory, this series of events
takes on the quality of scenes in a drama whose *dénouement* is all but
predictable. "They were going to settle down and . . . pay the same rents
for the same old shacks and it would go on and on" (87). Refusing to

play a part in that drama, the sixteen-year-old protagonist decided to "run away" from both his mother and the town (85).

Proceeding to discuss his early adulthood, Peter tells of spending a number of years "running around" in cities across the continental United States (88). "I'd knocked about through St. Louis, Frisco, Seattle, Detroit, New Orleans, worked at just about everything" (85). Although he shares few details about what happened to him during those years, he does mention that he "learned a few things" about the judgments that others would make about his character.

> I'd learned never to be belligerent with policemen, for instance. . . . What might be accepted as just good old American independence in someone else would be insufferable arrogance in me. After the first few times I realized that I had to play smart, to act out the role I was expected to play. . . . When I faced a policeman I acted like I didn't know a thing. . . . I looked as humble as I could and kept my mouth shut and prayed. (88–89)

Here, significantly, Baldwin invokes the motif of acting to capture the way in which interactions between whites and blacks often seem to be mediated by a repertoire of fantasmatic roles and scripts. What Peter "learned" from his first few encounters with police officers was that when he exercised his citizenship rights, those officers perceived him as a "belligerent" Bigger Thomas. What he learned from subsequent encounters was that in order to preempt this perceptual bias, he had to assume the "expected" role of a "humble" Uncle Tom. In this way, the first pages of "Previous Condition" treat the protagonist's early recognition of how a person can become caught in the double bind of antithetical yet mutually reinforcing stereotypes.

The protagonist's experiences in New Jersey and elsewhere should be sufficient to explain why, on the first page of "Previous Condition," Peter can be found lying on his back in a cold sweat, recovering from a "nightmare" whose contents he cannot remember—though he knows he "had been running" (83). Yet those early experiences also constitute the backstory for the central plot in "Previous Condition," which turns on Peter's attempts to achieve a felt sense of belonging in New York City. Like many other artists of his generation, Peter rents an apartment in the bohemian neighborhood of Greenwich Village. Having realized

that some landowners in the Village would be unwilling to lease an apartment to a black man, he entreated a white friend, Jules, to secure a room for him.[5] On the morning of his third day in the apartment, however, Peter is summoned from his bed by the sound of his landlady's footsteps on the stairs. When he opens the door, the landlady wastes no time in evicting him, asserting, "I can't have no colored people here" (91). As the landlady explains that her female tenants are "afraid to come home nights," Peter becomes aware that she too appears "frightened to death" (91). Witnessing the intensity of her emotions, Peter realizes that it would be nearly impossible to shake the image of him that she has brought to their encounter. Unsurprisingly, his insistence that the other tenants "ain't gotta be afraid of me" comes as little reassurance to the landlady. "You get outa my house!" she shrieks. "Why don't you go on uptown, like you belong?" (91).[6]

In this way, Baldwin uses the first half of "Previous Condition" to address a social problem that would have been familiar to most readers of *Commentary*: namely, the problem of racial stereotypes. During the nineteenth century, the word "stereotype" referred to the metal plates used by printers to duplicate text or imagery onto a page. In the early 1920s, however, Walter Lippmann applied the word to the sphere of everyday life. In *Public Opinion* (1922), Lippmann argued that individuals rely upon abstract "picture[s] in their heads" to respond efficiently to external stimuli (4). Describing how people make recourse to stereotypes in their encounters with new persons and environments, he explained that "we notice a trait which marks a well known type, and fill in the rest of the picture by means of the stereotype we carry about in our heads" (89). Whether or not Baldwin was familiar with Lippmann's work, his analysis of American race relations came to be shaped by a similar understanding of the ways in which mental images could premediate how people approach one another in the real world.[7] For black Americans, the persistence of racial stereotypes has meant that "a great deal of one's energy is expended in reassuring white Americans that they do not see what they see" ("The White Man's Guilt" 722).[8]

Yet if the first half of "Previous Condition" focuses on its protagonist's exhaustion with the typed roles that he has been made to play both inside and outside the theater, the second half focuses on the protagonist's dawning realization that he and his girlfriend have been activating those same roles in order to maintain a sense of emotional

security within their relationship. After he has been evicted from his Village apartment, Peter becomes aware that the pitying "concern" proffered by his white girlfriend, Ida, functions less to mitigate his feelings of vulnerability than to shore up her own feelings of security and virtue ("Previous" 96). At the same time, Peter comes to perceive that he has been trading on Ida's "subterranean Anglo-Saxon guilt"—and trading on his own "value as forbidden fruit"—in order to elicit certain responses from her (89). He perceives that he has been wielding his symbolic identity "like a knife," and that he has been "twist[ing]" the knife to "get his vengeance" (89). Put differently, Peter begins to realize that he has been "us[ing] his color like a shield" in order to "get what he wants" (89).

In the second half of the story, then, Peter comes to realize that he and Ida have been trafficking in images that serve to shore up their own sense of emotional security, images that keep each insulated from the vulnerability of self and other. It is at this point that the protagonist arrives at what his author would refer to as a revelation. "I knew these things long before I realized that I knew them and in the beginning I used them, not knowing what I was doing. Then, when I began to see it, I felt betrayed" (89). Peter's realization of how he has "used" racialized images and scripts is what leads him to joke with Ida that has been offered "the lead in *Native Son*" (95). But he promptly adds that he "turned it down," explaining, "Type casting, you know. It's so difficult to find a decent part" (95). Recognizing the irony in Peter's voice, and riffing on the absurdity of refusing such a part, Ida replies, "The very *idea* of offering you *Native Son!* I wouldn't stand for it" (95). While this exchange amounts to a moment of levity between the characters, it also carries an acknowledgment of the gravity of their predicament. For Peter's reference to *Native Son* reflects his awareness that if he and Ida were to continue to traffic in defensive emotions such as pity and guilt, they might end up inflicting injuries not unlike the ones that Wright's characters perpetrate against one another. Notwithstanding his feelings about the security operations of white people, it dawns on Peter that his own pursuit of emotional security threatens to become his most acute personal danger. "I'm not worried about that miserable little room," he exclaims; "I'm worried about what's happening to me, *to me*, inside" (93).

In this way, Baldwin uses the second half of "Previous Condition" to reveal how a moral-sentimental structure of feeling could underpin the existence of racialized images and roles. Contravening the common

sense about the genesis of stereotypes, Baldwin suggests that their origins lie not in literary and cultural texts, much less in direct observations or experiences, but rather in a feeling structure that relies upon morally coded images as moorings for sentimental emotions. Although Baldwin would never organize an entire essay around the topic of stereotypes, his early stories and reviews amount to an extended meditation on why it was that, in the theater of the white imagination, blacks were often cast as victims and perpetrators, sinners and saints. In Baldwin's view, the moral predication of black Americans as victims and perpetrators, exemplified by figures like Uncle Tom and Bigger Thomas, had come to play such an important role in organizing the sense that white Americans had of themselves—of their own virtue and vulnerability—that it prevented liberals and conservatives alike from perceiving black Americans in all their complexity, and hence from entering into complex relations with them.

Baldwin offers a similar analysis in the early literary review, "The Image of the Negro" (1948), for example, in which he suggests that the white majority have been able to disavow their vulnerability to economic and bodily volatility by projecting such volatility onto unconscious "images" of black Americans. By conjuring images of black Americans in the charged space of unconscious fantasy, white Americans are able to replace affects related to the contingencies of their own lives with stabilizing emotions organized around fixed and familiar images of others. Put more concretely, whites are able to replace decompositional affects like economic anxiety and erotic desire with sentimental emotions like pity and guilt, fear and fascination. Although these racialized images reside largely in unconscious fantasy—its own affectively charged fictional space—they exert real effects upon U.S. social and political life. In the first place, the dependence on such images results in the pernicious tendency to associate blacks with poverty, violence, sexuality, and so on. In the second place, the dependence keeps people invested in the enforcement of ascriptive hierarchies. In an essay suggestively titled "The White Problem" (1964), Baldwin explains: "What it means to be a Negro in this country is that you represent, you are the receptacle of and the vehicle of, all the pain, disaster, sorrow which white Americans think they can escape. This is what is really meant by keeping the Negro in his place" (78).[9]

In sum, while the first half of "Previous Condition" demonstrates

how stereotypes can impact the everyday lives of black Americans like Peter, the second half of the story asks where these stereotypes come from and why they have been so resilient. The answers to these questions emerge not from any new information about how the white characters treat the protagonist, but from the latter's reflexive insights about his own recourse to stereotypes. If readers identify with Baldwin's protagonist, they do so not because he is constructed, like the protagonist of a sentimental novel, as a morally innocent or virtuous character, but rather because he is a morally complex character who relinquishes his attachment to his own innocence just enough to experience a personal revelation that pushes him toward self-transformation.

But if "Previous Condition" turns on a series of revelations that suggest Peter has acquired a good deal of critical insight about his predicament, the story also acknowledges that he has yet to discover a new mode of being in the world that would enable him to connect in fulfilling ways with others. Toward the story's end, Peter decides not to audition for any more sentimental stage dramas and resolves to leave the liberal mecca of midtown. He boards an uptown train and makes his way to a "rundown" Harlem blues bar ("Previous" 99). Yet Peter will not feel any more "in his element" in Harlem than he had in the Village; for he experiences this return to a predominantly black neighborhood as a capitulation to the white world's attempts to keep him "in his place" (100). "I longed for some opening, some sign, something to make me part of the life around me. But there was nothing except my color" (100). Commenting on his outsider status in the worlds of both whites and blacks, he concludes, "I didn't seem to have a place" (100).[10] Finding himself with nowhere else to go, however, the protagonist attempts to create an "opening" by offering to buy a drink for a woman who appears to be a regular patron of the bar (100). Ironically, Baldwin's story comes to a close when, accepting this offer, the woman invites the protagonist to tell her about himself: "'Baby,' said the old one, 'what's your story?'" (100). Absorbed by the voice of Ella Fitzgerald on the jukebox, and startled by the reverberant "shaking" of his body, Peter can only reply, "I got no story, Ma" (100).

By concluding his first published story with the protagonist's admission that he has "no story," Baldwin may have been acknowledging that he too had yet to develop a literary aesthetic of his own. If the author of "Previous Condition" was resolved, like his protagonist, to turn the

page on literary sentimentality, what kind of aesthetic would he develop instead? Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, Baldwin would pioneer a post-sentimental realist aesthetic intended to help readers move beyond racialized images and scripts. In his magnum opus, *Another Country*, Baldwin attempts to dissolve such images through a particular articulation of song and story. In "Many Thousands Gone" (1951), Baldwin suggests that the surest way to dispense with racial stereotypes is to tell, as it were, the "story" of the black American: "To tell his story is to begin to liberate us from his image and it is, for the first time, to clothe this phantom with flesh and blood" ("Many" 34). The title of "Many Thousands Gone" is taken from a nineteenth-century spiritual whose melody would eventually be adapted into the Civil Rights anthem, "We Shall Overcome." Lest the significance of his title be lost on readers, Baldwin opens the essay by observing, "It is only in his music . . . that the Negro in America has been able to tell his story" (19). In the next section, then, I will explore how Baldwin's critique of literary sentimentality, together with his discovery of a post-sentimental strain in early African-American blues music, pushed him to rework the formal dimensions of his fiction.

II. DEVELOPING A POST-SENTIMENTAL AESTHETIC: 'ANOTHER COUNTRY'

In the sentimental novel, it is the sanctity of the self and the home—evidenced by access to stabilizing conventions of emotional response—that serves as the ground for expanding the bounds of fellow feeling. As scholars of nineteenth-century literature have observed, sentimental novelists constructed the family as the locus of privileged emotional attachments, and they presumed those attachments to be similar across all families. At the same time, by codifying a set of expressive conventions, sentimental novelists rendered the emotions of characters instantaneously legible to other characters and readers. These presumptions and conventions set the stage for virtuous protagonists to sympathize with the anguish felt by characters who had been separated from their family members—thereby modeling a sympathetic responsiveness that could be emulated by readers. Yet insofar as sentimental fiction trained the reader to reach out, from a position of relative security, to the members of other families in need, it risked predicating the virtue of the reader upon the vulnerability of socially differentiated

others. What's more, pity, guilt, and other stabilizing emotions could function as defense mechanisms not only against acknowledging one's own vulnerability but against apprehending the vulnerability of others.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Baldwin sought to pioneer a post-sentimental aesthetic in which the subject's exposure to volatility would be taken as the default human condition as well as the basis for reimagining life in common. Each of Baldwin's early novels might be said to open with the protagonist's exposure to a destabilizing condition or event, and then to build dramatic tension around the question of how the protagonist will respond. In *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), for example, fourteen-year-old protagonist John Grimes meets with the upheaval of puberty, and he flees to the sanctuary provided by the church. In *Giovanni's Room*, twenty-something protagonist David confronts his desire for another man, and he retreats to the safe haven of a culturally sanctioned form of intimacy. In Baldwin's third novel, *Another Country*, vulnerability is generalized as the everyday condition of a black man who loses his job and his income, and is threatened with losing his home and his social moorings. If the sentimental novel was grounded in the sanctity of the self and the home, Baldwin's third novel treats the struggles of a protagonist who has, in the words of Bessie Smith, "*no place to go*"—who has neither a stable home nor a family that he can turn to (*Another* 49). Influenced by early female blues singers like Smith, Baldwin constructs the characters of *Another Country* as sonorous subjects whose internal tensions will only be mitigated when they can accept the "shaking" and "trembling" of the body, let their vulnerabilities resound within an audiosocial space, and discover various affective harmonies with others.

The first chapter of *Another Country* is a lesson in just how quickly a person can lose his job, lose his apartment, and—having lost his self-esteem in the process—find himself too ashamed to appeal for help. The character at the center of this chapter is a talented jazz drummer who has been without a home for more than a month and without a gig for almost half a year. When the novel opens, the character has just emerged from a grindhouse cinema, where he had sequestered in hopes of settling a sleep deficit. It is not until the second paragraph of the book that readers learn the character's name: Rufus Scott. This deferral of nominal reference serves to reinforce Baldwin's portrayal of his character's phenomenological disorientation. For if readers are not provided

with the point of reference comprised by the protagonist's proper name, it is because Rufus has begun to lose his own sense of locality and directionality.

Readers approaching *Another Country* for the first time may be equally disoriented by the frequency with which Rufus's movements are interrupted by involuntary memory. Realizing that he might know some of the musicians at a nearby jazz club, Rufus heads north on Seventh Avenue in hopes that one of the guys on the stand might "lay enough bread on him for a meal" (4). Upon approaching the club, however, he is curbed by the thought that the regulars who knew him as a successful musician will now look at him "with pitying or scornful or mocking eyes" (5). At the same time, the recollection of a period in his life when he had felt in charge—"on the stand or in the crowd, sharp, beloved, making it with any chick he wanted"—triggers a second memory that is located not so much in the mind as in the visceral depths of the body (5). "He remembered Leona. Or a sudden, cold, familiar sickness filled him and he knew he was remembering Leona" (6). Baldwin will use the next thirty pages to familiarize readers with the events that have solidified Rufus's relationships with both his girlfriend, a working-class white woman named Leona, and his best friend, a twenty-eight-year-old Italian American named Vivaldo Moore. At the same time, by allowing the forward movement of the narrative to be all but taken over by the backward movement of memory, Baldwin is able to steep readers in the interference pattern that makes up the present tense of Rufus's life.

If layering multiple histories and temporalities creates an affective field that implicates the reader, it also deepens the reader's understanding of Rufus's implication in his own demise. For although Rufus is on the skids, he is not constructed as the kind of innocent victim common to sentimental fiction. When Rufus finds that he has become dependent on the money that Leona brings home from her job as a waitress, he defends against his feelings of dependency and guilt by displacing them onto her. Suspecting that her attraction to him is based largely on "his sex," and observing that she seems to credit blacks with harboring a "sexual secret," Rufus begins to accuse Leona of sleeping with other black men behind his back (68, 53). Soon enough, their defensive suspicions spiral into acts of aggression. "They fought each other with their hands and their voices and then with their bodies" (53). When Rufus realizes that these transactions leave him "utterly unsatisfied," he begins

to flee into bars, where a mixture of "triumph" and "guilt" pushes him "to pick fights with white men" (53).[11]

Gates justifies his assessment that the "central flaw" of *Another Country* inheres in characters who "seem to exist as set pieces for ideological diatribes" by citing a brief passage from Baldwin's novel in which Rufus meets Leona for the first time. Gazing into the face of this Southern white girl, Rufus is struck by a memory of being stepped on by a white drill sergeant in the South: "He remembered, suddenly, his days in boot camp in a Southern boot camp and felt again the shoe of a white officer against his mouth" (12).[12] Finding fault with the way in which this passage elicits emotion from readers, Gates offers the following gloss on its emotional pragmatics: "See that white girl, feel that boot!" ("Introduction" xxix). He complains that Baldwin is too heavy-handed in "telling" readers how they "should feel about the novel's action" (xxvii). But far from playing up the subjective dimensions of Rufus's experience, Baldwin describes only the physical actions of the protagonist and the drill sergeant. Nor does he use language that would invite a strong emotional response from readers. Indeed, where Gates uses the evocative word "boot," Baldwin uses the more neutral "shoe."

The part of Gates's analysis that I find constructive is his account of how Rufus's experience of racialized violence shapes his interactions with white people in the present. The paragraph in which Rufus is reminded of the drill sergeant's shoe comes to a close when Rufus acknowledges that his attacker had "vanished . . . beyond the reach of vengeance" (*Another* 13). Picking up on Rufus's desire for "vengeance," Gates observes that Rufus will fulfill this desire by taking advantage of the Southern white girl: "When Rufus takes Leona, Rufus is exacting Uncle Tom's revenge" ("Introduction" xxix).

Although I suspect that Gates may be right to draw attention to the sentimental dimension of the early encounters between Rufus and Leona, he neglects to add that the scenes he focuses on take the form of memories recounted in the first twenty pages of the novel. In subsequent pages, Rufus will make an effort to move beyond the sentimental scripts that organize his interactions with Leona. Indeed, while Baldwin may use the early pages of his novel to thematize the sentimentalism that pervades American culture, the greater part of *Another Country* treats the efforts of various characters to move beyond the sentimental feeling structure that mediates relations between them. In that sense,

the central focus of Baldwin's novel is not the "big-booted oppressions of bigotry"—to borrow a phrase from Patricia Williams—but rather the "small aggressions of unconscious racism" (61).

In the sentimental novel, characters are framed as worthy of sympathetic identification in part because they are endowed with the moral purity that comes with being deprived of agency—deprived, that is, of the ability to improve their situation, and of the ability to harm others. In post-sentimental novels like *Another Country*, by contrast, characters become worthy of sympathetic identification because they endeavor to build a life in a world full of volatility, and they struggle to avoid taking out their frustrations on others. Characters like Rufus are neither bereft of agency nor imputed with privileged insight and moral authority. My own interpretation of Rufus comes closest to the one offered by James Campbell, who ventures that "Rufus Scott is probably Baldwin's most fully realized black character after Peter in 'Previous Condition'" (155). In interviews, Baldwin refers to Rufus as a character who "had never appeared in fiction before" ("James Baldwin Interviewed" 104). He observes that Rufus is not imputed with the innocence of a sentimental victim like Uncle Tom: "There are no antecedents for him. He was in the novel because I didn't think anyone had ever watched the disintegration of a black boy from that particular point of view. Rufus was partly responsible for his doom, and in presenting him as partly responsible, I was attempting to break out of the whole sentimental image of the afflicted nigger driven that way (to suicide) by white people" (104).

Of course, if it would be a mistake to read Rufus as another Uncle Tom, it would also be a mistake to read him as another Bigger Thomas. Some literary critics have suggested that scenes like the one in which Rufus fights with Leona justify a strong moral evaluation of his character. For example, Houston Baker has concluded that Rufus is a "raging, screaming, sexually-aggressive Black creator pleading for the white world's acceptance" ("The Embattled" 68). In my reading, however, both Rufus and Leona amount to morally complex characters whose recourse to "raging" and "pleading" is part of a larger struggle to admit their vulnerabilities and see one another through. Rufus's abuse of Leona might be taken as an example of what Balfour refers to as one of the "most insistent points" of Baldwin's fiction, namely, that "the experience of victimization does not exhaust the experience or identity of

individuals who suffer systematic oppression; nor can it be disentangled from the experience or identity of individuals who are privileged by such oppression" (*Evidence* 103).

In his introduction for *The Annotated Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Gates also argues that in *Another Country*, Baldwin's obligation "to show or to dramatize" gets trumped by his temptation to "tell us . . . the way that we should feel about the novel's action" (xxvii). My claim is that while the characters' memories and flashbacks may be mediated by a prominent narrative voice, Baldwin minimizes the narrative voice when dramatizing action in the present. He does this in order to reopen the question of how characters and readers might feel within the unfolding present. Balfour makes a similar point: "As a writer, Baldwin strains for the words that will move his readers without making them conscious of his efforts or presuming to control exactly how they will respond" (*Evidence* 119).

Finding himself "bowed down with the memory of all that had happened" during those months, Rufus is eventually driven to the doorstep of his best friend, Vivaldo (*Another* 49). Rufus is astonished by the warm reception he receives from Vivaldo. "You've had us all scared to death, baby. We've been looking for you everywhere" (47). The expression of concern, even coming from his best friend, hits Rufus with a force that might as well be physical. "It was a great shock and it weakened Rufus, exactly as though he had been struck in the belly. He clung to Vivaldo as though he were on the ropes" (47). Here, Baldwin invokes the metaphor of boxing to convey the depth of the affective connection between Rufus and Vivaldo. The metaphor also reverberates with the history that has solidified their friendship. For one year earlier, when Vivaldo's girlfriend, Jane, had made an inflammatory remark in an Irish American bar, and Rufus had found himself confronted by one of the bar's imposing patrons, Vivaldo had been willing to put his body on the line for his friend in what would become a full-blown brawl. The fight sent Vivaldo to the hospital with a "great gash in his skull," but it also consolidated an unspoken trust between the two friends (35). While Rufus and Vivaldo "never spoke of this night," readers learn that "from that time on" the two friends had "depended on and trusted" one another as they did no one else (35–36).[13]

Yet while Vivaldo has demonstrated his loyalty to Rufus through a show of strength, it remains unclear whether he will be able to sustain the receptive embrace that he provides on the doorstep. The dynamic

that unfolds between the two characters after Vivaldo invites Rufus into his apartment becomes a crucial test of their relationship. The inconclusive nature of the unfolding interaction is crucial to Baldwin's portrayal of the risks that go with making oneself available to another. In earlier passages treating Rufus's memories of his interactions with Leona, Baldwin made use of indirect discourse to convey the nature of the couple's verbal and physical exchanges. By utilizing metapragmatic frames that captioned the performative force of such exchanges, he left readers with little doubt about the injuries that those characters had been attempting to inflict.[14] By contrast, when Baldwin describes Rufus's interactions in the ongoing present—as in the following exchange between Rufus and Vivaldo—the author limits himself to direct discourse and is extremely sparing in his use of metapragmatic description.

> "Did you ever have the feeling," he asked, "that a woman was eating you up? I mean—no matter what she was like or what else she was doing—that that's what she was *really* doing?"
>
> "Yes," said Vivaldo.
>
> Rufus stood. He walked up and down.
>
> "She can't help it. And you can't help it. And there you are." He paused. "Of course, with Leona and me—there was lots of other things, too——"
>
> Then there was a long silence. They listened to Bessie.
>
> "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.
>
> Vivaldo said, "Maybe you should stay here, Rufus, for a couple of days, until you decide what you want to do."
>
> "I don't want to bug you, Vivaldo." . . . Again he felt that he was smothering. (51–52)

Throughout this scene, Baldwin frames the dialogue between Rufus and Vivaldo with speech verbs—such as "said" and "asked"—that have minimal metapragmatic valence. At the same time, his account of the characters' movements is so restrained that it reads as stage direction, as in "He walked up and down." In this way, Baldwin deprives readers of the cues that normally indicate what the characters intend and/or accomplish by saying the things that they say, or by moving in the ways that they move. That is, he deprives readers of the cues that endow speech and movement with their social consequentiality. And by doing as much, Baldwin charges readers with interpreting what each inter-locutor is really asking of the other, how each is responding to the oth-er's proposals, and what kind of interactional event they are co-constructing. At the same time, and perhaps more important, he is able to steep readers in the ambiguities and tensions that suffuse the two characters' attempts to arrive at interpersonal harmony.

It is in this same scene that Baldwin first utilizes direct discourse to immerse readers in the aural ambience shared by the characters. As in much of Baldwin's fiction, stretches of both ambient sound and silence comprise their own rich semiotic medium and convey at least as much as the dialogue does about the communications between characters. In the above passage, it is Rufus who stands, walks to Vivaldo's window, and then repeatedly walks "up and down." Interspersed between the dialogue, his movements may reflect a desire to build more space—perhaps even to build more "streets"—into their relationship. By contrast, Vivaldo seems unsettled by what is described as "the silence that hung in the room"; and in an effort to fill it, he rises to flip through his record collection (48). When he sits back down, the plaintive tones of Bessie Smith's "Backwa-ter Blues" (1927) begin to echo through the sparsely furnished apart-ment. "*There's thousands of people . . . ain't got no place to go*" (49).

Earlier in the novel, Rufus had attended a party with Charlie Parker's music playing in the background (14). But the scene with "Backwater Blues" is the first time that music insinuates itself directly—mimetically rather than diegetically—into the text. The lyrics move Rufus to wonder how others have leveraged themselves out from a similar state of desolation. "Now that Rufus himself had no place to go—'*cause my house fell down and I can't live there no mo*', sang Bessie—he heard the line and the tone of the singer, and he wondered how others had moved beyond the emptiness and horror which faced him now" (49). To the

extent that the content of his conversation with Vivaldo constellates around friendship and hospitality, the answer may already be in the air. Alternatively, or simultaneously, the answer may be in the music—in its dialectic of content and form. For between Bessie Smith and pianist James Pete Johnson, there develops a relation of witnessing—in the antiphonal structure and harmonic holding—that serves to lighten the loneliness in the song's lyrics. "The piano bore the singer witness, stoic and ironic" (49).

In this crucial scene, Baldwin constructs the affective field as an audiosocial space in which flows of affect alternately harmonize and dissonate in the manner of sound waves, causing bodies to vibrate and resound like so many instruments or resonance chambers. In *Listening* (2007), Jean-Luc Nancy has used music to theorize a kind of subject that achieves its identity not through any substantive internal properties but rather through its difference or distance from itself, and through its being continually returned to itself by others—which makes subjectivity not only resonant but rhythmic. "It is a question," writes Nancy, "of going back from the phenomenological subject, an intentional line of sight, to a resonant subject, an intensive spacing out of a rebound that does not end in any return to self without immediately relaunching, as an echo, a call to that same self" (27). In Baldwin's fiction, the body is similarly presented as the locus of internal tensions that seek opportunities to resonate with other bodies, objects, and scenes.

Whereas Richard Wright had constructed the body of Bigger Thomas on the model of a furnace—as the locus of internal tensions that sought release—Baldwin constructs the bodies of his protagonists as so many resonance chambers whose internal vibrations seek to harmonize with their surroundings. In works like "Sonny's Blues" (1957) and *Another Country*, physical "shaking," "shuddering," and "trembling" are the signs that the characters remain open, that they can still be touched, that they have mustered the courage to approach the precipice of their own experience. Indeed, if Baldwin chose to narrate that crucial scene with minimal metapragmatic description, he may have done so in hopes of enabling unspoken thoughts as well as affective inrushes and outflows—of expectancy, hesitation, desire—to resound more clearly. In *Of Hospitality* (2000), Jacques Derrida reminds readers that "*reticence*, as you know, is the figure of a deliberate *keeping-quiet* so that more than eloquence can be heard in it" (95).

During his early years in Europe, Baldwin listened incessantly to the female singers of the "classic" blues era: Bessie Smith, Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Billie Holiday, and others. It was his way of maintaining a connection with his homeland and of uncovering another country within that homeland. At the same time, however, Baldwin took Bessie Smith's blues as a model for the aesthetic he hoped to achieve in his fiction. In recent years, scholars of black culture have argued that the blues fulfill a number of important functions within the African American community. Houston Baker interprets the blues as a locus for collective self-definition; Henry Louis Gates, Jr., interprets it as a vernacular for coded critique of the dominant culture; and Angela Davis interprets it as a propaedeutic for more overt social and political protest.[15] But these dimensions of blues music were not the ones that motivated Baldwin's interest in the genre. What drew Baldwin to the blues was the directness with which it addressed people's vulnerability to structural and contingent misfortunes, as well as the urgency of its appeal for a deeper sense of social entanglement and mutual responsibility.

In an interview with Studs Terkel just before the publication of *Another Country*, Baldwin explains that he had been drawn to the secular realism—or what he calls the "sense of tragedy"—that he perceived in the blues: "It is the ability to look on things as they are and survive your losses, or . . . to know that your losses are coming. To know they are coming is the only possible insurance you have, a faint insurance that you will survive them" ("An Interview" 22). In the spirituals, the sorrow songs, and other musical forms that emerged under slavery, the geospatial compass of African American music had been oriented toward the proverbial drinking gourd and the pole star—if not toward a more directly celestial deliverance. By contrast, the blues took shape as a secular realist aesthetic that was grounded in an acknowledgment of people's material and relational vulnerability—and did not presume to plot an escape from that condition.[16] What's more, the blues was a musical form in which a provisional sense of power or pleasure could be derived, however paradoxically, from the admission of vulnerability. In the lexicon of 1920s blues singers like Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith, words like "wandering" and "rambling" functioned as ciphers for an approach to the world premised on the acknowledgment and acceptance of such vulnerability.

If any respite from the condition of vulnerability were possible, it would take the form, in Baldwin's view, of horizontal and often evanescent connections with others. Baldwin believed that it was only by accepting limitations that people could find freedom. Thus, when Bessie Smith testifies on behalf of the lonely multitude who have no "place" to go, she is referring not to a physical location, but to a social, interpersonal refuge. In an essay appropriately titled "Nothing Personal," Baldwin makes this point bluntly: "I have always felt that a human being could only be saved by another human being" ("Nothing" 700). The blues, as Baldwin knew it, could offer not just a spatial home but a temporal one as well, giving people both locations to dwell in and techniques for dwelling on.

In this way, Baldwin perceived that the blues could inculcate an ethos that took dispossession or homelessness as the basis for our being in common. But he also believed that insofar as the blues nourishes an emotional stance that allows individuals to acknowledge and accept their vulnerability, it functions as a homeopathic aesthetic that can help them to survive such vulnerability:

> Now I'm trying to suggest that the triumph here—which is a very Un-American triumph—is that the person to whom these things happened watched with eyes wide open, saw it happen. So that when Billie or Bessie or Leadbelly stood up and sang about it, they were commenting on it, a little bit outside it; they were accepting it. And there's something funny—there's always something a little funny in all our disasters, if one can face the disaster. So that it's this passionate detachment, this inwardness coupled with outwardness, this ability to know that, all right, it's a mess, and you can't do anything about it . . . so, well, you have to do something about it. You can't stay there, you can't drop dead, you can't give up, but all right, OK, as Bessie said, "Picked up my bag, baby, and I tried it again." ("The Uses" 59; ellipsis orig.)

Baldwin understood that the "ironic" or "double-edged" relation to pleasure evidenced in the blues stemmed from the recognition that pleasure has no guarantees, that it may be here today and gone tomorrow. While the title character in "Sonny's Blues" has been able to

subdue the internal turbulence that had driven him to heroin, he acknowledges that "it can come again" (135). At the same time, this insight about the impermanence of pleasure was reversible, as evidenced by blues lyrics such as "Well, if we don't today, we will tomorrow night" (Baldwin, "Down" 311). That's what Bessie Smith meant when she sang of searching for a lost friend: "Picked up my bag, baby, and I tried it again" (Smith). To Baldwin's mind, this ironic sensibility was one source of the much-touted "tenacity" of black Americans ("Down" 311). In all of these ways, Baldwin perceived that the blues could mediate what Baker has referred to as the subject's "experiencing of experience" (*Blues* 7).[17] Baldwin developed a dialectical aesthetic whose purpose was to help readers perceive that personal security is a danger, willed innocence is a crime, and vulnerability is a key to freedom.

In the aforementioned scene from *Another Country*, Rufus and Vivaldo seem to approach the harmonic rapport that is evidenced between Bessie Smith and James Pete Johnson. "The most impenetrable of mysteries moved in this darkness for less than a second, hinting of reconciliation" (*Another* 54). In the end, however, they fail to establish such a rapport. Vivaldo's nervous energy moves him to pour another drink, turn over the record, disburse the tension: "He stood over Rufus for yet another moment, then he said, 'I'm going to take you out and buy you a pizza'" (54). By the end of the first chapter, Rufus will find himself alone on the street again. Not unlike the experience of falling, Rufus's feeling of isolation—his fall into himself—is made all the more agonizing by the feeling of being powerless to stop it. Later that night, Rufus will allow his body to drop from the George Washington Bridge into the Hudson River. His fate echoes that of Baldwin's best friend, Eugene Worth, who had committed suicide at the age of twenty-four in December 1946. Remembering this friend in an essay written toward the end of his life, Baldwin wrote, "I would have done anything whatever to have been able to hold him in this world" ("Price" 833).

III. BALDWIN'S FUTURES

One year after Baldwin published *Another Country*, Norman Podhoretz sought to defend Baldwin's novel against a string of patronizing reviews. Podhoretz argued that what reviewers failed to see was that the novel's banality was part of its radical efficacy:

> Whites coupled with Negroes, heterosexual men coupled with homosexuals, homosexuals coupled with women, none of it involving casual lust or the suggestion of neurotic perversity, and all of it accompanied by the most serious emotions and resulting in the most intense attachments—it is easy enough to see even from so crude a summary that Baldwin's intention is to deny any moral significance whatever to the categories white and Negro, heterosexual and homosexual. (247)

In the years since Baldwin's death in 1987, the moralism that Americans had long brought to the topic of race has made its way into debates about same-sex marriage, single parenting, immigration, abortion, and other topics. At a time when public discourse increasingly takes the form of a struggle to capture the high ground of moral innocence, what seems particularly relevant about Baldwin's literary practice is his attempt to forge an aesthetic that might help Americans to move beyond the moralism of a sentimental culture. Oddly enough, in *The Annotated Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Gates lavishes praise upon Stowe for having anticipated the "hot-button cultural and political concerns" of the twenty-first century: concerns such as "marriage, sexual orientation, class, language, and religion" ("Introduction" xiii). What Gates does not mention is that the sentimental structure of feeling reinforced by Stowe's novels may have been partially responsible for making those issues so "hot." As shown here, Baldwin's analyzes how the moral heat that Americans are capable of bringing to such issues can have detrimental effects on all manner of social relations. Because he understood that racial stereotypes were rooted in a moral-sentimental structure of feeling, Baldwin was able to perceive that the most effective technique for counteracting stereotypes might not be to launch a campaign of moral condemnation. His fiction suggests that the best way to draw down the drama around issues like race and sexuality might be to find ways of helping Americans to accept the vicissitudes of their affective lives. My hope is that shifting critical discourse away from questioning whether Baldwin was guilty of the sins that he condemned in his predecessors may increase focus on whether and how his aesthetic innovations might help to usher in another country—one less preoccupied with guilt and sin.

Independent Scholar

NOTES

1. Given the extent to which Baldwin's early essays on aesthetics have influenced Gates's literary criticism, it may come as little surprise that Gates does not engage them directly. In a recent interview, Gates affirms that "the consistent theme of [his] literary criticism" derives from an idea that he first encountered in those early essays: namely, "the idea that there's a difference between an aesthetic and a polemical statement" ("Q&A"). Even Gates's characterization of Baldwin-the-novelist as "Stowe in blackface" might be seen as a nod to Baldwin-the-essayist. For in "Everybody's Protest Novel," Baldwin used the trope of unwitting inheritance when he argued that Richard Wright's anti-sentimental *Native Son* (1940) made its author into the heir of Stowean sentimentality: "Bigger is Uncle Tom's descendent, flesh of his flesh, so exactly opposite a portrait that, when the books are placed together, it seems that the contemporary Negro novelist and the dead New England woman are locked together in a deadly, timeless battle" ("Everybody's" 18). By turning Baldwin's critical apparatus against his fiction, Gates is able to redeem the object of Baldwin's critique while figuring himself as the heir of Baldwin's critical mantle.

2. Few scholars have examined Baldwin's literary output for clues to the transformative potential that the author envisioned in fiction. Nor have scholars queried the particular form of fiction that Baldwin sought—regardless of whether or not he was successful—to engender. In an introduction to an anthology on Baldwin's fiction, McBride observes that while a "Baldwin revival" seems to have been fomenting since the 1990s, there has been a "paucity of real critical treatment of Baldwin's work in favor of the more biographical portraitures of the man" ("Introduction" 8). And in a recent bibliographic essay on Baldwin scholarship, Henderson similarly observes that while a "Baldwin Renaissance" seems to be under way, the vast majority of Baldwin's literary output "still remains unjustly overlooked" (240, 234).

3. While the presidency of Barack Obama has ushered the United States into a second "post-racial moment," I would not want my use of that phrase to imply that I believe a post-racial society has been achieved. Rather, the phrase is meant to index a historical period when the prospect of bringing about a post-racial society comes to hold a prominent place in the collective imaginary as well as to motivate the work of race scholars. In *The Problem of the Future World*, Porter focuses on how, during the 1950s, the prospect of bringing about such a society came to motivate the late writings of W. E. B. Du Bois—though Porter might as easily have focused on the writings of scholars like Ralph Bunch, Oliver Cox, or Baldwin himself.

4. For a cogent analysis of the "post-sentimental" as it is manifested in Baldwin's essays as well as in works of fiction by contemporary authors like Morrison, see Berlant, "Poor Eliza."

5. Campbell notes that in 1945, Baldwin's experiences with landlords and property agents in the Village drove him out of the city to upstate New York. "It would not be unusual, for example, for a friend of Baldwin's to rent a place and

move in first, establishing a confident relationship with the superintendent; only then would Baldwin follow. The superintendent might or might not object; or the neighbors might protest directly to the owner. If so, then Baldwin would have to leave" (30).

6. As Patricia Williams might put it, the landlady's "fight [is] not really about whatever the fight is about" (47). Rather, the landlady's altercation with Peter needs to be understood as an internal psychological confrontation "between the real and the imagined, the remembered and the fantasized, the likely and the outrageous" (47).

7. For an astute argument about how ideological images and scripts premediate human perceptions and experiences of the world, see Grusin, *Premediation*.

8. For a recent account of the energy that many people expend when dealing with "stereotype threat," see Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi*.

9. In the foregoing paragraphs, I have followed Baldwin in using the phrase "white Americans." But it may be worth noting that Baldwin recodes "whiteness" in terms of a sensibility that keeps people invested in the downward social constitution of others. In a 1968 interview with *Esquire*, Baldwin observed that whiteness "is not a color, it's an attitude. You're as white as you think you are. It's your choice" ("How Can We" 52). See also Baldwin's comments on whiteness in Baldwin and Mead, *A Rap on Race* 179.

10. In one of the few scholarly essays to take up "Previous Condition," Bluefarb asserts that "the core of the story" lies in Peter's assertion that he "didn't seem to have a place" (28). Bluefarb's main argument is that "Peter's inability to identify with either group—black or white—represents of course the true source of his alienation, as a Negro in the white society and as an Artist-Intellectual in the black" (28). Campbell makes a similar argument when he observes that the final scene in "Previous Condition" dramatizes the "dilemma in which its author was then trapped: between two hemispheres, one black and one white" (42).

11. Because I have already discussed how their respective histories inform the intimate relations between Peter and Ida, I will not elaborate upon how those same forces inform the dynamic between Rufus and Leona. But readers interested in such an analysis might consult Feldman, "Another Look" 93–95.

12. Questioning the historical plausibility of this passage, Gates asks, "After all, how many black soldiers could actually have been physically abused by white officers in boot camp even in the South of the 1930s and 1940s?" ("Introduction" xxix). Although data on such abuse may be hard to come by, Baldwin does seem to have based the scene on historical testimony, having received letters from his brother Wilmer in which the latter described being mistreated by a white officer in the army.

13. For an account of how Baldwin and his white friend Engin Cezzar were attacked in a bar called the Village Paddock, see Leeming, *James Baldwin* 161.

14. For an extended analysis of the metapragmatic dimensions of reported speech, see Hickmann, "The Boundaries."

15. For an account of how the blues has served as a locus for reflexive cultural self-definition, see Baker, *Blues*. For how the blues has served as a kind of encryption algorithm—or a vehicle for indirection and double-voicing—within the African American speech community, see Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*. For how the blues has served as a propaedeutic for social protest, see Davis, *Blues Legacies*.

16. Angela Davis may have been the first to observe that the blues was characterized by a nonteleological vision and an ambivalent emotional tonality. Discussing Gertrude "Ma" Rainey's "Lost Wandering Blues" (1924), Davis writes, "Although, contrary to popular belief, there is no all-consuming pessimism in the blues, blues consciousness also eschews the optimism so evident in the spirituals. . . . The lyrics of 'Lost Wandering Blues' articulate a commitment to undertake an emotional journey, regardless of what the risks may be and despite the fact that the destination cannot be precisely conceptualized" (112–13).

17. Here is Baldwin's eloquent description of how the blues can remediate experience in a manner that lends a margin of maneuverability: "I'm talking about the recreation of experience, you know, the way it comes back. Billie Holiday was a poet. She gave you back your experience. She refined it, and you recognized it for the first time because she was in and out of it and she made it possible for you to bear it. And if you could bear it, then you could begin to change it. That's what a poet does" ("*The Black Scholar*" 155).

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