

## Making Love, Making Friends: Affiliation and Repair in James Baldwin's *Another Country*

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In July 1957, James Baldwin stepped onto American soil for the first time in nine years. The previous autumn on the Parisian Boulevard St. Germain, he had come upon a newspaper photograph of white protestors abusively spitting on a fifteen-year-old black girl for daring to enter her recently integrated school in North Carolina. This violent yet powerful image inspired Baldwin to return to the U.S. to bear witness to and participate in the nascent civil rights movement. His writings published between 1957–1963 express a surprising hope in the movement's ability to counteract such racial persecution. In his 1961 essay entitled "Notes for a Hypothetical Novel," the author reflects on the suffering and early deaths that marked the lives of many of his childhood friends in Harlem, noting that he "has not known many survivors." Burdened by this sorrowful past, Baldwin argues that the writer's task is to imagine a renewed world that can bridge divisions of class and color: the "problem the writer has which is, after all, his problem and perhaps not yours is somehow to unite these things, to find the terms of our connection, without which we will perish."<sup>1</sup> Here then, Baldwin frames fiction as an inventive force to avert the violence that systemic racial discrimination often incurs.

The author's journey to "find the terms of our connection" necessarily navigates the utopian ideals of "brotherly love" and "beloved community" that emerged out of mid-1950s civil rights discourse. In "Notes for a Hypothetical Novel," he explains that as a novelist, he seeks to go beyond the movement's redemptive rhetoric and rediscover the country in a "real sense": "Now this country will be transformed. It will not be transformed by an act of God, but by all of us, by you and me."<sup>2</sup> In his 1962 novel *Another Country*, Baldwin thus departs from a longstanding American intellectual tradition of depicting

interracial fraternity as offering a sure path to national redemption. Instead, his deeply secular novel presents cross-gender bonds of affiliation as an alternative means of repairing those social wounds that may never fully heal. As is evident in the final lines of the essay, and in the “hypothetical novel” made manifest in *Another Country*, this collective transformation begins with literary attempts at repair: “We made the world we’re living in and we have to *make it over*.”<sup>3</sup>

Baldwin’s first goal upon his return in 1957 was to travel to the South to document the movement firsthand. On his first trip across the Mason Dixon, he met and interviewed Martin Luther King, publishing a biographical portrait of the leader in *Harper’s* in 1961. Prophetically entitled “The Dangerous Road Before Martin Luther King,” the article foresees King’s potential iconicity and martyrdom and testifies to King’s moving dedication to openly embrace the enemy.<sup>4</sup> His authorial perspective on the leader was influenced by King’s own writings about love and understanding published in the late fifties. King and his early partners in the Montgomery Improvement Association and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), particularly Bayard Rustin, Stanley Levison and Ella Baker, collaborated to develop an American political philosophy of nonviolence built from Judeo-Christian theology and the writings of Mahatma Gandhi, among others. Together they posed a transcendent and integrative ethics of love that they believed would eventuate the removal of geographic, social, and economic barriers to racial equality.

Seeking to achieve not simply legal desegregation, King and others argued for a truly integrated “beloved community” and posed “love” as the ethical stance that would “cut off the chain of hate” overtaking the country, especially the Jim Crow South.<sup>5</sup> In his 1958 article, “An Experiment of Love,” King claims that “brotherly love,” or *agape*, would allow individuals to rise above the erotics inherent to this dialectic cycle of hate.<sup>6</sup> The leader diverges from popular mid-century philosophies that heralded the revolutionary potential of eros, privileging platonic “brotherly love” to be a more powerful expression of “understanding, redeeming good will for all men, an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return. . . . When we love on the *agape* level we love men not because we like them, not because their attitudes and ways appeal to us, but because God loves them.”<sup>7</sup> This spiritually acceptable notion of brotherly love functioned for King as a theoretical ideal and also a tactical strategy. As a patriotic invocation of a divinely ordained America, his call to political brotherhood allied civil rights activists with the nation’s Christian founders.

However inspired he might have been by King's movement of nonviolent protest, Baldwin nonetheless remained critical of the kind of love that could bring about an honest and egalitarian interracial community.<sup>8</sup> King's narrow representation of *agape* as a spiritual demonstration of "understanding" and *redemptive* "good will" to those who may well be in a hostile relation to the nonviolent subject, obfuscates the crucial presence of erotic desire in encounters with racial difference.<sup>9</sup> Baldwin's *Another Country* builds on King's rhetoric to articulate a more transgressive conception of the civil rights "beloved community," one that restores the catalytic power of sexual desire to the cultivation of new interracial bonds. Subverting conventional notions of national union and fraternity, the novel portrays the struggles that men and women experience when attempting to cultivate bonds of affiliation across racial divides.<sup>10</sup>

In what follows, I read *Another Country* as developing an experimental narrative of interracial affiliation, in which love relationships constitute the work of bridging strict boundaries of sex and color that limited life for many under de facto segregation.<sup>11</sup> This narrative shows affiliation to necessarily combine "sociable, friendly" feelings with the more unwieldy energy of erotic desire.<sup>12</sup> The novel emphasizes the reparative practice crucial to maintaining affiliations across difference, and echoes Edward Said's claim that adoptive bonds can be creative vehicles for the ethical work of "re-assembl[ing] the world."<sup>13</sup> Although in *The World, The Text, The Critic* Said argues that affiliation results from "social and political convictions, economic and historical circumstances, voluntary and willed efforts," Baldwin's fiction gives voice to the contradictory affects and desires that bond individuals of different families, races, and cultures together.<sup>14</sup> Both celebrated and reviled during its day, *Another Country* elucidates this complex spectrum of feeling, foregrounding the intimate transgressions that underlie the era's public struggles for civil rights.

In my reading, Baldwin's novel painfully evokes the violence and suffering that mark twentieth-century American race relations, while simultaneously exhibiting an optimism unique to the early 1960s.<sup>15</sup> The novel begins by depicting the suicide and funeral of early protagonist Rufus Scott; this death symbolizes the wound of racial violence that the novel's narrative of affiliation attempts to repair and mourn. The alienation tragically marking Rufus's life, death, and memory was sadly familiar to many mid-century American readers. By reading for affiliation and repair, however, this essay recasts the novel's familiar story of estrangement to illuminate the way this death inspires a nexus of intimate and often consuming bonds that develop among the cast of surviving characters: Rufus's sister, Ida Scott; his best friend, Vivaldo Moore; his former lover, Eric Jones;

and his friends, Cass and Richard Silenski. The unusual interconnected love stories that emerge are emblematic of Baldwin's novelistic method that re-assembles the fragments of linear plots of romance and friendship in order to represent relationships that defy categorization.

On the one hand, Rufus's tragic loss of self can be read as evidence for the urgent necessity of 1960s political movements for group identity, which sought to heal the alienation of the oppressed through collective and personal liberation. Conversely, my reading of *Another Country* highlights how bonds of affiliation aim to alleviate alienation by transgressing group categories of race, gender and sexuality. To hold in abeyance the contradictory elements that comprise Baldwin's fragmentary narrative of affiliation is to be open to what Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick calls the "fracturing" hope that shapes our reading of fiction outside identitarian or "symptomatic" frames. In her 2003 *Touching Feeling*, Sedgwick writes that "hope, often a fracturing, even a traumatic thing to experience, is among the energies by which the reparatively positioned reader tries to organize the fragments . . . she encounters or creates."<sup>16</sup> In this reparative spirit, I interpret *Another Country* beyond the logics of identity to salvage its subtle gestures of affiliation.<sup>17</sup>

### **Mourning and Misrecognition in the "Beloved Community"**

In his choice to open *Another Country* with the loss of protagonist Rufus Scott, Baldwin dramatizes the psychic and social damages created by America's history of racial injustice, of which Rufus's suicide is a symptomatic and constitutive part. Like Baldwin's close friend who died in the late 1940s, Rufus grows up in Harlem and finds himself "entirely alone, and dying of it."<sup>18</sup> After entering into a perilous love affair with a white Southern woman, he succumbs to the psychic violence that haunted many living under de facto segregation in mid-century New York. Eighty pages into the novel, Rufus stands on the rails of the George Washington Bridge and reconciles himself to the terrible logic of the color line: "[H]e was black and the water was black" (87). Unable to envision a society where racial disparity might be overcome and individual differences embraced, Rufus jumps to his death where "the wind, the stars, the lights, the water, all rolled together" in fatal symmetry. After his death, it becomes the task of those who survive him to bear witness to his memory and achieve new heterogeneous and asymmetrical modes of interpersonal relation.

In his extended description of Rufus's funeral, Baldwin illustrates how King's "beloved community" is often ironically tied to collective experiences of mourning. In fact, this funeral scene sheds light on the essential problems of projection and guilt that impede

affiliation among those diverse individuals come together to mourn him. Described in terms of misrecognition, the collective ritual of working through this death is incapable of serving as a transcendent spiritual space for immediate “understanding” or interracial kinship. The scene opens with a young girl who grew up next door to Rufus singing from the pulpit. Her song, which expresses the ineffable emotions raging in the church, is also a performance of collectivity and its uneven reception by the audience highlights the fragmentation inevitable under racial oppression. The only white attendants at the funeral, Rufus’s friends Vivaldo and Cass Silenski are interpolated by the lyrics, “*I’m a stranger, don’t drive me away,*” themselves strangers to this scene. The next line, “*If you drive me away, you may need me some day,*” situates them in the reverse position, warning them not to shamefully overlook those who seek their help and reminding us of the failure of friendship that may have led to Rufus’s fate (119). While Cass and Eric quickly identify with the suffering of this young woman, their identification is met with estrangement. Asymmetrically aligned in their individual experiences of alterity, these visiting strangers become part of a tense collective defined by the destabilizing experience of mourning.

In this passage, the singer acts as a transitional figure with whom the mass of mourners can identify, a third term through which a collective is born. Yet the audience’s limited perspective and the uni-directional movement of their gaze constrains this identificatory moment. Sitting at the back of the chapel and looking up at the pulpit, Cass takes in a distanced view of the family that sits in the front row, noticing the “proud back” of Rufus’s sister Ida (119). From this perspective, the reader can see the singer, but not the congregation’s faces. Like Vivaldo, who attempts to save Rufus from self-destruction in the novel’s first section, Cass bears guilt for his suicide; she is one of the last people to speak candidly with Rufus about his suffering on the night of his suicide. Both Cass and Vivaldo project a common fantasy of their acceptance and recognition by Ida Scott onto the anonymous singer. Conversely, their direct access to her song serves to demonstrate Ida’s own inaccessibility, setting up the novel’s later recurrent image of Ida performing for, and being misinterpreted by, various audiences.

At the end of the funeral, Ida is shadowed by a literal black veil, a symbol of both the omnipresent specter of death and the unbridgeable racial divides that are symptomatic of the social segregation that contributed to Rufus’s death. In bearing witness to his death, this image of Ida pays heed not only to his dramatic loss of life but also, symbolically, to the truth the white characters in the scene cannot acknowledge: Rufus’s suicide is simply one link in a long chain of untimely tragedies that defined black life during the Jim Crow era.<sup>19</sup> As the family proceeds out of the church, they pass Cass, who stands at

the door. Ida pauses and looks “directly, unreadably at her from beneath her heavy veil. Then she seem[s] to smile” and thanks Cass for attending (123). Visually externalizing the seemingly invisible psychic violence that befell Rufus, Ida’s individual subjectivity is set just out of reach beneath her veil. She has become illegible, yet her note of thanks opens a window for further attempts at connection with Rufus’s closest friends.

By framing Ida at the border of public mourning and an incommunicable private grief, Baldwin illustrates the way this female character’s race and gender destabilize norms of kinship and community. Ida’s journey will require a lateral movement of interracial connection with Vivaldo and Cass, outside the ruptured family and the filiative private sphere. In *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship between Life and Death*, Judith Butler argues that in order to mourn those deemed invisible in society, the female mourner has to create new forms of signification to make these losses known. The necessary trespass of linguistic and social norms on the part of the female mourner also poses a threat to the very basis of blood kinship. In her claim that grief interpolates multiple objects of desire and identification in its slippery circulation, Butler illuminates the transgressive quality Baldwin brings to Ida’s grief.<sup>20</sup> She is the single character empowered to act as the spokesperson for the family, and it is only through her voice that the reader is privy to the Scotts’ horror of losing their son. Ida’s desire to hit the A train and develop a sense of self peripheral to her immediate family does not free her from making familial demands of friends and strangers. Her adoption of Cass and Vivaldo into her circle of friends highlights the porous quality of the supposedly stable boundaries of race and family. Baldwin tackles the damages created by segregation by offering a picture of adoptive kinship that exposes the impossibility of racial purity.

The kernel for the larger narrative, the story of Ida’s unique struggles illuminates the paradoxical, yet interconnected themes of affiliation and estrangement that *Another Country* presents. Moreover, her role as Rufus’s ideal mourner makes her the primary catalyst of the novel’s journey towards repairing the ruptures symbolized in his death. As this initial scene suggests, however, no one will ever be fully aware of Ida’s grief or interiority. As the mysterious center of the text, she is always seen from the outside and thus often subsumed by others’ affective projections and desires. Baldwin dramatizes the reader’s restricted access to Ida by never focalizing her consciousness; however, this narrative strategy inversely defines the character by her speech, empowering her as a speaking agent. As we try to comprehend the complex character of Ida, we learn to read the text as neither a site of latent nor superficial meaning, but rather as a contradictory collection of ideas and figures that we are compelled to hold together.

In an interview with Jordan Elgrably and George Plimpton in the 1984 *Paris Review*, Baldwin explains that he created Rufus in order to complete the portrait of Ida. Baldwin also repeats a story reported in biographies and other interviews with him, suggesting that the intra-racial sibling relationship between Ida and Rufus serves as the field through which a tentative interracial community can emerge: "In order to make the reader see Ida, I had to give her a brother, who turned out to be Rufus. . . . From the moment Rufus was gone, I knew that if you knew what had happened to Ida, you'd equally understand Rufus. . . . The principal action in the book, for me, is the journey of Ida and Vivaldo toward some kind of coherence."<sup>21</sup> The implied reader's excursion towards "some kind of coherence" depends on the creation of textual connections that gesture towards epistemic closure. However, "coherence" also denotes a grouping of concepts that collectively "hang together" in a loose assembly of ideas.<sup>22</sup> As the next section will show, Baldwin's emphasis on "coherence" also speaks to the text's evocation of competing and often paradoxical feelings within the love story of Ida Scott and Vivaldo Moore. Like the disjunctive scene of misrecognition at Rufus's funeral where a nexus of guilt and desire intimately link together those who assemble in the church, Ida and Vivaldo's relationship is triangulated by adulterous and melancholic attachments. However debilitating this triangulation may be to their erotic relationship, it proves fruitful in opening up a space of mutual dialogue that is necessary for their affiliation to bloom.

### Trying Dialogues of Affiliation

Originating in the unstable plot of mourning, the narrative of Ida and Vivaldo's affiliation blends the contradictory feelings of erotic desire and friendly love. Emblematic of Baldwin's portrait of love in the novel, their relationship is constituted from trauma and betrayal. For their interracial bond to be sustained, the characters must survive multiple damaging events: the death of a brother/friend, social stigma, jealousy and betrayal, and the outside threat of (sexual) violence. In these ways, the brutal obstacles that destroyed the initial interracial union of Rufus and his white lover Leona also challenge Ida and Vivaldo's union. Lovers but never friends, Rufus and Leona are driven solely by sexual desire, an unwieldy force of attachment that was made more dangerous by Baldwin's invocation of the terms of racial purity in depicting their interracial love as at times pathological. Caught within the static racial and gendered hierarchies structuring anti-miscegenation discourse, Rufus and Leona's love affair is bound to violently fail.

While a similar antagonism characterizes Ida and Vivaldo's mutual sexual desire, both characters, especially Ida, inherently resist the stereotypical scripts of race and gender

that led to the earlier couple's destruction. Modeling what feminist psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin calls "intersubjectivity," their relationship is built upon a difficult practice of linguistic dialogue.<sup>23</sup> The characters shuttle between recognition and misrecognition, separation, and connection, and through this destabilizing process form a contingent space of affiliation. Unlike Leona and Rufus who communicated only in vicious debate or violent argument, Ida and Vivaldo talk to one another in a self-revealing way. Even after their relationship becomes damaged from feelings of entrapment, jealousy, and humiliation, Baldwin stages the characters in scenes of linguistic communication. The disjunctive experience of reading the novel self-reflexively demonstrates the asymmetrical landscape of Baldwin's reparative ethics. Inhabiting the dialogic space of ambivalence that opens between the two characters, the reader is better able to avoid an over-identification with the text that might easily obscure the narrative's significant complexities.

Ida and Vivaldo's first night and subsequent morning together frames the erotic as an environment of risky contestation. After eliding their first sexual act in a narrative ellipsis, the author depicts Vivaldo watching Ida sleeping in the early morning. This initial refusal to represent the first key sexual event of their relationship is set against the sexually explicit depiction of Rufus and Leona's romance from start to finish. Although not violent, Ida and Vivaldo's relationship still navigates the perilous hierarchies of power assumed in their interracial heterosexual bond. Here Ida is a "stranger," "unknown [to Vivaldo] precisely because [she] is invested with so much of [him]self" (172). The joke is on Vivaldo, of course, when Ida turns to him and reveals she was in fact pretending to sleep in order to watch him gaze at her. Her feigned sleep symbolizes her awareness of becoming an erotic object of desire, especially of his white male fantasies. In a gesture echoing Vivaldo's earlier confession that the only black women he had been with before Ida were prostitutes, Ida sings at the end of the scene, while washing dishes, "If you can't give me a dollar, give me a lousy dime" (179). The lyrics satirize her value as a sexual object in Vivaldo's eyes, alluding to the reality that her actions may not engender an equal recompense. This irony points to Ida's tragic inability to receive payback for the loss of her brother, which, like the symbolism framing Rufus's suicide, depends on a redemptive logic of symmetry and correspondence. This melancholic moment therefore accentuates the importance of opening up a new plot of interpersonal attachment, which trades in total personal redemption for continuous and incomplete attempts at repair.

In a 1960 address at the time of *Another Country's* composition, Baldwin states that as an American writer he is defined by a life of "incoherence," an "incoherence that occurs . . . when I am frightened, absolutely frightened to death."<sup>24</sup> In 1984, Baldwin revises

this statement, describing the novel as bringing the story of Ida and Vivaldo “toward some kind of coherence” that comes close to a “harmonious connection of the several parts, so that the whole ‘hangs together.’”<sup>25</sup> This change suggests that in Baldwin’s work coherence is desired but always just out of reach, an ideal that can only be experienced as an *essai*, or attempt. Complete coherence can no longer be sustained in a fallen world where death serves as an everyday reality for many. Comparing the incoherent feeling of “being frightened to death” to the unknown truth about a friend’s murder of his mother, Baldwin writes, “No matter what I say I may inadvertently stumble on this corpse. And this incoherence which seems to afflict this country is analogous to that. I mean that in order to have a conversation with someone you have to reveal yourself.”<sup>26</sup> In other words, in order for a person to reveal himself in language, he must necessarily stumble upon many symbolic corpses, an inevitable affliction especially for African American writers of the time. Similarly, throughout *Another Country* the reader encounters multiple real and metaphoric deaths, and in order to hold these narrative ruptures in abeyance, she must let go of the expectation for epistemic symmetry or coherence.<sup>27</sup>

In the penultimate chapter of the novel, Ida and Vivaldo enter into a new kind of communication that demonstrates the impossibility of complete coherence. At the brink of their relationship’s collapse, the characters’ final conversation is constituted from interruption and breaks, a fragmentation characteristic of their affiliation more generally. In this scene, Ida and Vivaldo discuss how their racial difference poses difficulties to their romance. In dramatic opposition to Vivaldo’s ignorant claim that “suffering doesn’t have a color,” Ida testifies to the unique burden of losing her only brother (417). Vivaldo quickly replies that he loved him too, but Ida interrupts: “the point, anyway, at the moment, is that *I* loved him. . . . None of you, anyway, knew anything about him, you didn’t know him” (413). In Baldwin’s simple choice to italicize the “*I*,” he asserts the primacy of Ida’s voice and the unique quality of her love for and knowledge of Rufus that comes from their shared familial and racial background.

Ida’s limited account of her grief for Rufus serves as an opportunity to tell the story of her own struggles for self-determination, which parallel aspects of Rufus’s alienated trajectory. Like her brother, Ida seeks a career as a jazz musician as a way out of her oppressive environment, also freeing her self from the psychological enslavement that comes from racial subjugation. Singing the blues becomes her ticket for getting back what she believes is due to her, and she ties her artistic goals to the tragic hope of “settling the score,” which can never be fulfilled (419). As a black woman Ida can only achieve her dream of redeeming the suffering she and her family experienced at the dangerous

cost of sexually subjecting herself to white promoter Steve Ellis. As her career progresses towards a somewhat disturbing conclusion, the jazz industry will claim part ownership over her performance, her voice, and her body.

Baldwin dramatizes the unique dangers the artistic path holds for Ida by describing a tragic episode where a black male band member calls her a “white man’s whore” and threatens to “tear [her] little black pussy up” if she ever performs again in Harlem. This threat of sexual violence shocks Ida into humiliating abjection and leads to her ironic acquiescence to Ellis’s sexual advances that same night. Through Ida’s furious speech, Baldwin comments on the gendered and racialized dimensions of Ida’s victimization that amount to a kind of social death: “There’s always further to fall, always, always . . . I let him have his way.” In a gesture that echoes Rufus’s jump from the George Washington Bridge, Ida falls to the ground and holds “her hands against her belly, weeping,” her feminized body signifying this violent rupture as much as her speech (425–26). Here Baldwin substitutes for Rufus’s fallen body this image of Ida collapsed on the kitchen floor.

For this couple, heterosexual relationships are bound to an inevitable patriarchal violence, a structure that ensnares both characters but has more tragic consequences for the more marginalized figure, Ida. Listening to Ida’s horrible confession, Vivaldo in part shares in her experience of abject humiliation. The narrator describes: “[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). However, even though Vivaldo seems to empathically identify with Ida, he also registers a sense of disgust at her victimization and betrayal of their fidelity. His corporeality becomes destabilized when he remembers the “black whores, with whom he had coupled,” making him feel literally nauseous (426). As he internally categorizes Ida as a whore like all the rest of the black women he had slept with, Vivaldo exposes the real crisis in his self-interested subjectivity: if Ida is figured in the position of the whore, he is no better than the revolting figure of white male supremacy found in Ellis. This powerful scene never lets us forget that Vivaldo’s act of bearing witness to this young black woman’s abjection unfortunately also serves as a dangerous stage for the engendering of repressed aggression.

In the world of *Another Country*, characters struggle against succumbing to the psychic and physical brutality that seem inescapable within interracial heterosexuality. Emblematic of the novel as a whole, this episode shows that an individual’s capacity for empathy is dependent on the maintenance of difference and the recognition of the other’s singularity. Giving up this sense of separateness would lead Ida and Vivaldo closer to Rufus’s tragic fate: the erasure of difference that results in his suicide, which

Baldwin describes as a reunion with the “black” void of the river’s depths. To circumvent this ending, each must learn to exist independently from the other. After Ida’s revelation, which provokes Vivaldo’s anger but also his love, he looks into his coffee cup to learn that “black coffee was not black, but deep brown.” In a mundane revision of the dramatic scene of Rufus looking down into the river, Vivaldo thinks: “Not many things in the world were really black, not even the night, not even the mines” (430). Now that he can perceive racial identity as singular rather than stereotypical, Vivaldo sits at the precipice of facing the truth about Ida, the thing he most wanted. What remains to be seen in Baldwin’s conclusion of the novel is whether Vivaldo can go one step further and confront the difference within himself.

In its refusal to offer a romantic escape from difference, this novel’s broken scenes of recognition and forgiveness show interracial intimacy to be inflected by intersecting structures of power that cannot be transcended nor completely understood. Faced with the impossibility of fully comprehending the reasons behind the mixture of feelings that characterize their bond, Vivaldo explains to Ida that he cannot “understand, not really.” The truth of either character will never be fully known, but their attempt at mutual recognition remains.<sup>28</sup> Here then, Baldwin shows that the practice of bearing witness to the other as a separate subject worthy of respect is doubly difficult for lovers. If there is any hope for this fictional bond to survive, Vivaldo must step out of his possessive objectification of Ida—an act that may not be possible within the patriarchal structure of the novel. Nevertheless, the destabilizing combination of “anger, pity, love, and contempt and lust” that “all raged together in him,” might precipitate in Vivaldo a loss of innocence that would oblige him to account for his complicity in Ida’s suffering, breaking open a more realistic path of love (430).

### **Making Friends**

In the last pages of the chapter, Baldwin heralds a new kind of loving covenant that rejects the transcendent spiritual ideal of “hearts united” heralded in King’s calls for racial integration.<sup>29</sup> Neither simply erotic nor platonic, their love can survive only if the characters can bridge these two dialectical poles. Not seeking perfect integration or equality, Ida and Vivaldo can only attempt to bear witness to and recognize the limits of their knowledge of each other. After confessing to her affair with Ellis that ends in sexual coercion, Ida asks Vivaldo to promise never to be understanding or kind. Vivaldo replies: “I promise you that . . .’ And then, furiously, ‘You seem to forget that I love you’” (430). Ida’s refusal to speak in the scripted language of “understanding,” what Baldwin earlier

calls "that love jive," opens up a new affiliative connotation for the love that Vivaldo offers to her in return (410). The couple is poised to move, then, from the high drama of romance to the pragmatic realities of affiliation, neutralizing their erotic battle marked by a heat and tension that "flashed violently alive between them, as close to hatred as it was to love" (431).

At the anticlimactic conclusion of this narrative of affiliation, the chapter's final scene offers a secularized moment of promise-making, where Ida and Vivaldo vow to remain beloved friends rather than committed spouses. In a partial repair of the rupture left by Rufus's death, Baldwin gestures toward the couple's adoption of each other as nonbiological kin, modeling their bond after Rufus and Ida's initial sibling relationship. Echoing the early emphasis on siblinghood in the novel's funeral scene, the lateral bond between blood kin serves as the seed of a broader field of affiliation that crosses categories of social difference at the novel's conclusion. Thus, in this final image, the rocky love affair that was punctured by jealousy and estrangement transforms into a new kind of cross-gender and interracial friendship:

They stared at each other. Suddenly, he reached out and pulled her to him, trembling, with tears starting up behind his eyes . . . She clung to him; with a sigh she buried her face in his chest. There was nothing erotic in it; they were like two weary children. And it was she who was comforting him. Her long fingers stroked his back, and he began, slowly, with a horrible, strangling sound, to weep, for she was stroking his innocence out of him. (431)

The passage's emphasis on vision symbolizes the couple's role in the broader project of building "another country" based on the dream of mutual recognition. First they stare at each other face to face, but tears quickly blind Vivaldo's eyes, and Ida buries her "face in his chest." Their broken gaze illuminates their inability to transcend difference through a symbolic divine union. Showing how the erotic is always at play in bonds of affiliation, Baldwin intermixes sexual diction in verbs such as "tremble," "clung," "stroke." The implicit circulation of erotic desire taints the seemingly platonic bond they share, illuminating the erotic remainder that marks their interracial and cross-gender affiliation. In his use of the phrase "two weary children," Baldwin offers a mixed image of youth and rebirth, but also of exhaustion at reaching a new level of maturity. As "weary children," Ida and Vivaldo sit on the threshold of returning to a form of mutual obligation that has been lost with Rufus's death. Bearing the weight of a fallen world, they begin to see each other through a fresh perspective defined by duty and a shared sense of personal suffering.

If *Another Country* confirms that the heterosexual romance plot will break under the political burden of repairing racial divides, Baldwin nevertheless imagines sex as a powerful vehicle to achieve new ties of affiliation. The dangerous yet generative power of sexual desire is visible in the description of the “horrible, strangling sound” of Vivaldo’s weeping, which revises the novel’s initial scene of sexual encounter between Rufus and Leona. There, Baldwin depicts Rufus at the moment of climax, feeling himself “strangling, about to explode or die” (22).<sup>30</sup> Vivaldo’s ventriloquization of Rufus’s corporeal sensation suggests a capacity for change in the white character: he is no longer separate from, but rather positioned within, Rufus’s concomitant victimization and aggression. An unfortunate caution against interracial heterosexuality, Baldwin’s alignment of Vivaldo and Rufus reminds the reader that interracial sex is at best dangerous and at worst fatal. And yet, in this passage, Vivaldo finally acquiesces to Ida, allowing her to stroke “his innocence out of him,” showing their cross-gender bond to fluidly negotiate the play of dominance and passivity integral to any social hierarchy.

The portrayal of Ida and Vivaldo clinging to each other in an embrace that has “nothing erotic in it” echoes an adulterous erotic scene between the married Cass Silenski and Rufus’s former homosexual lover, Eric: “[L]ike children [and] with that very same joy and trembling, they undressed and uncovered and gazed on each other” (291). While their childlike innocence may depend on their common race and class, the characters’ subsequent inability to commit to each other marks a new approach for dealing with what Baldwin calls the difficult “intrusion of the future” that is inevitable in committed romantic relationships (363). The novel suggests that the origin of Cass and Eric’s affair “was that they were two independent people, who needed each other for a time, who would always be friends, but who probably, would not always be lovers” (291). This independence serves as prototype for the untold conclusion of Ida and Vivaldo’s story.

In his representation of these cross-gender friendships, linked by the short-lived union of Vivaldo and Eric, Baldwin turns away from the civil rights ideal of interracial brotherhood fulfilling national fantasies of reunion. His thwarting of any form of homosociality becoming a viable path to salvation is emblemized in the scene prior to Ida and Vivaldo’s final conversation, when Vivaldo goes to bed with Eric. Vivaldo tells Eric of his memory of a night when Rufus wanted him to take him in his arms, “not for sex, though maybe sex would have happened. . . . I had the feeling that he had wanted someone to hold him, to hold him, and that night, it had to be a man” (342). Baldwin brings a melancholic tone to Vivaldo’s regretful confession of his inability to fulfill Rufus’s homosexual desires and perhaps deliver him from the alienation that contributes to his

fall. And yet in the logic of the novel Vivaldo's liberal cowardice cannot maintain such a profane level of transgression, undermining the salvatory potency of "brotherly love."<sup>31</sup> Vivaldo and Eric's sexual union, which symbolically absolves their guilt, proves insufficient in the novel's greater reckoning of the irredeemable damages created by racial inequality. Although they achieve a similar utopian state of transcendence as Eric and Cass, which Baldwin describes also in terms of childlike innocence, in the end the men's bond cannot sustain the violent challenges of daily life nor fully repair the open wound of Rufus's death. This homosexual one-night stand serves as an idealistic wish that the novel defers in the service of a pragmatic ethics of reparation yet to come.<sup>32</sup>

In this turn away from the redemptive fantasies of national fraternity, the novel's narrative of affiliation valorizes the subversive and asymmetrical pairings that sometimes arise between former lovers, best friends, and adopted siblings. In *Another Country*, love relationships are constructed from various permutations of race, sex, and gender. The novel's emphasis on the contradictory feelings of duty, responsibility, and desire that are inevitable in bonds that cross-racial and sexual differences thereby queers the seemingly platonic "beloved community" of civil rights described by Martin Luther King.<sup>33</sup> Baldwin's alignment of two cross-gender couples, one interracial and the other adulterous, demonstrates how the transgression of social systems of racial purity is necessarily bound to the allied struggle against heterosexual norms. As Baldwin writes in his essay "In Search of a Majority," written at the same time as *Another Country*, "Love does not begin and end the way we seem to think it does. Love is a battle, love is a war; love is a growing up."<sup>34</sup> For Cass and Eric, and Ida and Vivaldo, the challenge that defines their movement towards affiliation is precisely to learn that love is a process that cannot be charted along a predictable trajectory; bonds of affiliation are therefore built from momentary needs and desires. Like Cass and Eric, Ida and Vivaldo seek to repair an injurious world together, even as their erotic feelings for each other make them more vulnerable to its horrors. The impending severing of their erotic bond does not serve as the end of their relationship, but the beginning of an incomplete story about friendship and survival that leaves the reader with a provisional sense of hope.<sup>35</sup>

While my own reading of affiliation concludes in the scene of Vivaldo and Ida's tentative embrace, the novel itself continues for another five pages. On the one hand, these pages might offer a redemptive iteration of the new country that Baldwin hopes to establish. However, I interpret this short, final chapter as symbolic of what remains unrepaired at the novel's conclusion. Here, Eric's French lover Yves steps onto the New York tarmac after a transatlantic flight from Paris and is hit by "a new and healing light"

that emanates from the redeeming force of his gay lover smiling down on him from the observation deck (435). This transcendent scene of the outsider entering the country and city “which the people from heaven had made their home” suggests a salvation-like conclusion to the novel (436). Despite this heady symbolism, however, Baldwin imagines the traveler thinking upon his arrival: “le plus dur reste à faire” (435) [the hardest part remains to be done]. Yves’s wearisome arrival connotes his entry into a new society born from a fallen world of contingency and limitation.<sup>36</sup> The uncertain reunion of Yves and Eric echoes the mix of expectation and fatigue that resounds in Vivaldo and Ida’s final embrace. Like the contrapuntal reading the scene requires, this imagistic blend of hope and despair, burden and transcendence constitutes an ironic rejection of an easy, healing love.<sup>37</sup> After adultery and betrayal, the novel concludes with a fragile image of this homosexual couple stumbling at the threshold of an unknown future. The sustainment of their love may be only possible if they choose to walk alongside each other in mutual attempts at repair.

In *Another Country*, interracial love is constituted from a dialectics of love and hate, desire and repulsion, sex and friendship. The ambivalent dangers that shape this fictional world illustrate that the only transcendence that can be found in interracial affiliation comes in the recognition of a common experience of alterity. The dislocation assumed within the cast of strangers tied together by Rufus’s life and death is the space that “another country” inhabits, for the title does not simply denote the invocation of a newly integrated nation, but the imaginative and wearisome world created between loving subjects. From this fraught space of estrangement, affiliation emerges as an unexpected framework for the relational work of repair.

While the familiar definition of repair is “to mend or restore,” the term also fittingly signifies both a setting out and a return. A measured return to Baldwin’s fiction of civil rights brings a renewed appreciation for the significant transformation of interpersonal relations that occurred during the sixties. The inescapable rhetoric of the failure of 1960s political movements to achieve radical structural change obscures the period’s lingering social relevance for the United States today. Witnessed in the now-fractured hope surrounding the 2008 election of President Barack Obama, our memory of the early civil rights movement persists as a stubborn longing for connection with others who are different from ourselves. No longer simply signifying an inheritance of broken promises, *Another Country* serves as a cultural archive to which the twenty-first century reader might turn to repeatedly, re-interpreting its pages into new circles of affiliation. To be positioned alongside a hopeful Baldwin writing in Istanbul in late 1961 is thus to see the

past as not behind us but adjacent to us, which however wearisome an experience, may compel us to embrace “the hardest part that remains to be done” (435).

## Notes

1. James Baldwin, *Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Library of America, 1998), 229.
2. *Ibid.*, 229–30.
3. *Ibid.*, my emphasis.
4. David Leeming, *James Baldwin* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 178.
5. Martin Luther King, *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James Melvin Washington (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 8. See also Harvard Sitkoff, *King: Pilgrimage to the Mountaintop* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008), 25–87.
6. King, 17.
7. *Ibid.*, 8. See Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (New York: Routledge, 1987). See also Marianne DeKoven’s analysis of Marcuse as a force for the New Left in *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2004).
8. King, 20.
9. *Ibid.*, 19.
10. This is also resonant in Baldwin’s early civil rights essays, including “They Can’t Turn Back” (1960), “In Search of a Majority” (1960), and “The Dangerous Road Before Martin Luther King” (1962).
11. The textual strategy of initial loss, fragmentation and subsequent repair that Baldwin brings to his 1962 novel is part of a broader literary trend that I believe emerged during the long 1960s. Post-1960 novels like *Another Country* develop asymmetrical bonds of affiliation among characters in order to provide a fictional framework for imagining attempts at collective repair.
12. Etymologically derived from the French term of the same name, “affiliation” originally signified the creation of adoptive bonds of kinship; it later came to be defined as the “sociable, friendly,” or “sympathetic” feelings these bonds inspire. “Affiliative,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989).
13. Edward Said, “Preface to the Morningside Edition,” in *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1985), xi–xiv.
14. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1983), 25. See also Ivy Schweitzer, *Perfecting Friendship: Politics and Affiliation in Early American Literature* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2006). In her study of friendship in early American literature, Schweitzer illuminates a similar problem of social hierarchy and inequality embedded within the concept of affiliation. Focusing on the interracial bonds between colonial and Native American communities, she illuminates the underlying conflict over sameness and difference that shapes the nineteenth-century friendship plot.
15. *Another Country* signals a uniquely optimistic period in the author’s literary career. Baldwin’s tentative idealism at the time of its publication quickly gave way to a mix of rage and ambivalence. By

- the time he publishes his next novel *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* in 1968, Baldwin has rejected his earlier project of imagining an interracial community. See James Campbell, *Talking at the Gates: A Life of James Baldwin* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1991), 163. In its place he offers a scathing depiction of white liberalism that matches his renewed interest in the force and limits of Black Nationalism. It is not until the 1979 publication of *Just Above My Head* that we see the author returning to the subject of civil rights, yet remembering the movement as a lost and failed dream.
16. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2003), 146. I am indebted to Sedgwick's notion of "reparative reading," without which this reading of affiliation and repair would not be possible.
  17. Baldwin's depiction of the psychic struggles that shape these tentatively hopeful ties echo the work of psychoanalytic theorist Melanie Klein, who asserts in 1937 that the subject's central developmental task is to bridge the forces of love and hate through a practice she terms "reparation." Rather than being solely defined by instinctual drives, the Kleinian subject strives toward a middle ground, in which the self perceives the other as a separate subject and not simply an object of desire. Klein therefore posits subjectivity as a process where "good" and "bad part-objects" are constantly reassembled into an imperfect whole, challenging the hetero-normative origins of traditional Freudian psychoanalysis. See *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works* (New York: Free Press, 1984), 306.
  18. James Baldwin, *Another Country* (New York: Vintage International, 1993), 4. Hereafter, page numbers will be cited parenthetically in the text.
  19. See Karla F. C. Holloway, *Passed On: African American Mourning Stories: A Memorial* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2002).
  20. Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2000), 67.
  21. Jordan Elgrably and George Plimpton, "The Art of Fiction LXXVIII: James Baldwin" in *Conversations with James Baldwin*, eds. Fred L. Standley and Louis H. Pratt (Jackson: Univ. of Mississippi Press, 1989), 244.
  22. "Coherence," *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989).
  23. Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (New York: Pantheon, 1988): 20.
  24. Building on this idea, critic Ernesto Javier Martinez contends that the novel's formal incoherence and confusion helps thematize the dual problem of ethics and epistemology under social oppression. See "Dying to Know: Identity and Self-Knowledge in Baldwin's *Another Country*," *PMLA* 124, no. 3 (May 2009): 782-797.
  25. Elgrably and Plimpton, 244; "Coherence," *Oxford English Dictionary*.
  26. Baldwin, *Collected Essays*, 228.
  27. Contemporary critics of Baldwin attacked him for this sketchy, incoherent form; others saw the novel as excessive and overwrought. See for example Robert A. Bone's essay, "The Novels of James Baldwin," which asks how, "if [Baldwin] repeatedly violates their integrity," the novel's characters

- "can they achieve the individuality which alone will make them memorable?" in *Tri-Quarterly* 2 (Winter 1965): 18.
28. Although the focalization of Vivaldo's character makes him ostensibly more accessible to the reader, the difficulty of achieving interpersonal coherence that Baldwin plots within the scene conversely demands the reader to hold in abeyance any true account of either character.
  29. King, *Testament of Hope*, 118.
  30. The specter of lynching is clearly evident in this erotic image.
  31. For more on this problem, see William A. Cohen, "Liberalism, Libido, Liberation: Baldwin's *Another Country*," in *The Queer Sixties*, ed. Patricia Juliana Smith (New York: Routledge, 1999), 201–22.
  32. Leslie Fiedler argues that fictional depictions of the white American male's search for an "innocent" and redeeming companion to accompany him on his journey into the paradisiacal wilderness usually casts non-white men as the bearers of this symbolic duty. Fiedler defines the structure of this companionship as a "hierogamos" or "sacred wedding"; see *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Basic Books, 1960), 26. In *Another Country*, however, Baldwin shows that the "sacred wedding" between Vivaldo and Rufus can never be consummated.
  33. King, Martin Luther. "The Power of Nonviolence," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 12.
  34. *Ibid.*, 220.
  35. While my reading emphasizes the inability of Ida and Vivaldo's love to fully heal the wound of Rufus's death, critics of the time, namely Peter Dane in *Transition* magazine, interprets this scene as a "moment of reality and truth and healing love made possible by a past in which they have a vitalizing share. Their love flowers out of the grave of Rufus." See "Baldwin's Other Country," *Transition: A Journal of the Arts, Culture and Society*, 5, no. 24 (1966): 24.
  36. This contingency is symbolized in Baldwin's choice to pose this thought in French, which demands the novel's English-speaking audience to translate and thus work harder to understand its complex meaning.
  37. See Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 66.