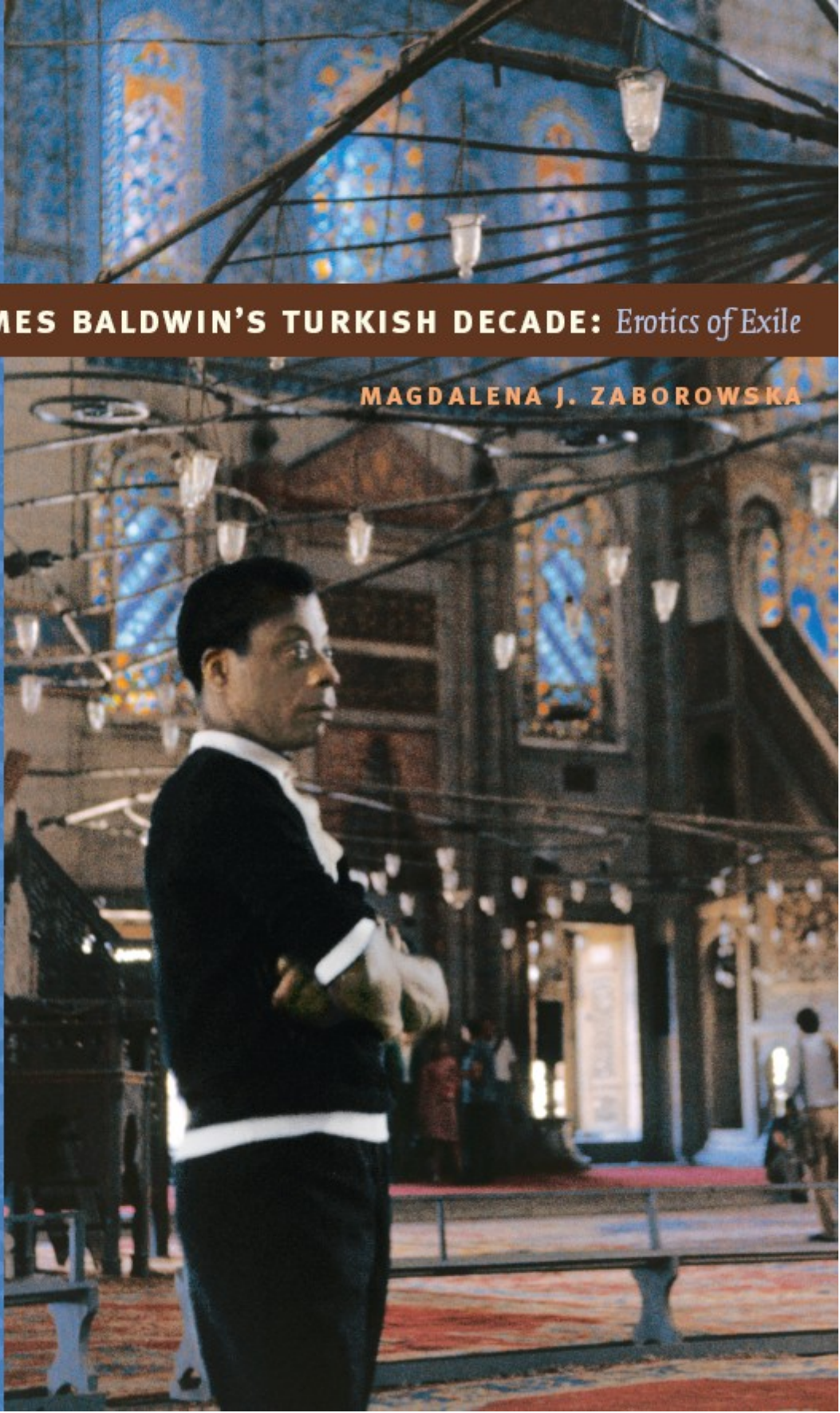
JAMES BALDWIN'S TURKISH DECADE: *Erotics of Exile*

MAGDALENA J. ZABOROWSKA



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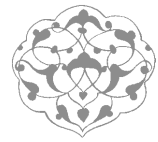

JAMES BALDWIN'S TURKISH DECADE

Erotics of Exile

MAGDALENA J. ZABOROWSKA

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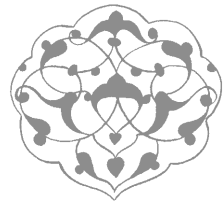

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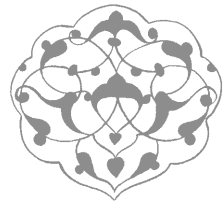


PREFACE

Sightings

It is immensely important for the person who understands to be located outside the object of his or her creative understanding—in time, in space, in culture. For one cannot even really see one's own exterior and comprehend it as a whole, and no mirrors or photographs can help; our real exterior can be seen and understood only by other people, because they are located outside us in space and because they are others.

—**MIKHAIL BAKHTIN**, "Response," *The Dialogic Imagination*

The African American writer and activist James Baldwin (1924–87) was born in Harlem, thousands of miles and an ocean away from Orel, the birthplace of Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975), the Russian philosopher and literary critic who wrote the foregoing epigraph. Despite the linguistic, geographic, and cultural distances between them, Baldwin and Bakhtin explored, each in his own unique way, how the social environment shapes both the language and the consciousness of groups and individuals, and espoused cross-cultural dialogue based on the belief that the human desire for self-knowledge compels reliance on others as interpreters of our identities.[1] Surrounded by the historical and social upheaval of the Soviet Revolution and its aftermath, Bakhtin spent some time in political exile and later withdrew from public

life into linguistic and literary study. He is best known as a literary theorist and as the author of numerous works of criticism, among them *The Dialogic Imagination* (1975), a volume that made Bakhtin's name, and that of his best-known concept, famous in the United States.

A descendant of southern black migrants to the promised land of the North, James Baldwin lived much of his adult life in France and Turkey but often returned to the United States to participate in the Civil Rights Movement, visit his family and friends, and confer with his editors and publishers.[2] Influenced by his international sojourns, and especially the little-known one in Istanbul, he wrote novels, plays, and essays that explored Americanness as inflected by race, class, gender, sexuality, and nationhood, within and outside U.S. borders. His world-famous two-essay volume *The Fire Next Time* (1963) called on Whites and Blacks "to dare everything" to "end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country, and change the history of the world" (141). It virtually prophesied the riots in American cities in the late 1960s. His works resound with a powerful mix of voices, and he commands complex sentences and emotions that make his style inimitable—from the intensely autobiographical tone of his first essay collection, *Notes of a Native Son* (1955), through the passionate intellectual and prophetic argument of *The Fire Next Time*, to the confessional narrative persona of his second novel, *Giovanni's Room* (1956), the polyphonic storytelling consciousness of his third, *Another Country* (1962), and a kaleidoscopic intra- and international layering of scenes of black experience in the essay volume *No Name in the Street* (1972), and his last novel, *Just above My Head* (1979). Baldwin's books and ideas influenced generations of black writers, from Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, Audre Lorde, and Toni Morrison, through Suzan Lori-Parks, Edward P. Jones, and Hilton Als, to Essex Hemphill, Melvin Dixon, and Randall Kenan.

Despite his extraordinary influence on American letters, however, Baldwin's death in France in 1987 followed years of relative obscurity in the 1970s and 1980s, years during which his later works were not well received or widely read and when his name began disappearing from course syllabi at American high schools and universities. The dimming of James Baldwin's literary star coincided with Mikhail Bakhtin's rise to prominence as one of the most popular international theorists embraced by literary and cultural critics in the United States. In Dale E. Peterson's words, Bakhtin was "an exotic and somewhat rough-hewn Soviet import" ("Response and Call," 761). In the 1980s and 1990s, a wide spectrum of scholars embraced Bakhtin's dialogism, polyphony, and double voice, concepts that were espe-

cially suited to the study of minority, multicultural, and marginalized traditions and authors. Not surprisingly, Bakhtin's ideas soon found their way into the groundbreaking works of African American critics, who explored black expressive traditions, celebrated "a plurality of [gendered] voices,"[3] and challenged racialized literary canons by means of creating "a new narrative space for representing the . . . so-called black experience."[4]

Baldwin may not be a dialogic writer in the classic Bakhtinian sense, but his works lend themselves to rich dialogic interpretations. His little-known extended visits in Turkey throughout the 1960s, the subject of this book, compel a new narrative space, a new telling of his life and of his black experience, as well as new readings of his works. As a scholar trained in literary, American, and African American studies, I have embraced this project because of its interdisciplinary and dialogic appeal. As an immigrant and a feminist, I was also compelled by the intense conversations between the political and the personal that I encountered while conducting research in Turkey and while writing every page of this book.

Growing up in communist Poland, I had heard of Bakhtin long before I learned of Baldwin's existence. In an instance of cross-cultural exchange, years before attempting Bakhtinian readings of James Baldwin's works as an international scholar, I may have seen his face on Polish national television around 1982. That first, real or imagined, sighting of James Baldwin in an unlikely location coincided with an event at the Polish United Workers' Party headquarters in my hometown of Kielce, where many high school students like myself had been herded to welcome a delegation of visiting Yemeni students earlier that day. After I returned home, I glimpsed a television program that featured African Americans, their faces vivid and moving, but their voices muted with the dispassionate voice-over of the Polish narrator.[5] The program referred to events in the United States, whose documentary footage the Polish propaganda ministry deemed important enough to include in a series of mind-numbing shows that exposed and critiqued American imperialism domestically and internationally.[6] Perhaps because they resonated with my naive conceptions of race and racism at the time, the images of the African Americans on the TV screen connected in my mind with those of the students from the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. We welcomed the Yemeni students and cheered for their country's striving toward "socialist progress"; all of us obediently applauded the same slogans at the Party headquarters. But in reality the smiling Yemeni students seemed nearly as remote and foreign to us as the serious American black men and women on television. Perhaps to us they all seemed merely

1. Architecture (yalı) along the Bosphorus, Boğaziçi, Istanbul, 2005. Photo by author.

a part of the state's propaganda machine—just as we must have appeared to them.

Several years later, as a student of American literature at Warsaw University, I learned that James Baldwin was an important writer when we hosted the poet Nikki Giovanni, whose conversations with him had been transcribed as *A Dialogue* and published in 1973. But we did not read any of Baldwin's works in my M.A. seminar in American literature, where New Criticism reigned and Ralph Ellison was revered as "innovative and modernist" and the only important African American writer.[7] I next encountered Baldwin, and finally read him, for my Ph.D. exam in twentieth-century American literature, after I had managed, not exactly legally, to leave Poland in 1987, the year of his death. The setting was Eugene, Oregon, and the book *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), Baldwin's stirring first novel, which I read

between stints as a maid and graduate teaching fellow (GTF) in American studies and composition.[8] As I was finishing my dissertation on East European immigrant women writers in 1992, with Eva Hoffman's "It is in my misfittings that I fit" (164) taped to the screen of my Mac Plus computer, I read Baldwin's second novel, *Giovanni's Room*, to "get away from my field." When I found myself coteaching that novel in my first academic job, at a private liberal arts college in the South, I realized that I had gotten far away from anything remotely familiar. I was as intrigued when some of my predominantly white, Baptist, and privileged undergraduate students complained to the dean that my colleague and I were "promoting homosexuality" by having them read *Giovanni's Room* as I was by those who claimed that "a black writer should not write white books" or that "Baldwin was making everybody fall in love with Giovanni, regardless of gender."[9]

This experience of "getting away from my field" and the attendant revelations, shocks, punishments, and lessons of my early career helped me to embrace more fully the interdisciplinary imperatives of scholarship in American and African American studies. A productive sense of dislocation—literary, geographic, political, and regional—became my modus operandi in the years that followed my immigration from Poland to the United States in 1996. As a newly minted "resident alien," I soon realized that I could not continue teaching "my immigrant writers" until I knew enough about black writers, and especially Baldwin and his contexts.[10] This meant not simply learning more about African American literature but rather coming to terms more fully with what my first book on Mary Antin and Anzia Yezierska had already taught me: how incredibly "worldly"—in Edward Said's elegant formulation—all literature is.

I offer these observations not to indulge my immigrant nostalgia but to explain how an international trajectory that has led me to Baldwin's works has also partially shaped this project on Baldwin in Turkey. I come from a country whose ties with Turkey have a long and complicated history; I was born and raised in a region that was, and might still be considered, part of the Orient.[11] Ever since teaching *Giovanni's Room* in the American South, I have been on the road with Baldwin, whom I saw more and more as putting a completely new spin on being an immigrant writer. I visited Paris and Saint-Paul de Vence in France; Istanbul, Ankara, and Bodrum in Turkey; as well as the American South, and Harlem and Greenwich Village in that country-within-a-country of New York City. As I read everything Baldwin wrote many times, and talked to people who knew him, I also taught his works in the United States and Denmark, always returning to Poland for

visits with family, during which my mother would sometimes ask with a puzzled smile: "But why would you not write about *your own* people?" This book is a product of my international peregrinations in Baldwin's footsteps and an answer to my parents in the Old Country, to whom I owe my first understanding of what Baldwin said so well in *The Fire Next Time*: "If you know whence you came, there is really no limit to where you can go."

In a 1970 interview, Baldwin proclaimed, "I don't believe in nations any more. Those passports, those borders are as outworn and useless as war."[12] While he was privileged to travel and live all over the world, he was still defined by his nationality and race until the end of his days. Thirty years after his passing, nationalisms of all stripes flourish, and walls and borders are still with us, more than ever in this time of brutal military conflicts around the world. James Baldwin lived in no less troubling times than ours and was vocal about the writer's responsibility to speak truth to power; we should be reading him today. In an interview from 1970, he explained: "My talent does not belong to me. . . . It belongs to you; it belongs to everybody. It's important only insofar as it can work toward the liberation of other people. . . . I didn't invent it. I didn't make myself, and I wouldn't have chosen to be born as I was, when I was, where I was. But I was, and you do what you can with the hand life dealt you."[13] Baldwin's deceptively fatalistic approach to authorship was an expression of strength, not resignation. It enabled him to persevere in his vocation as a poet and prophet, as he liked to call himself, despite his experience of racism and homophobia and despite his inability to find peace in his home country.

Baldwin's acclaimed first novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953) includes a scene that encapsulates the richness of his perspective on being black and male and American. The teenage protagonist, John Grimes, confronts his face in the mirror, "as though it were, as it indeed soon appeared to be, the face of a stranger, a stranger who held secrets that John could never know" (30). This compelling moment is signature Baldwin in its reliance on literal and metaphorical reflections and refractions of the gendered and racialized American self that his protagonist encounters. At the same time, it aptly illustrates Bakhtin's claim that self-knowledge depends on a confrontation with the other. When John Grimes "tried to look at [his face] as a stranger might, and tried to discover what other people saw," he saw only his physical features, or "details: two great eyes, and a broad, low forehead, and the triangle of his nose, and his enormous mouth, and the barely perceptible cleft in his chin" (31). Bakhtin's statements in the epigraph that "one cannot even really see one's own exterior" and that it "can be seen and under-

stood only by other people" help us to understand that while John sees his physical reflection in the mirror, he can look at himself only through his father's eyes.

This moment of intense self-perception echoes Du Bois's well-known concept of double consciousness and Bakhtin's notion of double-voiced discourse, as John realizes that both he and his father see blackness and maleness through the eyes of white American culture.[14] In John's eyes the "barely perceptible cleft in his chin" suddenly becomes "the mark of the devil's little finger" because that is what his unforgiving, self-hating, and fanatically religious father saw in his stepson (31). Baldwin's third-person narrator stresses that John desires "to know: whether his face was ugly or not" (31), but also to know how to free himself from his father's projections, that is, how to know himself, his humanity and beauty as a black male, by means of love and acceptance of others. While *Go Tell It on the Mountain* ends with hope that such love and acceptance are within John Grimes's grasp, Baldwin's own life story as a transnational black gay writer suggests that the price they exacted from him necessitated estrangement and exile.

In "Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Intellectuals" (1993), Edward Said evocatively links immigration and intellectual dissent in ways that help to represent Baldwin's predicament as a transnational black writer: "Exile is a model for the intellectual who is tempted, and even beset and overwhelmed, by the rewards of accommodation, yea-saying, settling in. Even if one is not an actual immigrant or expatriate, it is still possible to think as one, to imagine and investigate in spite of barriers, and always to move away from the centralizing authorities toward the margins, where you see things that are usually lost on minds that have never traveled beyond the conventional and comfortable."[15] As we know well from the examples of Henry James, Richard Wright, Nella Larsen, Gertrude Stein, George Lamming, and many others, writers abroad often tell us as much about where they are speaking from as their actual birthplaces. We need them and we need literature to make sense of who we are and where we stand. I hope that reading Baldwin now through his unexpected location in Turkey, and through the lens of the migratory literary misfittings that I deploy in these pages, will make the tale of transnational American literature even richer.

Baldwin's intensely personal rhetoric, imagery, and concern with the American self echo a large body of works in American literary history, including those of Emerson, Whitman, Douglass, and Du Bois, and challenge the genre of what Sacvan Bercovitch has termed "Auto-American-Biography."[16] Writing about the uniquely Baldwinian, black queer variation on this genre

compels a critic to be sensitive to—and often suspicious of—the ways in which the complex interplays of experience, ideas, and interpretation inform writing and reading literature. I have been especially aware of this as a scholar positioned between the autobiographically inflected traditions of immigrant and African American writings, in which issues of identity politics, self-reflexivity, self-positioning, and self-representation are centrally located and hotly debated.

This project has grown from years of research, thinking, and writing and records as much the results of a scholarly process as those of a complex personal journey. Perhaps because I have been captivated by Baldwin's perspective on authorship as unapologetically autobiographical, at times I cannot help reading his writings and experience through the lens of my own story as an immigrant scholar, and hence an outsider-participant in American culture and academy. Such an approach also echoes my training in feminist theory and my commitment to acknowledging the self-reflexive side of scholarship and teaching in literary and cultural studies.[17] While retracing Baldwin's steps through Istanbul, interviewing numerous people who knew and loved him, and engaging archival material, theory, and literary criticism, I have been aware that my experience of getting to know this writer echoes to a certain extent John Grimes's experience with the mirror in *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. That is, I initially, and perhaps naively, approached my task as constructing a kind of mirror that would reflect a clear image of James Baldwin's face to my readers. I soon realized that I was no more able to project this image without including the visions that others had of him than I was able to write about Baldwin in Turkey without occasionally having to grapple with myself as an author of this book.[18] Hoping that my autobiographical intrusions will be helpful to some of my readers, I felt compelled to include them by the following passage from Baldwin's 1985 essay "The Price of the Ticket," which echoes his better-known statement from *The Fire Next Time*: "To do your first works over means to reexamine everything. Go back to where you started, or as far back as you can, examine all of it, travel your road again and tell the truth about it. Sing or shout or testify or keep it to yourself: *but know whence you came*" (xix). By having led me from Poland, through the United States, to Turkey, this project has helped me to relocate American literature as a transnational tradition and to reinvent myself as a critic reconciled with the idea that doing one's "first works over" is never done.

In the chapters that follow, I focus on how Baldwin's residences in Turkey throughout the 1960s helped him to reshape his views on sociability

and national identity as much as on race and sexuality and hence significantly influenced his articulations of Americanness across the Atlantic. The accounts of his person and works by his Turkish hosts, friends, and collaborators shed light on a crucial decade in his life, and specifically on the period following the publications of *Another Country* (1962) and *The Fire Next Time* (1963), a period that has been unjustly neglected by scholars.[19] I hope that this study of Baldwin's Turkish decade and his relationships with Turkish artists and intellectuals will add an important chapter to the emerging field of transnational African American studies.[20] By putting in dialogue Baldwin's articulations of the erotic and exile and by locating that dialogue between Turkey and the United States, I show that his revolutionary works exploded limiting notions of authorship, place, and national identity and helped to build dialogic bridges across cultures.

In a statement that echoes Baldwin's own definitions and suggests his influence on a younger generation of black writers, the lesbian poet and essayist Audre Lorde terms the erotic the "creative energy . . . [and] knowledge [that] empowers us, [and] becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence."[21] When writing about his exile, Baldwin, as if anticipating some of Edward Said's more recent statements, refers to it as a condition that "saved my life . . . [by making me] able and willing to accept [my] own vision of the world, no matter how radically this vision departs from that of others" (*Price of the Ticket*, 312). These two notions of the erotic and exile crossbreed and fertilize each other in Baldwin's works and stand at the center of his project of making the writer's art a tool of social justice. I offer *James Baldwin's Turkish Decade: Erotics of Exile* as homage to this effort by one of the greatest American writers, with hopes that it will contribute to increasing our energies, knowledge, and vision in this troubled world.

Plan of the Book

This book's narrative design pays heed to chronology but focuses on the effects and influences that Baldwin's attachment to Turkish places, culture, and people had on his works rather than on the events of his life alone. Hence while I take note of Baldwin's trips to the United States and elsewhere, and of the many Americans and African Americans who move in and out of his life throughout the decade, I pay particular attention to the accounts and representations of Baldwin in Turkey as a black and queer writer from the United States.[22] That is, I examine how his works, his person,

and his activism were received, interpreted, and often misconstrued and misread by the Turks, and show how this new archive of knowledge from an unexpected location enriches our understanding of what and how Baldwin wrote at the time and how he functioned as a transatlantic black intellectual. Consequently my readings of the works he wrote there, especially *Another Country* and *No Name in the Street*, deliberately privilege Turkey as an authorial location and cultural context that explicitly and implicitly shaped the form and content as well as the literary imagination of these works.[23]

Throughout the chapters that follow the introduction, I interweave sections that bring together scholarship and literary critical readings with those that relay the results of my primary research in Turkey and that have been inspired by, and organized around, the accounts of Baldwin's friends and collaborators whom I have interviewed for this project. Such a design allows the reader either to focus on the more scholarly or more narrative chapters or to read all of them as an ebb and flow of different kinds of material. I hope that it will appeal to audiences outside the academy.

Chapter 1, "Between Friends: Looking for Baldwin in Constantinople," employs an array of original sources—unpublished letters, interviews with Turkish subjects, and local archives—to explore Baldwin's entry into the artistic and intellectual circles of Istanbul, where he relocated both from his home country and his migrant home in France. Using Sedat Pakay's film *James Baldwin: From Another Place* and his evocative photographs of Baldwin in Turkey as a visual framework, I discuss Baldwin's reception by the Turks as an "Arap," or dark-skinned stranger, and queer American. At center stage of the chapter are interviews with Baldwin's friend Engin Cezzar and his wife Gülriz Sururi. This oral history material is cast in the context of the memoirs in which Cezzar and Sururi offer their impressions of their friendship and collaboration with Baldwin for the contemporary Turkish audience.

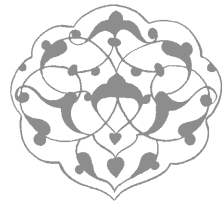
In chapter 2, "Queer Orientalisms in *Another Country*," I read closely Baldwin's second novel, which he rewrote and finished in Istanbul in record time, and which bears an important, and yet unexplored, Turkish imprint. I show how, while creating a complex image of the mid-twentieth-century American self and New York City in *Another Country*, Baldwin inserts implicit and explicit references to Turkish culture into its key interracial and sexual encounters. Such deployment of Orientalist imaginary and erotica opens up a new reading of Vivaldo's and Ida's affair as an example of how love and its very possibility have been debased by racism that extends beyond the United States. I read the novel's closing scene, inspired by Baldwin's friendship with the poet Cevat Çapan and featuring a young Frenchman's immigrant

arrival in the United States, as an allegorical representation of the process of semi-acculturation and de-Americanization that Baldwin experienced in Turkey.[24]

Chapter 3, "Staging Masculinity in *Düşenin Dostu*," focuses on Baldwin's debut as a director of John Herbert's play *Fortune and Men's Eyes* (1967), which was performed at the Gülriz Sururi–Engin Cezzar Theater in Istanbul in 1969 and 1970 and revolutionized the Turkish stage. *Fortune and Men's Eyes* recounts power struggles and sexual violence among white inmates in a Canadian correctional facility for young males; in a provocative Turkish translation, the play under Baldwin's directorship became a great local and national success. I examine the circumstances of its production, staging, and reception in Turkey on the basis of local publications and my interviews with the play's translators, Oktay Balamir and Ali Poyrazoğlu. I include as well an interview with Baldwin's assistant and interpreter, the journalist and cultural critic Zeynep Oral, who became a key Turkish expert on Baldwin. Baldwin used the play as an opportunity to participate in Turkish culture and to explore the trope of the "prison house" that in his later works he would juxtapose with images of gendered domesticity (e.g., *If Beale Street Could Talk*, *No Name in the Street*, *Just above My Head*). Along with migration and passage, theater and incarceration became his central metaphors as he continued to live in Turkey and traveled back and forth to the United States, where he confronted the "Blacks' Old Country" on several trips to the southern states.

Chapter 4, "East to South: Homosexual Panic, the Old Country, and *No Name in the Street*," retraces Baldwin's journeys between 1957 and 1971 to what he called the American "Southland," which inspired his two-essay volume written in Turkey, *No Name in the Street*. I read this work, against its general negative reception by critics, as a seminal text that provides a powerful commentary on race and gender relations and what I call "regional homosexual panic" as they entered the American literary imagination in the turbulent 1950s and the 1960s. I show how Baldwin's engagement with Turkish culture and politics at the time of the book's writing and his advocacy on behalf of political prisoners at home and abroad provide rich contexts for his autobiographical encounters with urban segregation, racial and sexual violence, and homophobia in the United States. Bearing a distinct Turkish stamp in form and content, *No Name* also anticipates and elucidates Baldwin's later, little-discussed novels *If Beale Street Could Talk* and *Just above My Head* and helps to explain his feelings of entrapment in the American "house of bondage" on the one hand and his desire for a Turkish "home on the side of the mountain" on the other.

The conclusion, "Welcome Tables East and West," reads his last, unpublished play, cowritten with the African American theater director Walter Dallas, as a kind of literary testament in the context of Baldwin's late writings on gender and sexuality. Begun in Istanbul and completed in France, *The Welcome Table* shows how Baldwin's engagements with his and his friends' interpretations of Turkish notions of sociability helped him not only to establish his art as his home and hearth in the world but also to claim femininity and queer and transgender subjectivities as artistic inspirations. Anticipated in *No Name*, whose experimental form and radical message on race and sex caused some critics to accuse Baldwin of "madness," *The Welcome Table* echoed his preoccupation with feminine narrative perspectives and authorial personae in the essays "The Preservation of Innocence" and "Here Be Dragons," the novels *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and *If Beale Street Could Talk*, and the play *Blues for Mister Charlie*.



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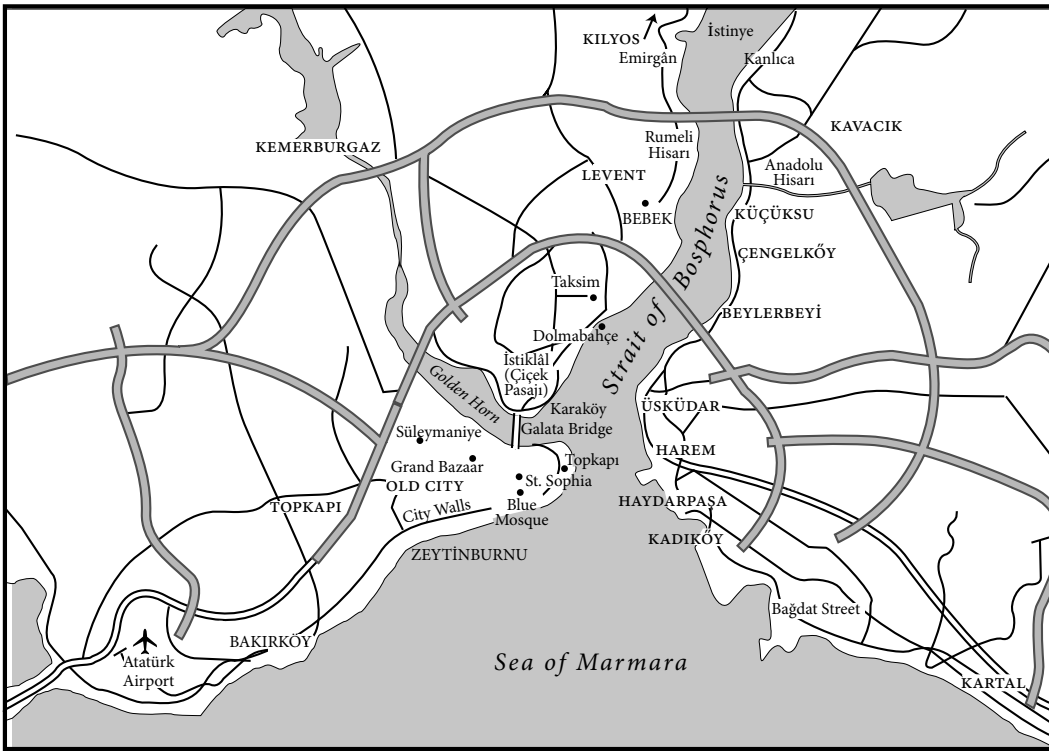
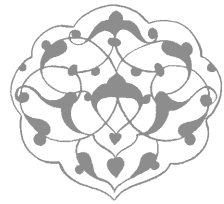
Turkey, 1961–81



James Baldwin's İstanbul

2. Sedat Pakay, *From Another Place*. James Baldwin in street, Istanbul, May 1970.



INTRODUCTION

From Harlem to Istanbul

"Perhaps only someone who is outside of the States realizes that it's impossible to get out," James Baldwin's voice-over proclaims in a short film by the Turkish director and photographer Sedat Pakay, *James Baldwin: From Another Place* (1973). Pakay's little-known cinematic gem records the writer's movements through the city of Istanbul over a three-day period in May 1970 and frames Baldwin's assertion with seductive photography of private interiors, city streets, and a boat ride on the Bosphorus. Like no other existing documentary, the black-and-white film captures the profound paradox of Baldwin's transatlantic vantage point by showing how he both belongs and remains an outsider in the teeming half-European, half-Asian Turkish metropolis. Baldwin's work has occupied an oddly similar position in American literary history and African American studies, as it has been woven in and out of the sometimes overlapping and sometimes discrete canons: American, black, and queer. Like Pakay's camera, this project attempts to bring the conflicting and often contradictory depictions of Baldwin's person and writings together.

In eerie ways and from an unlikely location, Pakay's compelling portrait of the black gay writer in Istanbul echoes the paradoxes of how African Americans were represented in the United States from the middle of the twentieth century onward. Caught between the hypervisibility of racist and oversexualized heterosexist images of African American bodies pervading

popular culture and the political invisibility resulting from systemic discrimination by the state's institutions and the population at large, American Blacks were erased and displaced, often violently so. Having to fight for their most basic civil rights in the country that prided itself on the ideals of democracy yet allowed rapes and lynchings to go unpunished, they were trapped in, and simultaneously exiled from, their homeland as "undesirable subjects." While this predicament shaped James Baldwin's life and career to a large degree and forced him to leave the United States in search of writing havens, it also provided a powerful subject for his works that recast blackness, nationhood, and the erotic in a transnational context.

One of the most important American writers of the last century, James Baldwin was marked by his lower-class background, his blackness, and his homosexuality and for much of his adult life found life in semi-exile in France and Turkey easier than in the United States.[1] His illegitimate birth in poverty in Harlem in 1924, his struggle to attain education while helping to raise his eight siblings, and his conflict with a preacher stepfather who disapproved of his intellectual aspirations and berated him for being "ugly" compounded his perception of himself as an outsider and interloper.[2] His parents' slave ancestry and migration north from Louisiana and Maryland added to his sense of displacement and entrapment and, in addition to his illegitimacy, provided powerful and challenging subjects for his works.[3] Baldwin's early passages within New York City, down and up along the island of Manhattan, suggested the shape of his travels to come. As a teenager, he commuted every day from Harlem to the Bronx to attend high school, and then to New Jersey to work at menial jobs. Soon afterward he moved away from Harlem to Greenwich Village, where he began his career as a writer and struggled to come to terms with his sexual identity.[4]

Young Jimmy's journey from the uptown storefront churches of Harlem, where he served as a teenage preacher, to the predominantly Jewish and secular De Witt Clinton High School in the Bronx, where he apprenticed as a poet, writer of short stories, and editor of a literary journal, the *Magpie*, was dramatic. As his long-term assistant, friend, and biographer David Leeming stresses in his 1992 biography of Baldwin, the young man's Bronx journey involved tough lessons about surviving and deploying his excessive visibility as one of the few Blacks at the school, and the only one who represented the Fireside Pentecostal Assembly Church: "[His congregation] would have been scandalized had they been able to watch their favorite boy preacher prancing about with a tambourine in front of several laughing Jewish boys, imitating in song and dance the saints stricken by the power

of the Lord at the foot of the cross."[5] While at De Witt Clinton, Baldwin formed friendships with Emile Capouya, Richard Avedon, and Sol Stein that later flourished into important connections and collaborations: Stein edited Baldwin's first essay collection, *Notes of the Native Son*, for Beacon Press in 1955 and became a lifelong friend; Avedon became a famous photographer and collaborated with Baldwin on a unique photo-text volume, *Nothing Personal* (1964); Capouya, who became a publisher, introduced Baldwin to the painter Beauford Delaney, whom Baldwin considered his artistic and spiritual father.

His second important transition, to Greenwich Village, where he worked as a waiter and occasional musician while trying to publish his early writings, took place after stints doing menial labor in New Jersey, or "New Georgia." This move also implied performances of a new identity and another betrayal, as he moved away from home after his stepfather's death, thus abandoning his mother and siblings for what his guilty conscience considered the narcissistic career of a writer.[6] The poet Harold Norse, whom Baldwin met when he was nineteen, evokes Greenwich Village after World War II as "an oasis of liberation to which, from all over America, young men and women flocked to express their socially unacceptable lifestyles."[7] Norse, older by a few years and white, immediately placed Baldwin in a hierarchy of racial stereotypes: "His half-starved, gaunt face . . . looked much older" (111), and his "wild eyes bugging out alarmingly" gave him the "crazed look of a junkie about to kill for a fix" (110). Despite Jimmy's small frame, he saw him as "ready to cut our throats for a quarter" (110). But Norse soon realized that Baldwin had approached him and his friend with similar apprehension: "I was worried. . . . Two white men skulking in the mist in the early hours can only mean trouble for a defenseless black boy" (110). Baldwin's comment evoked the brutal history of American race relations, which made Norse adjust his reading of him from pathological to pathetic, from a potential assailant to a victim, who was "discriminated against by both races," caught up "in a ghetto, outside the mainstream . . . an oddity in Harlem" and an "alien in the white world" (111).

Black, small, queer, and crazy-looking, Baldwin appeared to Norse the uttermost foreigner, out of place even in the bohemian Greenwich Village, and in a sense exiled long before he actually left his homeland. "Being queer was even worse than being black, Jewish, and poverty-stricken," Norse stresses, because "among bottom dogs gays were the bottom" (112). But while Baldwin's skin color made him a victim to Norse, his racialized queerness made him exotic: "His brown parchment skin reflected a silvery glow

like an ancient African mask" (112). Still, Norse would often get tired of Jimmy's "desperation [over racism, which] was so intense that I felt guilty for being annoyed" (174). This comment would echo two decades later in his critiques of Baldwin's later works and in Norse's references to their brief affair in his *Memoirs of a Bastard Angel: A Fifty-Year Literary and Erotic Odyssey* (1989), which he somewhat incongruously dedicated, "For James Baldwin. In fond memory of our twenties."[8]

Unlike his ambivalent relationship with Norse,[9] Baldwin's friendship with Beauford Delaney (1901–79) and his soon-to-become-contentious relationship with Richard Wright (1908–60) helped him to embrace the process of becoming a writer.[10] These two black mentors and successful artists helped Baldwin to see himself as valuable and gifted enough to follow his vocation, despite his inability to attend college. Delaney, a son of a preacher and gay like Baldwin, opened up a whole new world to him by sharing his art and tastes in music, colors, and shapes and by introducing him to other famous black artists, Marian Anderson among them, who were "not meant to be looked on by me as celebrities, but as a part of Beauford's life and as part of my inheritance" (*Price of the Ticket*, x). Impressed with sixty-some pages of the novel that Baldwin was struggling with at the time, which would almost a decade later become *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), Wright helped Baldwin to obtain a Eugene F. Saxton Foundation Fellowship and recommended him to Harper and Brothers. Baldwin idolized Wright, and when the older writer left for Paris in 1946, Baldwin "saw in his departure a future path for himself" (Leeming, *James Baldwin*, 50).

Baldwin's brief romance with the Left, perhaps in part encouraged by Wright's stint with the Communist Party, dates from around the time he entered the scene in the Village.[11] He befriended a young black man, Eugene Worth, whom he "loved with all my heart," and who was a member of the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL).[12] Worth persuaded Baldwin to embrace Trotskyism for a short time. Finding himself an "anti-Stalinist when America and Russia were allies," Baldwin soon realized that "it may be impossible to indoctrinate me" (*Price of the Ticket*, xiii). His alliance with the Left—"of absolutely no interest," as he stresses (xii)—ended with a painful loss that he would recall many times and that inspired the description of the suicide of Rufus Scott, the black jazz drummer in his third novel, *Another Country* (1962). Worth killed himself by jumping off the George Washington Bridge two years before Baldwin took off for Paris in 1948. For the rest of his life, Baldwin would regret that he had somehow failed to save him: "We were never lovers: for what it's worth, I think I wish we had been" (xii). After

a long struggle, he was finally able to write the scene of Rufus's suicide—one of the hardest things he had ever written, he claimed—while on his first long visit in Turkey.

Before he found himself in Istanbul completing *Another Country*, Baldwin spent nearly a decade in France, where he realized that "Europe had formed us both [American Blacks and Whites], was part of our identity and part of our inheritance" (*Price of the Ticket*, 172).[13] His famed and well-documented flight to Paris took place on Armistice Day in 1948 and initiated his literary life in transit among cultures, languages, and continents. This departure, not *to* France but *away* from New York City, as he stressed repeatedly, compounded his feelings of estrangement from his country and guilt toward his family. When he attained international renown with the publication of *The Fire Next Time* in 1963, exactly two decades after Baldwin the elder's death on the day of the Harlem riot that his stepson described so vividly in "Notes of a Native Son" (1955), James Baldwin was still in search of a place where he would fit in as a black and queer writer. His intra- and international journeys are vital to understanding him as a migratory writer, a "witness dedicated to blurring the distinction between patriotism and expatriatism, citizenship and exile," as the literary critic Joshua Miller aptly defines him ("Discovery," 338).[14]

Baldwin's transitions from Harlem to Paris and then to Saint-Paul de Vence in the south of France, where he bought a house and remained for the rest of his life, have received much attention in the scholarship published during his lifetime and after his death from cancer in 1987.[15] But few scholars except for the biographers—David Leeming, James Campbell, Fern Marja Eckman, and William J. Weatherby—have followed Baldwin to Istanbul and Turkey. And yet that city and country had considerable impact on his career that must be taken into account today, when scholars of the African diaspora proclaim the importance of the "outer-national sites" for studying canonical African American literature (Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 4).[16]

Baldwin's little-known Turkish decade, a period roughly between 1961 and 1971, stands chronologically at the center of his multiple journeys—from the Harlem ghetto and Beauford Delaney's Greenwich Village studio, where he first learned "how to see," through the churches and lecture halls and freedom marches in the South, to the salons of jet-setting international literati and the vistas of southern France of his later years. It was an important period of artistic incubation and thematic and formal experimentation to Baldwin that was bracketed by the innovative form of his third novel *An-*

other Country (1962), and the complex essay structure of his little-read fourth collection, *No Name in the Street* (1972). For readers of American literature, Baldwin's Turkish sojourn helps us to embrace more fully the transnational dimension of mid-twentieth-century black literary culture; it helps us to see that "certain moves, certain arguments and epiphanies, can only be staged beyond the confines of the United States, and even sometimes in languages other than English," as Brent Hayes Edwards recently observed (4–5).[17]

Baldwin's Turkish period is also vital to reassessing his contribution nationally and internationally, as we witness the emergence of transnational African American studies. This new field expands and challenges Paul Gilroy's famous formulation in 1993 of the Black Atlantic cultures and has produced interdisciplinary projects by, among others, Bill Mullen, Penny Von Eschen, Nikhil Singh, Maria Diedrich, Kevin Gaines, Tyler Stovall, Michelle Wright, and Melanie McAlister. While *James Baldwin's Turkish Decade* hopes to contribute to the rich conversations in this field, it also engages in dialogue with another emergent field, one that plays on the margins and borders between African American and gender studies, and feminist and queer theory, a field that E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson have recently defined as "black queer studies."[18] While relating Baldwin's prolonged stays in Istanbul and other parts of Turkey, this book engages the part of the world that has been persistently eroticized, exoticized, and Orientalized but little understood by the West. My subtitle, *Erotics of Exile*, plays on the stereotypical associations of the East and Islamic cultures with sensuality, on the one hand,[19] and Baldwin's insistence that his prolonged forays abroad must be defined as exile, on the other.[20] It also targets the intersections of race, sexuality, gender, and location that Baldwin explored in his works and rethought and recast amid his new milieu.[21]

As I show in the chapters that follow, Baldwin's attention to the intertwining of the erotic and race in a transatlantic context, and his embrace of what we would today call a "queer" identity, was sharpened and enabled by his Turkish exile precisely because he was free there from the American notions of race and sex. In my research for this book, I have tried to trace the influence of Turkey and its people on the texts that emerged from a prolific period in Baldwin's life, as well as acknowledging his occasional participation in exoticizing and stereotyping Turkish culture. I have done so by bringing together archival material—interviews with Baldwin's Turkish friends, unpublished letters, scholarly and journalistic accounts, photographs and film—with new critical interpretations of his works. Deploying a mix of theoretical tools and methods, from contextualized close readings and bio-

graphical accounts, through feminist and cultural studies approaches, to oral history and black queer studies, I offer this book as a contribution to the emergent dialogue on where and how we position the study of African American literature and culture in the twenty-first century.[22]

Looking for Baldwin in the East

Although it provided James Baldwin an excellent vantage point on his homeland and a lens through which to assess the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement, Turkey may seem a somewhat unexpected location for studying this writer in the context of African American literature and culture.[23] It lies outside the geographic reaches of the African diaspora delineated by Paul Gilroy's landmark project *The Black Atlantic*, and while it fits more easily with the spectrum of international locales taken up by the more recent work in transnational African American studies, it challenges a scholar with the difference of language and cultural context. As Leeming cautions, Turkey was an important location to Baldwin, but not as important as France, where he was a part of a large, vibrant, and well-documented African American community and chose to spend his last years.[24] Unlike France, which is the fictional setting for several of Baldwin's works, Turkey does not appear prominently in any. Nevertheless it made the creation and completion of these works possible as an authorial setting and as such is worthy of careful and thorough consideration. Few American readers know that Baldwin's works and presence have had lasting resonance in Turkish culture, whereas his fans in that country are not only aware of his residency among them but now have two translations of *Another Country* to compare,[25] as well as brand-new ones of *The Fire Next Time* and *Giovanni's Room*.[26] They know that he formed important alliances with local artists and intellectuals and directed a play whose daring focus on prison homosexuality dramatically changed the Turkish theater scene. As Ali Poyrazoğlu, of the original Turkish cast of *Fortune and Men's Eyes* (*Düşenin Dostu*) and currently a prominent actor and director, contemplates restaging the play to celebrate Baldwin's legacy, we can only hope that his endeavor—when and if it comes to fruition—will be recognized in the United States as an integral part of the writer's larger transatlantic story.

Located on the margins of continents—between Europe and Asia, in the vicinity of North Africa and the Middle East—Turkey provided a haven where Baldwin worked on some of his most important, and arguably most American, works: *Another Country*, *The Fire Next Time*, *Blues for Mister Charlie*,

Going to Meet the Man, *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, *One Day When I Was Lost*, and *No Name in the Street*.[27] Some of them would not have seen the light of day without the support of Baldwin's devoted Turkish friends, Engin Cezzar, Gülriz Sururi, Zeynep Oral, Cevat Çapan, Oktay Balamir, and Ali Poyrazoğlu, as well as the cultural newness and "breathing space" that their hospitable country afforded him. Turkey was an alternative location, a space of exile, but also a nurturing dwelling place after Baldwin had spent nearly a decade in France and Western Europe and failed to reestablish a permanent residency in his homeland upon his return in 1957. It became a hideaway during the depressed years following the assassinations of Malcolm X, Medgar Evers, and Martin Luther King Jr., all of whom Baldwin knew and considered friends. As a dramatically different location far removed from his home country, Turkey also provided a powerful lens through which he reimagined himself as a black and queer writer and readjusted his view of American race relations as the 1960s drew to a close. As Baldwin was fond of saying about people, countries, and works that punctuated profound moments in his career, Turkey "saved my life."[28]

Baldwin's first visit to Turkey took place in the fall of 1961. He went at the invitation of Engin Cezzar, a Turkish actor from the Yale Drama School whom Baldwin befriended in New York and cast as Giovanni in the Actors Studio production of *Giovanni's Room* in 1957. Jimmy, as his friends there called him, came to Istanbul with little money, depressed by a trip to Israel, and with a severe case of writer's block that made him desperate to finish *Another Country*. Local hospitality, the love and care of his hosts, and the peace of mind that surprisingly came to him in the middle of bustling Istanbul worked wonders. In a matter of months, fed, housed, and entertained by the extended Cezzar-Sururi-Çapan family, he rewrote and finished his long-overdue novel and returned to the United States to celebrate its publication and bestseller success.

After Baldwin had come back to Turkey a few months later, he established a pattern of remaining there for extended periods of time, returning home for visits with family and publishers, and traveling elsewhere that would last throughout the 1960s. While in Istanbul, he worked with abandon and socialized in a similar manner, as I was told by several of his friends, among them John Freely, a writer and physics teacher at Boğaziçi Üniversitesi (Bosphorus University), and Avni Salbaş called Avni Bey, an Afro-Turk who worked as a bartender in Divan Hotel, one of Baldwin's and his friends' favorite hangouts.[29] Following the phenomenal success of *The Fire Next Time*, Baldwin became an international celebrity sought after by the Turkish press,

3. James Baldwin, Marlon Brando, David Baldwin, and David Leeming in Urcan Restaurant, Istanbul, 1966. Reproduced by permission of Doğan Kitap and İzzeddin Çalışlar.

cultural establishment, and high society. His increasing fame and need to stay in close contact with his American publishers and editors at a time when Turkish telecommunications and postal services did not work very well were among the reasons why he decided to move to France in 1971. Baldwin's last Turkish sojourn, "an interlude of almost idyllic calm," took place in the early fall of 1981, when he spent perhaps the happiest months of his life with his brother David, Cezzar, and Sururi at a farmhouse in Bodrum, a resort on the Aegean Sea (Leeming, *James Baldwin*, 358).

Baldwin's long-awaited financial success in the mid-1960s made it possible for him to afford his own accommodations in Istanbul, some of them quite spectacular, and to entertain lavishly. He soon became a magnet attracting other Americans and African Americans who came as either visitors or collaborators.[30] Lucien Happersberger, the Swiss man whom Baldwin met in his early years in Paris and described as the love of his life, came to visit in 1962, while he was going through his first divorce, from the mother of Baldwin's godson, Luc (J. Campbell, *Talking*, 209).[31] When the actor Marlon Brando dropped by in mid-1966, he was clandestinely transported around the city in Cezzar's little car while his limo served as a decoy to deflect the crowds of fans.[32] Jimmy's artistic mentor, the painter Beauford Delaney, came from Paris around the same time and quickly became a magnet for other artists; he painted Jimmy's portrait and a lovely vista of