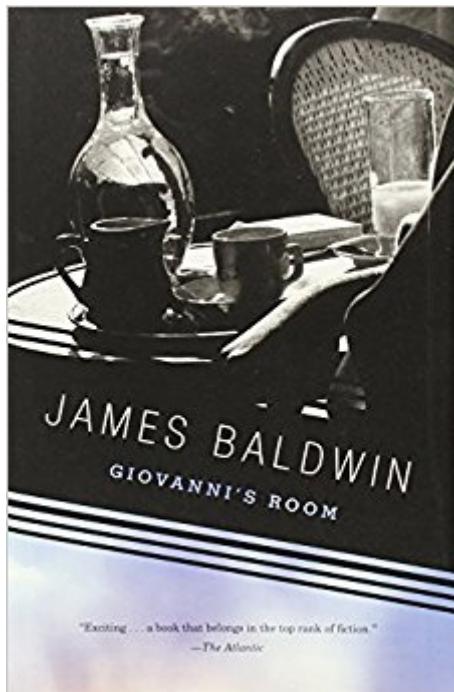


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# Giovanni's Room



## Synopsis

Set in the 1950s Paris of American expatriates, liaisons, and violence, a young man finds himself caught between desire and conventional morality. With a sharp, probing imagination, James Baldwin's now-classic narrative delves into the mystery of loving and creates a moving, highly controversial story of death and passion that reveals the unspoken complexities of the human heart.

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## Customer Reviews

Ã¢ "If Van Gogh was our 19th-century artist-saint, James Baldwin is our 20th-century one.Ã¢ •Michael OndaatjeÃ¢ "A young American involved with both a woman and a man. . . . Baldwin writes of these matters with unusual candor and yet with such dignity and intensity.Ã¢ •The New York TimesÃ¢ "Absorbing . . . [with] immediate emotional impact.Ã¢ •The Washington PostÃ¢ "Mr. Baldwin has taken a very special theme and treated it with great artistry and restraint.Ã¢ •Saturday ReviewÃ¢ "Exciting . . . a book that belongs in the top rank of fiction.Ã¢ •The AtlanticÃ¢ "Violent, excruciating beauty.Ã¢ •San Francisco ChronicleÃ¢ "To be James Baldwin is to touch on so many hidden places in Europe, America, the Negro, the white manÃ¢ " to be forced to understand so much.Ã¢ •Ã¢ " Alfred KazinÃ¢ "This author retains a place in an extremely select group; that composed of the few genuinely indispensable American writers.Ã¢ •Saturday ReviewÃ¢ "He has not himself lost access to the sources of his beingÃ¢ " which is what makes him read and awaited by

perhaps a wider range of people than any other major American writer. • The Nation • "He is thought-provoking, tantalizing, irritating, abusing and amusing. And he uses words as the sea uses waves, to flow and beat, advance and retreat, rise and take a bow in disappearing . . . the thought becomes poetry and the poetry illuminates thought. • Langston Hughes • "He has become one of the few writers of our time. • Norman Mailer

Set in the 1950s Paris of American expatriates, liaisons, and violence, a young man finds himself caught between desire and conventional morality. With a sharp, probing imagination, James Baldwin's now-classic narrative delves into the mystery of loving and creates a moving, highly controversial story of death and passion that reveals the unspoken complexities of the human heart.  
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CRUEL boyfriends and PASSIONATE lovers of every sex are no strangers to the BETRAYAL and the covert motives of the selfish heart disguised behind the faces of those we love. For many of us who have lived the adventures of the wandering, devoted, seeking and cold hearted lover, it is easy to look back, place oneself into each desperate role and play it to its gritty conclusion with no guilt. GIOVANNI'S ROOM makes no apologies for its brutality and manipulation of the personal truth as seen by each player and the narrator. In real life, as frequently witnessed, males/females predictably react the same in similar real life dramas to those shady people in this story. James Baldwin wrote this sexy torrid story to provide a voyeuristic look through a filthy glass window of doom leaving the gaze to fall on many souls inside tainted personalities in stagnant settings. Every desperate character is human and loveable because of themselves. The book is a MASTERPIECE! I purchased this book on .

Fiction, in and of itself is a mess. It's a smattering and oblong mixture of stylistic tendency, grammatical preference, and poetic nuance. Throw in the author's eccentricities and idiosyncrasies and you've got yourself a serious novel. But fiction itself is oblong. It's a colossal whale undulating to the rhythms of the sea of literature. Because of its immensity--precision, or the ability to say what one really means--from an author's standpoint--has become a rarity. Personal opinion and true artistic intent has taken a backseat to the commerciality and viability of the masque. That which covers has become the true face of the successful author. But the cornerstone of good fiction, and I mean really good fiction is precision in language. The author must carve their sentences from

granite and hope to God that what lies beneath the rubble is something pristine and worth looking at. In the case of Giovanni's Room the essence of precision is nothing short of astounding. Baldwin is an artist in the truest sense. He's a man who sticks to his convictions and writes prose with true artistic validity--that is--he goes for the jugular in hopes of throttling change out of a culture in stasis. Homosexual and black in the 1950's--Baldwin fled the U.S. and settled in Paris for a number of years, forming the basis of Giovanni's Room. The novel is the story of an American ex-pat who fled to Paris from his own fear of coming to terms with his sexuality. Ultimately, he settles in Paris, specifically-- in a man named Giovanni's room--where he's able, if only for a short while, to explore that which forms the essence of his being. The novel is far from the meanderings of an ex-pat in Paris. Where Baldwin truly elevates his story is in his ability to transform the landscape itself into a character. In Baldwin's world, Paris is more than a simple city. It is ethereal, steamy, it takes on the fluid transcendent characteristics of a lover, and as such becomes fleeting and evasive like the last touch before saying goodbye. All of which is conveyed by Baldwin's, tensilary, brittle prose. His writing is delicate and rigid, stretched to the point of snapping, revealing the delicate skeleton-framework beneath. Ripe with heartbreak, the struggles of coming to terms with self, and the immense difficulties behind attempting to be authentic in a society where your true face is a blackguard--that which is shunned and not acceptable to don in public. Baldwin was a pioneer, and Giovanni's Room is nothing short of beautiful, if not groundbreaking at a time when ground desperately needed to be broken. For more great book reviews go to [bookguyreview.com](http://bookguyreview.com)

GIOVANNI'S ROOM was not James Baldwin's first novel; his debut came three years before with *GO TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN*. Nor was it the first post-war novel to deal with homosexuality; Gore Vidal addressed the issue in 1948's *THE CITY AND THE PILLAR*. But Vidal, as good a writer as he is, is not a poet. And GIOVANNI'S ROOM is the work of a poet. Baldwin's writing is uncommonly beautiful. Even when dealing with the darkest of emotions and the most devastating of tragedies, his prose soars like an eagle above the usual form of the novel, giving the events a depth and meaning that, to my mind, most forcibly recall Tennessee Williams; it is a shame that none of Baldwin's novels or plays were ever filmed. The fairly simple story concerns David, an expatriate American in Paris, aged about twenty-seven or so and somewhat of a drifter. He is involved with a young woman named Hella, whom he has asked to marry him; at the start of the story, which is told in flashback, Hella is off traveling in Spain, considering David's proposal, which despite the appearance of importance she is giving it, has a hollow ring to it. While Hella is gone, David, needing money, becomes involved in the homosexual world of Paris. He does not go so far as to have sex

with any of the men, but he learns quickly how to use them to get the money that his father keeps refusing to send him from the States. One night, with one of these acquaintances, a middle-aged businessman named Jacques, David goes to a bar owned by Jacques's friend Guillaume, and meets the new barman, a beautiful young Italian named Giovanni. The two young men hit it off extremely well; without revealing too much, suffice it to say that the evening ends in Giovanni's room, in his bed. The remainder of the novel deals with David's inner turmoil over the fact that he has fallen head-over-heels in love with Giovanni, a love, though this is not said directly, much deeper than whatever it is he feels (felt?) for Hella. Later on, naturally, Hella returns to Paris, and David, afraid to face Giovanni, simply abandons him and takes up with Hella at her hotel. The inevitable happens, and Giovanni and Hella eventually meet on the street. Giovanni is with Jacques, and they invite David and Hella out for a drink. Hella, perhaps sensing something, begs off on the grounds that she does not feel well. David takes her back to her hotel. The following evening, David returns to Giovanni's room and attempts to explain to him why he must make his life with Hella, but at this point it is obvious that he is trying to convince himself. The novel turns tragic after David and Giovanni separate forever. Giovanni commits a murder and is sent to the guillotine; David and Hella rent a house in the south of France, but inevitably, one night, David disappears and takes up with a sailor. Hella tracks him down and finds him, very drunk, with the sailor, in a gay bar. Embittered, she leaves for the United States almost immediately. David, who appears to be planning to stay in Paris, leaves the house and goes to the bus stop to wait for the bus to the train station. I don't know to what extent David's self-loathing mirrored Baldwin's, or if Baldwin felt that way at all, but the really remarkable thing is that all of the people in this novel, American, French, and Italian, are white, yet Baldwin, who seems to have had an almost musical ear for dialogue, speaks in all these different voices with amazing accuracy and precision. This is an astonishing work of art. To describe it as a novel about homosexuality is to trivialize it. It is a deeply human story about people with flaws, and how these flaws sometimes can be our undoing.

I bought this book for a class assignment and I enjoyed reading it > In fact, all of James Baldwin's books are incredible reads. Thanks

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