



Ca' Foscari
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1950s QUEER LITERATURE: A TURNING POINT IN U.S. CULTURE

Daniele Ricciardi interviews Margaret Breen



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PROJECT PASSIONS

Online Interview with **Professor Margaret Breen**, Tuesday, July 20, 2021

Graphic Project **Noemi Russolillo**

On the Cover: **United Queers of America's Flag** by Tania Chirino and
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Other Illustrations Provided by Canvas

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You're actually putting someone down by saying that you don't understand their culture and hence it's not normal. Perhaps some things we find 'new' were simply things we were ignorant to earlier.

Dominique Jackson

To the Queer People of Ca' Foscari

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Introduction

Approaching 1950s U.S. representative novels of queer literature James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* (1956) and Patricia Highsmith's *The Price of Salt* (1952), and studying Professor Margaret Breen's papers "The Locations of Politics: Highsmith's *The Price of Salt*, Haynes' *Carol*, and American Post-War and Contemporary Cultural Landscapes" (2018) and "Queer in Translation: Translation Failure in James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*" (2017), several important topics emerged, matters that somehow help us – we, as the occidental 'progressive' society – understand our own perspective on certain contemporary issues. But how did we get here? Why are we able today to both enjoy and struggle with inclusivity, or at least, part of it? Nowadays, we tend to think about the whole of the community, something that is inclusive, something else different from the heteronormativity and the binaries which the Western world is socially constructed and regulated by. The Progressive Pride Flag itself tries to embrace several minorities from queer and transgender people to people of different races, people with disabilities, non-white queer people with disabilities, and more recently intersexual people, representing hence, intersectionality.

Building on the past perspective, therefore, allows one to question one's present. Why is that the case? Throughout the whole interview the reader will face a thought-provoking and intellectual interaction, dealing with literature, history, supreme court cases, and key queer concepts as time, cinema, sex, travelling, Americanness, manliness, family, riot, epidemic, and so much more. Thus, in order to shed light on all the above, I am going to be interviewing Margaret Breen, Professor of English and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies in the English Department at the University of Connecticut. Professor Breen's specialties are LGBT literature, queer theory, women's writing and feminist literary theory, and the novel. In order to properly prepare the reader for

the following interview, let me suggest Professor Breen's summaries of the two novels featured in both of her papers.

***Giovanni's Room's* recap from "Queer in Translation: Translation Failure in James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*"**

Baldwin's second novel, which he wrote in France, tells the story of David, a young Anglo-Saxon American, who, conflicted about his sexuality, travels to Paris, where he meets Giovanni, an Italian migrant who works in a gay bar. The meeting between the two men is momentous. Attracted to each other, they immediately become involved. For all the intensity of the relationship, though, David holds himself apart. He is unable to reconcile his same-gender desires with his investment in heteromascularity, particularly as it plays out within a mid-century American context. So, once his fiancée Hella, also American, returns to Paris from her travels in Spain, David abandons Giovanni. Thereafter, Giovanni's life takes a downward turn. Presumably out of emotional and, later, economic despair, he becomes involved with various men. He is eventually charged with the murder of Guillaume, the owner of the bar in which he worked, and is sentenced to death. David, in turn, understands his own culpability with regard to Giovanni's downfall. The recognition chastens him. Even as it precipitates the end of his relationship with Hella, it also opens up (or perhaps more accurately does not foreclose) the possibility that he might accept his own gay desires. David can, however, only gesture toward such a possibility, whose potential realization lies beyond the novel's narrative frame. Narrator-protagonist, he recounts in the course of a night – the night before Giovanni's execution by guillotine – the story of their relationship. *Giovanni's Room* is a confessional and coming-out novel in which Baldwin offers David's confession of his double betrayal (his refusal to accept both himself and his love for Giovanni) as a cautionary coming-out story for the benefit of readers, who must in turn decide whether to regard his narrative as evidence of his sins or of his atonement and relatedly, of his continued investment in or nascent resistance to homophobic belief systems.(2017:64,65)

***The Price of Salt*'s recap from "The Locations of Politics: Highsmith's The Price of Salt, Haynes' Carol, and American Post-War and Contemporary Cultural Landscapes"**

The Price of Salt tells the love story of Therese and Carol. Therese, a young woman, a near orphan, and an aspiring stage designer (in the film, a photographer), encounters Carol, a wealthy suburban married woman with a young daughter. Therese has a boyfriend, but she is not invested in either him or their "strange relationship" (24). While temping at a New York department store during the holiday rush, Therese serves Carol, and her attraction to and idolization of the woman some fifteen years her senior are instantaneous. The two begin to see each other, and when Carol, in the process of divorcing her husband, decides to take a trip across the country, she invites Therese along. During the journey their romance blooms. Unbeknownst to them, however, Carol's husband, Harge, has had a detective follow them, and he records them making love. The tapes become evidence against Carol in the divorce proceedings, and she hurries home to deal with the legal repercussions while Therese stays behind. Weeks pass during which time the women's contact is limited largely to letters. In one of them Carol tells Therese that she releases her from their relationship. Therese is stunned. She asks herself, "How would the world come back to life? How would its salt come back?" (250). "Salt" here, as in the title, stands for flavor and, more resonantly, vitality and self-preservation. For Therese a life without Carol would seem to be a life without salt. Yet the price of loving Carol might well be emotional devastation. More time goes by, and it is unclear whether Therese still loves Carol. Therese gets a job working in an office. She no longer idolizes Carol. Eventually Therese makes her way back to New York to begin her professional career. Shortly thereafter, the two women arrange to meet, and Carol tells Therese she loves her. She explains that she is now divorced and that she has lost custody of her daughter. This is the price that she has had to pay for the love affair. She has taken an apartment in the city, and she invites Therese to come live with her. Therese declines. Carol has a dinner appointment later and, after letting Therese know that she is welcome to join her, leaves. Therese heads to an engagement of her own, a party with various theater people. She only stays a short time. While there she realizes that she still loves Carol and wants to be with her. Therese rushes to the restaurant where Carol is dining, and the novel ends with Carol silently welcoming her. (2018:10)

I. Milestones in the History of U.S. Supreme Court Cases

Thinking of your paper “The Locations Of Politics: Highsmith’s *The Price of Salt*, Haynes’ *Carol*, and American Post-War and Contemporary Cultural Landscapes” the most salient matter in both the novel and the movie, I’d say, is the fact that there are several missed opportunities to represent minorities. Other than the non-intersectional, white, cisgender, queer characters Abby, Carol, Therese, and a couple of stereotyped racialized characters – even in the movie, as you put it in your article, “five black actors [...] appear as extras playing minor un-credited non-speaking roles, reflecting in at least the first three instances a low social status” (2018:22) – there’s nothing else. Of course, the movie needed to take on the novel to give the viewer that exact point of view of that time. Why would you say is there a lack of inclusivity? And how do you think that is related to the figure of *Giovanni’s Room*’s main character David: a questioning figure or rather a case of severe internalized homophobia? Would it be wrong to consider the queer issue an independent social issue in the United States of America?

Professor Breen:

I was intrigued when you mentioned the question with *Carol*, *The Price of Salt*, and why is the novel not so inclusive, why is that the case? Why aren’t there represented people of other races? And then, about *Giovanni’s Room*, why is it that we have a character like David who at times seems like a monster? What I would say about the 1950s is that in the United States there were censorship laws in place. There is a law from 1873 called the Comstock Law: even though it comes from the end of the XIX century, it is a law that was still very much used in the 80s, almost 40 years ago, maybe even less than that. So, the Comstock Law has remained very powerful in the United States, and it is a law that says that materials that are considered obscene or pornographic may not be transported over state lines. So, for example if I were to write a lesbian

novel, and I live in Connecticut, and I would send it through the mail to New York it would have been possible under this law to have the book ceased and for me to be prosecuted. This might be the most famous law, but there were a lot of laws regarding obscenity and what could be published in the United States of America. In the 1950s, the laws would incriminate in particular the representation or discussion of queerness, which at the time was called homosexuality, and homosexuality is of course a word that is full of a meaning of pathology and criminality. In the United States, it isn't until 1973 that homosexuality is no longer seen as a pathology: in 1973 the American Psychological Association decides that Homosexuality is not a pathology, but until then it was considered as such. So, for people like James Baldwin to write a gay novel about gay love... he's writing in a time where gayness, or what today you and I more broadly would call queerness, is considered a pathology and a criminal act.

Until 2003 in the United States gay acts, in many states, were illegal. In 2003 there was a famous supreme court case called Lawrence versus Texas and it's this law that says that the laws that individual states have against sodomy are no longer valid. This law overturns an earlier court case in 1986 called Bowers versus Hardwick: there was a man, and the police came to his house, they wanted to give him a warrant – an official document to question him – they came to his house, there was a roommate who let the police in, the police came in and they looked into the bedroom, and they saw the man who they wanted to talk to on the bed having sex with another man. They immediately arrest the man for sodomy. He's in his bedroom, he's in his house, not at the park, not at the university, grocery store, theater! The man makes the *privacy argument* in the legal system as in the United States there is this fundamental right to privacy, and that was not a public space. However, the United States says that there are some things that are so disgusting and pervert that this right to privacy is not valid for those things, especially for homosexuality it is no valid. Homosexuals have no right to privacy. This is what the supreme court says in 1986. In 2003 with Lawrence versus Texas the supreme court overturns, it nullifies this earlier ruling.

In 1967 there is the case of Loving versus Virginia: until this supreme court case in the United States people of different races, in particular white people and black people, in some states were not allowed to marry each other, it was illegal. There was a couple: they married in Maryland, right next to Washington D.C., and Virginia is right next them too. So, they married in Maryland but they were actually from the state of Virginia; they went back to Virginia to live because that's where they were from and they were arrested be-

cause Mr. Loving is white and Mrs. Loving is Black, and according to Virginia Law in the 1960 they are not allowed to be married. So, the Loving case goes forward and it goes all the way to the supreme court: Loving versus Virginia, and with that case the supreme court decides that these laws existing in different states against people of different races marrying to no longer exist. Loving versus Virginia gets rid of these barriers between people of different races not being allowed to marry.

In 1954 a very famous case called Brown versus The Board of Education is a case that is at the supreme court but it involves the Boarded Education in Topeka, Kansas. This supreme court case says that all people, regardless of race, must have equal access to education, to all facilities. Furthermore, it says that segregation by race is illegal. This case overturns a case from 1896 called Plessy versus Ferguson, a case that establishes the phrase *separate but equal*, and it is the supreme court case that says that segregation is legal. So, this is the case that, for example, in the South white people would use one bathroom and black people would use another bathroom, or white people would go to one school and black people would go to another school. And of course, even though there is this phrase separate but equal, the facilities were hardly equal, they were unequal. The 1954 case, Brown versus The Board of Education says that segregation is illegal. One last case is the supreme court case of United States versus Windsor, from 2013, and this is the case that makes same sex marriage legal, possible in the United States, in all 50 states: it becomes federal.

So why am I mentioning these laws to do with racism and these laws to do with homophobia? It is because several positive rulings for queer people have arguments that have taken the earlier arguments about race in order to make the case. So, for example, the case for same sex marriage draws on Loving versus Virginia. You are absolutely right to be thinking about race and gender and sexuality together within the United States context. It is so very important because so many of the kinds of arguments against queer people have also been racist arguments, and so many arguments in favor of the inclusion have been arguments that looked at race and looked at sexuality and looked at gender. So for the 1950, when both James Baldwin and Patricia Highsmith are writing, there are laws that say that if you are writing a book that is representing homosexuality in a positive way, then you are supporting a perversion and we must get rid of the book; we cannot publish the book or if the book is published we will censor the book, we will get rid of it, but we will also prosecute you the writer and you the publisher. Within this context it makes sense that both books have aspects in them that suggest that homosexuality is something bad. I mean for David: he at very best is conflicted but his ideas

about queerness are horrible, he is the tortured soul however he does things that are horrible; how he treats Giovanni is horrible. From the perspective of a publisher being very pragmatic – *can I publish this book?* – well David is a very useful character because it shows that even though he is involved with a relationship with Giovanni, David knows it is wrong, almost like he is absolutely homophobic. In the 1950s when the book came out if someone wanted to say *oh, James Baldwin is promoting, supporting homosexuality* the editor can say that he certainly is not: the protagonist may have gay desires, but he know that they are wrong. So, the editors do not have to believe their arguments they are making but they have within the book a narrative that allows them to make an argument. The book is not supporting homosexuality.

Moreover, queer people have a feel for subtle queer narratives, as usually their early-life experience is slightly different from the *norm*. These narratives are very distant from non-queer people who might well stop at the external homophobic narrative of the book itself. Though, as it is intended for queer people, the narrative is perceived differently, truly, and wholly by them, enhancing the perception of that subtle yet queer narrative. David might be queer, though terrified by that; he's in the heart of his questioning process. In the meanwhile, he tends to act horribly against queer people. Consequently, the author uses the whole apparent homophobic narrative as a strategy to be published and in order not to be censored, but at the same time he is delivering the queer message that most likely queer people will receive. It isn't about 1965 that the laws for publishing change and it becomes possible then to have stories that that have a happy ending for queer people. After 1965 we start seeing more and more books with a happy ending for gay and lesbian characters. However, it's very tricky as every editor and every writer must have an argument to say *oh, we do not support homosexuality. Look at the book, look at the tragic ending, look at how the character kills himself*, there must always be something in the book where someone can make the afore argument. That comes to *The Price of Salt* as well, as the happy ending is very subtle – it might not be considered a happy ending at all – though it is the reader who will picture that happy ending, even though it isn't written explicitly. You and I as queer people, we can read these books and we can meet them and say “ah-ha! This is a wonderful moment!” and understand these other things, kind of mirage, or we can also understand the difficulty of being people with integrity. Queer people with integrity in a homophobic society. We can understand how homophobia is a perversion, a sickness, not homosexuality. But for people who are homophobic they can say *oh, this tragic ending, we understand, this book does not support homosexuality!*

II. The Hollywoodian Nullification of Intersectional Minorities

Elaborating on this missed representation of minorities Hollywood has played a big role in what we could call a nullification of intersectional minorities. As yourself state in the afore said paper “The Locations of Politics: Highsmith’s *The Price of Salt*, Haynes’ *Carol*, and American Post-War and Contemporary Cultural Landscapes”, “For Haynes, however, the striking delineation of silent and subordinate black characters not only reflects his commitment to recording one key aspect of the racial politics of mid-century Hollywood but also functions as a marker of his awareness of the difficulties that attended the making of a lesbian film more than half century later.” (2018:23). It is said that the Cinema is the mirror of society; in that perspective, do you think Hollywood has somehow been responsible for dictating, for years, what is the standard, the normal, the norm, the acceptable, who is worth of representation on the big screen? How do you think this influenced people’s lives and their expression in the real world?

And, finally, I believe that queer representation in the medias does have an enormous positive impact on queer people’s lives, especially those of closeted individuals experiencing a psychologically claustrophobic-homophobic context. One of the biggest “plot twist” that has happened in my life is probably determined by watching the *RuPaul’s Drag Race* series: a queer production with queer characters explaining a queer world and more over, it was meant for queer people. I remember I felt this feeling of belonging I had never experienced in my life: it increased my self-confidence about my sexuality, gender identity and expression. I feel grateful for MamaRu, her show, and the visibility she put to a queer world I wasn’t aware of. May I ask you what are your thoughts on all of this?

Professor Breen:

These are very big and important questions that you are asking, and they do not have simple or definitive answers. I will attempt to respond to the first question first. I could say yes, but I am also a structural thinker; my thoughts are informed by sociology and by politics. Of course, for years what Hollywood has been able to represent on the screen was often determined by codes, there were censors who determined what you could show on screen, in particular with regard to sex – this was also heterosexual sex – but of course the most censorship regarded same sex suggestiveness or representation. And to speak of Hollywood is not to speak of independent films: what I mean is that Hollywood of course is very powerful and has a lot of money and it is supported by a lot of money. Within a U.S. and arguably Canadian context, some of the most interesting gay and lesbian films were made by independent films studios, or directors who were not linked to Hollywood. For example, I'm thinking of *Lianna* (1983) by American director John Sayles, a very important lesbian film.

Another important lesbian film was made by the director Donna Deitch called *Desert Hearts* (1985) and this is based on a 1964 lesbian novel called *Desert of the Heart* by Canadian American writer Jane Rule. Both of these films were made with low budgets, and they were lesbian films; now one can say, *okay, Hollywood was not at a point where it could make interesting and affirming lesbian films because of various pressures to not show lesbian or gay characters or to provide them with any kind of rich, in-depth personality.*

We have these independent activities, these independent endeavors that start in the 1980s in the US, but we have them also in Great Britain as there is this wonderful film about gay love from the 1980s by Stephen Frears, which is based on the English novel by the writer Hanif Kureishi: both the novel and the film are called *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) and it stars a very famous actor, Daniel Day Lewis. But even if this was an early film from the 80s, it has a wonderful storyline and it is cross-racial, it is cross-class, and it is a gay love story. This is a film worth seeing, it is very smart, and in particular when I think about your questions regarding intersectionality, here was a film, not a Hollywood film, and even though it stars some very famous actors, it wasn't a big studio production, a big deal, but it is such a good film and it's dealing with these issues of intersectionality that you bring up in your questions. So, in that sense I would say these smaller productions that start emerging in the 80s and 90s are doing the work that Hollywood is not doing and perhaps if we think of Hollywood we should also think of social and political pressures, but also of money: money and politics are so closely intertwined, anyway. But the smaller studios that do not have those pressures – but obviously also do not

have the money – are providing then really interesting representations. There are also, of course, by the smaller projects, terrible movies, terrible gay and lesbian movies, so you have to maybe look very hard to find something that is good. But certainly, these films that I have mentioned are well worth watching.

And what about trans and/or non-binary characters? Are any of these 80s and 90s films representing nonconforming genders?

Okay so this is a Hollywood movie that is very interesting, and it's set in the United Kingdom, but it involves the IRA, the Irish Republican Army – once there to be one Ireland – the film is called *The Crying Game* (1992) directed by Neil Jordan. Now this is a film in which there is a transgender character by the name of Dill: she is very beautiful, kind, good, and loving, but when the protagonist of this film who has fallen in love with her realized that she has a penis while they were making love, he begins to throw up. What we see there, in that sense, is a very disturbing film because, again, it's a relatively early mainstream representation of a transgender characters, a transgender character who has a prominent role in the film, and as compelling as she is for all kinds of reasons, she “has to” be rejected by our masculine, manly protagonist.

If I want to make an apology, a kind of defense of the making of this film, I could use an argument similarly to the argument that we discussed regarding representing any gay or lesbian character. If there is a negative outcome, nonetheless we have these wonderful moments within the novel that allow one to read a different kind of story or read the story irrespective of the negative outcome. Therefore, one maybe could say for this film, *oh but we have a main character and she is beautiful, and compelling, and lovely, and, and, and... it doesn't really matter that the protagonist rejects her*. I think it does matter, I mean he threw up, he vomited, he could have stopped and said he couldn't go through, that he didn't want to have sex with someone who had a penis, but there wasn't that possibility, that space in the film. It does not happen in the film. Instead we have an action that we so much associate with disgust. So, for that I'd say that the film, even if it has a transgender character, and in that sense it's widening the boundaries of possibility for representation, at the same time it is also foreclosing, it is also limiting the space, the possibility for accepting and enjoying having a transgender character because of the actions that are given to the protagonist, he vomits.

I agree, and in fact connecting with the other part of the question I would add that it's not only about the representation but how this representation is constructed delivers perhaps a wrong message to the big audience: *are we allowed to reject transgender people? We acknowledge they exist, but we can't appreciate nor accept them, we need to feel disgust, just as the protagonist of the movie did vomit.* Therefore, do you think that films like this, influenced or at least reinforced some homophobic and transphobic lines? Or, on the contrary, did the representation in this kind of movies help anyway people to express their gender identity and gender expression?

Representation is indeed important, vital for one's existence, one's being. I think Daniele, even an ambivalent space we can use productively, use it to good. But it's still only an ambivalent space. We need more, but I think you are putting your finger on something very very important, and that is: queer people, we hunger for our representation, for our visibility, for our acknowledgement and then yes for our acceptance. But even to be seen as small, as marginal, it is just so very important because so much of society is invested in erasing queer existence, so to have some representation is something that can nourish us. Is it enough? No, it's not enough, but it's something; it's a drop of water when what we need is really a couple of bottles.

III. The French Scenario

In both novels the figure of France emerges: the whole of *Giovanni's Room* develops in France. Richard wants to travel over there with Therese. Could you expand on that? Building also on David's fiancée Hella and her considerations on Europeans, what is the role of France and Europe? What was the imaginary of Europe and European people in the 1950s in the United States of America? And, specifically, do you think that the rejection of Therese, not wanting to go with Richard to France, might mean something?

Professor Breen:

It's a wonderful question that you have. What I would say is that France and Paris in particular, are special because France has the Napoleonic Code, one thing that says that homosexuality is not illegal. This is very important and it explains, Daniele, the long history of Paris being a place for queer people. So, if we think, from the end of the eighteenth century until the beginning of the nineteenth century, many many queer people went to Paris. Take Oscar Wilde for instance: once he's freed from prison he moved to Paris and died there. This is because in France people are not prosecuted for being homosexual. That makes France different from Germany if you are a man, and makes it different from Italy, even though in the south the presence of Napoleon is still felt but it is France that has the Napoleonic Code, it is France that does not prohibit homosexuality.

Thus, it is no accident. It is important that David decides he will go to France, almost like his very own first step of acceptance to his queer self. But Hella is the American Tourist. Right after the Second World War people had very very little, it was difficult to get food and all kinds of issues. People from the south would go north because of the unemployment, and this is in Italy, and it also explains how Giovanni is in Paris. It's so interesting that David decides to go to France; he says he goes in order to find himself. He also goes

because he has had this sexual relationship with a military man who is prosecuted, and David goes away. Now, it's not clear: is he running away from his sexuality or is he trying to have a first step toward acceptance, or is it both? But the thing is, because World War Two really does not touch the United States, not as the quasi-destroyed European countries, it means that Americans in the 1950s have a huge amount of money, they have consequently mobility and it also means that David and Hella have money; they can stay in Paris, they can travel, and they don't have to work in contrast to Giovanni who is running away from his sad marriage, the loss of his child, and maybe he too is looking for work. In the beginning of the novel we read that he does not have money but he can borrow money from a man, though we know he has money in the United States, it's just his father must send him the money. So, his economic situation is very very different from Giovanni.

On the other hand, if I think of the rejection of Therese not wanting to go with Richard to France, whether it might mean something... Well, that's an interesting question, I've not thought about it. She knows she doesn't love him. He too wants to be a tourist, he doesn't want to live in France, he just wants to visit and then return, marry, and have a "normal" life. So, his idea of travel is very different from her idea of travel. She doesn't go to Europe or to France, with Carol, but throughout the novel we have Therese's perspective, and at least twice in the novel she says about how she would like to visit different places with Carol. So, she wants to travel in different places of culture, and she wants to go there with Carol whom she loves. So, the key here may well be the other rather than their personal choices.

IV. The Chosen Family

With regard to family, the sense of belonging to family is always something distorted when related to queer characters. This is so relatable to the contemporary world, and I could perfectly well substitute the word “characters” with “persons” in the latter phrase, and it would still make a lot of sense. In both novels, we can only read about families when they belong to non-queer characters, take the families of Richard and Harge for instance. On the contrary, this normality concerning the concept of family does not exist – or it is a distorted representation of family, often represented very tragically – when related to queer characters, take Therese and Giovanni for instance. However, as far as it concerns David’s situation we are perfectly well aware that he is struggling with his own identity and for that, almost like a hybrid, he does have a family, only deformed, something different from what is considered “traditional family”. Would you please share what you think about this matter?

Professor Breen:

Well, I think that there is this expression in English, *Found Family*, *Chosen Family*, whether it is LGBTQIA+ characters or LGBTQIA+ people, and I think about the importance of those profound relationships that exist not because of blood, but because of love, because of shared experience. David, as you say, is an ambivalent character: he has a community in Paris, but it’s a community that he refuses to acknowledge as his community, even as he frequents it, even as he inhabits it, whether that’s Jacques who lends him money and David calls Jacques all kinds of name, or Guilherme who owns the bar. These are men who know him and accept him, in his ambivalence. And of course, there’s Giovanni who he obviously loves but the only way that he can express his love for Giovanni is by denying it: so that when he and Giovanni first come together and they kiss, the scene ends with David narrating and saying something like

and in that moment I said yes while some of me said no. So, we have this move from yes to no, a verbal performance of his ambivalence. And then there's a space on the page, and then David the narrator shifts and begins talking about the snow falling in the south of France: he can't even sustain a recounting of that moment with Giovanni, that first time, he must shift and talk about snow '*en Provence*'. It shows not only his ambivalence, but his inability to manifest in language what he actually experienced with Giovanni, that love and attraction he needs to white out, he needs to cancel with snow, with talking about snow. I think for many characters like David, but perhaps also for many people, it is really difficult to make that transition from thinking about family as where we have a definition of family defined by marriage and blood and biology, to a definition of family that is more expansive, and it has to do with a like-mindedness or with love, a love that isn't stuck by borders of marriage or blood, but that just is.

V. Vagare

Therese works in a dolls store. Yet when it comes to answer Carol's question about what she would have loved as a present when she was of the same age of Carol's daughter, Therese answers she wanted a toy train. It is interesting: the train over the doll. Not only this gives a hint of her "difference" from the average girl, a narrative clue that will later lead to the main theme of this novel, but it can also relate to Therese's non-conformity to what Judith Butler would call gender identity and gender performativity, womanliness. Besides, the train is representative of travelling, and it is during Carol and Therese's trip *to nowhere* that several plot twists develop: it is in the trip that the two characters say to each other that they love each other; and it is in the trip that the detective's narrative develops, with all its consequences. In *Giovanni's Room* too we understand the heavy semantics of *the train*: "David pictures how, aboard the train hurtling forward, the soldiers and young woman will engage in flirtatious exchanges. The scene allegorizes and puns on heteronormativity's ideological investment in a narrative structure that relies on reproduction, sameness, and linearity. David, while on the train, is nevertheless, not *en train*, not becoming part of the normative gender *Bildung* that the scene stages. As he says a few paragraphs later, he 'shall never be able to have any more of those boyish, zestful affairs' (1965:10)" (2017:73) we read in your paper.

It is in the trip to France, it is in the train, that David may have understood that he has achieved a form of self-acceptance. What would you say that stands for *travelling* when it comes to a queer perspective?

Professor Breen:

Have you heard of the Queer Scholar Judith Jack Halberstam? Judith Jack Halberstam defines as trans, and I will use the pronouns they/them/theirs to describe them. About eight years ago Halberstam published a study called *The*

Queer Art of Failure. One of the things that is also very common in Queer Theory is that oftentimes in literature, when there is a journey, a pilgrimage, or when people have progress, movement is seen in terms of utility, in terms of usefulness. For example, my life is a linear movement: do this, work very hard, achieve something, do that, work very hard, achieve something else, etc. In Queer Theory there is the recognition that many different kinds of people such as queer people or people representing other minorities, can work very hard, they can work very very hard, but they do not necessarily succeed by society's standards. You know the sport company Nike, their motto is "just do it". The idea is that if you'll just do it you will succeed. This is a very American perspective. But in Queer Theory there is the recognition that many many people do it and get nowhere.

So, if we think how this is related to travel in, for example, *The Price of Salt*, when Carol and Therese go on their road trip by car, they are not going in order to achieve something. Their trip is not a business trip, it is not about succeeding at anything. Carol wants to use the time to just do something so that she is not only waiting to get the divorce; she just wants to go. It is not a trip; it is not a journey tied to utility. In Italian there is the beautiful concept of *Vagare*, to move just for the sake of the trip itself. So, for people who in society are not likely to succeed, or for whom society presents all kinds of obstacles, it is more likely to do something for the sake of it, not because you will get something: but because society is not constructed for you. It's like *Vagare*, Therese and Carol are just going, maybe they'll go here, maybe they'll go there, and it is in the journey that they are able to admit to each other that they love each other. Unlike Carol's marriage to her husband, I, a queer person, don't marry because it makes sense, I don't fall in love because it makes sense, because our parents think it is a good idea: I fall in love, I marry, because I fall in love. There is no external factor, grip, or incentive to do what I do. In that sense to love another person is indeed like *Vagare*. You're doing it because you're doing it, you're doing it just because. Not because you're going to get something, a celebration, or society wants you to. The feeling of failure, of being defeated, that resignation that characterizes queer lives, it's a common feeling shared throughout the whole LGBTQIA+ community. However, one should never forget that it is not because of the individual; It's because of society, a heteronormative society that condemns what is other than the binaries. Oftentimes, queer people are in the wrong story, they are living in a society not constructed for them, and the trick here, is to put them back in the right story.

VI. Understanding Queerness by Analogy

Reading your essay, one becomes aware of the fact that Patricia Highsmith's *The Price of Salt* is a pretty unique novel for it represents what we could call non-conforming genre. Indeed, in the article we read: "both Highsmith and Haynes have reworked conventional plot and genre structures in order to expand the possibilities for affirming lesbian representation. [...] *The Price of Salt*, by comparison, grants its heroines the prospect of a happy life together. Such an outcome, proffered rather than fully realized, is possible because of Highsmith's innovation on the level of genre. Hers is a hybrid text that, mixing elements of romance and thriller, presents love as desire, an unstable, potentially unsafe and dangerous condition: whether between a parent and child or between adults and whether normative or not, desire troubles." (2018:11). Even being so open and nonconforming about genre, Patricia Highsmith seems pretty close-minded when it comes to gender identity and expression, as we perceive some kind of rigidity. In fact, not only the novel lacks on representation of minorities, but it displays the introduction of another stereotype, i.e. the butch-femme lesbian, as you summed it up in the article, "Despite the mid-century identification of lesbianism with butch-femme stylings and the broader equation of homosexuality with degeneracy, Therese recognizes that her relationship with Carol, neither conventionally heterosexual nor stereotypically lesbian, is nonetheless, classic. 'A classic,' she tells Carol a bit later in the novel, 'is something with a basic human situation'" (2018: 12).

Do you think the author here is trying to decriminalize the lesbian woman by making her look more feminine, condemning though the lesbian woman who is guilty of not passing (as a "standard" woman)? Or is it rather the opposite, and by that I mean: does she want her Therese and Carol to be at least physically far away from lesbianism – something only pictured as

butch looking – as a strategy to be published? Or could it be that Patricia Highsmith is trying to deliver the message that a queer sexual orientation is fine while a queer gender expression needs to be incriminated?

Professor Breen:

These are great questions, and I suppose the quickest answer I can give is: I'm not sure. Within the context of the novel, Therese is nineteen, she's young and she has had sex with Richard, and it was not a great experience. She hasn't really felt love. She also has a background where the way that she is able to understand herself and claim authority for herself is primarily by rejecting or distancing herself from other people, so we have this whole backstory about how her mother leaves her in this boarding school that is run by I think Anglican nuns. She has this background and so when her mother visits her on occasion, maybe a few times a year, at a certain point Therese tells her not to come anymore. There is an assertion of her needs, but it's an acidic assertion of herself that is largely through renunciation of need and desire. This is her background, there she is: she is nineteen and all of the sudden she is drawn to Carol, this older woman, and she has no context nor perspective for understanding it.

She can do it by analogy, so that at a some point she can say, *is this love? When I compare it to all the feelings that I am supposed to have for Richard, I can say this is love.* She needs heterosexuality as a kind of mediator in order to understand lesbianism. We can say that that need for heterosexuality which functions as a translator for her is because there are no obvious positive representations of lesbianism around her that are available to her, whereas the signs of heterosexuality are all around her. I think that it is really important for her as when she is looking around and she is trying to think about Carol and she can see the butch-femme women, or the two butches who are wearing pants – in the 1950 you wear pants and immediately there is the question of gender, transgression – and she knows that she isn't like those women. She doesn't dress that way, her own gender presentation is not that. So, the women for her she can identify with a stereotype is available to her within a very heterosexist and homophobic culture, and she knows she doesn't fit that stereotype and therefore, there is this question *what am I then? What are my feelings? If I am feeling what these two women feel for each other... but I don't look like them, what am I?* I think I am most comfortable answering your question by saying that her distancing of herself from the butch women is much more about the limited representations of lesbianism that are available to her, and because she does not see herself in those representations, she isn't sure: what she is, what she can feel, she doesn't have the context really. She doesn't know, she thinks,

am I allowed to be this? Let me argue by analogy. I think of, how so many of us when we go to university and our parents did not go to university for example: whether it's ourselves or our friends, we certainly know many people who are the first ones of the family to go to university, and so there can be a real sense of dislocation. What does it mean that I am in a university, and the rest of my family is not, am I allowed to be here? What if I'm not like all these other people at university, whose parents went to university, whose grandparents went to university? So there is this reflection of isolation, a reflection of very real limitations that are imposed upon society and people, so those can be class limitation, and in the case of the novel, it's that representations of lesbianism are so narrow and so negative that for a young women – she's nineteen – it is almost impossible to understand herself with a representation that doesn't really reflect her, there are some similarities because she can say she loves and she is attracted by Carol, but she doesn't do gender the way these other women do. What does that mean? She is left with questions. And as much as anything that is why I say I don't know; Therese herself is the character who doesn't know. She isn't sure.

In terms of Patricia Highsmith condemning a certain performance of gender, I tend to think not: this is only because I read about Highsmith herself, and she often wore her man Levi's, and she had a jeans jacket in the 50s, so her gender performances were of a certain kind even of butch character, or certainly on the continuum with the butch character. But I think Therese just isn't sure of what she is because she doesn't have these reflections of who she is.

VII. The Reaffirmation of Traditional Gender Roles

In your paper “Queer in Translation: Translation Failure in James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room*”, you attribute the term translation failure – that is, “the whole of translation strategies of omission and evasion” (2017: 64) – to David, the narrator, translator, and protagonist of *Giovanni’s Room*. The main character so, while intentionally leaving certain words and phrases in French and therefore, failing to translate them in English, enhances his distancing from the Parisian queer culture, from Giovanni, and from himself. More than once we find in your paper the connection between David’s inability to reconcile his same-gender desires and his investment in heteromasculinity within a mid-century American context, talking straightforwardly of “mainstream American culture” (2017:65). For instance, in a scene, “David suspends his recognition of the person who approaches him on the night that he and Giovanni meet”, using the ‘it’ pronoun addressing them. Indeed, you argue, “The person’s gender incoherence and sexual coding frighten and disgust David; for most of the passage he uses the pronoun ‘it’, and with the masculine pronoun at the end he underscores the gender discord. David’s own use of France here - *va te faire foutre* (that is, ‘go get yourself fucked’) - acts as a doubled verbal bar against male homosexuality and gender instability. [...] David fears the loss of his masculinity and, with it, a loss of identity that encompasses not only his gender and sexuality and race, but also his Americanness.” (2017:67).

Is “Americanness” equal to manliness? Would you say that the constant need of showing off virility, almost as consolidating one’s manliness or masculinity, characterizes the 1950s in the United States?

Professor Breen:

I would say about the 1950s that the emphasis on manliness was very real. In part, this had to do with World War II, as during that war many American

men were fighting in the war, and this meant that many women had then to take over the work or the jobs that men had before the war. So, the women began doing things like working in factories, building ships, they were carpenters, welders, women were performing traditionally male roles. After the end of World War II in 1945, the male soldiers start coming back, they come home, and they resume, they take back their jobs, so they are ship builders, the welders, the carpenters, and so on. But in the meantime, women have been performing these jobs so that the war causes a kind of gender fluidity, or a possibility for rethinking gender roles. But in order to stabilize the economy and the culture what happens in post-war America is a reassertion of traditional gender roles. So, if we look at films, there is a reinforcement of traditional gender roles, there are some great comedies that have men in drag, but ultimately the films work to reaffirm traditional gender roles. There is indeed this need to assert masculinity, or even hypermasculinity, in part because the experience of the war raised the question of gender possibility, or the possibility for breaking out of gender norms. From this perspective it also makes sense that the 1950s were an important time for Western Films in the United States. Within the post-war Films West, we find roles that reinforce the hypermasculinity for men.

Could you please elaborate on how the situation is today in the United States and whether would it be right in this case to talk about *toxic masculinity*?

Certainly the phrase that I link to toxic masculinity is gender privilege and certainly, within the last five or so years, we have seen in the United States but also in Europe and in other places the #metoo movement: this movement has questioned male gender privilege and toxic masculinity though what I find interesting is of course that now there is a backlash, there is a movement that rejects the #metoo movement. This is a time when certainly in the United States, gender roles are being questioned: what does it mean to be a manly man? Is there a distinction between hypermasculinity and toxic masculinity? Can men perform a hypermasculinity and have that performance not be judged toxic? I think it's possible, and here's why: I think the more visibility and acceptance that we have for different kinds of gender performance, gender understandings, whether that is a masculine man, a masculine woman, a trans woman, a trans man, a feminine woman, a feminine man, the more that we allow for the possibility of gender to be fluid the less likelihood there is for a toxicity, or damage to be done. The more these different possibilities are accepted, welcomed, and supported, socially, politically, the less chance there

is of male masculinity being seen as toxic. It is toxic only if it has a power that is based on the subordination, rejection, exclusion of others, but if we accept other kinds of gender possibilities for ourselves and for others, than we dilute toxicity as it is not the most important thing. It's not the only thing, it's just a thing, that's it: it's not THE thing.

VIII. Queering Time

In the abovementioned “Queer in Translation: Translation Failure in James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room*” you state that David offers a narrative that enacts a “queer temporal sensibility” (2017: 72), mentioning Lee Edelman and Elizabeth Freeman’s respective terms “reproductive futurism” (2004:3), “temporal drag”, and “chrononormativity” (2010: XXII). As David himself writes, “I remember that life in that room seemed to be occurring beneath the sea. Time flowed past indifferently above us; hours and days had no meaning. In the beginning, our life together held a joy and amazement which was newborn everyday.” (Baldwin 1956:99). Could you please expand on these key terms and the queer perception of time?

Professor Breen:

Lee Edelman’s *reproductive futurism* refers to an understanding of time in which an individual sees time in a linear fashion: time is a line. So here I am, married, with children, and I think about the things that I do, the money that I save that I can then give to my children, and so regardless of my own mortality, my next generation, and the generation after that, I can see myself into the future through the biological reproduction of myself, overtime. Now if you are gay, lesbian, or trans, you are not necessarily going to be able to see yourself in that way – i.e. here I am, then I will marry, I will have children, and then they will marry and have children, and, and, and – you will not be able to do this for a number of reasons. You may not reproduce nor may reproduction be your cultural and ethical value, so then what you produce, whatever that is, might go off to the side, it might go to someone else, someone you want to do something for, but it isn’t necessarily in this way and you aren’t necessarily living in order to imagine how your life will affect all these other people in the future who are all related to you. The other part of this is that Lee Edelman and his theoretical work has been profoundly shaped by the AIDS crisis. If

we think about the AIDS crisis and its effect on many gay men between the 1980s and 1990s, they are people who came of age during a time there was quite strong homophobia, and more importantly, there was this disease for which there was no cure and it targeted gay men. Thinking about one's life, one's purpose, one's value, one's worth, was not something that one could think about in terms of the future, because there was a radical question of whether one could even have a future, given this epidemic that might well affect oneself. One's life might be cut short. So, Edelman's work on time and his concept of reproductive futurism has to do with an understanding that gay men, in a very profound sense, during the AIDS crisis and in other contexts, have not had a future. If future depends upon not getting infected, and the epidemic is so widespread within your community, can you speak of having a future?

So there has to be a theory for thinking about time that brings recognition and value to gay men in particular, more broadly to queers who don't participate in what Elizabeth Freeman calls chrononormativity, i.e. a sense of time that is related to heterosexuality and normative gender roles: chrono, time, and normativity taken from heteronormativity. And so what we can say about David is that, if David had been straight, and he had not been ambivalent about his sexuality and had not fallen in love and had not had sex with Giovanni, then his time in France would have been a kind of a nice a vacation, he would have met Hella there, they would have fallen in love, then they would have gone back to the United States and marry and have children. So, would have been this chrononormative reproductive future that awaited them. But he is not that, and so in the novel we don't have time proceeding like a straight line; instead David the narrator he's looking back, he's looking back over the past year and his time with Giovanni, and then at the end of the novel he leaves to get on a bus to go on a train to Paris, but what he is going to do and where he is going to go, and whether that place that he is going to arrive at, and whether his actions are going to lead to something productive, like he would get a job, he would find someone to be with, he would return to the United states and make lots of money... we don't know any of that, and he might not do any of it. All we know is that he is going to leave the place that he has lived in the South of France and go. So why that sense that we have of *Vagare*? Just walking for walking's sake. The movement here is not one that reinforces a linear timeline that is productive and emphasizes a stable life and a stable future, or a certain kind of family, of legacy.

Temporal Drag is a term that comes up with Elizabeth Freeman and we can think of it in a couple of ways: she is not the only critic who explores this idea, as there is another young critic Heather Love who has an important book of literary criticism that focuses on lesbian literature called *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (2007). So if Lee Edelman criticizes this uncomplicated linear move into the future through sexual reproduction, a term like 'temporal drag' thinks about the queer possibilities of time, where, if we are looking back, we can reaffirm who we are. Even though something is past and we can say that we are done with it and what we should be doing is thinking about the future, what many queer characters do is to look at the past in order to reaffirm who they are; or they look at the past in order to intervene or disrupt injustices, whether those are gender injustices, sexual ones or racial ones, that occurred in the past. So, Elizabeth Freeman uses temporal drag to talk about queer performance art, and therefore artists who take on the past: for example, black queer performance artists who reenact gestures of slavery in order to represent them or rewrite them as moment of queer black desire. If we think of the ways in which someone might wish to critique slavery, and in particular the slavery of black bodies, of African people, they could do that through the use sadomasochism. We should think about using bondage, restrains or whips, and using them not to diminish someone, not to make them less, not to reduce them to the level of a slave, but rather to express their pleasure and desire so that even a person who is in the role of the submissive is enacting their desire and has agency. Thinking of sadomasochism in this way and throwing away the judgement behind it – rather thinking about how within the erotic, sexual play both or multiple parties, can have power and pleasure – it's not simply about a dominant person abusing a subordinate person: it is rather a play among people in which all parties have power and agency. There are many writers who talk about how sadomasochistic practices actually work therapeutically, so that for example if someone has suffered sexual abuse, sadomasochism allows one to experience a power differential in a way that is affirming rather than abusing. Not only is it a good thing, but it's a good thing the potential to actually heal something that was abusive. So, Freeman is talking about temporal drag in terms of black performance artists who use sadomasochistic practices or performances in order to comment on a history of slavery within the United States, they are going back in time, they are putting themselves in temporal drag: they are going back in time and performing that in order to expose the injustices, the abuse, but also to turn these practices and suggest productive pleasurable erotic possibilities.

Consequently, is this why we see people wearing sadomasochistic costumes – with leather, whips, and chains, etc. – at Pride parades?

You know, maybe, this is actually a really good example for question VII! When we see men in leather bikini with chains and everything, and say *oh my goodness, that's toxic masculinity!* but of course, it isn't at all! Within these gay pride parades there are all different kinds of gender and sexual possibilities that are represented in the parade.

IX. Years of Intersection and AIDS Activism

How do you think riots and protests, let's say the Stonewall Riots for instance, changed the bigger audience's perspective on queerness? Is it reasonable to think that it is because of these riots that we, as a community, were able to welcome the new and more progressive laws, developing acceptance and inclusivity that mostly characterizes our time?

Professor Breen:

Yes, but what I think is that the Stonewall Riots happened at a particular time and place: there were other confrontations with the police that queer people had, earlier. Think about 1969 in Europe and we can think about years of protest. In the United States the protests were for Civil Rights, so for the Rights of African Americans, they were against the Vietnam War which was also a recognition that it was racist, there was also what is called the Second Wave of Feminism. So, there are the Anti-War protest, the Civil Right Protest, the Second Wave of Feminism, and then we have what is called the GLF, the Gay Liberation Front. All these protests are happening at the same time, and people, not everyone, belonging to different groups are talking to each other. So, the strategy that they are using is: they talk to each other and they draw on many similar tactics and strategies, or they try different ones. 1969 is a year of intersection. It's a convergence when all these different groups are happening, and so in June of 1969 when there are the Stonewall Riots the cultural and political context is there to make the riots visible, and to make the voices of the gay, lesbian, trans people, drag queens and kings, queer people heard, in a way that they weren't heard even a few years before. So, this is fundamental. However, what truly makes the difference is the AIDS activism in the 1980s and 1990s. It's that activism that really creates much more visibility and much more consciousness that Queer Rights are Human Rights issue. And in part, Daniele, it is because, let's say, parents who have children who are dying of

AIDS, and there is no cure, and there is not the money, as the government would not give enough money for research, or let's say the church thinks it's okay as queer people are terrible people. Parents recognized their children are dying. Maybe for many years they thought *oh, my child is gay, this is terrible, disgusting*. Nonetheless, when their child was dying the parents started to change their minds, their minds started to open up and they started to think *this is terrible, this does not need to happen*. So I think it is the protests of activists, of queer people in the 1980s and 1990s, during the AIDS epidemic, but is also the changing of perspective on the part of families who maybe before thought it was okay to be intolerant to my child – *I will not talk about their sexuality* – but when this horrible disease hits, their minds open up and they recognize no one should have to suffer this. No one. And that I think, is crucial to this change in habit.

X. A Turning Point

Now, even though we are at the very end of Professor Breen's Interview, I'd like to give the reader the feeling that we have just started. This is a turning point, the beginning. There is, indeed, an entire Area of Studies that covers all of this. Basically, we have talked about LGBTQIA+ literature and how through that, we can connect and expand on several disciplines. Shall we say that what we discussed today might concern, even a little, the Academic Field of Queer Theory? What is the institutional status of Queer Studies in the United States? When was it instituted? How did it rise and when did it become a discipline, a field of studies recognized in the Academy just as a regular Academic Field?

Professor Breen:

Queer Studies, as a field, began in the 1980s, and in particular in the late 1980s, and it was shaped by feminism, in particular lesbian feminism and by the AIDS crisis, and with it the gay movements. Between 1950s and early 1970s there were gay and lesbian groups that protested for gay and lesbian rights, but they did so in very respectful ways: it was very important to appear gender normative, and to ask for example to be accepted so that one could not be fired from a job, that one would not lose one's apartment, thrown out on the street because of one's sexuality. So, it was these very basic rights that people demonstrated for. With the AIDS crisis, what became so clear is that so many, gay men in particular, were dying and that the U.S. population and politicians, many of them were indifferent: they felt it didn't really matter that there was this epidemic since it was hitting only the gay community, which was the community who was suffering the most. Now, if the gay community is disgusting, what do we care if there's this epidemic. So, lesbian, gay, and trans people began to decide to engage in political actions that were much more *in your face*, straightforward, provocative. There were groups like Act Up, Queer Nation,

and it's up this time – mid, late 80s – that the term queer, which used to be a horrible, negative, disgusting term to use to talk about lesbian and gay persons, became a term of political agency, a political power that queer people embraced, it's a transformed term. There are many examples throughout history of people taking something negative, a stigma, and turning it into something positive. A very good example of this is the cross that many Christians wear as a necklace. The cross, a sign of torture, a sign of being a targeted minority. But what Christians do is that they elevate the cross to a sign of believe, a sign of salvation, they turn it into a beautiful thing. What queers do in the 1980s is that they take the term *queer*, this term of disgust and negativity, and they turn it into something powerful, admirable, something that fills you with admiration, and it's about being open and comfortable with one's sexuality, with no need to apologize for one's gender or sexuality.

Therefore, because this happens in the 1980s it generates the field of Queer Studies, so this is when Judith Butler begins her important work; it's in this context that she, as young assistant professor, starts writing about gender issues and *Gender Trouble* which comes out in 1989. So, it's really in the 1990s that universities start to talk about Queer Theory, and you have young academics working in this field and beginning to teach LGBTQIA+ literature. In my case, I arrived at the university of Connecticut in 1994 and in 1995 I taught the first course on LGBTQIA+ literature. Since that time we have had those courses but that was the first time. I think that the university of Connecticut started to provide this course within a few years of the first university began to teach, so it is a good indication of how the field and discipline began to develop. Queer Theory, Queer Studies, became recognized in the 1980s and it was widespread in the 1990s.

XI. Queer Literature: the 2010s and the 2020s

Concluding, could you recommend some titles for the curious reader who wants to be more involved in quality queer literature of the United States?

Professor Breen:

I'm going to mention, and recommend, few fairly new books as I am preparing for my Queer Literature class for the fall:

- ◇ *Real Life* (2020) by Brandon Taylor: gay novel,
- ◇ *What Belongs to You* (2016) by Garth Greenwell: gay novel,
- ◇ *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (2019) by Ocean Vuong: gay queer novel,
- ◇ *Confessions of the Fox* (2018) by Jordy Rosenberg: trans historical novel,
- ◇ *Mostly Dead Things* (2019) by Kristen Arnett: lesbian/queer,
- ◇ *Little Fish* (2018) by Casey Plett: trans/lesbian novel [Canadian author],
- ◇ *A Safe Girl to Love* (2014) by Casey Plett: trans short story collection,
- ◇ *A Dream of a Woman* (2021) by Casey Plett: trans short story collection,
- ◇ *The Subtweet* (2020) by Vivek Shraya: trans novel,
- ◇ *Fiebre Tropical* (2020) by Juliana Delgado Lopera: lesbian novel,
- ◇ *Bestiary* (2020) by K-Ming Chang: queer novel,
- ◇ *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches* (1991) by Tony Kushner: a two-part play, a critical literary response to the AIDS crisis.

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You will not tell me that you accept me. You will not tell me that you tolerate me. That is not your power. I take that from you. You will respect me for who I am.

Dominique Jackson



Approaching 1950s U.S. representative novels of queer literature, and studying the following Professor Margaret Breen's papers:

- ◇ James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*
- ◇ Patricia Highsmith's *The Price of Salt*
- ◇ "The Locations of Politics: Highsmith's *The Price of Salt*, Haynes' *Carol*, and American Post-War and Contemporary Cultural Landscapes"
- ◇ "Queer in Translation: Translation Failure in James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*"

Several important topics emerged, matters that somehow help us – we, the occidental 'progressive' society – understand our own perspective on certain contemporary issues.

But how did we get here?

