



## Homosexuality in James Baldwin's Novels

### KEYWORDS

Homosexual, James Baldwin, African American gay writers, Racism, Religious.

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### ABSTRACT

*James Baldwin was African American novelist and social critic. He was born illegitimate and black boy. But he became a well-known writer in bisexual and queer in African American literature writing with his novels. Baldwin's acclaimed novels are Go Tell It on the Mountain, Giovanni's Room, Another Country, Tell Me How Long the Train Been Gone, If Beale Street Could Talk, and Just Above My Head.*

*This paper tries to show how homosexual is used in James Baldwin's novels. James Baldwin carefully studied and disguised the homosexual theme in the first novel through John who was searching for his existence or identity, While, in Giovanni's Room, homosexual was fully undisguised. The success of Giovanni's Room as a gay and white novel made Baldwin to choose homosexual as main theme in his later novels. So, Baldwin opened the door in front of the next generation of gay writers to study and discuss gay theme in their works.*

**James Baldwin** had difficulties in his childhood life. He did not know his biological father. He had complex and tough relationship with his step-father. His father showed a strict and violent father. He spoiled his son's self-respect. Baldwin grew up in Harlem Renaissance. Literature played a vital role in the life of homosexuals. It pushed and encouraged the processes that lead to enhance literary. Literature encouraged the strange relationship of the homosexuals in the community. For Baldwin, literature and art considered as a tool for social change because; he had oppression and injustice in his life. He felt isolated and frightened in his community.

**Baldwin** had racism and negative social attitude because his strange sex and color. Racism considered one of the social negative in his community. Pinderhughes defined racism as "the total social system in which policies and institutions interlock and reinforce one another in their capacity to deprive and cripple many people of color while offering preparation, support, and opportunity to white." Religious also impacted in homosexuals' life. Most of African American gay came from religious background. It caused a huge immense amount of pain and confusion. Black church developed and extended the sexuality in African American community. Ron Simmons depicted the increase of hate and fear of homosexuals in African American literature to religious sets of beliefs from the traditional black church "homophobia is not much fear of homosexuals but a fear that homosexuality will become pervasive in the community." Therefore, majority of gays kept their queer relationship secret.

**Homosexual** was one of the major themes in Baldwin's novels. It appeared openly in his oeuvres. In his novels, Baldwin explained homophobia and racism on grounds of heterosexual and white panic. He celebrated homosexuality as a tool of social change and criticized his contemporaries' sexism. Baldwin resisted the labels of gay and homosexual in America. His agenda for liberation gave him a leading role in debates and analyzes over the meaning of American citizenship and democracy.

**Go Tell It on the Mountain** (1953) is Baldwin first novel.

It portrays the efforts and life of John Grimes. It comes to terms with John African American cultural inheritance and his homosexuality. His sexual feeling is increased. John feels alone and attracts to his teacher, Elisha. Louis H. Pratt describes their relations as "yet it is also significant that he turns to Elisha after he finds himself totally unable to establish a single genuine relationship between himself and the other characters in the novels. Only Elisha is able to function as a father-surrogate for John because Elisha, unlike Gabriel is attuned to the young boy's needs as John searches to his own identity." While, Baldwin portrays his protagonist admiring on Elisha as "John admiring the timbre of Elisha's voice, much deeper and manlier than his own, admiring the leanness, and grace, the strength, the darkness of Elisha in his Sunday suit." And also John is interested in Elisha dance in a state of great religious "Muscles leaping and swelling in his long, dark neck, and his thighs which more terrible against the cloth of his suit." John touches Elisha's arm with trembling. John tries to tell him something, but he finds difficulty to say any word. John has a "Holy kiss" from Elisha. It is as "seal inefaceable forever." In *Go Tell it on the Mountain*, Baldwin tries to provide insight into adolescent gay sexuality. It also weaves the character's motivating into the sexual, social and racial context of America.

**Giovanni's Room** (1956) portrays the homosexual relationship between David and Giovanni. Giovanni is Italian handsome boy. David explores his sexuality while his fiancée Hella is in Spain. Within one day, David and Giovanni becomes friend. They meet in gay bar, and their relationship becomes stronger. They stay together for months. David traps in dilemma. He cannot break the chain of his psychological and he is unable to leave Giovanni alone. He has unpleasant and nasty situation. John Shawcross depicts David situation as "One's bondage to sexual being with in tarn tempers one's sensitivity of love and hate, one's reasoning power and philosophic needs. The crisis of Giovanni's room is the opposition between human bondage resulting from sexual make up and the bondage of the market place. There is also the bondage of the care: those inner aspects of one's self, which first must be recognized and acknowledge and somehow either suppressed

or accommodated." Shawcross indicates that religion and milieu are the main reason behind people homosexuality. David's bondage makes him impossible to love or become father's man. Baldwin uses high stylistic and language to describe and make things real about David sexuality. David states his homosexuality experience as "To remember it so clearly, so painfully tonight tells me that I have never for an instant truly forgotten it. I feel in myself now a faint, dreadful stirring of what so overwhelmingly stirred in me then. Great thirsty heat, and trembling, and tenderness so painful I thought my heart would burst. But out of this astounding intolerable pain came joy, we gave each other joy that night.". Another incident about David's bondage is his relationship with Joey "Joey is a boy, I saw suddenly the power in his thighs, in his arms, and in his loosely curled fists. The power and the promise and the mystery of that body made me suddenly afraid. That body suddenly seemed the black opening of a cavern in which I would be tortured till madness came".

David has unpleasant and difficult situation. His situation reflects by Baldwin's using images such as, the body, the mirrors, the windows, and Giovanni's room itself. David describes his own homosexuality and Giovanni's room as "What kind of life can we have in this room?—this filthy little room. What kind of life can two men have together, anyway."

**Giovanni's room** sets in Paris. It provides a homosexual alternative to western heterosexual romances. Horace Porter depicts the novel as "Giovanni's Room is as significant among Baldwin's works as it is in Afro American reasserts itself throughout James's career, so Giovanni's Room has played a similar part in the complex continuing drama of Baldwin's life and work. The novel primarily distinguishes Baldwin from among his influential literary forebears." Novel rejects to publish but, it becomes a central text for queer and lesbian studies in America.

**Another country** (1962) is a short story on reconciliation. It is written in Baldwin bohemian years in the village. It is multiethnic cast constitutes of eight people in America. It describes their life. All the eight individuals engage in bisexual and interracial relationship. They attempt to bridge the gaps between races, genders and orientations.

**Another Country** reveals Baldwin's outrage with maximum force. In the novel, Baldwin gives and endows homosexuality with ability for healing, it is Eric. Eric is the gay character. He transfers the power of love from race to sex. He has sex with most of novel's characters, Vivaldo, Yves, and Cass. They get satisfy with his sexual relation. Rosenblatt Roger comments on Eric sex as "Homosexuality in the person Eric, becomes the main liberating force of the novel and thinks the novel is about sins of mission and a modern of inferno that contains them." Vivaldo has sex with Eric. He gets what he has lost. Vivaldo describes himself, and his body like Eric. He feels comfortable and gets what he looks from Eric. Baldwin describes their homosexual relation as "he murmured at last, in a strange voice, as he now heard himself murmur, Oh, Eric. Eric. What was that fury like? Eric. He pulled Eric to him through the ruined sheets and held him tight. And, Thank you, Vivaldo whispered, thank you, Eric, thank you. Eric curled against him like a child and salt from his forehead dripped onto Vivaldo's chest." Homosexuality in the novel is a reason for guilt and panic. But Eric resolves many of the conflicts in which the other protagonists of the novels find themselves involve. Eric learns love and provides healing to other but

he cannot provide it to himself.

**James Baldwin** becomes a spokesperson for the civil right movement. The growth of violence against black people encourages Baldwin to speak with more conviction against white supremacy in America. Baldwin also becomes one of the best intellectual people in his time. Channels and the media start to give and focus on him as a gay black man.

**Tell Me How long The Train Been Gone** (1968) is a strong reply against black people who question Baldwin's role in the civil rights movement because of his homosexuality. Eldridge Cleaver says Baldwin's homosexuality as race hatred and dismissed all black homosexuals as "outraged and frustrated because in their sickness they are unable to have a baby by a white man. The cross they have to bear is that already touching their toes for the white man, the fruit of their miscegenation is not the little half white offspring of their dream." In *Train*, Baldwin reacts against critics attack by portraying the relationship between Leo and Christopher. Christopher is recalled the theme of redemption through homosexuality which explores in *Another Country*. He derives that there is a contradiction between gay sexuality and black militancy.

**Just Above My Head** (1979) is Baldwin last novel. It is a story which states the life of Arthur Montana. Arthur is the protagonist of the novel. He is an African American gay gospel singer. Arthur is died at age of 39. He has heart attack in London. Halle is Arthur's sister. She starts her searching and questing about her brother past. She finds homosexuality as one of his death's reason. Homosexuality repeats as a major theme in the novel. It is the basis for the emotional distance between Arthur and his family. Homosexual becomes clear in the contrast between the events which follow Arthur's break up with church and Halle's divorce up with Julia. But, James Baldwin treats differently with homosexual as theme in this novel than other novels. Obviously, homosexual is not more interest than Baldwin's earlier novels. It is moving smoothly to the life of Arthur to help him for quest his existence in his community.

#### Conclusion:-

**Baldwin** has central position in America and African American gay writing. His works challenges the white oppression and compulsive heterosexuality which dominates by white rules in his community. He openly and directly discusses the homosexual and bisexual themes in his novels. He describes as a queer by straight white men who want to have sex with him and as a black stud by white women who want to have a negro experience and want to save him from homosexuality. Baldwin emerges as a nodal point in the life of African American gay and becomes a symbol for entire generation of black American gay writers.

**Baldwin** writes about homosexuality and considers sex between two men is work as a great tool and revelation to emancipate the people from restrict rules of social categorize. Baldwin's novels is clearly included the implication of race and homosexuality. In his first novels, homosexuality acquires striking political dimension, while through his later novels; his idea towards sexuality is improved and creates a new space for intelligent African American gay writers.

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