

ISSN : 2395-4132

THE EXPRESSION

An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

Bimonthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access e-Journal



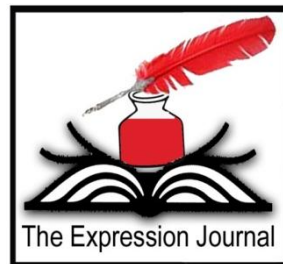
Impact Factor 6.4

Vol. 9 Issue 1 February 2023

Editor-in-Chief : Dr. Bijender Singh

Email : editor@expressionjournal.com

www.expressionjournal.com



JAMES BALDWIN'S *ANOTHER COUNTRY* AS A PICTURE OF REAL AND ACTUAL DIMENSION TO RACIAL INTERACTION AND POWERFUL INDICTMENT OF INJUSTICE IN SOCIETY

S. Sujitha

PhD Scholar, Department of English (P.T.)

**Sri Meenakshi Govt. College for Women, Affiliated to Madurai Kamaraj University
Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India**

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Abstract

American Literature plays an important role in English Literature because there are many American writers who have represented their country through their works and their culture and society has been depicted through their works. There is a long list of American writers but among them, James Baldwin plays an important role. He has written many novels, plays, essays and poems. His remarkable novels are *Go Tell It on The Mountain*, *Giovanni's Room* and *Notes of a Native Son*. The present paper attempts to present James Baldwin's novel *Another Country* as a clear picture of real and actual dimension to racial interaction and powerful indictment of injustice in society. Baldwin delves deep into the moral and psychological disease that lies at the core of racism. Baldwin being the social activist and a great spokesman of the Negroes, his novels reflect the appalling conditions prevailed in the United States in 1960s. Through the characters of Rufus, Leona, Ida and Vivaldo, he touched upon various social issues like racial discrimination, poverty, homosexuality and heterosexuality among the black and whites in America. Thus, with a deep analysis of this novel, this paper claims it as a real and actual social dimension to racial relations in America.

Keywords

American Literature, James Baldwin, *Another Country*, Society, Discrimination, Racism, Relationships, Injustice, Conflicts.

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What is commonly understood is that Baldwin's novels reveal his untiring struggle to fashion out of his own private history and the turbulence of social and political affairs in contemporary America, a voice that is much dignified and at the same time, terrifying. While giving expression to his moral disgust and passionate fury in his fiction, Baldwin diagnoses the moral and psychological disease that lies at the core of racism in America. According to Baldwin, the racial problem is not a mere Negro problem but an American problem and the youth in the United States are immensely affected by it. He shows how the youth of both the races are utterly frustrated in their attempts to overcome the racial barriers and how they all grope in the dark in search of a solution to their peculiar problems. Baldwin seems to remind the Americans that unless the racial problems are tackled with care and fortitude, the country will, certainly, have to face an explosively dangerous situation.

Another Country (1962), Baldwin's third novel, is the most ambitious and sensational of his novels. While his first novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain* deals with the unmitigated pain and sufferings in the lives of millions of American blacks living in the Harlem Ghettos, *Another Country* presents the anguish and pain, and the problems of love, sexuality, quest for identity and psychological tension in the lives of both blacks and whites. The novel chiefly focuses on the problems related to racial interaction and its resulting manifestations. It is precisely because of Baldwin's concern with the nature of racial prejudice and its consequences, that this New York novel has become so powerful an indictment of injustice in society. The novel contains perhaps, for more social protest than any of the preceding novels. It is this intensity of fury that distinguishes *Another Country* from Baldwin's earlier works.

Baldwin, being an activist and an eloquent spokesman of the Negroes has been immensely influenced by the appalling conditions prevailing in the United States in 1960's, to adopt a militant stance in his writing. The racial, political and socio-economic problems of the decade alone, would have prompted Baldwin to take this militant Stance—the very stance

The Expression: An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

(A Peer Reviewed and Indexed Journal with Impact Factor 6.4)

www.expressionjournal.com ISSN: 2395-4132

which in his early essays he had found so damaging to literary achievement. About the decade of the 1960's, Milton Yuiger wrote:

“Either it will go down in history as a decade in which a tempered citizenry in this country (United States) solved the problems of racial, ethnic and religious injustice or it will be remembered as one in which the seeds of hatred distrust and violence burst forth so widely and extravagantly as to destroy in a moment a century of hard-won gains in civil rights and social justice.” (Yuiger 5)

The racial problems were never solved. Civil rights movement proved to be a disappointment and disillusionment. Writing in such an atmosphere of oppression, violence and lynchings, quite naturally, Baldwin could not have contained his burning hatred and fiery rage to which he gave expression through the characters of Rufus Scott and his sister Ida Scott.

The publication of *Another Country* in 1962, produced howls of rebuke and indignation. Though critics like Robert A. Bone have described the novel as “a failure on a grand scale”, (Kinnamon 41), most other reviewers have spoken in praise of the novel and acclaimed it as one of the most powerful novels of the period. To call it “a failure on a grand scale” is to pay undue attention to its furious rhetoric and its lurid representation of sexuality which within the design of the moral acquire a validity that is undeniable. This novel deals with the inter-racial and inter-sexual relationship among a group of people who inhabit a kind of underworld, for the most part physically located in Greenwich village. Of the five major characters in the novel, two are Negroes—Rufus Scott and Ida Scott and the other three are Whites—Vivaldo, Eric and Cass Silenski. The story is unfolded through a series of flashbacks which illumine the various facets of characters involved in this racial drama. The characters and their relationships are carefully representative of black and white, male and female, married and unmarried, homosexual, bisexual and heterosexual. With regard to the tangled relationships among the characters, Norman Padhoretz observes:

“Whites coupled with Negroes, heterosexuals coupled with homosexuals, homosexuals coupled with women, none of it involving casual lust or the suggestion of neurotic perversity, and all of it accompanied by the most serious emotions and resulting in the most intense attachments—it is easy enough to see... that Baldwin's intention is to deny any moral significance whatever to the categories, white and Negro, heterosexual and homosexual”. (247)

Baldwin believes that the terms white and Negro refers to two different conditions under which individuals live, but they are still governed by the same fundamental laws of being. Similarly, the terms homosexuality and heterosexuality refer to two different conditions under which individuals pursue love. All these signify only a form of the stander liberal attitude to life, and Baldwin holds these attitudes with a puritanical ferocity and he spells them out in such brutal and naked detail that one is frightened by them. The novel sought to encompass and to more fully examine the roots of America's social malaise. It assumes that the large-scale social problems such as racial oppression and its consequences are the result of limitations within the psyche of the individuals rather than of the dynamics of contending social forces. The responsibility for social problems therefore lies with the individuals, whether he be the oppressed or the oppressor. There are occasions in the novel, when the black people are shown oppressing whites as well as conversely, and there are no obvious distinctions to be made between the one act of oppression and the other. in this novel, every individual whether black or white has the equal opportunity for oppression, suffering and love. Laying stress on Baldwin's concept of individual responsibility in the novel, Donald. B. Gibson says:

Vol. 9 Issue 1 (February 2023)

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“Baldwin believes that the injustices committed by groups against other groups, and individuals against other individuals come about because individuals do not know themselves, cannot be honest with themselves or others and do not possess therefore, the capacity to love.” (Therman 11)

What is emphasized here is that most of the characters in the novel have at the centre of their portrayal an isolation from the society, culture and even from each other. *Another Country* can obviously be regarded as a novel which deals with the individual's lonely and futile quest for love. Each and every character in the novel has lost the sense of the self. Each character seeks to complete his incomplete self in the arms of another, but none finds this desperately sought haven because he is a Negro in a white world or because he is a white man who can love only men. From the very beginning of the novel, Baldwin makes us aware of the ominous forces which conspire to oppress and kill, while Rufus Scott strives to avoid the “murderous” crushing weight of New York, which becomes symbolic of the cunning, cruel and merciless white-oriented society:

“You got to fight with the landlord because the landlord's white: you got to fight with the landlord's boy because the mother fucker's white. Any bum on the Bowery can shit all over you because may be he can't hear, can't see, can't walk, can't fuck—but he is white!” (AC 68)

The victim of white's cruelty and prolonged emotional rejection, Negroes look upon them with hatred and dreams of vengeance and as a consequence lose forever the capacity to love. In fact, what all the characters in *Another Country* are fundamentally grouping for love. Each of the principal characters in the novel has received “the blow from which he would never recover” and as a consequence suffers from a most profound isolation and estrangement from the past. The past and its pain and the transcendence of pain are the implicit parts of the characterization of Rufus and Ida in the novel. Throughout the novel, Baldwin plays scorching jazz solos and low-down blues, historically, the folk Negroes' most expressive means which gives depth to Baldwin's characterization of Rufus, the person on whom the entire novel hinges.

Rufus Scott, the central figure of Book-I of *Another Country* is a talented jazz drummer, who is driven to suicide by the pressures of a racist society. Hatred, fear, anguish and frustration have been etched indelibly upon his brain sensitive, bitter and violent, Rufus sublimates his hatred by pounding on the white skin of his drums. With something of the same malice, he brutally torments his white mistress Leona, a poor southern white girl ultimately, driving her insane. Though Leona offers her love, unselfishly as a means of extricating Rufus out of his prison of hatred and revenge, Rufus fails to reciprocate her love. He can only use Leona as he has been ill-used by the white society. Symbolic of that society, Leona becomes the objects of his scorn, contempt, humiliation and abuse. Rufus, fighting within himself, both the real and imaginary aspects of the race problem is incapable of communicating with Leona. He has picked her up with the conscious purpose of sexual exploitation and of getting rid of her before she can bug him with her story of pain and suffering. Having suffered real racial persecution, even the harmless remarks by Leona send Rufus into a rage. He cannot surmount the indestructible barriers erected by centuries of racial inhumanity in order to accept Leona's love for him and to return that love.

On the other hand, Leona tries desperately to fathom the black American experience and to regard with compassion and understanding:

“I love him, she said helplessly,

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I love him, I can't help it.
No matter, what he does to me.
He's just lost and he beats me because
He can't find nothing else to hit" (59)

It is true that Rufus also seeks Leona's love and admits that he loves her and needs her desperately, but ultimately destroys them both with his sadism. In fact, the love relationship between Rufus and Leona ends in tragedy, because of the racist culture in which they are compelled to live. On several occasions, Rufus and Leona encounter racist reaction to their being on the street together and living together. Ida and Vivaldo too have similar experiences on many occasions. There are also several instances in the novel which show the white policemen at the ready to enforce the uncodified laws regarding proper relations, relations between black and white sexes. Hence, there is a real and actual social dimension to racial relations shown in *Another Country*.

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