The Ambivalence of Materialism and Sanctity in James Baldwin's Go Tell it on the Mountain

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Abstract:

The paper is an analytical study of how James Baldwin succeeds in employing and interweaving Christian myths into the fabric of his novel Go Tell it on the Mountain and how the main characters are torn between belief and disbelief. It also looks into how far could a phony and a holier-than-thou cleric turn into hell the life of those who live with him. James Baldwin portrays the conflict of ideas in the minds of the main characters as regards religious and mundane tendencies. It also tackles how the characters' sense of history affects their social and private lives. The characters find themselves engaged in several fundamental struggles that are fundamentally inextricable but the major struggle might be designated Sanctity vs. Materialism.

الخلاصة:

إن هذا البحث هو دراسة تحليلية لقدرة جيمس بالدوين في تظمين ونسج القصص من الكتاب المقدس في سياق روايته أذهب لتسردها على سفح الجبل وكيف ان شخوص الرواية الأساسيين موزعوا النفس بين الأيمان وعدم الأيمان.كما يدرس البحث كذلك كيف يمكن لشخصية دينية مرائية ان تحول حياة من حولها الى جحيم. يسلط هذا البحث الضوء على كيفية تصوير جيمس بالدوين لصراع الأفكار في اذهان الشخوص الرئيسة في روايته حول النزعة الدنيوية والدينية. كما يتناول البحث كيفية تأثير ألأحساس بالتاريخ على حياة شخوص الرواية الشخصية والأجتماعية. يجد شخوص الرواية أنفسهم منشغلين بعدة صراعات اساسية والتي لايمكن الخلاص منها بيد ان اهم هذه الصراعات هو الصراع بين المادية والأيمان.

Leaving Iraq temporarily because of the waves of sectarian violence, I headed to the United States in the summer of 2007 and to be exact my destination was New Jersey-Seton Hall University. It was at there at Seton Hall University where I was teaching English 1202 that I discovered James Baldwin for the first time so; I included him in my syllabus as part of the course entitled "Literature and Ethnic Identity". I deemed it necessary to introduce this great master of fiction to the Iraqi scholastic community through an analytical study of his seminal novel *Go Tell it on the Mountain*. Most critics and scholars of James Baldwin agree that his first novel, *Go Tell it on the Mountain*, is his most important work. Opinions explaining why this is apparent vary. James Baldwin felt the piece was very important as well. He deemed it the novel he had to write if he was ever going to write anything else. The novel was a painful ten year production. Baldwin finished the novel in a small cabin in a small village in Switzerland.

A great deal of African-American literature conventionally has personified an anxiety as regards Christianity between faith in God and consternation over his affirmed servants' behavior with blacks. The black church provided an acceptable and "attractive vehicle for Baldwin to express and

develop ideas of social discontent"[1]. O'Neale argues that Baldwin's works illustrate "the schizophrenia of the black American experience with Christianity"[2] more than those of any other black American writer. She notices how the divisiveness of this dichotomy dominated Baldwin's writing and made him the first black American writer to so openly question "the justice, judgment, and sincerity of God"[3] and to distance himself from the " lone enduring black institution, the black church"[4].

Part of Baldwin's fierce denigration of the church takes place in The Fire Next Time, where he reprimands its malfunction to follow universal love:

> *There was no love in the church, It was a mask for hatred and self-despair. When we were told to love everybody, I had thought that meant everybody. I But no. It applied to those who believed as we did, and it did not apply to white people at all.*[5]

The characters' maladies lie deep in their church's representation of God as the Torah figure menacing penalty and denunciation, rousing fear rather than love. This image engenders the religious neurosis manifest in the major characters' overriding sentiments of panic, remorse, and rage and it stimulates peak religious experiences or conversions that are dubious. John feels all three of the afore-mentioned emotions concerning sex, his father's incomprehensible denial of him, and God's associated judgment. He particularly worries that the "sin" of typical sexual progress to maturity which he is experiencing involves unpardonable acts, and he feels that both God and the devil are waiting for him to fall. In the depths of his misfortune on the threshing floor he feels wholly cut off from love. Gabriel also absorbed as a youth the attitude that God hardens his heart to the sinner, thinking "he had turned aside in sin too long, and God would not hear him."[6]

Gabriel's fright that God would not honor him with a son or sons to carry on his holy work is ascribable to his guilt over deserting Esther, the mother of his first, now deceased, son Royal. He finds a suitable rationalization for his generally unloving stance and decision and rage in the church's widespread representation of God, as *"his daily anger was transformed into prophetic wrath"* (15). Even though Florence, John's aunt, for most of her life has selected to decline the church's control, she was impacted by her mother's stern religious temperament and has experienced repressed guilt over departing her mother, strong anger at her brother and all men, and dread for her soul as death becomes well-nigh. Taking the prevalence of these passive emotions into account, it is not astonishing, since the novel depicts "the religious conversion of a 14-year old black adolescent"[7] that Baldwin depicts the peak religious moment or commitment as containing elements of compulsion. Gabriel was baptized, at age twelve, only unenthusiastically, and he aggressively opposed being immersed in the river. When Elizabeth accepted Gabriel's special treatment and his creed, she did it because of the want for safety rather than out of love or faith, and her need of deep

religious certainty may be sarcastically in charge of her relative calm temperament. Florence's instant of expressing grief audibly and falling on her face at the altar is not one of wholesome, pleading display of intense emotion but of liberation from overpowering anxieties and fright of death.The verbal communication of Go Tell it on the Mountain is primarily Biblical and allusive. Biblical quotes and paraphrases abound, mingling quotidian speech, as well as the authorial voice itself: "He who is filthy, let him be filthy still; Set thine house in order"—these assertions reverberated through the text, are twisted and reinterpreted. The Logos is a living word for these characters, and a divine conversion is the novel's exciting event. Biblical allegory proliferates. In combination, these elements constitute a book steeped in religion.

The novel is steeped in a burning sort of Protestantism whose guiding doctrines honor the Torah and its concept of a rancorous deity. The ulterior motive behind is ascribable to the continuing identification that many American blacks felt with the anguish of enslaved Hebrews of the Old Testament, with the promise to be led, as the chosen people, from the desolation of oppression to the Promised Land. Hence, the discourse and symbolism of the Old Testament is there in the minds of the characters, and the Biblical parallels in the novel's main events often refer to this first book—there are obvious associations with Abraham and Isaac, Noah and Ham, and Jacob and Esau, John perceives his house as grimy; the air of the church strongly smells of "the odor of dust and sweat"; the family surname, Grimes, connotes a dirtiness passed from one generation to the other. Hence, Sin is symbolically prevalent in this world as a blatant stain. The Protagonist's hesitation as to whether pursue the narrow path, relinquish the mundane life and join the saints or to fight for worldly success—is related to the bad relation with his father. He feels the pressure to follow his father, to please his father, and to prove himself to his father by way of his virtue and piety. But, by the same token, he has a profound contempt for his father. John realizes that his father is "God's minister, the ambassador of the King of Heaven," and that he, therefore, cannot "bow before the throne of grace without first kneeling to his father." We read, "On his refusal to do this had his life depended...." The special idiom of Christianity in the spirituals has historically personified the assurance of transforming the way of life by which African Americans live under serfdom mainly the hard periods of time subsequent to the **Emancipation**[8] and the Great Migration. As a competence of transformation (accepting Jesus Christ into one's heart as a personal savior), Christian spiritual discourses in the African American context can save the body and soul from unfair treatment and inequality. This heritage of personal and cultural transformation in turn puts a grave weight on African American men, as depicted by Gabriel Grimes in Go Tell it on the Mountain. Taking for granted that God can deliver him from psychological extinction and a life of decadence, Gabriel also has to accept the burden of the performance of transformation when he uses Christian discourses to construct himself as a man and a patriarch. The discourses of his spiritual uplift demonstrate his powerlessness to change the materiality of Gabriel's experience. He is only able to

find work as a yardman in Mississippi and a chauffeur in New York. Gabriel's struggle with masculinity, in the context of spirituality, is being able to define himself as a man in the African American context when he is not allowed to be a man in the larger social context. The setting in which Go Tell it on the Mountain is situated identifies the extent to which Gabriel is able to construct himself against reigning discourses about masculinity and patriarchy. Taking place in the period immediately following the Civil War, Go Tell it on the Mountain presents the reality of the limited opportunities for all the characters, but, particularly, for Gabriel whose choices influence the destinies of his wives, sister and children. Instinctively, Gabriel makes devastating choices when he gives way to licentiousness and drunkenness. Consciously, he makes two choices: to be saved and to migrate north. The narrative structure of the novel shows the effect of these choices. The family he grew up in and the family he seeks to steer through the temptations of the material world feel the sway of these choices. But, neither his son John nor the narratives of the other characters can speak directly and personally to the social pressures and conditions Gabriel faces. One can observe the sway of Gabriel's choices on John, who has been picked on to follow in his father's footsteps as a priest, on Roy the "bad" son who gives into material temptations, on his wives, Deborah and Elizabeth, who faithfully and unconditionally back him up, on his young lover Esther, who dies while keeping his secret of their illegitimate son, Royal, and on his sister Florence, who blames Gabriel for her social disillusionment as a woman in the Christian family and in African American society.We are asked to answer a question through the perspective of the other characters, which John asks his mother *"Is my father a good man"* (24)? This question implies a gesture toward the materialism/ sanctity dialectic John is facing, but John is limited in his perspective. The response is simple to some characters, for instance, Florence who looks at Gabriel as a Janus-faced clergyman, an abuser of his family. But she too cannot address his conflicts. Nonetheless, this question of whether Gabriel is a good man is suggestive of the text—because in responding to the question it concentrates, not on the ethical question of Gabriel's character, but on the historical and cultural circumstances that make Gabriel's self-centeredness and incentive.

John's coming of age story is a central reading of Go Tell it on the Mountain. In "Religious Symbolism and Psychic Reality in Baldwin's Go Tell it on the Mountain," Shirley S. Allen writes "The central action of the novel is John's initiation into manhood, a ritual symbolization of the psychological step from dependence to a sense of self; but most critics describe the conversion as the acceptance of his blackness"[9].

In terms of the structure of the novel, John's coming of age story establishes a frame for the stories of Florence, Gabriel, and Elizabeth. It takes place over the period of a few days centered on John's fourteenth birthday and the bookends with the greater family story about being the descendant of slaves and of the **Great Migration**[10]. Unlike Milkman Dead in Morrison's Song of Solomon, John is naïve to this greater story and remains to a great extent naïve at the end of the novel. John has a

powerful symbolic role, but his choice to be saved is of value in the context of Gabriel's choices. However, we see the "ironic distinction between the "house" as Gabriel's soul and the disarray and despair of his household"[11]. This Michel Fabre points out in "Fathers and Sons in James Baldwin's Go Tell it on the Mountain:" These characters lean on their past in such a way that the figure of Gabriel, with the stories of Florence and Elizabeth on either side, emerges a little like Christ between the Holy Women (120). Clarence Hardy argues that Baldwin in this novel " does engage, even if less explicitly how black self-loathing and Christianity are interwoven in black life"[12]. He also asserts that Baldwin "makes his characters associate their blackness with dirtiness, shame and sin"[13] and the name Grimes is a case in point.

The ordeals and choices of Florence, Gabriel and Esther reveal the historical and cultural context of the book. To read these stories as aspects of the family context alone would be to miss the focus on the larger cultural contexts and how these have impacted the lives of the characters. Carolyn Sylvander comments on how closely is this related to the argument of this study. Sylvander argues that the novel's point of impact lies with the author's use of history, "personal and collective – on an individual, whether or not that individual is aware of it."[14]. The two characters that do not realize how history has impacted their lives are Gabriel and John. Gabriel does not want to realize it and John desperately does. Lynn Orilla Scott advocates this idea and develops it by stating that the novel was also an example of how history can be abused when passed from generation to generation.[15]

Sylvander's intelligence is when she links John to whom she feels is his Biblical equivalent, Ishmael. She holds that, "Ishmael, the disinherited outcast, comes to us here in the form of John, figuratively if not literally disinherited, and suggests the disinherited, 25 outcast black in American history."[16]. Baldwin had deep feelings of being disinherited and rejected by his father and his society. Sylvander's scrutiny of the novel considerately links how these feelings were incorporated into his first work.

The novel also exudes a strong religious theme. Roger Rosenblatt observes that everyone in the novel "wants to change, because everybody wants to be saved, and salvation here is connected with change."[17]. Rosenblatt makes a solid observation that illuminates how salvation is related to a form of liberation from the expository character's former selves. Rosenblatt goes on to say that, "There is supposed to be salvation and safety in the church."[18]. The characters use the church as a form of escape from the pressures and realities of the outside world. However, the characters, especially Gabriel, find in their religion an escape from the darkness and shame of their past lives. Thus, religion for each character is a form of survival and escape. However, in using religion in this way each character's grip of reality is weakened and damaged. Stanley Macebuh correlates Baldwin's real life experience with the religious aspect of the novel. Macebuh contends that the novel was an attempt by Baldwin to rid himself of the personal corruption his church had instilled in him. He also

points out Baldwin's bitter feelings against the church and how the novel was an assertion of Baldwin's long "quarrel with God."[19] Macebuh goes on to declare that, "such a quarrel could only with great difficulty be made the essential theme of a successful novel."[20]. He believes that John resembles Baldwin because of his apprehension toward religion and fragile durability of his conversion. Macebuh further points out that the personification of the God in the novel is that of a vengeful God for vengeful minds. Macebuh exhibits a unique ability to tap into the religious psychology of both the author and the characters he produces. The novel is based on instants of choice and alteration. Gabriel's judgment to quit Mississippi for the North is culturally restructured. In the same vein, Gabriel's personal change and redemption are looked at in the context of his desire for alcohol and women and in the context of his desire to worship God. He fights with what he terms the sins of the flesh, the seductions of the evil spirits, and the alteration that is latent through conversion. His life is structured around the story of "setting thine house in order" from Kings 1:20 which John recognizes as the piece of scripture that his father lives by (32). Reviewing the past from a new perspective, he comes to know his time spent in inns and with streetwalkers as giving in to seductions that kept him from his belief. Jackson notes that many of the characters in the novel embrace the incarceration of the spiritual world but at the expense of any real possibility of emotional release or self-discovery by attempting to escape what they cannot, their experience. She continues to emphasize that the novel brought about the beginning of the "existential posture"[21] that her work already examined. The character's effort to rise above their experience generates a distorted vision of self within the heart of each individual. Jackson's study probes deep into the existentialist vein of interpretation of the novel and how such an interpretation helps in the commencement of the novel's abstractions in the character's identitie John's decision appears to sustain the cycle of building up one's life around an instant of choice and alteration. Oscillating between a life of material and religious pursuits, his life is not going to be simple. Therefore, one can see John's change in light of Gabriel's life. The novel shows on purpose John's challenge (between the material and social Word) and Gabriel's (between the pleasures of the flesh and the afterlife) as distinctly different. Gabriel is an older man who experienced the vices of the world and the inherent racism of living in the South. John is a fourteen year old who has been earmarked to be saved in circumstances that seek to protect him from the temptations of adolescence: *Everyone had always said that John would be a preacher when he grew up, just like his father* (11). The process of phallocentric impulse in Go Tell it on the Mountain shows that Gabriel is placed in a digressive split of the *religious* and the *material* whose change through Christ is unobtainable. However, Christ cannot protect him from himself or from the historical realities that keep plaguing black men. Gabriel creates a self-centeredness that will make it possible for him to negotiate prevalent discourses about phallocentric notions and one that will supply him with the essential tools to keep his family. Further, Gabriel fights to reconcile Christian practices with individual family members to

accept him as the speaker of God. Gabriel desperately seeks to create a family context for his personal salvation, contrary to his old days as a womanizer but to accomplish this he has to put up with the burden of being a Christian patriarch within the African American context.

In the book of Daniel in the *Bible* Gabriel, the angel, was an interpreter of a vision. He revealed to Daniel the implication of his dream and extricated his vision. In the book of Luke in the *Bible*, Gabriel was sent to Mary to tell her she would be giving birth to a son whom she was to name Jesus. The archangel Gabriel was also sent to Zechariah to tell him that his wife Elizabeth would soon become pregnant with a 101child she was to name John. Baldwin's naming of his main protagonist, John, and his mother, Elizabeth, can also be linked to a Biblical context. Gabriel in the Bible is a messenger, as Gabriel Grimes is in *Go Tell It on the Mountain*.[22] To come to grips with Gabriel's character, one should focus on how Gabriel's self-centeredness has been conventionally interpreted as despotic to his family and hypothesize his the construction of his self-centeredness. Gabriel has been placed as the progeny of Christian discourses that was employed to enchain African Americans and to render them as less than human thus justifying the "inferiority of people of African descent because Ham's sons migrated to Africa."[23] Baldwin is well aware of this legacy within African American culture. In "James Baldwin Looking Towards the Eighties," an interview that appeared in the Black Collegian in 1979, Baldwin says:

> *When I said the church, I was thinking about the overall, two thousand year history of the Christian church, one of the results of which was the enslavement of Black people. On the other hand, what happened here in America to Black people who were given the church and nothing else, who were given the Bible and the cross under the shadow of a loaded gun, and who did something with it absolutely unprecedented which astounds Black people to this day. Finally, everything in Black history comes out of the church*[24]

On the psychological level, the building up of the African American patriarch has meant doing away with lust—outside a matrimonial milieu. He could sense that being rescued is the one passageway for deliverance because of the moral teachings of his mother: *"Honey their mother was saying, Don't you let your old mother die without you look her in the eye and tell her she going to see you in glory. You hear me, boy?"* (76) There is a particular social strain, but Gabriel's conversion is presented as an intensely personal one. He subdues his desire to have sex outside marriage when in the midst of sleeping with a prostitute *"Lord worries his mind"* (94) to such an extent that sleeping with her becomes nauseating. In a sudden outburst he trips over of her bed and falls to his knees as he comes back home beseeching God to save his soul. Then Gabriel remembers *"the day my dungeon shook and my chains fell off* (95). Redemption for Gabriel implies that God conferred on him the self-centeredness to negotiate material temptations and circumstances. Therefore, Christ

becomes the instrument which allows him to recreate his self-centeredness. Gabriel's instant of private redemption, "the day my dungeon shook," is a story of education for young African Americans. It creates him as a well thought-of elder of the population whose experiences in the South grant him cultural trustworthiness. To the people attending worship, he stands as an example that personal dedication to the life of Christ helps African American men to flourish regardless of social and cultural repression. However, the seductions are still perceptible and possible threats to his self-centeredness., Gabriel fights these demanding circumstances socially and culturally in Harlem. Nevertheless, John can't help but notice the agony that seems to have overtaken his community with frequent family prayer and Bible study. Walking with his father to the storefront church in which he serves as a pastor on Sunday, John is bordered by drunkards and prostitutes:

> *Sunday morning, ever since John could remember, they had taken to the streets, the Grimes family on their way to church. Sinners along the avenue watched them—men still wearing their Saturday- night clothes, wrinkled and dusty now, muddy- eyed and muddy- faced; and women with harsh voices and tight, bright dresses, cigarettes between their fingers or held tightly in the corners of their mouths* (11-12).

Because of the social desolation that they encounter in Harlem, the sinners who are African American men become drunks with low wages, run down living conditions, crime, and increasingly drugs. Gabriel is conscious of how fast his life had twisted out of control because of his experiences in the South, and consequently he reacts callously to Roy's appeal to the streets. But, Gabriel's actions only highlight the misery of the state of affairs encountering African American men. Protecting Roy from himself does not work out anymore. He has to try, and to use the means for a righteous and reputable life that are accessible to him. Gabriel's dissolution can be seen as sycophancy. This is probably the importance of Baldwin's investigation into Gabriel's self-centeredness. Well-established in Christ, Gabriel has created a very limited reading of the moral path. His reading is a reaction to what he has lived and the guilt of his experiences. These experiences comprise racial discrimination and the witnessing of violence, particularly the killing of African American soldiers:

> *There had been found that morning, just outside of town, the dead body of a soldier, his uniform shredded where he had been flogged, and, turned upward through the black skin, raw, red meat. He lay face downward at the base of a tree, his fingernails digging into the scuffed earth. When he was turned over, his eyeballs stared upward in amazement and horror, his mouth was locked open wide: his trousers, soaked with blood, were torn [illegible] hairs of his [illegible]*

The observation of results like these was educational to Gabriel because they made him aware of how African American men are anticipated to perform their identities and the liberty that they can

live in both the South and the North. It is of significance here that the intricacy of Gabriel's stance is recognized and he is not reduced to a two-faced and vicious person. writes "Economics exerts a more severe, if less direct, influence on John through its effect on Gabriel, whose native cruelty and harshness are accentuated by the pressures of providing for his family . . . His early idealism proves insufficient when confronted with the cynical economically motivated preachers at the revival meeting," and his demand for money after his adulterous affair " . . .These experiences engender the hypocritical cynicism which sets the tone for Gabriel's life and leads to the angry bitterness which he projects onto John"[25]. An improbable leading role, Gabriel has been seen as a executor of ideological discourses and coercion. Seen as a progeny of white men system, Gabriel is interpreted as a patriarch who coerces his family. Because patriarchal discourses are exceedingly opposing to women, from a feminist perspective Gabriel's requirement to be a head of family is seen as disadvantageous to the women characters. As in real life for Baldwin, so it was in his "fiction of *Go Tell It on the Mountain* that the father works as an oppressor and stranger."[26]. Focusing on the women characters in Baldwin's novels, in Black Women in the Fiction of James Baldwin Trudier Harris describes the restrictions that Christian discourses inflict on phallocentric impulse. Harris argues:

> *Through the church, the women are very early taught to accept their places as wives, mothers, and sisters, and to feel guilty if they do not. They are taught to be other-centered, to be preoccupied with the things that form a part of their lives beyond themselves and too little occupied with their own hopes, dreams, and aspirations.*[27]

One of the confrontations that African Americans come across in practicing Christianity is the innate prejudice towards women in Christian discourses, and Baldwin does not evade describing the influence of Christian discourses on Black men and women's self-centeredness. On the other hand, Baldwin depicts the melancholy in the Grimes household as that of the feeling that all of the characters are caught in their own way by their choices, as well as by their culture. Furthermore, Harris argues that Gabriel sees the inheritance from a father as an inherited discourse and chooses to accept the contradictions of this discourse in order to "construct its realities for an African American preacher". In this sense, Christianity is seen as the tool of patriarchal power, which consigns Florence, and then Deborah, to roles of obedience and fourth-class citizenship (behind white men and women and black men). Harris sees Gabriel's use of Christian discourses as endemic to his very humanity "Gabriel operates at a surface level with powers he thinks have been conferred upon him by the supernatural; he seldom, if ever, operates at the level of conscience to respond to human needs in this world"[28]. But, as a Black man, Gabriel is also a victim of racialized discourses as well as the limitations of Christian discourses, which do not bring about a change in his material conditions.

Perhaps no one knows the challenges of Christian discourses for Black phallocentric impulse more than Gabriel himself.

Correspondingly the female characters in Go Tell it on the Mountain do not admit the challenges to phallocentric impulse. Gabriel trusts Christ because his conviction demands that he act on, not his emotional needs and desires, but on the dictates of the Ten Commandments. It is these circumstances that Gabriel's sister and second wife, fail to notice. Their relationship to Christianity and to their self-centeredness as women is presumably what occupies them, but Gabriel's fight is only in part associated with his struggle to produce a dedicated link with a woman who can be a Christian wife. Nevertheless, there are conspicuous advantages to being a black man, which are only the social and cultural gains that Black women do not have in the context of African American community. Gabriel is not resistant to the inconsistencies of Christianity as a person. Like Southern whites, who failed to see holding slaves and being God fearing as a contradiction. Unlike Southern whites, Gabriel is conscious of the incongruity:

> *The sandy-haired man, struck by Gabriel's bitter, astounded face, bit*
> *his laughter off, and said "What's the matter, son? I hope I ain't said nothing to offend you?" "She read the Bible for you the night you preached didn't she?" asked another of the elders, in a conciliatory tone.*
> *"That woman," said Gabriel, feeling a roaring in his head, is my sister in*
> *the Lord." "Well, Elder Peters here, he just didn't know that," said someone else.*
> *"He sure didn't mean no harm." "Now you ain't going to get mad?" Asked Elder Peters kindly—yet there reexamined, to Gabriel's fixed attention, something mocking in his face and voice. "You ain't going to spoil our little dinner?"*
> *"I don think it's right," said Gabriel, "to talk evil about nobody. The*
> *remember," Elder Peter said, as kindly as before, "you's talking to your elders."*

Baldwin depicts Gabriel's resolution and his fight with that resolution by investigating the problems that these incongruities create to the process of Gabriel's self-centeredness construction. Gabriel encounters, in this episode the inconsistency in Christian discourses when he turns down to take part in a sexist and humiliating argument about Deborah. Seniors in the church defy Gabriel's effort to be an esteemed man of God in an attempt to define who is a Godly woman. The women in his life also defy this self-construction when they question his decisions as a father to his son and step-son. While Christianity gives him a way out of the lunacy of endless nights of sex and alcohol, Gabriel constructs a joyless and hard life for himself and his family. Gabriel sees enticement as a "test," and he pleads each time that he encounters the option of regression when presenting his saved self as prepared within his faith,. For instance Gabriel, as a young man frequently visited brothels.

One night while coming back home from a prostitutes' house, Gabriel feels an unbelievable amount of guilt *"Later, he said of that morning that his sin was on him, then he kn[e]w only that he carried a burden and that he longed to lay it down. This burden was heavier than the heaviest mountain and he carried it in his heart"* (93). Delivered, Gabriel's load is raised. Gabriel's personal salvation is constructed as a memorial reconstruction that he presents an audience: *"I remember, he was later to say, the day my dungeon shook and my chains fell off"* (95). In an episode reminiscent of Christ's struggle in the wilderness, *"Gabriel cries 'Save me!' 'Save me!'* And all creation rang, but did not answer. I couldn't hear nobody pray." He perceives his salvation as "the beginning of his life as a man'" (97). Thus, through prayer, he piously calls for a conviction in an unerring faith, creating his self-centeredness and his identity with the presentation of language. Putting all his faith in Christian discourses does not let him recognize his fight and flaw in a public or close discussion, except in terms of tests, trials, and evils. Belief in a personal God who will guide him through the wilds is the performance of Christianized self-centeredness. By modern values, Gabriel's treatment of women likewise deserves censure, but it is significant to acknowledge the historical context that made this behavior possible. Gabriel constructs his self-centeredness against his mother's stories about the harsh realities of slavery and white male intimidation. Without fear, pity, or remorse, Gabriel brothers and sisters were removed from his family one at a time:

> *She had grown up as one of the field workers, for she was very tall and strong; and by and by she had married and raised children, all of whom had been taken from her, one by sickness and two by eviction; and one whom she had not been allowed to call her own had been raised in the master's house"* (70)

Christianity, as a divine model, exists in the digressive watershed of a material/racist world. Gabriel's position as a cleric does not exempt him from being involved with racist issues. Gabriel struggles to uphold a conviction in his conversion and that the white men who tease him one night in town will convert ultimately:

Someone spat on the sidewalk at Gabriel's feet, and he walked on, his face not changing, and he heard it reprovingly whispered behind him that he was a good nigger, surely up to trouble. (142) Once again, the supremacy of Christ's "good nigger" threatens to rename or redefine his identity, a process that creates a particular predicament to Gabriel's self-centeredness construction process. To evade rearranging his identity, Gabriel reads the behavior of Southern white racists as an issue of spirituality not socialization. Reading their actions in such a manner keeps Gabriel from being obliged to settle his place as God's messenger with the daily lack of respect white men show towards him. Drawing on his experiences, Gabriel recollects his mother's counsel *"to pray for loving kindness"* and *"yet he dreams of the feel of the white man's forehead against his shoe; again and again until the head wobbled on the broken neck and his foot encountered nothing but the rushing blood" (142).*Christ, To Gabriel, offers a plan for existing because it supports an affiliation with

language and meaning where inconsistencies are improved semantically. This incongruity is redefined in Gabriel's conviction about patriarchy. Gabriel's patriarchy is based on a spiritual framework between himself and God. By means of the Bible as a framework, Gabriel marks patriarchy as receiving what God promised those who devotedly serve Him. Having faith in that apart from his condition that he will harvest what God has vowed, Gabriel outwits racialized discourses about his beliefs beyond material conditions. He makes fit Christmas speeches for his own purposes. As Keith Clark shows, Gabriel urgently wants to be part of a historical and Biblical discourse that required wiping him away as a presence:

> *Gabriel's attempt to textualize himself via a Biblical discourse which upholds patriarchy and male privilege, unwilling to acknowledge how his position as black male subject complicates his reading of Christ—a text he misreads and misuses as a basis for his own aborted attempts to conceive a royal line*[29].

He has faith in Christ because he credits that he can rescue himself from his self, and that he can save himself from the humiliation of being an African American living in the South. If he only believed enough, Christ can determine the inconsistencies that he lives everyday. He treats this literally and tracks this scheme in his affiliation with Deborah only to discover that she is incapable of giving him the son he wants because she suffered injury to her reproductive system when she was raped as a young girl. This makes him in a predicament: he is keen on Deborah because she prays with him and has faith in him, but he wants the male heir that God has promised him. Incapable of comprehending this promise with Deborah, he maintains his faith in the transformative powers of Christian discourses, a faith that he sermonizes to Esther, a young girl who is more concerned with enjoying the Southern night life than religious life. Preaching about God's transformative powers, works as Gabriel's context for spending time with Esther at work. His relationship with Esther leads to a lascivious affair and a son, who he eventually disowns. When he conceives a child outside of his marriage, he thinks that it is God's test not his sin. He reasons that because Esther is a prostitute, her baby boy cannot embody his "royal line." For this cause, he denies any affiliation with Esther and her "bastard" child. As a preacher, he asks himself "where could [he] have gone with Esther" (148)? Gabriel finds relief in his belief that *"the Lord held me back . . . He put out His hand and held me back. I couldn't have done nothing else what could I have done" (148)?* In his implementation of Christ, Gabriel is incapable of differentiating between the *spiritual* world and the *materialistic* world. In the Bible is written what God has promised Gabriel-- that he will beget a son in wedlock "who would work until the day of the second coming to bring about His Father's Kingdom" (115). Esther died while giving birth. She seemed to mock Gabriel in naming his son Royal: *"she remembered . . . what had perhaps been her last breath she had mocked him and his father with this name. She had died, then, hating him; she had carried into eternity a curse on him and his" (139).* Even though Esther dies, Gabriel, like the Devil, in his own eyes has entrusted himself to hell. He

has to exist with his choices and the penalty of his choices in the South and later in the North. Gabriel's dealing with Esther is in sharp contrast to the courtliness he shows Deborah. It reflects the burden of his transformation, especially in the brutal death of his biological son. Gabriel's action, as Clark points out, "is the historical desire for and abuse of black women by white men"[30]. To repent for his immorality, Gabriel tries to be a community figure to Royal after Esther dies. He plans to warn him about the path that he is on, but he hears that Royal has left to go North. Relieved he sighs, "it was only the hand of the Lord that had taken Royal away, because if he had stayed they would surely have killed him"[31]. Nonetheless, Royal is cruelly stabbed in a gambling game, reducing any accountability, and Gabriel, opportunely dismisses the likelihood that damaged Esther, Royal, and Deborah.

In Harlem, Gabriel imparts Christian values of sin and redemption, which become a critical lens for his children. John's perspective shows the extent to which Gabriel has succeeded in taking advantage of Christian family values. Regardless of what role Christianity plays in his relationship with John, John's memories show the success of what Gabriel is attempting to do with his family:

> *His earliest memories—which were in a way, his only memories—were of the hurry and brightness of Sunday mornings. They all rose together on that day; his father, who did not have to go to work, and led them in prayer before breakfast . . . (11).*

At this point, Gabriel succeeds in creating a family context and ritual. Whether Gabriel is admired for his attempts to separate his children from the drunken trance and despondency of Harlem or not is not as crucial as recognizing the choices that he makes to counteract the hopelessness and cultural despair that surrounds his family in the North. The women in his life, particularly his sister Florence, are critical of his choices and his heavy- handed manner with his children. Florence resents the special privileges given to Gabriel as a man: *"With the birth of Gabriel, which occurred when she was five, her future was swallowed up. There was only one future in that house, and it was Gabriel's—to which since Gabriel was a man-child, all else must be sacrificed (172).*Gabriel remains conscious of what his deeds are and what they signify to the women in his life. Gabriel does not overlook his irresponsible actions, particularly when he looks back on his past. He says, in a dialogue with Florence "The Lord, he knows my life,-- he done forgive me a long time ago (212). Florence's abhorrence for what she understands to be as male rights overtake her. In a dialogue with Deborah, Florence says: *"that all men were like this, their thoughts rose no higher, and they lived only to gratify on the bodies of women their brutal and humiliating needs" (74).* These convictions about men influence Florence's affiliation with Gabriel and her husband, Frank. Then Florence threatens to pass a letter to Ruth that contains Gabriel liaison with Esther, but she withholds. Frank and Richard mirror the fight of living in the North. Opposite to Florence's experience, Frank is in love with Florence and is after bringing her joy. He would come home on

Saturday afternoons, already half drunk, with some useless object, such as a vase, which, it had occurred to him, she would like to fill with flowers—she who never noticed flowers and who would certainly never have bought any. The prayer of household grumblings intrinsic in this account shows the degree to which Frank's deeds are constantly misconstrued and he is incapable of understanding why and how Florence experiences him them the way she does. According to her expectations of fiscal responsibility, Florence limits Frank's role in her life and undermines their relationship. But Florence's viewpoint about Gabriel also derives from her experience with other men, particularly her husband Frank. In turn, Frank serves as a mirror to Gabriel's struggles highlighting the struggle of an affectionate love in the context of the struggle in the North. Florence's beliefs about men affect Florence's relationship with Gabriel and her husband Frank. In Harlem, Florence lives in the past to such an extent that when she falls in love with Frank and starts living with him, his behavior is seen as no different from what she remembers of her brother. To Florence, Frank's response to the lack of opportunity for Black men is really his lack of ambition. In a heated argument she tells her husband Frank *"I thought I married a man with some get up and go to him, who didn't just want to stay on the bottom all his life" (86)*. Correspondingly, Richard, John's real father is mistakenly known as one who commits a crime for which he is imprisoned. He is found to be innocent and later released from prison. Although he is released from prison, Richard has no longer any belief in his ability to guard Elizabeth and himself from racist behaviors and eventually commits suicide. Elizabeth had only seen one other man weep and it had not been like this. She touched him, but he did not stop. Her tears fell on his dirty, unkempt hair. She tried to hold him, but he would not be held. His body was like iron; she could find no softness in it. She sat curled like a frightened child on the edge of the bed, her hand on his back, waiting for the storm to pass over. It was then that she decided not to tell him yet about the child. By and by he called her name. And then he turned, and she held him against her breast, while he signed and shook. *"He fell asleep at last, clinging to her as thought he was going down into the water for the last time. And it was the last time. That night he cut his wrists with his razor and he was found in the morning by his landlady, his eyes staring upward with no light, dead among the scarlet sheets (174).*

He might have been abused in jail, or has witnessed how the capriciousness of the law can be in terms of the guilty and the innocent. These images of men show the anguish that African Americans experience, and their herculean effort to find personal contentment in the face of challenges to their manliness.On the other hand Gabriel is completely contrasted with Frank and Richard. He is not frolicsome in his love, nor does he surrender to the hopelessness in his own life as Richard does. He is accountable for what happens to his family, notably, due to the social context of Harlem. Gabriel is different than Frank and Richard who are unable to keep an affiliation with the Christian standards. His liaisons with the women are not insignificant. They are truly imperative to see the nature of their closeness with him. They rebuke him, but also advocate what he wants to accomplish for his family

and the community. For example, Florence is angry because their mother privileges Gabriel's gender, but she does not tell his wife, Elizabeth, about the adulterous relationship he has had with Esther. In fact, the novel closes with her threatening Gabriel with the letter that Deborah wrote her about his affair and illegitimate son. Esther, in turn, rejects Gabriel's spiritual life. Esther vowsthat she won't *"read to Royal (her illegitimate son with Gabriel) out of no Bible and Iain't going to take him to hear no preaching" (135).* From a different angle, she keeps he liaison from the community. She makes up her mind to give birth to Royal in Chicago so that the community won't know that Gabriel is her son's father. In her fight to reconcile his image of himself with the reality of other characters, Gabriel sets a way of life for his family that Elizabeth, John, and Royal endeavor to accomplish. The degree to which Gabriel has the support from the women in his life measures his achievement as a cleric. In the North, Gabriel embraces Christ as protection against the evil world. Thus, he embraces the Christian archetype: good vs. evil as self-centeredness. He advises his son, John, that *"all white people were wicked, and that God was going to bring them low. . . white people were never to be trusted, and that they told nothing but lies, and that not one of them had ever loved a nigger" (36).* Roy and his companions engage in a brawl with a group of white boys *"a warning from the Lord" about whites' contempt for "niggers" (48)*. The success John scores at school is for Gabriel Satan's effort to obliterate the Word. The attempts by Roy and John to introduce material art and motion constitute a confrontation with Gabriel's endeavor to create a Christian life that wards off mundane vices. According to the exegesis of the Bible John and Roy should be protected from the disturbances of the street. John constructs from material literacy self-centeredness that differentiates him from Gabriel. For John, academic literacy represents "power" and a space to hide "his intelligence from and hatred" from his father (21). The movies, as a way of middle class anticipation, give him a chance to envision another world. The North also offers an opportunity to make distinctions between black collective identity and white society. The various obligations of John, Roy, and Gabriel, to church is the territory of their disagreements. To Roy the house of God manages to stop him from living the gratifications of adolescent life. Roy is attracted to the street life. maturity for him is aggression towards those who form a menace to his identity as a Black boy (this is why he gets into a fight with some white boys) and towards anyone (including Gabriel) who abuses his mother. When Gabriel smacks Elizabeth, Roy intervenes on behalf of his mother. Roy calls Gabriel a *"black bastard" and tells him "You slap her again . . . and I swear to God I'll kill you" (49)* Roy curses his father with profane language for slapping his mother. For him, manhood is justified antagonism towards anyone who forms a menace to his male identity and Gabriel's abusive nature. Thus, John, Roy, and Gabriel demonstrate how the oppressive use of patriarchy is constructed in response to particular and distinct sets of circumstances The point that an approach to history betrays that Gabriel's stance toward material literacy has emanated from his experiences in the South. This affiliation is delved within the context of his connection with his sons. Due to his

inability to articulate the influence of the need more alternatives available to African American men, Gabriel is domineering and arrogant, and his way of life becomes unintelligible to his family, who had to live the momentum to escape the horrendous circumstances of the South. Baldwin demonstrates, through Gabriel's character, that in order for a "black man to be saved," he should reset Christianity within an African American context—this signifies the rift of Christian discourses from their historical uses and understanding that in both the North and the South, Christianity is the territory on which Gabriel sets his fight for empowerment and individuality. Gabriel's wish to be saved is a fight to create a new identity within the discourse of the enslaving Christianity. Therefore, comprehending Gabriel's self-centeredness presents new importance to the "The Threshing-Floor." At the end of the novel, John is saved because he goes through the rituals of being saved.

The ambivalent conclusion sheds light on how the performance of language is incapable of containing the traces of the performance of being Saved. The novel's concludes with Gabriel's skepticism of John's conversion because of his own previous life. The chasm between one's intentions and one's performance of those intentions is enormous. Gabriel does not "move to touch him" he appears to be uninterested in John's conversion, "kiss him," nor "smile. They just stood before each other in silence while the saints rejoiced" (207). Elizabeth, Florence, and the congregation members congratulate and praise God for choosing John as a faithful servant. Gabriel on the other hand, is remote and unable to be enthusiastic about his son's conversion because he has first hand experience with the relationship between language and intention. In response to John quoting the Bible passage: "My witness is in heaven and my record is on high" Gabriel says "It comes from your mouth. . . I want to see you live it. It's more than a notion"(207). To Gabriel, being Saved does not absolve one from their sins, nor does it intercept situations of temptations. Being Saved will not make Northern whites respect John any more than becoming a Southern preacher made Southern whites show deference to Gabriel. Gabriel's experience shows that being Saved is a spiritual achievement that does not exclude one from worldly battles. John will have to face in the future his identity as a black man and his faith as a spiritual man. The differences in being "Saved" demonstrate the focus on personal transformation and the burden of that transformation. While the beginning suggest that John is so much like his father and will follow his footsteps, the ending demonstrates that being saved underscores their differences as old and New Negro, South and North, religious and material patriarch, and fatherless son and son. Every act of being saved is characterized with a historic altering and each "witnessing" highlights oddly enough the ambiguity of private conversion.

Conclusion:

Baldwin's prose style, resting on nuances of observation and expression, creates beauty out of an ugly world while never denying the threat that such a world represents. The Old and New Testament are alluded to constantly. The framework, chapter headings and title depend on the Bible

and spiritual songs. Many of the characters names are also biblical and are, thus, symbolic of their status. In addition to this, the plot, based over two days, draws heavily on John's spiritual awakening and Gabriel's religious hypocrisy. This novel relies on Christianity for its structure and plot, but it is controversial whether the novel wholly adheres to Christian ideology. It is rather more accurate to argue that Baldwin uses Christian motifs and evangelical worship both for purposes of content and for exemplifying the struggle between Gabriel and John. Symbolically Gabriel and John are depicted as representing an ancient problematic relationship between father and son that is applicable to description of the racial discrimination were synchronous with writing the novel; with America being the father and African-Americans as John. This is made explicit in the references to Noah and Ham in Part Three. Gabriel and Elizabeth more fully and in a more abstract sense this technique insists that identities are shaped by history.

The linearity of the narrative is, therefore, always under threat of being interrupted by memories from the past and this indicates that the past can never be fully forgotten. Actions taken in the past haunt the present lives of the older generation. This style enables the reader to understand the background of the characters only gradually and also has the effect of undermining the objectivity of each life presented to the reader. It is made clear, then, that perspectives are subjective and are constructed by personal and national histories. This work is also a Bildungsroman that traces John's development. His thoughts, perspectives and actions are pivotal to the content of Part One and Part Three and he is an adolescent who feels detached from his family and his step-father in particular. Richard negates God and white rule; his false imprisonment and suicide offer strong indictments against racism, and against living in fear of the Almighty.

Go Tell It on the Mountain is arguably a record of Baldwin's own attempt to come to terms with his inheritance; Go Tell is much more than merely autobiographical. Imbued with an epic sense of history and resonant with elaborate biblical imagery, it is a universal story of initiation, of coming of age, of a young man's struggle to forge an autonomous identity in opposition to surrounding authority figures. John cannot accept his heavenly father because he hates his earthly father who is supposed to be the symbol of Christianity in their family. Baldwin uses the Biblical legend of the curse of Ham to illustrate the guilty and rejected son syndromeThe novel is an ironic indictment of Christianity and about the historical dehumanization of Blacks that was part of the white southern tradition. The novel is not a Christian novel, in the sense that it tries o convince the reader to come to Christ, but is a novel about Christian experience and Christian values.

Go Tell is a distillation of emotion for Baldwin. It represents what he once felt about history, tried to avoid it, escape it like the character Gabriel. The novel is also about how religious development affects the psychology of an individual. Gabriel could never understand who he is

because he did not want to understand who he was. He did not want to understand his present pain for fear of his dark past. His pain was a result of things he had done in his past and was perpetuated by his treatment of it. By striving to be alienated from his past, Gabriel became an unhistorical creature. The novel is a perpetual exposition of struggle and one of them is the character's struggle with his past.Baldwin makes several references to the Holy Bible in Go Tell it on the Mountain, most importantly to the story of Ham, Noah's son who saw his father naked one day. Noah consequently cursed Ham's son Canaan to become the servant of Noah's other sonsThis significance of the novel is probably ascribable to two main reasons. The first one is that it constitutes a criticism of the Biblical justification of slavery and the explication of the supposed inferiority of people of African descent because Ham's sons migrated to Africa. The second reason is that it established the taboo of the nakedness of the patriarchy. Because of this, the story of Ham is referenced often when Baldwin describes John's crisis of faith.

The novel alludes to the story of Moses leading the Jews out of Egypt, and drawing a parallel to that exodus and the need for a similar exodus for African-Americans out of their subservient role in which whites have kept them. The rhythm and language of the story draws heavily on the language of the Bible, particularly of the King James translation.

Notes

1. Stanly Macebuh, James Baldwin: A Critical Study (New York: Third Press, 1973), 30.
2. Sondra O'Neale. "Fathers, Gods, and Religion: Perceptions of Christianity and Ethnic Faith in James Baldwin," Critical essays on James Baldwin, ed. Fred L. Standley and Nancy V. Burt (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1988), 127.
3. Ibid, 131.
4. Ibid, 140.
5. James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time (New York: Dell, 1963), 57-58.
6. James Baldwin, *Go Tell it on the Mountain*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1952), 97 hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.
7. Robert DiYanni, Literature: Reading Fiction, Poetry, and Drama (New York:The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.2007), 433.
8. Emancipation Proclamation: proclamation issued by Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863, during the American Civil War, declaring all "slaves within any State, or designated part of a State ... then ... in rebellion, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free."
9. Shirley Allen, "The Ironic Voice in Baldwin's Go Tell it on the Mountain," James Baldwin: a Critical Evaluation, ed.Therman O'Daniel (Washington, DC: Howard UP , 1977), 30-37.
10. During the first decade of the 20th century, the infestation of Southern cotton crops by insects called boll weevils diminished production and curtailed the need for farm labor. Growing unemployment and increasing racial violence encouraged blacks to leave the South. Soon after, in 1914, World War I broke out in Europe. Although the United States did not enter the war until 1917, its factories supplied the combatants. American industry needed labor, and the war slowed European immigration. In response, Northern manufacturers recruited Southern black workers to fill factory jobs. From 1910 to 1930 between 1.5 million and 2 million African Americans left the South for the industrial cities of the North. By 1930 more than 200,000 blacks had moved to New York, about 180,000 to Chicago, and more than 130,000 to Philadelphia.
11.Michael Fabre, "fathers and Sons in James Baldwin's Go Tell It On The Mountain," James Baldwin: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. By Keneth Kinnamon,(Englewood Cliff: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1974), 132.

12.Clarence Hardy, James Baldwin's God: Sex, Hope, and Crisis in Black Holiness Culture,(Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003), 30.
13.Ibid.
14.Carolyn Sylvander, *James Baldwin*, (New York: Frederick Unger Publishing Co., 1980), 36.
15.Lynn Orilla Scott, *James Baldwin's Later Fiction: Witness to the Journey*, (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2002), 102.
16.Carolyn Sylvander, *James Baldwin*, (1980), 42. ……..

17. Roger Rosenblatt, "*Out of Control*: *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and *Another Country*," *James Baldwin*, ed. by Harold Bloom, (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986), 81.
18. Ibid.
19. Stanley Macebuh, *James Baldwin: A Critical Study*, (New York: The Third Press, 1973), 51.
20. Ibid.
21. Jocelyn Eleanor Whitehead Jackson, "The Problem of Identity in the Essays and Selected Novels of James Baldwin," (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1973), 181.
22. Luke. 1. 1-38 NIV (New International Version).
23. Wikipedia.
24. Baldwin, James. "An Interview with James Baldwin." Conversations with James Baldwin. Eds. Fred L. Standley and Louis H. Pratt. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1989.
25. James Baldwin, Notes of a Native Son (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), 88.
26. Craig Werner. "The Economic Evolution of James Baldwin." Critical Essays on James Baldwin. Eds. Fred L. Standley and Nancy V. Burt. Boston: G .K. Hall and Co., 1988. 78-93.
27. Trudier Harris, *Black Women in the Fiction of James Baldwin* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 12.
28. Ibid, 27.
29. Keith Clark. Black Manhood in James Baldwin, Ernest J. Gaines, and August Wilson (Chicago: U of Illinois, 2002), 143.
30. Ibid, 144.
31. Ibid, 142.

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