

ALIENATION IN THE NOVEL *ANOTHER COUNTRY*

Written by **Premnath Y* & Udhayakumar M****

* Assistant Professor in English, Dwaraka Doss Goverdhan Doss Vaishnav College, Chennai,
India

** Assistant Professor in English, Karpagam Academy of Higher Education, Coimbatore,
India

ABSTRACT

Another Country is a sprawling book that brought together Baldwin's concerns with race and sex, it has daring themes like black race, interracial sex, homosexuality, white guilt, and urban malice. It crosses an ocean, color lines, and sex lines. *Another Country's* main characters are seen as marginalized exile, alienated and despaired and it shows the novel's move towards otherness that characters temporarily inhabit. It is significant that characters are treated as outcasts. The present paper uncovers the role of alienation in the lives of characters.

Key words: Dystopia, alienation, gender identity, catastrophe, oppression.

Another Country was published in 1962 and it is Baldwin's third novel. It is a big novel and turned out to be a bestseller in the most conventional sense. It is a sprawling book that brought together Baldwin's concerns with race and sex, it has daring themes like black race, interracial sex, homosexuality, white guilt, and urban malice. It crosses an ocean, color lines, and sex lines. It sprawls over more than four hundred pages, yet it is impressively tight, much of the unity of the novel is achieved through the interactions of the various characters, the intersecting lines of contact, the points at which so many of the lives touch one another.

Novel's title could be explained through a single line "Love is the country he knew nothing about" (291 AC) which tells that the novel craves for a country which pours forth the love which is inaccessible for the people in the novel and the line foregrounds the novel's main

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concerned theme that of love. This novel is full of darkness and gloom, and it is also full of pessimism and claustrophobia. The novel is divided into three books: "Easy Rider", "Any Day Now" and "Toward Bethlehem".

The real world of Baldwin's novel is a kind of dystopia, the world of which New York is a microcosm, is presented, with sufficient and imaginative intensity. He selected New York city as his setting because it is the metonymy for the entire multi-cultural and multi-ethnic America. Baldwin is often at his best when describing the squalor of Harlem, the desperate and suicidal conviviality of the village, and his evocation of the impersonality of the city at night is a moving one. He has painted a Dantesque picture of New York—the heat, the starch, the gross inhumanity. And he sees New York as the symbol of both contemporary American civilization and of American barbarianism.

Baldwin's descriptions of New York contain striking images of malice, scenes and gestures which expose the moral texture of contemporary urban life. The surface of his prose reflects the act of modernism, the sense of loneliness of the city. Harnessed commuters and jostled pedestrians seem to yearn for closer ties. Visitors of a village bar clutch their drinks with a gesture of buried sense of despair. The whirl of cash registers and blatant glare of neon signs proclaim the harsh ascendancy of the spirit of materialism. The tense of subway crowds and the police are the symbolic of a sense of latent violence. The furtive scribbling on lavatory walls provides a chilling commentary, in their mixture of raw lust and ethnic hate on the scope and depth of a civilization.

Another Country is indeed a monument work to the inarticulate desires of its characters. It is a novel which is purely a character development. It conveys the frantic nature of their search for answers, and the inadequacy of the questions which they ask of themselves, of each other and of life and ultimately their search for themselves. Each character is introduced in juxtaposition with another character to stress their faults. The central characters in *Another Country* are undoubtedly Rufus Scott and Eric Jones. It will be highly rewarding to explore their similarities as Baldwin has shown. Rufus dominates the first part of the book and Eric dominates the second and last part.

Baldwin's use of two dominant artist-heroes in *Another Country* lends itself to an examination of the impact of race and sexuality on the maturation process of the artist-figure. Despite the variable of race, both Rufus Scott and Eric Jones must undergo a revelatory experience in order to be reborn as artists. Rufus' memories lead reader to Eric and Eric's memories enable reader to understand Rufus. Rufus is black, Northern and Urban. Eric is white and he belongs to Southern part and small town. Rufus is a talented and personable musician and Eric is an actor. While Rufus' life ends in suicide, Eric's life ends in love and success. These superficial facts may make one assume Rufus' failure to be a function of his race and Eric's success to be a function of his. Baldwin seems to suggest through these two characters that while pain and suffering are inevitable, acceptance of pain is a necessity.

The most arresting character that Baldwin has created is Rufus Scott who remains unforgettable largely because of the depth of his literal and figurative fall. The place of Rufus in *Another Country* is the figure of the crypt. The text's syntactical reenactments of Rufus's death are central, and it holds a traumatic place in the characters and also in the narrative. For the characters, Rufus seems melancholically undead; he returns over and over to haunt them, asserting his presence through the reenactments that commemorate him.

Ida Scott, sister to Rufus is the personification of Baldwin's rage and his mouth piece. This personified rage in conjunction with Rufus' life and suicide, provides Baldwin with a useful instrument for achieving the self-confrontation of other characters in the novel. Every phrase and censure she makes throughout the novel exposes Baldwin's belief on race relations of that time in America. In one occasion Ida spits her anger and rage for whites as "I know that I am not about to be bugged by any more white jokers who cant't still figure out whether I'm human or not. If they don't know, baby, sad on them, and I hope they drop dead slowly, in great pain." (AC 275). Few can read *Another Country* and fail to be affected by the oppressive intensity of the fury of this novel by Ida's anger, or by the homicidal passions of Vivaldo's gigantic adversary in the red districts of Harlem.

The function of anger in *Another Country* is a curious one. Baldwin's use of anger as a vehicle of meaning of the two most angry characters in the novel, Rufus and Ida, are in fact

least sympathetic. Baldwin's portrait of Ida, for example, leans heavily on the exotic, on the stereotype of primitive tribal. Negroes are depicted as more alive, more colorful, more spontaneous, better dancers and above all better lovers than the whites depicted as city dwelling flamboyants. Steve Ellis looks down upon Blacks and he is quiet happy to exploit to fulfill his desires. Richard is a self absorbent racist, who believes that he is an intellectual and a good writer. His character is cold, calculating and unfeeling. Leona is a fragile female figure who is powerless and she becomes insane.

The suicide of the main character at the end of the first chapter disturbs the flow of the novel, an important jarring from which it spends the remaining three hundred and fifty pages trying to recover. This early event in the novel has evoked sharp criticisms from all camps. Rufus's suicide is simply one link in a long chain of untimely tragedies that defined black life during the Jim Crow era. Eldridge Cleaver calls Rufus's suicide an "indulgence in the white man's pastime" and a manifestation of Baldwin's own "racial death wish." (165). Others have voiced their disapproval. Most commonly, as a reflection of the way in which the issue of suicide is dealt with in real life, critics have chosen to gloss over the implications of Rufus's death and focus on the rest of the novel. One piece that deals with Rufus's suicide in some depth is "Falling in Public: Larsen's *Passing*, McCarthy's *The Group*, and Baldwin's *Another Country*" by Katy Ryan. In it, she articulates the difficulty in reading and mourning suicide for it "unsettles fundamental assumptions, most emphatically the assumption that life, however painful, is worth living. More precisely than any other act, it illustrates the tensions between freedom and determinism, between being an agent and being a victim." (166).

Through his suicide, Rufus's body comes to represent the very question that torments those left behind. Rufus remains the central figure of novel taking on certain "undeadness" within the relationships between the rest of the characters. One of the important issues of the novel is that of betrayal. Characters in the novel like Vivaldo, Cass and Ida believe that they betrayed Rufus. Vivaldo is experiencing the pangs of betrayal and wants to do something in repentance hence he falls in love with Rufus' sister Ida. Vivaldo is a well-intentioned young man, kind, considerate and determined to be friendly with Rufus. But in the story it appears

that Vivaldo is inhibited because of Rufus' color. After Rufus' death readers find Vivaldo in remorse:

Being the son of impoverished Italian immigrants, Vivaldo has to live through almost as much suffering as Rufus. But Vivaldo is white and Rufus is black. In a racist culture, this is the most poignant reality. Vivaldo's failure to perceive the complex anatomy of Rufus' pain, leads to his betrayal of Rufus. Certainly Vivaldo is not capricious, rather he feels happy that he has done everything to alleviate the sufferings of Rufus on the day of his death. Vivaldo feels that he has done everything for a friend in need. He has fed him, bought him drinks and even offered a woman to be taken home. After Rufus' tragedy the remorse that Vivaldo feels, is in proportion to his exuberance on the day of Rufus' death.

Baldwin's major characters are suffering from a most profound isolation, alienation and estrangement. This becomes too heavy to bear, and they cry out in agony, as they search for the redeeming power of love. Rufus struggles amidst feeling of frustration and hostility, waging what he senses to be a losing battle with the establishment for survival. Throughout his novels Baldwin presents major and minor characters who struggle to overcome their profound sense of isolation in a hostile culture and to establish sufficient pride in themselves and their achievements to combat the seemingly relentless threat of despair.

In an episode Rufus accompanies Vivaldo to a pub; though he is surrounded by a crowd there, he feels isolated from the rest of the world, "He felt as removed from them" (AC 89) and "Then something began to awaken in him, something new; it increased his distance; it increased his pain." (AC 90). When his sense of isolation becomes unbearable he leaves Vivaldo, reaches the bridge from where he jumps into the river to put an end to his complete isolation, pain, suffering and anger. Vivaldo's estrangement is pictured as "He felt totally estranged from the city in which he had been born" (AC 67). Baldwin's approach to the issue of despair is rooted in his own experience of American racism. Despair is, after all, a function of perceived or real powerlessness- and of fear; and Baldwin equates despair with death even as he equates "trying" with life.

Another Country's main characters are seen as marginalized exile, alienated and despaired and it shows the novel's move towards otherness that characters temporarily inhabit. It is significant that characters are treated as outcasts; Rufus and Ida are looked down upon because they are Negroes. Eric, because he is a homosexual, Cass, because of her husband's false values, and Vivaldo, because of his failure in self-fulfillment, except by way of alternation. The only characters who are willing to exist within the framework of contemporary society are, Richard Silenski, who welcomes a cheap success, and a cynical and empty impresario named Ellis. Cass chose to marry the son of a Polish carpenter and has been condemned to live in social exile from her aristocratic New England family. Richard has exchanged his Polish ancestry for the dubious fame and recognition which he achieves as a writer.

Rufus is estranged from his family because of his licentious life style and his white mistress, Leona. Ida earns the contempt of her parents because she is involved with a white partner. Vivaldo's isolation from his alcoholic father and his relationship with Ida makes him the black sheep of the family. Eric has been banished for his youthful illicit intimacies with his black Alabama friend LeRoy. Yves has long since despises his mother for the reason that she enjoyed bargaining her favours with German soldiers.

Baldwin tells about the sense of banishment in one's own mother country as "Whoever, in New York, attempted to cling to this right, lived in New York in exile – in exile from the life around him." (311 AC) Baldwin's theme in the novel concerns how the matrix for understanding between people of different races fails when ideas about 'Others' are accompanied by a certainty about what it means to know them. As Rufus and Leona continue their walk through the park, anxiety bubbles beneath their light banter, and a mechanic assemblage diagrams a territory where racial diversity is marked by generalized attitudes that make communication between them impossible. Thus, they are manifestations of Sartre's assertion about the Self's perplexing inability to know Others. The existential philosopher writes, "The Other's look makes me be beyond my being in this world and puts me in the midst of the world which is at once this world and beyond this world" (320). Consequently, the couple

is both immersed in and displaced by binary thinking that dominates the racial categories they have internalized.

The kernel for the larger narrative, the story of Ida's unique struggles illuminates the paradoxical, yet interconnected themes of affiliation and estrangement that *Another Country* presents. Moreover, her role as Rufus's ideal mourner makes her the primary catalyst of the novel's journey towards repairing the ruptures symbolized in his death. As the mysterious center of the text, she is always seen from the outside and thus often subsumed by others' affective projections and desires. The dislocation assumed within the cast of strangers tied together by Rufus's life and death is the space that *Another Country* inhabits, for the title does not simply denote the invocation of a newly integrated nation, but the imaginative and wearisome world created between loving subjects. From this fraught space of estrangement, affiliation emerges as an unexpected framework for the relational work of repair.

Alienation is the basic form of rootlessness. The term 'alienation' has its simple meaning—a condition of being estranged from someone or something—the word 'alienation' implies an intense separation first from objects in a world, second from other people, third from ideas about the world held by other people. It might be said that the synonym of alienation is separation, while the precise antonym of the word is integration. Alienation is the major theme of human condition in the contemporary epoch. The theme of alienation has been variously dealt in modern literature. The alienated protagonist is the recurrent figure in much of twentieth century American fiction.

Alienation is the result of loss of identity and it is the feeling of emptiness within. The hollowness that man feels within the depths of his soul is existentialistic by nature, and this has to be countered to bring the individual to the mainstream of life, to rescue him from perennial isolation. Most existentialist thinkers conform to the theory that life as a whole is futile and one's comprehension of life can never be absolutely soothing. Thus, alienation is cogent to existence as an inherent solipsism enshrouds the subconscious even while the mind is consciously attempting to reach out to other living beings to make life meaningful. Alienation, it should be noted emerges as natural consequences of the existential predicament both in

intrinsic and extrinsic terms. Fromm views self-alienation is the absence of self-awareness or a complete loss of it. He considers self-alienation is pertaining to feelings. He writes in his book *Sane Society* that: “the meaning of alienation is that process of feeling in which anyone feels alienation from self” (10).

An alienated man becomes alienated from society, because the identity of self-alienation and the situation of the lack of or loss of self-awareness alienate him from society. In alienation, individual self is stunted, warped or choked, he is said to be in a condition of alienation from himself or alienated from self. Sociologists see loneliness as a kind of alienation, which is found in the absence of intimacy with others. Loneliness is the loss of significant relation with others and it is the lack or loss of this relation with others that generates a source of alienation.

There are arresting lines in the novel about Rufus' suffering from alienation in the midst of human indifference. ”He was so tired, he had fallen so low.....he was broke. And he had no where to go” (AC 13) and “he began to walk, very slowly now, away from the music, with his hands in his pocket and his head down. He no longer felt the cold.”(AC 16), his departure from the music forecasts the departure of his soul from his body, because Rufus was once a successful musician. Music is his elixir and now he became unfamiliar with the music. Rufus tells Vivaldo “I don’t need no company. I done had enough company to last me the rest of my life” (AC 74).

Rufus’s isolation marks his heterogeneity — his race, his sexuality, and his class — alienates Rufus from a world that spreads difference even while it produces. Rufus Scott commits suicide because of his deep-seated loneliness and desperation. Vivaldo’s loneliness is described as “His own loneliness, magnified so many million times made the night air colder. He remembered to what excess, into what traps and nightmares, his loneliness had driven him”(AC 67) and when he was in bed with Ida, he once again feels alone “She was in his bed but she was far from him; she was with him and yet she was not with him” (AC 172). The cross of alienation becomes too heavy for the people to bear and they cry out in agony as they search for the redeeming power of love.

On the narrative level, the novel is infused with descriptions of the cultural inscription of racism. Historically, blacks were brutally killed and immorally dehumanized by whites. Whiteness was the noose which garnered the neck of black identity, seeking to steal the last breath of hope for a suffocating race. The novel *Another Country* assumes significance as Baldwin dramatizes the moral effects of racism and shows the existential predicament of a single individual. Here lies the strength of the novel as Rufus predicament can be that of a citizen of the 20th century living in a soulless city. One of the fundamental intentions of the novel might be to dramatize the racial problem. However, the characters lack this insight. Baldwin elucidates the effects of stereotype on individual identity through the violence and hatred of Whites and through the integration of these stereotypes into individual identity.

The depiction of racial ethnicity in *Another Country* relies heavily on Baldwin's experiences growing up in Harlem, where he observed the injustices that were routinely inflicted on Blacks by Whites. Baldwin translates these observations into a sentiment of helplessness inherent in the Blacks portrayed in the novel. In his work, Baldwin generally presents a sympathetic portrayal of his black characters. He does not, however, reveal much information about their behaviour nor provide an understanding of the complexities of their motivations.

For Baldwin, stereotypes become a potent force in the oppression of Blacks in America. *Another Country* exposes the racial stereotypes. The representation of black men as the polluters of the white race has its historical origin in the first encounters of Whites with Blacks during the slave trade. Blacks were stereotyped as sexual animals, capable of the most amazing feats of libidinal stamina *Another Country* discloses this stereotypes as rooted in the reality of racism in America as intertwined with gender, sexuality, and class in ways that constrain and resist questioning, forcing readers to recognize the harsh consequences of categorical oppression that even intensive examination might not alleviate. Baldwin explores the relationship between racial prejudice and sexuality while exposing the childish sexual rivalry among men.

This novel illustrates the effects of oppression on black identity through Baldwin's portrayal of the ethnic closet, black stereotypes, and an affirmative black consciousness. The ethnic closet which cannot conceal the racial trait of skin colour for Rufus and Ida becomes a poor defense against the oppressive forces of white dominance. Black identity is rooted in the oppression experienced in American society. Baldwin promotes the acceptance of this reality through his character Ida and describes the overwhelming effects of oppression through her brother Rufus. Ida's prime motivation for her assimilation into white culture is to take revenge against white people for destroying her brother. Ford observes,

It is a bitter recital of mistreatment, humiliation, and rejection of the Negro by white America. And it is not a plea for mercy. It is rather a warning to the white man of the explosive power of revenge that lies below the surface of the Negro's exterior passivity. It is an explanation of the devious ways in which the wronged blacks can seek sardonic satisfaction-(Ford 124).

Desire is an innate inclination to persevere in beings that is expressed through a body's capacity for being affected in two ways, by actions of the body undertaken James Baldwin's *Another Country* is affected by the passions or the feelings appearing to the minds of the characters. This is evident in the exposition of *Another Country* that begins with an extension into the intradiegetic level of a Byronic figure.

Rufus Scott, the moody, tormented jazz drummer, stumbles from a movie theater into the street at Times Square. The third-person narration draws attention to the effects of this inequity on Rufus's body and mind. He is exhausted, hungry, and broke. With nowhere to go, he walks as "one of the fallen" among "boys and girls drinking coffee at the drugstore counters who were held back from his condition by barriers as perishable as their dwindling cigarettes" (AC10). While Rufus walks the late-night streets of Greenwich Village, he metamorphoses as "a sudden, cold, familiar sickness filled him" (AC11), and a memory of his former lover, Leona, triggers a stream of consciousness that complicates the plot. This rupture in the narrative speeds up the pace of the telling in a line of flight that collapses distinctions between mind, body, space, and time to form a new multiplicity. This shift is one that signals a departure from

objective realism, pollinates the narrative with a trope that disrupts the linear momentum of the story.

There are revelations in *Another Country*, most of them dramatized through discoveries of the leading characters. Rufus learns that Leona and Vivaldo love him unselfishly despite of their color. There is a revelation for Cass and Vivaldo in their discovery of the horrific conditions under which Blacks have to live. Vivaldo had grown up on the fringe of Harlem and Cass visits black ghetto to attend Rufus funeral. Ida also discovers that white people like Vivaldo and Cass can be her friends. Throughout the novel, the revelation that visits upon the characters most often is the realization that their socially constructed identities, i.e. gay/straight, black/white, male/female, wealthy/poor fail to contain their desires and experiences.

Notions about sexual identity and racial identity are mutually exclusive categories has led to the assumption that Baldwin's novels in which (homo)sexuality is a theme threaten to efface his more "authentic" racial concerns contained in his essays. The literary criticism of *Another Country*, more than any of his other novels –in portraying both black and white characters as well as "gay" and "straight" characters – contains the most blatant suggestions that Baldwin's racial and sexual alliances are in conflict. This knowledge is nearly taken for granted given the fact that the majority of the characters enact deviant expressions of desire. However, unlike what some critics have argued *Another Country* does not stop there and claim that sexual deviancy contains the path to transcendence. For if read honestly, it is clear that sexual relationships, even love, are not enough to lift the shroud of ignorance or to dispel the destructive power of knowledge that form along lines of race, gender, sexuality and class. As Feldman writes "The very fact that *Another Country* focuses more on love's inability to transcend social barriers for the only black male character suggests that Baldwin in no way regarded love, and its expression through sexuality, to be seen as a magical elixir capable of overcoming the psychological and social damage from oppressive social structures."(89).

In *Another Country*, Baldwin depicts how love too often is seized as a means of self-avoidance, as a means of distancing oneself from one's past and one's responsibility to others.

In the final scenes of the novel, the movement of the characters from innocence to experience becomes evident. Vivaldo, having failed both Ida and Rufus, gains the courage to involve himself in the lives of others. As a result he is able to put aside his fantasies about Ida's life, accept her confession of infidelity, and honour the tender feelings for her. Cass discovers that the image of Richard which she has fashioned is a false one. She begins to realize, finally, that she has loved her husband as a child, and that her true personality has been sublimated to Richard's needs. Eric matures to the extent that he begins to understand that frustration and anguish are vital components of human nature. It is this awareness that gives him the strength to rise and achieve an acceptance of his bisexuality.

All of the characters are moving "Towards Bethlehem" as the title of Book Three suggests characters' wish for a journey from the world of pain and anguish toward a world of happiness and fulfillment in love. Having rejected traditional barriers of family, race, country, religion and sex, they are progressing towards a discovery of their own 'moral centers' which ultimately hold the promise of a new and total understanding of themselves.

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