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Religious influences in James Baldwin's Giovanni's Room

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the religious dimension of James Baldwin's Giovanni's Room, a largely overlooked area in Baldwin studies. While criticism has predominantly focused on sociopolitical, racial, and queer perspectives, little attention has been given to the theological implications of Baldwin's fiction. Drawing on biblical texts, Thomist theology, and Baldwin's Pentecostal background, this essay argues that the novel discreetly incorporates Catholic elements that stand in contrast to Protestant traditions. In particular, the confessional tone of the narrative is interpreted through the lens of Catholic sacramental practices, especially penitence, which reveals a spiritual layer that has often gone unnoticed in critical discourse. By highlighting these features, the article contributes to ongoing debates on Baldwin by underscoring religion as a significant, though neglected, category of analysis in Western literature and culture.

KEYWORDS: Baldwin, Christianity, literature.

Influencias religiosas en La habitación de Giovanni de James Baldwin

RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza la dimensión religiosa de Giovanni's Room de James Baldwin, un aspecto que ha sido desatendido en los estudios sobre el autor, ya que la crítica se ha centrado principalmente en las perspectivas sociopolíticas, raciales y queer. A partir de textos bíblicos, la teología tomista y el trasfondo pentecostal del autor, este estudio sostiene que la novela incorpora sutilmente elementos propios de la tradición católica que contrastan con los fundamentos del protestantismo. En particular, se interpreta el tono confesional de la narración a la luz de las prácticas sacramentales católicas, concretamente la penitencia, lo que revela una capa espiritual en la estructura narrativa que con frecuencia ha pasado inadvertida en la crítica literaria. De este modo, el artículo contribuye al debate actual sobre Baldwin al destacar la religión como una categoría relevante, aunque poco explorada, para el análisis de la literatura y la cultura occidentales.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Baldwin, cristianismo, literatura.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Due to the author's sexual orientation and race, researchers have traditionally focused on themes about either racial or sexual discrimination (Armengol's 2012 investigation is particularly noteworthy). Nevertheless, few papers have been written concentrating on Baldwin's system of beliefs (that of his personal religious postures). Lynch was the first author to mention how little information there is about this subject and the necessity of further research on this issue (284). Later, other authors included in this essay have also paid attention to the religious aspect in Baldwin's works (Field, 2008; Hills, 2022). Thus, the main purpose is to offer a profound account of these matters, contributing to a new perspective that enriches the studies about the novel and can provide a correct cultural background to explain the book.

Thus, this study attempts to analyse the theological bases that structure the novel establishing three main objectives.

First, the aim is to describe the treatment of homosexuality in Christianity. To do so, this paper takes into consideration the *Bible* and the *Summa Theologiae* by Saint Thomas Aquinas and his criticism towards the relevance of personal will in contrast to the importance divine grace plays in salvation (which is known as "Pelagianism", a concept that will be elaborated on later).

Second, to assess the importance of the role played by the Pentecostal religion in Baldwin, as this is the Protestant denomination in which the author was raised. In his essays, Baldwin acknowledges the constant use of religious vocabulary and the inability to abandon this terminology regardless of his detachment from any institutionalised religion and the way he creates his own system of beliefs. Consequently, it is worth noting that this stems from his early contact with religion as a child and teenager.

Third, to analyse Baldwin's subtle adherence to traditionally Catholic ideas in this novel by means of a confessional structure, the condemnation of Neo-Pelagian postures, the need for God's mercy to obtain salvation and the Virgin Mary's intercession, which are differential characteristics of this church in relation to main Reformed denominations. This would open a whole new critical perspective on Baldwin's works as research has conventionally concentrated on Protestantism when studying his literature.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section is divided into sociopolitical, where racial and sexual issues are considered, and religious works focusing on the Bible and Baldwin's personal theology.

2.1. Blackness and queerness as factors of discrimination

First, Bercuci inserts the novel within the category of "white-life novels", where the action is performed by white characters despite being written by Black authors (192). Moreover, the author highlights the use of metaphoric language with the use of the colours white and black to represent heteronormativity and sexual ambiguity, respectively (where desired behaviour is associated with the first colour while reprehensible actions belong to the second one). Another key aspect is the appearance of the room itself, which is claimed to be a metaphor for prison, as the protagonist lives trapped in his own lie of being heterosexual (203).

Considering Armengol's article, he supports the critique to the relations of powers in the novel and claims that it was written at a time when homosexuals and communists were considered as a threat to the American identity (671). His analysis also points at the dichotomy white against black, associating moral connotations such as "sin" with blackness whilst whiteness is considered as "pure" and "innocent". Then, sexuality and morality are interconnected. There is a depiction of how, historically, white women have been seen as symbols of purity (as well as mere objects to preserve white race by marriage and, finally, reproduction) in opposition to Black races, who have been the object of sexual desire on white privileged men's part in order not to feel guilt, so a process of misogynistic objectification occurs (676). This mixture of sexuality and race is found in Giovanni, who is given all the stereotypes attributed to Southern Italians (considered legally as Black during the first decades of the 20th century in the United States) and is used as a sexual object on David's part (678). The reason for this behaviour is said to be an internalised way of homophobia due to his American background, which leads him to identify manhood with heterosexuality and a feature to be proud of (681). This all results in an authentic fear of homosexuals and any kind of what he considers to be gay acts (690).

Additionally, Kent relates homophobia to fear of a weak reproductive drive (79). Then, she agrees with Armengol in seeing heterosexual marriage as a means, not as a way of love or even a sacrament, but as the traditional form of creating future citizens. On the contrary, the result for those who do not respect this convention is social ostracism. Such an idea leads her to establish a relation of social selflessness, a care for the community, who oppresses

individual desire for the general well-being (85). Kent also considers that it is the reason why David's self-control is weakened in Paris, as American restraint is far away and he feels his own determination can change his life, dream that finally leads him to disappointment (87). This vision is quite interesting regarding this analysis as far as Pelagianism is concerned due to its emphasis on individual means to obtain redemption, which will be studied later. Wesling goes even further and states this ideology has historical roots in the United States identity (328). She studies how the heteropatriarchal order is linked to the State itself, then assuring protection for those citizens who respect the heterosexual enforced system, while abandoning those who do not respect the imposition. This is the fear that prevents David from embracing who he really is (332). Grandt also remarks that frustrated act of will, although he rejects David's behaviour by categorising him as a treacherous character and even "repulsive" due to his lack of consideration as well as constant manipulation concerning other characters (281).

The aforementioned social ostracism is central in Pearl's paper. The author reflects on the delusional nature of believing humans are in complete control of their own lives (65). The fear of social punishment takes the form of embarrassment and impedes action (71). That is why the protagonist despises other homosexuals that he encounters in the novel. It is by projecting his own sexual desire in others that he believes to be in control of the situation, considering how those people are not respected according to male standards because there is a connection between heterosexuality and masculinity, while homosexuality is misogynistically related to womanhood (67). This vision is also shared by Thomas, who relates effeminacy with cowardice (612). Continuing with Pearl, she examines the metaphor of the closet (represented in the novel by the appearance of the "room" ever since the title). It is there that sexual fantasies can take place and be fulfilled. Nevertheless, the restriction is patent, and the clear boundary of the private space shows the inability to be made public. Consequently, the problem is not to be gay (it can be exercised privately) but to be publicly gay as that man will be automatically seen as effeminate (77).

As can be seen, the American restrictive morals prevent citizens from fulfilling their personal expectations. As a result, Roszak claims that it is the reason why an Italian character that serves as a relief is employed (84). It has already been described how all the stereotypes assigned to Italians are given to Giovanni. Traditionally, they have been regarded as sensual and violent, which is related to heteronormativity. These are characteristics that Giovanni possesses. Thus, Baldwin reduces that country to mere clichés,

pointing out the lack of civility and the presence of class discrimination when stating that Giovanni comes from the poorer South (94). This relation of power and racial privilege is studied by Abur-Rahman, who observes how the fact that Giovanni is sexually exploited by the so-called "white characters" is the consequence of economic discrimination and vulnerability (484). Scaccia delves into these stereotypes to conclude that the process of blackening comes from the sexualisation of Africans. It is said that depending on which racial category the State assigned individuals to, they would benefit from a series of privileges or would be prevented from them (88). The civilisation reserved for the few resulted in the invention of Black characters in literature to explore the possibilities of crossing the boundaries of white citizenship so a clear animalisation and even reification of Black people was present (92). Thus, the "Negro" is not a faithful representation of the race, but a mere literary role that functions as a relief of the white impotence (99). Then, Giovanni is a tool to address taboo themes at the time such as same-gender attraction (104).

The last article concerning the materialist perspective gives a more benevolent view of David's attitude. DeGout admits David's inability to maintain a durable love relationship as he cannot embrace his true self, and this is the authentic plot of the novel (428). The outcome is a prison-like lifestyle where David is enchained by his own desires (432). However, he describes the two main characters as innocent lovers whose social circumstances prevent them from self-realisation (426).

Considering the above, it is necessary to clarify the main aspects that have been discussed so far about the sociopolitical analyses. David is mostly described as a person who lies to himself by giving excessive importance to his determination (Neo-Pelagian perspective). Moreover, his internalised homophobia is the product of society's norms and conventions, where whiteness is related to power and purity in a metaphoric way. The opposite is Blackness, which has negative moral connotations (sinful, dirty, and effeminate as well as coward in a misogynistic way) and is related to the Black race, which is treated as inferior economically and morally, serving as a catharsis for the most carnal desires experienced by white people.

2.2. Religious background

2.2.1. Biblical influence in sexual discrimination

For a start, all allusions to homosexuality in the Holy Scriptures condemn it as a sinful action that deprives people of God's favour, so they will experience eternal suffering by not entering Heaven. The two oldest norms that prohibit homosexual activity are in the Old

Testament: "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination" and "If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them" (RSV-CE, Lev. 18.22; 20.13 respectively). These texts consider that same-sex encounters are against nature, and the violence present should be noted. It is said that the only way to amend this so-called fault is by means of death, very similar to a kind of martyrdom where the lovers' blood is a purificator.

The roots of this homophobic vision are found in the first book of the *Bible* as follows: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.'" (Gen. 1.27-28). To continue with this supposed paradise, He orders them to have offspring, and it can only be possible biologically by the sexual encounter of a man and a woman. Therefore, the condemnation of same-sex encounters, as it can be noticed, comes from the inability to have children and consequently not respecting God's first desire to humanity, so a utilitarian vision can be inferred here. As a result, the sexual encounter is only a means, not a goal (the fact that carnal desire is seen as a purpose would not respect God's desire, either it is heterosexual or homosexual).

In the New Testament, Saint Paul states that: "men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error" (Rom. 1.27). In this case, earthly death is not considered as important, not because of the immoral connotations murder has as a crime against human dignity, but rather because the "due penalty" that is mentioned refers to eternal condemnation in Hell, which in Christianity is regarded as the authentic "death", i.e., the impossibility of remaining in God's company forever. He insists on this aspect in his later letters. For instance, the apostle warns the Corinthians by asking them: "Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God." (1Cor. 6.9-10).

Last, another authorised text of the Church, traditionally attributed to Saint Jude Thaddeus, also supports Saint Paul's hypothesis in his letter: "just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise acted immorally and indulged in unnatural lust, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire." (Jude 7-8). He exemplifies how God had already punished humanity for their immorality and carnal desire in the cases of Sodom and Gomorrah, which function as cautionary tales that were well-known back then for a Jewish audience.

Thus, homosexuality is regarded as an explicit and voluntary refusal to divine will (which is to say, augmentation of humanity by means of birth, so that sexual relations have not the purpose of pleasure, but of reproduction) as well as one of the gravest sins, whose consequence is eternal separation from God and subsequent unbearable disgrace.

2.2.2. Baldwin's personal theological system

Field points at how little attention this aspect has had in literary research (437). He also mentions that Baldwin was raised in Pentecostalism as a child preacher but in his adulthood, he refused any religious institution and underwent a process of supposed secularisation, which always had a spiritual preoccupation and development (438). The author argues the marginal status of the Pentecostal movement due to their belief in glossolalia, divine signs (such as instantaneous healing, which were considered heretic by traditional denominations) and individual experience of God instead of the importance given by more clerical groups to the figure of the priest) influenced Baldwin's independent attitude towards institutionalised religion, which destroys individuality (446). On the contrary, Baldwin seems to create his own interpretation of Christianity, where salvation can be attained by one's own means without authority figures, only by having direct contact with the divine and reciprocating God's love (447). This can only be achieved if sharing pain with loved ones (450). The conception of physicality is fundamental because it stands against puritan prejudices that are based on shame and regret. Thus, sex has as redemptive power when done by love and not to obtain merely pleasure, which obtains a spiritual nature and purity towards the Holy Trinity (452). As Hills claims, this vision was not shared by mainstream either white or Black churches, who fostered disunion and a submissive attitude towards social injustices (2).

Lynch also underscores the critical foundations of Baldwin's personal theology, in opposition to a Christian world that had corrupted the original message (285). Baldwin was disappointed about the fact that the idea of love had disappeared from established churches, while only promoting oppression. Hills explicitly refers to the fundamentalist Black church attended by Baldwin and how sexuality was a taboo (4). Following with Lynch, he notices how Baldwin uses blasphemy in his fiction to criticise that tyrannical vision of God (289). That is the reason he considers Christ as the model for morality, whose example of sacrifice must be imitated in everyday life. Moreover, Lynch coincides with Field in the redemption brought by sexual encounters where respect for the other is the rule (292). Consequently, a combination of the eternal and worldly happiness is present, with attention to the individual

action as it is the only way to be saved (294). Last, the redemptive potential of suffering is particularly important, especially when it is experienced for the neighbour's well-being (296). As Hills proves, Black religious fundamentalism was not in favour of such an open-minded vision, but encourage a self-restricted practice focused on a conservative morality (3).

As it has been proven, Baldwin seems to have created an autonomous theology based on the ideals of love and respect. His past membership to Pentecostalism, which was seen as marginal, served him as a base for his independent views and direct contact with God, without external mediation. Moreover, social activism is patent concerning racial status and sexual orientation, which is defended in his vision against most widespread religions that are based on the biblical references previously mentioned to condemn these actions. Individual will is central in his theological system and that is why this directly confronts with Saint Thomas Aquinas's refusal of Pelagianism, which states that in order to be saved one's own means are sufficient, which is heretical because grace is not taken into account and then God's influence is not important either (276).

Having said that, attention will be paid to Baldwin's own essays and their references to religion. In "The Male Prison", he relates Protestantism to trauma due to sexual orientation because religion forces believers to suppress what is against the divine law (132). As a matter of fact, religious prejudices alienate men, and the consequence is the inability to lead a free life as repression is always present (134). In addition, self-deprecation results in the incapacity to maintain authentic relationships with one's fellows, which leads to unhappiness and degrades human behaviour by uncontrolled sexual desire that augments increasingly despite human effort to repress it (136). The suppression of inner desires and feelings is an unnatural action that only tries to obey social conventions. However, the consequences are fatal for human beings as it reduces one's personality to a mere obedient servant in an impersonal structure that uses religion to spread sentiments of guilt and hatred. Focusing on "Preservation of Innocence", he argues that the origin of this suffering is found in social conventions, which confront nature and its impulses by subduing human desires (594). Last, it is interesting that he mentions the Garden of Eden as an example of the original nature of sexuality, where sexual orientations did not exist (596). Then, it can be noticed the irony when he uses one of the traditional sources that defends heterosexuality as an argument in favour of orientations against heteronormativity. For Baldwin, the Garden of Eden would be a paradise but not in a religious sense, but in a social

one. Then, it would be a state of liberation where the possibility of authentic, unprejudiced love could take place regardless of social punishment imposed by the powers that be.

Referring to the most recent warnings against Neo-Pelagianism, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith should be noted. In their letter, it is said that uncontrolled individualism in society has made people believe their own will and personal effort are the main tools to succeed in any purpose (1). Moreover, they warn against the existence of excessive individual relation with God, which results in forgetting the objective of the Incarnation, which involves sharing the message of universal sainthood. This form of Neo-Pelagianism creates selfish individuals that believe in their own personal strength as only way to obtain salvation, so God the Father is marginalised by not being considered as supreme judge and Jesus's redemptory sacrifice is not respected accordingly as maximum proof of God's love for humankind. This vision is reinforced by what is called in the letter as Neo-Gnosticism, where subjectivity and moral relativism enable humans to change God's will according to personal interests and historical circumstances, stating that salvation is an interior process, and no institution has anything to do in this world as a representation of God (2).

3. *GIOVANNI'S ROOM* ANALYSIS

This part is devoted to specific passages of the novel where religious themes are considered, either explicitly or in a more veiled manner, so an exercise of inference and interpretation is required.

First, the novel is set in France and narrates the affair between David, an American citizen whose fiancée is in Spain deciding about their future marriage, and Giovanni, a young Italian man who works as a bartender in a gay bar in Paris. The whole novel is permeated by David's lack of decision and refusal to embrace his sexual attraction towards men, despite having had previous homosexual encounters. David mentions that when he met her fiancée, Hella, she was "very elegant, tense, and glittering, surrounded by the light that fills the salon of ocean liner" (4). From the very first pages the appearance of whiteness represented by the presence of light is mentioned. Authors, such as Bercuci, relate this with a symbol of heteronormativity (203). When it comes to Armengol's analysis, he already noted that in the novel there is a connection between sexuality and morality, so that heterosexual behaviour is considered as "pure" whilst homosexuality (which is symbolised as black) is sinful and despicable (676). Besides, he thought that "she would be fun to have fun with"

(4). The last author also pointed out that, traditionally, there has been a reification of women as mere objects of male carnal desire (676). Then, David's interiorised homophobia and reluctance to admit his homosexuality leads him to be convinced that the sexual encounter with a woman (in this case, Hella) is a desirable and morally right action as the appearance of light suggests. The important matter is that the sexual encounter has a heterosexual nature, although he simply considers Hella as an object of desire from which he can benefit and calm his sexual impulses. As a matter of fact, in a tone of confession, he admits it when he says that "I am not sure now, despite everything, that it ever really meant more than that to me. And I don't think it ever really meant more than that to her" (4). His inability to acknowledge his selfishness and sexuality make him blame Hella as well, as a kind of distribution of blame to comfort himself (i.e., a redistribution of guilt). He constantly tries to be convinced by his own lies. When he proposed to her, he mentions that "I told her that had loved her once and I made myself believe it. but I wonder if I had" and that "I suppose this was why I asked her to marry me: to give myself something to be moored to" (4). Thus, his only intention was to manipulate himself first to manipulate Hella later in an attempt of self-denial. It is no wonder Grandt considers these actions as "repulsive" and the character of David is described in the same terms by this researcher due to the manipulation David exercises over all characters throughout the novel in search of his own interests (281).

His untrustworthy nature is recognised by stating that "one particular lie among the many lies I've told, told, lived and believed" (5). It is interesting to note that this behaviour leads him to suffering and interior repentance because he knows the wrongfulness in his actions and how it has consequences not only in him, but also in those that surround him, so David only can say that "I repent now" (5).

In contrast to the previous purity represented by lightness; David also explains his first homosexual encounter. In this case, dark is the predominant colour as it relates to sin and repugnance. The object of desire in this case was a friend named Joey, who had "dark eyes" (7). Moreover, his body was "brown" and "suddenly seemed the black opening of a cavern in which I would be tortured till madness came, in which I would lose my manhood" and "I thought I saw my future in that cavern", which scared him (8). To begin with, the image of the cavern as an dark place is very remarkable. That obscurity is disturbing because what is inside is unknown and the fact that he can see his future in there disturbs him. This fear is explained by Wesling when relating heteronormativity with the State because the institutionalised power provides security and status only to those citizens that respect

social conventions while those who are rebels suffer social ostracism (332). As a result, what scares David is the possibility that he could lose his status as an American citizen. Wesling also notes how heteronormativity is rooted in American ideology due to the Christian background this country has had ever since the first colonisers (328). Then, Wesling states that Christian hegemony and its homophobia were interiorised in American culture and it caused any sexual orientation different to heterosexuality to be legally prosecuted as a crime during most of the 20th century, which in male same-sex relationships received the name of "sodomy". These sociopolitical consequences make David continue being manipulative and a liar to the point of inventing "a long and totally untrue story about a girl I was going with and when school began again, I picked up with a rougher, older crowd and was very nasty to Joey. And the sadder this made him, the nastier I became. He moved away at last" (9). Once his sexual desire was calmed, he denied his encounter with Joey and bullied him with his new group of friends. The one who suffered was Joey himself up to being practically obliged to move from the city as he posed a nuisance to David's objective of preserving a false image of heterosexuality.

Considering what has been analysed until now, lies are constant in David, who does not hesitate to take advantage of whoever surrounds him to dispose of them at will as if nothing had happened. As a result, the lies create a split in his self, between public appearance and his hidden selves. As a religious analysis, it would be pertinent now to look at what is mentioned in the Holy Scriptures about lies and abuse once some of the non-religious sources have been considered. Focusing on abusive behaviour, it should be borne in mind that:

> Then he will say to those on this left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' (Matt. 25. 41-43).

It is considered that the repentance David shows has much deeper meaning than a secular guilt. He is scared by the possibility of being not only condemned in this world, but in eternal life as he has not been righteous with those in need, on the contrary, he has taken advantage of everyone to fulfil his desires without respecting the norms of fraternal charity. In addition, lies had been related to evil and the Gospel explicitly remarks that "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he

speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8.44). This depiction is perfectly adequate for David as he is used to telling lies which have painful and serious consequences for others. It is very possible that Baldwin knew these passages and depicted his character with those moral features as a kind of demon on Earth or someone over whom the Devil has either power or influence.

Additionally, lies work as a kind of tool to control reality for him. David believes that by his own will, that take the form of repetitive falsities, he can change reality and be saved from earthly and eternal judgement. This serves as an example of Neo-Pelagianism as the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith warns against because of the hegemonic form of extreme individualism that has been occurring ever since the 20th century due to capitalism (1). David confesses that he was "one of those people who pride themselves on their willpower, on the ability to make a decision and carry it through", adding that "People who believe that they are strong-willed and the masters of their destiny can only continue to believe this by becoming specialists in self-deception" (18). He regretfully admits his falsity in considering himself in control of his life, as Kent points out (87). Pearl also considers this to be a mere "delusion" whose outcome is frustration and pain (65). David continues reflecting on will and self-satisfaction admitting the presence of "evasion" from reality because of shame and fear (18). Pearl sees this in causal terms, by stating that it is fear itself that prevents action, leading events to happen as time goes on, while personal inability to face the truth produces shame and embarrassment (71). It should be said that such a fantasy is also experienced by Giovanni himself because David narrates that "he was trying, with his own strength, to push back the encroaching walls, without, however, having the walls fall down" (102). Those walls of the room are regarded as a prison, according to Bercuci, which are not only constructed by bricks, but also by David's lies (203). Even Hella tells him off about his habit of changing his mind and breaking promises: "Well, the fact that you're going to be married to *me* doesn't mean you have to break your word to your friends" (117). It is noticeable that their relationship has not been very long, but the fiancée has already realised the unfair treatment David has with his beloved ones, in this case, friends (specifically, the easiness with which he disposes of everyone according to his interests without concern for their feelings).

This behaviour, which seems to be the result of lacking morality and responsibility for his actions, takes the form of a "prophecy" in David's terms: "But it allowed all of Hellen's prophecies about me to come true. She had said that there would come a time when nothing

and nobody would be able to rule me, not even my father. And that time certainly came" (14). The fact that the word "prophecy" is employed is not accidental. On the contrary, it involves religious connotations and directly relates to the influence of Pentecostalism in Baldwin's life. The role played by the individual relationship with God is one of the key aspects of Pentecostal theology, according to Field's article (446). Thus, it is through the people around David and his personal experience that God (through the Holy Spirit) communicates with David and warns him against his despicable attitude and unhappy future. Another very good example of this prophetic style takes the form as well of what is known as "word of knowledge", when David looks at Giovanni and foresees the disgrace that is about to come: "I watched him as though I were watching an imminent disaster from miles away" (114). This gift of the Holy Spirit took place as well in his first homosexual encounter and they both have in common the atmosphere of disgrace, fear and sadness.

The utilitarianism of David's behaviour is exemplified in his vision of marriage and women. First, it has already been said that in the *Bible* sexual activity has the purpose of human reproduction (Gen. 1.27-28). Nonetheless, David says that he "wanted a woman to be for me a steady ground" (93). His wife would simply be an object to secure his privileges as a heterosexual, male, American citizen. Moreover, he considers reproduction merely as a problem as it is proven here: "I wondered if she had done anything to prevent herself from becoming pregnant; and the thought of a child belonging to Sue and me, of being trapped that way" (89). He does not respect God's will concerning human offspring through sex, but merely the satisfaction of his ego and the fulfilment of his attempts to prove his manhood and heterosexuality. Hella also breaks with the original sense of marriage as she believes that "we might get married now and stay married for fifty years and I might be a stranger to you every instant of that time and you might never know it" (111). They cannot or refuse to appreciate the supernatural character of marriage as a divine order whose objective is the augmentation of God's creation. However, they merely reduce it to its most carnal superficiality based on boredom of each other as time goes by. Consequently, their secular vision of marriage does not relate to that of the Italian woman who recommends David to "go and find yourself another woman, a *good* woman and get married, and have babies. *Yes*, that is what you ought to do" (60). It should be clarified that the conservative perspective these quotations have might be considered certainly antiquated, but it must be said as well that it is the base on which Christianity has had its foundations and the lack of consideration for these aspects would entail a breaking with tradition and impoverishment of the subject

of study and the sources. As a result, it cannot be criticised that the character of this old woman considers as desirable only heterosexual marriage, without considering the possibility of happiness in other sexual orientations, as her religious beliefs sustain these recommendations.

A remedy that is given to put confidence to God is the prayer. While talking to the previously mentioned old woman, David is asked if he prays, to what the answer is "No. Not often". She also asks if he is a believer, and the answer is a simple "Yes". Last, the lady recommends him he must pray as "Even just a little prayer, from time to time. Light a candle. If it were not for the prayers of the blessed saints one could not live in this world at all" (61). This Catholic woman (who seems to be also a channel of the Holy Spirit talking through a human) gives him a piece of advice that involves admitting one's own inability to stay in charge of everything that happens in the world, an idea that David could not conceive at all due to his confidence in his own strength. Besides, just before saying goodbye, she repeats her advice again: "One must make a little prayer from time to time" (62). The reinforcement of this idea that Baldwin develops in this passage gives the recommendation special importance although she was not Pentecostal or from any other Protestant denominations.

It is useful to seek for the roots of his ideas now. First, the passages of the *Bible* where homosexuality is condemned should be recalled. The eldest is: "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination" (Lev. 18.22). It regards homosexuality as a criminal action against human nature, a perspective that is not shared by Giovanni as he reproaches David that he only wants "To find out, to find out, you keep saying, as though we were accomplices in a crime". Nevertheless, David argues that "it *is* a crime" (72). It is true that at first sight he only worries about the social punishment that could come in the United States, but the reality is that the origins of those homophobic measures are in the Christian foundations of the Western world, as the already mentioned passages express. This interiorisation of homophobic ideas leads him to moral suffering in his life, and he complains that "then anguish and fear had become the surface on which we slipped and slid, losing balance, dignity and pride" (67). It is interesting how he describes his relationship (something with which he should be comfortable and happy) in metaphorical terms of loss of balance that provoke humiliation and lack of respect concerning one's own value. Armengol remarks that the crime-like nature of homosexuality was widespread in the USA during the Cold War as they were considered a threat to the general well-being (671). Besides, the author states that in the novel features such as heterosexuality and masculinity

are reasons to be proud of, which directly relates to the mentioning of "pride" and "dignity" (681). This form of self-sufficiency is also exemplified by Jacques' reproach to David when the first one says that he should stop pretending "that *immaculate* manhood that is your pride and joy" (27). This obsession about appearance is perfectly explained by Pearl, who points out how the problem is found in being publicly gay, which is to say, as long as the person does not prove his homosexuality outdoors, there is nothing to be anxious about (77).

DeGout states in her work that his inability to embrace his true self prevents him from loving authentically (428). This might well explain his lack of morality in the decisions he makes throughout the novel. Additionally, as previously explained, Pearl argues that he tries to convince himself that the others also feel the same desires and impulses he suffers from in order not to be the only guilty one in his mind (67). That is the reason why he expresses disgust for people who he considers inferior (inferiority that comes from accepting their true homosexual nature and showing it without fear). For instance, talking about his friend Jacques, David acknowledges that "I understand now that the contempt I felt for him involved my self-contempt" (21). It should be borne in mind that previously he characterised most people as "fool" or "cowards" and "most people are both" (20). It poses a confessional style where he is embarrassed by his actions and admits his guilt and cowardice. Another group he repudiated at first were "*les folles*" who were "always dressed in the most improbable combinations, screaming like parrots the details of their latest love-affairs – their love-affairs always seemed to be hilarious" (24). This is another proof of the problem he has with anyone who is publicly homosexual. At the end of the day, "*les folles*" were free of social prejudices and did not care about public opinion, only about enjoying themselves by accepting their nature and desires, what brought them joy. His anguish comes to the point of even feeling repugnance for Giovanni: "With this fearful intimation there opened in me a hatred for Giovanni which was as powerful as my love and which was nourished by the same roots" (75). Thus, intimacy for David is a sign of weakness and the recognition of his weakness is intolerable, so his interior reaction can only be fury and hatred. Pearl remarks how David relates cowardice and weakness with effeminacy, something he cannot show at all, as he tries to maintain a surface of strength and masculinity (67). As a matter of fact, when Giovanni is exhausted and cannot continue any longer he bursts into tears but David's reaction is the following: "while I felt his anguish entering into me, like acid in his sweat, and felt that my heart would burst for him, I also

wondered, with an unwilling, unbelieving contempt, why I had ever believed him strong" (94). It is shocking how in a moment of suffering, when his supposedly beloved one is crying, he cannot avoid regarding him as weak and consequently effeminate. Without a doubt, for David, the expression of feelings is an error that humiliates people.

David's inability of accepting reality creates, in Giovanni's terms, an "English melodrama" that only causes suffering (73). Unfortunately, the existence of this melodrama is grasped by all characters except David himself. For example, Guillaume warns Giovanni of the mistake he is making and the consequences it will have: "he said that you were an American boy, after all, doing things in France which you would not dare to do at home, and that you would leave me very soon" (96). Guillaume's hypothesis is defended by Kent, who argues in her research paper that the fact of being in a foreign country is the reason why David goes wild and does whatever he pleases (87). This directly relates to the previously mentioned idea about American homophobia and its sociopolitical consequences, which leads David to behave as an exemplary citizen (i.e., heterosexual, as sexuality and morality are interrelated), as long as he is under the supervision of American authorities. Therefore, such a situation, as DeGout defends, renders both David and Giovanni victims of a lie from which they cannot escape because of their inability to realise what they are going through (432). It is sad that Guillaume's "prophecy" also comes true at the end, which causes outrageous pain in Giovanni against David's apathy: "If you cannot love me, I will die. Before you came I wanted to die, I have told you many times. It is cruel to have made me want to live only to make my death more bloody" (122). The way David manipulates others' destiny makes him acquire a God-like nature as he seems to admit to Hella when he argues that Giovanni thinks of him as if he were God (120). It is likely that he rejoices in that belief, as his Neo-Pelagian self-satisfaction and sufficiency as well as his impassivity towards the other characters prove.

Next, the focus is on the fatal outcome of what has been depicted until now. Here, the religious turn that takes place in the last pages is very significant. To begin with, after having murdered Guillaume, Giovanni is reported in the newspapers to have "repented, called on God, wept that he had not meant to do it" (135). It is remarkable how despite the general secular tone of the novel up to that moment, when the end is approaching, Giovanni turns to God as his only hope (David's divinity is replaced due to the discovery of his real weak and false essence). It is also David who thinks of divine mercy and, quite interesting for a non-Catholic novel, the sacrament of confession and the intercessory power of Virgin Mary

(148). David appears to admit the real power of penitence and the presence of Jesus's mother too. Besides, he continues with a reflection on God's grace and salvation in a prayer-like style: "Yet, the key to my salvation, which cannot save my body, is hidden in my flesh" and "I must believe, I must believe, that the heavy grace of God, which has brought me to this place, is all that can carry me out of it" (149). The first idea is directly related to the warning given by Saint Paul: "For this reason God gave them up to dishonourable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error" (Rom. 1.26-27). David just waits for his punishment, but not an earthly one, but a divine penalty, as his selfishness and sexual impulses have caused ineffable suffering and knows God condemns that kind of attitude.

Field argues in his essay that, for Baldwin, the only way to obtain salvation was through sharing pain with loved ones and embracing God's love (450). In addition, sex done with love had supernatural effects and brings humans closer to divinity (452). However, throughout the novel there are examples of banal sexual encounters where there is no love, but merely desire. For instance, Jacques is said to be incapable of "trusting a living soul" (21). Consequently, the fact that he cannot rely on anyone prevents him from establishing authentic love relationships and then obtain happiness (the same can be said for David as it has been proven). Lynch remarks how this earthly happiness must be accompanied by divine joy, as they are both complementary and need each other (294). Baldwin himself insists on his essay "The Male Prison" on the importance of love as a redemptory action. By means of not embracing one's true self, there is only space for self-deprecation, anguish, sexual obsession and unhappiness (136). Those consequences are perfectly relatable to David's case as previously analysed. It should be said that in "Preservation of Innocence", Baldwin set the Garden of Eden as a paradise where there was no alienation nor prejudices as sexual orientation did not exist (596). It is precisely this place that Jacques refers to in the novel complaining about the fact that "Nobody can stay in the garden of Eden" (22). This prohibition finds his roots in the expulsion of Adam and Eve in the first place, but from a secular perspective (to which Jacques might be referring to) this ban comes from sexual prejudices found in society. Besides, this character (who may well represent Baldwin's own opinions) admits that his happiness comes from the fact that, when it comes to his sexual encounters, "there is no affection in them, and no joy. It is like putting an electric plug in a

dead socket. Touch but no contact. All touch, but no contact and no light" (49). What a remarkable simile as it expresses homosexual relation in terms of lightness. As a result, Jacques/Baldwin states that if carried conveniently, a homosexual couple can lead to sainthood as much as a heterosexual one (if love and mutual care are the pillars of the relationship).

4. CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions will now follow the order of the objectives. Firstly, there is no doubt the original texts of Christianity condemn homosexuality as a sin against God's will. The reason for this stance resides in the inability to fulfil God's order to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, which is to say, that of preserving humankind by means of reproduction. This could only be obtained biologically by a woman and a man, so the fact that same-sex couples have sexual relationships is infertile and, from a Christian perspective, useless. That is the reason why later canonical texts also repudiate homosexuality as a deviance, as the maintenance of tradition plays an important role in the Church.

Secondly, Pentecostalism is not very present in the novel. As a matter of fact, the only theological basis of this denomination that is constantly present is the use of different characters by the Holy Spirit to warn David and Giovanni, such as the old lady and quite remarkably Jacques's case, who also seems to be Baldwin's narrative voice.

Thirdly, it can be concluded that David meets the criteria to be considered as a Neo-Pelagian character from a Catholic point of view. However, it is useful to detail that his selfish and even cruel behaviour does not relate to this heresy, but it is simply a feature added to the character by Baldwin. It has also been demonstrated that his morality changes as time passes in the novel. Thus, he appears to reach the conclusion that human beings are not self-sufficient and need God's grace up to the point of hinting Catholic values after witnessing Giovanni's last moments in the quotes previously cited, such as the communication prayer poses, Virgin Mary's intercessory power and the role of the sacrament of penitence. It is precisely this last example that plays a major role in the novel structure as it is written in a confessional style. There is no doubt about the fact that David regrets his previous behaviour, and he expresses his sorrow as a confession, where he may well wait not only for God's absolution, but also for the reader's pardon (at the same time that his intimate *mea culpa* serves as a cautionary tale against the dangers of not embracing one's true self). Then,

what at first was a profound belief in Neo-Pelagianism becomes an embrace of sorrow and an acknowledgement of human weakness to act independently.

Last, it should be clarified that the studies concerning religious aspects in Baldwin are not abundant. On the contrary, sociopolitical themes are the vast majority. It is precisely the reason why this paper encourages future research about the religion in Baldwin's fiction and essays.

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