Chapter IV

Realization of the Code

"White rejects light
While blackness drinks it in"¹

*If Beale Street Could Talk* and *Just Above My Head* take a turn from the heterogeneous social context back to the homogeneous context of the black community. The main concern of Baldwin in these novels remains with blacks and their immediate families. Though there are hardly any major white characters in them, yet the white world, as the force of oppression and racial violence still looms large over the destinies of the blacks as the crisis in the lives of these characters as well as their families is invariably engineered by the whites. In *Just Above My Head* the civil rights movement occupies a large part, but is seldom foregrounded to be linked to the personal problems of the characters the way it has been done in *Another Country* or *Beale Street*. In *If Beale Street Could Talk*, religion and church are present but the negative attitude of the author towards the formal aspect of these institutions is obvious. Though church as an institution is present throughtout *Just Above My Head*, but, except in the case of Julia, the impact of religion on the life of the characters is not the subject matter of the novel.
These novels add a new dimension to the ‘code’. The viability of the ‘code’ is explored only at the level of individuals in the novels discussed so far. At the level of society it is only by way of implication. But in these two novels, the code has been enlarged to include the community as well. Apart from this, the procreative aspect of love which was hitherto only symbolically hinted at in *Tell Me How Long The Train’s Been Gone*, is now brought forth in the form of child birth in *If Beale Street Could Talk*. In *Just Above My Head*, Baldwin has furthered both these aspects of the ‘code’ through the use of a narrator who tells the tale in order to understand the life of the protagonist in a better way, suggesting the need on the part of the community to follow suit; procreation is elevated to the philosophical level through new interpretations.

*If Beale Street Could Talk* is Baldwin’s shortest and the simplest novel. It has variously been described as Baldwin’s own protest novel, “a form of social realism,” a flatly written “novel of frustrated rage,” “a little angry and embittered novel about Harlem which, if lacking overt violence, has to do with the violence done to man’s soul,” and “a quite moving and very traditional celebration of love” depicting not only the love between a man and a woman but also among the family members which involves a
supreme sacrifice on their part -- a human situation that is so rarely depicted in contemporary American fiction. The novel received high accolades from David Thomas who interpreted it as an evidence of Negroses' "new-found capacity for self-creation,\textsuperscript{8}" self-esteem, cultural freedom and the ability of the black race to make itself finally in its own image. Contrary to the views of David Thomas or Joyce Carole Oates, Farrison held that the novel does not have "any socially and morally respectable ideas and ideals... [the characters] seem naively incognizant that such ideas and ideals exist.\textsuperscript{9}"

Notwithstanding the negative reception of the novel or the lack of it, a reading of the novel makes it clear that if Beale Street could really talk, it would talk of the heroic struggle of a family against the oppressive legal and judicial system of America and would also talk how love adds meaning not only to the life of individuals but also to the life of a family and of the whole society if they keep faith in love. This justifies the use of stereotypes in the novel. Baldwin has been criticised on the ground that his fiction is replete with stereotypes. But the way he uses stereotypes in this novel intensifies the thematic design and vision of the novelist. Stereotypes such as racist cops and the legal system, poverty of blacks, 'white-skin syndrome' characters, weak father, sensuality and sexuality of blacks, sexual angle of racism etc. are
used in the novel. But Baldwin uses these stereotypes only to transmute them to bring forth an affirmative and optimistic vision of life by projecting a creative symbiotic relationship between the characters and the black community. Most of these stereotypes are reflected in sexual relation of the characters. Within the limited range of sexual relations -- only heterosexual relations among black characters -- various aspects have been taken up in the novel. The new dimension that Baldwin has added in this novel is that of procreation. The sexual aspect of race relations is made more obvious and is instrumental to the crisis in the life of the protagonists.

The novel is in first person narrative mode, written from the point of view of Tish, its nineteen year old female protagonist. Her state of pregnancy and the fact that her lover lands up in jail on false charges of rape, at the time when they were planning to get married, adds an element of sensitivity and poignancy to the tale. Tish and Fonny have loved each other since childhood and were called Romeo and Juliet in their peer group. It was their love for each other which saved them, particularly Fonny, from drug addiction, alienation, frustration of unemployment, loss of dignity, racial segregation and desperation and defeat “that was waiting to overtake the children of [their] age.” Tish and Fonny make each other happy by their
love. As against Ida’s conviction that “love and hate are very close together” is Tish’s belief “that love and laughter come from the same place.” These contrary views explain the difference between their approaches to love.

Tish’s seemingly simplistic views are not naive as they appear to be. She knows what it means to be in love. She knows that to be in love is not only “to belong to somebody” but it is also “very frightening to belong to somebody” (p.96). It is frightening because there is a fear of the loss of love. She has realized that even the temporary loss of the lover brings pain and suffering. Not only Tish but Fonny also realizes the importance of love in their life and the very thought of separation makes him “scared of what might happen to both of [them] without each other” (p.109). He even thinks of “getting out of this fucking country” (p.109). He is afraid that they may degenerate into frustration and desperation like Daniel, who is a typical example of such defeat in the face of racial segregation and brutality. Fonny is saved of desparation even in jail by the love of Tish and the family: “Even if you have only one visitor... it means that someone outside cares about you. And this can get you through the night, into the day” (p.170).

This ideal bonding between Tish and Fonny is also reflected in the ‘idealization of family’. The portrayal of an ideal loving pair and ideal family
(Rivers family) is one of the issues of critical controversy about the novel. But this ideal and sacrificing behaviour of family is not unknown to human experience, particularly in the moments of crisis. In contrast with Rivers family is Hunt family, which is indifferent to the extent of turning against Fonny even in his difficult time. They help the legal department by telling them that Fonny has always been a worthless person always running into troubles.

The difference in attitudes of the members of both the families is reflected in their reactions to the pregnancy of Tish. The Rivers family celebrates the event and calls the Hunts family to share the news and celebration, but they are unhappy barring Frank. Everybody is happy except the three Hunt women. Mrs. Hunt, reacting more strongly than the event calls for, curses: “The Holy Ghost will cause that child to shrivel in your womb” (p.74). Frank gets furious and knocks her down. Fonny’s sisters pass only disparaging remarks about the capability of Tish and Fonny to rear the child.

The celebration of the pregnancy is marred by the crisis engineered by the oppressive white set-up which is oblivious of the tender human feelings of love. This white system tramples over the ‘idealized’ love affair between Tish and Fonny when Bell, one of its representatives, implicates Fonny in a
false rape case, an easily available pretext for the whites to gag and cage the blacks. The tragic irony of the whole situation is that Fonny was ‘booked’ for protecting the chastity and dignity of his beloved -- a privilege exclusively-owned by the whites and denied to the blacks. The way Tish describes Bell makes him look a direct descendent of Jesse, the white sheriff of ‘Going to Meet the Man,’ who can get sexual gratification even with his white wife only when he remembers in detail the brutality he inflicts on a black boy he has arrested. Tish notices:

When I was alone, the eyes clawed me like a cat’s claws, raked me like a rake. eyes look only into the eyes of the conquered victim . . . . When Fonny was alone, the same thing happened. Bell’s eyes swept over Fonny’s black body with the unanswerable cruelty of lust, as though he had lit the blowtorch and had it aimed at Fonny’s sex. (p. 186).12

Fonny’s attempt to “love, honour and protect” his beloved has limited possibility in the racist society indeed. His fears of losing his beloved are not unfounded. The tone of the sexual aspect of racial brutality has already been set by Daniel’s remark: ‘I don’t believe there’s a white man in this country, baby who can get his dick hard, without he hear some nigger moan” (p. 117).

Racial violence, a potent threat to love relations in Another Country, and Tell Me How Long The Train's Been Gone, arises out of the inter-racial
pairing of lovers but in *If Beale Street Could Talk* racist attitudes play an active role in threatening the love between a black man and a black woman whose pairing does not disturb any real or imaginary equanimity of the society. Racism in this form has an external impact but it has another equally dangerous impact too. It results in the internalization of the stereotypic image of blackness resulting in self-hate for being black. This self-hate, in turn, distorts the emotional and psychological make up of the individual leading either to the drying up or inversion of emotions. This lack or inversion of emotions renders Fonny's mother and his sisters totally incapable of love, sympathy, pity, anger, or even hate. All three of them are typical examples of 'white-skin-syndrome' character. Their reaction to Tish's pregnancy and Fonny's arrest are of indifference at best and of shrieking curses at worst. Their sexual behaviour is symptomatic of these distortions of personality. Tish sums up Fonny's sisters' personality thus: "I hated them. They didn't hate me. They didn't hate anybody, and that was what was wrong with them. They smiled at an invisible host of stricken lovers as they entered our living room" (p. 67). The inability to hate, and the 'invisible host of stricken lovers' reflects on their inability to commit themselves to a loving relationship. Hence, the absence of
love in them shows the lack of emotions and psychological depth in their personality. It becomes more clear in Tish’s use of the imagery of “dried up yellow cunt” (p. 76) for them.

Mrs. Hunt’s case is more complex than her daughters because she is a ‘sanctified woman’, given to religion. But her religion is only “one fraudulent form of religion”, because church is reduced to a place where she could out-perform other women in dancing and dressing. She pretends that she loves Jesus. In her coming to church, she believes, God will take care of the family. Fonny’s recounting of the sexual battle between his parents is immediately followed by Mrs. Hunt’s visit to church and her hypocrisy in and out of the church is established at once. She emerges out physically and philosophically ugly in the novel. She boasts that her daughters will not bring any bastards, but she is unaware that they will not bring bastards because they do not consider any man good enough for them. The hypocrisy of her religion and her life becomes clear in Fonny’s description of the sex-act between his parents:

I’d hear her say, The Lord sure blessed my soul this evening. Honey, when you going to give your life to the Lord? And, baby, he’d say, and I swear to you he was lying there with his dick getting hard, and, excuse me, baby, but her condition weren’t no better, because this, you dig? was like the game you hear two alley cats playing in the alley. . . . he just want ot get some sleep really, but she got her chorus going, he’s got to stop the music and ain’t
but one way to do it . . . And she’d say, Oh, Frank, let me bring you to the Lord. And he’d say, Shit, woman, I’m going to bring the Lord to you. I’m the Lord. And she’d start to crying, and she’d moan, Lord, help me help this man. You give him to me. I can’t do nothing about it. Oh, Lord, help me. And he’d say, The Lord’s going to help you, sugar, just as soon as you get to be a little child again, naked, like a little child. Come on, come to the Lord. And she’d start to crying and calling on Jesus while he started taking all her clothes off -- I could hear them kind of rustling and whistling and tearing and falling to the floor . . . and when he got her naked and got on top of her and she was still crying, Jesus! help me, Lord! my Daddy would say, You got the Lord now, right here. Where you want your blessing? Where do it hurt? Where you want the Lord’s hands to touch you? here? here? or here? Where you want his tongue? Where you want the Lord to enter you, you dirty, dumb black bitch? you bitch. You bitch. You bitch. And he’d slap her, hard, loud. And she’ say, Oh, Lord, help me to bear my burden. And he’d say, Here it is, baby, you going to bear it all right, I know it. You got a friend in Jesus, and I’m going to tell you when he comes. The first time. We don’t know nothing about the second coming. Yet. And the bed would shake and she would moan and moan and moan. And, in the morning, was just like nothing never happened. She was just like she had been. She still belonged to Jesus and he went on down the street, to the shop. (p. 17)

The sequence of events and the use of the church related vocabulary suggests the hypocrisy of Mrs. Hunt’s religion and her pretentiousness and Frank’s violent and condemnatory feelings towards her. Mrs. Hunt’s passion is sex but she cannot confront and submit to it, thus, she makes it to seem as if she is overpowered, taken against her will. She can manage to remain free from guilt for having sex and enjoy it too under the garb of the ‘symbolic rape’ by
attributing the act to Frank. The double entendre meanings in 'burden bearing,' 'second coming' and the 'Lord' tie the secular and the sacred suggesting their perverse connections which makes it clear that 'holy' has been brought low and the profane has been elevated.

This sex-act between Frank and Alice Hunt is in sharp contrast with the sex-act between Fonny and Tish which is described in poetic language. Tish says that “it was the most beautiful thing that ever happened to me” (p. 87) and the same is Fonny’s reaction too. The poetic description of the sex-act suggests the intensity of their love. Their mutual trust, readiness to merge their identities into each other and intense feelings towards each other enable them to affirm their relations, through the sex-act which is characterized by a tenderness that is absent in the previous sex-acts in Baldwin’s fiction except in Leo-Barbara relationship. Tish-Fonny love goes even beyond Leo-Barbara love relationship in two ways -- first it is more 'elevated' and second, it leads to ‘procreation’. Leo and Barbara have established a perfect communion, trust and awareness of each other’s true lives through the personalization of the physical-emotional act but it remains short of being ‘sacred’. The sequence of events that precedes the sex-act sets the tone of the act itself. Feelings of Tish show a tender vulnerability.
He took me by the hand, then, and he led me to the pallet on the floor. . . . I knew what he was doing and I didn’t know. I was in his hands, he called me by the thunder at my ear. I was in his hands: I was being changed; all that I could do was cling to him. . . . My life was holding me. My life was claiming me. I heard, I felt his breath, as for the first time: but it was as though his breath were rising up out of me. He opened my legs, or I opened them . . . “Don’t be scared,” . . . “Hold on to me”. (pp. 84-85)

And the sex-act itself is described thus:

I knew we would die. Fonny moved again, at first very slowly, and then faster and faster. I felt it coming, felt myself coming, going, over the edge, everything in me flowing down to him, and I called his name over and over while he growled my name in his throat, thrusting now with no mercy -- caught his breath sharply, let it out with a rush and a sob and then pulled out of me, holding me tight, shooting a boiling liquid all over my belly and my chest and my chin. . . . There was blood, quite a lot of it -- or it seemed like a lot to me, but it didn’t frighten me at all, I felt proud and happy -- on him and on the bed and on me; his sperm and my blood were slowly creeping down my body; and his sperm was on him and on me; and, in the dim light and against our dark bodies, the effect was as of some strange anointing. Or, we might have just competed a tribal rite. (pp. 86-88)

The sex-act between Tish and Fonny becomes a ‘ritual’, a ‘rite’. The conversion of a girl to a woman paralleling religious conversion, turns it into a ‘sacred’ act. Based as it is on their intense love feelings reflective of “an interior life of wanting, needing [their sex-act] the human meaning in a human context”14 Both Tish and Fonny know their own limitations, the social and economic problems they have to encounter and overcome in the hostile
world. Tish even accepts her subordinate status in Fonny’s scheme of preferences -- sculpture and Tish.¹⁵ Both have a knowledge of their own true self which makes their passion ‘personal’. Knowledge of the self “creates the potential for knowing a lover in sex.”¹⁶

Such a personalization of passion presupposes the presence of a person inside, of complex human being who is willing to know and feel the other person. It leads to the act becoming “a communion, sharing, mutual possession of an enormous mystery.”¹⁷ The intensity and the magnificence thus felt transforms even the violent feelings into tenderness. The bonding between Tish and Fonny is strengthened and an exceptional feat is accomplished in Baldwin’s fiction, i.e., the sex-act between the lovers leads to procreation.

Procreation takes the personal act to communal level. Family, being the primary unit of community, thus, becomes important from this angle. The child to come becomes the hope of communal survival and all efforts must be made to preserve and save the child. The family tries to outmanoeuvre the system through both the legal and the illegal means. They leave Tish free to keep in touch with Fonny. They pool their economic resources and devise new means to raise the exorbitant amount of bail money set by the District
Attorney. But it is not simply transforming "the stigma of moral laxity among Blacks to idealized love, innocently seeking fulfillment."18

Sex, love and art are complexly related in this novel also like his previous novels. Leo and Eric channelize their pain and suffering in their acting, Vivaldo is able to get the crucial details of his novel only after he has resolved his love for Ida. In the same manner Fonny's sculpture is inspired by what he feels at the time of the creation of that piece. When he kissed Tish for the first time and his sex jerked against Tish in those times of frustration and desperation (for the youth of his generation), he executes a naked figure and "the whole motion of the figure is torment" (p. 38).

Sex and love are creative and enchance the bonding between them. The physical change that this creative-procreative sex brings to Tish is symbolic of the spiritual growth that has taken place: I'm beginning to have real breasts now, because of the baby, in fact, and I still don't have any hips" (p. 55). The act of sex with Tish is more than mere sex for Fonny. When Fonny masturbates in jail out of frustration and loneliness "he does not wish [Tish] to have any connection with this cell, or with this act" (p. 194). because to associate Tish with masturbation is to reduce her status from an individual to an instrument, the act of sex from a grand rite to mechanical
(Frank-Alice) and from procreation to waste of the energy (Adrienna and Shiela).

For some critics, Fonny and Tish story, when viewed from the perspective of community life, becomes peripheral and communal love becomes central. "The feelings of affection and mutual concern shared by the members of the family are directed not toward individual self-fulfilment, but towards a familial love which, by the nature of its collective vision, transcend the individual component of the emotion in order to reveal a vaster, more compelling aspect of love."19 The importance of Tish and Fonny cannot be made subservient to the community because the individuals and the community relate to each other in a symbiotic relationship and not in the manner Pratt suggests. The positive ending of the novel is suggested by the last words that Fonny is "working on the wood, on the stone, whistling, smiling and from her far away but coming nearer the baby cries and cry like it means to wake the dead" (p. 213). Tish has given birth to the child and Fonny has been released from jail by the herculean efforts of the family.

Commitment and involvement between the lovers creates a strong bonding between the individuals and it carries them through the dangers of loneliness, frustration and desperation safely. Physical manifestation of love
in sex becomes an example of perfect communication, personalisation of the emotion and leads to procreation. Through procreation, family identifies with the love relation itself and a symbiotic relation between the two is established. Baldwin has made an expansion of ‘code’ and has achieved its realization in this novel.

The title of *Just Above My Head* is taken from a song that Ida Scott, the black jazz singer, sings in *Another Country*. Loneliness, sex, love, religion, race relations, morality, art, pain and suffering in all their hues are present in *Just Above My Head* making it Baldwin’s most comprehensive and inclusive novel. Against this thematic background Baldwin concentrates on a handful of characters who act as windows through which the reader witnesses the impact of racial discrimination on blacks and the black community’s response to it in the form of the civil rights movement. Continuing with his earlier concerns Baldwin expands upon and seems to resolve many of the ideas, problems and conflicts that characterise his fiction.

Whereas heterosexual love attains its purest and distilled form in *If Beale Street could Talk* -- through procreation at the level of individuals and the community, homosexual love attains its finest form in *Just Above My
Head. Arthur’s homosexuality is devoid of any grime of guilt and shame which subdues John and David, and is confronted and overcome by Eric and Leo. Arthur finds a niche in homosexuality, without a tinge of misogynist feelings. Though Giovanni had commitment and involvement in his homosexual relation with David, but it did not lead to any kind of alleviation of the pain and suffering of the others. In Arthur’s case his homosexual experience and relations equip him with a kind of enlightenment to see the pain and suffering of others which Baldwin’s earlier characters fail to achieve to this extent. This also explains the difference between the earlier characters and Arthur who unlike them could enter into sustained homosexual relations spanning over a period of years without any fear of losing the partner.

Another aspect of Baldwin’s ‘evolving code’ is manifested in the novel through the philosophical overtones given to the procreative aspect of love.

Though Just Above My Head has an all black cast yet the thrust of the work is not ethnic; it is simply human. Like his earlier novels, Just Above My Head has also evoked a mixed critical opinion ranging from ‘simply artless’ to high praise for capturing the cultural reality of America. Richard Gilman considers the novel “swollen, meandering, awkwardly colloquial, and pretentiously elevated by turns . . . a novel struck halfway between life and
art, with none of the originality or fatefulness of either.” For Pearl K. Bell, it is a ‘huge chronicle about the children of two Harlem families... that drifts and flounders in the riptide of uncertainty.’ But Timothy S. Seibles, holding a different view, finds that the novelist creates live and real characters through evocative images and voices. He contends that the “message of Just Above My Head is compassionate. It seems the narrator ultimately feels we can rise above the idiocy, panic, and injustice that history offers as our one constant inheritance” and also that “Baldwin has succeeded in creating a powerful drama, both complex and clear.” But the highest accolades come from Eleanor Traylor, that the novel “is a gospel tale told in the blues mode... The tale begins with a death but celebrates a life. It laments a loss, yet it sings a song. It is both a dirge and a hymn... The tale of the terrifying journey of the possibilities, and failures of love is the dramatic center of the blues-gospel narrative mode of James Baldwin.”

The novel begins with the narrator Hall’s need to relate his younger brother Arthur’s story two years after his death, in order to fill the void within him, created by his brother’s death. He can still hear the voice of his brother but realizes that “not even the voice can fill that space in which Arthur moved and walked and moaned and talked.” In his effort to tell the story, Hall re-
lives the whole experience of almost three decades in order to understand Arthur’s discovery of his song (he was a gospel singer), his love, and himself. Hall is able to understand himself in a better way only through a committed and compassionate understanding, recognition and acceptance of another’s humanity. Hall has lived for two years with this pressing need but he could not indulge into this self-introspection because he was busy taking care of the business that Arthur left incomplete. The center stage in Hall’s psyche is occupied by Arthur who surfaces even in his dreams despite the happiness that his wife and kids give him. The immediate need to precipitate the reliving experience is accentuated by the urge to answer the question put by his son Tony: “What was my Uncle-Arthur-like?” (p. 30) and it explains his urgency to tell the tale.

Hall has a pressing need to fill the void and make sense of his own life, shatter the grief that he has been carrying for the last two years and create a positive impression of his brother in his son Tony so that he is not ashamed of his Uncle Arthur for his homosexuality. In the whole novel there is only one reference to his potential heterosexuality which is not even thought to be taken to the level of consummation. Hall’s effort to look at Arthur’s life, his homosexuality, his sentimentality, is an effort Baldwin has
not made in his earlier fiction. The difference between Arthur and the earlier homosexuals is that the burden of shame that Arthur feels is not for his homosexuality *per se*, but for the shame it might generate in his family members, as compared to David who is ashamed at his homosexuality himself.

Arthur's first sexual experience at the age of thirteen years is a homosexual tryst with an unknown black who took him to a building, opened his and Arthur's pants, and "took it in his mouth . . . and I started to cry . . . And I had just started singing" (p. 55). Arthur was filled with terrible curiosity and could not touch anybody for a long time. Arthur "said slowly I never forgot the man not as much because of the physical thing but [because of] the way he made me feel about myself" (p. 56). The difference that we note between Arthur and Baldwin's earlier homosexual protagonists is that Arthur is 'initiated' into homosexuality by a grown up black male as compared to the earlier protagonists' own leanings towards it. Another difference is that of the feelings attached to the first experience -- Eric, David and Leo remember the joy, pleasure they got and gave to their partner but Arthur remembers not the joy but the "terrible curiosity" and how he felt about himself and also his impromptu need to "make a confession" (p. 56) in
his song. At the same time like Leo but unlike David and Eric, he also takes it for granted that he will be understood by Hall: "I wouldn't be able to live, man, if I thought you were ashamed of me" (p. 57). Arthur is not ashamed of his homosexuality but is afraid that Hall might be ashamed of Arthur for it.

On a singing tour Arthur finds sustained love in Crunch. The relation between them is that of 'perfect' tactile communication because they get orgasm through each other's ejaculation. The new found joy and love is reflected in their music which attains a greater harmony and the voice that attains a greater haunting quality. Crunch and Arthur maintain this homosexual relation till Crunch departs to join the army, without any break on their part. The only threat that the relation could have suffered was saved by Crunch's truthfulness. Crunch and Julia fall in love and Crunch undergoes a period of conflict but he decides to tell the truth to both Arthur and Julia, and there was still "peace between them and . . . he pulled Arthur closer" (p. 270). Crunch gives him a lesson akin to the one Yves gave to Eric and this saves their relation from sentimentality to a large extent. He advises Arthur to find a girl, because, he thinks, Arthur "can't love [him] forever, man, you got to grow up" (p. 267). Crunch joins the army, and unable to bear the burden of racism, particularly the violence done to him by a black man on the
orders of white men “becomes profligate, and wastes himself”\(^{26}\) like Rufus in the sense that he is rendered incapable of love on account of the extreme hatred he feels for the whites and for himself.

Arthur’s yearning for Crunch’s company would have driven him insane but he saved by the love he has for Crunch, and his brother Hall. He feels ‘lonely’, ‘dry’, ‘wary’, and ‘bitter’: “It’s lonely as a mother out here, ... Love must be the rarest, most precious thing on earth, brother, where is it hiding?” (p. 463). His search continues and takes him to the arms of Guy in Paris. His experience with Guy is not only full of enjoyment and pleasure but educative as well. Love that he was seeking in the arms of numerous people till then was of only ‘touch not contact’ and could not fill the gap that Crunch had left. Guy not only fills the gap but also makes Arthur’s relation with him ‘enlightening’. They talk looking into each other’s eyes to convey the ‘meaning’ completely. Arthur sees the dark shadows in Guy’s eyes and comprehends the pain that was so overpowering: “There is an anguish, ... living and determined to live, in the depths of a dungeon ... which knows ... what happened, something which refuses reconciliation. This is also the look at the very bottom of Arthur’s eyes” (p. 511). This is the look of pain and suffering, the loss of a lover lost to the cruelty of history. Guy’s awareness
of history and his frank confessions and need for sympathy from Arthur give him a message that pain and suffering have to be lived through; love is possible only momentarily under these circumstances; history clings to a person, though one may not have access even to that history which clings to him. This history of the person, of the nation and of the human race has to be re-examined and overhauled before the person can possibly use it. He has to resolve all the paradoxes of history. Since the paradoxes are not of his creation he has to begin with the paradoxes of his own life and move on. This knowledge equips Arthur to see his pain in a proper perspective.

Arthur's sex-act with Guy attains the level of pleasure and fulfilment of "coming together, endless fall, the rising into daybreak ... at home in each other" (p. 499) and he wishes to stay with Guy forever. This fulfilment is the same that he attained with Crunch. His love with Crunch is that of complete involvement and commitment. With Guy also, it becomes a means for Arthur to know the other, to involve with him and commit to him. It is a liberating experience because it has been purged of all the pre-conceived ideas of race, language and nationality. It is a redemptive and restoring relation that prepares him for his love relations with Jimmy. Arthur is cleansed and redeemed of the emptiness of uninvolved sex with numerous persons and
restored to the status of innocence with which he loved Crunch. He is now prepared to receive Jimmy in a state of purity.

The relation between Jimmy and Arthur is that of mutual trust, of giving and receiving, love and saving each other from the perils of the world: "Not many people are present in times of trouble . . . and Jimmy was present" (p. 47). Arthur and Jimmy become the 'dwelling place' that they both were searching for. Arthur is resurrected from his pain by Jimmy through the happiness that travelled between them, charging the atmosphere; "Jimmy's love gave him a joy and a freedom . . . invested him with a kind of incandescent wonder . . . since he knew he was loved . . . it filled his voice with multitudes" (p. 572). This joy and freedom is borne of the bondage they have bound themselves in. The underlying note of sadness, of the fear of loss of the lover is minimised here and the passion becomes personalized for Arthur as well as Jimmy because their love recognizes the person within each other. Sex transcends the barrier of physicality and the love they have for each other enables them to face the dangers of the world. Arthur's need to "give himself to someone who needs to give himself to Arthur" (p. 470) is fulfilled in Jimmy. His need is to feel "a purity, a shining joy, as though he had been, astoundingly, blessed" (pp. 470-471).
In spite of the love Arthur received and gave in his life, in spite of being free from guilt, "nothing less than confession is demanded of him" (p. 483). But this confession does not relate to his ability or inability to face his sexual identity; it is not related to the shame that Baldwin's earlier homosexual characters feel. The confession demanded of him is that his parents, brother and God may "[t]ake me as I am" (p. 483). He is afraid of the shame his homosexuality might bring to his parents but he fails to comprehend that the fact known to the whole world must also be known to his parents and if they still love him they are not ashamed of him. The conflict of joy and confession is rooted in the context which is "his inheritance . . . struggling with the given" (p. 483).

Arthur is decidedly different from David, Eric and Leo, because their resolution is on individual level. They have to nurture courage of conviction and be able to face life without shame or feelings of guilt. But Arthur is not burdened by a guilty conscience. He doesn't have any internal wrangling regarding his homosexual status. He rather expects society to change its flawed matrices aimed at segregating individuals and imposing an inheritance of guilt and shame on their beings, as his cry, "to Paul, his father, and to
Hall, his brother, and to all the world, and to his Maker [is], 'Take me as I am!' (p. 483) makes it clear.

Hall's second preoccupation Julia, in many ways, is "the center of Baldwin's spiritual, sexual, and familial confusion in the novel." She has been a child preacher, wilful and arrogant, spoiled by parents. She loses faith after her mother's death, falls in violent incestuous relation with her dandyish, weak father, escapes to New Orleans, prostitutes herself to support Jimmy, becomes Hall's beloved, abandons him to go to Africa in search of a new meaning of life, is initiated into a new philosophy and settles down in New York to live a life of dignified loneliness.

A turning point comes in her religious life when her mother near her death sensing Julia's jealousy for her brother and her husband's voluptuousness and moral culpability, warns her to pray for herself and her father rather than wasting the prayer for her recuperation. The complexity of her character is revealed in her thought process who is being molested by her father:

She knew that something in her had always wanted this, but not this, . . . she wanted to say, Please, Please wait, . . . She had never wanted this, this rage and hatred. She had always wanted his love. She had, herself brought about this moment -- yes, she had, but not this moment . . . . Every thrust of her father's penis seemed to take away the life that it had given, thrust anguish deeper into her, into a place too deep for the sex of any man to reach, into a place it would
The feelings of Julia during her molestation leave her bruised mentally with deep scars. To purge the violation of sex, she pleads with Crunch to restore her to womanhood (although she is fourteen years only) by taking her, by accepting her for the sexuality that is the cause of her molestation. She does so because she likes him. Crunch, respecting her need, restores her womanhood through the sex-act. They fall in love and she has to pay the price for loving Crunch. Her father, feeling dispossessed, beats her mercilessly and she aborts the child that she is carrying. The abortion leaves her barren and the physical barrenness becomes a spiritual barrenness which even a stormy love affair with Hall will not be enough to fill. The sex-act between Hall and Julia is never done for the sake of sex. It follows the feelings of mutual respect and love for each other. But suddenly she breaks the commitment to Hall and goes to Africa where she is initiated into the philosophy of life. Deeply disturbed as she is at her incompleteness, she gains her real womanhood when her African lover tells her that she:

... was not barren, that childbirth takes many forms, that regret is a kind of abortion, that sorrow is the only key to joy... He made me begin to look forward, instead of looking back... I didn’t know who I was. But that was very important -- to know I didn’t know. It was strange to be looked on, not merely as yourself, but as
part of something other, vaster. I hated it. But now that I'm back here, among all these people, who think that everything begins, and ends, with them, it all begins to make sense. (p. 569)

Julia has found the purpose of life; she has found the key to life; she has found the way to deal with her own history. She is able to treat her sorrows as part of life and her ability to convert the suffering into joy makes it procreative. The sorrow and suffering when internalized, give birth to joy. This is 'life' because a person as an individual is not the end of life; life begins only when one learns to relate to the sufferings of others. To relate to suffering is not to lick one's wounds but relate it to the suffering of others, and joy comes when one begins to belong to others in their suffering, pain and sorrow. Failure to do so is abortion; to regret for one's past life is abortion; to move ahead in the suffering of others is 'childbirth'. Thus, procreation which was the physical manifestation of love in the earlier novel is now inbued will philosphical and spiritual connotations by Baldwin.

Similarly Hall also comes to develop his vision through his love for Ruth. The vision thus gained enables him to prepare himself to come to terms with his love relations. After he has come out of the wilderness of the loss of Julia, he is ready to receive Ruth. He comes to understand that "real love involves real perception and that perception can bring joy, or terror, or death,
but it will never abandon you to the dream of happiness. Love is perceiving and perceiving is anguish” (p. 380) — a vision of life similar to Julia’s. This similarity of vision and approach to life enables him to understand Julia’s love in proper perspective. He now knows that to love is to perceive the anguish deep down in the heart of the other person. To love, thus, is to share the suffering and pains which will bring ‘joy’; mere happiness arising out of a simplistic approach to life or sex means nothing. This approach to life necessitates him to perceive his brother’s life in order to share his song, his suffering and his being.

Hall’s pressing need to tell the story to understand his own life through a balanced perception of his younger brother’s life enables him to see through his lack of commitment in his love relationships. This also enables him to appreciate Julia’s life and her anguish. Jimmy, planning to write a book on Arthur, goes on a pilgrimage to the places where Arthur had been in order to feel what Arthur might have felt. Both these efforts suggests that for a symbiotic relation between the society and the individual, the approach to ‘connect’ through procreation is not enough. The individual has to be understood as well.
If Beale Street Could Talk and Just Above My Head present a mature vision of life. Both the novels are complementary in that the vision projected in If Beale Street Could Talk is the basis of the philosophical approach of Just Above My Head. The limited canvas of black life in If Beale Street Could Talk with an ideal heterosexual couple and an 'idealized black family' signifies the 'connectedness' of the individuals and the society, pre-supposing that the individuals are required for the purpose of furthering the community. The emphasis on understanding of the pain and suffering of the individual at the level of community and the broad canvas of civil rights movement enables the writer to broaden the 'code' in its broadest terms. The 'code' as it is applied on the characters of Just Above My Head suggests that the individual attains the 'grace' when he is true to himself, bears his pain and suffering of this knowledge 'connects' with others' pain and suffering to forge a love-relationship and converts this suffering into joy by looking forward to the future and makes an effort to change the history that clings to people and to which people cling so desperately.
NOTES


2 It is used here in the sense that it does not carry the burden of religion, morality or racism to the extent his previous novels carry.


4 Martha Duffy, "All in the family" rpt. *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, p. 41.


8 David Thomas, "Too Black, Too White," rpt. *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, p. 44.


15 Trudier Harris puts forward this idea in her discussion of Tish’s character in her book *Black Women Characters in the Fiction of James Baldwin*.

16 Andrea Dworkin, p. 68.
17 ibid., p. 71.

18 Mary Fair Burks, p. 85.


   *Just above my head,*

   *I hear music in the air.*

   *And I really do believe*

   *There's a God somewhere.*


22 Pearl K. Bell, “Roth and Baldwin: Coming Home,” *Contemporary Literary Criticism,* pp. 42-43.

23 Timothy S. Siebles, “James Baldwin: A Larger Apprehension of Our Song,” *Contemporary Literary Criticism,* p. 44.


26 Eleanor Traylor, p. 221.