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**| Book Review**

**Book Review: *James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, and the Rhetorics of Black Male Subjectivity***

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**| ABSTRACT**

James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, and the Rhetorics of Black Male Subjectivity', Aaron Oforlea, analyses the strategies that Toni Morrison and James Baldwin employ in their quest to tell the African-American story. He uses subjectivity, intersectionality, discursive divide, among others, to explain to the reader the issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality. He analyses their African American characters and how they thrived despite their problems of social alienation, sexual preferences, and class status. The discursive divide is a concept discussed throughout the novel; it entails moving from the objects of discourse to an empowered agent. In this paper, we will highlight the various concepts addressed by the authors in each chapter.

**| KEYWORDS**

James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, And the Rhetorics of Black Male Subjectivity

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*James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, And the Rhetorics Of Black Male Subjectivity*

By Aaron Ngozi Oforlea

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Aaron Ngozi Oforlea, in the introduction section, discusses the concept of the discursive divide and how blacks have to be on the lookout to live. He discusses the idea of whiteness and how it affected the black male characters in James Baldwin's and Toni Morrison's books. According to Oforlea, black men want self-definition, selfhood, and communal consciousness. Oforlea's close readings are generally fantastic, except for his lengthy disproportionate introduction. He gives a tour through the insights of Donna Haraway, Jacques Derrida, Lev Vygotsky, Julia Kristeva, Louis Althusser, Johannes Fabian, Homi Bhabha, Martin Heidegger, and many others.

In the first chapter, Oforlea notes that Black men had to show that they were reliable, loving, and kind to their families while still displaying fear due to the prevailing circumstances. Oforlea, in the novel *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, reads the silence characteristic of Paul D in his oppressor's presence as an active refusal to accord to slavery psychic legitimacy. Paul D enacts silence as a means

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of endurance, self-reflection, and resistance as it is seen when he is in the Garner plantation when he maintains his silence about his pursuits as a freeman even with Sethe. Paul D struggled with the wisdom discourses of being a pleasant man and the anthropological domination of being a Schoolteacher so that he could create a new role for himself as a father, husband, and freeman. Slavery converted blacks into objects and property. Paul D experiences represent the redefinition of male subjectivity and the cruel nature in which manhood can be denied, defined, and redefined. The author also discusses Morrison's use of double consciousness, which enables black subjects to develop endurance strategies that will help them to acquire what they want.

In the second chapter, Oforlea turns his attention towards Baldwin's book, '*Go tell it to the mountain*'. The section discusses the life of African American Christians, their challenges, and the lessons we can learn. Drawing from the character of Gabriel, Oforlea analyses the paradoxes that faced blacks who ventured into Christianity. Life back in the south was not favorable for a black person; hence Gabriel decided to move to the north in order to find a job. In the north, jobs were available for African Americans, but they were not well paid. African Americans were forced to live in secluded areas that were in bad condition. Gabriel's move to the north changed him as he converted to Christianity as a way of salvation. He mentally and physically abuses his wives and illegitimate son, which shows the ingrained hatred of whites. Baldwin uses Gabriel's character to show the reader the circumstances in which African Americans lived and what influenced them to become Christians. Religion gave hope to a group that had been mistreated since the times of slavery. At the end of the book, John is saved and undergoes a transformation; hence does not make the same mistakes as his father, Gabriel.

Oforlea's third chapter discusses the character of Leo in the book. *Tell me how long the trains been gone*. He focuses on the idea of black subjectivity. Leo's ambitions are to be an actor, but he has to be careful of how his brother (a pastor), mother, and his black counterparts view him. Leo moved out of Harlem to pursue a career in acting. Oforlea analyses Leo Proudhammer's acting performance and presents them in the African American roles as the domain of individual struggle and contestation. The chapter represents both the realization of the discourses and the strategies for manipulating them. Proudhammer simulates these discourses to some degree extent to establish a subjectivity as clear from his socially-built black identity. He views his path of being an actor as a mimicry, which stages a parodic action of a black character to a white crowd to show the extents to which the black identity's social constructions are parodies of the lives of the African Americans.

Oforlea's fourth chapter is '*Song of Solomon*.' It shows most residents in the Great Migrants who fled the random acts of violence and poverty of the south for the promises of employment and security in the north, just to find themselves culturally bankrupt and socially alienated. Milkman's path to selfhood evolves within the Great Migration context. Early in the *Song of Solomon*, Milkman is materialistic, detached, selfish, and alienated. As a descendant of such Great Migrants, especially his aunt and father, Milkman is born to a community and family, which is determined by these disassociation feelings. However, he is revealed to family legacies and cultural discourses, which link him to his Southern family roots. Oforlea emphasizes that Milkman should work out the competing conversations about community and self-responsibility. Also, the author discusses the idea of re-inscribing and renaming places as a way of conserving African American folklore. Morrison uses Milkman's life to explain the discursive divide that is present between the North and South. Milkman struggles to adapt to society because of the family secrets that even threaten his survival. He can achieve freedom when he gets a job as the property manager for his father.

In this chapter, Oforlea prioritizes the discourse of sexuality and how it is represented by Baldwin and Morrison in their books. African-Americans have endured being mistreated; the author takes us through the issue of homosexuality in the context of African-Americans and slavery. Also, it is essential to note that Baldwin narrates his book from a female character perspective, which raises several issues. Elaine Showalter criticizes this move and notes telling the stories from a female character perspective indicates the deep-rooted issue of patriarchy where men speak for the women. However, Judith Butker disagrees by noting that male characters cross-dressing is not a problem as it indicates the performative nature of gender. Oforlea views Gabriel as a burden to subjectivity when he uses his Christian discourses to establish himself as a patriarch and a man. The materiality of his encounters is that he is only capable of finding employment as a chauffeur in New York and as a yardman in Mississippi. Oforlea demonstrates how Gabriel's struggles with masculinity and how it helped him to view himself as a man in the African American contexts when he is not permitted to be a man in the higher social context.

In the last chapter in his book, Oforlea highlights the epitomes of African Americans' subjectivity, which indicates a paradigm switch from the Fanonian dialectics of "self and other." *Tar baby* portrays a love affair between Jadine and Son, two Black Americans from very different worlds. Oforlea explores the original epitomes of African American subjectivity, which rely on the rhetorical actions of what Gayatri Spivak termed as the 'strategic representation of self.' Also, he explores the issue of feminism and how being alone impacted Morrison's family life. Morrison preferred to stay alone and raise his kids while still writing his books. He notes that this affected her family life. He blames the differences encountered in both African-American males and females to slavery but refuses to admit that those differences are eternal.

In conclusion, Aaron Oforlea has assiduously labored to create a remarkable and significant book for American and rhetoric studies as well as for Morrison and Baldwin professionals. His book explores the discourses of class, sexuality, and race through debating about welfare, family breakdown, crime, sex, drugs, and other political arguments, which mark the definition breakdown and values. Oforlea articulates the inner workings of these supreme discourses, which marginalize black men subjects and define male subjectivity and sheds light on the ways black subjugation is kept through rhetorical practices, which enabled white people to gain from race, class and gender without taking responsibility for black oppression. It can help many rhetoricians to trace the strategic language used by African Americans from rhetorical forms like slave narratives and spirituals to contemporary Black activism and digital expression.