

## BEYOND MULTICULTURALISM: PROPHETIC FORMULATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN-AMERICAN CULTURAL DISCOURSE

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In his appeal to reintegrate the relations between the artist and the historical embedding of his inherently alienated society, James Baldwin points both to the plights of American society and to the role the artist can play in mending them:

In the same way that to become a social human being one modifies and...lies to oneself about all one's interior, uncharted chaos, so have we as a nation, modified and suppressed, and lied about all the darker forces in our history....The artist is present to correct the delusions to which we fall prey in our attempt to avoid such knowledge... (*The Price of the Ticket* pp. 315-17).

My paper proposes to examine a particular aspect of the discourse used by Baldwin and other African-American artists in their attempt to re-create such intercourse with society. It seems to me that in choosing their discourse these artists and intellectuals emphasize the need for transcendent perspectives that do not neglect the period's specific particulars, and interlace universal essences with concrete American existential realities.<sup>1</sup>

In undertaking this labor of multiple mediation the artist does not assume the role of a peace-maker. On the contrary, imposing self-scrutiny he becomes a disturber of the peace against whom society constantly wages war. By the same token, "he must never cease warring with it, for its sake and for his own" (*The Price of the Ticket* pp.316-7).

Mitigating the antagonistic nature of this intercourse, however, Baldwin insists on its dual, bitter-sweet, quality:

Societies never know it, but the war of an artist with his

society is a *lover's war*, and he does, at his best, what lovers do, which is to reveal the beloved to himself, and with that revelation to make *freedom real* (p.318, my italics).<sup>2</sup>

Two elements of the artist's war of love with the community are noteworthy here. First, in terms of formulation: It is conducted in a double-edged rhetorical pattern which fuses devotion and criticism, affirmation and anxiety. Second, in terms of objectives - social and ideological. The artist seeks to re-create the pristine essence of the symbol of 'America' (*The Price* p.244). Only by preserving an analytical sense of history in an otherwise isolated, ahistorical postmodernist climate, and by emphasizing the participatory attitude in a fragmented and atomized society, can one uncover that *real freedom* which will elevate the American people, "beyond the *Old World* concept of race and class and caste, to create finally, what we must have had in mind when we first began speaking of the *New World*" (West, *Prophetic Thought* p.54; Baldwin, *The Price* p.318, my italics).

My aim in this study is to consider these two facets of the intercourse between artist and society in African-American cultural production, highlighting ideas embedded in works of James Baldwin, Cornel West and Ralph Ellison.

It is my contention that African-American philosophers, novelists, and musicians resort to a complex discourse of paradox and dialectical tension, not merely as part of an essential professional aesthetics, but also as the projection of a dichotomous vision inherent in the specific context of African-American existence.

Taking the argument a step further, I suggest that while this dialogic tension of opposites may denote a sectarian style - the marginal even subversive position of a doubly alienated group - it is possible to relate it, beyond the particular sphere, to a more general aspect of American cultural discourse. Its roots can be found in the art of double-edged rhetoric of Scriptural prophets, which merges castigation and encouragement, social criticism and moral renewal, sceptic realism and spiritual inspiration.

Cultural historians have shown that this rhetorical practice greatly influenced American Puritan texts of the seventeenth century, and remained manifest in American symbology and cultural production throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In their war of love with society, prophet, preacher and writer seem to have resorted to these artistic patterns, consciously shaping their message to gain the attention of a potential audience.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, 'America' as geographical space which has yet to evolve into a symbol of real freedom, newness, and good society, may signify here the specific connotations - social, economic and political - of a marginal group for whom the dream has not yet come true. At the same time it clearly resorts beyond ethnic boundaries to the same open-ended rhetorical constructs with which the New-England Puritans, drawing from scriptural discourse, first introduced the symbology of the New World.

Thus viewed, the production of some twentieth century African-American artists can be studied within the framework of the diachronic historical progress of cultural discourse from prophet to preacher to artist, hailed by American bards from Winthrop and Jonathan Edwards, through Emerson and Whitman in the nineteenth century, to Wallace Stevens and Norman Mailer in our own time.<sup>4</sup>

## II

Binary opposition and dialectical tensions which inform the artist's intercourse with society, are inherent elements in the position and discourse of Scriptural prophets.

The prophet often presents himself as a lonely, marginal figure, alienated from society (Jeremiah 20:7-9). At the same time, however, his teaching is motivated by the principle of solidarity (Walzer p.80), and he is deeply involved with and in need of his community of listeners. His message "presupposes common ground on which prophet and audience stand" (Greenberg p.56).

A similar vacillation between the conflicting attitudes of estrangement from and participation in communal life has informed African American discourse in recent decades. One example is the ongoing debate on the nature of "the Black Aesthetic" among African-American artists and intellectuals.<sup>5</sup>

Another example is provided by Cornel West - a distinguished paragon of the bond between scriptural prophetic discourse and that of contemporary African-American intellectuals - who asks the isolated and marginalized artist of postmodernist market-society to balance atomistic self-indulgence with "human connection", which he regards as a fundamental element of prophetic thought. (*Prophetic Thoughts* p.5, p.32, pp.87-8).

This duality of aloneness within participatory existence is equally imputed by Baldwin to the rhetoric he recommends for artistic production. In an interview about a year before his death, Baldwin

tells Quincy Troupe: "What I was actually doing was trying to avoid a certain estrangement ... between myself and my generation ... I'm talking now in terms of one's function as an artist".

One's function as an artist, Baldwin and West seem to claim, equally involves serving as a witness of present reality and advocate of future reforms. The act of witnessing the present, moreover, must be conducted in light of the past, in order to retain a sense of history (Troupe, p.190; Baldwin, *The Price of the Ticket* p.368; West, *Prophetic Thoughts* p.4). Only such scrutiny of past and present which, as mentioned earlier on, involves a bold unveiling of their darker aspects, can culminate in the reassuring promise of a different and better future for society. One of the central premises of this trend of African-American discourse is that history is incomplete and "the future is open ended, and what we think and what we do can make a difference" (West, *Prophetic Thought* p.6).

Testifying to present plights and advocating reforms, the artist resorts to a dual discourse of castigation and encouragement, threat and promise, despair of the tragic elements of past and present predicaments, and hope in the vision of a better future. "The world is before you", Baldwin tells his audience, "and you need not take it or leave it as it was when you came in". His dual rhetoric of exhortation and encouragement is directed to the black community as well as to white mainstream society.

A similar dialectical tension between critique and reassurance, is characteristic of Scriptural prophetic discourse, which asserts and combines the prophet's roles as visionary and connected social critic (Heschel p.12). As a concerned witness he relentlessly criticizes the community for some present iniquity in light of past history. At the same time, however, he advocates a change of conduct and aspires to instill hope in the hearts of the community for a transformed, better reality (Micah 6, Amos 9, Jeremiah 31:23-35). Far from being a mere soothsayer, he fuses anticipation with actuality; Involved in the contemporary scene, he strives to combine the sense of transcendent union with everyday moral concerns (Toulouse p.3). His message is this-world oriented, and his vision is directed to encourage listeners to make a choice and change the terms of their existence (Deut 3:15-20).

The prophetic tradition of double-edged discourse was introduced to American ideology and symbolic language at its moment of inception. Scholars such as Sacvan Bercovitch and Larzer Ziff have shown that this both/and dialectical interaction - exhortation and encouragement,

despair and optimism - and the paradoxical fusion of pressing actuality and visionary formulations based on scriptural prophecies, is predominant in the religious and lay sermons of seventeenth century American Puritans. Perhaps one fitting example is John Winthrop's lay sermon *Model of Christian Charity* delivered in 1630 on board the "Arabella" heading towards the shores of the New World, in which the speaker casts himself in the role of his ancestor, Moses on Pisgah - creating a direct continuity between the historical and the present moment - and like Moses, pronouncing both threat and reassurance for the future at a time of choice and transition.<sup>6</sup>

John Winthrop's more immediate spiritual ancestor, perhaps, was Martin Luther, and it is to him that Cornel West resorts in order to establish the historical continuity of prophetic thought in America, and its manifestation in African-American discourse. West shows Luther to be both heir to the tradition of Scriptural prophets and a model for American Puritan discourse. Castigating iniquity and advocating reform and freedom Luther entertained a legacy of prophetic discourse, which West claims, he bequeathed to his twentieth century African-American namesake, the social critic and "prophetic Christian", Martin Luther King Jr. King's discourse followed the critical vision of Scriptural prophecies, Reformist preaching, and American Jeremiads by warning that America was on the brink of self destruction and at the same time providing "the only slim hope for social sanity in a violence ridden world" (*Prophetic Fragments* p.259, p.3, p.11).

### III

The double-edged vision of African-American artists and intellectuals has been often generated by the doubly marginal position forced upon them by White America. Their attempt to wrestle with mainstream exclusion has led, moreover, to ideological ambivalence, masquerading, and double consciousness. Thus, Ralph Ellison speaks of "our long habit of deception and evasion" (*Shadow and Act* p.xxi), Dubois, of "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of another" (Weinberg, p.20), and Baldwin, of the difficulty "to maintain a kind of watchful, mocking distance between oneself as one appears to be, and oneself as one actually is" (*The Price* p.852).<sup>7</sup>

Ambiguities have been compounded, however, not merely by division of skin-color but also by diversities among African-American intellectuals themselves, precisely on the issue of who "one actually is". While they seem to agree that a defined social and cultural heritage -

the sense of one's individual and communal history - is vital to artistic production, they argue about the extent to which the African-American artist can deem himself heir to Western civilization and its symbolic language.

As early as 1900, W.E.B. Dubois offered an either/or attitude to mainstream culture: "Such a double life must ... tempt the mind to pretense or to revolt, to hypocrisy or to radicalism" (Weinberg p.211). Positions have since ranged from radical separatism which underscores Afrocentricity, and is reflected in such movements as Garvey's "back to Africa", the Black Arts, and the Nation of Islam, to a call for total integration.

James Baldwin expresses the ambiguity inherent in the search for cultural forefathers when, many years after a Harlem storefront church pastor asks him "whose little boy are you"? he still feels a twofold outcast:

I was forced to recognize that I was a kind of bastard of the West; when I followed the line of my past I did not find myself in Europe but in Africa ... I brought to Shakespeare, Bach, Rembrandt...a special attitude ... [T]hey did not contain my history...this was not my heritage. At the same time I ... had certainly been unfitted for the jungle (*Notes of a Native Son* pp.6-7).

Baldwin seems to echo Richard Wright's sense of marginality expressed, ironically, in the double-edged rhetoric of St. Paul and embraced by the American Puritan forefathers: "Negroes had never been allowed to catch the full spirit of Western civilization ... *they live in it but not of it*" (quoted in Ellison, *Shadow* p.93 my italics).<sup>8</sup>

Conversely Ralph Ellison believes that the African-American artist is situated within the boundaries of Western cultural heritage. This position allows him to turn exasperating ambiguities to a rewarding multifaceted cultural texture, and the either/or (or even neither/nor) dichotomy to a both/and enriching dialogue:

In my own case, having inherited the language of Shakespeare and Melville, Mark Twain and Lincoln and no other, I try to do my part in keeping the American language alive and rich by using in my work the music and idiom of American Negro speech, and by insisting that the words of that language correspond with the reality of American life as seen by my

own people ... (*Shadow* p.267).

Endorsing a similar both/and attitude, Cornel West rejects the propensity to either "deify or demonize" (white) Western cultural heritage. West's formula transcends existing patterns of ethnic consideration - the discourse of whiteness and blackness- to deal with the larger issue of human quest for a defined identity vis-a-vis the 'other' (in terms of race, gender, or religion) in a multicultural society (*Prophetic Thought* 26-30). It strives to counterpoint a sense of displacement by advocating individual and communal self-assertion while stressing an interaction with society at large.

Cornel West's both/and rhetorical strategy wrestles with the vital question of cultural legacy by rejecting any confining "notions of pure traditions or pristine heritage", and offering instead "ambiguous legacies, hybrid cultures ... cross cultural fertilization". This broad grasp of cultural origins is one of the four constructs which constitute the *prophetic* vision he espouses; The other three are communal commitment, self-criticism, and human hope (pp.3-6). Thus presented, West's rhetorical strategies seem to re-create the paradigmatic structure of Scriptural and early American prophetic discourse even as he adds the particular nuance of African-American concerns.<sup>9</sup> So construed, the rhetorical form he proposes may project the thematics African-American artists, such as poet J.W.Johnson, wish to convey:

a form expressing the imagery, the idioms...and the distinctive humor and pathos too, of the Negro, but which will also be capable of voicing the deepest and highest emotions and aspirations, and allow of the widest range of subjects and the widest scope of treatment (J.W. Johnson quoted in Barksdale p.484).

Two intertwined idioms of African-American life are instrumental to this double-edged discourse when it aims to ensure *real freedom* of individual identity within a multifaceted existence: The particular symbolic expression of the black church, and the spirit of black music - notably jazz and the blues. These sources offer patterns and structures which reflect the often paradoxical, dialectical tension typical to African-American cultural dualism. Both religious rituals and musical performance offer means for self-assertion which range from assimilation to separatism. Both fuse elements from past traditions with those of present trends; In both idioms African elements mingle with a

Western orientation creating examples of 'cross cultural fertilization'.<sup>10</sup>

In both black church rituals and the cadences of black music the binary oppositions found in prophetic rhetoric - isolation and communality, despair and hope, suffering and joy - are predominant; equally predominant is the oral, spontaneous verbal expression, typical of prophetic formulations.

The black church is often seen as the single most influential cultural product of the African-American community, and it is within its framework that writers such as Cornel West and James Baldwin have found reverberations of prophetic thought. From its inception the black church has directed its worshippers towards an individual quest for salvation within the boundaries of a tightly knit communal framework. The vision of its preachers has been double-edged and paradoxical, fusing a sense of depravity, humiliation and suffering, with an equally strong sense of dignity, patience, and faith in future redemption (West, *Prophetic Fragments* p.5, p.7, p.42). White Protestants' stereotypical configuration of the black as evil, sinful and sexually menacing has contributed to the dual vision inherent in black church discourse. Preachers used mainstream Christian moral discourse to conduct their lover's war with the community. On the one hand they exposed crime, immorality and inherent depravity in the worshippers' hearts by resorting to rhetorical constructs of accusation, castigation and threat (Baldwin, *The Price* pp.337-9). In the familiar tradition of Scriptural prophets and early American preachers, these constructs made use of predominant feelings of uncertainty, fear and despair, to wrestle with external and inner chaos and to safeguard the unity of the congregation.

By the same token, preachers harnessed the feeling of pain and fear, humiliation and degradation to the cultivation of patience and hope, historical identity and faith in an open-ended future (West *Prophetic Thought* p.6). They found their symbols and archetypes in Old and New Testament prophecies, and contrasted the figures of the sinful, dark-skinned Ham and the outcast Ishmael with the hope-inspiring typological metaphors of "chosen people" and "God's suffering servant" (Washington p.155ff).

African-American writers have often resorted to the prophetic idiom of black church preachers to depict the quest for human affirmation within the framework of their contemporary plight. James Baldwin speaks, in the introduction to his play *The Amen Corner*, of the affinity between the playwright and the preacher - each conducting a 'lover's war' with his respective audience: "What I wanted to do in



the theater was to recreate moments I remembered as a boy preacher, to involve the people, even against their will, to shake them up, and hopefully to change them" (p.xvi).

A similar wish to counterpoint agonizing reality with hope, to confront problems and offer solace - a kind of "strategy of living in an unlivable situation" - informs African-American musical idiom, notably jazz and the blues (Middleton pp.48-9). "In all jazz, and especially in the blues", says Baldwin, "there is something tart and ironic, authoritative and double-edged". An art of ambiguities and dichotomies it constitutes, as Ralph Ellison puts it, "the only consistent art in the United States which constantly reminds us of our limitations while encouraging us to see how far we can actually go" (*Shadow* p.246).

This artistic expression offers, as part of the total African-American discourse, variegated strategies of self-assertion; From the bibop subculture of musicians like Charlie Parker and Theolonius Monk which emphasizes the subversive, separatist stand, to the more assimilationist, traditional entertainer's performance of, say, Louis Amstrong (Ellison, *Shadow* p.225; West, *Prophetic Fragments* p.77).

Cast in the crucible of Black-church rituals, this distinctive musical expression has helped permeate the secular sphere of life with a religious spirit. The musician is often seen as the secular counterpart of a religious leader. James Weldon Johnson describes blues musicians as "black and unknown bards", who "sang a race from wood and stone to Christ", and whose "songs of sorrow, love, and faith and hope" stir the blood "like a mighty trumpet call" (Barksdale p.486).<sup>11</sup> Ralph Ellison sees the blues singer, Bessie Smith, as "a priestess, a celebrant who affirmed the values of the group and man's ability to deal with chaos" (*Shadow* p.257). Ellison underscores the affinity between musician and preacher when, in his story "And Hickman Arrives", he presents a preacher who is also a trombone player, and who tries to overcome a crisis in the church by grabbing his trombone and playing the 'St. Louis Blues'. Daddy Hickman's use of antiphony during the service is described as part of a jazz performance: "two voices...playing variations on the verses just as he did with his trombone" (p.704).

The musical idiom records the plight of existence, but ends on a note of hope and promise; It speaks of anguish and yet creates a kind of joy (Dubois p.204). Working within the tradition of religious cadences, the African-American musician weaves together limitation and self-assertion, sorrow and joy, into a discourse which expresses an acute awareness of a collective past tradition and leads to individual expression within the attentive community (O'Meally p.90).

Two elements of jazz ideologemes highlight the family resemblance to the double-edged rhetorical model I have proposed: In terms of its historical orientation jazz requires the musician to "learn the best of the past, and add to it his personal vision...with a fluid style that reduced the chaos of living to form" (Ellison, *Shadow* p.189). In terms of their subject position the orientation of jazz and the blues require a paradoxical interplay of isolation and participation.

#### IV

In 1971 Houston Baker observed: "Today's writers are engaged in an attempt to construct a chrysalis of blackness, which will set them apart and enable them to grasp the essence of the black American's reality" (p.17). Does Baker suggest that the balance between self-assertive and participatory stances in African-American discourse should tilt in favor of the former? Does the trend towards radicalization spell the death of dialogue between the particular and the universal?

True, problems of ambiguous socio/cultural identity and the pressing need to reduce communal chaos to living form, have generated in African-American writing concerns of their own. My argument, however, is that the codes of African-American music and religion offer even today ideologemes that can transcend the debates over eurocentrism and multiculturalism in form and content alike.<sup>12</sup> With this aim in mind, there are African-American writers today who look back to hybrid rhetorical traditions for means of shaping their paradoxical responses to the present, and their prospects to the future (*Prophetic Thought* x.4).

Viewed from the perspective of their structures of content and form, James Baldwin's texts provide salient examples of my rhetorical model. Baldwin's narrative constructs are molded by implicit and explicit traces of the prophetic heritage which counterpoints defiance with participation and agony with solace.

In *The Fire Next Time* (1963) Baldwin foregrounds the dialectics of his discourse in ways that discredit any one-sided reading, whether of castigation or encouragement. In a rhetorical formulation reminiscent of Scriptural prophecies and New-England jeremiads, *The Fire Next Time* counterpoints punishment and promise, underscoring personal and communal choice. "Everything now, we must assume, is in our hands" - compresses the dialectics. A further strategy for foregrounding the ambiguity of choice consists in the conditional formulation which characterizes the double-edged rhetoric in the prophetic mode in

general and the Puritan jeremiads in particular. Thus construed, the tone of thunder in the titular epigram - "God gave Noah the rainbow sign, No more water, the fire next time" - must be seen as but one aspect of the conditional formulation which allows for both threat *and* assurance. On the one hand, "[i]f we do not falter ... we may ... change the history of the world" - a note of strong optimism and promise, echoing the 'light to the nations' motif of Isaiah and Winthrop. On the other hand, "[i]f we do not now dare everything" introduces the threat of total devastation - "the fire next time" (*The Price* p.379).

The double-edged, open-ended dialectical rhetoric he inherits from black religion and music, equally dominates Baldwin's play *The Amen Corner* and novel *Just Above My Head*. But for the sake of brevity, Baldwin's characteristically dialectical discourse lends itself most readily to analysis in his early short story "Sonny's Blues". Told by the protagonist's elder brother, the tale relates Sonny's choice of jazz as a way of survival.

In the relations of the solitary player with the group of musicians that Sonny joins Baldwin stages a dialectical intermediary between the initially contradictory ideologies of the two brothers. Before the lesson of jazz, the elder brother's assimilative ideology seems to flatly oppose Sonny's defiantly estranged stance, while Sonny sees in professional playing an opportunity for individual self-assertion.

Paradoxically, to master the African-American musical tradition and shape it to his individual form Sonny must assimilate the past and interrelate with present communities of co-players.

Playing with Sonny and listening to the performance, all participants experience a moment of freedom that is not chaos; of suffering that does not refuse solace:

He and his boys up there were keeping it new, at the risk of ruin, destruction, madness and death, in order to find new ways to make us listen. For, while the tale of how we suffer, and how we are delighted, and how we may triumph is never new, it always must be heard ... it's the only light we've got in this darkness (p.141).

Momentary solace only, because the darkness within and without - the hatred, tension and ambiguity - still exist, perpetuating the need for exhortation and threat. Yet still a triumph, enriching and hope-inspiring, because it allows the artists to perform (and the audience to accept) at their best, regardless of existing problems, in the name and

for the good of humanity at large.

If at the outset Sonny insists on bipolarity by claiming his affinity with the bibop separatist musical trend (his idol is Charlie Parker and not Louis Armstrong), at this moment of shared experience he transcends the either/or boundaries of the particular ethnic quest to the much larger scope of human quest for freedom and self-assertion. This ultimate message of tormented individuality and comforting communality, suffering and joy, is foreshadowed by a sidewalk revival meeting which takes place earlier in the story, and which the two brothers witness from different locations. The revivalists, testifying and singing with their Bibles and their tambourines, bear a message of agony and redemption. They are preachers closely connected to the community they address: "The woman with the tambourine ... was divided by very little from the woman who stood watching her" (p.130).

The experience of communality and the message of pain and joy seem, for a moment, to lighten the darkness and instill hope:

As the singing filled the air the watching, listening faces underwent a change, the eyes focusing on something within; the music seemed to soothe a poison out of them; and time seemed *nearly* to fall away from the sullen, battered faces, *as though*, they were fleeing back to their first condition, while dreaming of their last" (p.131, my italics).

Neither religious nor musical expression can dissolve the problems of existence faced by African-American artist and audience, but the double-edged discourse they create allows the outcast artist, Son[ny], to transcend the agonizing dilemma of forefathers, and record his vision of a defined identity. It enables him, moreover, to conduct his 'lover's war' with the community and work toward restoring a sense of freedom within tension-ridden contemporary America: "Freedom lurked around us and I understood, at last, that he could help us be free if we would listen, that he would never be free until we did" (p.142).

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## REFERENCES

1. Cornel West argues, for example, that while American literary critics borrow heavily from French poststructural discourses they neglect to relate them to "the realities of black (and female, hispanic, gay, and lesbian) otherness, difference, and transgression occurring beneath their very noses in America" (Prophetic Fragments p.170).
2. Baldwin makes use of this bipolar, paradoxical discourse when he states that social integration can be gained only if "we, with love, shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it" (The Price p.336, my italics). He justifies his critical position, saying: "I love America more than any country in the world, and exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually" (Notes of a Native Son p.9).
3. Teresa Toslouse examines in The Art of Prophesying the degree to which prophet and preacher balance inspiration and artistic formulation in delivering the message of the Spirit. See also S. Bercovitch The American Jeremiad.
4. For the influence of prophetic rhetoric on Puritan discourse see S. Bercovitch's work, notably The American Jeremiad. Studies which discuss the continuity of this influence from seventeenth century Puritan preachers to Jonathan Edwards in the eighteenth century and on to R.W. Emerson, include S. Bercovitch "Emerson the Prophet"; U. Brumm American Thought and Religious Typology; W. Clebsch American Religious Thought; M. Lowance The Language of Canaan.
5. Baldwin, Ellison, West, Jones and Neal are among these intellectuals. In "The Black Arts Movement and Its Critics" David Lionel Smith examines this debate. On the one hand - the demand for isolation and elitism as a cure against assimilationist tendencies, and on the other hand the insistence (by Larry Neal and others) on a communally oriented and participatory literary production (pp.94-101).
6. For the dialectical tension in the prophetic personality see Heschel p.6, p.12, pp.180-185, p.445. Peter Bulkeley's The Gospel Covenant and John Winthrop's A Model of Christian Charity are examples of religious and lay sermons where the complexity of prophetic rhetoric is evident. See also S. Bercovitch, The Puritan Origin, and The American Jeremiad; L. Ziff, "The Literary Consequences of Puritanism". Michael Walzer presents the prophet as a connected social critic, who combines threat and encouragement in his message (pp.69-94).
7. Martin Buber points to double consciousness as an inherent characteristic of the prophet's personality. The prophetic idea, he claims, is "an expression...of man's longing for rescue from his own inner duality" (p.34). In The Invisible Man the protagonist's grandfather gives his son the following advice: "I want you to overcome them with yeses, and undermine them with grins, agree them to death and destruction" (p. 16). This duplicity is reiterated in the lyrics of a blues song: "Got my mind for white folks to see/ 'nother for what I know is me;/ he don't know, he don't know my mind". Also see Bone p.3; Cooke p.16.
8. After his first meeting with Elijah Muhammad, leader of the Nation of Islam movement, Baldwin claimed that "the Negro has been formed by this (American) nation ... and does not belong to any other - not to Africa, and certainly not to Islam" (The Price p.368). On the question of cultural origins, Wilson J. Moses mentions the case of William H. Ferris, a black nationalist, who was paradoxically responsible in the

1920s for the term "Negrosaxon" (p.648).

9. In the introduction to Prophetic Thoughts in Postmodern Times West states that the main theme of his book is the need to "go beyond...multiculturalism in order to keep alive prophetic thought and action in our time"(x).

10. Cornel West mentions three African elements in the black church: kinetic orality, passionate physicality and combative spirituality. Prophetic Fragments pp.5-6, p.43). For a discussion of the influence of African music on the blues see Oliver p.39, p.223; Middleton pp.34-54.

11. For further discussion of the affinity between the spiritual leader and the musician see Reilly p.145, Bone p.238, Middleton p.5. In Go Tell It On The Mountain Baldwin weaves together the idioms of faith and music. As his adolescent protagonist undergoes a moment of conversion during a service in church, he hears a sound coming from his cracked open heart - the sound of the blues "that could only come from darkness, that yet bore such sure witness to the glory of the light" (p.200).

12. I borrow the term ideologeme from F. Jameson's The Political Unconscious (London, 1981). On the thematic significance of form see Terry Eagleton Criticism and Ideology (London: Verso, 1978).