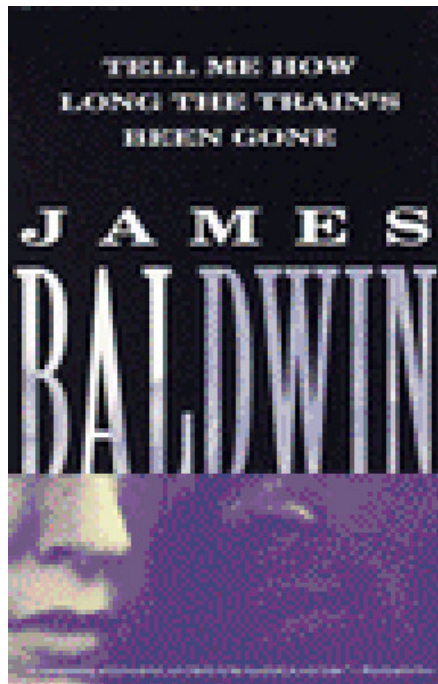




Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone

James Baldwin

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Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone James Baldwin

At the height of his theatrical career, the actor Leo Proudhammer is nearly felled by a heart attack. As he hovers between life and death, Baldwin shows the choices that have made him enviably famous and terrifyingly vulnerable.

For between Leo's childhood on the streets of Harlem and his arrival into the intoxicating world of the theater lies a wilderness of desire and loss, shame and rage. An adored older brother vanishes into prison. There are love affairs with a white woman and a younger black man, each of whom will make irresistible claims on Leo's loyalty. And everywhere there is the anguish of being black in a society that at times seems poised on the brink of total racial war. Overpowering in its vitality, extravagant in the intensity of its feeling, Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone is a major work of American literature.

Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone Details

Date : Published February 17th 1998 by Vintage (first published 1968)

ISBN : 9780375701894

Author : James Baldwin

Format : Paperback 496 pages

Genre : Fiction, Classics, Cultural, African American, Lgbt, Race, Glbt, Queer



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From Reader Review Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone for online ebook

Chalida says

Not my favorite James Baldwin, but still highly engaging. Engaging enough to read all 484 pages in 8 days during the school year. They publishers market this book with Leo Proudhammer's two love affairs, one with a white woman and the other with a younger, gay Black man post WW2. The latter isn't mentioned until the last 30 pages. The former love affair left out too many details. I appreciated Proudhammer's strong sense of identity, never seeming to doubt himself nor whom he loved as a Black, bisexual man during the 1940's. Yet, both of his lovers seem to do all the critical talking about race. I was most engaged reading Baldwin's portrait of this biracial couple at one point living up in upstate NY and seeing others' reactions which made me think about my own relationship and how difficult it would have been 60 years ago. Proudhammer's an interesting character. There is an sexual relationship with his older brother that is touched upon but never explored. Similarly, the relationships with Barbara and Christopher aren't fully developed and had me inferring. Baldwin ends with a lovely tribute to San Francisco, but the ending is just as abrupt as other parts of the book.

Sofia says

4.5 stars

Baldwin's view of America is different that the view I get from other books. It's a view full with pain, hurt, anger, violence, poverty, racism which affect in one way all another all the people in play that is all Americans.

"I was part of these people, no matter how bitterly I judged them. I would never be able to leave this country. I could only leave it briefly, like a drowning man coming up for air. I had the choice of perishing with these doomed people, or of fleeing them, denying them, and, in that effort, perishing."

Published midway through his writing career Baldwin gives us Leo Proudhammer, slight Leo who shares many autobiographical elements with Baldwin. Through Leo he explores ways forwards out of poverty and hate. Religion, Art and Violence. Which is the way forward? There is no one road for all. Some find the way in religion like Caleb or in angry protestations like Christopher or in art like Leo. Maybe the fact that there is no one road makes the battle so much more difficult as there is no unity of purpose or of method. Any which way is chosen, the price has to be paid. Each choice has it's own consequences. Leo's pursuit of his art in fact made him very elusive to the people around him, to commitment, rather lonely.

Another stop on the Baldwin Journey with Maya
(as usual read with lots of highlighting and precious discussions with Maya)

Trista says

I hate to rate this book only four stars because it's Baldwin. The work is a good loooong example of Baldwin's narrative style; talky, conversational, personal. But it mostly works against him here and feels like (and I may have even read this in the Bio I read on him) that while he was writing it, he had to crank out pages for the publisher and really had no idea where he was going with it. There's no real reason this book needs to be so long.

The story of stage actor Leo Proudhammer begins with his heart attack just as he's reaching his peak as an actor. The friends that rally around him at that time, along with family life and tales of his childhood, carry the emotional content of the book. Though you do feel the events as they happen and experience the corresponding emotions, it's strange because you're also at a distance from Leo. Perhaps Baldwin addresses this when the main character says things about maintaining distance between himself and other people, but it's strange how you can know so much about a character's life, see everything from his perspective and still have only just a sense of who he is. It is no surprise the character has a heart attack for the heart ache experiences from those closest to him and the constant pressures and dangers of racism but that he rarely expresses. The story is kind of a sad, unresolved and succeeds in communicating how youth, dreams and love can create such a roaring fire but as time passes, how quickly they may reduce to a single, flickering flame, aware of the varied and unpredictable extinguishing forces, and flickering nonetheless.

Juliette Barasch says

Three and a half stars? A deeply frustrating read at times, due to some serious navel-gazing, which makes sense for a protagonist of this sort, but is ultimately mostly unrewarding for the reader. I feel Leo's written pretty inconsistently, especially with regard to his inner dialogue with his awareness as a politicized subject. It's a bloated, floaty, drifting novel that jumps timelines and burns slowly, but Baldwin dazzled me with his ability to make me want to spend a lot of time with this cast, despite not viewing them highly as human beings. I was disappointed in the lack of serious emotional and sexual exploration and depth in each of Leo's relationships (including his incestuous one), as they're marketed as focal points in his life. Unfortunately, I found them to be quite cold and even partially filled with inequality and resentment. The devastatingly beautiful reflections in prose, deep understanding of humanity, and unapologetic political blackness are all pretty typical for Baldwin, but they especially grabbed me here, and are ultimately what kept this novel afloat for me.

Geoff says

Baldwin, for me, is one of those writers who defines what their art is about. He is able to address a range of themes and emotions in a clear, unfussy style that makes his stories both a joy to behold and an experience to share. His characters live and breathe in ways to which we can all relate, and exist in worlds we recognise. It is this authenticity of description and experience that allows you to become so involved and invested in the stories and the journeys of his characters. That there is such a personal experience gained from - and a personal investment made in - stories created in another time and place is testament to Baldwin's skill.

Throughout the book, humanity sings out from every page, paragraph and word. Any anger that is in the book - and there is a lot - comes from a place of love and faith (in humanity) and not from hate or despair. Characters are scarred and affected by their environments, sure, but they are also able, to various degrees, to

attempt to take control and influence their own outcomes. This positive approach allows us to share in the anger that an unjust world provokes, but also infuses the reader with a positivity that we, you and I can change, and allow ourselves to be changed, if we really care enough about the world we live in and our role within it.

Above all, you will be entertained and enjoy this book. On top of everything else, isn't that reason enough to give this book a try?

Faith says

Leo is a famous, black, bisexual stage actor who has just had a serious heart attack. As he is in the hospital he thinks back on episodes of his life, in non-chronological order. This structure made the writing a little choppy. I've been reading a lot of James Baldwin this year and this is the first book that I've felt was too long (by about 200 pages). I preferred the parts of the book that dealt with the theater, but the parts about Leo's childhood in Harlem felt like I'd read them before in other Baldwin books and a lot of the book was pretty boring. I thought that his love affairs were particularly uninteresting. I wouldn't recommend starting with this book if you are new to Baldwin's work. The narration by Kevin Kenerly of the audiobook was excellent.

Kenya (ReviewsMayVary) says

Looooooooong. Leo is an old successful man reflecting/ remembering his life from younger brother in Harlem to accomplished actor.

Great realistic coming of age, fiction, bisexual MC. Race, love, siblings. #WNDB

Kamron Alexander says

This is my second Baldwin title, and he still sits as one of the best writers i've ever stumbled upon. In this novel, just like Another Country, I saw parts of myself in many of the characters, which is a talent that cannot be scaled.

The pain and the lust and the intimacy and the world pre-civil rights all was hyper real and demonstrated how many aspects of the Black American Male psyche has not changed, and cannot change without replacing instilled hatred with love. As hard as that actually is, in the day to day, when encountering a world still baffled by plenty of ignorance.

Baldwin represents that he understands, and for me is a hug that no father or mother, or bestfriend, or lover could ever give.

Sarah says

I really loved this book. Few writers have the capacity to make me fall in love, and to break my heart, and Baldwin does it best. A beautiful story, structured like a series of memories during a turning point in a man's life. The memories jump forward and back in time, as memories do, but not too drastically, and they are treated with that sort of painful, bittersweet nostalgia that one feels when looking back at those defining

moments in one's life. The moments of regret and warmth, the fights with loved ones that almost broke you, but ended up bringing you closer when you survived them. This novel is different from his earlier novels, being written when he was so much older -- more even-tempered and reflective. Which makes sense, and makes the book feel well-marinated. Yum.

Kat says

The back of this book makes it out to be the life story of a black actor who rises to greatness, but is "torn between two different kinds of love". I don't think Baldwin makes as big a deal as all that about the fact that the character, Leo, has one lover who is a woman his age and one who is a man much younger than he is. The woman, Barbara, is white and that is a big deal. But that doesn't affect their feelings about each other nearly as much as it affects their ability to be together in society. The fact that she and he are both famous actors affects their love story about as much as their racial difference.

Anyway, Baldwin writes subtle characters, and astute political commentary that is *not* subtle but still doesn't feel heavy-handed or awkwardly inserted. These are things I like in an author. But the structure of this book feels very Hollywood to me (a man recovering from a heart attack reflects on his whole life and the loves therein), and that leaves me cold in a way I can't justify.

Rod-Kelly Hines says

Jimmy leaves my jaw on the floor Everytime! There is no greater writer.

Chris brown says

The prose of this book is, in actuality, poetic. This was not one of my favorite Baldwin books but the beauty and craftsmanship of how these words are placed together keeps you reading to the very end. I think if I had been a different person, maybe interested in theater or film, or if I had a brother, maybe that deeper connection would have been made. Still this book is high art well worth a read and discussion.

Curtis Ackie says

Baldwin once said "You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read." And this sentiment is certainly what I felt whilst reading this wonderful novel. At times it was eerie how well I could relate to it.

Liz says

I picked up this book after a long period of reading either non-fiction or science fiction and fantasy. Its safe to say that i have fallen deeply in love with James Baldwin and I have been brought back safely to novel-land. In this lesser known work, Baldwin demonstrates his skillful use language, and his deep understanding

of the human condition in the racist, sexist, heteronormative, capitalist United States. This book will truly move your heart and mind, and push you grapple with your own contradictions...READ IT.

Armin Hennig says

Hundert Jahre Freiheit ohne Gleichberechtigung ist der Titel eines Sachbuches von James Baldwin aus der Zeit der Bürgerrechtsbewegung. Vermutlich nimmt er in diesem Diskurs eine bedeutende Rolle ein, sicher auch in der Chronologie der Literatur der Amerikaner mit afrikanischen Wurzeln. Wenn sich etwas positives über dieses Buch sagen lässt, dann, dass es sich wohl um einen Versuch handelt, die seinerzeit bestehende Ungleichheit in Romanform zu verarbeiten.

Hatte mir das Buch sozusagen als *Roots* 100 Jahre später auf die Leseliste gesetzt, denn Alex Haileys Familiensaga entwickelt sich nach der Aufhebung der Sklaverei zu einem ziemlich dünnen Erzählstrom. Die Plotline klingt auch ziemlich interessant: Eine Art Sidney Poitier oder Sammy Davis Junior erleidet auf der Bühne einen Herzanfall und lässt sein Leben Revue passieren. Als Mann steht er zwischen seiner weißen Dauergeliebten und seinem schwarzen Lover, der zu den Waffen greifen will, um der Diskriminierung ein Ende zu machen.

Stoff für ein großartiges Buch, seinen Anspruch als Erzähler will Baldwin mit einer dreisträhnigen Erzählstruktur unter Beweis stellen. Deshalb folgt auf einen längeren Erzählstrang mit Leo Proudhammers Infarkt- und Genesungsgegegenwart, ein Abschnitt aus

seinem Elendsbildungsroman aus Harlem oder den Jahren vor seinem Durchbruch, in dem sich sein verhängnisvolles Verhältnis zu Barbara entwickelt, eine von Rassismus und persönlichen Defiziten belastete Daueraffäre, bei der sich beide den Wunsch nach Nachwuchs versagen müssen.

Die Liebe zum Black Panther Christopher ist durch familiäre Wurzeln geprägt, denn der junge Liebhaber erinnert an den stolzen Vater, Leos Verhältnis zum später fromm gewordenen Bruder Caleb trägt stark homoerotische Züge. Zuletzt muss Rekonvaleszent Leo aber auch erleben, wie sich Barbara über eine Affäre mit Christopher den jungen Leo zurück ins Bett holen will. Der von ihr initiierte Beginn der Affäre für den sie ihren Italian Stallion kickt, ist eine Eifersuchsreaktion, sie will ihren bislang nur als Seelenfreund genutzten Leo nicht an die Hauptdarstellerin verlieren und setzt damit Prozesse in Gang, die beiden das Leben unglaublich schwer machen.

Das klingt alles so weit ganz gut, allerdings fehlt James Baldwin jegliches Gespür für erzählerische Balance oder Relevanz, zwar gibt es Sätze zum Einrahmen oder immer wieder Abschnitte bei denen man hofft, dass das Buch vielleicht doch noch die Kurve kriegt*, aber alles in allem entsteht der Eindruck, einmal hingeschrieben und nie mehr im Kontext gelesen. So nimmt Leo Entlassung aus dem Krankenhaus zwanzig überaus geschwätzte Seiten ein, sein Verhältnis als Teenie mit einem schwulen Gangster als neuem Beschützer eine halbe Seite, seine Leiden als Schauspieler, der keine Chance bekommt, übersteigen ein Drittel des Buches, sein Durchbruch bekommt zehn Seiten, in die auch noch der Tod der Mutter eingearbeitet ist.

Insofern gerät das Ganze zu einer ziemlich zusammenhanglosen Jeremiade, in der wenig erbaulicher Sex mit Angehörigen beider Rassen und beiderlei Geschlechts vielleicht als Kitt dienen soll. Mein zweiter Baldwin nach dem verheißungsvoll gestarteten und in der Hälfte jämmerlich zusammengeklappten und lustlos zu Ende gebrachten *Beale Street Blues*, mit dem er viele Klischees teilt, etwa die immer wieder angestimmten Arien auf das Recht der armen unterprivilegierten Schwarzen, jedem Weißen/Juden alles zu klauen, was sich unter den Nagel reißen lässt.

Vermutlich ist der Zug für James Baldwin bei mir abgefahren. *Another Country*, das ich erst als möglicherweise gelungenen Vorgänger ins Visier genommen habe, krankt anscheinend an denselben erzähltechnischen Leiden. Als Romancier ist Baldwin ein kläglicher Versager, weil ihm die Hand für das Große Ganze abgeht, das wird erst deutlich, wenn man die aus demselben Zeitraum stammenden *Bekenntnisse des Nat Turner* zum Vergleich nimmt. Styrons Autoren-DNA samt dem Verklemmungsgrad ist zwar allzu unverkennbar, aber das Buch aus Sicht des Anführers des einzigen Sklavenaufstandes in den

Vereinigten Staaten ist absolut sauber komponiert und psychologisch so weit stimmig. Bei Baldwins Jeremiade hatte ich immer wieder das Gefühl, er hätte demütigende Erfahrungen aus unterschiedlichen Quellen einfach zusammen gemixt, um ein zeitgemäßes Nachfolgebuch zu *Another Country* nachschieben zu können.

* z.B Die Gästechronik mit den zur persönlichen Katastrophe geratenen Künsterschicksalen aus dem Village-Lokal, in dem Leo kellnert und Calypso spielt oder Calebs Erweckungserlebnis.

Jabiz Raisdana says

James Baldwin talks to a part of my soul like no other writer. I have read three of his books so far and have made a promise to read every word he has ever written. This is great, because he has over 20 novels, plays, and collections of short stories and essays.

He writes about race, class, art and life like no one else. He is one of the most important writers of our time. The content is not for MS readers, but he is a name you should add to your list when you are older as someone to explore.

I am moving onto another book of his next. 490 pages was not enough.

Joachim Stoop says

I was a bit anxious to read this one because lately I've been eagerly declaring that Baldwin (with Stefan Zweig) is my favourite -or at least the most versatile and ahead of his era- writer.

Baldwin's essay collections are sublime and even (or better: certainly) today quintessential reading. But his novels, man! Don't misjudge his scope: he goes way further than the afro-American struggle theme he's famous for. I actually know few writers with such depth and insight in the human psyche and such accurate drawing of real life characters.

My advice on diving into his fiction:

Commence with Giovanni's room,

continue with Another country

and please don't skip Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone. The latter is in some parts a little less lucid and inviting as the others, but what this author does with the English language and storytelling is of another level. The power, anger, love, fear, hope, ambition, all with such a personal and yet universal quality and timbre to it.

It is rare to find a book which you want to savour and devour at the same time: slowly reading line by line tasting it's poetry and urgently turning pages to find out what's ahead.

Next time somebody claims Philip Roth is entitled to winning the Nobel prize, I will ask if he or she read enough Baldwin.

Humeyra says

The fact that some parts of this book was written in Istanbul makes my heart happy, it's ridiculous but I don't care lol.

You know what I wanna do this summer? Drop everything and read all the Baldwin books I can get my hands on!! ^.^ This was the longest book of James Baldwin I have yet to read but there wasn't one dull moment. I don't know how he does it but the writing in every one of his books keeps me captivated from the first page to the last. Baldwin's stories are not particularly happy stories, and neither of his characters but they are real for sure and that's probably why I always go for another Baldwin book right after I read one. A side note though, speaking from personal experience, if you're trying to quit smoking maybe stay away from Baldwin for a while and come back when you feel like you've got a strong hold on the addiction because oh my god the amount of smoking in his books is real! lol

Ronald Morton says

I won't bury the lede: Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone is one of my favorite works of 20th century literature; if you haven't read it (or haven't read Baldwin) you should consider that a gap worthy of being filled post haste. While not essential to one's reading, I would recommend pairing this with The Fire Next Time, as there are numerous autobiographical details discussed in that book that directly contribute to moments in this book.

There was something very wonderful which Salvatore brought to the fore in Jerry. Jerry showed a side of himself to Salvatore which he showed to no one else. I think if I had never seen Jerry with Salvatore, I would never have known what pain and love were in the boy, could not have guessed how much he had lost already, and why it was possible for Barbara really to care about him. Salvatore treated Jerry like a son; and this brought forward the man in Jerry. It brought forward in him elements of delicacy and courtesy which Jerry, in most of his daily life disguised by rough speech and rough play. The lost and loving boy Jerry was attempting—helplessly—to divorce and deny was the only creature Salvatore saw, and it did not even occur to him to doubt the value of this creature. Salvatore could not know it, but he thus reached directly into the heart of Jerry's loneliness, and also foreshadowed his hard and lonely life. When I watched Salvatore and Jerry together, I was happy for Jerry but I was sad for me. For the old, sturdy man recognized Jerry, he had seen him before. He found the key to Jerry in the life he himself had lived. But he had no key for me: my life, in effect, had not yet happened in anybody's consciousness. And I did not know why. Sometimes, alone, I fled to the Negro part of town. Sometimes I got drunk there, and a couple of times I got laid there. But my connections all were broken.

The writing in this book is exceptional. Baldwin has constructed a deeply intimate book, told through the first person narrative of Leo Proudhammer, that lays bare the anguish and bitterness of the early-20th-century African-American experience, and yet it doesn't succumb to despair. This balancing act never feels forced or saccharine, and Baldwin's detailed prose is constructed in such a way as to bear the brunt of this weight.

I've seen this book described as "experimental" (the descriptor pops up on wikipedia's entry for Baldwin), which is almost entirely misleading. The novel is mostly told in retrospect – with the present-day action only taking up 2-3 days – but nothing about it is especially experimental. It is simply – I use the word facetiously – a stunning work of well crafted literature. There are large sections of the book that were so anguished, so

crushing, that my chest hurt while reading them. But it is relenting in this overwhelmingness, and there are passages of grace and beauty that keep the balance in check.

Again, this is an indispensable work of literature; even here upon my second reading of it I'm still blown away by what Baldwin has achieved.

Some moments in a life, and they needn't be very long or seem very important, can make up for so much in that life; can redeem, justify, that pain, that bewilderment, with which one lives, and invest one with the courage not only to endure it, but to profit from it; some moments teach one the price of the human connection: if one can live with one's own pain, then one respects the pain of others, and so, briefly, but transcendently, we can release each other from pain.

Arturo Belano says

Bir dönem ülkemizde de ya?ayan, tiyatro oyunları sahneleyen James Baldwin'ın son büyük eseri kabul edilen ve kimi otobiyografik öğelerde bulunan Ne Zaman Gitti Treni büyük bir keyifle okudum.

Kitap 40'l? ya?lar?n ba??nda olan büyük tiyatro sanatç?s? Leo Proudhammer'ın sahnede geçirdi?i kalp krizi ile ba?lıyor. Sonra?nda ölümden dönen kahraman?n?m?z? hastane odas?nda geçmi?iyle bo?u?urken buluyoruz. Üç bölümden olu?an kitab?n Ev Zencisi bölümünde 30' lar?n Harlem'ine konuk oluyoruz. siyah bir çocu?un siyah evinde ve siyah sokaklarda geçen bu bölüm, sanatç? kimli?inini yan?na eylemci kimli?ini de ekleyen Leo' nun beyaz Amerika' dan nefretini olu?turdu?u anlara tan?k ediyor okuru. Polislerin pis beyaz elleri üzerinde nedensizce gezerken 9 ya??ndaki çocuk ?öyle diyor " tanr?ya hepsini öldürmesi için dua ettim. Sonra tanr?dan nefret ettim." Umutsuzluk kokan ve sonu ya hapis ya beyazlara hizmet ile bitecek bu hayattan ç?k??? oyunculukta bulan Leo' yu ikinci bölümde Amerika ta?ras?nda aktör e?itim salonunda buluyoruz ki bence kitab?n en güçlü yeri burası. Baldwin' ın fanonu okuyup okumad???n? bilmiyorum ancak Siyah Deri Beyaz Maskeler kitab?ndaki psiko seksüel tespitler, siyah erkek beyaz kad?n ili?kisine dair çok güçlü ç?kar?mlar Barbara- Leo ikilisinin bilinç altları?ndan süzülerek kar??m?za ç?k?yor. Son bölüm ise sahne y?ld?z? sokak eylemcisi Leo' nun hastaneden ç?k??? ile ba?lıyor ve sürprizsiz bir sona do?ru ilerliyor.

Ne zaman gitti tren sizi metin ya da kurgu olarak ?a??rtacak, ters kö?e olaca???z bir eser de?il, post modern anlat? meftunlar? için arkaik bir eser bile denebilir. Ancak Amerika' da siyah olmaya, bunun yaratt??? fiziki ve psikolojik y?k?ma dair okunabilecek duru, yetkin ve içerden bir eser.

Yerini ve s?n?rlar?n? kabullenmeyen bu siyah çocu?un Harlem' den zirveye ula?an ki?isel hikayesini, kendi ötekisini öcüle?tiren bütün ta?ral?lara, Franz Fanon' un lanetilerine, " soylu ruhlar? ?rkç?" olmayan beyazlara ve iyi okura öneririm.
