

The Peculiarity of the First-Person Narrator
in *If Beale Street Could Talk*

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Tish, a girl of eighteen, is the heroine and the first-person narrator of *If Beale Street Could Talk* written by James Baldwin. Usually the first-person narrator tells his story by looking back on the incidents from the present time of novel. In *Giovanni's Room*, another story by the same author, David, the narrator does so, and the style of his sentimental narration reflects his state of mind well. He neither can "commit" himself to his girl lover nor to a homosexual one, and he hopes to, but cannot escape from this condition. He is doomed to lose all relationships, including his relationship to himself. The end of this story suggests his killing himself, which is his only way of liberation from his doom.

Tish, however, wants to save her wrongly sentenced lover and give birth to their baby: she wants to save not only him but herself. The features of her narration differ completely from those of David's. Her point of view is limited neither by the first-person nor by the literary convention of looking back. These features of hers have much to do with her childbirth. Baldwin seems to create her as a new type of heroine, using a rather complicated style of the narration and a symbol of childbirth: she, then, embodies the traditional black spirit and the new possibilities of blacks at once.

The peculiarity of the first-person narration of this story lies in the gradual change from the conventional first-person narration to the omniscient first-person narration in which the implied author becomes ambiguous. But there is a problem. Baldwin creates this story and his heroine, based on the premises of his biases toward childbirth, and accordingly toward women. He, who appeals the liberation from biases upon blacks and homosexuals, cannot free himself from the male consciousness.