

From Dusk to Dawn: A Study of Gloria Naylor's Select Novels

By

S. Rizwana Fathima

(13PEN013)

A Thesis submitted to

Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education

for Women, Coimbatore – 641 043

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of Master of Arts in English

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S. Kalamani
31.03.2015

Signature of the

Head of the Department (i/c)

S. Kalamani
31.03.2015

Signature of the

Supervisor

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CONTENTS

S.NO	CHAPTER	PAGE. NO
1.	Introduction	1
2.	The Need for Human Bonding	28
3.	Blues- A way of Expression	62
4.	Conclusion	99
5.	Bibliography	105

Chapter 1

Introduction

African-American literature is a field of literature that is created by the writers, whose ancestry lay on the African descent. The past history of African-American literature is as old as the history of United States as an independent nation. It has started in the late 18th century with writers like Phillis Wheatley, Lucy Terry and Jupiter Hammon. The Harlem Renaissance of 1920s was a blooming period of African-American literature and arts. At present African-American literature has reached an eminent position and the African-American writers have got recognition by getting the highest literary awards including Nobel Prize, Pulitzer Prize etc., The major themes and issues explored in African-American literature are – the role of African Americans within the larger American society, the conflict between their cultures, racism, slavery and social inequality.

In African-American literature, Lucy Terry is the oldest known author who has written a ballad named *Bars Fight* in 1746, which was published posthumously in 1854. A poet named Phillis Wheatley published her book *Poems on Various Subjects* in 1773, three years before American independence. Wheatley was the first African-American to achieve an international reputation as a writer. Her poetry won the attention of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and was praised by many of the leading figures of the American Revolution.

Jupiter Hammon is another American author, whose work *An Evening Thought Salvation by Christ with Penitential Cries* was regarded as the first published book by a black writer in America. In 1778 he wrote an ode to Phillis Wheatley, in which he

discussed their shared humanity and common bonds. The first African-American novel published in the United States was Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig*. It was rediscovered and republished by Henry Louis Gates Jr., in 1980. *Our Nig* deals with the intricate lives of free Blacks in the North. It is also a mother-centered novel of the nineteenth century.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, a new genre of African-American literature known as the slave narratives developed. It talks about the lives of deserted slaves in the South. At that time, the controversy over slavery led to impassioned literature on both cruelties of life under slavery and the persistent humanity of the slaves as persons. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* represents the abolitionist view of the evils of slavery. Slave narratives can be widely categorised into the tales of religious redemption, tales to inspire the abolitionist struggle and tales of progress. Some of the noteworthy slave narratives of nineteenth century writings by African-American are Frederick Douglass's autobiography and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Jacobs.

In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries spiritual narratives evolved in African-American literature as a new genre. It flourished with the literary panorama of nineteenth century. Through their spiritual narratives, African-American women had contributed to the advancement of their message about African-American women's society. Zilpha Elaw, a writer of spiritual narratives, published her *Memoirs of the Life, Religious Experience etc.*, in 1846. Elaw allied herself in a literary tradition of respectable women of her time who were trying to combat the immoral literature of the time. Maria W. Stewart, another spiritual narrative writer, published a collection of her religious writings with an autobiographical experience attached in 1879. The publication

was called *Meditations from the Pen of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart*. Stewart's works focus specifically on the plight of African Americans in America during that period.

After the end of slavery and American Civil War, many African-American authors wrote non-fiction works about the condition of African Americans in the United States. One of the most prominent writers among them is W.E.B. Du Bois who published a significant collection of essays called *The Souls of Black Folk*. The essays were drawn from Du Bois's personal experiences and they described how African Americans led their lives in the larger American society. Another prominent author of this period is Booker T. Washington, whose views were opposite to the views of Du Bois. His works like *Up From Slavery (1901)* and *My Larger Education (1911)* represented his belief that Blacks should prove themselves equal to the whites before asking to end racism.

The Harlem Renaissance from 1920 to 1940 was an important period of African-American literature and art. A huge number of Black artists produced standard works in different fields from jazz to theatre. The renaissance is the best known period for the literature that came out of it. Among the renaissance writers, poet Langston Hughes is the most notable writer. He first received attention with the publication of his work *The Book of American Negro Poetry*. His most popular poem is *The Negro Speaks of River*. Zora Neale Hurston is another notable writer of the renaissance, who is the author of classic novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Later, her works were rediscovered in 1970 and were published in "Ms. Magazine" by Alice Walker. Walker found in Hurston, a role model for all female African-American writers.

The other writers of the period were Jean Toomer, author of *Cane*, who portrayed the rural and urban Black life in his novel; Dorothy West, whose work *The Living is Easy*

examined the life of an upper-class Black family; Countee Cullen, whose poetry collection *Color (1925)*, described everyday black life. The Harlem Renaissance marked a turning point for African-American literature. Earlier to this time, books by African Americans were primarily read by other Black people. With the renaissance, African-American literature began to be absorbed into mainstream American culture.

A large migration of African Americans took place during World War I and World War II. This migration produced a new sense of independence and empowered the growing American Civil Rights Movement and it made a powerful impression on Black writers during the 1940s, 50s and 60s. Similar to Black activists who were struggling to end racism and to create a new sense of Black Nationalism, Black authors also attempted to address these issues in their writings.

One of the writers to do so was James Baldwin, who talked about race and sexuality in his novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. The other great novelist of this period was Ralph Ellison, best known for his novel *Invisible Man (1952)*, which won the National Book Award in 1953. The Civil Rights time period also saw the rise of female Black poets, most notably Gwendolyn Brooks, who became the first African American to win the Pulitzer Prize which was awarded to her 1949 book of poetry, *Annie Allen*. Along with Brooks, other female poets who became well known during the 1950s and 60s were Nikki Giovanni and Sonia Sanchez.

As part of the larger Black Arts Movement, which was inspired by the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, African-American literature began to be defined and analysed. Many scholars and writers are generally credited with helping to promote and define African-American literature as a genre during this period, including fiction

writers Toni Morrison and Alice Walker and poet James Emanuel. James Emanuel, who is the editor of *Dark Symphony: Negro Literature in America*, took a major step towards defining African-American literature. The book is a collection of black writings released by a major publisher. This anthology and Emanuel's work as an educator at the City College of New York greatly influenced the birth of the genre. Other influential African-American anthologies of this time included *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing*, edited by Le Roi Jones and Larry Neal in 1968; *The Negro Caravan*, co-edited by Sterling Brown, Arthur P. Davis and Ulysses Lee in 1969; and *We Speak As Liberators: Young Black Poets - An Anthology*, edited by Oorde Coombs and published in 1970.

Starting from 1970s, African-American literature reached the mainstream as books by Black writers frequently progressed towards award-winning status. This was the time when the work of African-American writers became a significant genre of American literature in academic world. Meanwhile, the increment of African-American women writing during this period brought a much needed attention on the woman's space. These writers, in common, discussed the interconnections of racial and gender issues. They opposed the male dominating ideas of Black Nationalists as well as the pressure given to the black women to sacrifice gender issues regarding racial concerns. Hurston was the pioneer, whose path these women writers have followed. These writers also brought in the element of bonding in their works particularly Alice Walker in her work *The Color Purple* (1982) and Gloria Naylor in her *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982) and *Bailey's Cafe* (1992).

Toni Morrison helped promote African-American literature when she worked as an editor for Random House in the 1960s and '70s. She edited books by authors like Toni Cade Bambara and Gayl Jones. Later, Morrison emerged as one of the most important African-American writers of the 20th century. Her most famous novel *Beloved*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1988 talks about a slave who found freedom but killed her infant daughter to save her from a life of slavery. Another important novel is *Song of Solomon*, a tale about materialism, unrequited love, and brotherhood. Morrison is the foremost African American to win the Nobel Prize for Literature.

In the 1970s, novelist and poet Alice Walker wrote a famous essay that brought Zora Neale Hurston and her classic novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* back to the attention of the literary world. In 1982, Walker won both the Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award for her novel *The Color Purple*. Her novel *The Color Purple* is an epistolary novel (a book written in the form of letters). It tells the story of Celie, a young woman who is sexually abused by her stepfather and then is forced to marry a man who physically abuses her. The novel was later made into a film by Steven Spielberg.

Gloria Naylor's novel *Bailey's Cafe* deals with women who were deeply scarred in their life. Naylor presents the challenges women face in their lives. These writers generally speak in the context of gender issues and of dominant patriarchal views. But Gloria Naylor also gives chances for Black men to express their blues and struggles in their lives through her fiction *The Men of Brewster Place*.

Other important writers in recent years include literary fiction writers Gayl Jones, Rasheed Clark, Ishmael Reed, Jamaica Kincaid, Randall Kenan, and John Edgar Wideman. African-American poets have also received attention. Maya Angelou read a

poem at Bill Clinton's inauguration, Rita Dove won a Pulitzer Prize and served as Poet Laureate of the United States from 1993 to 1995 and Cyrus Cassells's *Soul Make a Path through Shouting* was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in 1994. In addition to that, she is also a beneficiary of the William Carlos Williams Award. Natasha Trethewey won the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry with her book *Native Guard*. Lesser-known poets such as Thylia Moss also have been praised for their innovative works.

Remarkable black playwrights include Ntozake Shange, who wrote *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Unuf*; Ed Bullins, who is the author of the plays *I am Lucy Terry*, *The Mystery of Phillis Wheatley* etc. ; Suzan-Lori Parks, who has written *The Sinner's Place*, *Venus* etc. ; and the prolific August Wilson, the writer of *Fences*, *The Piano Lesson* etc., has won two Pulitzer Prizes for his plays. Most recently, Edward P. Jones won the 2004 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for *The Known World*, his novel about a black slaveholder in the antebellum South.

Most of the criticism on African-American literature is based on the argument that Black literature sometimes does not portray Black people in a positive light and that it should. In 1921, W. E. B. Du Bois wrote in "The Crisis" magazine on this topic, saying, "We want everything that is said about us to tell of the best and highest and noblest in us. We insist that our Art and Propaganda be one" (189). He added in 1926 "Crisis", "All Art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists" (297). Du Bois and the editors of "The Crisis" repeatedly stated that literature was a tool in the struggle for African-American political emancipation.

Du Bois criticised author Claude McKay over his best-selling novel *Home to Harlem*. Du Bois thought the novel's frank portrayal of sexuality and the nightlife in

Harlem appealed only to the prurient demands of white readers and publishers looking for representation of Black “profligacy.” Others made similar criticism of Wallace Thurman's novel *The Blacker the Berry* in 1929. The novel exasperated many African-Americans for addressing prejudice between lighter-skinned and darker-skinned Blacks.

Many African-American writers felt that their literature should present the full truth about life and people. Langston Hughes expressed this view in his essay “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” (1926). He wrote that Black artists should intend to express themselves freely no matter what the Black public or White public thought.

According to Joanne Gabbin, a professor, African-American literature exists both inside and outside American literature. “Somehow African American literature has been relegated to a different level, outside American literature, yet it is an integral part” (142), she says. She bases her theory on the fact that even though African-Americans have long asserted their American identity, in most of the U. S. history they were not accepted as complete citizens and they were separated. As a result, they were part of America while also outside it.

Similarly African-American literature is within the frame of larger American literature but it also remains independent. As a result, new styles of storytelling and unique voices which are created in isolation, help rejuvenate the larger literary world. Jazz and hip hop are the two best artistic examples that developed in isolation within the Black community before reaching a larger audience and ultimately rejuvenating American culture.

African-American literature has already gained reputation as an eminent genre in literature. Its growth is amazingly fair in current literary panorama and the writers of this

field are making use of their opportunities to come out vibrantly by employing distinguished themes, techniques etc., to articulate their views, thoughts and ideas in a more intellectual way.

In “Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers”, Barbara Christian points out that “a persistent and major theme throughout Afro-America women’s literature [is] our attempt to define and express our totality rather than being defined by others” (139). *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *The Color Purple*, the two novels embody many similar concerns and methods, ones that characterize the black women’s literary tradition -- a tradition now in full flower through the work of such writers as Toni Morrison, Paule Marshall, Gloria Naylor, Toni Cade Bambara, Ntozake Shange and Audre Lorde.

Naylor joins the ranks of other significant African-American women writers in her attempt to deal with the Black identity. In contrast to the culture that has marginalized African-American women, where they were dictated how they should lead their lives, and were psychologically abused, novels by African-American women depict heroic struggles and valiant role models who helped their sisters not only to endure but to prevail. Though this theme is not an exclusively African-American issue, the practice of women relying on one another for direction and strength crops up with notable regularity in the novels of African-American women. For example, Alice Walker's Celie initially becomes her own healer through her letters written to God, and with the arrival of Shug Avery, Celie encounters the heart and the hands that offer comfort to her. Toni Morrison's many engaging protagonists sometimes heal and sometimes wound. Pecola represents the world

of unreality; Sula, the epitome of self-reliance heals herself but wounds a community; Jadine refuses the wisdom and healing powers of both Son and Aunt Ondine.

Gloria Naylor is one of the most prominent African-American women writers in the recent period. It is no wonder that Gloria Naylor has a great curiosity for reading and writing because Naylor's mother Alberta was determined that her children should receive the best education that could be provided for them. Even as a farm worker Alberta Naylor had used some of her meagre wages to buy books that the segregated libraries of Mississippi denied her. When Gloria was old enough to sign her name her mother began to take her to the library. Naylor became an ardent reader and began to write poems and stories even as a child.

After graduating from high school, she decided to postpone going to college in order to serve as a Jehovah Witness missionary. This decision was greatly influenced by the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. Due to the restrictions of religion and spurred by the need to develop her talents, she matriculated at the Medgar Evers campus of Brooklyn College. Working as a telephone operator in New York City hotels, she pursued a degree in nursing. But she was greatly interested in literature and so she transferred to a major in English. As an avid reader from childhood, she already admired such writers as Austen, Dickens, the Brontes, Faulkner, Ellison, and Baldwin. She soon recognised that all of these writers were either male or white.

The time she spent in her college was a key time for Naylor. There, her black consciousness, particularly as a black woman, began taking form and compelled her to explore her creative powers. Her eyes were opened greatly by reading the works of black female authors such as Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker. Later, in a

creative writing class she was introduced to Toni Morrison. Morrison became a model for depicting one's own reality and for crafting beautiful language. Gloria Naylor began to attend readings by Morrison to hone her own skills as a fiction writer.

In 1980 Naylor published her first story in "Essence" magazine. The secretary to the president of Viking publishing company circulated four of Naylor's stories among the editors in January 1981. In "A Conversation with Toni Morrison", Naylor says about her becoming a writer:

I wrote because I had no choice, but that was a long road from gathering the authority within myself to believe that I could actually be a writer. The writers I had been taught to love were either male or white. And who was I to argue that Ellison, Austen, Dickens, the Brontes, Baldwin and Faulkner weren't masters? They were and are. But inside there was still the faintest whisper. Was there no one telling my story? And since it appeared there was not how could I presume to? . . . [Reading] *The Bluest Eye* [was] the beginning [of the ability to conceive myself as a writer]. . . .The presence of the work. . . .said to a young black woman, struggling to find a mirror of her worth in this society, not only is your story worth telling but it can be told in words so painfully eloquent that it becomes a song. (567)

Similar to Gloria Naylor, writers such as Walker, Morrison, Kincaid, and others have their own perceptions about the struggle of their community for freedom.

Gloria Naylor's works include, *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982), *Linden Hills* (1985), *The Meanings of a Word* (1986), *Mama Day* (1988), *Bailey's Cafe* (1992),

Children of the Night: The Best Short Stories by Black Writers, 1967 to the present (1995), and *The Men of Brewster Place (1999)*. Naylor has also written screenplays as well as the stage adaptation of *Bailey's Cafe* in 1994.

Gloria Naylor won the American Book Award, for *The Women of Brewster Place*, 1983; she was the recipient of a fellowship from the National Endowment of the Arts (1985) and Lillian Smith Award, 1989. One of the few black women to win the coveted Guggenheim Fellowship for creative writing, Naylor has been hailed, according to the "African American Review" as, "one of contemporary African American literature's most insightful and significant writers." (543)

Gloria Naylor grabbed the attention of readers and critics through her first novel *The Women of Brewster Place*, which is a portrayal of the black female experience. She focuses on the lives of seven women who succeed by simply managing to survive in a decrepit building by bonding with each other and finding asylum. Mattie Michael is a source of comfort and strength for the other women in the novel. Etta Mae Johnson is a free spirit who frequently gets involved with men who disappoint her. Kiswana Browne has racial pride and in due course accepts her mother's middle-class values. Lorraine and Theresa are lovers; when Lorraine is gang-raped, she is deeply troubled by the attack and murders Ben, who is one of her few supporters and the janitor of Brewster Place. Cora Lee loves her babies, while Ciel is on a path of self-destruction, having suffered a series of personal disasters. At the end of the novel, the women remove the wall that separates them from the rest of the city.

The novel received strong reviews, won many awards and was made into a television movie. "Publishers Weekly" called it "a remarkable first novel from a gifted

black writer [that] marks Gloria Naylor's talent as one to watch" (56). It is a saga of the strengths, struggles, and hopes of seven black women of different ages, backgrounds, and lifestyles and how they tackled poverty, racism, sexism, and domestic strife both alone and together. Naylor covered the entire range of human experience, from Kiswana Browne, who defects from a comfortable middle-class existence to ally with the people of the street, to Cora Lee, whose overriding passion is the care of her beloved babies. The chief aim of Gloria Naylor in *The Women of Brewster Place* was to smash stereotypes about black women and to prove that their experience is as varied as that of whites. She also wanted to show the indomitable spirit of then downtrodden in overcoming tough circumstances.

Linden Hills, Naylor's second novel, is a story of resistance and renaissance. It depicts a world in which black Americans have achieved status and some measure of power, but in the process they have forfeited their hearts and souls. The initial idea for this novel was influenced by her reading of *The Inferno* in a Great Literature course at Brooklyn. The book was cited for its noticeable parallels to Dante's *Inferno*. Two male poets, Lester and Willie come in from another town in search of work and make their way through a series of drives that ring the suburban development in a way similar to Dante's nine circles of hell. As the twosome venture down the hill, they meet those who have moved up in society. More or less cast in the role of the devil is Luther Nedeed, a local mortician and real estate tycoon whose family has reigned at the top of the Linden Hills hierarchy for over 150 years. Lester and Willie discovered that the people lost their souls in order to get their American dream fulfilled, but ultimately failed to get fulfillment for which they long. Throughout the novel, Naylor made the point that

attempting to raise the ranks of white-dominated society through economic means results in a shallow victory. In a 1985 review in “the New York Times”, Michiko Kakutani wrote, “Although the notion of using Dante’s *Inferno* to illuminate the co-opting of black aspirations in contemporary America may strike the prospective reader as precious, one is quickly beguiled by the actual novel—so gracefully does Miss Naylor fuse together the epic and the naturalistic, the magical and the real” (17).

Naylor's third novel, *Mama Day* published in 1998, proves a continued succession in her boldly imagined fiction. It is a rich and powerful novel that shows the influence of both Toni Morrison and Alice Walker in venturing. It features plot twists and themes centering on spiritualism and reconciliation, which has drawn comparisons with Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. Its settings are New York City and Willow Springs, a sea island off the coasts of Georgia and South Carolina whose most powerful inhabitant is Miranda (Mama) Day, healer and magician. Day had also made an appearance in *Linden Hills*. When Mama Day's beloved niece, Cocoa (Ophelia) brings her husband George to visit, they all become involved in a plot to save Cocoa from a deadly curse.

Mama Day also narrates a love story of a good marriage that was sometimes far from calm, and it presents for the first time in her novels a kind, responsible, and interesting husband. Ophelia and George Andrews work in a small Manhattan engineering office. George, has abandoned as an infant in New York, grows up in a shelter for boys. He has learned to stress intellectuality and insist upon reason and provable facts. Cocoa values not only what she has been taught in college but also the folk wisdom of Mama Day and Abigail, their intuition, but not their connection with magic or conjures. George and Ophelia hesitantly fall in love, frequently fight, and finally

learn to listen to each other by taking turns expressing themselves in long monologues. This continues even after one is in a grave and the other is sitting next to the grave.

The novel speaks of the death in the early pages and what one might hear in the cemetery. The courtship and marriage are thus recounted for the reader after the marriage has been broken by death. They recall memories of the details of arguments, happy events, and of their childhood. The love story is told in first person by the two narrators in alternating sections. Only occasionally and when another person appears in the story does the third-person omniscient narrator speak... Naylor observes the conflicts between men and women, exposing woman as the storehouse of the sensual and emotional and the male as the essence of rationality. "On this wondrous island," wrote Bharati Mukherjee in the "New York Times Book Review", "slavery and race relations, lovers' quarrels, family scandals, professional jealousies all become the stuff [that] dreams are made on" (29), and Mukherjee called the novel "magnificent" in its illustration of a host of peculiar characters ranging from rogues and frauds to martyrs and spiritualists.

In *Bailey's Café*, Naylor deals with the intersecting lives of the proprietors of the café and its various customers. The Café is a centre of attraction that draws many of society's gatherings, each with their own tale to narrate. The novel surveys female and male sexual identity but the main concern is female sexuality. Led by Bailey and Nadine there is Sadie, whose addiction to alcohol is second only to her mania for cleanliness; Esther, who takes nothing but white roses for her very particular favors; Peaches, whose badly mutilated face is in sharp contrast to her goddess's body; Miss Maple, a transvestite who makes a handsome living by entering soap flake contests; and Mariam, the Ethiopian child who may be the bearer of a miracle. The characters in the novel may be considered

misfits by the world outside, but, in the café each character remains as an icon of the victory of firmness over hardship. The novel depicts the need of valour in the everyday lives of the people. Naylor employs the blues and jazz as a way for the characters to tell their stories. It makes them powerful to produce the hope which is necessary for their living. This quality returns in *The Men of Brewster Place*, a sequel to *The Women of Brewster Place* that brings back the character of Ben, a janitor from the earlier novel, as both narrator and chorus. In 1994, Naylor adapted *Bailey's Café* for the stage, which gave her an opportunity to dramatically display the rhythms of her characters' lives and speech patterns.

The novel's narrator is called Bailey though that was not really his name. He gets the name from his customers when he and his wife, Nadine, took over the run-down café called Bailey's. Bailey was a Negro World War II veteran and avid fan of baseball, especially the Negro pro league. He is the richest character of the book. There may a tendency for the readers to mistake him as the author, because he narrates the story and sets the stage for the characters to reveal their lives to the readers.

Bailey's Café is set in a run-down neighbourhood of Chicago. Down the street is Eve's boarding house. Women do not go to Eve's and take a room, but find their way there, and may be invited by Eve, if and only if they think that the boarding house may be a way-station back into a meaningful existence. Along the way Eve's story and some of her boarders can also be learnt. There is Sadie who tries to earn love by being the perfect fulfiller of anyone's needs for order, cleanliness and elegance. Esther, who hides from light to obscure what used to happen to her in the dark cellar of her home. Mary is so beautiful that her life had only one public meaning until she scarred her face. Jesse Bell

moves from the slums to the hill top with disastrous results. The Ethiopian, Mariam, suffering genital mutilation and a virgin pregnancy for propriety's sake. And finally Miss Maple, the rich, well-educated son of a wealthy Negro family, who becomes the transvestite house keeper / bouncer for Eve's home. Bailey's own extraordinary story is thrown in for good measure.

In the "New York Times", Ben Brantley offered a mixed review of the play's opening in Hartford, Connecticut. "Its allegorical elements," he said, "which were woven more slyly into the fabric of the novel, have been expanded and exaggerated here, and the play simply can't sustain their full weight." Still, he added that "Ms. Naylor is a masterly storyteller, and there's a rich narrative force to the individual monologues" (14).

In *The Men of Brewster Place*, Naylor focuses on the male residents of the Brewster Place. It has the same rich grace, humour, and compassion that Naylor brought to *The Women of Brewster Place*. It explores the other side of the gender issue and the characters in the novel are those who played a minor role in *The Women of Brewster Place*. "The Men of Brewster Place" includes Mattie Michael's son, Basil, who jumped bail and left his mother to forfeit the house she had put up as bond. Eugene, whose young daughter stuck a fork in an electrical socket and died while he was fighting with his wife Ciel, turns out to be a closeted homosexual; there is Ben, the alcoholic superintendent whose Sisyphean task is to piece together the failing architecture and cramped households of Brewster Place; Abshu who launches an outrageous smear campaign against a politician, and the other characters include Brother Jerome, Moreland T. Woods, and C.C. Baker.

Eugene, is a well-intentioned husband and father who is unable to conquer his tendency toward homosexuality. Reverend Woods is a wolf in sheep's clothing and he is all too willing to sacrifice his soul on the altar of political gain. Basil atones for his part in Mattie Michael's displacement by marrying an irresponsible mother of two. Autistic Jerome, a talented pianist whose blues playing rivals that of Jelly Roll Morton or Count Basie, is cursed with a mother who exploits his gift for monetary gain; the street-wise C. C. Baker is driven as much by fear as anger and rebellion and Abshu, the community activist and playwright, struggles in vain to rescue the ill-fated community from its inevitable demise. With each narrator there is an effort to achieve conscious manhood in a society that denies equal access to the tokens of manhood which are money, power, and respect. This is the point Naylor highlights. In her works, she represents a notion that, in contemporary Black situation, Black women are co-labourers in the struggle for equality. Ben tells the reader early "there was always a her in his story" (8). But, the idea that there needs to be interracial unity in order to achieve progress remains underdeveloped, and the women in the text are as demonised as their male counterparts in Naylor's earlier novels. The tension between genders remains unresolved.

It is appropriate that Ben introduces the reader to Naylor's male subjects. Resurrecting his spirit and voice is a clever narrative strategy, one that helps to establish intertextual continuity and also thrusts the reader into the Dantesque realm that is a hallmark of Naylor's fiction. Ben's situation, which is traceable to slavery and its bitter legacy of emasculation, is everyman's dilemma, and his story of injustice, anger, powerlessness, and despair suggests a historical frame for the background of the stories that the other men relate. One of Naylor's objectives in this novel is to promote the men's

personal situation from the individual to the collective realm. Ben, much like his grandfather, an ex-slave turned sharecropper who is unable to protect a sister from the sexual abuse black women often experienced, fails to rescue his daughter from Mr. Clyde's sexual exploitation. Ben's touching story links the past, present, and future in such a way as to direct attention to the timelessness of the black male situation. Here she offers what is missing in the first novel, an in-depth focus on the repressed anger that prompts Ben's retreat into alcoholism.

All of these men have unique situations that tie them to Brewster Place. The gifted piano player, Brother Jerome, captures the plight of all Black men of Brewster Place through his playing of the blues. Although he is labeled as a retarded child, he is the silent, brilliant force that is able to put things together through his music. Naylor's methodology is quite clever. Although Ben died in *The Women of Brewster Place*, the "Author's Notes" in this sequel states that Naylor "takes her poetic license to resurrect [Ben's] spirit and voice to narrate major portions of [the] novel" (11).

Gloria Naylor's novels contain a bit of autobiographical elements in various forms like names, places, etc. Naylor's novels are connected together in such a way that when she refers to characters and places in one work, that become considerable in another text. For example, the male characters in *The Women of Brewster Place* are occupying significant roles in *The Men of Brewster Place*. Naylor also illustrates expansively from the Bible due to her connection with Jehovah's Witnesses. Similar to Jehovah's Witnesses, Naylor has likeness for the images and events prophesying the destruction of the world and she makes use of them in her novels. Her work echoes moral and religious susceptibility. She designs crooked worlds in her novels and her characters

need to seek shelter to be safe from those worlds. Naylor's novels highlight the strengths of women, particularly African-American women, and the effects of racism and sexism on the lives of people.

Naylor's depiction of unusual women, that is, women with the power to heal, appears first in *The Women of Brewster Place* in the character Mattie Michael, who demonstrates an almost magical ability to save others, and it continues through her next three works *Linden Hills*, *Mama Day*, and *Bailey's Cafe*. In the first of these Willa Nedeed restores her sense of self by examining the letters, lists, and photographs of three generations of wives in the Luther Nedeed family. In the second "magical powers" appear in the title character, Miranda "Mama" Day. In *Bailey's Cafe* the allegorical cafe as well as Eve's garden restore life and hope to women on the edge. Naylor's four novels reinforce the theme that one can overcome their blues and their difficulties with the guidance of others, usually a female other.

Naylor's *Bailey's Café* received several acclamations from readers and critics. Cristina Garcia, in "Philadelphia Inquirer", said, "Absorbing, poignant, and wise . . . Naylor has crafted a heart-rending testament to the human spirit" (23). Richard Eder stated in "Los Angeles Times", "Moving . . . told in contrasting shades of harsh, comic and magic realism . . . crackles with passion and wit . . . Naylor writes consummately well of the real world's edge . . . Brilliantly conceived and fleshed out . . . it is an unforgettable successor to Ellison's metaphor of the invisible man, and as incandescent" (19).

The novel also got praised by various journals. "People" commented that, "Gutsy... a collective blues performance in prose- a lyrical remembrance and triumph

over personal catastrophe . . . A sublime achievement” (54). “Atlanta Journal-Constitution” noted that, “A stunning achievement . . . *Bailey’s Café* is a rich medley of dissonant yet somehow melodic tales of struggle and triumph. With lyrical language that brings to mind the mastery of Toni Morrison and a savage humor that rivals Terry McMillan’s . . . Naylor becomes a magician, a practical conjure woman who pulls off a literary sleight of hand that is dazzling” (15).

“Washington Post Book World” mentioned about her work as, “Graceful, sometimes piercing, often spellbinding. Gloria Naylor’s is a commanding fictional voice” (21). “Chicago Tribune” praised, “Audacious and mesmerizing . . . memorable and musical, harsh and funny, strange and familiar . . . it spills into the imagination of the reader” (7). Gail Caldwell and Patti Doten made their remarks about the novel in “Boston Globe”. Caldwell said that, “A lacy, near-mystical cantata sung by several voices. This mix of myth, history and mysticism . . . offers a sensibility as rich in potential as that of the Latin American magical realists . . . Moving and memorable” (25). Doten stated that, “Naylor mixes lyricism with . . . sexual detail to bring to life the blues sung by her various female characters. In the café, these women’s pain and triumph, often bittersweet, are explored. What keeps the reader turning the page is Naylor’s unswerving moral fervor and intelligence. Plus an arresting sense of humor that she wields like a velvet cape over the pain of racism” (63).

“Vogue” gave a commentary, “*Bailey’s Café* has the rhythm of music- and the power of religious allegory. Beneath its symbolic overlay are tales of fractured lives that will move even the most hardened reader” (33). “Entertainment Weekly” applauded that, “A dazzling novel. When you enter *Bailey’s Café*, you won’t leave without being touched

by the wonder and the horror that lie there- nor can you fail to be impressed by Naylor's ability to show it plain. In this novel, she has hung on to the mystical streak that runs through her work...and settled into her own voice- and quite a voice it is" (14).

"New York Newsday" observed that, "A powerhouse of a novel... It is a book with something of a comic Ellisonian or Faulknerian rhythm, a defiantly hopeful stance. *Bailey's Café* absorbs us in the mastery of its telling" (18). "New York Times" book review commented that, "Set in a diner where the food isn't very good and the ambience veers between heaven and hell, this bestselling novel from the author of *Mama Day* and *The Women of Brewster Place* is a feast for the senses and the spirit. A virtuoso orchestration of survival, suffering, courage and humor" (12).

"Mirabella" stated that, "There's much . . . in the intense rhythms of Naylor's slow-burning language, which sings of abuse and violence and hate and pure joy, and of the sweetness and power of the human spirit" (49). "Cleveland Plain Dealer" remarked, "[An] appealing strong work with moments of unusual power. Naylor manages to avoid being sentimental, and [is] a wonderful storyteller. When these stories touch us, they do so deeply, mainly because Naylor possesses not only great sweetness, even humor, but also a willingness to stare down some very tough issues" (14).

"New York Daily News" stated that, "[A] remarkable novel . . . Naylor has transcended the realism of her [previous] three novels to find means anew to give voice to the suffering of black women. In *Bailey's Café* that voice is poetic and profound" (20). "Miami Herald" gave a review that, "The narrative of *Bailey's Café* is simple and resonant, its dialogue genuine, as though Sadie and Miss Maple and all the rest really are

telling you about their lives over a bad cup of coffee. Transforming the lowly into poetry is a tall order, but Gloria Naylor dishes up something beautiful” (17).

Similar to Bailey’s Café, *The Men of Brewster Place* also received various reviews. According to “African American Review”, Naylor, “turns her artistic and political attention to the plight of the black man, and she does so in such a way as to render a compelling fictional expose of his dilemma” (176). “The African American Review” noted, “There is little, if any, of the lyrical prose which readers have come to expect from this gifted novelist” and that the male characters “lack much of the emotional involvement and depth that make Naylor’s female characters so memorable.” Despite these failings, however, the “African American Review” called it “a much needed glimpse into the inner life of black men from a black woman’s perspective” (70).

It is remarked by Amazon Booksellers,

Gloria Naylor revisits the dilapidated brick walls, sagging ceilings, and decrepit plumbing of Brewster Place, a feeble fortress that jealously guards the hell, heartache, and hope of its tenants. Ben, the kind, alcoholic janitor from *The Women of Brewster Place* returns as a mythical minstrel of sorts, wandering in and out of the lives of Brewster's male denizens, introducing their stories, each a quest for the meaning of *manhood*. (1)

Kirkus Review stated that, “The inevitable sequel to Naylor's unaccountably successful *The Women of Brewster Place* is comprised, like its predecessor; of a collection of linked portraits of the inhabitants of the urban housing project denoted by its title . . . Naylor contrives interesting characters and promising situations” (11).

“Audio File edition of Detroit Free Press” gave a remark that, “Naylor is a master at creating an emotionally charged page-turner... Gloria Naylor has created a series of stream of consciousness remembrances linked to the women of her previous novel. Here, the men seek absolution for their sins. They offer rationalizations for their earlier reprehensible behaviors” (1).

Hyperion praised the novel by the comment: “It is refreshing to see someone address the Black male character and explore him realistically. Certainly, this work should be an inspiration to all who read it, and it should also encourage other writers to explore Black male characters from similar vantage points” (15). Connie Lauerman, Tribune Staff Writer, stated that, “*The Men of Brewster Place* presents their struggle to live and understand what it means to be men against the backdrop of Brewster Place, a tenement on a dead-end street in an unnamed northern city where it always feels like dusk” (37).

It is worthwhile to make a note of the remark given by Maxine Lavon Montgomery from Florida State University stated in “African American Review”,

In *The Men of Brewster Place*, Gloria Naylor not only revisits the dilapidated urban environs of her award-winning first novel, she breathes new life into the male residents who once wrecked havoc in the lives of African American women. Brewster Place’s men, once mere shadows hardly deserving of the marginal space lent to their characterization, assume centre stage in Naylor’s latest work of fiction, telling of the trials and tribulations, which have led them where they are. Naylor, a skillful writer adept at creating a range of uniquely individual characters- each

with a story to tell- turns her artistic and political attention to the plight of the Black man, and she does in such a way as to render a compelling fictional expose of his dilemma. (134)

Similar to Naylor's themes Alice Walker's and Toni Morrison's works have also received several reviews. In the article "Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* : Struggle of Black Women for Gender Equality", a scholar named Shalini from Lucknow University says that, "Her works deal not only with the problems of being black women, but also with the possibility of change and progression, even though if it is a slow process . . . Alice Walker's intention not only gives voice to black women but also provide their freedom" (32).

In "Voicing the Voiceless: a Study of Alice Walker's the Color Purple", Indu. B. C. a Research Scholar from International Centre for Kerala Studies states,

The *Color Purple* deals with the struggle, both in America and in Africa, of women to gain recognition as individuals who have a self and identity of their own, there by defying the exploitative and oppressive chains of a society dominated and constructed by male. All the women characters in the novel exhibit the determination of overcoming all kinds of oppression leveled upon them in order to live a meaningful life. (1)

Trudy Bush, from "Christian Century", says in "Transforming Vision: Alice Walker and Zora Neale Hurston",

Walker . . . places greater emphasis on the importance of sisterhood. In *The Color Purple*, all the major relationships are triangular, with a man at the triangle's apex and two women at its feet. If the relationship between

the women remains competitive, one of them is destroyed; if the women recognize their sisterhood and become united, they transform the destructive triangle into a circle of cooperation, where all -- men and women alike -- are equal. (5)

Natália Fontes de Oliveira says in “Sisterhood across different races and ethnicities” that, “In many of her novels, Morrison challenges preconceived ideas and depicts the implications of being a black woman during and after slavery. She also discusses about how sisterhood can represent a bond among women from various races and ethnicities” (17).

Nasrin Chegeni, a scholar from Islamic Azad University, in an editorial named “Marginalization and Oppression of Afro-American Women in Toni Morrison’s *Sula*” stated that, “It examines the quality of black women’s suffering through racism, and sexism in the American society. *Sula* depicts the oppression towards the black people in different forms, especially on women’s marginalized life” (46) M. Àngels Francés, from the University of Alicante, stated in her article, “An Appeal for Sisterhood: A Comparison of Toni Morrison’s *Sula* and Montserrat Roig’s *L’hora violeta*” that, “Set in a Midwestern black community called The Bottom, *Sula* is centred on a matriarchal line of three generations of women and the story of the relationship between the two main female characters, Sula and Nel, from their childhood to their divergent choices as adults” (2).

The present dissertation aims at focusing on not only the sufferings of the Black people, but also on the human bonding that helps them to stand together in their sufferings and difficulties and how music helps them to give an outlet and to express

themselves through their blues in *Bailey's Café* and *The Men of Brewster Place* which are significant in the writings of African-American women authors.

Chapter one deals with an overview of Afro-American literature, Gloria Naylor's background which includes a brief note about her works, themes and techniques. Chapter two deals with the sufferings of women in *Bailey's Café* and the sufferings faced by the men in *The Men of Brewster Place*. It further includes the need for human bonding. Chapter three discusses the blues in *Bailey's Café* and *The Men of Brewster Place* which is used as a medium to express their sorrows; it also talks about the way the characters are led to their self realisation. Chapter four sums up the arguments of the previous chapters and tells how Gloria Naylor ends her works on a positive note.

Afro American writing is an emerging area in which a lot of research works can be done. Since many works are already done on the prominent Afro American writers like Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Ntozake Shange, Ralph Ellison, Gwendolyn Brooks etc., the present work is a modest attempt on the works of Gloria Naylor who is equally powerful. The research reiterates the importance of human bonding and the need to survive with hope.

Chapter 2

The Need for Human Bonding

Bailey's Café, the fourth novel of Gloria Naylor covers the sagas of various characters, especially women characters. Naylor focuses on the troubles faced by black women in present-day American society. The chapters start with "Maestro, If You Please" and are finally wrapped up in "The Wrap". In *Bailey's Café*, Naylor returns to the style of structuring the novel as a short story series which she followed in her debut work *The Women of Brewster Place*. Each chapter excluding the last one represents the struggles of women to overcome their torments in their lives. The last chapter is assigned to recite the sufferings of a male protagonist named Stanley a.k.a Miss Maple.

The prologue "Maestro, If You Please" gives an introduction about Bailey, who is a chief narrator of the novel. The other narrators are Nadine, Bailey's wife and Eve, who runs a boarding house near the café. Due to the reason that Bailey sets the stage for the characters as they reveal their lives, there is a probability of mistaking him as the author. Bailey is not really his name but when he took over the café named Bailey's Café his patrons started calling him Bailey. He thinks that the café is earning him a PhD in life. He says that "You might say I'm majoring in Life" (3). Bailey describes his childhood as he was born as the child of African Americans who were the servants of wealthy African Americans, his courtship with Nadine, his failure in various jobs, and his participation in world war.

Through a few incidents, Bailey illustrates racial discrimination. He says that Black people don't get jobs among White people. He also says that even wealthy Blacks are not ready to employ poor Blacks. According to Bailey's mom, Mrs. Van Morrison,

their proprietor, didn't want them as servants because it would lower their status in the eyes of their neighbours. Bailey says, "Wealthy Negroes held the same kind of attitudes as wealthy white people but even more so, feeling that they had more to prove.

According to my mother, Mrs. Van Morrison didn't want them as servants because it cheapened their appearance to their neighbours" (7).

As a boy, Bailey narrates another incident in which Blacks are lowered. Bailey is an ardent base ball fan. He says about Pop Lloyd, a famous Black base ball player, who is nicknamed as Flying Dutchman. Once Pop Lloyd is lauded by the newspapermen as Black Honus Wagner (Honus Wagner is a renowned White base ball player). But, Bailey thought that the highest compliment for Pop Lloyd is to call Honus Wagner "White Pop Lloyd." Bailey states "And it leaves me confused, why these newspapermen look back at Pop's career and call him the Black Honus Wagner; all things being equal- or in this case unequal- the highest compliment to pay the Flying Dutchman is to call him the White Pop Lloyd" (10).

Later on, when Bailey has grown up as a man, he took part in World War II. He narrates the horrors of the world war. He says, "They ate their own dead in New Guinea. And I stepped over clumps of jungle ants finishing what they left" (24). Bailey, as a soldier, has to follow the orders. He says, "I'm a soldier. I follow orders. I spray napalm from the air to send rivers of fire running through the streets. I burn ammunition factories. I burn shipyards. I burn schools. I burn homes . . ." (25). He expresses his disgust for the men who tried to seize the lands and who are responsible for the destruction in the world war. "I was getting tired of these bastards. They wanted this lousy, stinking land: I'd bury them in it" (24). He has been deeply wounded by the

holocaust he witnesses through his own eyes. He utters, “And the land I walked on was killing me” (24). After that, he left his line of work and presently he strangely started working in the café with Nadine. It is evident through the words of Bailey; while he was describing the tale of Hiroshima he suddenly switches on to the description of the café. It shows the mystery of Bailey landing to the café. Bailey says, “A hand reached through the fog and touched my shoulder. –There’s a customer waiting, Nadine said. Startled, I turned around and she was standing in back of me. And in back of her was this café” (27). Further, he doesn’t say that “When I came here . . .” instead, he says “When I found myself in here . . .” (27).

Bailey says that he has not started the business to make his living or for his personal charm. He also says about his customers visit to the café that, “They don’t come for the food and they don’t come for the atmosphere” (3). The Café originally was a haven for people who have been refused the comfort of human care. Bailey says that “this place had to be real real mobile” (28), which means that the café would appear wherever people would need it. Bailey further says that “we’re only here when they need us” (28). Even Mariam has been guided to the café from Ethiopia.

In the second chapter “The Vamp”, Bailey introduces two characters namely Sister Carrie and Sugar Man. Sister Carrie is a religious fanatic who pretends to be highly moral. Sugar Man is a pimp who pretends to be a benefactor of women. But both Sister Carrie and Sugar Man are interested only in controlling others.

The next chapter “Mood Indigo” discusses the life of Sadie, who has sustained the life of silent desperation. She dreamt of winning the love and approval of her mother by remaining ideal. She has become a homemaker at the age of ten and further became a

caretaker for an imperious alcoholic mother. Sadie's mother compels her to prostitution at the age of thirteen and later subjects her to painful abortion and thus she is wounded physically and emotionally. Despite her dreadful situation and her life as a prostitute, Sadie fights back to remain respectful. After her mother's death, she lands up in a job as a cleaning woman in an upscale white brothel. There she meets Daniel, thirty years her senior who delivers firewood for the house once in a week. After few years, Daniel extends a marriage proposal to Sadie when he learns that the house has been closed down by law officials.

Sadie remains in Daniel's house as his wife and housekeeper. She attempts creating an agreeable home for her husband and herself. She stays without intruding Daniel's space as she has learnt the art of silence from living with her stern mother. When Daniel dies, Sadie is left with nothing, because he has handed down the house to his daughters from previous marriage. Sadie once again returned to prostitution when she is in need of money to get back the house. Even though she has returned to prostitution she has resigned only for her need, but not to overcome her poverty. She is arrested and she remains in jail for two weeks. Because of this she is not able to earn the full amount required to get back the house. Sadie becomes homeless and at last enters into Bailey's Café asking for a cup of tea. In the café, Sadie becomes friendly with an Iceman. When Iceman proposes to Sadie, she is reminded of her past frustrations and disappointments and hence rejects his proposal.

Throughout her life Sadie tries to receive credit from others. At first she tries to please her mother and then her husband Daniel. Sadie enjoys a little happiness only when she accepts the attention of Iceman Jones. Through the creation of Sadie, Naylor brings

out an exception to the belief that prostitutes are undeserving and abandoned creatures of the basest variety. She shatters the common notion that the category of women as good woman and bad woman and she also proves that all prostitutes are not despicable. Sadie enters prostitution only when she is in dire necessity of finding a place to live. “She drank her dinner of hot water and sugar as she pulled out pencil and paper to calculate what was yet to be earned” (BC 60). This illustrates that she is in prostitution not for a lavish life. Sadie’s only option to achieve her dreams is to sell her body. But she is also undoubtedly a lady in a sense that Sadie has concrete ladylike manners of self respect, dignity and serenity which is witnessed by Bailey. Bailey and Nadine recognise the lady within the whore in Sadie.

The next chapter is about Eve, who owns a boarding (brothel) house next door to the café. Similar to the café, Eve’s boarding house also remains as a haven, but unlike the café it does not welcome anyone who visits there. Eve affords house only to those who truly need help or in whom she sees promise. Eve is an orphan and she is raised by a firm person a few days after her birth. It is evident through the words of Eve: “The very day he said he found me in a patch of ragweed, so new I was still tied to the birth sac and he had to bite off the umbilical cord with his teeth and spit it out to save me from being poisoned: And going through all that for any she-creature earns me the right to decide when it was born” (83).

Eve calls the person who raises her as Godfather and she doesn’t mention any reason for calling him “Godfather”. Eve says, “Godfather always told me that since I never had a real mother or father and wouldn’t be alive if it weren’t for him . . .” (82). Her relationship with Godfather is quite strange. Godfather has given her nightly bath

habitually and he continues it even after Eve undergoes her puberty. He prevents Eve from socialising with other children, particularly with boys. The most mysterious part of it is that he bathes Eve even after her puberty without any sexual inclinations towards her. Even Eve says that the women of their place raise unnatural questions about Godfather's relationship with her. She says, "But the women's eyes held other questions, unnatural question, as their heads followed us when we rode by in the wagon. Why was he still cooking and cleaning for me? Why had he never married? Why was no boy ever allowed to come and call? Or even walk me home from church?" (83). Eve points out the queries of the women as unnatural questions which indicate that there is no sexual relationship between her and Godfather.

Later on, Godfather stopped bathing Eve due to those questions. When he discontinued the baths, Eve starts missing the touch by another human being. Eve utters "Did those women understand what they had done with their slitted eyes and evil questions? I was now forced to go through months and months with no one and nothing to touch me" (83). As her body continues to grow and develop, she longs for such kind and gentle touch. Soon Eve discovers a way to be satisfied. With a mentally challenged boy named Billy, Eve invents a game that provides her with physical pleasure. Lying in a prone position, pressing her body into the ground, Eve instructs Billy to march backward and forward around her body while stomping as vigorously as he can.

When Godfather discovers about this game, he flew into rage. He said to Eve that she was going to leave him the same way he'd found me, naked and hungry. He did the same way as he said. He threw out Eve from the dwelling, leaving her without clothing and food. Nowhere to go, Eve starts her journey towards Arabi and then she visits New

Orleans where she develops a talent for making money and a love for making gardens. After leaving New Orleans, she ends up next to Bailey's. There she establishes a boarding house and outside it she creates lovely gardens. She insists on her residents' gentlemen callers to purchase flowers from her gardens to present to the ladies they have chosen.

Eve is a more mystical figure in the novel. Her relationship with Godfather is strange; Eve says that it took her thousand years to reach Arabi from her place and she was also able to make the out off season flowers to bloom. Naylor even draws Eve's story as a parallel one to biblical Eve. Eve remains a motherly figure for the residents of her boarding house which is similar to the biblical Eve, who has been considered as the first woman and mother of all living beings. Just as the biblical Eve is thrown out naked, she is also thrown out. Eve says "To be thrown out of his church was to be thrown out of the world" (85).

After being thrown away from church, Eve doesn't have a place to reside. She says "It seemed there was nowhere on earth for a woman like me" (BC 91). Finally, Eve has constructed a sanctuary not only for herself but also for other women who would be suffering dislocation like her. Eve's role is extended in the next few chapters, in which her house becomes a place of protection for the souls that are neglected and deserted and hence deprived of compassion in their existence. Eve's boarding house is able to cure all those who have undergone painful struggles and disheartened. Eve's remedy for every case is to build hope among her tenants who have lost their possibilities of hope to live a satisfied life. It is similar to her activity of blooming out off season flowers which is also impossible to happen.

The next chapter is about Esther who is forced into prostitution at the age of twelve and remains in such condition for twelve more years. Esther's brother made her a concubine to his chief, who is a farmer. But he says to her sister showing the farmer that, ". . . This is your husband . . ." (95). Esther has mistaken her relationship with the farmer as marriage because she is not old enough to understand the reality of her condition. At the age of twelve she has doubts that whether it is a marriage but she trusted her elder brother's words. She says, "Can you be married without a gown? Without the beautiful white flowers and the veil that sweeps the floor of the church? Without love? Even at twelve years old I doubt, but I believe in my older brother. He is kind to me and calls me only *little sister*" (95).

Esther's new husband provides food and shelter for her. Esther imagines herself as being like a princess and does not immediately understand her situation. She also believes that her brother is caring for her by giving her to the farmer to marry. Even though the farmer provides comforts and necessities for Esther, she in turn, is subjected to the sexual acts that the farmer performs in the basement of the house. At that age, Esther remains ignorant and immature and she does not understand her relationship with the farmer. Esther says that in the basement she has a wooden chest of toys with which she used to play, but she also comes to understand that those are not children's toys. She begins to understand that her body is a playground for this man and that being a good girl means remaining obedient and silent. In her isolated world of silence, Esther finds comfort in listening to the radio. It is the radio program "The Shadow" that gives her acknowledgement about what is happening in the dark basement between her and the farmer.

At the age of twenty four, she recognises that she is not legally married to the farmer. She comes out from the dark world. When she has come to Eve's boarding, Eve understands her and affords her a room in the dark so that she can hide herself in the dark. None of her patrons have seen her in the light. Esther also insists her patrons to get white roses for her. Because, throughout her life she has been cheated of appropriate marriage and she is not able to identify it. She asks for white roses because unlike the acts performed in the basement, they can be identified even in the dark. She says that "I like the white roses because they show up in the dark" (95).

Through this tale it is clear that women are not consulted and they have no rights to decide about their willingness to sacrifice themselves. They are treated as the sexual slaves for the sake of others. It shows the helplessness of women and cruelty of men who keep their women worthless. The sacrifice and the sufferings of the women remain unrecognised. Esther also points out that there are still many girls who are going to have similar fate like her. She says "there are just too many twelve-year-olds" (99).

Eve says that Esther has "the most honest face of any woman" (99), because Eve knows that Esther's eyes and honest face will give away the secret that Esther carries within herself. She is a character endowed with heroism, for her stay with the farmer for twelve years as a repayment of debt for her brother who looked after her against the protests of his wife when she was young. Esther always narrates her tale in the present tense, which indicates that she is unable to overcome her past. Esther hides in the darkness of Eve's cellar and recalls the disloyalty of her brother again and again. She asks her gentlemen callers to, "call me *little sister*. Or I no longer come" (99). By saying so, it

becomes evident that she is not able to forget her brother's betrayal of her about her "marriage".

The next chapter deals with Mary alias Peaches who is described as the most beautiful woman anyone has ever seen. The chapter opens with Peaches father searching for her in Bailey's Café but she has taken up residence at Eve's house. Peaches father wants to rescue her and return to the Kansas City but Peaches life has changed so much so that she cannot easily return to the Kansas City. When Peaches has remained as a teenager the boys in the neighbourhood often tracked her. But, her father is so protective and she is not allowed to date any of the suitors.

Peaches started seeing herself as two people, one pure, wholesome and good; the other depraved, promiscuous and aggressive. Peaches decides to submit the lascivious one to a host of men in order to protect her more sacred self. Peaches is overwhelmed by her beauty because men constantly approach her, flirt with her or grin at her. Peaches engages in one affair after another when she is left with no other option. When her father finds out about her meeting, he becomes very anxious and starts hurting her with razor straps, leather shoes and with his fists. Peaches describes this incident in detail:

And I tried to tell Daddy Jim why I followed them everywhere in Kansas City. Did whatever they wanted. He'd find out about some man and go raging out, wanting to fight. But it was not *that* man . . . Don't lock me in my room, not there, I pleaded; I'll have to find a way to get out again. I tried to stop him from wasting his money on doctors. I tried to stop him from hurting himself by beating me with razor straps, leather shoes, his fists. . . I couldn't stand to see my father that way. (106)

Peaches finds it difficult to see her father tormented in this way, so she decides to leave home at last.

Peaches becomes a prostitute in order to survive and she begins to hate herself as her self-esteem sinks lower and lower. One day, she meets a man who tries to be a boyfriend of Peaches. He, like her father, tries to save her from her temptations on men. Peaches says, "He made the same mistake Daddy Jim had" (109). He put her in an apartment and she doesn't get out of it for a week, so that she can control her temptations. But there is nothing that remedies the situation. Peaches feels guilty for her infidelity to this man, she makes a determined effort to suppress her feelings. For a week she almost drives herself mad and she doesn't even answer the door, because she is frightened that she may get tempted at the men who deliver packages. She says, "For a solid week I never left the apartment. I didn't even trust myself to take packages from the doormen" (110). At the end of the second week she takes a drastic measure, believing that her beauty will plague her forever. Peaches takes a beer opener and slices a diagonal line across her right cheek all the way to the left side of her chin, all the while suffering piercing pain. She is no longer beautiful and feels relieved of the torment (men approaching for her beauty) that has been a part of her entire life.

After Peaches is discharged from the hospital, she started travelling in a train without fixing a destination. At last she reaches Bailey's Café and from there she is directed towards Eve's house. At the end of the chapter, Peaches father is sent to Eve's house but he is not even allowed to cross the threshold. Ultimately Peaches comes to know that she can return home whenever she wishes.

When the chronicle of Peaches is examined, she has two extreme characteristics. One is so good that is trying to be a good daughter to her father and another one is the immoral one which she fears about herself, "I didn't even trust myself to take packages from the doorman" (110). She says so because she is afraid that she may seduce the man from the door. Peaches is torn between her natural inclination to enjoy her own sensuality and her desire to be her father's baby. Here again women are not allowed to decide how they should remain. When she attempts to be good, other men constantly approach her. When she is inclined to her desires, her father's concern torments her. She has become a victim of a viewpoint that the two aspects she finds within herself cannot survive together. She tries to lose herself and she is not able to reconcile herself. At last, she says "I grabbed the [beer] opener in both hands and dug down" (111).

She attempts to fit herself to the desirability of other males. She tries to control her temptations on men for her father and for the man who tries to rescue from those temptations. She also gives the men whatever they needed for those who approach her for their sexual desires and who become one of the reasons for her temptation. Naylor leaves a message that women must learn to value themselves eliminating others desirability. Eve understands Peaches and provides her with a space where she can express her both aspects (the good woman who is trying to fit according to her father's wish and the bad woman who expresses her desire for men). At the end of the chapter, when Peaches refuses to go with her father, Eve says to Peaches' father, "I will return your daughter to you whole" (114). The term "whole" in the sense, Peaches remaining as herself without trying to escape from her nature.

Succeeding Peaches' tale is the story of Jesse Bell. Jesse's family, The Bells, is born to proud people who work long and hard on the docks. The Bells accept those who know how to affirm their power in a respectful manner. The Bells are people who stand up for that which they believe and allow others to do the same. Jesse Bell is already a woman living with a strong sense of individuality and assertive pride. She is married to one of Manhattan's most prominent Black families, the Kings. Jesse Bell says that it is a shock that she is married into the Kings and she also explains about how a woman gets treated in the Kings' family. She says,

It was a big shock when I married into the Kings and went to Sugar Hill. Those women got treated any old way and took it. I don't mean being slapped upside the head or any such thing; they figured that was the kind of treatment I saw around me growing up. Well, I had sometimes, but there are worse things than hitting a woman. Like having your husband call you stupid and lazy in front of a whole roomful of people while you stand there and smile and smile. (121)

In Jesse Bell's family Uncle Eli King, rules over the family. But Jesse Bell remained happy, because her husband treats her well. She says, "My husband was different. Way different. He loved everything about women. I mean, even little things like how I managed to get the seams in my stockings straight or how I penciled in the beauty mark over the right side of my lips" (123).

But Uncle Eli dislikes Jesse. Because, Uncle Eli has thought that Jesse Bell is worthless of the King's name. Uncle Eli is obsessed with an idea that Blacks should be uplifted to the level of Whites. Uncle Eli even criticises that the food made by Jesse Bell

is slave food. In contrast, many others in the family find Jesse Bell's food pleasing. Jesse Bell says that her husband has a belief about what his Uncle Eli says on lifting their race to the level of whites' race. She states, "Still, a part of him believed in what Uncle Eli said. All that lift-the-race this and lift-the-race that" (125). Jesse also mentions about her relationship with the other girl. She further says that, her husband acknowledges that and accepts her relationship with that girl. She says, "But my husband knew right up front, right from the beginning . . . I never brought her there although he told me I could" (125).

But slowly, Uncle Eli starts showing his patriarchal attitudes towards Jesse. She says, "It started slow at first, you know. And in that quiet, sneaky way that people like them are so good at" (127). She indirectly points out Uncle Eli's cunningness in planning Jesse's break down. After the birth of her son, matters become even worse. Uncle Eli very cunningly plans to separate the young King from Bells family. He completely takes over the situations and decisions regarding Jesse Bell's son, and keeps her son away from Jesse Bell's all possible influence. The final rage comes when the Kings celebrate her son's acceptance in Harvard. On that day, it rained incessantly and so when Uncle Eli invites the Bells family he has told them to arrive two hours later than the other guests so that by the time they arrive, there is no more room available under the tent. Due to this Jesse Bell's mother catches a cold which leads to pneumonia, and then she dies a month later.

When her husband refuses to consider that the whole event is planned, Jesse Bell is driven completely mad and she starts consuming heroin for her comfort. In addition to these problems, when a dyke club raided, Jesse Bell is affirmed as bisexual and is dragged to confinement. Uncle Eli has destroyed her entire reputation through a local

newspaper. Her husband and her son dissociate themselves from her and thus she is left in isolation. When Eve visits confinement centre for civic duty, she meets Jesse Bell. Eve gives a hope of recovery for her.

Initially Eve has thought that it is incapable for Jesse Bell to overcome her drug habit. Later on, Eve has understood that Jesse Bell is serious about her recovery when she has undergone a painful four-day withdrawals from consuming drug. The chapter ends with a positive note that Jesse Bell is able to resist her flaw.

Jesse Bell has been portrayed with some optimistic, gallant view at the beginning and end of her saga. But in the middle, she is completely devastated by the patriarchal Uncle Eli. She severely clings to her roots and takes pride about her family and her clan. She says that “I was proud to be a Bell” (125). She also declines Uncle Eli’s idea to raise the status of the Blacks to that of Whites and she says “I didn't see a damned thing wrong with being colored” (125). Jesse has fought a good fight by refusing to be ashamed of the people and culture she loved.

Jesse Bell tries to prove that she is worthy of the King name by becoming a loyal wife and doting mother. But Uncle Eli has bided his time in order to collapse Jesse, and he works out his plans regarding that and defeated all of Jesse's efforts slowly and steadily. She is also true to her family (the Bells) and to her culture. Naylor points out that varied principles are practised for men and women where courage is concerned. Instead of honouring women, they are reprimanded for upholding their principles and values when those are not coinciding with patriarchal principles and values. At last, when she is an experienced person at Eve’s house, she has become her own person, no longer obliged to any authority but herself.

The next chapter entitled “Mary” (Take Two) deals with a mysterious story of Mariam. Mariam has come to Eve’s house from her own country, because others there believe that she has committed sin. Mariam is an Ethiopian Jew, who finds herself pregnant though she vows that “No man has ever touched me” (143). No one in the café or boarding can question the genuineness of her affirmation. Mariam has been sent to Eve’s house by Gabe, who owns a pawnshop that stands near by the café. Gabe is also a Jew, who is introduced as an opponent of Bailey. The two of them frequently argue over the issues of race, history, politics, etc. Gabe speaks well for Mariam’s evident innocence and virtue. Whenever people come into the pawnshop looking for a haven, Gabe sends them to the café and then if Bailey sees them fit, he will send them to Eve’s house. But for Mariam, Gabe straightly directs Mariam towards Eve’s house. Because, he knows that Mariam will be cared with respect only at Eve’s.

A large part of the chapter discusses Mariam’s life before she arrives at Eve’s. As a young girl, Mariam suffers genital mutilation. Eve has thought that, because of her condition there is no possibility that Mariam could have slept with a man without the knowledge of others. However, the people from Mariam’s village have thought that she is lying and she is cast from her village. Journeying from Ethiopia she arrives at Gabe’s shop and at present Eve and the others on the street have started preparing for the birth of Mariam’s baby. After the successful delivery of her son, who is named George, Mariam dies.

The tale of Mariam is similar to that of Mother Mary and Mariam is a girl who is unwed and pregnant. Mariam’s story is narrated by Nadine and Eve because there are certain issues which men may be ineligible to represent. Mariam remains speechless and

helpless throughout her life. The only matter she often speaks while staying at Eve's house is that no one has ever touched her. Impregnated, exiled and ultimately bearing a child shows that she is also helpless.

Mariam's death remains mysterious and Naylor leaves it unexplained, however she highlights the patriarchal idea that women can stop to exist after they have served the purpose of their existence. The whole story strikes the disappointment with the reality of women's position in society.

In the next chapter, Naylor gives a chance for the men to express their blues. It is the story of Miss Maple whose actual name is Stanley. Stanley is named after famous black men who have contributed to the betterment of American society, mainly because his father wanted him to make his mark in the society in an impressive way. Stanley becomes Miss Maple after suffering a series of setbacks that have left him unsure about his suitable place in America. His father grants him a private education and supplies him with as many intellectual challenges as Stanley can get through. Stanley attends Stanford University where he earns his PhD in mathematics. After completing graduate study Stanley sets out to secure gainful employment, firmly believing that he will successfully get a job.

From Los Angeles to Philadelphia Stanley applies to various firms, only to know that he can attain only a blue-collar position but never an executive seat and also to further know that no one is willing to hire a Black man. When he continues to travel from west to east he faces an increasingly hot summer and he feels that he cannot stand with the muggy men's clothing that he has worn for these various interviews. He then decides to get into loose-fitting women's clothes. Unable to find a job, Stanley remains as a

housekeeper at Eve's house. He has continued to wear women's clothes during summer. Eve bestows him the name Miss Maple and he says that "I'd never felt more like a man" (204). Miss Maple has made a small fortune by winning jingle-writing contests that have been sponsored by some of the companies that refuse to hire him. His story ends with the hope that he will be able to start his own company and finally chart his own course.

Naylor points out that Miss Maple, as a man, controls his life as an individual more than women. Naylor uses male characters not only to illustrate racial discrimination, but also uses them as narrators sarcastically to address the readers about the ideas of patriarchal tradition. Miss Maple is bold enough to defy the social conventions by cross dressing. Miss Maple is a man of such confidence and emotional security that he dares to take any name, any title, any job and certainly any attire, without minding that it may affect his identity and masculinity.

Similar to *Bailey's Café*, *The Men of Brewster Place* portrays the sufferings and struggles of men. *The Men of Brewster Place* is a continuation of Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place* and represents the men who play only minor roles in that novel. It is an insightful work that deals with the other side of the gender issue. The novel starts with 'Dusk' and ends with 'Dawn'. It discusses the lives of seven characters-Ben, Brother Jerome, Basil, Eugene, Moreland T. Woods, C.C. Baker, and Abshu. Naylor's methodology is quite clever. Although Ben died in "The Women of Brewster Place," the "Author's Notes" in this sequel states that Naylor "takes her poetic license to resurrect [Ben's] spirit and voice to narrate major portions of [the] novel."

Naylor has already told the conditions of women and by offering a chance for the men to articulate their secret motivations, their social conditions, their freedoms and their

restrictions she establishes balance as a writer. Naylor places herself as a black, feminist woman writer, writing on behalf of black men.

Ben plays the role of the narrator similar to Bailey, which is setting the stage to know the stories of the characters in the novel. Ben says that Black men are not the cause of the problems faced by Black women; rather, the problems are common to their race. Ben states that either a person is working at his career or working in depression, life is tragic for everyone. He says “hardworking, all of 'em. If they were working at a job or just working at despair” (8). In the novel, Naylor writes about the men not only of all ages but of different characters—from the elderly Ben to young misguided C.C. Baker; from the homosexual Eugene to the immoral womaniser, Moreland; from the benevolent Abshu to the gifted and retarded Jerome. Naylor portrays the inner conflicts of men, who are struggling to fulfill their roles as men. Through Ben, Naylor points out that, men to a certain extent define themselves related to women. Ben says that “And with each of 'em - no matter whom he was - there was always a Her in his story” (8).

Both men and women of African American ethnicity suffer silence as a part of their struggle in order to establish their identity. Ben says that silence has been taught to young African Americans, traditionally. He illustrates it through an incident from his Grandpa Jones' life. Through omniscient narration Ben's Grandpa's memory is given. It narrates how Grandpa Jones lost his sister, and how an overseer brutally raped her that subsequently leads to his sister's death. This is the situation where Ben's grandpa learns about the silence of being a man:

But Grandpa listens for someone to say, It was wrong . . . Even if among themselves there is some cry of No. even if they have to whisper No. But

they all remain silent . . . As if none of it had happened. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away, the minister had said. And Grandpa had yelled out No. No, he don't. All eyes turned to him before his mother slapped him. Boy, shut your mouth, you hear? Shut your mouth. Be a man. (15)

Ben additionally says that silence is also passed from one generation to the next leaving with the pain of unreasonable silences. He also says that "It is my turn to be the silent old man as I inherit more than my share of the pain riding on the question. What does it mean to be a man?" (28). For Ben, it is not easy to incorporate silence, since he, as a narrator is in need to speak. So he becomes a drunkard, because drink helps him to maintain his silence and his common sense.

Ben also discusses their difficulties to establish them as men. It is not the age that differentiates the African Americans as boys and men, but it is their status that declares their position as men. Ben says that, "My next job in the city was shoeshine boy. We all called ourselves boys even though in my late twenties I was the youngest one there" (19). He admits that, "Near to sixty-eight years old when I look back over my life, and one of the things that bothers me most is that I ain't never been in a situation where anybody ever called me sir" (11).

The desire of all men in *The Men of Brewster Place*- Ben, Basil, Eugene, Moreland T. Woods, C.C. Baker, Abshu, Greasy, is to be respected as a man. Basil has started working hard taking up full time and part time jobs to make compensation to his mother because he wants self-respect and he has further stated that, "I was starting to feel like the man I always wanted to be" (43). Eugene has become afraid of losing his wife's respect for him as a man, if she comes to know about his homosexual tendencies.

Next comes Brother Jerome, who is labeled as a retarded child. But, he is a gifted piano player and he expresses the troubles of Black men through his music. Even though no specific role is given to Jerome, he is depicted as an instrument who plays all the feelings of other men around him. There is an element of mysticism in Jerome's tale and he does not have desires and intentions like ordinary human beings. Naylor leaves it unexplained about, how a retarded man, who has not experienced life, is able to translate the feelings of the men "the sound of the black man's blues" (37).

The theme of portraying women as victims has started from the slave narratives in which the offenders were white men. This theme has also been portrayed in the novels of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker in the early 1970s. But the greatest difference is these writers' works have black men as offenders. In recent years the image of black men as perpetrators of violence has changed; the black men are naturally aggressive because they need to prove their masculinity or they have to vent their frustration of failing to prove their masculinity. For the first time an African American man is portrayed as a character who states that his mission of life is to "be a solid family man" (50). This character is Naylor's contrast to all the cruel husbands and bad fathers of the other African American works of fiction.

The fourth chapter deals with Eugene, in which Eugene himself is a narrator because it is necessary for him to tell his own story; to share his secret and to articulate his thoughts and intentions. Eugene has genuine love for his wife Ciel and daughter Serena. He worked overtime and occasionally double time at docks. However, he could not earn enough money and failed to fulfill his dreams to own a red brick house. With the passage of time, the love and affection between Eugene and Ciel vanishes and the

hardships of life start ruining their life. Eugene remembers his first job in the docks where he meets Bruce, a very strict worker and a head foreman for the company in the docks. Meanwhile, when Bruce and Eugene go to the bar, Eugene meets bar worker Chino, in a good looking makeup and hairstyle. Chino wants to befriend Eugene but he rejects Chino's overture. Although Eugene gets entangled in the trap of Chino's artificial beauty later he realises that his two years of marriage has come into trouble. By this time, the couple's married life has become sore and bitter. Eugene is in an utterly financial crisis as he has finished all his account balance. Bruce has lately become a sort of godfather and Chino as a fairy godmother for Eugene. Both of them consult about his marriage and even Chino tells him to properly divorce Ciel. But Eugene becomes furious and retorts, "Get the hell away from this table"(86).

Eugene is not able to withstand the thought of his wife losing the respect for him as a man, if she comes to know about his homosexual tendencies. He prefers to hurt his wife and himself, and be the worst type of man, the most disgraceful man, than to cease to be a "real" (who is free from homosexual inclinations) man in her eyes. Eugene has torn himself apart, destroying himself and those he loves when he cannot reconcile homosexuality to being a man.

The affinity between the couple becomes bitter and Eugene finally starts to think about the advice of Chino. During this time, Eugene loses his job, shouts on Ciel and holds her responsible for his plight. He is ready to search for a new job and wants to leave his family for some time. During this time, Ciel too wants to go with Eugene but he frankly refuses and also does not disclose about his destination. Ciel loves Eugene very much and tries to stop him but Eugene wants to go away at any cost.

In the meantime, their daughter Serena gets electrocuted by poking her hands into the slits of the electric socket. Eugene is unable to express the depth of his horror at the death of his daughter, but the speech he employs when speaking of it indicates that he cannot bring his mind to accept the reality. “She wasn't crawling under the kitchen table she wasn't dying to poke her fingers into the slits of the electric socket, she wasn't banging against the electric socket...” (90). His daughter's death permanently causes the break and Eugene has truly become alone as he is far away from his wife as well as his daughter. It seems clear that Eugene loves Ciel and after missing his family he has become isolated.

Eugene can be even compared to Miss Maple of *Bailey's Café*. Both Eugene and Miss Maple breaks social norms, Eugene by his acknowledgement of his homosexuality and Miss Maple by cross-dressing, but only Eugene is suffocated by shame. Eugene is like a victim but Miss Maple is one of the admirable characters of Naylor, who has the courage to reconcile the multiplicities within himself, having “learned [his] own language, set [his] own standards, began to identify [himself] as a man” (182). From this tale, Naylor points out that when men do not seem to succeed in living up to the expectations of their women, they are, however, men who are doing their best under certain circumstances.

Next is Rev. Moreland T. Woods, who belongs more to the upper class than to the working class. It is quite strange that Rev. Moreland T. Woods is a man of Brewster Place. It is in *The Men of Brewster Place* the character of Rev. Moreland T. Woods is clearly addressed. He is an egoistical, greedy, heavy drinker and womanizer. He is a politically ambitious man who does not hesitate to manipulate the church for his own

ends. Although he is popular with the women, Moreland seems to be hated by the men around him, from Deacon Bennet, his arch rival in Sinai Baptist Church, to Clifford Montgomery Jackson (Abshu), who daily plots to kill him.

Moreland Woods has also betrayed the very people who elected him to the Council; Moreland Woods is voted to destroy Brewster Place. Abshu is the only person of Brewster Place, who eventually slips down Moreland of his position as a councilman. But not even Abshu could do anything to turn the destruction of Brewster Place.

It is an irony that Naylor has given the tales of Moreland T. Woods and C.C. Baker continuously. The former is a preacher and council man and the later is a gangster and drug dealer, but both are the personalities who demolish the society. In this novel, Naylor gives the sufferings of men at first and then gives the men who are the cause of sufferings. In C.C. Baker's story, the gangs trap the young people with bribes and threats, pitilessly killing and forcing others to kill, and in general, threatening the public with violence. Trapped within the confines of the city, this category of young men who feel that their very existence is threatened, prefer negative recognition to no recognition at all, "There is no conscience in the streets" (125). Craving the respect which recognition implies, they represent a group of dangerous young men who would rape and kill to obtain their ends. C.C. Baker even becomes proud of his crimes saying that, "He is dealing and proud of it. And wants his old man to be proud of it too" (125). In one way C.C. Baker even becomes the victim, the victim of circumstances.

In this story, Naylor has identified and described a particular problem of the urban, unemployed, African Americans of young age. Naylor presents C.C. Baker's story as a case beyond rescue from his situation. He is beyond redemption because he does not

want another way of life. His story is told on two different levels of consciousness - one in the police interrogation, and the second which is the italicised 'true-story', narrated by the omniscient narrator without looking into C.C. Baker's point of view. Naylor indicates clearly that Baker's story is a tragedy where distracted young men of the African American community entirely misunderstand what it means to have courage and be a man, "He aims for the face ... C.C. runs and runs ...he thanks God for giving him the courage to do it. The courage to be a man" (129).

Next to C.C.Baker's story, Naylor has given the tale of Abshu to present contradictions. When C.C. Baker has felt alienated in the society, he defies it and chooses to go out the boundaries of law, whereas, Abshu decides to work within the system. He doesn't defy the law, but stands within the boundaries of it and attempts to improve his life as well as the lives of other people in his community; He gets a degree, does social work, and "followed the law to the letter" (144). Naylor brings out the fact that C.C. Baker has taken a selfish decision when compared with Abshu. Similar to C.C. Baker, Abshu has also tolerated hardships in his childhood, but unlike C.C. Baker he has chosen to lead a generous life. Through Abshu, Naylor has disproved that C.C. is just a negative externality of a corrupt system or otherwise fated to live by breaking the law.

Abshu has grown up to be a respectable and responsible man who is one of Naylor's best protagonists. He is contrary to C.C.Baker and an asset to the society. The main objective in his life is to improve conditions for the poverty stricken of his race, especially for the children. Though Abshu has been brought up by Masons, he has consciously shaped himself, to be with all that Masons are lacking. The mention of the "one and a half sandwiches", and the "half an apple", indicates the atmosphere of living

with lack of completion or satisfaction. Abshu has become determined to destroy such conditions in as many lives as he can reach out. "Existing that way all the time, on the edge of hunger, on the edge of kindness, gave Abshu an appreciation for a life fully lived" (140). The language of Masons like "Dirty feet - stink, stink", or "Don't be a piggy-piggy" (139), shows that there is no proper understanding of life in Masons. This has paved way for Abshu to think that the Brewster Place youth should have taught discipline and patience.

Human Bonding is a common element present in African-American literature. One of the most intimate human relations is depicted everywhere as "Love." This subject matter is dealt in many literary texts, either as a central theme or as a peripheral theme. In African-American literature, this love takes form through the human relationships like motherhood, sisterhood etc. Toni Morrison's *Sula*, Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*, Gloria Naylor's *Bailey's Café* are some of the illustrations for the portrayal of love through motherhood, sisterhood and friendship. This theme is also portrayed in Naylor's other novels like *The Women of Brewster Place*, *Mama Day* etc.

There are some significant points that are implied by Naylor in her novels. They are, it is unnecessary to be biologically related mother, daughter or sister to depict motherhood and sisterhood in her works; second, the motherhoods and sisterhoods in Naylor's novels function as substitutes of other relationships, either for family relationship or for marital relationship; third, the characters are used by Naylor to oppose the stereotypes about black women as matriarch.

Naylor ignores that motherhood, sisterhood should be presented only through blood relations. In *Bailey's Café*, Eve remains as a mother figure to Esther, Jesse Bell, Peaches and Mariam, but there does not exist a biological relationship between Eve and others.

The concept of substituting motherly or sisterly figure for biological relationships is unique to African American culture as well as to Naylor's fiction. According to Collins,

other mothers [are] women who assist blood mothers by sharing mothering responsibilities. ... Grandmothers, sisters, aunts or cousins act as other mothers by taking on child-care responsibilities for one another's children. However, —in many African-American communities these women-centered networks of community-based child care have extended beyond the boundaries of biologically related individuals to include fictive kin. (196)

Collins also attempts to show that “other mothers do not always have to be blood relatives. The fictive kin can be also neighbours of the mother and the child” (196). Eve is one of the best examples of other mother in Naylor's works. By caring for others (Jesse, Esther, Mariam, Peaches) she remains as a substitute for the biological mother, brother, father and for husband. By portraying such love among women Naylor breaks the stereotype of women as a matriarch.

In Naylor's novels, the concept of substitute mother or sister seems to be even broader. For example, Eve's character in *Bailey's Café* demonstrates that she is a substitute mother of all the women she accommodates in her boarding house. The relationships of the substitute mothers and their adoptive children in Naylor's novels are

distinctive because people in these relationships seem to be more happy and prospering than many of those between a biological mother and her child. The case of Sadie is an example for this view. Sadie is despised by her mother and has been sold as a child prostitute in *Bailey's Café*. On the other hand, Eve remains as a mother to all women who are subjugated because of their sexuality. The group of people depicted in the novel thrives under the leadership of Eve who uses her supernatural properties to help others.

Gloria Naylor has portrayed her motherly figures with some magical properties. These figures are Mama Day from *Mama Day* and Eve from *Bailey's Cafe*. Even though these characters have varied qualities they are similar at remaining healers for others. Mama Day is a non-Christian but highly spiritual, coming from an African tradition and the worshipper of nature. Eve is a Christian woman, herself based on the biblical Eve. On the other hand, both Eve and Mama Day are the leaders of their communities; both have magical qualities and both can help other people, especially women.

The questioning of truth and some widely held beliefs is also an issue in *Bailey's Café*. One of the characters through which Naylor criticises certain interpretations of the Bible is Eve. The leading woman Eve's connection to the divine origins is stronger because this character is a revision of the biblical Eve, the mother of all living beings. Eve's birth remains mysterious.

During childhood she is raised by a man whom she calls Godfather. He refuses to tell her little about her age and her parents. Since Eve's story, like the whole *Bailey's Café*, is richly inspired by the Bible, Godfather is a version of God and thus he could be the creator of Eve. Eve's Godfather says that, "And going through all that for any she-creature earns me the right to decide when it was born" (83). Through this he indirectly

indicates that he has authority over her life and birth. But by saying that, going through all that for any “she-creature”, he suggests his superiority over women. This is a hint at the interpretation of the Bible as a justification for patriarchy.

During her journey from Pillottown to Arabi, Eve determines her age “And when I finally reached Arabi, ... I sank to my knees to think. Ten miles outside of New Orleans. By then I’d lived a hundred years ten times over, so there was a lot to think About” (90-91). During this journey, Eve also realizes about Godfather’s saying that she was born from the delta which means the rich Louisiana soil. At this point, Eve declares power over her life by deciding about her origin. She rejects God as her creator and instead it seems that the Mother Earth is her creator. Throughout the book Eve has a close relation to the earth, for example by growing flowers.

Eve is one of the significant characters through whom the bond of motherhood and sister hood is depicted. She is a care taker of every woman who visits her boarding house. She treats them with care and love. Bailey’s Café is also another place where it supports the customers who visits there for the need of comfort in their life. Some of Eve’s healing rituals in the novel are curing Jesse Bell from drug addiction and looking after the birth of Mariam’s son, George.

A miraculous event happens at the end of *Bailey’s Café*, especially when Mariam gives birth to her son, George. The birth is miraculous because Mariam is a virgin. After hearing Mariam’s story, people find it unconvincing. It is Eve who explains that, “it’s not unusual along the shores of the Blue Nile for virgins to give birth. But I’ve bathed this girl and seen her body; no man has even tried (152).

Eve's idea for numbing the pains of Mariam while giving birth is the use of light. Her use of the lights to calm down the pain contributes to the miraculousness of the birth. The use of magic to soothe the pain during the childbirth contrasts with the brutality of practices like clitoridotomy. First Eve gives details of a bit harsh reality that, "I'll have to cut her before her water even breaks. (224). Then she decides to spare the girl from pain saying that, "No, this girl has been through enough, I can't do anything about the blood, but there's a way to alter the pain. (224). Instead, the Café is lit up by beautiful light, "Sequins of light that swirled and spun through the air. Cascades of light flowing in, breaking up, and rolling like fluid diamonds over the worn tile" (225). This incident means that Eve, even though she is not so generous person for the first time she feels compassion for a woman which leads her to make the childbirth a bit easier for Mariam through using her magic.

Another character in *Bailey's Café* whom Eve helps through using magic is Jesse Bell. She is a heroin addict who gets Eve's card in the women's house of detention and she decides to find Eve. When Jesse comes to boarding house and meets Eve, she swears that she wants to quit drugs and Eve agrees to help her. The method Eve uses to cure is partially real, and partially not. Eve leads Jesse to bathrooms which exactly like the one she has always wanted from her childhood. After Jesse survives a couple of days without drugs, she gives her several bags of pure heroin and a silver needle. After four days of rehabilitation, she gives a treatment which is more mysterious. She gives her a golden needle and pure heroin, then a platinum needle, etc. It seems to be miraculous that Eve manages to cure Jesse in a short time of a month. Wondering at the miraculous cure Jesse Bell asks "None of this can be real. Where am I?" (138). For that Eve answers as hell. It

is somewhat true about what Eve answered for Jesse. Jesse can put in her veins the high-quality heroin but after that she goes through such a pain that it is a hell.

In *Bailey's Café*, the characters Jesse, Esther and Peaches have fine association among them. For every victim who visits the Café, there is redemption from their past either in the Café or in the boarding house. Narrator Bailey, Eve and Gabe remain as a source of comfort for those victims. They help the victims to get a new hope in their life. Sadie gets a little bit of bliss from Iceman Jones, Eve not only establishes herself better in her life but also proves a great help to others. Peaches, Jesse Bell, Esther, Mariam and Miss Maple get their help from Eve and her place which allows them to stay there as if it is their own place.

In *The Men of Brewster Place*, the barbershop plays a significant role in serving as a house of refuge and bringing people together. The conclusive part of the novel begins with the barbershop which shows the picture gallery of men's ill-fated. Max's barbershop is a place where debate and understanding take place between men. In addition to that, it is the place where all Black men come to remain as themselves and to discuss about their lives in the society. It is at the barbershop where they sing their blues. They discuss their present conditions, their frustrations, and their dreams about a more promising future. It is also where the men get together to socialise and to solve out the problems of world as well as blacks, who are passing their life under the influence of slavery. In *The Men of Brewster Place*, the problems they focus on, however, are never local or personal; rather they are global and generic: White men, black men, and women.

A lunatic Greasy, one of the inhabitants of Brewster Place, regularly comes to the shop. Max and the other locals know very well about the past life of Greasy. Sometime

back, Greasy had a job, a home with wife, two kids and also a safe future but unexpectedly, he goes insane and loses it all in just the same planned order. In frenzy, he knows and keeps one thing in his mind that he should cut his hair at least in a month regularly. So, "... he comes in, smelling to high heaven, the seat of his pants slick as mud, and dropping the nickels and dimes that he gets from begging as he tries to count out the cost of his haircut"(160). His pitiful looks get the attention of Max and as usual, Max greets and invites him in his saloon to cut his hair free of cost. On the other hand, Greasy is so crazy that nobody knows that when Greasy will do some crazy things. Whenever Greasy comes into the shop with his stinky self and unwashed body all the men get up and leave that place, saying that they cannot tolerate such a kind of person. Although as a sympathiser Max always makes Greasy understand about his filthiness yet he in a normal way always says, "I'm trying, Max. I'm trying" (160). Max reveals that mostly a man's grief is entirely different from a woman's grief and man too cries as much as woman but usually he cries just from inside. In the case of Greasy, he was assaulted by time and he was bleeding from inside.

The barbershop is also the place where the character Greasy ends his life. Max recalls that incident. Once Greasy comes for a haircut and Henry, brother of Max, takes charge of Greasy's hair cutting (knowing his condition). There was no commotion in the shop; all were silent because of Greasy. Greasy darts toward Henry's chair picking up the razor on the counter seizes Henry from behind and holds the razor to his neck. Everyone was shocked to look this scene. Greasy starts saying, time and again, "I'm a man" ... "I'm a man" (165). In fact, Max too accepts that he is a man therefore; he could put down the razor to Henry's neck. Greasy became so wild and violent that he more tightens his

hold on Henry's neck. Henry's condition is so awful; he could not move an inch or even breathe too. All were there trying their best to cool down Greasy saying, time and again, that he is a man but all efforts go futile.

Finally, Max takes responsibility and mollifies Greasy, saying that he will cut his hair as he always did. Greasy leaves Henry and a circle of men stand about three feet far from him. Abruptly, Greasy again takes the straight razor and slits his own throat. Now:

“Blood from the artery in his neck gushed so forcibly that it is sprayed all along the mirrors and on every man in the shop. And the fall that Greasy took, hitting his head against the floor almost tore his head from his neck” (166). Looking at this ghastly scene, Max becomes shocked and feels dismayed.

Greasy's suicide brings out black's alienated position in the society. Naylor is of the opinion that the blacks all over are living in discrimination and responsible to make themselves backward and compel themselves to commit suicide or crime. Later on, Max's shop is closed for a week and when it opens the entire residents of Brewster Place make themselves responsible for Greasy's death but somehow, they do not accept that they are slaughters. They, however, realise that if they had regularly treated Greasy as their brother and did not mind his filthiness, perhaps he would have lived longer, “After Greasy's death, though, the barbershop becomes even more important”. As Ben claims, “it is the place to look into each other's eyes and see what we need to see ... we thrive and are alive” (178.) Ben hates Max's shop and only one thing he accepts that he will fight till the end of his life against injustice.

Greasy serves as an image that brotherhood stands for more than the fake masks Blackmen wear or the fake words they say to each other. Only through Greasy's death do

the Black men notice that, their problems are similar. They are all men who are hurting, struggling, coping, and attempting to make their best in the rest of their lives. Naylor uses the characters in the novel to deal with the issues that Black men face. She explores the Black men realistically.

Greasy's death is the turning point for the men to understand that they all have same problems and that they are in need of a bond among them. They also recognise that brotherhood is more than their spurious attitude towards others. At the end of the novel there is an optimistic light that the men are trying to gain identity and make their presence powerfully felt by dint of their doggedness and self-styled approach to life even in confronting failures, misfortunes and disappointments. Initially the barber shop serves as a place to depict a bond among the men, which is, sharing each of their lives with others as a means to gain a little bit of comfort. It is also an element of brotherhood. Ultimately, it becomes a place to make them realise their own problems and the need for unity among them to overcome those problems. The shop further makes the bond between the men even more stronger, not just by mourning their difficulties, but through making the men to expand a hope to fight for their liberation and to achieve their own identities as a whole.

Bailey's Café and *The Men of Brewster Place* have represented that there are so many situations in which men and women have to face their own problems. Both the men and women of African-American society could try to overcome their problems by making connections.

Chapter 3

Blues – A Way of Expression

Gloria Naylor uses blues in her novels which plays a significant role in Black culture. Blues is a musical form which originated in African-American communities in the Deep South of the United States around the end of the 19th century. Its inventors were slaves, ex-slaves, and the descendants of slaves- African-American sharecroppers who sang as they toiled in the cotton and vegetable fields. Blues is a fusion of traditional African music and European folk music, spirituals, work songs, field hollers, shouts and chants, and rhymed simple narrative ballads. According to *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, the blues is a “slow jazz song of lamentation, generally for an unhappy love affair” (101). It further goes on to state that “the ‘blues’ implies a largely vocal form and a depressed frame of mind on the part of the performer. Its form originated from Negro spirituals and made use of a blend of major and minor harmony and non-tempered scale intervals” (445). Blues works as a socio-historic medium to combine individuality, emotions and social politics.

Blues have greatly influenced literature starting from Jean Paul Sartre’s *Nausea* to Philip Roth’s *The Human Stain*. African-American authors use spirituals, blues and jazz in their writings. Spirituals indicate the sufferings and struggles; blues reflects the reality of urban life and jazz depicts the individualistic humanism. There are many significant writers including Nella Larsen, Zora Neale Hurston, Ralph Ellison, Toni Morrison, James Baldwin, Gayl Jones etc., who make use of blues in their novels. African-American writers have included blues as a considerable part in their broader literary works.

In the essay, “In a Different Cord: Interpreting the Relations among Black Female Sexuality, Agency, and the Blues” Nghana Lewis presents the argument that Black women writers “used the medium [of the blues] to manipulate and control their construction as sexual objects... [which allowed them a] distinguishable idiom precisely because it enabled black women to own their past, present and future by confiscating and reconstructing their identities” (599). Naylor demonstrates it through her female characters in *Bailey’s Café*.

In *Stompin Blues*, Albert Murray says that, “blues also is an age old way to dispel ominous atmosphere and express positive impulses, urges, drives, cravings, needs, desires and hence the definitive purpose, goals, and ideals of human existence” (16-17). It is one of the reasons that Naylor has presented through the medium of blues. Naylor portrays her characters as those who have been beaten by circumstances in their lives but refusing to give up and quit. In “Gloria Naylor’s *Bailey’s Café*: The Blues and Beyond” Sylvie Chavanelle says that, in *Bailey’s Café* Naylor “uses the blues as a matrix to unveil the truth, empowers these marginal beings and connects them in a network of sisterhood” (74). It becomes evident through the tales of Sadie, Eve, Esther, Peaches, Jesse Bell, Mariam and Miss Maple. Each character in the novel finds power and strength by narrating their stories through blues, which helps them to embrace their inner spirit.

In *Bailey’s Café*, the epigraph sets up the blues as a means through which the tales of the characters will be narrated. It also indicates how the stories in the novel should be listened.

hush now can you hear it can’t be far away
needing the blues to get there

look and you can hear it
look and you can hear
the blues open
a place never
closing:
Bailey's
Café. (Epigraph *Bailey's Café*)

Naylor points out that the tales should be listened in silence, so that they can be clearly heard and the hearers may lend their voice for those who have been refused independence and individuality. Naylor's characters in the novel bring out the characteristics of the blues like silence, loneliness, up-rootedness, and suffering. Naylor further includes popular themes of blues such as lack of love, violence and humiliation in relationships between men and women which are seen through the women characters in the novel.

Next, Naylor introduces the conductor of the novel in the chapter "Maestro, If You Please" Usually the blues does not have a conductor; but Naylor uses Maestro as an integral character of the story, who sets the stage and tone for other characters. He says that, "There's a whole set to be played here if you want to stick around and listen to the music. And since I'm standing at center stage, I'm sure you'd enjoy it if I first set the tempo with a few fascinating tidbits about myself" (4). Bailey starts telling his tale by giving a glimpse of his childhood. He talks about his family life- especially about his father, mother and Van Morrisons, their employers, a well-to-do Black family in Brooklyn. This style of storytelling is found in the blues as the blues singer sets up the

story by telling the audience a little that mama or papa used to say. One of the best examples is, Lil Johnson's "Press My Button (Ring My Bell)" song which has the lines of a mom consoling her son, "Come on baby, let's have some fun / just put your hot dog in my bun."

Throughout his childhood years, Bailey becomes a good observer by listening to his parents' interactions with one another and through that he figures his ideas about people and their conditions etc., He has a unique sense of seeing below the surface for he analyses things deeply. One best example is his observation about his brother. He says,

If my older brother hadn't been so much older than me, he probably could have explained things to me a little sooner than I learned them myself. But with a twelve-year difference in our ages, he was already on the road before I started kindergarten-

-To discover his fortune: my mother

-A shiftless bum: my father. (5)

Another illustration is his mother's hatred for Mrs. Van Morrison "I used to think my mother didn't just up and poison Mrs. Van Morrison because we ate whatever they had left over from supper, but now I know that she relished hating that woman and would have done anything to keep her alive and well so the whole thing could go on and on" (5).

Later on, when Bailey narrates his World War II experiences, there comes a repeated phrase, "We weren't getting into Tokyo" (21). Through this repetition, Naylor, not only drives the attention of the phrase but also about the actions that follows. At first glance, the phrase means that they were not getting into Tokyo, because Bailey occupied

the service position in World War II, which kept him far away from the combat. But, when deeply examining the meaning of the phrase, “not getting into Tokyo” means getting into other places like Guadalcanal, New Guinea, Okinawa, Saipan, Pika-don, Manila, Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Bailey narrates the horrors of the World War II. He says, “They ate their own dead in New Guinea. And I stepped over clumps of jungle ants finishing what they left” (24). He also says, “I was saved. Hiroshima in exchange for my soul. Count the bodies. I’d left more dead in the streets of Manila. On the hillside of Okinawa. Pika-don. Just count the bodies. But then Nagasaki- where it turned to claim our children. The unborn children” (26). It is the experience during the war which has sent Bailey to the brink of life and he is in need of a place where he can simply exist and not be consumed by his blues. The passage below portrays one of the chief themes, that is, remaining on the state of the brink. Bailey says,

What do we do when the party is over? I knew life was going to be very different (A different prayer, could there have been a different prayer), and I felt it just wasn’t worth it. Before Hiroshima it had definitely been worth it. I still believe this country had even been worth Hiroshima happening, but at the very moment of Hiroshima happening, it all stopped being worth it. You get a man like that, with thoughts like that, staring out over the edge . . . The only world worth existing for me in that white shroud was the sound of the surf, and I already knew what the surf was bringing . . . susshing . . . susshing . . . (27)

By narrating Bailey’s story in this manner- from boyhood to manhood- Naylor sets Bailey’s tale similar to blues songs. The blues singers, rather than simply telling their

tales, they would often take down the listeners to a trip down memory lane so that the full scope of their blues could be understood. An example of this can be seen in the opening lines of Bessie Smith's song "J.C. Holmes Blues"; "Listen, people, if you want to hear a story told about a brave engineer/ J. C. Holmes was the rider's name, a heavyweight wheelman with a might fame" (303).

Through Bailey's unique sense of seeing below the surface, he is able to direct each character in the right direction- usually to Eve's boarding house and ultimately creates a melody that speaks of each unique experience. After reciting his story, the maestro (Bailey) moves to "The Vamp." In a blues song, the vamp is a minor section where a brief solo, or some kind of improvisation, takes place. In *Bailey's Café*, the story of Sister Carrie and Sugar man is improvised in "the Vamp" section.

The women centered aspect of the novel starts from Sister Carrie. Sister Carrie is an odd character. On the one hand she is the "cornerstone of the Temple of Perpetual Redemption" (32), while on the other hand she prays to God to "Remove this burning from me. Remove these evil thoughts" (34). At first glance Sister Carrie can be summed up as a woman who once gave in to her carnal desires, had a child, and is now a single parent trying to keep her only daughter, Angel, from following her footsteps: "The girl wants to sin. She can see it in the breasts that keep pushing up over her brassieres. She buys them tighter and tighter . . . Inviting trouble. Wanting trouble. Cover yourself. People are staring. Wash yourself down there. Again. Again. She can't let her smell like a bitch in heat. Like the bitch she wants to be" (34).

Sister Carrie focuses her attention on her daughter Angel. In an effort to ward off all worldly temptations she throws herself into religion and considers those outside of her

circle especially Sugar man as filth. In contrast to Sister Carrie, Sugar man is filled with worldly desires and he feels like a big man, even though he is a small man: “He’s a little man, Sugar Man. Dresses to the nines and practically lives in a 1936 Duesenberg. . . Tiny hands with big diamond rings. Tiny feet in alligator wingtips. . . We have to charge him three times what the meal is worth because he’d insist on paying it anyway” (33). With his flashiness and flamboyance not only does he indulge in his carnal desires, but also caters to the desires of others as his line of work allows him. It is because of that, Sister Carrie’s blood boils and it causes her to draw Angel even closer to her protective bosom.

Sister Carrie and Sugar man seem to be poles apart. But, when examined deeply, there are more similarities in their characters. Both Sister Carrie and Sugar man visit the café only during the week when the menu is predictable; they don’t visit the café during the weekend. During the week the menu is “Fried Chicken Mondays. Hamburger Tuesdays. Hash Wednesdays. Pork chop Thursdays. Fish on Fridays” (31). But in the weekend the customers can have whatever food they want; and everyone would have their own choice. The absence of Sister Carrie and Sugar man during the weekend indicates that each of their lives is restricted in some sort of way, and without those boundaries they would find themselves out of control and without an identity.

Introducing Sister Carrie and Sugar man at this point of the novel imitates the blues which is similar to the launching of two minor chords. These characters add the right blend to the novel by further setting the tone for what is to approach. For example, in Jesse Bell’s chapter, Sister Carrie’s meeting with Eve shows Eve’s calm behaviour which is a sharp contrast to Sister Carrie’s frenzy behaviour:

Without turning around, Eve will raise her own voice and talk straight across the counter to the lard cans up on the shelf: Somebody in here likes Ezekiel. Carrie's mouth drops open . . . Eve keeps holding her conversation with the lard: Somebody even likes the *thirteenth* verse of the sixteenth chapter of Ezekiel. And maybe somebody should try the *fifty-second* verse on for size. And before Carrie can lick that thumb and flip over the page, Eve is quoting it by heart . . . Carrie's chest starts heaving and she's just licking that thumb and flicking those pages until they're a blur. (135)

Sister Carrie's role is minor but vital, because her "call and response" with Eve sets the stage for Eve's interaction with Jesse Bell, and Jesse's eventual withdrawal from heroin.

In blues, a "call and response" is a succession of two distinct phrases usually played by different musicians, where the second phrase is heard as a direct commentary on or response to the first. It corresponds to the call-and-response pattern in human communication and is found as a basic element of this musical form, such as verse-chorus form in many traditions.

The next section that follows "The Vamp" is "The Jam" which covers the major section of the novel. Almost all characters in "The Jam" are given an opportunity to get along with Bailey and tell their story. When each chapter begins, Bailey sets the tempo and introduces each character. By doing so, Naylor proves the idea that the café serves as a junction for the blues. The first story in "The Jam" is "Mood: Indigo" which is the tale of Sadie. She says that, "I'm so lonesome I could cry; Cause there's nobody who cares

about me; I'm just a soul who's bluer than blue can be. When I get that mood indigo, I could lay me down and die" (166). When Sadie is first introduced, she is in the café uttering the words "-A little tea, please" (39). Her nature is very polite and her touch is so gentle, "the thick mug had lost its cracks and stains" (40) Sadie becomes much more tragic as Bailey reveals that Sadie was a wino and was a twenty-five-cent whore.

Sadie's mother hates her because she was born inspite of the mother's attempt to abort her. However, Sadie tries to be the best daughter in order to win her mother's affection. She cleans meticulously, speaks, walks and eats softly—all in an effort to be good enough to hear the words of her mother which she could hear only in her dreams: "Yes, I'm so proud of you. You're a good girl, Sadie" (44). Despite Sadie's efforts at being good enough, her mother's hatred grows until finally she forces Sadie into selling her body to pay their bills and support her drinking habit. As far as Sadie's tale is concerned, Sadie's mother is a respondent twice in the technique of "call and response."

Sadie loses her virginity to a man who mistakes her to be an adult; but when he realises that Sadie is a girl of thirteen, he asks Sadie's mother, "—what kind of woman are you?" (45). Her response for the question is silence. Six months later the same call is given, when Sadie's mother enlists a doctor to sterilize Sadie; however, this time instead of silence a different response is given by her: "The kind with double the money to pay you" (45). Sadie's mother, sarcastically views the forced sterilization as an act of kindness. She says, "Your life woulda been pure hell ever having to take care of a child" (45). As repayment Sadie proceeds to take care of her mother until she dies.

After the death of Sadie's mother, Daniel, who is thirty years Sadie's senior, enters her life as her husband. Naylor shows that Sadie is moving from one loveless

relationship to another and this lack of love is one of the significant themes of blues. Just as she has been doing before, Sadie cleans and remains silent trying to earn Daniel's affection and to prove that she is good enough to be loved. But contrary to her expectations, the very things that Sadie does to prove that she is worthy of Daniel's love are the things that make him think that he is not good enough for her: "Her cleaning irritated him—her way of saying that where he'd brought her to live wasn't good enough. The prim way of eating. The prim way of wiping her mouth. All of it saying that *nothing* around her was good enough" (54). Once, when Daniel attempts to throw away her red geraniums, in an effort to save her flowers, Sadie breaks her silence and engages Daniel in a call and response.

—They leave, I leave, she said

He jumped up, took a pot, and smashed it in the yard.

—Woman, this is *my* damn house.

—They leave, I leave, she said [. . .]

Then he picked up one of the Mason jars and threw it against the house to be sure she would hear it. He tiptoed over to the window to peek in and see if she was packing . . . she was.

—They stay, he said. (55-56)

Finally Daniel comes to realise Sadie's worth; but he dies within a short period and Sadie loses the house to his daughters.

Taking the events of Sadie's life and her appearance at the café into consideration, it is no wonder that Naylor places Sadie's story at the beginning of "The Jam". Because Bailey's Café serves as a junction of the blues and Sadie is the only customer who takes

refuge in the café, while the others make Eve's boarding house as their haven. Through her story, Naylor further strengthens Houston Baker's notion of "blues at the junction". According to Baker, a junction of blues, Bailey's Café is being "the way-station of the blues . . . where endless antinomies are mediated and understanding and explanation find conditions of possibility" (7). By making visits to the café (via Bailey's narration) at the beginning of the each chapter, Naylor strongly points out that the café is an intersection of the blues.

Even though the café gives a few possibilities for Sadie's happiness, there is no resolution in her story. Although Iceman Jones offers her his world by saying "What I have, you'll have. What I eat you'll eat. Wherever I lay my head, there's a place for you . . . —And I want you to know, I ain't talking nothing improper. You get my name, such as it is, along with the whole bargain" (77). However, Sadie couldn't accept it. Like many blues songs, Sadie's tale ends without a closure.

Naylor models Eve after the blues women of 1920s. Eve is similar to Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday, in her tendency of gardening and nursing the women in need. Eve uses her experiences like lost love, lost innocence, and displacement, to teach and nurture those who are willing to listen, and she leaves those who turn a deaf ear. Eve's lost love, lost innocence and displacement happen successively.

Eve's lost love takes place when her community judged her relationship with Godfather, "the women's eyes held other questions, unnatural questions, as their heads followed us when we rode by in the wagon. Why was he still cooking and cleaning for me? Why had he never married? Why was no boy ever allowed to come and call? Or even walk me home from church?" (83). The only affection Eve experienced was on

Saturday nights when Godfather bathed. Due to the looks and questions of the women in the community, the baths stopped. Eve thought, “Did those women understand what they had done with their slanted eyes and evil questions? I was now forced to go through months and months with no one and nothing to touch me” (83). The questions the women posed resulted in Eve’s leaving for Bailey’s Café.

Eve’s lost innocence happens when she played hide-and-seek. Eager for touch, Eve is pressed against the earth, feeling the warmth of the soil and the smell of the grass when Billy Boy comes stomping by: “I hurl myself [onto] my stomach to press as tight as I can into the earth and the tremors, the tremors on my arms, legs, thighs. I part my thighs ever so slightly and arch my pelvis hard into the soil—there, yes, now I can feel it even down there. So close to the earth—the tremors. *Stomp, Billy*” (87). On discovering this game, Godfather, a man of few words, sets his reaction in motion. Eve is stripped of her clothes; left starving and is driven from the church by Godfather. Eve has nowhere to go, and she starts travelling from Pilottown to Arabi which would take thousands of years to complete like that of biblical Eve as she is sent out of the garden of Eden . This travel motif is indicative of the blues where the blues men used to sing frequently about their travels on the railroad. Because of Eve’s life experience she is able to help others recover without expecting anything in return.

In the chapter of Peaches, there is a key scene which is in the form of “call and response”. Eve engages the father of Peaches in a wordplay regarding his daughter’s whereabouts:

Eve won’t let Sugar man and the father past the front door . . .

—Leave your daughter here, Eve says, and I’ll return her to you whole.

[. . .]if they go upstairs with a bouquet that's less than perfect, Eve's taught her to send them back down again. Look in that mirror good, and accept no less than what you deserve . . .

—I don't know what she's doing up in that room, Eve says, and to tell you the truth, I don't care . . .

—But whatever she's doing up in that room, she's doing it feeling beautiful . . .

Winter's coming soon and Peaches will still demand daffodils. More perfect and more perfect daffodils . . . And it will take a special man to give Eve what she's ask for hers. A man special enough to understand what the woman upstairs is truly worth . . .

—Go home, my friend, Eve says, and I'll return your daughter to you whole.

The man standing in front of Eve is crying, and he keeps calling for Peaches to come down to him . . .

—Go home, my friend. I'll return your daughter to you whole. (113-114)

Through this scene it is understood how Naylor takes specific elements from the blues—in this case call-and response and uses them to tell a story. Although Peaches's father never speaks to Eve directly, Eve's response is silence. Similarly, in blues songs, the musicians sometimes initiate a break using silence followed by a series of notes or with a line sung by the singer. By using this element Naylor uses the theme of loss—a father losing a daughter—and subsequently offers a suggestion of how this grief might be resolved, “—Go home, my friend. I'll return your daughter to you whole” (114).

In the chapter titled “Mary (Take Two)” there is a change in the narrative viewpoint. In this chapter, Nadine, Bailey’s reserved wife, plays the role of the narrator: “I only agreed to set this one up because there isn’t a man in here who’s willing to do it” (143). By initiating this change in the tempo, this section of the novel becomes the *bridge*, the part of the novel that connects the entire piece.

Mariam’s story serves as the bridge of the novel in three ways. First, Mariam’s repeated phrase “No man has ever touched me” (143) hints that all the preceding tales in the novel have been told by women who have been touched by a man or men. Mariam, however, has not been; this distinction between Mariam and the rest of the women in the novel signals a shift that could only be brought about by the tale being told by the women. Second, Mariam’s tale is the last tale told either by or about a woman in the novel. Third, a birth which happens in this chapter signifies the point that Bailey’s Café is the way station for people who have come to the end of their hope and suddenly find the place where new life begins.

In “Miss Maple’s Blues” the title alone holds “Miss”. However, it is the story of a man named Stanley, the second of two tales in this novel about a man. As Davis points out in *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, “Typically in blues that is woman-centered, the song generally speaks of the subjugation and oftentimes the sexual exploits of the female singers” (23). This tale is of a man who finds himself discriminated against in corporate America despite being the most qualified man who has completed his doctorate. Miss Maple, like all the other characters experiences a form of oppression. It is this oppression that Miss Maple experiences, both as a suite wearing man, and then as a

cross dressing man, that speaks to the blues sensibility of the novel and links him with the rest of the characters in the novel.

When a blues song ends, the audience knows that the song is over and the next notes they hear will be the beginning of a new song. Naylor also gives similar incidents at the end of the novel. The birth of George is an illustration for a new song. Nadine says,

A child isn't *supposed* to be born on this street. I don't care what kind of worlds we all came from; there isn't much of a prayer for life itself if a baby had to be born here. But maybe it's meant for this baby to bring in a whole new era. Maybe when it gets here, it'll be like an explosion of new hope or something, and we'll just fade away. And maybe I should just stop talking and wait to see. (160)

Again Naylor's use of "call and response" pattern is seen when Peaches begins to sing soon after George's birth:

Anybody ask you who you are?
 Who you are?
 Who you are?
 Anybody ask you who you are?
 Tell him—you're the child of God. (225)

In response to her song the others join in:

Anybody ask you who I am?
 Who I am?
 Who I am?
 Anybody ask you who I am?

Tell him—I'm a child of God. (226)

This interaction between the characters in this way not only brings them together on the event of George's birth, but also unifies them in spite of their cultural and religious differences. Call and response serves as a unifying strategy between the characters. Another element that Naylor makes use of is the use of repetition. In the blues a certain melody or phrase will be repeated in order to emphasize its importance to that group. Naylor makes use of such repetitions in many chapters in "The Jam." There are two occasions in the novel, where the sadness of the character is highlighted by means of such repetitions.

In "Sweet Esther" the repeated phrase, "We won't speak of this, Esther" (95) not only points to Esther's abuse at the hands of her "husband" and her abandonment by her brother, but also to her own silence once she sets up residence at Eve's. Though Esther appears at the café only twice, her presence in the novel is significant. Because she represents the pauses that often occur in a blues number. . In the chapter "Mary (Take Two)" the line that is repeated, "No man has ever touched me" (143) shows the ruthlessness of her situation and foreshadows the tragedy that is going to happen (i.e. Mariam's accidental drowning). Naylor places many forms of silence throughout the novel—Sadie's physical silence, or Peaches' self mutilation. By placing the silence, one thing is made very clear: though their silence is used as a way to control their activities, it in turn becomes the very thing that makes them visible and gives them voice. Their silence proves more eloquent than their words. As Sylvie Chavanelle says in the article "Gloria Naylor's *Bailey's Café*: The Blues and Beyond" , "Naylor's blues song restores

[the] voices to the speechless Sadie, the caged-in Esther, [and] the schizophrenic Mary” (59).

In *Bailey’s Café*, Gloria Naylor has successfully taken the elements of the blues and formed them into a text without losing the rhythm, tempo and style that characterizes the blues. Even though the blues is not typically “feel good” music, Naylor is successful in keeping *Bailey’s Café* from being the “feel good” novel. In “The Wrap” Bailey tells, “I don’t believe that life is supposed to make you feel good, or to make you feel miserable either. Life is just supposed to make you feel” (219). Likewise, Naylor leaves each character and the novel as a whole without closure and she indicates that the blues isn’t supposed to make you feel good either, it’s “just supposed to make you feel” (219).

In *The Men of Brewster Place*, Naylor uses the character “Brother Jerome” to play the Black men’s blues. Ben says that Brother Jerome’s function is to play “the black men’s blues” (37). Succeeding his chapter, Ben narrates the story of the seventeen-year-old autistic resident Brother Jerome a gifted pianist and neighbourhood celebrity who possesses only a three-year-old mind. Ben remarks about his talent and his mind: “hands just got better and better while his mind stayed at three years old (31-32). Ben from beginning to the end narrates about Brother Jerome, who is unable to speak, write or go out alone.

Even though Brother Jerome is newly introduced in this novel (he does not appear in *The Women of Brewster Place*), he emerges quite early as an important figure. His tale is very short, but it serves as the pulse of the novel because it sings the Black men’s blues. It highlights the discovery of Jerome’s talent and his rise to local fame. Jerome is born to an indifferent and self-absorbed woman, Mildred (known far and wide for her

robust house parties). Jerome's mother is a very possessive and caring mother for her only child but she remains emotionally detached from her son. Jerome's father abandons Mildred and their son, leaving her without the emotional and financial support that she needs to cope with the disabled son. Ben analyses about Mildred's life, who though alone with a retarded child, believes in a straight and simple life. She works at the drycleaners from Monday to Friday and organises parties during weekend with group of people for laughing and amusement. Jerome is an expert in repairing old and nonfunctional piano. He spends his days and nights alone playing the blues on the piano.

As years pass, Jerome's playing becomes holy work, for his blues receive "Amens" from apartments where individual men turn bitter about their lives. The story of each man stays individual, but the response to them becomes communal, because the "Amens" come "from every brick; every piece of concrete and iron railing on Brewster Place" (37). When Naylor says that "Amens" come from lifeless objects too, she underlines the isolation of men who have long been taught to remain silent, like those objects.

Brother Jerome is compared to Saint Jerome, a translator. Like Saint Jerome, who produced the *Vulgate*, the first authentic Latin translation of the Bible from Hebrew, Brother Jerome is also a translator, though his medium is different. The whole folk treat Jerome as Saint Jerome and ask him to play the piano. For both Jeromes light plays an equally compelling role: for the historical Jerome a blinding light forced him from his delirium and into a renewed awareness of life, for Brewster's Jerome, light from the lamp magically leads the Young Jerome to the piano. In one of the best parties of Mildred, ". . . the light from the lamp kept swirling around the room" (34-35) and this moving light

allured the invitees and Jerome. Jerome is sitting in a corner with, "... the seat of honor" (35). All on a sudden, Jerome plays the piano and fortunately the disturbed atmosphere gets silent. He has not ever played before, but through the light, by "listening for the light" (31), he somehow knows, without realising, that he is telling the men of Brewster Place about their lives.

The novel is set firmly in the present, but Naylor still relies on the past (particularly in the case of Ben's story) to offer an initial basis for understanding these men. Moreover, Naylor relies on the genre of music to increase the aesthetic effect and to chart the historical development of black manhood.

With his inexplicable talent, Brother Jerome effortlessly plays the piano as he gives musical voice in the form of blues, to the plight of Black men. Lisa, in her work "Gloria Naylor's colours in the patchwork quilt of African American Fiction" says,

By playing the blues (echoing black man's pain), Jerome is performing several beats. First, he is acknowledging the humanity of a man who shares the pain; second, he is thinking the experiences of the man and offers them camaraderie; third, he is illustrating one of the coping mechanisms Black men use (creativity) and fourth, he is providing yet another means of reviewing the history of the Black men in America.

(157)

By invoking the blues, Naylor clearly bows to the past while also anticipating the future for the optimistic hope of Black men. Considering the Black men and his blues, Ben thinks, "Can you call it any man's blues? I don't know but you can definitely call it the black man's blues. There's something about us and pain that keeps spinning out there

in the universe to return again and again” (161). The pain that is connected to the blues is, ironically, the black man’s link to his past, and if it returns again and again it will link him to his future. It is also the pain that unites them as a race.

Brother Jerome acts as a type of filter in the novel, a filter of matters which go deep beneath the surface. Jerome has not been given a character or even a voice. He is more a vessel than a human being, an instrument which absorbs and replays all the vibes from the men around him. The very buildings of Brewster act as conductors of emotions, as they come from every brick and every small piece. All of these emotions and vibrations flow into Jerome and miraculously, under the catalyst of light, flow out again as the blues. There is not the slightest hint of ordinary human traits of desires or intentions on Jerome's part. Naylor clearly does not intend to give any plausible explanation of how a spastic child who has no experience of life and seemingly no self awareness has somehow managed to translate the deepest heartaches of men into “the sound of the black man's blues” (37). When people hear his piano they become astonished and start to cry, “... it was the blues, nothing but the blues coming from that boy’s heart through that piano reading your life and sometimes his”(32). Ben states that, there is always some message in the piano music and mostly his music speaks about, “our lives” (37).

Brother Jerome’s expressions provide the background for the men’s lives and help them to acknowledge their pain. It encourages every people against their blues as well as exploitation. It stands to reason that the autistic Jerome is also acknowledging the value of their lives. Brother Jerome’s presence in the novel provides a constant reminder that every life has value.

Naylor in her novels *Bailey's Café* and *The Men of Brewster Place* gives a series of progressive tales, in which the characters are able to enhance their lives. Each character embodies a representation of a progressive journey towards individuality. Naylor, in *Bailey's Café* creates a space for the women to go to a place where they are welcomed without judgment and are allowed to live their lives on their own terms. Through the telling of her story, Eve becomes the embodiment of the idea of carving out a space in a community and making it her own. Once she has created that space, she welcomes those women who are in need of such a place to live their own lives with independence.

Eve, when cast out by Godfather, instead of lamenting and wallowing in her exile from the community, says "I don't spend a lot of time with the right or wrong, good or bad of what I am – I am" (85). Although this statement is very short, it is very powerful. Eve exemplifies two very important aspects of Christianity. The first is that she does not hold a grudge against those who have wronged her. Jesus tells his disciples; "If you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins" (Mark 11:25). Eve understands that in the eyes of the community she has sinned, and although she does not agree with them, she does not have ill feelings towards them. The second aspect of Christianity that Eve exemplifies is that she does not judge others. In this, Eve proves to be very unique. Because she understands the emotional pain that comes with being unfairly judged by others, she does not judge others. Eve remembers what is said in the book of Luke. "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you" (Luke 6:38-41). It is this element of Christianity that Eve carries

with her and this is the reason why she opens her haven to those who are in similar need. Eve's resurrection out of delta dust has not earned her independence; it is because she has awakened the spirit within herself that Eve has gained identity and subjectivity.

During her journey in the delta Eve gains a full understanding of the powerful identity that her sexuality as a woman gives her. Eve has learned that like a butler she should wipe out the historical and social identity given to her by the society and in its place rewrite her true identity. Once she has gained this knowledge, Eve understands that she cannot keep it to herself, but must extend it to those who need the ideals of hospitality and hope that were denied to her. She has, through her suffering, come to a place where she recognizes exactly who she is and who she wants to be. Thus Naylor gives Eve, a powerful identity. For Example, Eve says, "I learned to eat what the muskrats ate-- hope" (90). Muskrats are animals that are very good at adapting to survive and do not give up a fight easily, much like Eve.

The women who come to live at Eve's are there because they have learnt the same lesson as Eve: "Eve knows exactly what some people think about her. And she honestly doesn't care" (81). Eve has put aside the historical and cultural living style of what society has qualified as "woman" adopting her own identity. The women do not care about what the society thinks about them, as they have a very healthy combination of spirituality and sexuality that enhances their characters. When the women come to Bailey's looking for Eve's, he tells them, "Go out the door, make a right, and when you see the garden – *if you see the garden* – you're there" (81). Only women of certain character are able to find how much Eve helps much in the path to recovery. It is

available to everyone, but only specific people are strong and courageous enough to walk that path.

Although Eve listens to the other women's stories and she has empathy for them, she only takes in the women who have learned to respect themselves; she wants them to realise that they too are the people of value and not door mats for society to wipe its feet on. The views expressed by Montgomery and Alexander regarding Naylor's female characters are worth considering in this connection as those who "possess the inner strength to escape abuse and redefine [themselves] in the face of rejection" (93).

Through Eve, Naylor has created a space where the true values of Christianity are allowed to grow and flourish. Naylor brings together a group of people who, much like Eve, have been unjustly judged and cast out of their communities. Because of her own experiences, Eve has created a space where "she passes no judgment on the behavior of those women once she lets them live there, and she passes no judgment on their [male] visitors" (92). Naylor creates for them a community where unconditional Christian love can nurture their souls and heal their spirits.

Naylor's presentation of spirituality echoes that of Walker who brings to light the idea that black women hold a very deep spirituality and that many of them do not even know that they possess such spirituality. This can clearly be seen in *Bailey's Café*. This deep spirituality is not only the element that brings the characters to the café to find their redemption and spiritual healing, but also the medium that allows each character to actualise her identity independent from the labels that society (or their families) has previously forced on them. What Naylor has done in the creation of Eve's place is to provide the women with a room of their own where they can be comfortable with their

sexual identity, and possess their own identity free from the superior eye and judgment of society.

Many characters come to Bailey's café with wounded souls in search of the spirit within and healing. These characters have been forced to live and suffer in silence. One of the first memorable female characters Naylor introduces is Sadie. Sadie is taught at a young age that life can be very harsh and confining. As a child Sadie learns quickly that silence is a form of salvation and safety. Sadie's mother never wanted a child and often referred to Sadie as "The One the Coat Hanger Missed" (41), so much so that Sadie had thought it was her name. As a result of her poor choices in life, Sadie's mother slowly drinks herself into insanity turning tricks on the streets of Chicago. At age nine Sadie comes to understand that the best way to avoid aggravating her mother is to "become very good" (43).

The child discovered ways to make absolutely no noise. Sadie became so good at being quiet in the morning, the woman would have to clear her bleary eyes and open the shutters to find her: under the shelves of the cupboard, a soda cracker softening in her mouth before she dared chew it; in the middle of her pallet, legs clenched tightly together to hold back her full bladder since a creaky floorboard separated her from the chamber pot.

(43)

One characteristic feature of true womanhood under the principle of domesticity is that, woman must suffer in silence. At a very early age many women are steering into the world of forced silence, and it is often their family which introduces them to such

situations. Sadie is a very tragic character and her learned silence is something she carries with her through her marriage and subsequent ruination because she never truly learns to speak for herself. Sadie is a character who early in life became a lost soul due to the abuse of her mother and later to her own abuse of alcohol. Although she found her way to Bailey's café, she does not have enough courage or strength of character like Eve to find her way to a place where she will be able to live with society.

Naylor's characters are victims not only of forced silence, but also of the very rigid moral code placed upon them by men. One character through whom the effect is most deeply seen is Esther. At the age of twelve, Esther (much like Sadie) learns that obedience and silence are necessary for survival. Esther's understanding of the world is limited to that much her brother tells her, and as Esther says, "I believe in my older brother" (95) because he is kind to her, keeping and caring for her for twelve years despite his wife's protest. When Esther is told by her brother that she is the new "bride" of the man for whom he works she is told, "Do what he tells you, and you won't be sent away like the others" (95).

Esther's new husband allows her to sleep in a very comfortable bed in a beautiful room and provides food and shelter for her. Esther imagines herself to be a "princess" and does not understand her situation at first. Esther believes herself to have landed in a fortunate situation, and is grateful to her brother who is so caring as to arrange such a good life for her. She says, "My new husband has four hundred acres and six men, along with my brother, to help him plow. There are jars and jars of pickled beets, string beans, cabbage, molasses, and whole plums in the cellar. Thick burlap bags of flour, potatoes, and cornmeal that tower high over my head where I kneel after he calls me" (95).

Through this description of the food, Naylor illustrates the complexity of Esther's situation. To a young girl the wealth of food in the cellar is a symbol of comfort and stability, indicating the ideals of a healthy fulfilling marriage. It is in the last line of this description that Naylor brings Esther's terror to light. The fact that Esther sees this abundance of food only when she is kneeling in the cellar is beyond disturbing and clearly depicts the polar opposite between the two worlds in which Esther lives: the light and comfortable world of the bedroom upstairs and the cold dark dehumanizing world of the cellar where the farmer calls her to kneel. Although the farmer gives Esther many of the comforts and necessities she needs to survive, in turn he also abuses her sexually in the cellar when she is called to kneel.

For Esther, this way of life has become a routine. It is in the dark cellar where Esther's innocence and childhood fantasies about marriage and white flowers are stolen from her that she learns about a world she did not know existed. Esther says, ". . . in the dark, words have a different meaning. Having fun. Playing games. Being a good girl" (97). She understands that her body is a playground for this man and that "being a good girl" means being obedient and silent. After each trip to the cellar Esther wonders about what is happening to her in the cellar. When she asks him about this, he simply ignores her question saying, "We won't speak about this, Esther" (95). Because Esther is afraid of him and because she does not want to disappoint her brother she does not ask him anymore about this.

In the isolation of her silent world, Esther also finds comfort in listening to the radio. Ironically, it is the radio that begins to break Esther's silence and gives her the answers she has been seeking. The radio program "The Shadow" she says "becomes my

friend because it finally gives me the words I have been seeking. What we do in the cellar is to make evil” (98). It takes many years for Esther to fully acknowledge that in the darkness of the cellar something evil and shameful happens to her. “At night when my husband is home from the fields, . . . his eyes avoid mine” (97); it is because she knows that if he were to look at her, he would not see any shame on her part, but see his own shame reflected in her eyes.

As a result of this newly gained understanding Esther stays with the farmer “only” twelve years. Esther has learned that her body is a precious commodity. With her body, obedience, and silence she can buy a better life for her brother and his family. Naylor has demonstrated that a great deal of power lies not in a woman’s beauty, but in a woman’s ability to use her body; in her story Esther is described as an ugly monkey,. As Naylor has shown, when the “husband” is sexually satisfied, it is Esther who actually holds the power because it is her body to give and, when she is ready, to take back.

Esther leaves the farmer and her brother having bought her freedom by repaying each day of her brother’s “caring” nature. Esther thinks of killing the farmer but much to her anguish she realizes that she cannot save the other twelve year old girls who are subjected to the same kind of treatment by other men similar to the farmer.

When Esther arrives at Eve’s house, Eve gives her a room and removes the light bulbs herself, saying, “What they’ll need from you, they’ll need in the dark if they know it or not. . . even that type could not bring themselves to return if they saw your eyes. You have the most honest face of any woman I know, sweet Esther.”(99)

Eve knows that Esther’s eyes and honest face will give away the secret that Esther carries within herself. Much like many of the other female characters in Naylor’s novel,

Esther has come to learn that it is she who actually holds power over the men, and not vice versa. It is true that men are using her body to gain sexual pleasures; Esther also holds power because she allows her body to be used in such a fashion, perhaps in an effort to save the other little sisters.

Esther is the sole owner of that precious commodity of flesh that the men crave and need. It is hers to give and hers to take away. “Men must only visit in the dark. And they must bring me the white roses. And they must call me *little sister*. Or I no longer come” (99). Esther sets the rules of engagement. Esther does not see the use of her body as an act of love, but a way to make the men her possessions. Esther has learned that the men who come to visit her, need her in the desperate way that they need water to survive, and it is Esther who sets the terms for their survival. The men will come to her bringing the white roses that were denied to her in the fantasies about marriage and that were stolen with her twelve year old innocence, and they must call her *little sister*, before they get their desires fulfilled.

By demanding that her callers call her little sister, Esther is claiming her own identity and living her own life. The label of ‘little sister’ brings in the image of family and protection to her mind. Each man who calls Esther little sister is being forced to subconsciously acknowledge that they are not protecting her or being a guardian over her, but are robbing her of her innocence. Esther realizes that the men who come to see her are slaves to their lust; she owns them and has power over them because she is the only one who can satisfy their needs. Esther uses her body to reclaim the power taken from her and in so doing has begun to live her life on her own terms, no longer kneeling in the

cellar simply fanaticizing about being saved, but actually taking control of her destiny and living her life on her own terms.

Peaches, who is taught to hate her beauty because it is the one thing that gets her noticed. Peaches' father and the men who would handle her with watering mouths are the very men who continually warn Peaches of the dangers of her beauty. She says, "I remember the wall he started building around the house when I was nine years old. And I remember that it was already too late" (105). Not only had the men started to notice her, but she had too begun to experience an awareness of her sexual desires. Daddy Jim takes on the role of dominant male "protector."

As Peaches becomes aware of her sexual desires, she begins to feel ashamed because she is disappointing her father. She is torn between her sexual desires and her loyalty to her father. Her father has been very protective of her whereas other men approach her with their desires. She tries hard to suppress her desires and feelings. Because her brothers who are already jealous of the attention she receives from their father mock at her once they come to know of her sexual urges. As a result of this disgrace, Peaches learns to hate the sexual woman she is and has become. Because her family and community use her beauty solely for sexual purposes that have nothing to do with expressions of genuine love and deep emotions; this makes her hate herself. Peaches tries to lock the "other" sexual self away, denying the very existence of that which makes her a whole person: "In horror I watched her grow up, and I learned to hate her for breaking my father's heart" (105)

Peaches, like many women, tries very hard to hold captive within herself, that very desire that makes her human: sexual desire. When Peaches can no longer fight her

desire, she embraces it. "I gave them *her*. Sweet, Sweet relief (105). Once Peaches comes to hate her beauty she scars her own face. The act of self mutilation is Peaches' final attempt to rid herself of that "other" part of her that does not allow her to fit into acceptable society. The men she encounters after this see her scarred face as a tragedy because they only see Peaches at "face value" and do not see her inner power and beauty.

When Peaches finds her way to Bailey's Café and then to Eve's, she begins to learn what she did not previously understand. Naylor's use of flower representation continues here with the character of Peaches. Peaches chooses the daffodils because they, like her when she first arrives at Eve's, are very fragile. Through allowing her to embrace her sexual desires in a space free from judgment, Eve is helping Peaches to become a whole person. She is learning how to separate lust from love and how to show genuine love for others and more importantly for herself through her sexual desires. Once Peaches has mastered her inner spirit, Eve will return her to her father "whole" (114). Eve's is a place where Peaches can experience the full positive emotions of her sexuality. Thus when Peaches comes to live at Eve's, she does so because she has found a place where she is no longer simply surviving the label the public has shamed her with, but she has embraced her sexual identity and has begun to live with self-love.

Naylor uses the character of Jesse Bell to demonstrate how a character can lose and eventually regain their sense of self pride. Jesse Bell's marriage lasts for nineteen years, but signs of its demise emerge in the early years. Uncle Eli King, the family patriarch, has been determined from its inception to destroy the relationship, because he believes that Jesse Bell is not worthy of the 'King' name. He obliterates Jesse's relationship with her son and her husband and indirectly he becomes a reason for the

death of Jesse's mother. As a result of this, she becomes a heroin addict. She is also imprisoned when Lesbian club raided and affirmed that she is a homosexual.

Once when Eve visits the women's prison and its isolation cells intending to give her card to those inmates who will seek help, she meets Jesse. When Eve sees Jesse in her cell, she stops, not because she "was moved by her story. Although Uncle Eli may have pushed Jesse until she reached the breaking point, it is still Jesse's decision to respond by using heroin.

In the section where Jesse and Eve meet, Naylor illustrates the struggle and complexity of the idea of free will. What Jesse is finally able to do when she decides to find Eve's is to become clean by beating her heroin addiction. Just as simply, it is Jesse's decision to quit and restore herself to health.

Near the end of the novel Naylor introduces the character of Miss Maple. Miss Maple is unique even among the individuals who live in Eve's house. Unlike the other characters, he does not take gentlemen callers. Miss Maple is, in fact, a male character named Stanley, whom Eve hires to be her housekeeper.

Stanley attends Stanford University where he pursues a degree in Mathematics, and ultimately earns his Ph.D., but he is refused a job because he is a black. As he moves on from one place to another, he cannot find men's clothes comfortable as he feels that they are heavy and smother him. He starts wearing women's clothes and feels comfortable in it and is called henceforth Miss Maple.

Naylor, through the character of Miss Maple, is commenting on how judgmental US society is when considering a person's gendered appearance. And how that judgment can and often does limit a person's ability to connect with his or her own inner spirit and

live their lives. In the case of Naylor's other female characters, society deems them perverse because they dared to embrace their sexuality. In the case of Miss Maple, society deems him unfit, not only because he is black, but because of his preference to dress this way. Miss Maple's dress is an extension of his spirituality.

In *The Men of Brewster Place* also, Naylor shows the men searching their identity. The world of men as portrayed in *The Men of Brewster Place*, is a convenient complement. Be it Basil or Brother Jerome; Eugene or Moreland Woods; C. C. Baker or Cliff Jackson, each one of them, despite their inherent weaknesses, follies and dreams thwarted, do have a world of their own. They explore their paths, struggle hard, attempt to establish their identity, and make their presence powerfully felt by dint of their doggedness and self-styled approach to life even in confronting failures, misfortunes and disappointments. These men can be called the essentials of the enclave. They do have their own say. Undoubtedly, they make their presence felt, meaningful, purposeful, and above all useful to the women folk, children and invalids.

All the seven male characters, whether married or unmarried, when they come in contact with women, they commit mistakes and try to live assuming the role of a friend, husband, lover or father. All these characters are socially insecure and politically weak to face problems and obstacles, so they want to restart their life with unity and also desirous of living with their family. In fact, this novel is a story of revenge and redemption. In the case of Ben things prove the opposite. Though Ben is a good husband he is oppressed by his wife and also oppressed by the white masters. Eugene, being jobless always misbehaves with his wife. He is racially and sexually tortured and because of his frustration he leaves his family. Though he is considered as a reputed person, Moreland

T. Woods is a lewd and cheater. So he is compelled to leave the ministership of Sinai Baptist Church.

Basil feels redemption when he comes back to his doting mother whom he had left previously. He turns over a new leaf and gets married to Keisha; unfortunately he finds a deceit in the woman he gets married to. Finally, he has broken away and wants to get back his lost individuality. C.C. Baker is a most violent and hard hearted person. First of all, he rapes an innocent girl and then kills his stepbrother only for his fake male domination. Abshu is a decent person and always protests against injustice and supports his girlfriend Kiswana as possible. Whether the crime is committed by the blacks or whites, Abshu is always ready to take revenge against such mal-activities. The last character is Brother Jerome, whose blues speaks for everyone in Brewster Place. Though he is mentally retarded he indirectly does some noble work for the black community through his piano playing, so the people regard him from the bottom of their heart. Thus, the black men of Brewster Place are suffering at the hands of white masters and on the other hand, they are similarly oppressed at the hand of their black females. They not only suffer injustice and humiliation but also undergo exploitation and discrimination in the society. These men, to survive in the society protest against all atrocities dissipated by the ruling powers, whether it is whites or black females.

Gloria Naylor's male protagonists do strive in the society and with this struggle they have caused harm to their female partners; in repentance they choose punishment for themselves. Although Gloria Naylor faces problems and difficulties in the white as well as black society, she very positively reflects the community rules and traditions through her male characters. She tries to highlight the issues pertaining to the life of these

hopeless and unfortunate men. *The Men of Brewster Place* is a classic example and her effort to represent the conditions of black men and she very perfectly launches her seven male characters with their negative and positive shades.

The black community, as a matter of fact faces slavery and various forms of atrocities at the hands of white society and remains dominated for centuries; yet they continue their search of identity and self-respect. Naylor has made an attempt through her characters who search for their self-identity and self-respect of black men in the novel. Her black male characters behave in a barbaric manner with their female partners at times, they are also kind and loving. Eugene, one of the protagonists, tortures his wife mentally and finally deserts her but after some time he realises his mistake and feels sorry for his misdeeds. The males consistently try to reconcile with their females. Though black males face acute economic and social depression and are discriminated against in every field of society, they become outrageous and behave like criminals at times; but ultimately they regret and try to find solace with their family and community.

While narrating his story Ben shows his deep concern and affection towards his family and community. Ben's grandfather too was a very affectionate person towards his family and community and it has a deep impact on the character of his grandson, Ben. Ben is a father of a daughter whom, he loves too much and for the sake of his daughter, he even separates himself from his cruel wife, who always hates her daughter because she is lame. Ben becomes upset when his loving handicapped daughter has to leave home to earn more money. He also leaves his home and wife and being isolated he never gets his mental peace because he has lost his wife and daughter. He continues his search for his

identity. Although he shrinks from his responsibility towards his family, he is a doting father and a caring husband.

Brother Jerome, is very unique, simple and innocent person. He has a great urge to play the piano but unfortunately he does not know about his own ability because "... his blues speak for everyone on Brewster Place." (22). And as a child, whenever he played the piano, he would wet himself and the chair. His piano playing would be so blissful that everyone would be silent and find solace through his music. He becomes the hero of the society and his mother even starts charging high-fees in the parties which are organized on behalf of Jerome. The parties are organized every weekend and Jerome earns enough money for their livelihood. Jerome unconsciously does his duties towards his family and community.

Even in his young age, Basil leaves his mother and runs away. When he becomes matured he wants to find out his identity. Although he succeeds to find out his father yet his search for his own identity continues. He loves Helen but in the meantime, his cousin sister Keisha meets him with her two kids and this meeting changes the life of Basil. He becomes the father of both the children and completes his duties towards his new family. But anyhow, Keisha is not satisfied with him and eventually, both separate and sustain their life on their own. Basil, once again becomes isolated and being aloof tries to find out his identity and lift up his life with certain possibilities.

The next character is Eugene. Though he is a very faithful husband, under pressing economic conditions he leaves his wife in frustration. He is aware of his priorities and duties towards his family; but he miserably fails to stand by the family in its difficulties. Finally, Ciel leaves him and he becomes alone. Thus, Eugene, for the sake of

redemption chooses to lash himself. Black man's responsibility towards the family and community is shattered when he faces the malice and distress in white dominated society in the form of joblessness. As a result, the frustration forces them to leave family and community. Once more, being isolated, Eugene starts his search for identity.

Considering the role of Moreland Woods, it is obvious that he is a power monger and craves for getting placed high in the society. But, he has his own dreams and to realize them, has worked hard to come up, though he does have his weaknesses. As a clergy, he preaches what his folk wanted: "He could be so comfortable at the altar . . . he enjoyed preaching . . . with a silver tongue. The man who could make heaven feel high and hell low. But above all, a man who could give them respite from lives that were overworked and underpaid; lives that no one seemed to care about except them and the Lord—and Reverend Woods, of course" (56-57).

C.C. Baker is a criminal and the most violent rapist. He never thinks about the family or community. It was his male chauvinism that has made him rape Lorraine in a very heinous and brutal manner along with his hooligan friends as a result of which, she dies. Other instance of his cruelty is the killing of his stepbrother Hakim. Naylor's black protagonists exhibit their over-possessiveness towards their family and community

None of the men here in this novel can be branded as resolute rogues or rascals. Even when one is forced to draw darker streaks on their character, one realizes that they are the victims of circumstances. Further, the earlier phases of each of these men's lives would have had frustrating moments, thwarting incidents blocking their individual freedom to an insurmountable degree.

Abshu, is a very positive, supportive character and very loyal to his girlfriend, Kiswana. Kiswana is one of the finest characters of Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place*. Abshu fights against injustice and discrimination. He is much attached to his family and very chauvinistic towards his community. Abshu is openly against Moreland Woods and wants to remove him from the minister's post. He gathers womenfolk who are the victims of illegal relationships with Woods and now wants retribution by terminating him from the ministership at any cost. Abshu as a grim and fervent symbol of chauvinism plays a significant role towards his family and community to remove Woods' fake identity. Although his childhood was not very smooth yet he fights against those gloomy days of adversity, and finally gets enough success which he deserves. Abshu eventually proves himself a winner with great abilities who loves his family and community equally. Finally, he gains his identity and proper place in society.

Thus, the black men, on the one hand, try to find their 'identity' even under pressing and difficult circumstances and, on the other prove loving and caring people who are proud of their community.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Gloria Naylor, who can be considered as triumvirate in African American women writing, in their writings deal with the common themes of the sufferings of African American community (both men and women), and their struggle to live with dignity. But, one significant difference between Naylor and the other two is that Naylor also provides an opportunity for the men of the African American society to express the anguish they face like the women of the African American society. Naylor articulates that whether it is male or female both suffer injustice, humiliation and struggle a lot for their survival at the hands of white masters. Naylor also expresses that when black men face subjugation from white men, black women face suppression from both white people and black men. But Naylor has created her characters in such a way that they do not give up despite the harsh realities, racial and gender oppression, discrimination, poverty, hatred and betrayal.

Naylor succeeds in portraying personalities who certainly cannot be characterised simply according to any stereotypes, either negative or positive. Naylor avoids any adoration of the strength of her characters. Instead, she makes them whole by attributing them with good and bad features. In fact, Naylor herself has a specific attitude towards a person's good and bad sides, as can be observed from her conversation with Virginia Fowler:

VF: Do you believe that human nature is essentially corrupt?

GN: No, I believe that within human nature, side by side and intertwined, are the potential for incredible corruption and the potential for

incredible heights. But I don't believe that the essential material of human nature is corruption and evil and that we always strive away from that. I don't believe that. I believe that human nature is a mixed suit, that both are there, and that it just simply depends on how you dip into it. That's what I think. I think that I am capable right now of the most degrading, the most heinous acts that have ever been perpetrated on this earth. I, Gloria Naylor, am capable of doing what Hitler did, of doing what Idi Amin did, I am capable of that. (128)

Her characters possess a mixture of good and bad qualities as real people do. One best example is Eve, who helps the women she shelters but not Sadie, one of the saddest cases in *Bailey's Café*.

Naylor uses the bond of human and blues as a way to express their distress in their lives. Using blues music as a conduit, Naylor has told the stories of remarkable marginalized people who through their own unique struggles in life have learned the fundamental importance of unconditional love, and have extended that love to those they encounter. Naylor uses many of the linguistic patterns that are characteristic of the blues to orchestrate a blues tale that is reminiscent of the blues in theme, cadence and execution. By using music Naylor provides a novel experience to the readers who are supposed to read not merely with eyes and voice, but with sound, the sound of the blues. She also helps in deeply analysing the bonding factors of black community. The blacks are caring, loving and doting people, who nurture others to bring out of their difficulties in their life and they are the people with whom the grief of the lives can be uttered. They remain as a source of comfort to one another within their community.

Another feature that is central to Naylor's fiction is the supernatural elements. The supernatural properties are used effectively to expose certain assumptions about women's sexuality. The leading woman, Eve, is expelled from home by her Godfather (like God expelled Eve from Eden) because of harmless innocent pleasure. Instead of accepting Godfather as her creator, she decides for herself that she came from the earth. Like Eve's, the other women's stories are also instances of various cases of women's sexual oppression. Ironically, these women find peace and happiness in the boarding/whore house, which is Eve's version of paradise.

While stressing on the importance of what it is to be together and the strength of human bonding, Naylor also points out the factor that destroys the relationship between men and women and the causes that make the men fail to nurture their bond with their own family. For example, Basil loves Keisha's children for whom he marries Keisha and he remains unattached to her. Eugene leaves his family to seek a job and fails to understand his wife's love for him. C. C. Baker rapes Lorraine for the mere reason that he wants to prove his manliness. Though black men are basically caring, loving and also try to nurture their family according to their culture and tradition the adverse circumstances that prevail over them in the white-dominated society and a few of their own qualities. Their family lives are shattered under the compelling influence of socio-political and economic backwardness and eventually, they fall a prey to such circumstances. The racial discrimination disrupts the harmony between the husband and wife. Their sufferings, insults and ill-treatment make them finally choose protest for survival and try to get united for the common cause. They realise that their unity will be their strength. Naylor brings out the importance of human bonding, and further makes the point very clear that

during their struggle against subjugation by the whites, the black people need unity among themselves which will bind them as a whole and big force.

The blues is taken from its oral form and converted into written form by Gloria Naylor in her *Bailey's Café* and *The Men of Brewster Place* as Toni Morrison's *Jazz* and Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* have done. While turning oral blues into written blues one has taken into account the various elements that are characteristics of the blues like call and response, repetition and variation, redundancy and the way each of these elements is used in its oral form. So that one can gain an understanding of how to read and understand the blues novel. For example, the element of redundancy appearing in blues as well as jazz, is utilized quite often to draw attention of the readers particular to a line, phrase, or particular chord that drives the song. In *Bailey's Café* Mariam's repetition of "No man has ever touched me" (146) and in *The Men of Brewster Place* Greasy's repetition of "I'm trying, Max. I'm trying" (160). It brings out the nature and qualities of these characters. This redundancy will tell the reader that this element is quite important and should be paid attention to. The elements of the blues and jazz are incorporated in the blues novel as a way to give a clue to the reader to know what is important and should be paid attention to and also to relate these to the individual characters and their varied experiences.

Another important aspect of Naylor's writing is that she brings out the sufferings of black men. When other women writers point out black men as the reason for the women's sufferings, Naylor says that black men also have their own torments. Naylor however has portrayed the sufferings of women in her novels *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Bailey's Café*.

In the novel *The Men of Brewster Place*, Naylor portrays black men's lives in different shades and colours. She very successfully and effectively presents the difficulties the black men face. For instance, Eugene loses his job and his economic condition becomes worse; in addition to that, he loses his daughter Serena. Basil's wife Keisha leaves him and goes with her former lover. She also separates her children from Basil by taking them away with her. They lack prosperity, happiness and concordance with their spouses. They always pass their lives fighting for human rights in the society. *The Men of Brewster Place* projects a scenario and a glimpse of such humiliating circumstances under which the black men have to live in the society. Naylor brings out the predicament of these people as they battle against injustice and the humiliating circumstances created by the white community.

Naylor's desire is for black men to define themselves outside of Western society. Naylor presents a variety of men who are at different places as they fight for their identity. These men seek to gain their manhood- money, power, and respect in a society whose structure inherently denies them these things. Naylor encourages the black men to return to their roots to find their identity.

Naylor's narrative techniques are outstanding. Naylor's works incorporate a large degree of inter textuality, drawing from and building upon the works of European, American and African American authors of the past and the present. Naylor's authorial voice is therefore a pioneering one, enriching as well as upholding the African American literary tradition by exploring previously forbidden or unreachable territories. Naylor deals with the issues of solidarity amongst women, women's language, silence and articulateness, de-mythifying, retelling, materialism, culture and identity, the relationship

between black men and black women, sexuality, social taboos, and the evolving African American society. Naylor's work contains space as well as structure, flow as well as direction and the language of the mind as well as spirit. In her novels, Naylor reflects the all-important fact that she is keenly aware of her roots without being tied down by them.

In *Bailey's Café* Naylor uses female characters to demonstrate many of the fundamental characteristics of Christianity that have been often overlooked by patriarchal societies using religion as a means to maintain "power" over others. What they often forget is that Christ ministered to individuals who lived on the margins of society. He reached out to those whom society had deemed as unfit and had discarded; in much the same way, Naylor's character Eve reaches out. Through Eve, Naylor reminds readers of the importance of unconditional and all-encompassing love, generosity, and hospitality, all of which are cornerstones of Christianity. Christian spirituality is not something that is meant to be locked up inside; it is meant to be lived. In the Bible it is stated that God made people in his image, and thus what the inner spirit of each individual carries is an extension of the Lord. This is the message that Naylor presents through her female characters.

By leaving her works without providing a solution, she encourages and welcomes an active involvement of readers and the audience to support as they struggle against the subjugation of the whites. Through this she indirectly points out that the solution for such exploitation does not remain with writers like her, but with every individual acting together to attain their objectives.

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