EMOTIVE HEALING

The reason firm, the temperate will,
Endurance, foresight, strength and skill;
A perfect woman, nobly planned
To warn, to comfort and command.

– FAWCETT AND FAWCETT
CHAPTER – V

EMOTIVE HEALING

Good literature suggests what it is to be human. Zora Neale Hurston asserts that it is only in folklore “the boiled-down juice of human living” (qtd. in Baker 13) can be heard. The transcendental power of the story-telling-blues-tradition reveals the Africans’ tale of suffering, their delight and their triumphs in future. As James Baldwin in his *Sonny’s Blues* remarks, “There isn’t any other tale to tell. It’s the only light we’ve got in all this darkness” (139). Singing the blues and telling a story have long been integrally linked elements in African American culture.

Blues is a musical genre, an aesthetic sensibility created by the blacks to represent the past slavery of African American culture. In Getrude “Ma” Rainey, Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday’s lyrics, there are references to oppression and feminist resistance. Bessie Smith’s “Down Hearted Blues” concludes with the following lines asserting female sexuality to be not only gratifying but also empowering. She sings her song as: “I got the world in a jug, the stoppers in my hand/ .../I’m gonna hold it until you men come under my command” (qtd. in Ballon 11).

The oral blues expresses female self-possession and assertiveness. They also represent the germination of the feminist consciousness that emerged later. Writers like Toni Morrison and Gloria Naylor have contributed novels to the written blues. Gloria Naylor’s fourth and ambitious novel, *Bailey’s Cafe* published in 1992, rounds off her self-described novels completed as quartet begun in the eighties. Naylor said
during a recent book tour stop: “I had envisioned four novels that would lay the foundation for a career. This one finishes that up” (Due F2).

Naylor has situated her characters within the ‘nebulous contours of a folksy eatery right on the margin between the edge of the world and infinite possibility’ (Ward 5). The blues music serves as a matrix manipulated by the writer to unveil the truth. The songs sung by the ‘marginal beings’ connect them in a universal network.

Naylor through her “maestro” urges the readers to listen below the surface. The power of love as a force that heals and provides peace and happiness has been prevalent in all the three novels examined. The characters from *The Women of Brewster Place* to *Mama Day* have shared their wealth of love. Through the literal communal healing in *The Women of Brewster Place* to self-healing through inspirational documents in *Linden Hills* and the matriarchal and mythical healing in *Mama Day*, Naylor in her last of the quartet *Bailey’s Cafe* has provided a haven for the needy, ultimately healing their heart, soul and body. The place in which the healing deeds are performed with the musical code forming the matrix for this closing quartet is explored in this chapter.

The pivotal epigraph serves as a clue to the reader to find the characters in *Bailey’s Cafe*. Naylor creates a space thereby enkindling the reader to penetrate beyond “the immediate realm of possibility into the infinite possibility” (76) with the blues music serving as a vehicle, which finds its expression before the narration as:

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
a place never
closing:
Bailey's
Café

By introducing a blues number "Maestro, if You Please ..." Naylor has attempted to unveil the truth through the blues matrix. The maestro, Bailey, the assumed name of the narrator serves as the conductor who sets the stage for the rest of the characters. Each story takes the readers “back to the cultural roots of male domination, paradoxically the cradle of religion(s)…”(Chavanelle 64). Through the art of narrating the stories of those who have suffered, Naylor begins the process of healing.

Once when the stories are listened to and acknowledged, the readers bear witness to the unresolved pain that has been accumulated through the history of oppression. There might certainly be an enormous store of creativity and energy both in the characters that have integrated themselves into that space and in the readers too. Being heard is the first step in the healing process. Bailey begins his tale as:

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 tit bits about myself. (BC 4)

After completing his formal education on the muddy streets in Brooklyn, and procuring his diploma from the Pacific, he married Nadine and settled in this cafe. As in the blues music, where the singer will set up his story, Bailey narrates his tale to the audience not of his school life but of his mother and father and their relationship with the employers-- the Van Morrison, a well-to-do-family in Brooklyn. Even as a child Bailey could read between the lines. It reflected “his psychological depth and complexity of character” (Montgomery 2). The portrayal of Bailey’s brother depicts this when 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)

His ‘secret nature’ towards women, which he learnt from his mother and his improvised behaviour, which he resorted to for the sake of his basic needs, gets revealed with his changing attitude to 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 super, 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)
Even when Bailey narrates his experiences as a World War II Veteran, the readers get exposed to the horrors of war through Bailey’s past. This veteran reveals not only his position as being under the “surface”, but is also capable to understand the plight of his foe’s too:

Too late to wish there might have been a different prayer. Right here on this soil, we’d be forced to watch them grow. To watch them lead. My prayers had saved me, but the one god to answer went on to spawn for this country the sons – and more sadly, the daughters – who could have marched into Tokyo. (26)

Naylor presents this veteran not just as a “male”, but also as a human being. Though he had gone to the brink of life, he had not only found a place for himself but has decided to sing the blues of those women, who had suffered more than him. To him “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 bring … sussing” (27). He rises to narrate to his audience/readers the lives of his customers in the cafe where he has ended up. By presenting his pathetic blues, Bailey serves as a maestro to share the plight of his customers. In the blues, “Vamp” is a minor section, which represents a brief solo or an improvisation. In the next section, “The Vamp”, the stories of Sister Carrie and Sugar Man are improvised.

Sister Carrie is the “cornerstone of the Temple of Perpetual Redemption” (BC 32). She is a woman, who once had given herself to sexual desires and had landed up as a single parent to her only daughter, Angel. After her bitter experience,
she repeatedly warns her daughter only to save her from the congregation outside which she considers as “filth and scum” (BC 33). She fears the world and laments as a typical mother, who cares for the daughter:

But, Lord Jesus, I never know when it’s safe to bring my Angel in here. Never knowing what she’ll run into. And if any of this filth and scum tried to proposition me or my Angel, if this filth and scum ever...

(BC 33)

Sister Carrie fears Sugar Man who, though small in physical stature, is a big man who lives for the “almighty dollar.” Bailey describes him as: “A little man, Sugar Man. Tiny hands with big diamond rings... We have to charge him three times what the meal is worth because he’d insist on paying it anyway” (33).

Sister Carrie identifies the carnal desires of this “big man” which she herself once possessed. She fears the male dominated world to which she was once a prey, as it might throng on her daughter Angel, too. Sister Carrie and Sugar Man, both had a regulated and restricted life by visiting the cafe only when the dinner was predictable: “Fried chicken Mondays, Hamburger Tuesdays, Hash Wednesdays, Pork Chop Thursdays, Fish on Fridays” (31). These restrictions and the disciplined ways of living are not to be seen in their morale.

The main section of the novel “The Jam” follows “The Vamp.” In every chapter, Bailey sets the tempo for the readers as in the Blues melodies prior to each character’s tale. As a “way station”, Bailey and his cafe have given their customers an opportunity to improvise and narrate their story thereby nurturing their own souls.
The first tale in this section titled "Mood: Indigo" deals with the life of Sadie who, in Bailey's words, is "a wino" (BC 39). Her sad tale is "a reference to Duke Ellington's 1931 song of the same title" (Whitt 160). The words of the song are quite literal in the case of Sadie: "I'm so lonesome I would 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" (BC 166).

Bailey by characterizing Sadie accepts to narrate Sadie's story which he says, "I see I'm gonna have to bring this one in by myself. It calls for telling straight out the way it was, pure, simple, and clean" (BC 40).

Sadie was born to a mother who considered the child's birth to be "The One the Coat Hanger Missed" (BC 41). She often spent her time by drinking "to curse her (Sadie) for the daddy's face she wore" (41). Even when she was four years old, the girl had not known her name and later learnt that her name was "Sadie." The only remedy this young girl child derived to come "out of this was to love" (42). The mother had lost most of her mind by drinking pure absinthe, which rotted her brain. This thirteen-year-old girl's world was full of those kinds of dreams:

...There was to be a trim white bungalow with a green picket fence, and she would keep the front yard swept clean of leaves and pick all the withered blooms from their fence full of roses. She would go to the academy, learn French and elocution in a starched white collar and black ribbon tie. become so expert with the typewriting machine she'd be the first colored woman hired as a typewriter in the biggest
insurance company on State Street. Mama would come down to meet her for lunch. And she could say, Mama, I’m doing so good here, they’re going to give me a rise. And Mama would bring one of the tiny red rosebuds from their yard to pin it on her collar, saying, I knew you could do it; I’m so proud of you, Sadie. You’re a good girl, Sadie. (BC 44)

All these dreams of love are shattered when Sadie’s mother takes her to the streets and tells her firmly, “I’ve been selling my tail all this time to feed you till I’m sick and near death. Now you better kick it too” (44). This thirteen year old girl is brought to the streets by her own mother for their survival Sadie’s mother pushes her into a profession, which she herself has been pursuing all these years after the father had absconded unable to provide a pint of milk for the child.

The men who utilized Sadie as their “object of desire” though grabbed her mother and asked her what kind of woman she was, later returned to meet the same girl after six months. When the same question comes from another man though with double the money, the mother as an act of kindness forces Sadie for a sterilization and justifies the same: “Your life would a been pure hell ever having to take care of a child” (BC 45). This girl, to provide her mother the most wonderful lunch, picks up a John who is old and very ugly. To stop her mother shaking, she takes “them, all day and all night, never resting, one by one, two by two. Three by three” (BC 46).

After her mother’s death this teenage girl’s world becomes lonely and she finally “became the personal maid for one of the house favourites. It gave Sadie a
bigger pay but took longer hours. Later she ultimately becomes Daniel’s wife, who
was thirty years her senior whom Naylor describes as an element who trades “one
loveless relationship for another” (47) and this depicts the black girl’s realization of
the modes of survival. She goes off with a man older than and enough to be her
father, and ends up living with her mother again for the next twenty-five years. Even
amidst this dreadful life, Sadie’s way of a duty-bound life to her old husband proves
her sense of yearning for an orderly life:

... She ran a race against the 5:15, 7:20, 11:55, and 3:12. As steady as a
clock: Daniel gets his breakfast, his lunch pail is packed, and he’s out
of the door. The 5:15. Sweep down the front porch ... The 7:20. Boil
and stir the sheets, pillowcases, shirts, pants, and leggings... The
11:55. Wipe down the rope clothesline. Hang up the washed clothes
...The 3:12. Wipe down the rope clothesline again...Sadie worshiped
the man who had given her the closest thing that she would ever have
to what she’d dreamed of. And she was trying to prove that she
deserved it. (BC 51-52)

Once when Sadie falls sick and Daniel attempts to throw away her ‘dream
world’ of red geraniums, she breaks her silence and engages in a response that
resounds with a finality, which reveals her strength of character:

He jumped up, took a pot, and smashed it in the yard.
- Woman, this is my damn house.
- They leave. I leave, she said. (BC 55)
Even when the laws of nature made her a widow, Sadie pleads the two daughters of Daniel to rent the house to her. When they decide to sell, she is eventually driven to the streets and gradually lands at the cafe. There she meets Iceman Jones who becomes a regular customer in the cafe after his wife's death. He is a "bear of a man" who at twenty had taken a job on an ice wagon. As his son and daughter have deserted him, he lands up in the cafe and promises Sadie a living, which he confirms: "What I have, you'll have. What I eat you'll eat. Wherever I lay my head, there's a place for you.... Sadie shook her head no. It was a deal she just couldn't live with.... She knew this dear sweet man was offering her the moon, but she could give him the stars" (BC 77-78).

Though Jones knew that Sadie is a twenty-five percent whore "her laughter was like music" (BC 77) to him. Sadie decides not to offer him a life. As Sylvie Chavanelle observes, "... if she rejects ice it might be because her boundless love for her mother and devotion to her husband had finally drained her heart." (5)

Literary representations of women sacrificing their lives by selling their bodies to keep themselves or their children alive have been sympathetically portrayed by great writers of the past. For example, Victor Hugo's portrayals of prostitution in his classic novel Les Miserables (1832) were mainly centred on streetwalkers. The girl Fantine abandoned by her husband Tholomyes is forced into prostitution. Victor Hugo distinctively depicts prostitutes and terms them as "fallen women" and blames the society for it: "It is society buying a slave. From whom? From misery, from hunger, from cold, from loneliness, from abandonment, from
prostitution. Melancholy barters. A soul for a bit of bread. Misery makes the offer, society accepts” (Prostitutes n. pag).

Naylor assumes a position similar to that of Hugo. She represents Sadie and her mother as two of the hundreds of women who succumb to prostitution thrust on them as the last resort. Though Sadie unwillingly accepts the profession, she never despises her mother. She understands her helpless plight. To overcome poverty, both the mother and the daughter yield to such means of survival.

Sadie strikes a contrast to Vivi, the daughter of Mrs Warren. When Mrs. Warren in Bernard Shaw’s Mrs. Warren’s Profession (1898) discloses her profession to her Cambridge graduate daughter Vivi, the latter does not accept her mother. Sadie’s acceptance of the miserable plight of her mother in spite of her being uneducated proves the attainment of the consciousness, which can be developed only by identification.

The same unrewarded love finds a description in Eve, who serves as a matriarch. She is “an assertive character taking life into her hands, performs her own solo as the epitome of womankind: she is an allusion to the first woman born a thousand years ago” (BC 82). She has no father and no mother and has proven her worth in ordeals. She has wrestled with the elements, been covered with mud literally and figuratively. She is the first customer to Bailey’s Cafe. This central character gradually emerges as the owner of the boarding house near Bailey’s Cafe and establishes herself as the “mother” for all the women who find their way to the boarding house. Through the portrayal of Eve’s character, her life and bitter
experiences, Naylor draws attention of all individual women and the entire human race to nurture themselves and to heal others, too.

A ‘Godfather’ who found her “in a patch of ragweed, tied to the birth sac’(83) brought up Eve. He bit off the umbilical cord with his teeth to save the child from being poisoned. When Eve’s age “was old enough to start making a difference” (83) and when she rode by in the wagon, the community’s passing judgement on her relationship with Godfather forced him to an extinct which led Eve ‘to go through months and months with no one and nothing to touch” (83) her.

Yearning for love and touch, Eve ended up in a game of hide and seek with Billy Boy. When the Godfather came to know about this ‘illicit game,” the situation became fraught with uncertainties and tragic possibilities for the future:

He said I was going to leave him the same way he’d found me, naked and hungry. And he wasn’t one of those preacher men who deal in flowery language – he meant just what he said. The first chores I ever did around that house were to haul the wood and build the yard fire where he burned every one of those brown sack dresses he’d sewn for me…. he purged me with jars of warm water and Epsom salts. To remove, he said, every ounce of food his hard work had put into my stomach. (BC 88)

With dead lice and gnats in her matted hair in the year 1913 Eve ended up at New Orleans and for the past twenty-five years taking over brownstone and her garden, she had used her potential to be a self-made-woman.
Naylor’s Eve manages a garden, where she grows flowers throughout the year. She has chosen one flower for each woman in her bordello. Her choice was the lily. Margaret Early Whitt justifies Eve’s character to the majestic flower lily:

According to flower lore, the lily stands for majesty, “demanding the company and contrast of other flowers to make its majestic impression: it is also an emblem of virgin purely. All of Eve’s other flowers are for sale; only the lily cannot be bought. Its place in the centre of her garden, standing alone in all its varieties, anchors those other flowers – the same role that Eve plays in her boarding house for the women who have come because they need to be able to depend on her. (BC 178)

Though exiled by the merciless preacher, Eve does not accept defeat. She fights her way up and proves that she can survive on her own. Sylvie Chavanelle observes Eve’s character as a “survivor extraordinaire” (4). She decides to help other women who have had the similar bitter experiences, by providing them a healing place, which she herself was denied. As she had been denied of the boarding house, she decides to provide not only a shelter, but her space proves to be “a sanctuary and a place for physical and psychological healing. Bailey’s is the first stop: a place for orientation, for getting one’s bearings: Eve’s is for many the destination itself”(5).

As an intuitive gardener, Eve grows wild flowers in her garden. This sanctuary had been sensuous with “all wild flowers” and there were flowers around the border of the yard kept and nurtured by Eve which bloomed in cold weather: “... camellias, coltsfoot, winter jasmine, pearly everlasting” (BC 92). All kinds of flowers bloomed
throughout the year. Just as all her garden flowers were for sale so were her women. She insisted that her boarders only entertain florists who buy flowers. If a customer cannot buy a flower, he need not be entertained: “If he can’t do that much for you, he doesn’t need to waste your time” (BC 93). Bailey asserts, “She’s got some kind of plan to all of this” (BC 92). As each woman at her place had special tastes, she assigned the flowers according to the woman’s quality.

The choice of the flower was according to the “gentleman callers” (BC 92) and the acceptance of the woman to whom it was given created a sort of a mutual self-revelation. The ability to feel and to respond to actions would serve as a connecting bond to both the giver and the receiver, which might gradually lead them to attain wholeness in future. William Wordsworth’s famous lines in Immortality Ode (1804), “To me the meanest flower that blows can give thoughts that lie too deep for tears” (205-207), gains its relevance here. He suggests that the ability to feel can cause thoughts that go beyond feeling. Eve’s emotional healing strategy of the choice of a particular flower proves her determined attempt to fuse feeling and thought in the spirit of self-acceptance. Such gradual acceptance of reality often encountered by these women leads them to a philosophic state where they collectively welcome the birth of the child towards the end of the novel. An experience at the physical plane gets elevated to spiritual dimensions. A perfect harmony emerges between the giver and the receiver.

Scientifically too it is proved that flowers can impart healing vibrations. Typical of its characteristics, each flower can empower and heal the individual by encouraging an emotional release and transformation. Naylor’s Eve by her floral
strategy has proved herself to be a therapeutic healer too with aesthetic taste. For all those “Battered, molested, shunned and exploited” (Puhr 5), Eve’s bordello serves as a physical and psychological asylum. Women like sweet Esther, Peaches, Jessie Bell and Mariam are restored to health by Eve. She proves herself to be, “the mother of all healers” (82).

Sweet Esther is the first of the exploited who seeks a shelter in Eve’s bordello. She is sold into “sadomasochistic service” (BC 5) to her brother’s master. Sylvie Chavenelle observes,

The chapter on Sweet Esther, Poetical in its lay-out (with a chorus and stanzas), illustrates how difficult it is for characters to speak. Esther has been walked in muteness for twelve years; a line in italics, compulsive and soothing at the same time, recurs like a whisper from Eve, like a lament, too: “we won’t speak about it, Esther. (95)

Esther appears at the cafe only twice – first upon her initial arrival and later towards the conclusion – at George’s birth. The only person to whom Esther has ever told her story was Eve.

When Esther was twelve years old, her older brother called her to come down into the cellar, showed her a man and said: “This is your husband ... Do whatever he tells you, and you won’t be sent away like the others” (BC 95). A twelve-year-old girl called lovably by her brother as “little sister” (95), for the sake of ‘much more food’, decides to oblige her brother. Naylor reveals the innocent twelve-year-old girl’s ignorance as:
... my husband touches me and there are no babies. Is there another kind of touch? Should he touch me when I am in bed and not kneeling in the cellar? Would that bring me the babies? I have no one to ask. I am ashamed of my ignorance. I am allowed no friends. And the only woman to visit is the hug.... The radio is my only company.... The songs speak of making love. I cannot imagine what that is and I grow irritated by the songs. The music causes me to ache in a way I cannot understand. (BC 97-98)

For her older brother to buy his fat wife a Bendix washing machine and many other things each year, Esther is asked to stay in the cellar. Her anger against the patriarchal order and her thought of killing “too many of them” remind us of Willa Prescott of Linden Hills, who is guided by the documents to destroy her husband. However, it is true that Esther lacks the determination of a Willa Prescott. For Willa, death is a solace and redemption, whereas it is not so for Esther. For Esther, Eve’s boarding house is a haven.

After those miserable years, Esther is offered a basement room which she reminisces:

The first thing she offered me was this basement room. And she removed the light bulbs herself. What they’ll need from you, they’ll need in the dark if they know it or not, she said. Even that type could not bring them to return if they saw your eyes. You have the most honest face of any woman I know, sweet Esther. (BC 99)
This act of Eve proves her healing attitude. She not only provides a healing space to women like Esther and identifies the need of male dominated world, but also empathizes with Esther. Esther refuses to see the face of even ‘Miss’ Maple, a transvestite, who comes to clean for “he’s still a man after all” (BC 75). She decides that men must visit her only in the dark and bring her white roses and call her little sister as her brother used to. As her brother had cautioned her, “we won’t speak about this, Esther” (BC 97), she never utters a word of the happenings in the cellar. She “develops psychoses that allows her to exist only in the dark basement of Eve’s boarding house” (Page 30). Pestered by the own brother, at a very tender age of twelve to have sex in the dark basement, Esther is another lost soul projected by Naylor as a victim of “male subjugation” (BC 30). The ‘white rose’ for sweet Esther symbolizes silence, which even the men who visit her maintain, for Esther cannot speak about her life of the past.

To reconstruct a ‘positive self-image’ and to proclaim that black is beautiful, Naylor carves out her next character- Mary/Peaches. Bailey describes Mary as “more than pretty. She’s one of those women you see and don’t believe. The kind that lives just outside of your imagination” (BC 100). Sugar Man, a local pimp, describes Mary in derogatory terms. The dual identity in this girl a disparity between her external and internal images finds reconciliation in Mary, the “Cocoa-butter dream of all men” (BC 101). As the girl was, “Plump and sweet. Yellow and sweet. Daddy’s baby. Daddy’s beautiful baby” (BC 102), she was called Peaches by her father. She was the “one daughter” her brothers had told her “her father took her everywhere” (BC 102). The father, when the girl reached her teens, had built a wall
“to keep the boys out” (BC 102). With the lustful desires, Peaches had built an internal wall between “her repressed self and her whore self that she sees reflected in every man’s lustful eyes” (BC 30).

When her father’s friends praise her “The gal has promise, Jim” (BC 104), he is so proud of his daughter’s beauty. This external realization of her beauty, which the male world needed from her, results in her doom, which she later understands.

Mary/Peaches reminiscences her past as:

I was free as I gave them her. In the cloak closets after school, behind the prayer altar, under the druggist’s soda fountain, against the coal furnace in the Girls’ Club, in the backs of milk wagons, in deserted streetcars, shadowed doorways. Any teacher. Any janitor. Any deacon. Any porter. Any storekeeper. Any race, any age, any size – any son of any man – had the power to drive away that demon from the mirror.

Over and over, they became my saviors from her. (BC 105)

She “had little choice” (106) to avoid her father “seeing her that way” (BC 106) and to stop him from hurting himself by beating her with razor straps, leather shoes. However, his continued acrimonious posture towards her drove her away from her house though she had never had such intention previously. She came out of the house and when she got fed up “with trying to live decently”; she began to stoop down to her “whore self.” The bodily price, which she had paid, had given her a decent flat and warm clothes in the winter, but at last termed her as “a sick bitch” (BC 107). After degrading herself to eagerly looking men only she could realize how ugly
she had become. Regretting how her sexual depravity had betrayed her moral strength, she started “thinking that I should always have hated myself” (107). The self-hate in Peaches leads to a late realization and she feels:

> I was probably always making men in the streets look at me that way, my father’s friends look at me that way. I was probably always asking for it, asking for it. I was probably always dirt. Yes, I was sick. Sicker than the angry man in front of me knew. Last night I warmed inside when he caressed my neck and touched me. (107)

She had not known how to stop herself with one or two whom she believed “really cared” (BC 108). The club-footed man who worshipped her and called her by her real name “Mary” and decked her with white had at last turned up to be ‘possessive’ of whom she utters, “just took out his straight razor one morning at breakfast, pressed it against my throat, and told me very quietly that the next man I was with, I would have to watch die” (BC 110).

Peaches could adhere to his threatening for only a solid week. She herself laments that if she had known a way to stop, she would have and when she realized that “there was no place on earth to run” (BC 112), she ends up with self-mutilation. Even the police suspected that it would not have been her own deed. There were many who were ready to cure her and ‘fix her face’ which she wanted to put an end to.

As she was told that she could “find Bailey’s Cafe in any town” (BC 113), Peaches lands up in Bailey’s Café tempted by Eve, looking at her scar, murmurs “beautiful”. To heal the withered Peaches, Eve demands daffodils from every man, as
it was the only remedy. Mary’s gentleman callers purchased daffodils from Eve’s
garden to visit her. Daffodils belong to the narcissus family and suggest a link to the
narcissus myth.

According to this myth, Narcissus falls in love with his own reflection in a
mountain pool of water and dies still looking at his own image reflected in the
water. Upon his death, he is transformed into a flower called narcissus. The daffodil
also belongs to this family of flowers. By associating Mary/Peaches with the
daffodil, one hopes that Peaches will also be redeemed in the end. Eve’s assurance
to Peaches’ father three times, “I’ll return her to you whole” (BC 113-114) proves
that she will be healed eventually. The promise and the proclamation which Eve
declares to Peaches’ father who comes in search of his daughter “… Go home, my
friend. I’ll return your daughter to you whole” (114), also reiterates our hope for her
healing. Rebecca Wood observes:

Mary signifies her reconciliation of external and internal images by
etching her internal pain on her body, a literal act of defacement that
liberates her from her previous image – In contrast to her former
tortured feelings about herself, whatever she is doing at Eve’s boarding
house, she’s doing it feeling beautiful. (114)

The external beauty being inadequate without the recognition of internal beauty,
which Naylor attempts to define in Peaches/Mary’s character, is an attempt by Naylor
to raise the concept of ‘beauty’ to spiritual dimensions transcending the evanescent
boundaries of physical reality. Mary/ Peaches, like the biblical figure Mary
Magdalene, is both a sinner and a saint. As a body loved, admired and worshipped by her father, her external, physical image is beautiful and pure which in fact is whore's body to Peaches: “Everywhere I turned, I could see her. But what was she doing in my room? She was a whore and I was Daddy’s baby” (BC 104). The salvation which Eve offers to Mary/Peaches is “not a dictum to go and sin no more’ as Jesus suggests to the adulterers in John, but an invitation to stay and know herself, to choose her own role. Eve’s plan is to allow peaches to discover an integrated self”(Ivey 7).

Mary/Peaches character parallels that of Jessie Bell’s, another character in the same novel. Naylor endows Jessie Bell with a problematic rationalist stance. Jessie Bell is a cultural nationalist figure. She is brought up by the figures of black power and is unable to accept the “integrationist attitude of the blacks” (Wood 5). The disgust and the antagonistic attitude in Jessie results in her being ‘paranoid’ and lands her in Eve’s boarding house. She is nurtured and healed by Eve’s hellish temptations.

Jessie Bell hails from the family of shore men around Manhattan Island. Her men had led an honest living. They were rough men who worked even during the frozen winter season. Those people demanded respect from others which Jessie describes, “Nobody messed with colored longshoremen” (119), and they credited this respect to the ‘real strong woman’ who made a home for men like that. The sons would ‘act up’ only after looking into their mother’s eyes. Jessie Bell hailed from a family of brothers who respected every woman they took up with; as their mother had drummed into their heads as to how hard it was “without a daddy -- or, daddies”(BC 120).
Just as the famous saying goes "Power knows power", Jessie inherits this power and the nationalistic cultural perspective. When Jessie is married into the king's family of Harlem's Sugar, she faces the "psychological and social damage caused by the "black acceptance of white middle class values" (Dubry 33). It is through Uncle Eli, "the handkerchief-head[ed]", who headed the band that she receives the rude shock of her marriage, which she reflects later as follows:

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.... Yeah, there are worse things. Like having the girlfriend and the wife at the same dinner table. . Like the wife knowing about it all the while, and the husband knowing she knows, and him getting a thrill out of it all. Cause the wife's not going to say a word. Cause this son of a bitch is a doctor somebody or a lawyer somebody – or maybe just a man somebody that she feels she's nobody without. Women up there look at other women as nothing unless they're attached to some man's name. And attached they stay, no matter what he does. (BC 121)

As uncle Eli had insisted on avoiding "slave food" (124), Jessie's husband finds their smothered pork chops, fried catfish, collard greens, biscuits, and oxtail soup hard to swallow"(BC 124). Jessie through the ancestral food desires to acknowledge the power of the past. Jessie's sexual approach along with the knowledge of their cultural heritage succeeds in her first lesson: "Husband I said.
pointing, this is sweet-potato pie. Didn’t have a bit of trouble after that except it was all the man wanted for dinner for the next month” (124).

Though Jessie gave birth to her son, he was brought up in the elitist way. Later at a stage when he refuses to go to his maternal grandmother’s ninetieth anniversary, Jessie realizes the materialistic attitude in which he was brought up. When the sixteen-year-old son questions: “And how could she have an anniversary anyway, since she’d never been married?” Jessie reacts against her son:

First time in my life I ever laid a hand on him. Straight across the face.
It was the anniversary of her life! And if she hadn’t been married to her life, his miserable little butt wouldn’t have been here. It might as well have been a dead woman ranting at him. I looked into that boy’s eyes and saw my words were lost, lost. (BC 128)

Not only are all these black folks humiliated but discarded too. On a picnic celebration, Jessie’s family looked like: “a bunch of trained monkey’s at the circus.” standing out in the rain, eating soggy potato salad, and drinking warm beer” (BC 130), which after a month resulted in Jessie’s mother’s death due to pneumonia, a direct result of her exposure to rain. Jessie blames Uncle Eli and her husband’s response, which makes her “seem paranoid” (BC 129). One night when Jessie was looking for answers, “someone slipped a little paper envelope of white powder in my [her] hand, and she found what she needed and she was branded as a heroin addict” (BC 130).
Jessie was to land up in the detention centre. It was Eve, who identified her plight and thrust a card, which directed her to Eve’s house where Eve’s power of conjuring healed and nurtured her. Ultimately when Jessie is fed up with unlimited access to the enslaving drug, she feels frustrated and in a state of exasperation desires to go to hell not knowing that she is already existing there only. Eve opens her eyes: “I think you’ve forgotten that’s where we are” (BC 141).

It is Eve’s healing strategy that restores Jessie to health. Jessie Bell’s flower is dandelion-- a weed that Eve would have eliminated from her garden. She cares for this weed just like she cares for all other flowers. Extending this analogy to metaphorical levels, we can understand that Eve cares for the weed Jessie Bell, too. Just as all the parts of the weed dandelion can be made use of – the leaves, stems, flowers, and roots for Narwies foods, Naylor chooses this weed ‘dandelion’ to Jessie Bell for it symbolizes both grief and bitterness, which was, “one that early Flemish and German painters used in pictures of the crucifixion to suggest the suffering of Christ in which salvation is included” (Whitt 190).

The last and the horrific deviant character whom Naylor picturizes is the pregnant fourteen-year-old Jew from Ethiopia, “a castrated female and the Virgin Mary revisited” (BC 140). Mary claims, “No man has ever touched me” (143). The chapter is titled “Mary (Take Two)” (BC 140). Naylor shifts the narrative perspective from Bailey to Nadine, Bailey’s reticent wife. She asserts: “I only agreed to set this one up because there isn’t a man in here who’s willing to do it” (BC 143). It is this section of the novel that serves as a bridge in connecting the entire piece. The most silent character Nadine steps forward to share Mariam’s tale with Eve. By conversing,
both Nadine and Eve provide a vehicle for collective learning. They strengthen their commitment to a constructive change and towards the end they both inform the readers as to what actions might be the most appropriate for the future. All the preceding oppressed women have been touched either by a man or men whereas Mariam alias Mary has not been touched. Hence the tale is told by a woman, about a woman. It is in this Bailey’s Cafe, Mariam gives birth to a child, thereby giving a new life not only to the newborn but also to all the other characters that unite in harmony and thereby get healed.

Amidst all the other victims in Eve’s whorehouse, Mariam is the only girl who has experienced the brutal ritual of genital mutilation. Mariam stands as a representative of the twelve million women in Northern Africa who suffer each year from the experience of female genital mutilation and infibulation (Daly, 1978). The ritual is regarded to be “…in service to tradition, to what makes us a people, in service to country and what makes us who we are” (226). The other novelist who has discussed the severity of this violence in her fiction is Alice Walker. In her *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), she has focused on the psychological effects of infibulation on the protagonist Tashi, who undergoes the ritual. Though there are other works, which include references to this violence, the severity of the ritual has been attempted only by Naylor and Alice Walker.

These social sexual rituals are callous expressions of patriarchal domination over female sexuality and sexual activity. When Mariam entered the cafe’s doorstep, Eve could realize that her claims were the first of its kind. She hailed from the Beta Israel, the holy place. Each child is a welcomed hire and each child means survival. If
the child happened to be a girl child as it is the law of the Blue Nile, the child had to 
undergo 'circumcision'. The high priest’s wife who travelled all the way from Addis 
Ababa performed the ceremony with dance and song: “... as the midwives squat the 
naked girl over the hole dug into the hut of blood” (BC 149). The crude ceremony, 
which they perform, is described as follows:

The child’s hanging skin is held together with acacia thorns and boiled 
thread. A clean straw is inserted to ensure there will be a small opening 
after the body has healed itself shut.... The girl may cry when it is time 
to relieve herself. Drip by drip. But she will know this hut again. And 
she will know no other way to pass her blocked menstrual blood. Drip 
by drip. (BC 151)

This act was considered to raise “a woman’s value” (BC 152). In spite of the 
infibulations. when this fourteen-year-old girl became pregnant, her people had 
disowned her. Though Mariam demanded “pure and simple justice” she was denied 
but the only solace was the priest’s wife, who hid herself and waited for the girl and 
placed “an amulet around her neck with a note pinned on it to be given to one of her 
old friends in Addis Ababa” (BC 158). The only hope denied by her family but given 
by this high priest’s wife was, “walk toward the rising sun” (158).

Mariam landed up at Gabriel’s pawnshop. Though a stranger, he came forward 
to help her and said: “And I will lead you to a place where you can rest” (BC 159). 
Immediately Eve took up the task and pronounced:
Whatever happened to that girl, Eve said, she is pregnant. And I have an entirely new situation on my hands. My place is a way station, just like yours. And there is no world for this girl to return to. (159)

Eve’s decision to provide a shelter to Mariam and the child to be born casts a revelation, which Nadine claims:

I hope little Mariam will find a place to go before its time for the baby. A child isn’t supposed to be born on this street. I don’t care what kind of worlds we all came in from; there isn’t much of a prayer for life itself if a baby has 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 … (BC 160)

Of the two tales in the novel about men, the former one about Bailey has already been examined, the second deals with the story of Stanley Backcourt Booker Tat Ferro and Washington carver. This tale is unlike the sexual exploits, which has led to subjugation. It is the tale of a man with an ethnic ancestry who finds himself marginalized in corporate America despite being “the most qualified man” (BC 197). Stanley experiences a different form of oppression. He is a Stanford graduate, a Ph.D. in statistics “who can’t get hired anywhere in America because he is black and ultimately takes to wearing women’s clothing and renames himself as “Miss Maple”(197) to find a job.

The confrontations and attempts to overcome the rationalist concept of identity built upon difference lands him in the cafe. Stanley’s overt integration tactics fail to
secure him a job in corporate America. As Jessie Bell, Stanley is proud of his integrated family history, which he declares:

... I had aunts of all assortments: pure-blooded Yumas; full-blooded Negroes; full-blooded Mexicans; Yuma-Mexicans; Mexican-Irish; Negro-Mexicans; and even one pure-blooded African who still knew some phrases in Ashanti: all hearty and strong. Women who could straddle a row of cotton all-day and still straddle a man at night. Because there had to be a lot of babies; we had a lot of land. (BC 171)

Through mental and logical interpretations, Stanley fixes himself to the universalistic integration. His physique displays the stigmata of black collective memory and rebels against Stanley’s attempts to transcend race. During World War II when he volunteered to donate blood to the Red Cross, it was refused as he was of mixed blood, but contrary to this he was asked to fight in the war. When he refused, he was imprisoned for three years as a “conscientious objector” (King 3).

He argues: “If my blood n’t good enough for the Red Cross, why [i]s it good enough to be spilled on the battlefield?” (189). Even in prison Stanley attempts to desegregate the prison’s dining hall, foregrounding racial difference. Though he succeeds, he is placed in a cell with “a repeat offender serving for three counts of murder” (BC 199) and threatened. Stanley is accused as a rape victim in the racist corporate America.

The racist oppressions extending even to Shakespeare’s works gets exhibited in the confrontation between the Gatten brothers and Stanley’s father and Stanley.
When the freighting office clerk Peter carries the three crates containing the Shakespeare volumes out of Stanley’s father’s brick, the Gatten brothers enter the office, armed with knives, take off Stanley’s and his father’s clothes and lock the two naked in a store room. The Gattens, as they do not elicit any response from the two captives, go for the sacred volumes:

They had gotten to the books. The silk cover was gouged with holes, the spine busted and bent over double. They’d torn out handfuls of pages, crushed, what was left between their fists, and then urinated on the whole thing. (BC 183)

Though all these racial, sexual and academic oppressions threaten to lead Stanley to consider suicide as the final option, this personal crisis ultimately leads him to Bailey’s Cafe. Stanley enters the café in his American female clothes “sleeves were short, the skirts loose and airy” (BC 203). It is this female identity which leads him to Eve’s boarding house, offers him a job “with terms that [he] couldn’t refuse” (BC 213). Stanley begins working as a housekeeper in Eve’s boarding house.

From this bordello he gains access by a clever stratagem to the ninety-nine companies that had rejected him earlier as a marketing analyst. He achieves financial success by entering jingle contests sponsored by companies such as Chiffon, Feb, Ajax and Colgate-Palmolive Peet camouflaged as a woman. He wins nearly $50,000 in cash and prizes. It is the covert methods that have made him achieve his integrationist goods. Rebecca Wood observes: “Stanley’s use of a symbolic back door reinforces the white male hegemony of American business.” (4).
The tale of Stanley is told in “The Wrap,” which is the last song in the Blues. This is quite significant in as much as it comes embracing the sufferings of Naylor’s men also. For the first time towards the end of the last of the quartet novels, Naylor’s feminist preoccupations seem to give way in favour of espousing the larger cause of her race as a whole, both black men and women. This disintegration does not mean that her feminist concerns are over by any means. It should rather be seen as a rippling effect embracing within its fold a more benign view for her oppressed race in entirety.

Naylor has chosen the tale of Stanley, a transvestite male, to focus the attention of her race on the oppressions perpetrated by the whites with selective interests. She seems to convey that if it is a black woman, the whites will offer a job with the ulterior motive of sexually exploiting her, not out of a sense of equity or compassion.

The final episode of the birth of a male child George, considered in juxtaposition with the event of Stanley’s success with the white oppressors, conveys categorically Naylor’s belief that the struggle for freedom by the black woman must go hand in hand with that of the liberation of her men folk also. Any isolationist tendency based on narrow gender biases may result in frittering away the whole fight. If viewed this way, the integration of the whole community inclusive of men and women to accept and welcome the birth of the fourteen year old Jew Mariam’s boy child could be understood in the right perspective.
Eve assumes the role of a midwife at George’s birth. Almost all the people in the street gather inside: “...even strange little Esther. She’d squeezed herself into the darkest corner of the room, sitting on the floor with her arms wrapped around her bent knees. But even her face was in awe” (BC 225). When the baby’s first thin cry is heard, the place goes wild with happiness and laughter. The integrated harmony of men and women in the solemn atmosphere, which finds its description in Naylor’s lyricism in the following passage, heralds the need to universalize the concept of space in both the genders of the black race:

Nadine hugged me so tight she almost lifted me onto my toes. Then Gabe grabbed me, whirled me around, and we started to dance. He could kick pretty high for an old goat. Miss Maple took his other hand and the three of us were out in the middle of the floor, hands raised and feet stomping. People were up on tables and cheering. Someone was anging on the counter with my spatula. Someone tore open a sack of rice and was throwing it into the air. I didn’t give a damn. Jesse had her skirt raised in the throes of a mean flamenco. And, wonder of wonders, Esther smiled. But I think it was Peaches who started to sing. I know she has the best voice, and the spiritual started off high and sweet. You could hear it even above the mayhem. As everyone could still hear the lone cry of new life. (225)

This group consciousness of welcoming a child denotes a state of transpersonal awareness amidst all the characters irrespective of the gender. All the members feel as though they are subjectively united. Through their dance, song,
smiles they perceive themselves as mutually interdependent and as a 'whole' community. All of them develop an authentic concern for the birth of the child and the rituals of circumcision, which is performed for the child. This rings in the need for a productive functioning together. As Leopold Senghor, a West African social philosopher, describes another dimension of humanism, “I feel the other, I dance the other and therefore I am” (3), the characters both men and women in their interconnectedness succeed in restoring a cosmic harmony by welcoming the child. Their song reveals their integrity:

Anybody ask you who you are?

Tell him – you’re the child of God.

One voice joined in. Another voice joined. And another. (225)

Eve’s healing device— the use of light for numbing the pains makes the hut in the back of the cafe where Mariam gives birth resemble the famous stable in Bethlehem lit by an enormous star.

According to rant biblical scholarship, the miraculous birth narratives in Matthew and Luke as well as the details of Christ’s baptisms, were constructed decades after Christ’s death” (Ivey 5). The framework chosen by Naylor for setting up the Christ figure first and then constructing a history for her character “mimics the construction of Christ’s own history” (6). Perhaps Naylor indicates that the arrival of the Christ figure is made possible by the burial of divisive tendencies in her community which is symbolically presented through the unification of the whole community on the eve of the childbirth.
The welcoming of the child establishes both "a living and livable African American space, thereby restores a sense of the past and provides hope for the present" (Page 45). The spaces – the Café and Eve’s bordello have offered all these characters a basis for positive identity formation. These characters have learnt to accept the abyss first by recognizing the evil, and then by successfully dealing with it. Thus, they have survived, outwitted and triumphed over it.

The final sequence of all these stories is not a negative dark atmosphere but an optimistic one with a new birth—a bright light, a hope for the future. Stanley, Bailey and Gabe play key roles. The whole community gets united and welcomes the infant. With much hesitation and a streak of doubt, they acquiesce themselves to send Mariam and the baby to her own country—Beta Isreal.

In the following resounding statements of Bailey, Naylor gives the gravest warning, not only to her own black people, but also to the oppressed people of all colours and denominations wherever they are:

People are people. And government is government. And Israel isn’t gonna be run any differently from any other country. The first order of business is to make sure they can survive at all, since they got plunked right down in the middle of new neighbors who aren’t gonna be knocking on their front doors with lemonade and pound cake. But inside those borders it’s the same old story: You got your have-s and your have-nots. You got those who are gonna be considered inferior to others because of the type of Jew they are, the color of Jew they are, or
whatever. But above all, the groups who are in power are going to do whatever they can to stay in power. (BC 222)

Though permitted to go back, Mariam does not have the will and courage to leave these people. During Eve’s absence, Mariam drowns herself in the waters and the child George is looked after by Eve and later handed over to Irene Jackson who runs a shelter for homeless boys. The readers have already been introduced to this character George in Naylor’s third novel *Mama Day*, thereby ensuring a synthesis of the quartet novels.

In Alice Walker’s *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Tashi the protagonist destroys the agent M’Lissa who had performed the ritual circumcision on her, whereas Mariam is unable to do so. For the murder committed, Tashi is executed which she overwhelmingly accepts with the satisfaction that she has raised a consciousness both in herself and in her people by her resistance. If Mariam had acted like Tashi, she too would have encountered the same fate. For the world is always the same—murdering its reformers and messiahs.

Naylor through Mariam’s sacrifice has restored both George and the people at Eve’s garden. The Cafe has not only provided a geographic location but also extended a psychic healing space to the deviants who land up there seeking solace.

The search for a place, both literally and figuratively, is similar to the experience of the African-Americans ever since the first Africans were brought to Virginia in the seventeenth century. The ultimate attainment of a space and an identity—only a Bailey’s Café though—proclaims Naylor’s optimism about the
broader cultural concerns of her people in general and women in particular. By the synthesis of cultures, individuals, genders and generations, Naylor has established a cosmic harmony that is characteristic of the West African religions and philosophies. The tragic stories of Sadie- an aging alcoholic, Eve's individuated sense of self leading her to being cast out, Esther's sadomasochism, Mary's self-mutilation, Jessie's heroin addiction, Mariam's immaculate conception and the gripping story of Stanley alias Miss Maple - all these players stay and come to terms with Bailey and his cafe with their suffering. They find peace.

The universality of all these deviants lies in the fact which Gabe, the Jewish pawn-broker, philosophically states as follows: "... neither of us is considered a national treasure in our countries, and that's where the similarity ends ... we don't get to comparing notes on who did what to whom the most ... the way I see it, there is no comparison" (220). By bringing together the black male proprietor Bailey and Gabe, the Jewish owner of the pawnshop, to bless Mariam's child, Naylor has provided, "a cross-cultural nurturant concern" (qtd. in Gates 34). Naylor's work, with its balance of pathos and joy has not only portrayed successfully the desires of the outcasts but has also very effectively projected the belief in rendering solace to the most oppressed. Her poetic art, in the words of Chavanelle, is "inseparable from the call for recognition on behalf of her brothers and sisters" (7). The emotive healing experienced and shared by men like Bailey, Gabe, and Miss Maple has elevated Naylor to be a universal healer.

The African social philosophy of 'Ubuntu' gains its relevance in her works. When Gabe says of looking at events by mutually affirming and enhancing
relationships with one another, one observes the concept of Ubuntu which Naussbaum defines as follows:

Your pain is my pain,
My wealth is your wealth,
Your salvation is My Salvation. (1)

South African sociolinguist Buntu Mfeenyana further explains ubuntu “as the quality of being human. It is the quality, or behaviour of ‘ntu’ or society that is sharing, charitableness, cooperation. It is a spirit of participatory humanism”(2). Almost all the women - Sadie, Eve, Esther, Peaches, Jessie Bell, Mariam lose their familial and communal sources of support. For their survival, after various other modes of employment, they end up in their bodies as objects of exchange in a patriarchal economy. When all of them land up in Eve’s “cathouse” as whores the place and its mistress Eve provide salvation through sharing, charitableness and cooperation—the qualities of ‘ntu’.

To experience wholeness, individuals must occupy a place where they have the freedom to possess and love things and persons they choose. Her whorehouse is a safe haven for all the characters including Stanley/Miss Maple. The four proprietors—Bailey, his wife Nadine, Eve and Gabriel alias Gabe, and the pawnbroker – become accustomed to the abysmal world. With clear-sightedness and straightforwardness, they accept everyone. Bailey claims, “I call ‘em the way I see ‘em” (32). According to Bailey, Nadine also has the same quality: “Like me, she calls ‘em as she sees em” (116). Nadine resembles biblical Sarah in laughing at men. Bailey reads the silent laugh of Nadine in her eyes: “Looking up into her eyes, I saw that she was laughing.
Down at the bottom of those dark orbs, she was bent over double and howling. She laughed and laughed and laughed” (19). This laughter is “directed towards masculine assumptions of femininity” (Ivey 41).

Eve serves as a mythical emotive mother. Though unmarried she provides an aesthetic solace with tolerance and open mindedness, and offers a relief for all the sufferers. It is not only a healing which Naylor emphasizes, but as Philip Page observes: “Readers must learn what the four proprietors have learned and what the victimized visitors are struggling to learn – how to go below the surface, to take “em one key down” (34). As Bailey identifies and proclaims in the beginning: “Every one-liner’s got a life underneath it. Every point’s got a counterpoint.” (34) it is the listeners who have to identify them.

Naylor with her emotive blues symphony has exposed the chaotic life with its ugliness and has provided a beauty to it in Bailey’s Cafe. The yearning for beauty, as it is deep in every individual, is realized with a consciousness, where universalization with a human understanding is aimed at and achieved.