Chapter-2
Ethics of Partnership: Man and Nature

Many historians and cultural critics believe that ‘the conquest of the natural continent’ is the basic framework that has been instrumental in shaping and formulating the American idea of a nation. The European settlers left the crowded civilization of Europe with a purpose to explore the new world. They went in search of a land that could be owned, used and mastered for their benefit. In America, they found such a land. Patricia Nelson Limerick has highlighted the most popular origin myth of white Americans:

Europe was crowded; North America was not. Land in Europe was claimed, owned and utilized; land in North America was available for the taking. In a migration as elemental as a law of physics, Europeans moved from crowded space to open space, where free land restored opportunity and offered a route to independence. Generation by generation, hardy pioneers, bringing civilization to displace savagery, took on a zone of wilderness, struggled until nature was mastered, and then moved on to the next zone. This process repeated itself sequentially from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and the result was a new nation and new national character: the European transmuted into the American. (322)

Patricia Limerick observes that this story of the origin of American settlement has been misread as the story of “freedom, opportunity, abundance, and success” by the individualist American mind, while “Professional Western historians explored conflict, unintended consequences, and complexities” in the same story (324). The land claimed by the Europeans was not empty. It was inhabited by the Indians or native Americans and this process of ‘bringing civilization to displace savagery’ had fatal implications for native Americans and the tensions which ensued in its wake still reverberate in the relationship of white America with nature, with native Americans, with Afro-Americans and with women at large.
Carolyn Merchant notes that Christian religion played a central role in cementing white man’s authority over and against natural order of things. Biblical teachings naturalized man’s domination over nature as his prime duty. “In the Genesis 1 version, God created the land, sea, grass, herbs, and fruit; the stars, sun, and moon; and the birds, whales, cattle, and beasts–after which he made ‘man in his own image…; male and female created he them’” (29). Carolyn Merchant clearly notes that subjugation of American lands by Europeans was done in the name of Christianity for recovery of the original garden lost in the Fall.

Psyche of the white settlers was quick to embrace the picture of Adam in the image of God Himself. Carolyn Merchant maintains that Christianity propagated the school of thought in which “Original Adam is the image of God as creator, initial agent, activity. Fallen Adam appears as the agent of earthly transformation, the hero who redeems the fallen land” (32). This myth played a vital role in enshrining the responsibility of improving American lands in the male hands. Rachel stein offers a similar perspective: “Arguably, the Puritan’s ordained mission to transform the heathenish wilderness into the Lord’s garden without falling prey to the lures of the physical world set the pattern for settlers’ alienated manipulation of the natural terrain” (8).

This ordinance places God as different and superior to nature and the white man becomes His chosen choice for cultivation and improvement of the land. The white man embraced this dictum and declared himself superior to the natural order. Western school of thought believed that since man (white) was cast in the image of God, he was created as more important than the rest of nature. Nature was to be treated as subsidiary to human requirements. It was the duty of this superior, the chosen man, to utilize and manipulate land for the betterment of his life and the recovery of the original garden of Eden. This appropriation of man over natural environment reduces nature as a lifeless resource, empty of its purpose or meaning. In the transformation of heathenish wilderness into Lord’s garden, nature is juxtaposed as a non-agent, non-subject and a passive entity. In man vs. nature binary, man assumes the status of an agent, the subject, the active controller and dominator who
may seek to use or annex nature according to his desires and purposes. This paradigm fixes nature as a passive object which needs to be acted upon by active male subject.

This Eurocentric canon based on the binary of man vs. nature is an antithesis to the view of symbiotic relationship between man and nature upheld by Native Americans and Afro-Americans. From the beginning itself, European theory of man as master over and against nature was at odds with the conception of nature Native Americans had. Native Americans merged and mingled with nature without disturbing its delicate balance. Without understanding the integrity and complexity of Indian cultures, Euro-Americans accused them of savagery and of not using their land properly. Patricia Limerick notes:

> From the beginning, the usual justification was that Indians were not using the land properly. Relying on hunting and gathering, savagery neglected the land’s true potential and kept out those who could put it to proper use. A sparse Indian population wasted the resources that could support a dense white population. The argument thus shifted the terms of greed and philanthropy: it was not that white people were greedy and mean-spirited; Indians were the greedy ones, keeping so much land to themselves; and white people were philanthropic and farsighted in wanting to liberate the land for its proper uses. (190)

In this questionable liberation of Indians from savagery to civilization, the European binary of man versus nature was cemented in the name of philanthropy, progress and opportunity. With the ruthless displacement of Indians, the seeds of commodification of nature were firmly planted in American soil. The vast varied bounty of nature was treated as the raw material that must be used to realize the American dream. Hence, nature was accorded the status of a raw material, a lifeless commodity by the egocentric, individualistic European settler.

Nature was “viewed as the antithesis of civilization, as the threatening wilderness that must be tamed and transformed for progressive development to thrive” (Stein 6-7). This nurtured the myth that wilderness was dangerous to human survival. Since nature was thought to be against civilization, the settlers were all the more in a hurry to subdue nature. The wilderness of nature evoked in white man the hierarchy of
order over disorder. The scientific advancement augmented the mastery over nature and laid the foundation of modern America.

John Gatta acknowledges this opinion in *Making Nature Sacred*: “in the earliest stages of New England colonization, settlers were more eager to possess than to be possessed by the land. Sorely pressed to survive, they showed considerably more interest in mastering than in marvelling over their new physical environment. Frost said it best: ‘The land was ours before we were the land’s’” (17). Estrangement was the core word that characterized Euro-American conceptualization of relationship between man and nature. Man is different and superior. So, he must alienate himself from nature. The possibility of a dialogue, or any form of communication with nature is an unthinkable proposition to the Western mind: “Close attachment to nature violated the colonial mission and was proscribed God’s minions in the new land” (Stein 8). Hence, nature was deemed as threatening wilderness, which if left to its own sources, can put human survival at risk. It was considered mandatory that it should be pruned and restrained. It was regarded a controllable, spiritless matter, secondary to human requirements and desires.

In this formulation of nature and national identity, Euro-Americans were sovereign subjects taking nature as the natural object of their expansionist desires. This resulted in mindless exploitation of nature. The conquest motif not only started but also intensified and increased commodification of nature and everything associated with nature. It promoted capitalist acquisition and nurtured competitive individualism which ruthlessly smothered nature for petty gains.

Losing sight of the bigger picture, the white man began his dream of building the nation on fixed binaries which approved man’s domination over nature and people associated with nature. When ‘primitive’ and ‘savage’ Africans were brought to America, they were also considered nature incarnate to be mastered in the name of civilization. Euro-Americans failed to understand indigenous ingenuity of Native Americans towards their land and they remain equally oblivious of Afro-Americans’ view of nature.

Africans were uprooted from their homeland and main culture, but their life on plantation gave them ample opportunity to continue their relationship with nature.
They were able to sustain their relationship with nature and this relationship with nature in turn sustained them in foreign land and they passed this correlative bond with nature to future generations of Afro-Americans. The reciprocal relationship Afro-Americans have with nature is strikingly different from the Eurocentric hierarchical division between man and nature. This complementary relationship between Afro-Americans and nature challenges the power politics of white man over nature. Naylor contests the polarity and fixity of Western paradigm of man over nature by mutual interdependence of man and nature and tries to describe Afro-American’s conception of this world as dynamic, ever changing flux of interdependence.

Nature is not a two dimensional static entity as projected by the Western mind. For Afro-Americans, it is a dynamic, multi-dimensional, breathing force. Naylor positions Afro-American conceptualization of nature as a spiritual and healing source against the Eurocentric visualization of nature as a chaotic and amorphous wilderness. She re-evaluates the Eurocentric domination and exploitation of nature for individual profit. In response to man’s mastery over nature, she emphasizes the concept of partnership between people and nature.

Nature has always played a very important role in the lives of Afro-American people. For them, the relationship between man and nature is not a fixed binary preposition; rather, it is an equation of symbiotic harmony. It is opposed to the Eurocentric theory of detachment and estrangement from nature. Afro-American conceptualization of nature thrives on the attachment and involvement with nature. For them, the world is a seamless web where all living things are interconnected. They believe in the harmonious relationship of man with nature and recognize the importance of interdependence and reciprocity of man with nature.

For Afro-American people, nature is God-incarnate. Their relationship with nature is characterized by love and reverence as they view every aspect and object of nature as full of life. Afro-American’s conceptualization of nature seems to be in close affinity with environmental ethics of Native Americans. Land, trees and fauna are not viewed as objects/commodities to be used and exploited; rather, they are “…regarded as spiritually animate ‘gifts’ offering themselves to the people….Within this ethic, nature was disturbed as little as possible, and only what was necessary for comfortable
tribal survival was harvested from the land” (Stein 119). This is a very positive attitude towards nature which is self-enriching in the ultimate analysis. Because of this respectful attitude, Afro-American people have escaped being egocentric. They tend to feel a part of the larger universe because of their affinity, kinship and communication with every aspect of nature.

Throughout her career as a writer, Naylor has given us ample proofs of her affinity with Afro-American concept of nature. In an interview conducted by Michelle C. Loris, Naylor has categorically and vehemently affirmed her belief in creativity of nature and its indelible impression on human spirit. On being asked about the meaning and utility of garden in her life, Gloria Naylor sums up her open reliance on nature for positivity and creativity in the following words:

It [garden] reaffirms my belief in creativity and in life. Despite the weeds, the obstacles, those turnips came up. It’s about what I do for work. You take a tiny little seed…and I have giant marigolds that I grew from seeds. Those seeds came up. And now there are these absolutely gorgeous marigolds. And so what a garden does for me is to say that human spirit is a kick-ass thing. That’s what that garden does. (“The Human Spirit” 263)

In her interviews and in her autobiographical accounts, Naylor has always highlighted her dependence on and affinity with nature. She sees values embedded in the natural world which reassert their spiritual connection with the material world. Her views about interdependence of human and natural world and her belief in healing power of nature have remained consistent with her development as an artist. In one of her more recent interviews with Maxine Lavon Montgomery, Naylor admits, “I believe walking through a park in the springtime, looking at the beauty of the tulips, and the beauty of the trees budding out, is healing. Nature can be healing” (“Opening Up” 86-87). She has always approached nature as a well-wisher and has emphasized her opinion through her stories and characters.

Willow Springs is an imaginary and unmapped island off the coast of South Carolina and Georgia and it serves as a setting for Naylor’s third novel, *Mama Day*. Gloria Naylor chooses this very place to challenge Western conception and treatment
of nature. The bounty of mother nature in the form of vegetables, fruits and herbs is, time and again, stressed in *Mama Day*. It’s a calm, serene and pristine island which is situated right in the lap of nature. It’s a land full of oaks, huge pines and palmettos. It is so green that the air becomes loaded with various shades of green. When George, a city boy, visits Willow Springs, he has “no choice but to breathe in lungfuls of oaks dripping with silvery gray moss” (175).

A small bridge connects the island with the mainland of America. The inhabitants of Willow Springs are the descendants of slaves. The purity of their natural environment suggests that they have been able to protect their culture because they protect their relationship with nature from any western influence. Their land, water and air–everything is loaded with the texture, sound and smell of magnolia, yellow jasmines, wisteria, live oaks and pines. The natural environment in Willow Springs has a finality and infinity of ever-so-powerful God. People in Willow Springs not just revere nature, they live with it. It is a source of religious and spiritual sustenance for the community of Willow Springs. As opposed to “Judeo-Christian belief in a transcendent God, superior to and separate from the physical realm…” (Stein 119), Naylor presents nature as an embodiment of God (Himself). She presents nature as a reflection of all pervasive and animating power. Through her central character, Mama Day in *Mama Day*, Naylor delineates the extra-ordinary beauty that unfolds itself when nature is experienced with reverence:

Miranda Kinda blooms when the evening air hits her skin. She stands for a moment watching what the last of the sunlight does to the sky down by The Sound. They say every blessing hides a curse, and every curse a blessing. And with all of the aggravation belonging to a slow fall, it’ll give you a sunset to stop your breath, no matter how long you been on the island. It seems like God reached way down into his box of paints, found the purest reds, the deepest purples, and a dab of midnight blue, then just kinda trailed His fingers along the curve of the horizon and let’ em all bleed down. And when them streaks of color hit the hush-a-by green of the marsh grass with the blue of The Sound behind
‘em, you ain’t never had to set foot in a church to know you looking at a living prayer. (78)

Mama Day’s reverence of nature as God stresses the bond of love and partnership between human beings and nature. This model of partnership is opposed to the model of domination of man over nature. A similar picture of God is provided by Shug in The Color Purple. Shug teaches Celie that God is in everything including the flowers, the air and water:

God ain’t a he or a she, but a It....I believe God is everything, say Shug. Everything that is or ever was or ever will be....one day when I was sitting quiet and feeling like a motherless child, which I was, it came to me: that feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all. I knew that if I cut a tree, my arm would bleed....I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don’t notice it. (Walker 176-77)

There is a radical similarity in Gloria Naylor and Alice Walker’s conceptualization of this universe as a seamless web. Both the writers speak of the Afrocentric concept of God being one with nature and nature being one with the human world. If Alice Walker finds God in the color purple, Naylor brings the whole rainbow alive to create her own church. In their scenery, both writers move away from the Western tradition of admiring nature for the sake of beauty only. For them, God is in nature and human beings constitute an integral part of this natural universe. Hence, all entities exist on an equal platform. First of all, this identification of nature with God helps Afro-American writers to position nature as a spiritual force of sustenance. Secondly, this conceptualization of nature as being one with God and human world explodes the Western hierarchy of man over nature.

Both Mama Day and Shug interact with nature by being an integral part of the natural landscape. Nature, with all its manifestations and colors, is a living reality for them. For Shug, cutting a tree amounts to cutting her own arm. Similarly, the penetration of natural environment inside the bodies of inhabitants of Willow Springs is so absolute that the moment any visitor steps foot in Willow Springs, he feels as if his senses “were coated with the various shades of greens, browns, and golds in the
muddy flatlands” (Naylor, *Mama Day* 175). It is this interconnection and feeling of being part of everything that gives force to the oppressed characters in Naylor’s fiction and they are able to gain foothold against marginalizing forces of dominant culture.

The treatment of nature as incarnation of God is linked to nature’s role as a healing force in the lives of Afro-American people. Almost every act in the social lives of the inhabitants of Willow Springs involves direct participation of nature. As Christians turn to Christ for help and direction, Naylor gives an alternative picture of people in Willow Springs seeking help from nature in their times of need such as birth, death and illness. Mama Day helps Bernice to conceive by reaching out to the innermost recesses of nature. As a result of her deep faith in nature, Cocoa’s life is saved. Cocoa herself starts growing fresh herbs in her home and in her backyard to keep her husband’s heart strong and ticking. Parsley, thyme, basil, sage, tarragon, oak bark, red sumac, and mallow root are not mere part of wilderness for these women of Willow Springs. These are herbs and parts of plants that have distinct characters, definite use and a positive existence. People of Willow Springs are not just surrounded by nature, but it has entered the very heart of their homes, i.e. their kitchens, as an alive and concerned caretaker. By delineating positive role played by nature in healing the lives of people of Willow Springs, Naylor highlights the role of nature as an active agent of change and she deliberately shakes the Western delineation of nature as passive work-field.

Just like religious rituals revolve around physical manifestation of God, the folk tradition and festive celebrations on Willow Springs centre nature. What Christmas is for the Western world, Candle Walk is for the community of Willow Springs. Candle Walk night is observed/celebrated on December 22. It is a direct and apparent expression of reverence to mother nature. But more than just being a reverence, Candle Walk stresses the motif of partnership between man and nature. In Candle Walk night celebrations, the whole community participates. People give to other people “any bit of something, as long as it came from the earth and the work of your own hands. A bushel of potatoes and a cured side of meat could be exchanged for a plate of ginger cookies, or even a cup of ginger toddy” (Naylor, *Mama Day* 110).
This ritual, deeply rooted in the gifts of nature, maintains the sense of community in the region, for it becomes a noble way to give help to somebody without obliging him or to say thank you for the help received during the year. This custom enshrines the practice of helping and receiving help as the time tested tradition of the community.

By centring the most important celebrations on the island around the gifts of nature, Naylor shows how nature can teach benevolence and enshrine the spirit of sharing in human beings. People who remain in touch with nature are able to extend their kinship to their fellow human beings. It is a theme which Naylor has extended in her characterization of three women characters, namely Mattie, Eve and Mama Day. Mattie’s love for her potted plants, Eve’s labour in her garden and Mama Day’s reliance on woods for her medicinal cures keep these women in touch with nature. Mattie, in *The Women of Brewster Place*, prays in a room surrounded by huge vines and plants. Her yard is filled with seasonal flowers. She has planted and nurtured the greenery about her. Like *Mama Day*, nature is her church. She feels guilty about missing the church. But she sits in her garden and feels assured:

“…if God were everywhere, surely He was here among so much natural beauty and peace” (43). It is this symbiotic relationship with nature that makes these women characters extend the nurturance they receive from nature to other members of their community.

Nature has been a guiding force for the Afro-American people. Deported from their homeland, the slaves were banned from practicing their traditions and culture. Bereft of any resources to fall back on, African slaves spoke to nature, and nature in turn spoke to them about infinite possibilities. It is the beauty and bounty of American landscape that has been giving them hope since the time of slavery. While talking about her piece of land in St. Helena Island, Naylor highlights this aspect of nature in her sixth novel, *1996*:

I came to learn that the only perfect thing about my home was the massive oak that stood in the front yard. It was atleast three hundred years old and swept the ground with its ancient branches. I named her Old Beauty. If trees didn’t have genders, too bad. This one did. Staring at the tree gave me hope. If she had lasted that long and was still
fighting, surely, I could manage the next forty years with patience and resilience. (12)

For Shug, if cutting a tree is like cutting her own arm, for Naylor, tree becomes an extension of human hope, survival and fight against injustice. Naylor sees a living prayer in the sunset. Nature is the spiritual saviour and physical healer in Naylor’s fiction. Nature plays a pivotal role in the folk traditions and rituals. But that doesn’t mean Naylor is offering us another hierarchy of nature over man in response to mindless domination of man over nature. Her vision regarding nature is based on partnership ethics. Through her observation, Naylor seems to be highlighting the Afro-American’s belief that natural environment is connected to human emotions and actions and vice versa. Afro-Americans view cosmos as a living and breathing organism. This perspective stops them from treating nature as a machine or resource to produce finished products. Man is not entitled to act as a law above nature; rather, the human beings are part and parcel of the landscape they inhabit.

For a healthy communication with nature, nature must be approached as a living entity, as a friend. In Mama Day, Naylor convinces us that if you really listen, it is possible for you to understand and communicate with nature. A drop of vapour from her morning tea turning gold gives the message to Mama Day that Cocoa will be “coming in today, a little earlier than expected” (34). For this communication to happen, you have to approach nature as a fellow, as a friend. Mama Day believes, “there is more to be known behind what the eyes can see” (36). Empirical Western thought, which believes in either/or structure of this world, fails to acknowledge the non-hierarchical multiplicity and interdependence of this world.

Naylor echoes Afro-American perspective against any attempt to prune nature. She refuses to accept the picture of man as a protector and the creator of garden of Eden on earth. She is all for nature in its pure, pristine and unadulterated form. Any attempt to culture nature makes it artificial. It makes it a commodity for consumption, thus, breaking its harmonious relationship and communication with the individual and community at large. Naylor clearly gives the message that integrity of nature must be respected at any cost. In her autobiographical novel, 1996, Naylor compares the
effects of commercialization on nature by contrasting the opulence of nature on two Islands, namely Hilton Head and St. Helena:

In Hilton Head, the palm trees have been cultivated to stand in straight lines like soldiers. Shopping malls abound, and the white sandy beaches are hidden from view by concrete highways. A paved, two-lane highway also runs through St. Helena, but, as it makes its way over the bridge from Beaufort to its end at Fripp Island, it is surrounded by salt marshes, tomato fields, and live oaks. You feel that people live on St. Helena, not just tour it. (10)

It was while walking up and down the dusty lanes of this island that Naylor was convinced that purity, serenity and eternity come to reside with human lives if nature is left undisturbed. She supports nature’s right to flourish without pioneering efforts of a pioneer white male. Commodification of nature alienates man from his self, his community and his surroundings, whereas communication with nature keeps one grounded and rooted in one’s culture.

Naylor has underscored a similar concern in *Mama Day*. She clearly shows that in order to keep themselves bonded with the roots of their culture and history, the people of Willow Springs are opposed to the exploitation of nature for material gains. For them, nature is the lifeline to wholesome sustenance. Nature is a means through which they find themselves rooted in their culture and history and at the same time it acts as a source that gives to their present a meaningful sustenance. Afro-Americans’ belief in the co-construction of the social and the natural teaches them to respect the integrity of nature. Their belief in organic existence of nature puts moral sanctions on the actions which can be allowed with respect to exploitation of nature. For them, exploitation of nature is associated with the explosion of their unique ways of living and preserving their sense of community and spirituality. Simply stated, the belief in nature as a living entity is necessary, for it prevents unethical and selfish exploitation of nature for personal or commercial gain.

As against Euro-American concept of agriculture, the indigenous tribes of Africa value hunting and gathering. They believe in finding land for cultivation in the clearings of the woods or near rivers rather than clearing the land for cultivation. From
their tribal life, Afro-Americans retained their belief in common ownership rather than individual property rights. That is why, the developers are not allowed to purchase land in Willow Springs.

In *Mama Day*, Gloria Naylor has convincingly shown Mama Day as the representative of all the inhabitants of Willow Springs. She is never tempted or lured by money considerations. For a short term gain, she never loses sight of the bigger picture. She never favours material advancement at the cost of nature’s loss, for she understands that any breach in the natural fiber of Willow Springs will despoil the physical, psychological and spiritual well-being of their community. That is why, she does not allow the commodification of island at the hands of white industrialists and developers, who, with their fixed binary of man over nature, completely fail to understand the innate power of physical, psychological and spiritual healing of the world of Willow Springs:

Sure, we coulda used the money and weren’t using the land. But like Mama Day told ‘em (we knew to send’em straight over there to her and Miss Abigail), they didn’t come huffing and sweating all this way in them dark gaberdine suits if they didn’t think our land could make them a bundle of money,...You shoulda seen them coattails flapping back across The Sound with all their lies about “community uplift” and “better jobs.” ‘Cause it weren’t about no them now and us later–was them now and us never. Hadn’t we seen it happen back in the ’80s on St. Helena, Daufuskie, and St. John’s?...ain’t nobody on them islands benefited. And the only dark faces you see now in them “vacation paradies” is the one’s cleaning the toilets and cutting the grass. On their own land, mind you, their own land. (6)

Naylor has related domination of nature, women and people of color with the capitalistic perspective. It is the capitalistic motive that prompts the greed to see nature, women and black people as nothing more than resources. Market oriented culture is quick to ignore the ethics and integrity of an organic world. Mama Day knows that people driven by profit can never be concerned with community upliftment. For them, nature and people of color associated with nature will always
remain a resource to be used till they dry out by excessive use. That is why, she mentions that the only dark people you find in those vacation paradises are being forced to do the invisible, exhaustive and underpaid work of cleaning the toilets or cutting the grass.

Mama Day understands how Native Americans and indigenous people were robbed of their land in the name of development. She understands that transferring the ownership of land in the hands of white developers will amount to trading their self-respect and the prospects of their future development. She values land for its own sake and as a living member of the family. She doesn’t want to trade land for money or use it for sheer commercial gain. So, a special clause in the inheritance pattern of Willow Springs forbids the present generation from having any rights over their property. Cocoa admits: “Some kind of crazy clause in our deed. It’s always owned two generations down. That’s to keep any Day from selling it” (219). By protecting the land, they preserve nature and their culture for their future generations. This confirms the Afro-American’s belief that nature and community cannot have smooth development if either of them tends to dominate the other. Naylor believes that if nature and human beings live in a harmonious manner, only then the development of both can be ensured.

This theme of continuous interdependence between nature and the human beings is given a comprehensive treatment in *Mama Day*. Through Willow Springs, Naylor brings out a more wholesome picture of reality, using nature as the central symbol of continuity. Reality and life are not a linear progression as portrayed by the Eurocentric school of thought that advocates a beginning and an end. Naylor relies on the cyclic movement of nature to bring home the reality of the circle of life, emphasized in the Afro-American school of thought. That is why, *Mama Day* begins and ends in 1999. Naylor suggests that the complete understanding of life is possible only when one is ready to appreciate the interconnectedness of the living and the non-living; the real and the magical; natural and the supernatural; past and present; living and dead in wholesome circle of continuation. Mama Day remarks, “And I came to tell you not to worry: whatever roads take her from here, they’ll always lead her back to you” (308).
George dies, but his presence remains. He matures in and after his death. With this wisdom and maturity, he is able to have a dialogue with Cocoa even after his death. She is able to communicate her side and get to know his side of the story even after his death in Willow Springs. After Abigail’s death, every morning Mama Day continues to send routine good mornings to her sister in her standard sentence: “You there, Sister?” and she looks at the forest to listen to her sister’s reply in “the rustling of the trees” (312). According to the Afro-American view, after death, once you become one with earth, you become part of nature and hence, a living entity. So, Mama Day continues to address her sister as someone still alive. Sapphira Wade, who brought freedom to people of Willow Springs, is still alive as a guiding spirit for the younger generations of her community. Mamma Day relies on the vision of Sapphira Wade for her strength and peace.

By highlighting interpenetration of the material (physical), natural and spiritual world, Naylor valorizes animism, an ancient Afro-American system of belief, which perceives “a much more fluid boundary between the natural and the supernatural than do rationalists, a perception presupposing a close connection between the material world and the spirit world” (Hayes 180). By doing this, she challenges the Eurocentric school of thought that is fearful of otherness and turns everything beyond its realm into dead things. Interpenetration of the social, natural and spiritual world is possible when nature is respected as a living and dignified entity.

One of the rituals in Willow Springs requires people to put the green moss from the woods in their shoes before entering the graveyard. The belief is that the presence of moss (nature) will enable the living to hear the voices of their ancestors. As against the Eurocentric belief in dead past, in *Mama Day*, past has a living presence in the present. People of Willow Springs honour their ancestors. They can hear their voices. They turn to them for spiritual guidance. But this connection is facilitated only by nature (moss). By this ritual, people of Willow Springs invest nature with emotional significance and transform the entire natural space into a sacred space. To quote Danielle Russell: “Investing space with emotional significance has the potential to transform the secular into the sacred” (166). Like Toni Morrison, for Naylor too, nature functions as a powerful place of resistance as well as a site of regeneration.
where the past meets the present and the present meets the future with a wholesome connectedness. By holding on to their past and nature, people of Willow Springs resist being marginalized in their own land.

By juxtaposing seemingly two opposite worlds together, i.e. the material and the supernatural, Naylor challenges the Eurocentric preoccupation with the control of reality. By showing interpenetration of human with the natural and the natural with the supernatural, Naylor shows that reality of the natural world is too complex to be ordered into neat labels and categories. Nor can it be mirrored by two dimensional maps and pictures. Here, Naylor puts a question mark on the white world’s romantic conception of nature as a picture postcard. Susan Meisenhelder notes, “…the white world’s maps, pictures, movies, and myths are depicted as inadequate to express black experience” (114). Such static, realistic and two dimensional images only express the surface of Willow Springs beneath which flows subtle but profound flow of the stream of life. Developers are unable to appreciate the real beauty of Willow Springs as their vision remains pigeonholed in the image of ‘the picture postcard’. Naylor has shown that such ways of viewing reality are insufficient and they miss the rituals, social mores, conjure world, divination and spirituality of the community completely. Such two dimensional postcards are likely to miss the physical, psychological and spiritual vitality of natural spheres.

We find George in Willow Springs trying to interpret nature and its signs in terms of connotations and denotations of the white world. George, born and brought up in New York, is thoroughly schooled in white scientific and capitalistic philosophy of individual power of man over nature. He represents the male, Eurocentric perspective about nature. He is frustrated when he is unable to find Willow Springs on any of the maps and that is why, on his visit to Willow Springs, he continues to look at the island with the eyes of a cosmopolitan, mainland man.

When George visits Willow Springs along with Cocoa, he tries to interpret the beautiful island in terms of the white world and he fails miserably. He is baffled by the slow pace of routine in Willow Springs. Taught to be bound with time, George is surprised to see that ‘clock’ is meaningless in Willow Springs. Like white developers, he also fails to notice an underneath current of time of which people of Willow
Springs seem to have a deep understanding. People are leading an unhurried and tranquil life because they respect natural cycle of seasons and nature. The reader is made to see the foolishness of George’s earlier fascination with the control of nature and measurement of reality: “The clocks and calendars we had designed were incredibly crude attempts to order our reality—nearing the close of the twentieth century, and we were still slavishly tied to the cycles of the sun and the moon” (Naylor, *Mama Day* 158). Reality is too complex to be ordered and separated in terms of years and months. The passage of time is recorded in memory also. George himself realizes: “We had invented nothing, had yet to conceive of anything, that could chart the mental passage of time” (158).

Secondly, for him, Willow Springs with its slow pace and abundant natural beauty is a perfect holiday destination. He represents the main thrust of Eurocentric nature writing where nature is presented as an escape from adversity. Through George, in *Mama Day*, Naylor revisits the Western preoccupation with romantic excursion into natural places far away from human populace and habitation.

Afro-American writers do not describe nature for nature’s sake. Nature is always in context of human communities. It is not separate from the human existence. Hence, unlike Eurocentric excursions into wilderness, Afro-American writers conceive a natural world coexisting with human actions and life. This approach has guarded them from writing about nature as the ‘other’.

Nature is a living organic entity and hence a fellow actualized agent in all its spheres. This approach is in sharp contrast to the Western canonical nature writing. Wes Berry notes that writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Thoreau and other Anglo-American writers have conceptualized nature by portraying unending landscapes or excursions into places far removed from human habitation to seek moral lessons of human behaviours. The critic states: “In canonical nature writing, wilderness is often a destination, a playground where a person can be freed for a while from the mathematical progression of modern civilization”(134). He further notes that “In novels and memories by minority writers, however, ‘Wilderness’ is bound up with cultural memory to an extent that it is seldom just a place to escape to”(135).
Gloria Naylor, through her conceptualization of Willow Springs and Eve’s garden, adds to this growing body of Afro-American writers who are positioning their nature narratives along with the master narrative of canonical American nature writing. For writers like Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Gloria Naylor, nature is one with all the human actions. Characters who are at peace with themselves in Naylor’s fiction do not go to nature in search for solace only; rather, they walk with nature. They work with nature to weave a wholesome cosmos of life.

For Mama Day, the other place is not just a place to escape to. Rather, she goes there with her problems in order to actively seek their solution with the real participation and direct involvement of nature in her life and its problems. The history of her community and her family is intertwined with natural environment of the other place. This is what differentiates her perspective from that of George’s approach towards nature.

George’s schooling inculcates the Western myth of origin in his mind. George embodies the Western canonical thrust of nature writing in his vision of Willow Spring as a ‘picture postcard’. For him, the natural beauty of Willow Springs becomes a backdrop against which he wants to play Adam and Eve with Cocoa. He has no qualms in accepting his image as Adam. His training in Christian school and later his specialization in science instils in him the colonial mindset of being the protector, the saviour and finally the user of raw materials of earth.

That is why, George is completely spellbound by the beauty of the tangled beds of wild flowers in the West Woods. He imagines himself as a plantation owner and appoints himself in the role of the keeper/manager/ steward of nature and woman both. He imagines his wife doing little jobs around him. With his wife, Cocoa, in tow in the wild garden with a water view, George imagines himself as a southern plantation owner. For him, nature is nothing more than a pleasure or a fantasy at his disposal and he is happy in his role as a manager of this. He says: “We have a chance to sneak up among these trees and take advantage of paradise, and you’re sitting there with your knees locked” (Naylor, Mama Day 222).

Cocoa, a female and deeply rooted in the natural rhythm of Willow Springs, brings home to him the dangers inherent in viewing nature as a passive paradise.
Cocoa problematizes the relationship between the settler and the setting: “You really don’t know this place. But just go on and roll around in those woods with your clothes off, and the first red ant that bites your behind will tell you all about paradise” (222). George wants to be a farmer, it is Cocoa who reminds him that farming requires back-breaking work and not just wishful thinking. Naylor, time and again, questions George’s vision of nature as a controllable entity.

As opposed to the Biblical Eve who is considered responsible for the Fall, it is Cocoa who tries to save him by pointing out dangers inherent in the realm of nature. Secondly, this perspective of the dark side of nature is required to establish nature as a living, changing and self-actualized being. This view is necessary to establish nature as an independent agency. It pricks George’s fantasy and clearly underlines his folly in regarding nature as picture postcard. The interaction between individual and the natural space is a two-way process. If an individual can act upon the natural landscape, natural forces also have the agency to alter the plans of an individual in the same way. Understanding of this two-way communication is important to comprehend the complexity of humanized landscape. Milkman, the protagonist of Toni Morrison’s *Song of Salomon*, is able to undergo transformation because, through his visit to the south, he is able to appreciate the complex layers of natural environment: “The low hills in the distance were no longer scenery to him. They were real places that could split your thirty-dollars shoes” (257). Unlike Milkman, George fails to grasp the deeper significance of Cocoa’s utterance and remains an outsider to the timelessness of Willow Springs.

Naylor contests the visualization of the American man as pioneers of wilderness. In Eurocentric canon, nature’s wilderness and chaos is more emphasized over the image of nature as nurturer so that man is justified in taming the wild. However, Naylor shows the powerlessness of human beings in the hands of nature in *Mama Day* as George realizes that the power of nuclear generator is nothing in the face of storm that hits Willow Springs. George had worked to redesign a nozzle for a nuclear steam turbine generator with “blade rotations of eighteen hundred revolutions per minute” and a capacity of “over a million kilowatts” to light up every home in New York (251). George represents a male check that engineers and co-ordinates the
management of natural resources for human consumption. For George, this machine has been an ideal embodiment of human power to create everything. It is the storm in Willow Springs that jolts his imagination and he is made to understand the meaning of power. As he experiences the force of water and winds, threatening to split open the very earth on which he is standing, he realizes the power and fury of nature: “But the winds coming around the corners of that house was God” (251). The might and power of his mechanical engineering fails before the magic and independence of nature.

Naylor not only shows powerlessness of man in front of nature, she subverts the picture of the American men as pioneers of wilderness by presenting a more life-reinforcing relationship of women with nature through their gardens. Black women have long been associated with nature and hence have been treated as a part of ‘terra nullis’ that should be mastered and conquered by the pioneers of wilderness.

Carolyn Merchant has shown how Biblical stories and myths passed the responsibility of the upkeep of the nature’s garden in the hands of man:

In the Genesis 2 version, thought to have derived from a different and earlier tradition, God first created the plants and herbs, next “man” from dust, and then the garden of Eden with its trees for food (including the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the center) and four rivers flowing out of it. He then put “the man” in the garden “to dress and keep it,” formed the beasts and fowls from dust, and brought them to Adam to name. Only then did he create Eve from Adam’s rib. (29)

These myths naturalized the role of man as a ‘dresser’ and ‘keeper’ of the nature’s garden. This version of origin story has been quoted at length to show how these Biblical stories and myths passed the responsibility of the upkeep of the nature’s garden into the hands of man. They naturalized the role of man as a ‘dresser’ and ‘keeper’ of the nature’s garden.

Contrary to this Biblical notion, in Naylor’s fiction, no white man or black man is projected as Adam—the saviour of earth from wilderness. The central figure in her garden is not a male pioneer of the frontier but a woman. The woman in her garden diffuses the image of white colonizer entering the virgin land. The image of woman
working as an agent of creativity in her garden confers power on women as agents of creation. Women in Naylor’s gardens give a strong message that they must come out of the confines of their homes and take the responsibility of housekeeping of the whole world in their own hands. While George is horrified with the hurricane that hits Willow Springs, Mama Day looks for signs of hope and recovery of the garden which has been destroyed by the storm. She has no fancy plans of controlling nature; rather, she is trying to work around the natural cycle of rebirth through her garden. In this sense, she is not building over nature, rather she is building around nature:

She’s walking under cloudy skies through her garden, ankle deep in leaves and broken branches. But crumbling a fistful of earth and then licking at her fingers, she knows there’s reason for hope. It’s all right, you [storm] took six peach trees and my big pecan, but at least there’s no salt….

The rest of the garden is sure enough gone, but it was August anyway. She’d salvage what she could and just turn the rest under, fallen birds and all. Let it lay through the rest of the year and start again next spring. Her throat tightens up at the rush of gratitude that there would be a spring…and she’d sit here snug as a bug till her garden was laid by. (Naylor, *Mama Day* 254)

In Mama Day’s world, there is a complete acceptance and understanding of the nature’s fury. She is literally talking to the power of nature as it took away her six peach trees and her big pecan because she knows that she is being given a patient hearing by the spirits of nature. She seems to understand nature’s fury. Her thought process is in sync with natural rhythms of seasons as she is ready to wait till next spring to lay her garden. But George, on the other hand, expects a sun shining in the sky the very next day of the storm. His expectations are grounded in the knowledge he has accumulated by reading Victorian novels and Western texts; whereas, Mama Day’s expectations are more pragmatic as they are rooted in her first hand experience with nature. On the day following storm, George is uncomfortable and restless, whereas Mama Day’s heart is filled with gratitude that there is at least a promise of spring in this devastation. Mama Day’s acceptance of her garden destroyed by the fury
of the storm is important in projecting Naylor’s understanding of nature as a co-existence of sublime beauty and potential dangers.

The garden in Naylor’s fiction also becomes an individual sanctuary which resonates intimate relationship of woman with nature in which nature offers shelter, sustenance and security to its inhabitants. Women on their part recognize this nurturance they receive from nature and treat their gardens as the sites of creativity rather than the sites of exploitation. Eve’s garden is another example of the recognition of nature’s regenerative powers in Naylor’s fiction. Naylor rewrites nature’s imagery when Mama Day and Eve become instrumental in recreating their gardens.

Christian Eve is considered responsible for the fall of Adam from the Garden of Eden. But Naylor’s Eve, in Bailey’s Cafe, becomes an enabling and empowering resource. Eve is brought up by a stern Godfather. While growing up in the preacher’s home, she longs for any human touch or closeness. As she approaches womanhood, she tries to understand the mysteries of her own body by lying on her stomach and being as close as possible to earth. She asks her friend, Billy Boy, to stomp over her.

Masculine hierarchy of the society reserves the privilege of experimenting with one’s sexuality for men only. But Eve’s association with nature shows that this exploration is possible for anyone. She says, “The earth showed me what my body was for” (87). As Toni Morrison notes that masculine Western ideology fears ‘funkiness’: “the dreadful funkiness of passion, the funkiness of nature, the funkiness of wide range of human emotions” (The Bluest Eye 83). When Eve’s Godfather discovers this game, she is outcast by her Godfather. She is thrown out of her home and town in a naked and hungry state. In this state, Eve leans on nature until she becomes one with delta dust and it is her association with nature that preserves her funkiness, her natural expression of herself that is so necessary for the psychological well-being of an individual. It is this association with nature that gives her the strength to refuse to restrict her freedom by the limits set by society.

In Eve, Naylor creates an Afro-American heroine who is not enslaved by the land but who becomes one with it. Eve’s relation with nature is emblematic of possible synchronous interrelation that can exist between human beings and nature.
Eve’s association with nature gives her the strength to rise from the subservient position in a male dominated society to a place of autonomy where she is free to decide her own terms and conditions. She doesn’t require an Adam to recover her garden. Eve is not a wife or a mother, but with her garden, she achieves a unique sense of personhood. Her oneness with nature is complete and she is more than capable to allow her garden to bloom in all seasons. Eve forges a new connection for herself with a kinship with her flowers. Her garden becomes a symbol of her individuality and creativity. Her hard work blooms into a riot of colors:

Even the stone wall blooms around Eve’s garden. And there’s never a single season without flowers. The spring aubrietas and Russian mustard planted between the stones give way to summer pinks that kinda scent the air with clove before the autumn joys take over along with alpine poppies and columbines….

And then there are the flowers around the border of the yard itself that Eve keeps blooming in cold weather: Camellias, coltsfoot, winter Jasmine, pearly everlasting.

She’s got some kind of plan to all of this. (Naylor, *Bailey’s Cafe* 91-92)

The flowers in Eve’s garden bloom unaffected by the harsh realities of gendered and racist hierarchies. Her garden becomes a metaphysical place where the individual self, lost as a result of patriarchal hierarchy, is located and restored. Her garden is a feminine place that symbolizes healing, revival and growth as against the hurt and suppression that a patriarchal society has to offer. Her garden seeks to return the dignity of those women who are labelled as outcast and whores by the outside world. In her garden, her boarders are free to discard their identity and conjure up new identities for themselves.

Eve’s garden is not to be confused with an escape from the turmoil of life; rather, it is a life-saving mechanism that teaches women how to cope with the realities of life with dignity. Her garden not just fulfills the aesthetic need; it is a sheltering and protective space. Eve is not only able to discover herself through her garden, but she also extends its shelter and nurturance to sustain other equally marginalized members of the society. Eve recognizes the power of nature to create and nurture new
beginnings. Her flowers, supple and vibrant products of nature, are a source of inspiration and she extends this hope to instil self-esteem in the women who come to her boarding house. Every gentleman caller must buy a particular bouquet of flowers in order to meet a particular woman in her boarding house. In this sense, her garden becomes both private and public. By asking the callers of her boarding house to offer flowers to the women they wish to see, Eve celebrates a gesture that signifies continuity between the earth and internal well-being and self-esteem of her boarders.

Afro-American women writers are not privileging pastoral landscape as a heavenly retreat. In Naylor’s living cosmology, Willow Springs is not just a picturesque island with natural bounty. Rather, it is a symbol of a community that believes in close-knit, co-operative and organic relationship with nature. It is also symbol of a community that recognizes the rough and the uncontrollable side of nature also. Deadly storm disrupts the peaceful scenery and vandalizes the routine fabric of island community. Little Caesar dies during the hurricane. Conjuring, which heals community, is used by Ruby to poison Cocoa. But the communities that construct their relationship with nature with a belief in their reciprocal and interdependent existence are able to protect themselves from the hierarchies of race and gender of a bourgeois world. The moment one approaches nature as a nonhuman resource, the egalitarian perception of the world changes. Such people end up tying themselves to the particular and bourgeois setting of the capitalistic world.

Naylor has successfully brought out the effects of the white man’s disconnection with nature. Even those Afro-American people who treat nature as a commodity and use it as a source for economic gains are forced to lead a life of alienation. Driven by a strong sense of domination, like the white male pioneers, they become self-centered and their alienation from nature severs their ties with their own family, community and tradition.

Like white male developers, these Afro-Americans treating nature as an object of consumption lose the ability of experiencing the magic of the world of nature. Their preoccupation with exploiting nature acts as a block in understanding the blissful relationship between man and nature. This concern is reflected in the conceptualization of Linden Hills as opposed to the wholesome existence of Willow
Springs. Linden Hills is a failed community because it is based on the foundation that tries to suppress nature and subvert the natural order of things.

In Willow Springs, Mama Day refuses to allow white developers to exploit nature as a showpiece paradise for monetary gain. In Linden Hills, Luther Nedeed uses land and tries to convert it into “A Wad of spit–a beautiful, black wad of spit right in the white eye of America” (9). He literally becomes a real estate agent and acquires a state charter for the new Tupelo Realty Corporation needed to finance and construct private developments. By refusing the developers to put a foot on her land, Mama Day succeeds in preserving the natural environment of Willow Springs and hence its culture; whereas, Luther, as a private developer, himself plans to build over nature and ends up alienating himself and the entire community of Linden Hills from their past and black culture.

Luther is in search of those people who will be willing to erase the memory of their iron chains and will be more than willing to accept this servitude of white gold. Nedeed is on the look out for those tenants who are ashamed of their grandparents’ slavery in the cotton fields and are now eager to “learn how to turn the memory of our iron chains into gold chains” (Naylor, Linden Hills 12). They choose “marble and brick, the fast and sleek” to rule over their past and present (9). Once they suppress nature, they end up suppressing their past and their identity: “Strong, solid walls and heavy, marble steps–the finest in the new community–strong enough, solid enough to bury permanently any outside reflections about other beginnings. The Tupelo Realty Corporation offered them all this, and a memory was a small price to pay” (11). Mama Day goes out of her way to retrieve her past and to stitch her past with the present so that she can follow the natural flow of things; whereas, Luther chooses to build over nature and their racial past.

Mama Day’s perspective of equal partnership between man and nature allows her to protect the growth of Willow Springs as a unified entity. As opposed to the wholesome and self sustaining single unit of Willow Springs, geography of Linden Hills is divided into identifiable landmarks and roads. Willow Springs as a single geographical entity stands for symbiosis whereas division of Linden Hills into eight circular roads represents the hierarchies of a divided society. True to this division of
land is its economic advancement that rules over spiritual advancement in Linden Hills.

The difference in the ethos of Mama Day’s harmony with nature and Luther Nedeed’s dominance over nature is reflected in their character as individuals and leaders which in turn is projected on the ethos of their respective communities. Mama Day’s companionship and co-partnership with nature make her a tolerant, accepting and well-meaning human being, whereas single minded pursuit of land as an ‘ebony jewel’ and its use as a means of black success transforms Luther Nedeed into a living incarnation of devil. His attitude towards his land is reflected in the selection of his wife and his tenants. He uses Linden Hills to turn it into an ‘ebony jewel’. He selects his wife to be another showpiece for himself: “At his tenth college reunion, he’d moved carefully among the ones [women] who had never managed to marry at all by that time. And he noticed those who had lost that hopeful, arrogant strut” (Naylor, Linden Hills 67). For him, finding a wife is like finding a new pair of slippers. For him, finding a mate is not about love, but it becomes a mechanical search when one is trying to find the least noisy and most comfortable pair of slippers. He is in search of somebody who would “quickly forget the foolish dreams that she’d had for a mate ten years ago. She was more than willing to join the life and rhythms of almost any man–and for a man like himself, she’d bend over backward” (68). His selection of black residents for Linden Hills is also based on commodification of people to establish a successful black society. Luther deliberately selects those residents who are willing to suppress the natural within them. He requires “carbon paper dolls” rather than real human beings to adorn his version of paradise.

Suppression of nature instils a certain meanness in Luther Nedeed. He remains outside the circle of compassion and tolerance which comes if one lives in harmony with nature. Naylor shows that to suppress nature is to suppress the essential core values of humanity. Mama Day protects the land and residents of Willow Springs by working in harmony with nature. Nedeed uses land and forces the residents to sell their soul to stay in Linden Hills. Mama Day is tolerant for those who may not share her perspective about life as long as they don’t threaten the community with their evil designs. But Luther is not tolerant towards anyone who has a different viewpoint and
life-style from the way he wants it to be. Luther not only forces his wife to abide by the punishment he has reserved for her for not producing an identical son, he also forces other members of his community to tow his line of thought.

Luther’s relationship with his wife and his residents can be seen as the result of his subjugation of nature into a predefined parameter of American success. He is afraid of the natural growth, fertility and funkiness of nature and that is why, he wants to suppress any sign of deviation in his relationship with his wife and his residents. His relationship with his wife and his residents is not just mechanical but hovers on the point of being devoid of any emotion, empathy and feeling of companionship.

Luther disapproves Winston Alcott’s homosexual alliance with his friend and love, David. He forces Winston to enter loveless nuptial ties with a woman, Cassandra, by secretly threatening to expose his sexuality in the law firm. A lease on the exclusive piece of land in Tupelo Drive Area is used as a bait by Luther to coerce Winston to suppress his natural desires in favour of materialistic advance. Luther’s commercialization of land commodifies people too and relationships are viewed in terms of profit and status.

In this process, Luther dehumanizes himself. He shows no compassion for the actual feelings of the three people affected by this loveless marriage-Winston, Cassandra and David. Luther knows that this suppression of natural desires will break Winston into pieces. He knows that by this loveless marriage, he will be pushed to the brink of suicide in the next five years. Yet he doesn’t show any compassion or empathy. He is more concerned about protecting the shine and sheen of his ‘ebony jewel’ than with the vitality of his space and people. To project an image that is considered the standard and acceptable in the society, he doesn’t mind suppressing the natural deviation.

This is the difference between him and Mama Day. Mama Day is an acknowledged leader, for she fuses creativity and vibrancy of nature with the growth of people; whereas, Luther forces himself to be a leader by suppressing and squeezing nature and the natural in acceptable categories and labels. Mama Day’s kind-heartedness is reflected in her single-minded pursuit to protect the happiness of the
members of the society. Luther’s dominance over his landscape engenders cruelty and nihilism in him that propels him to subjugate human beings as lifeless commodities.

Naylor has shown in unambiguous terms that nature is sacred and it is a continuous source of physical, psychological and spiritual well-being rather than just being a resource for raw materials. Close proximity with nature facilitates growth and keeps one rooted in one’s culture. It teaches tolerance, compassion and resilience. Naylor has openly challenged the powerful assumptions of the Eurocentric world that have given legal, moral and natural sanction to man’s proprietorship over nature. She questions the futility of these assumptions when she shows how suppression of nature alienates one from his self and community. Suppression of nature lays the foundation for suppression of women and other members of the society who are considered close to nature. Nature is not a background for human actions. Nor it is an escape from the hardships of life. Rather, it’s a companion in man’s life. Nature shares its past and present with human history. Until whites and black reconceptualize their relation with nature, it will not be possible to redress the problematic social hierarchies of race, gender and class as they operate in American Society. For this, it is imperative that destructive models of social/natural relations must be replaced by more egalitarian and life-affirming designs.
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