Chapter Five

TOWARDS SALVAGING AND REDEMPTION:

BAILEY’S CAFE
With her fourth novel, *Bailey’s Café* (1992) Naylor completes the sequence of novels that she conceives as a ‘quartet’ that includes *The Women of Brewster Place, Linden Hills, Mama Day* and, *Bailey’s Café*. At this, Naylor feels self-confident enough to call herself a writer. After the publication of *Bailey’s Café*, in one of her book tours, she declares that it takes her through the final step of her literary career. In a conversation published in *The Writer* she admitted that it is as if she had all along been undergoing apprenticeship, and with *Bailey’s Café* she became a writer. She realizes that she has set the goal to become a writer and has achieved it. Naylor confirms the same to Donna Parry:

With this last novel, Bailey’s Café, I have done the quartet that I had dreamed about. As I look back, I wasn’t keeping stock of time or anything, but this is 1991, and I finished *The Women of Brewster Place* in 1981, and now I had finished the quartet. This was to lay the basis or the foundation – I saw it like this little square foundation – for a career I was going to build, so, I now believe that I will have the kind of career I want.1

*Bailey’s Café* is a collection of life profiles of nearly half a dozen women and a few elite men. They are told in a variety of voices thus making it polyphonic in tone. Naylor continues the same in her next novel *The Men of Brewster Place* (1995) in which similar interwoven stories are told, but of men. *The New York Times Book Review* describes Naylor’s *Bailey’s Café* as ‘a virtuose
orchestration that sings of survival, suffering, courage, and humour of certain characters. Michael D. Sharp while discussing the structure of Naylor’s novels says:

*Bailey’s Café* relies on the structure of a musical composition: a maestro, the nameless narrator, often called Bailey, introduces seven characters, each of whom performs a song or tells a story to the invisible audience [the book’s readers] sometimes characters from one song play a part in the solo of another character. But all the songs together add up to form the entire score, the novel *Bailey’s Café*.²

The frame story for *Bailey’s Café* is Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*. Like Chaucer, Naylor has constructed her characters in such a way that they are on a pilgrimage as well. While Chaucer sends his pilgrims on a religious journey, Naylor sends her pilgrims on a journey of self-redemption. This seems to be the whole premise on which the patrons’ accidental or purposeful visits to the café or Eve’s boarding house are based. The setting of Bailey’s Café and Eve’s boarding house provide the ground on which characters unfold their troubled stories. Bailey the narrator becomes Chaucer who narrates their tales. It is evident that Naylor esteems the European classics to the core and is sensitive to the denotations of them.

In *Bailey’s Café* Naylor continues to appropriate familiar stories from Western culture, but by modifying content and form, she recasts them in ways that destabilize absolute ontological boundaries defined by genre, gender politics class

184
cultural and literary tradition. To this end, she deliberately foregrounds a reciprocal relation that potentially obtained among all texts—and incipient intertextuality, which she makes increasingly overt in her novels, says Margot Anne Kelley.

Eventually, with the addition of Bailey’s Café, the quartet of novels becomes self-reflective and regenerative, their ‘meaning’ and relation to one another, and to their Western ‘precursors’ constantly in flux, depending on one’s point of reentry. Thus, the relationship of Bailey’s Café to the quartet is exactly analogous to the relationship of the quartet to the Western literary tradition itself: belying established boarders and significations, the parts reconfigure the whole. As a group, the novels create a dynamic system of intertextuality that does not nearly make room for the ‘other’ in the Western tradition but, rather, modulates the new materials, reconfiguring the tradition itself. Naylor co-opts the entire properties of that language as correspondence to properties in her matrix of thought and expression as an African American woman. Moreover, Naylor clearly conceives of the entire properties of language as not only the word itself and the Western literary tradition at large, but, at the same time, any and all discourses integral to Western—American culture.

Naylor has admitted to Morrison once having felt that she lacked the authority to write because the ‘masters’ were either ‘male or white’. Then she read Morrison’s The Bluest Eye which uses paradigmatic white middle class cultural narrative against them to expose their disastrous consequences for an impoverished black family. From Morrison’s disfigurement Naylor learned that literary ‘barriers were flexible’, that ‘you can create your own genre’. While writing The Women of 185
Brewster Place, her initial effort to create a genre of her own, Naylor was already conceiving of a 'quartet of novels' that she believed 'would be a foundation of her career'. In one sense than, their eventual interconnectedness encompass much more than the links between seemingly disparate character and locales.

Bailey's Cafe is a psychological and didactic fiction. It is set in a diner and a boarding house in Brooklyn of 1948. The story moves with the characters of the postwar American society. What the narrative moves toward is certain of a reality deeply rooted in the black vernacular that more closely reflects the particular experiences of marginalized women across the globe. Naylor is clear that the café moves about appearing wherever and whenever someone is in a problem and needs a place to get encouraged to come back to normalcy. It is somewhere in between a dream allegory and blatant reality. Geographically, the café is found nowhere. People can enter the café from the real world at any point. The unusual location of Bailey's Café, which exists 'everywhere and nowhere', points to its symbolic significance. It represents the unexplored boundaries of a creative consciousness that is at once both black and female. The edge of the world is at the front door and the void at the back. It is clearly magical and mystical. Dan Wakefield points to the mystical concept of the novel:

"You can find Bailey's Café in any town," for this setting is not the geography of Brooklyn but the territory of the soul. Bailey's "sits right on the margin between the edge of the world and infinite possibility." You step out the back door "in to the midst of nothing"
and there are people who come in and head straight for that door and are never seen again. Yet others with the same intention stay and find some quirky, unexpected, singular kind of salvation.3

Eve’s boarding house is down the street where Bailey’s café is located. It is also phantasmagorical like the café. It is run by the mother figure, Eve who helps in healing the residents of their wounds inflicted by men in their lives. These down-and-out women who are deeply scared by their past come to Bailey’s Café when they reach certain level of hopelessness. Further, they remain at Eve’s since they cannot go anywhere else. At the same time they gain a glimmer of hope, at least a safe haven, if not redemption. Eve’s boarding house is only a way station and sends people back into a meaningful existence after they get healed of their physical and spiritual crisis. But the healing process in their lives starts in their decision to pick up the loose ends of their lives. If they decide to get healed they would ask how to get to the Eve’s to start life again. Therefore, Naylor, analyses that the novel ‘is about starting over again’.

In addition, Bailey’s Café attempts to deal with female sexuality. Naylor makes many references to the Biblical women of religious overtones. She makes it clear to Tomeiko Ashford:

Eve is Eve from the Bible. What I did in Bailey’s Café was to retell classic stories of women in the Bible. So, that’s why you have Eve and you have two
Marys – one Mary Magdalene and one the Virgin Mary. You have Jessie Bell, you have Peaches. I’m trying to think of Peaches’s title. She was ... Mary Take One. The Ethiopian girl was Mary Take Two. So, with Eve what I was doing was restructuring the Eve that was made of that came out of the dust in the Bible, and she was the mother of us all. Therefore, this Eve becomes a mothering figure for all the other woman.⁴

Maxine Lavon Montgomery too establishes Naylor’s purpose of relying on the Bible in conveying the theme of the novel:

Her [Naylor] heavy reliance upon Scripture particularly that from the Old testament canon relevant to female sexuality, as an intertext sheds light on her attempts to redeem her female characters from the places assigned to them by a male – authored text and to restore their status and dignity.⁵

Karen Joy Fowler notices similar aspects of the novel for the fulfillment of the theme. He details it as a powerful expression of Naylor’s ideals:

The book is clearly religious- filled with Biblical references and retorts to Biblical stories – and, just as clearly, magical. It posits the destructive power of real events and argues that fiction is equally powerful. It encompasses history, myth, imagination and quotidian detail. So much is packed into a
relatively short book, so little let out, that it spills into the imagination of the reader and travels in a hundred different directions.\textsuperscript{6}

Amy Benson Brown also establishes the biblical revision in *Bailey's Café* by stating:

It is a Bible-quoting battle between a frigid fundamentalist and a quasi-supernatural madam that inspires Bailey the overarching narrator of Gloria Naylor's *Bailey's Café*, to remark on the Bible size—“Awfully large”, however, refers not merely to the length. Bailey sardonic response to the interpretive battle being waged in the café underlines the breadth and diversity within the ancient text that Naylor engages in her revision of several women biblical characters. With these characters Naylor examines the constructions of heterosexual identity through which African American women's sexuality, in particular, has been understood. Safely, ensconced in the ‘whore house convent’\textsuperscript{116} that is Eve’s boarding house, Esther, Jessie Bell, and the two Marys tell their stories of orgines. “Home” in each of the women characters’ stories represents the site of the construction and control of women’s identity and sexuality. Naylor’s biblically informed imagination however, constantly underscores the fact that the production of meaning is always mythical and textual as well social and historical.\textsuperscript{7}

189
The characters in the novel belong to 1948 Brooklyn and it is Christmas season as in Naylor's *Linden Hills*. Naylor uses Bailey's voice in establishing time, place, and characters for each woman's stories, except that of Mariam. Among the women characters Eve is the first customer to enter Bailey's Café. Eve, whose name means 'mother of all living,' is essentially self-generated. It is her narrative in particular whose discrete patterns signal the recursive structure present in black women's writing - a structure repeated in the other narratives which comprise the text. Not only does "Eve's Song", with its references to the Louisiana delta soil suggest a dissolving of traditional historiography, it reveals a freedom from imposed gender-specific labels. "I had no choice but to walk into New Orleans neither male nor female - mud", she informs. "But I could right then and there choose what I was going to be when I walked back out" (*BC*, 91).

Maxine Lavon Montgomery relates Eve to the biblical Eve:

One cannot help but to associate Naylor's fictionalized Eve with her biblical predecessor, who uses her feminine charms to entice a gullible Adam to eat of the forbidden fruit and thus defy divine law. In a similar sense, Naylor's Eve encourages a creative revisioning of the spaces that traditionally have defined women's lives. That Eve walks, she tells us, a thousand years before reaching Bailey's is an important allusion linking her role among a community of women to the millenial reign of Christ. On one level, she is a redemptive figure for

190
women such as the feisty Jesse Bell, who turns to heroin and female lovers when her marriage into the wealthy Sugar Hill King Family ends in a bitter divorce.⁸

The newspaper misrepresents Jesse in its sensationalized account of her divorce. Her lament that she “didn't have no friends putting out the Herald Tribune” (BC,118) suggests the exclusion of the experiences of women of colour from the written word and the printed text. Yet in the retelling of her story Jesse reads her own life-story in such a manner as to subvert the voice of Bailey, who sets up her narrative. According to Jesse, Eve's role in Jesse's recovery is questionable at best. Eve relies upon magic or the power of conjure in curing Jesse's addiction to heroin by engineering a series of well-crafted illusions which allow Jesse to have unlimited access to the enslaving drug. During Eve's unconventional treatment of Jesse, in a moment of exasperation, Jesse tells Eve to go to hell. Eve's rather pointed response directs attention to the ambivalent fictional world that informs the novel: “I think you've forgotten that's where we are” (BC,141).

Naylor's Eve is thus a character that can be placed of within the antithetic poles of mother-figure in African American writings. Neither an Eve, in the biblical sense, nor strictly a Madonna, she resides somewhere between the two extremes. Her ability to manipulate reality and her close affinity with the supernatural are qualities that invite a comparison with folk figures such as the shape-shifting trickster or the revered conjure woman. Despite the many ambiguities surrounding Eve's character,
her role in the narrative action is to be considered in terms of her effect on her female ward Jesse. The omniscient narrator points out is cured in less than a month.

Eve is one of the victims of male perpetuation of oppression and is made a scapegoat of her godfather’s obsession with sex. Added to this, Billy Boy, with his childish pranks troubles her. Finally, it results in her ostracism. She manages to escape the tragic fate, and on reaching Bailey’s Café, takes interest in business and love for gardens. Eve is the biblical Eve and her relation to the godfather is like that of Eve’s and God’s in the Garden of Eden. He is also a figure of male authority. Her success comes in recreating herself to redeem the outcast women. Maxine Lavon Montgomery attributes magical powers to Eve, showing her extra ordinarily significant:

That she has no clear-cut parental ties suggests that she is at once natural and supernatural-more than a mere woman - and her song is replete with references to organic matter, especially the rich delta soil, God father claims to have found her “in a patch of ragweed, so knew I was still tied to the birth sac.”(BC, 83)

Nadine, who is also called Deenie, is the wife of Bailey. At the time of the story she has been married to Bailey for twelve years. They both are the right kind of fit for each other. She is the second powerful woman, next only to Eve. She is also definitely an impressive character like Eve. She narrates Mariam’s sad story which is a horrible female experience. Naylor presents her as taciturn and serious,
therefore, Karen Joy Fowler, finds her a disappointment in the novel in narrating Mariam's story:

Nadine is supernaturally taciturn. Her silence has such a powerful, magical feel that one of the few disappointments is chapter in which she begins to talk. She gives us the story of Mariam.⁹

Montgomery has a different opinion:

(Thus) in retelling Mariam’s tale, Eve and Bailey’s otherwise reticent help-meet Nadine forms a duet, for the male voice is severely limited in its ability to decode the very private experiences the women relate. Bailey can offer empathy but not immediately between Mariam, the speaking subject, and the reader/audience.¹⁰

In the second chapter, “The Vamp” Bailey introduces the two ‘one note players’ Sister Carrie and Sugar Man. Sister Carrie is a religious fanatic and pretends to be highly moralistic. Sugar Man, who is a pimp, pretends to be a benefactor of women but, actually, both are interested in controlling others. Although they are only ‘minor voices’ as Bailey says, they illustrate the fact that the truth lies in what happens under the surface.

In the long section that follows “The Jam”, the characters do bare their souls ‘play [ing] it all out’. In each of these seven chapters the characters reveal a
life so full of suffering and defeat and, as a result they end at Bailey’s Café. The first three stories, those of Sadie, Eve, and Sweet Esther, all describe the betrayal of a girl child by a person from whom protection, care and love are expected. Sadie’s mother contemptuously uses her child first as a servant, and then as a profitable prostitute. Sweet Esther’s brother barters her to an older, propertied farmer in exchange of higher sharecropping wages when she is only twelve. Her brother knows that he will brutalize and corrupt her. As a result, Sweet Esther is found in a state of self-hatred and homophobia. At Eve’s bordello she is confined to a cellar. She does not see the face of the men who come to her. She takes nothing but white roses for her particular favours. The reason, she says: “[But] I do like the way the white roses show up in dark. I can see them clearly, very clearly, as they wither and die.” (BC, 99)

Another two women, Peaches and Jesse Bell enjoyed only kindness when they were children but disaster awaits them in the adult hood. In the case of Peaches, her father almost worships her and in her adulthood she demands sexual homage from every man she meets. Jesse Bell’s problem is her upper class husband who resents and humiliates her for her backwardness. At last, she rebels, disgraces herself and destroys her marriage. She is a heroin addict when she reaches Eve’s. Mariam, a fourteen year old Ethiopian Jew has been destroyed by the male dominated society’s preoccupation with female chastity. She is circumcised to destroy her pleasure in sex, sewed up to ensure her virginity. So, Mariam could not possibly have been impregnated by a man. Naylor describes what has happened to Mariam in her village:
Finding her a decent husband would be difficult with so many other virgins to choose from and that is why she [Mariam’s mother] had the midwives close her up that tightly. It raises a woman value. So you see, if it had been rape, the whole village would have heard her screams. Even on the wedding night, the ensaslaye, with a willing bride and cautious husband, the village will hear the scream.” (BC, 152)

Mariam repeatedly says that no man has ever touched her. It is inscrutable as to how Mariam is pregnant. The people of her village expel her with an intention that she should die. The social custom and religious laws demand her expulsion. Finally, Mariam ends up in Eve’s boarding house alongwith other dispossessed women. Naylor equates Mariam to Virgin Mary and her son George’s birth to that of the birth of Christ.

Naylor sets out to reclaim the stories of women by giving voice to those individuals whose experiences are often excluded from written history. By dedicating her novel to “the two Luecelias: 1898-1977, 1951-1987”, for instance, says Montgomery, she reveals the novel’s blurring of traditional conceptions of time, space, and identity. Her heavy reliance upon scripture, particularly that from the Old Testament canon is relevant to female sexuality, as an intertext sheds light on her attempts to redeem her female characters from the places assigned to them by a male-authored text and to restore their status and dignity. Notions of morality which the Bible sanctions are held up for scrutiny. When Sister Carrie of the Temple of
Perpetual Redemption quotes the Bible in condemning Jesse Bell because of her succession of female lovers, Eve, who was reared by a preacher, quotes the book as well: “Thou also, which hast judged thy sisters, bear thine own shame for thy sins that thou hast committed more abominable than they: they are more righteous than thou: yea, be thou confounded also and bear thy shame, in that thou hast justified thy sisters” (BC,135). In her citation of this Old Testament passage from Ezekiel, Naylor thematizes the importance of global harmony among all women regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, or even sexual preference. Eve turns Sister Carrie's narrow, legalistic, and homophobic perspective on its ear by stressing the essential oneness between Jews and Gentiles and encouraging a non-judgmental stance toward issues of morality set forth in divine law. In her revisionist use of scripture, Naylor thus, ushers in a new era for women whose lives were once circumscribed by a discourse that is male-authored, and therefore paves the way for a more sensitive reading of the texts of African American women.

The stories which comprise the novel echo and reecho each other, but resist closure. Naylor mentions that she feared the sense of finality suggested by her first novel, *The Women of Brewster place*. Already she had begun the emotional trek to Linden Hills, whose environs are visible from Brewster. Within the tradition of African American women's fiction Naylor's texts are unique in that they are symbiotically related: Brewster's community activist Kiswana Browne is from the middle-class Linden Hills: Cocoa, in *Mama Day*, is a cousin to Willa Prescott Needed, who perishes along with her husband and son in the apocalyptic flames.
which destroy the Needed home in Linden Hills. Cocoa's husband George sees Bailey's Cafe from Harlem. Mariam's son, also named George, is to attend Wallace P. Andrews Boy's Home echoes the story-line in Mama Day, for Cocoa's husband is a product of that academy.

The female subjectivity to male desire is echoed throughout the stories of the women. Such is the case with Sweet Esther, whose pervasive hatred for men stems from the commodification of black women within the context of a rural economic system. Esther suffers exploitation as her elder brother barters her to an older, propertied farmer in exchange for higher sharecropping wages. Passively, Esther surrenders to the farmer's whims while he chooses to be intimate with her only in the cellar of his home. The pink and lace-trimmed bed where she must sleep alone reveals her confinement to a socially prescribed gender role. Her monologues point to a profound self-hatred in a world that evolves no terms for her existence.

Regarding the male characters in Bailey's Cafe, Naylor moves away from showing them as negative forces. She produces certain dignified male characters, among whom. Bailey, the Cafe's manager is the most impressive. Naylor infuses complexity and depth of character in him. He is full of humour and insight and is the narrator for most part in the novel. Bob Corbett highlights Naylor's skill in presenting Bailey in place of the author. "Since he [Bailey] narrates the story and sets the stage for the other characters to reveal their lives to us, there is a tendency to think of him as the author."
Bailey is not his name but he never mentions his real name. When he and his wife, Nadine take over the run down café called ‘Bailey’s’, he is stuck with the name by his customers. He is an avid fan of basket ball, especially the Negro Proleague and a World War II veteran also. After the atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the World War II in which Bailey took part and was overcome by guilt and despair. Nadine rescues and installs him in the café. He is seen in the novel as a curious character always interested in others, talking to his customers, and speculating about life. If Ben is the hero of Naylor’s first novel The Women of Brewster Place, Bailey is the hero of Bailey’s Café.

While upholding Bailey for his psychological intensity of characters on one side, Maxine Lavon Montgomery disapproves him for not offering ‘satisfactory ending to the moving stories that unfold’ on the other side. He just leads the stories and leaves them for the readers’ analysis. He is further criticized for not allowing happy endings to the women’s stories. He declares his contention of life in the section, “The Wrap”:

If this was like that sappy violin music on Make-Believe Ball room, we could wrap it all up with a lot of happy ending to leave you feel real good that you took the time to listen. But I don’t believe that life is suppose to make you feel good, or make you feel miserable either. Life is just supposed to make you feel. (BC, 219)
Despite criticism, Bailey, like Ben is Naylor's constructive and worthwhile character. She denies any denotation added to have a male catalyst for the broken women's restoration in an interview to Tomeiko Ashfort. But to the readers it imports her concern for the male society as in the case of her other novels except *The Women of Brewster Place*.

Naylor devotes another successful story in *Bailey's Café* to Stanley, another significant male character. His middle names are Backwouth Booker Taliaferro Washington Carver. But, in the novel he is called Miss Maple. He is a rich, and well-educated son of a wealthy Negro Mexican family. He is a Ph. D in Statistics from Stanford; the time when not many blacks have Ph. D. In the process of job hunt as a statistical analyst he was rejected for ninety-nine times because America is not ready to accommodate a Negro in a decent frame. He travels across America during the summer of 1948 only to find himself 'a victim of his own stupidity':

I didn't travel below the Mason – Dixon for what I thought then were obvious reasons. A victim of my own stupidity- anywhere the bus could have taken me in the forty-eight states was all *south* of the Canadian boarder. The offers accumulated: bellboy, mail room clerk, sleeping-car porter, elevator operator. And after all, who was I to turn down an honest living? There were other Negroes with Ph. D's doing this work. Who was I indeed? (*BC*, 166)
Even at Stanford, Stanley’s work is not easy, because he is a black man. He puts in sincere efforts to get decent grades, but the professors give him only C and D grades. It is the same with all other Ethiopian League of black students on the campus. Stanley, while answering a theory paper, reworked on Kant’s critique of ‘Pure Reason’ all the weekend and reproduced in the examination. He also put his name on top of the answer sheet. Stanley found the same ‘D’ grade. His professor repented for not being able to give him a better grade. He pleaded with Stanley to understand him. Stanley, in return, was grateful to him for his concern and confession.

Stanley’s bitterness was aggravated when his Negro blood was refused by the Red Cross during the World War-II. His story is full of such instances through which he survives. Naylor is capable of breaking a new ground by producing alternative modes of masculine identity in Stanley’s character. Peter Erickson observes Naylor’s unique dimension is portraying Stanley’s character, in *Bailey’s Café*.

The last, longest and most important story is devoted to a man. This is where Naylor breaks new ground. . . In *Bailey’s Café* Naylor provides a positive masculinity. It is a sign of Naylor’s humor that the man capable of this masculinity bears the name Miss Maple and wears women’s dresses.¹²

Stanley is transformed into Miss Maple, a transvestite house keeper and bouncer for Eve’s. He is not a product of sexual ambiguity or confusion, but just
provides a different dimension of manhood. The essence of his story is that he tries to fit into Corporate America, but fails to. Then, he gives up his grey flannel suit for light percale house dresses, which signals that he has shunned corporate America once for all. Sugar Man who is a symbol of traditional manhood has a misconception about this transformation. He is anxious if Miss Maple is a homosexual. But it is not the case with Bailey who honours Stanley for his transposition and points to Sugar Man’s view of Stanley: “And it does no good to tell him [Sugar Man] for the thousandth time that Miss Maple isn’t homosexual. Sugar Man has had to cling onto that or he would just about lose his senses when Miss Maple is around.” (BC, 163)

Naylor does not show Miss Maple as a case of sexual ambiguity nor of gender indeterminacy but is only as a different definition of manhood. It is not that Stanley’s story is less painful than that of the women’s. But, Naylor skillfully offers a study of diverse crisis in the case of males. The most poignant aspect of the novel is to call for attention the black man as a female contender and the white dominant society as a black male contender, the concept very much true in Stanley.

Stanley is acquiescent to give-up his ‘self’ for ‘peace’ and is comfortable in erasing his original identity as in the case of Ellison’s Invisible Man. In the case of Invisible Man, Ellison is credited for self-realization his protagonist attains being isolated. Therefore, he is a positive model for male identity. Same can be said true about Naylor’s character Stanley. Stanley, instead of resorting to some extreme decision, or revolting against the oppressors, he gives us an affirmative signal for
male identity. It’s another way of self realization, attained in isolation as a result of racism.

In order to reach a different definition of manhood, Miss Maple, then Stanley, has had to overcome the same anxiety: “Manhood is a pervasive preoccupation when you’re an adolescent boy, and you tend to see a fairy under every bush.” (BC, 175) This fear is concentrated on his father, whom the son regards according to conventions as “a coward for his refusal to fight back against white racist harassment: (but) I didn’t see him as a man at all.” (BC, 173) Eventually the boy’s view is reversed, he breaks out of the impasse in which his resentment toward his father has trapped him and comes to realize that his father is instead the model for an alternative manhood: ‘how to be my own man’. How Naylor brings about this transformation is testimony to the brilliance of her comic imagination.

In the funniest moment of the book, Naylor has the father and son (Stanley and his father) stripped naked and locked in a storeroom by four uncouth white brothers, whereupon the two black men put on female clothing, break out of their prison, and take revenge by summarily dispatching each of the four whites in turn. The scene could not be more cartoonish, slapstick, and farcical, yet the secret of Naylor’s comic inventiveness is that its effects are both hilarious and deeply moving, at the same time, as though the hilarity gave access to deeper levels of feeling. Under the duress of their imprisonment, Stanley’s angry outburst against his father suddenly gives way to the physical contact he had earlier shunned. “Papa reached out to me in the darkness and I jerked my shoulder away from his hands. Don’t you touch me.
My teeth were clenched. Just don’t touch me.” (BC, 180) Further, he resents at his father’s inaction:

You don’t even amount to the ape they [the white men] called you—you’re nothing. And you’ve always been nothing. Nothing . . . nothing. . . noth. . . . My whole body started vibrating, my teeth chattering, my hands and leg muscles moving with a will of their own. He caught me in his arms before I fell to the floor. And then he placed me down gently to hold me as I cried like the child I was. My flesh against his flesh. . . (BC, 181-182)

Forced by the occasion, the father for the first time expresses his hope that his son “identify yourself as a man” and the son begins to have a new understanding of what—from his father’s perspective—it means “to become a man.”

The reconciliation of father and son is confirmed by the father’s abandonment of passive resistance and his recourse to violent retaliation. Ironically, what finally provokes his heroic attack is the white men’s desecration of the complete set of Shakespeare volumes the father has purchased as a “legacy” for his son: “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. The stench of The Tempest was quickly filling the close room.” (BC, 183) The entire network of Shakespearean allusions through the previous three novels is compressed into one
image- the Shakespeare corpus represented in the most literal way possible as a set of books, physical objects shipped in a crate. The image illustrates the complex, multiple effects of Naylor's comedy. On one level, the educated, self-confident black man is moved to defend the Shakespearean heritage against ignorant whites. Yet, on another level the humour turns in a different direction to make the Caliban-like gesture of destroying the books a magnificent act of exorcism. As a fitting conclusion to her long engagement with Shakespeare over the course of the quartet, this farewell is a riddance ritual that announces the end of Naylor’s artistic apprenticeship. The moment is not only unaccountably funny but also satisfying. The taboo surrounding Shakespeare as sacred icon is broken; we are allowed to experience Naylor’s outrageous comic violation as a release.

The final section of the novel that follows Miss Maple’s story continues the focus on male identity and enters what might be considered non Shakespearean territory: the relationship between blacks and Jews. The problems of black anti-Semitism and Jewish racism have recently received new attention. Naylor’s contribution to this discussion is deeply affecting because she is able to use the medium of fiction to convey the possibility of cooperation.

Bailey’s Café is situated between Eve’s boarding house and Gabriel’s pawn shop. Gabe is a Russian Jew in America. The customers are directed to the Café from the pawnshop, because there is a sign board with a red and gold coloured arrow mark pointing to the café. The card board with painted clock and movable hands shows the time of Gabe’s arrival to the shop. If flipped, the card board reads: *out of*
business. He never opens his shop, and Bailey never closes the café. Naylor is symbolic in her description of Gabe: “His spine is bent from straddling so much of the world for so long and his eyes water constantly from the strain of all he’s seen.” (BC, 145) Naylor reflects upon the vast experience that Gabe had with the world. Bailey and Gabe talk for hours about politics, the War and the bloodshed in Europe on Jews. Gabe is sure of his opinions, whereas, Bailey’s is unsolicited.

Gabe is certainly a redeemer since, it is he who directs Mariam, the fourteen year old pregnant girl, the Ethiopian Jew to Eve’s boarding house. Like the angel Gabriel who announces Christ’s birth to Virgin Mary he guides Mariam to Eve’s. It is in Eve’s boarding house Mariam delivers a boy child signalling the birth of Christ. Thus, Gabe is responsible for the emancipation of Mariam.

Margot Anne Kelley analyzes the success of Naylor’s projects in her novels, particularly the musical rhythm in Bailey’s Café, after the formal design of blues and jazz. Naylor modulates the design of her novel’s individual narratives within a frame tale with the recursive suppleness of the blues like Mood: Indigo. By infusing her novels with musical rhythms and borrowing blues terminology, for example, as in the section “The Vamp” and “The Wrap” as a structures device, she effects a merger of two artistic forms’.

As a proof for African American experience, the blues ‘matrix’ shaping Bailey’s Café renders the tales of its once silenced wayfareres powerfully
audible. At the same time, it structurally signifies or its Western ‘origin’, creating ‘intersections of experience where the blues singer and his performance absorb and transform discontinuous experience with formal expressive instances that bear only the trace of origins, refusing to be pinned down to any final, dualistic significance.

In a New York National Public Radio interview with Tom Vitale in “Moring Edition” on 22 September 1992 Naylor explained that the story of Sadie and Ice Man Jones is her attempt to “transliterate Duke Ellington’s Mood Indigo” a composition that leaves her ‘feeling every sort of lack, every sort of ‘might have been’ imaginable”. In a later Interview with Charles Bowell, Naylor explains that the entire novel began with an image of Sadie and Ice Man conjured by Ellington’s tune. When she began Bailey’s Cafe Naylor explains: “the only thing I know. . .about this novel [was] that it was going to be shaped by jazz.”

A creative juxtaposition of chapter titles drawn from the realms of music and drama with individual narratives reminds the reader/audience of the close relationship between the written text and the performance mode adds inspiration for the novel. Thus, the title of Sadie's touching narrative, “Mood: Indigo,” is taken from Duke Ellington's popular 1931 jazz composition, and Naylor admits that Sadie and suitor Iceman Jones floated into her consciousness on the strains of that tune. More than any other musical form, it is the blues, with its characteristic repetition-with-a-variation scheme, that anticipates the discrete linguistic patterns of the text. An enigmatic epigraph serves to introduce the novel: “hush now can you hear it can’t be faraway needing the blues to get there look and you can hear it look and you can hear
it look and you can hear the blues open a place never closing: Bailey's Café and
the same performance resonates in the final section, as well. The book begins with
"Maestro, if you please", (BC, 3) in which Bailey is the band leader. The similar
structure of jazz concert has a harmonious ending, where in all the characters coming
together for the birth and ritual circumcision of Mariam’s baby boy George. In the
brief final section of the novel which is aptly titled ‘The Wrap’ has a suggestion for
universal love and peace. The black male Bailey and, the Russian Jew Gabriel, join
to celebrate the birth of Mariam’s baby boy, George. Miss Maple (Stanley) also joins
them. The three prominent males of the novel respond to the very first cry of
Mariam’s son, George.

Naylor describes how the women celebrate George’s birth: Jesse dances, Ether smiles, and Peaches sings a Christmas carol. It is being sung in unison:

Peace on earth, Mary rocked the cradle
Tell him — was with the child of God.
Mary rocked the cradle and Mary rocked the cradle.
Peace on earth, Mary rocked the cradle.
Tell him --- was with the child of God. (BC, 226)

The same men Bailey, Gabriel, and Miss Maple preside over the
ceremony of circumcision, Gabriel has to perform the ceremony, Bailey as a
godfather to George and Stanley as another male guest on the occasion. Unlike in
her first novel The Women of Brewster Place, where solidarity among women of the
same community is pivotal, Naylor in Bailey’s Café extends her vision and suggests
universal accord. Mariam's story has a general appeal for the worldwide oppressed women. The naming ceremony and carol singing in unison with call – and – response pattern are relevant suggestions of a cultural code among an international community of outcasts. Hence, Naylor in her final of quartet broadens her burden to empower the oppressed from the communal to the universal.

Naylor makes a unique contribution in Bailey's Cafe with regard to the relationship between the blacks and Jews. She discusses the problem of black anti – Semitism and Jewish racism in the characters of Mariam, and Gabriel. Bailey offers a valid reason to identify with each other's sufferings:

He’s a Russian Jew. I’m an American Negro, Neither of us is considered a national treasure in our countries, and that’s where the similarity ends. We don’t get into comparing notes on who did what to whom the most. Who’s got the highest pile of bodies. The way I see it, there is no comparison. When most folks come out with that phrase, what they’re really saying is that their pain is worse than your pain. But Gabe knows exactly what I mean: they’re two different ball games. (BC, 220)

Naylor, thus, presents the concern for cross cultural nurturing among the oppressed people found worldwide. She particularly expresses her opinions regarding the internal disparities among the Jews in Israel. She meticulously sets the novel in 1948, the same year Israel has been declared an independent nation. She
 says that solidarity among the oppressed worldwide is not ‘different from any other country’. (BC, 222)

In conclusion, the novel reflects Naylor’s optimism towards universal friendship and harmony. Bailey is ‘down’ with happy endings since he feels that life has more questions than answers. Yet, Naylor puts her faith in ‘hope for survival’ ‘wraps’ the novel in happy ending of dance, music and celebration. All the characters of the novel, male and female in a together celebrate the birth of Mariam’s son, George:

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 otherhand and the three of us were out in the middle of the floor, hands raised and feet stomping. People were up on the tables and cheering. Someone was banging 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. (BC, 225)

Dan Wakefield refers to Naylor’s auspicious new beginning of life as follows:

Bailey says he doesn’t believe in happy endings (I’m sure he means the unearned kind), yet the final of all these stories is not madness or darkness but light and
birth. All those on the street gather for the delivery of a son by a pregnant 14-year-old Ethiopian Jew named Mariam who claimed “No man has ever touched me.”

Naylor by involving Bailey and Miss Maple along with Gabriel in the naming ceremony of Mariam’s son in Jewish tradition offers a suggestion for harmony between the opposing rituals and religions. It is an outcome of a concept of multi-cultural community. A close study of Naylor’s novels predicts her effort to go beyond a single dimensional approach to her male characters. Even in Bailey’s Cafe as in Linden Hills the males are highlighted. They are made to carry out religious ceremonies and are apt in passing out opinions on world politics. At the end, the three dominant male characters; Bailey, Gabriel, and Stanley (Miss Maple) dominate the occasion. This seems to suggest that religion, politics, and social issues largely concerned with the males and their involvement and participation.

Naylor modifies and expands on her strategic interventions, extending her deconstructive impulses from the ‘Great Tradition’ to the Bible and American Popular Culture, including, for example, Hollywood film and the history of baseball. Taken together, Naylor’s discursive merges and modifications self consciously compel reconsiderations of the ‘provisional nature of all fixity. Charles E. Wilson, Jr. also examines Naylor’s use of deconstruction as a literary device in Bailey’s Cafe. He analyses:
Early in countship Bailey (even) makes the mistake of trying to understand Nadine by evaluating her on what he considers normal behaviours. Concerned that she is not enjoying herself on one of their dates, Bailey question her on her constant refusal to smile, only to receive the following response: “But what does that [smile up] have to do with being pleased?” (BC, 17) Completely miffed, Bailey is at a loss of words. However, Nadine has, in essence, deconstructed one aspect of acceptable human behavior. The smile could be read as a mere symbol that in Nadine’s estimation, has no bearing on her actual mood. And in the same way that Saussure examines arbitrariness as a result of moving from one language to another (with a different set of symbols or signifiers) Nadine’s seemingly bizarre response is also subject to the same examination. In another culture, or language, her smiling might in fact have nothing to do with being pleased. Practically every element in this novel serves to subject accepted ideas of reality and meaning. In this way, Naylor forces readers to reassess their own personal notions of normally and to reclaim a pattern of learning that appreciates questions as much as it does easy answers.16

Maxine Lavon Montgomery while elevating the significance of the theme of Bailey’s Café as across culture nurturing, resents Naylor’s denial in offering a valid conclusion to the stories of Mariam and her son George:
In what is part of her ongoing search for an authorial voice with which to tell or, rather, retell—the experiences of women of color, Naylor chooses to locate her fourth novel within a specifically cultured and gendered context where voice and all of its associations are directed toward subverting the myriad of forms of authority patriarchy legitimizes and constructing a new world order among partially dispossessed women world-wide. The novel itself is comprised of a series of loosely connected stories—each one from a different woman’s point of view—and it culminates with a magically real, communal celebration of the birth of Mariam’s son George during the Christmas season. For the first time not only is there oneness among a culturally diverse group whose traditions and customs span the globe, but the voices of women also unify in the ritualization of George’s arrival. George’s long-awaited birth, like that of the Messiah, could signal either an end or, hopefully, new beginnings for the pluralistic group present. But in this climactic scene, after conjuring an image of global harmony, Naylor denies the reader/audience the privilege of knowing the fate of the young mother and son: Does Mariam find acceptance among an American Jewish community? What is to become of George, now en route to Wallace P. Andrews Boys’ Home?17

In this connection, Alexander Meirelles tries to visualize the tragic ending, and says, since Mariam is to be a permanent resident of Eve’s, the baby will
be taken to an orphan home, perhaps, when time to be adopted. *Bailey's Cafe* has trouble with its form of presentation which is often confusing. The narrator's voice often changes from Bailey's to the character telling the story. This kind of shift in narration with movements back and forth between the voice of Bailey and the characters create trouble in identifying the narrator, therefore, such confusion is distracting.

Another such concern that bothers the critics is of the mythical characteristics found in the café and Eve's boarding house. All the stories of women are reliable with the sole exception of Mariam's. They are realistic and tragic. But, the unreal nature of Bailey, the café, and Eve's bordello take away the reality of the rest of the novel. The café has a back room where strange and fantastic things like suicides and child birth happen in a light flooded space resembling rural Ethiopia. The instances of magic space of Eve's bordello is mysterious and puzzling. Above all, the story of Mariam is inconceivable and does not stand for reason and logic in any way and questions the validity and the relevance of the novel. Though the story belongs to 1948 it has the tone and tenor of the contemporary language and expression.

The novel is known for its portrayal of life like male characters namely Bailey, Gabriel, and Stanley (Miss Maple). Above all, the novel establishes Naylor as a writer on a contemporary literary landscape with the novel's ending message of propitious new beginning for the dispossessed women, calling for its theme of
"starting over again"\textsuperscript{18}. And in the process of salvaging Naylor is found graciously assigning suitable roles for her male characters.
REFERENCES


    File://H:\Naylor, Gloria BAILEY’S CAFÉ.htm


