Chapter Six

CONCLUSION
Naylor's artistic sensibility is shaped by her experience in Jehovah's witnesses, and her strong identification with feminism. She is a self avowed feminist and black cultural nationalist whose works resist easy classification. But the perspective of new and established scholars both from domestic and international, black and white, male and female are unified by the pursuit of the holistic connections that build the 'quartet design' of Naylor's first four novels. They are the connections drawn among themselves, and other African American texts, white authored novels and poetry, African tradition, and deport the theme of cross cultural naturalism in Bailey's Café, communal bonding in Linden Hills, womanist and black cultural speech patterns in The Woman of Brewster Place, and African American mysticism in Mama Day.

Regarding the literary influences on Gloria Naylor, Toni Morrison is considered the 'originator of an alternate' that shows Morrison an important resource than anyone else. Her influence makes Naylor a part of the renaissance in contemporary African American women writing. Using the term 'renaissance' to the black women's writings Toni Morrison says: "It's a real renaissance. You know, we have spoken of renaissances before. But this one is ours, not somebody else's."\(^1\)

In an article in which a number of authors answer the question, "what is your favourite opening passage in a work of literature, and why?" Naylor cites Claudia's preface to The Bluest Eye and says:

Each writing seminar I begin teach with having my students read Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye. I believe that by taking apart the first novel of any great
Thus Naylor declares Morrison as a vital and eloquent influence on her literary career. Morrison, as an eminent writer of African American experience, through the spoken and written word, has created a new space for readers. It brings the readers' imagination and intelligence to the complex cultural, political, social and historical issues of contemporary times. Moreover as an editor and novelist she makes it possible for the African American texts and particularly African American women writings to reshape the contours of American literature.

Besides Morrison, Naylor repeatedly returns to the Bible for thematic inspiration. She identified herself with the Jehovah's Witnesses until she was twenty five. Her novels *Mama Day* and *Bailey's Café* are around spiritual power and biblical revision. Besides her characters Mama Day and Eve, Bailey acts as a god like figure. *Bailey's Café* has utopian and quasi-religious undertones that stress the need for brotherly love. It updates seven Biblical stories since Naylor favours an ethical core of Judeo-Christian beliefs as found in her novels.

Though the influence of Morrison and the Biblical revision are primary Naylor has alliance to many more literary masters who had written before her. One such instance is her evident appreciation of Shakespearean works in most of her
novels. Under canon studies many critics of Naylor study her expressive impressions of Shakespearean works evidently found in her novels. The character Cora Lee and others in *The Women of Brewster Place* attend an all-black production of *A Mid Summer Nights Dream*. *Mama Day*, the story of doomed love and its protagonist named Ophelia, and the island location of the novel are evident influences of *The Tempest*. It also has the artistic reflections of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear* and *The Taming of the Shrew*. In *Bailey's Café*, in an episode of Stanley and his father, a complete set of Shakespearean works spurs the climax. *Linden Hills* and *Bailey's Café* are patterned on Dante's *Inferno* and Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. Peter Erickson considers Naylor well read, but ill taught by their homogeneous perspectives in the literary classics and argues:

> Naylor's attention to Shakespeare serves to raise the question of Shakespeare's changed status when seen from the vantage point of the emergent tradition in which Naylor is a participant. By putting into play and testing both positive and critical attitudes toward Shakespeare, Naylor's work dramatizes with particular fullness the conflict between established and emergent traditions.³

But others like Henry Louis Gates Jr., simply see the use of Shakespeare by Naylor as an experiment of both the traditions of literature. She, in doing so, follows the best of her predecessors. Gates declares: "Naylor, it seems clear, is not
afraid to experiment formally, and her works, like the best of her predecessors, engage European as well as American traditions."

Another landmark concept in Naylor's writings is the dual perspective of both male and female, which bears strong connection to Ellain Showalter's impressions that says:


our current theories of literary influences... need to be tested in terms of women's writings. If a man's text... is fathered, then a women's text is not only mothered but parented; it confronts both paternal and maternal precursors and must deal with the problems and advantages of both lines of inheritance. ...[A] woman writing unavoidably thinks back through her fathers as well [as her mothers].

Therefore, Naylor writes from the notion of a female author's confrontation with a dual ancestry, of her text's "parented" status, which is certainly applicable to the African American woman's literary tradition, and which has been forced to develop as much as its white woman's counterpart in the shadows of an overwhelmingly male canon.

Naylor avoids criticism levelled at her fellow black feminist writers for their negative depiction of black men. The present chapter attempts to sum-up Naylor's worthy male characters of their salvific gestures in emancipating their women characters, while they, themselves struggling at variance with seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Michael Akward observes Naylor's approach to her male characters is to resolve dispute between genders. He analyses this view of his from
the study of Naylor's full length male character, Ben in *The Women of Brewster Place*.

It seems possible to regard Ben as Naylor's first and fifth novels' fully sketched male character, and in some respects a representative of the African American men. As a consequence of the profound mental chaos that follows her rape, Lorraine, his surrogate daughter attacks the male figure (Ben) who moved 'in perfect unison with the sawing pain that kept moving inside of her.' In an attempt to stop the pain she kills Ben, Brewster Place's janitor who had served as a father figure for the otherwise painfully isolated woman. During an argument with her lover Theresa, Lorraine, who believes that her homosexuality is enough to permanently isolate her from the larger African American community, speaks of herself as someone "who just wants to be a human being-a lousy human being, who's somebody's daughter or somebody's friend or even somebody's enemy."(*WBP*, 165) She tells Theresa that she is able to achieve such feelings only in Ben's basement apartment.

Ben's northern journey to Brewster is motivated, at least in part by his inability to protect his infirm daughter from sexual exploitation at the hands of her white employer. Lorraine travels to Brewster largely because of her fear of difference and because of the pain of her father's violent reaction to her homosexuality. Hence, their relation is based on loss they experienced. Each of them fulfill for the other the role of absent family and take courage in each other. Lorraine achieves a positive dense of self and a firmness in her spirit after joining

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Ben. Michael Awkward explains:

"The Women of Brewster Place primary inheritance from its male precursory text is technical in nature. More specifically, it has to do with how most provocatively to depict the disunity of African Americans, while at the same time, acknowledging and faithfully representing Black cultural impulses that insist on unity."

When understood in the light of Akward's analyses which contains for the informed reader, an equally apparent implication that Naylor insists on unity in her community, which in her later works more specifically the unity between the genders.

Naylor's presentation of 'The Men of Brewster Place', a novel from male perspective is a result of her evolution of maturation, and clarification and her responsibility toward her male community, says Maxine Lavon Montgomery in Introduction Conversations with Gloria Naylor. The Men of Brewster Place galvanizes readers with clarity of voice, an unflinching relation, and compassion to the male characters. Its male denizens and their tremendous psychological insights show the novel a male perspective. They are more dynamic characters, since they shows growth and development as the reader garners a more complete sense of their internal drives and their frustrations, as well as, their aspirations and pride filled moments of achievements, says Charles E. Wilson, Jr., In addition to revisiting the men who appeared in The Women of Brewster Place, Naylor also introduces a few new characters who serve as unifying agents in the overall text. Though ostensibly set in the same time period that frames The Women of Brewster Place, the later novel
extends more closely to the present. Naylor thus expands her poetic license in order to make contemporary observations and applications.

Naylor delivers a powerful rendition of the men's existence on Brewster Place in *The Men of Brewster Place*. The novel is clearly introspective, layered and succinct. Each of the primary characters are fully developed and intricately portrayed. Although the lives of the men in this novel may not always end on a happy note, there are powerful lessons that can be learned from each of the men's lives. One must read the other side of the sentence, or hear the quieter voice speaking from the page. The end of the novel closes on the wings of possibility and the certainty of a promise.

In *The Women of Brewster Place*, Naylor risks, perpetuating the erasure of the black male under the label “absent father”. Charles Johnson asserts: “except for the old sot Ben, nearly every black male in this book resembles the Negro Beast stereotype described so many years ago by white racists as the brutal, stupid creatures of violent sexual appetites.” Despite Naylor's assertion that she 'bent over backward not to have a negative message came through about men' and her repeated explanation that her 'emotional energy was spent in creating a woman's world' and 'men were used as dramatic devices to bring conflict into the lives of women', Naylor, like her male characters in *The Men of Brewster Place* disparately tries to atone the ‘sin’ she had committed in showing them as negative forces. She shows her regard for the men of her community in one of her novels:

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(I spoke about) the strength of black women but reminded (the audience) that we could never look at the black woman without giving credit to the contributions of black men. The Million Man March.

. . (and) it was an event that moved me deeply, the sight of hundreds of thousands of black men brought back memories of my father who had died in 1993. I thought about him coming home red eyed and tired from his shift as a subway motor man, flees of steel dust embedded in his beard and skin. But he still kept persevering because of his belief that a responsible man took care of his family. A true man never quit.8

*The Men of Brewster Place* is often related to Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*:

The dominant theme in this novel [The Men of Brewster Place] is presented in the question, "what defines black manhood?" Each of the main character finds himself in a search for identity in a world that, according to Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, would rather not see him at all. Given the black man's inherent struggle, then, with the majority population, his very existence as a survivor is an affront to the tenets of white supremacy. As a consequence, the black man has been forced to adopt the posture of silence and to mask feelings of frustration and anger lest such expressions render dangerous repercussions.9
According to Wilson Naylor's critical revision of the African American literary canon is highly esteemed by Richard Wright's *Native Son* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. As Ben states in his collections about his silent and stern grandfather, black men are told that the only way to be a man is to exhibit strength in by denying pain, and such a burden for the black man is particularly taxing because, even if the white man is to complain about his pain, all he might suffer would be ridiculed, whereas, if the black man is to express his pain, he would be summarily abused, if not lynched.

Ben and his grandpa Jones like Wright's protagonist Bigger Thomas in *Native Son* represent the complex struggles the black men face in the elusive quest for self, manhood and sexual identity. Wright is of the opinion that Bigger Thomas is a fusion of man, who confines to political and social commentary in America. Bigger's lawyer says that Bigger is destined to end up since he is a necessary product of the society:

Bigger, you're going to die. And if you die, die free. You're trying to believe in yourself. And every time you try to find a way to live, your own mind stands in the way. You know why that is? It's because others have said you were bad and they made you live in bad conditions, when a man hears that over and over and looks about him and sees that his life is bad, he begins to doubt his own mind... The job is getting people to fight and have faith in making them believe in what life has made
them feel, making them feel that their feelings are as good as those of others.10

Naylor's male characters also confront with such reality that consequently suppresses all those feelings that might be constructed as signs of weakness. The ironic result of this posture, however, is the resultant silence defined as a hardened machismo that almost obliterates even a semblance of humanity. In short, the black man is caught in a no-win-situation like Ben and Grandpa Jones. The major difference is Bigger's absence of the knowledge of the social and historical context that forces the strategies to become emblems of anti-social or disturbed behaviour. For example, when Ben discovers that he is powerless to protect his daughter from Mr. Clyde's molestation he resorts to alcohol thinking if he numbs himself he can endure the pain such vulnerability causes. Some might view this strategy as self-defeatist, as weak; Ben explains the ultimate motivation here, and his paradoxical statement serves to highlight the seeming contradiction between defining the play as an act of tragedy or an act of courage. Ben says: 'So I settled on killing myself - slowly with booze-and on God understanding that I'm fighting for my manhood.'(MBP, 28) Certainly, one opinion might be that Ben is hopeless alcoholic who exhibits antisocial behaviour; thus his is a tragic downfall. However, when Ben states that he is fighting to salvage his manhood, one realizes that his drinking is actually an act of courage, for he still thinks he has manhood worth saving. As such, Bigger who resolves to violent killing, gets himself identified through his anti-social approach, thus his 'manhood' is elevated.
Serving as philosopher/observer, Ben’s development is presented in two ways. First, his insights into the struggles of the other men reveal an intellectual profound that one might stereotypically consider unusual for someone like Ben. Second, Ben’s present outlook on life, in short his personality, is made more intelligible once one gains a comprehensive understanding for his past. Ben’s most pronounced insight about the other men is presented early in the novel and it serves to characterize not only the social reality of these other men, but also Ben’s skill in recognizing that reality. Ben suggests that any man, whether he lives in Park Avenue or the south side of Chicago, can feel worthless, if he is denied affirmation and support. Ben understands that a man’s circumstances are less important than his attitude and level of hope and promise about those circumstances.

A wealthy Park Avenue man can be just as forlorn as a poor man in Chicago’s south side, if his self-esteem is diminished. It is that ‘inside’, the spirited and emotional grounding of a man that affects him most. When one considers all that Ben has endured throughout his life-growing up with an embittered grandfather, being thrust into the world to survive at an early age, suffering through a loveless marriage, and finding himself unable to protect his only child- and when one observes Ben rather philosophical response, one finds man who has learned from his experiences. When Ben is presented in The Women of Brewster Place, the reader is given a suitable composition of a man whose present demoralized state is linked to his feelings of inadequacy about his role as father and protector. The kindness he extends to Lorraine in the novel, the readers come to understand, in his attempt to
redeem himself for failing his daughter. However, in *The Men of Brewster Place*, Naylor expands the scope of Ben’s background as a means of highlighting the fact that Ben’s limitations are not just personal; rather they are linked to very real circumstances. In this way, Ben’s present alcoholism is not just the manifestation of an empty shell of a man. It serves, instead, as an indication of strong manhood, only in a frustrated state. When Naylor links Ben’s inability to protect his daughter to his Grandpa Jones’s feelings of weakness and cowardice because as a boy he could not protect his sister she is reminding the reader that just as it would be unfair to criticize a boy for his inability to perform a ‘manly’ or brave feat, it is unfair to judge a man like Ben who has been rendered important by societal encumbrances. In short, the readers must assess Ben’s life comprehensively in order to appreciate its complexity.

Like Ben, the other men in the novel also confront this almost impossible struggle with defining manhood. Basil, for example tries to achieve manhood first by acknowledging his past mistakes of jumping bail and abandoning his mother cowardly acts that result in her losing her house and then by trying to redeem himself by battering the lives of a single mother and her sons and, in turn, contributing positively to society. Yet Basil’s circumstances reveal the paradoxical relationship between black men and the justice system. Though Basil’s attorney assures him in *The Women of Brewster Place* that he will be exonerated as the day of the trail draws nearer Basil becomes more and more paranoid about his plight.

Basil’s development is the result of internal changes. Having engaged in much soul-searching and introspection, Basil takes full responsibility for ruining his
mother’s life. In *The Women of Brewster Place*, Basil is depicted as a spoiled, selfish brat, even as a thirty year old that his mother even had to live in Brewster Place was the result of Basil’s self-centered behaviour. However, Basil has transformed himself from being a taken to being a given, a change highlighted when Basil offers a prayer of thanks for his entire mother sacrificed. That Basil expresses gratitude and thanks is indicative of personal growth. In addition, however, when he thanks her for not sapping all of her funds on his behalf, he reveals the fact that he fully understands that she had already expanded more than enough energy and money on his behalf. The latter comment suggests that Basil would like to reverse all of the actions that his mother made on his behalf; in short, he wishes he could retract the selfish requests and demands he exacted on his mother’s good nature. Basil’s development, too, is the result of his own shouldering the guilt that he made his mother feels in *The Women of Brewster Place* when she initially suggested that he stays in jail until his trial. Some of the pain he caused her he is now feeling and bravely enduring.

Even though Basil knows that the man he is accused of murdering is a barroom brawl simply struck his head on the bar when Basil pushed him away in self-defense, he still fears that he will be found guilty of murder and imprisoned. Sensitivity to the historical reality of the black man’s treatment by the legal system and consequently destructing that system, he flees. And now five years later as a married man with his adopted sons, Basil tries to prove that he is no longer that sacred young man; rather he is an independent person in charge of his own destiny.
Unfortunately, the new found growth is short-lived. Basil’s arrest, at the hands of his wife, provides the cosmic irony that so often seems to plague the lives of the black men in the novel. Basil is arrested for involuntary manslaughter, not for jumping bail. And though he has tried, over these few years, to atone for the pain he inflicted on his mother, his very act of atonement of providing two young boys is hampered when he is in concerted the same punishment he feared years ago though he was assured he would be spared. At every turn, it would seem, Basil’s attempts at manhood are thwarted. To exacter but matters, his sudden departure from Eddie and Jason has a detrimental effect. By the time Basil satisfies his six year sentence, Jason, now fifteen, has served time in juvenile detention, and Eddie, now thirteen, has began to manifest antisocial behaviour. The novel seem to suggest, in this depiction, that black manhood is forever doomed to failure, that all societal elements collude to undermine its efforts to thrive. Nevertheless, Basil is the level of obsession. In short, C.C hungers for money, power and respect. And if acquires these ‘tokens’ of manhood requires illegal activities, then he will accept the challenge. It is quite clear that C.C. has a distorted view of manhood, yet he has simply embraced the definition meted out in the popular culture. Unfortunately, when one requires external objects moves power, and in the case of C.C. a gun to define one, once these objects are lost or seized, one’s manhood is lost as well. So even though someone like C.C. feels himself powerful because of his acquisition, he is, in fact, made weaker with every ‘necessary’ acquisition. Once he has no power to
lord over anyone else, once he has no one to make feel inferior, than he is lost and empty.

C.C.'s attitude about respect is also distorted. Not understanding that one cares, commands or respects, he harbours the misguided notion that one can 'demand' respect when in fact one is only 'demanding' fear when he reveals that he has lost respect for his father because his father cannot provide the luxuries that he provides with his ill gotten gain and because his father blindly accepts his gifts without question, C.C. fails to understand that his father's sense of manhood is not necessarily linked to the empty tokens he provides or to an acknowledgement of his fortune. Perhaps, his father's reticence is a move to allow his family some material pleasure without intruding upon C.C.'s turf, C.C.'s perverted sense of manhood is made even clearer when in the final moment of the chapter he murders his step brother Hakim and then runs away, grateful for 'the courage to be a man.' (MBP, 129)

While C.C. maintains the most warped view of manhood, Abshu provides the most wholesome perspective. A compassionate warrior, Abshu fights for the betterment of society in general and of Brewster Place in particular, providing a voice for the needy and disenfranchised. Abshu is a strong man because he understands how one should define himself a man: "do whatever job makes you happy, regardless of the cost; and fill your home with love." (MBP, 140) He embraces very simple philosophical concepts. Instead of feverishly struggle to acquire as many trinkets as he can, Abshu advocates pursuing a job that provides emotional and spiritual
fulfillment. In short, the true man looks within himself for definition rather than without, and once he has a stable emotional foundation, he can withstand the various external pressures.

Another worthy principle in Abshu, as noted by Wilson is to attack others physically as a final option. Wilson observes: "[In addition] Abshu practices one important tenet of black manhood, first advocated by Frederick Douglass in his original narratives, engaging in physical retaliation only as a last resort. Instead of fighting, one should use one's wits to best his opponent." At one point in the 'Abshu' chapter one of Abshu's pupils finds himself and his friends being bullied by some slightly older boys. In an effort to teach the young boys how to use their intellect, Abshu teaches them to curse like Shakespearean characters do. Instead of using profanity, the utterance of which might result in violence the boys learn to make pronouncements such as 'you drone'/you curse'/ or 'you abuse wretch' completely miffed by such strong language, the older boys ultimately retreat. Successes like these not only provide the young boys with the confident to confront future challenges but also encourage Abshu that his often unheralded action are relevant and effective.

Abshu's unyielding commitment to these young boys and their futures provides the basis for his disenchantment with Moreland Woods. Because Abshu tries to honour his own responsibilities, he expects the same from other so-called men, especially those who have assumed a leadership role with the help of community. When Woods betrays Brewster Place by advocating its demolition,
Abshu practically comes unhinged at the prospect that Woods would be allowed to maintain his seat on the city council. Abshu’s loyalty to his friends and neighbours completely over weights any allegiance he might have felt to the lone black member of the council. In this case, challenging and ultimately defeating a black man one whose interests are not consistent with those of the black community strengthens Abshu’s self-respect and thus his manhood.

Abshu’s sense of brotherhood and communion with others in the community is echoed in the final chapter, set in the barber shop. This scene serves as a wakeup call for black men to honour and respect each other; in doing so, they honor and respect themselves. Even though Greasy seems alienated from the rest of the community, he is still one of them. Unlike C.C., who wreaks havoc on the lives of others, Greasy hurts only himself. Yet when Greasy commits suicide, all of the men in the shop are affected by the tragedy. In the final analyses, they feel as though they have failed Greasy because they lost sight of the humanist that is common to all. As a collective body, the barber shop clients did not adopt a whole some notion of manhood in regard to Greasy. Instead they, ironically, adopted the model of the oppressor. They made themselves feel better about themselves by distancing themselves from Greasy’s plight.

Bearing with pain courageously is also the stamp of Eugene’s growth when introduced in The Women of Brewster Place, Eugene like Basil, is represented as callous and mean spirited, belittling his wife for sport. In The Men of Brewster Place, however, Eugene offers an extended apology to his wife Ciel as he attempts to
explain his past behaviour. By giving voice to strengthen his resolve to be a better man he realizes now that his former hardened macho image was merely an attempt to hide his insecurities. When donning these masks, Eugene becomes an empty shell, lacking the very strength he wished to project. Now that he has divested himself of these masks Eugene has positioned himself for further growth. And though his method for affecting this growth is rather unorthodox—enduring the sadistic physical abuse inflicted by Chino— at the very last Eugene is willing to share the pain that he now knows Ciel must have felt emotionally during the marriage and certainly upon Serena’s death, says Charles E. Wilson.

The story of “Brother Jerome” has no traces found in *The Women of Brewster Place* is new to Naylor. The short narration is heart breaking and symbolic in its approach. Brother Jerome is a retarded child of Mildred, but he is a music genius, “(But) there is enough light to edge the boarders of his mind, the island where lives alone with music.” (*MBP*, 31) says Ben, the narrator. Naylor’s creation of Brother Jerome represents the community which often experiences retardation and isolation. Like the narrator in Ellison’s *Invisible Man* who could produce poetry in isolation, Brother Jerome is talented in playing piano. Both are perfect representatives of the community:

“(And) it was your story if you listened real hard. Some folks would just hear what he was playing and be amazed; while others really listened and began to cry. Because, it was the blues, nothing but the blues coming from that boy’s heart through
that Piano reading your life-and sometimes his." (MBP, 32)

The final chapter is set in the barber shop, a haven for men. Here, the black male clients, “armchair or barber chain polician(s)” (MBP, 158) discuss politics, namely the tension between black men and white men: “The white man carries all the guilt for messing up the world; the black men gets all the blame” (MBP, 158) They also discuss women, who they think are beyond incomprehension. It is in the barber shop that these men can offer their opinions and vent their frustrations without censorship or ridicule. Though they may feel burdened in their domestic space or demeaned outside their own community, they know that within the domain of the barbershop they rub un-obtrusively.

Serving all the climatic ending to the novel, the “Barber Shop” scene culminates in a horrific moment that challenges the equilibrium sedulously maintained in this black male sanctuary. One of the frequent customers is the homeless Greasy, on one occasion Greasy enters the business and soon begins his typical tirade, “I am a man. I am a man.” (MBP, 165) where upon he also seizes hold of Max’s employer Henry and threatens to stab him. Max and waiting customers attempt to calm Greasy down, a struggle that takes some time. Suddenly, though Greasy releases Henry, and in that same instant, Greasy slits his own throat and sends blood gushing all over the shop. The chapter ends with the men speculating on what they might have done to prevent Greasy’s suicide, and with them having to reconcile the demise of Brewster Place, which with the assistance of Moreland Woods, has been slated for demolishment alongwith Max’s barber shop.
The last section of the novel, a brief epilogue, witnesses a forlorn Abshu walking through the now ghost like neighborhood of Brewster Place. He wonders if he could have done anything more to save this place he has called home. Though Abshu is saddened by the death of Brewster, he is determined to believe that all his efforts were not futile, that in fact, this most recent struggle was mere practice for him to wage more battles in the future.

In *Linden Hills*, Naylor broadly transmogrifies Dante’s *Inferno*. The two young black men Willie and Lester take on odd jobs in the affluent black suburb of the book’s title. Willie, who is audaciously nicknamed ‘Willie White’ because his skin is so black, is an oral poet. Another important concept with which Naylor presents him is that he grew up in the Putney Wayne Projects which is a different kind of community from its near neighbour, plush Linden Hills. He has committed over six hundred poems to memory and 'can cast the ingredients of a cereal box into heroic couplet at a single glance', Sherley Anne Williams comments. His memorizing of poems, the quality to be found in him is an example of African American oral tradition which highlights his character. His soulmate Lesterfield Tilson though born and raised in Linden Hills in its most modest section, is also a poet but in the more formal sense. He is mauverick enough to prefer the education of the streets that he gets while hanging out with his partner. Together they embody the best of the oral and literary traditions in African American experience.

At the bottom of Linden Hills where the most opulent homes are, is the seat of the succeeding generations of the dark skinned “satanic” Luther Nedeed. The
original Luther was a freedman who, having bought the land in the 1820s, rented shacks to blacks who were too poor to farm. The later Nedeed, prosperous morticians and all of them follow in the patriarch’s footsteps. Each of them acquires a ‘octoroon bride’ to bear the next generation and presides over the increasingly wealthy Linden Hills of his particular day.

*Linden Hills* has many compelling moments in the form of the ‘sins’ of assimilated black community which are hypocrisy, loveless marriage, material infidelities, idleness—all carry the weight of Naylor’s expert literary attention. Naylor serves notice that she is a mature literary talent of formidable skill in her very second novel. *Linden Hills*, sending the proposition of affluent blacks who run after upward mobility of material search clearly revises the literary image of the black bourgeoisie.

In keeping with the contours of the geography, Naylor uses quite different forms in her two novels; *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Linden Hills*, forms that demonstrate the relationship between the shapes of her two neighbourhoods and the ways in which power relations affect them. Because women usually have little access to power in the larger society it is not surprising that black women, doubly affected by their racial and gender status, are the central characters in poverty-stricken Brewster Place, while the apparently powerful Luther Nedeed is the kernel character in Linden Hills. Yet, in dramatizing the stories of the women in Brewster Place, who seem to be in control but are not, and in analyzing the precarious position of Luther Nedeed, Naylor shows the inaccuracy of such terms as matriarchy or patriarch as they apply to African Americans.
Naylor’s account of Linden Hills is opposite to the recent African American women’s literature in her presentation of central male characters. In her development of Nedeed’s character, she not only gives their attempt to develop their patriarchy but their failure as well. The failure is due to their inability to create a community, which Naylor suggests must be the source of any route African Americans take to empowerment. While her first novel focuses on women friendship, *Linden Hills* emphasizes the friendship between men, Willie and Lester, who are not opposed to each other’s values. They two, like Dante’s and Virgil, move down the circular drives one by one and witness the profound alienation, rootlessness, and displaced blackness of Linden Hills, the modern day inferno. In so tenderly portraying relationship of these two, Naylor may be suggesting that genuine friendship between men who share similar values, as well as friendship between women, is critical to the African American community’s search for empowerment. Like Kiswana Browne in *The Women of Brewster Place*, Willie is interested in and knowledgeable about the history and literature of African Americans. But he is also educated in one respect that she is not. He comes from a living working class African American community with a deep cultural past that is as old as Naylor. Through his friendship with Lester, he learns about Linden Hills from the inside and thus knows that the solution of the creation of an elite class fragments and destroys the community. As a person intensely involved in the direction of his folk’s future then, he is not as likely as have some upper-mobile working class men, to repeat Nedeed’s error.
Willie Mason is sensitive to women’s suffering that suggests potential communication between the sexes. As Willie draws closer to discovering Willa and to participating fully in her plight, he becomes more feminized. The scene which begins with Willie worrying that his brothers will ridicule him for wrapping his Christmas presents like a woman, ends with him wondering about whether he really is turning into a woman. As Willie thinks about Willa and how ‘she was waiting for him’, he shudders, ‘now [I] really [am] turning into a woman-[I sound] like somebody’s superstitious old aunt.’ Yet, it is when Willie most fully takes part in Willa’s history (enabling her escape from the cellar) that he is turned, if only for a moment, into a woman. After unwittingly sliding the bolt back from the cellar door while at Luther’s house, Willie looks into a mirror and sees ‘what Willa saw,’ finding her face in the mirror instead of his own. Willie’s total identification with Willa, then, allows for the possibility of his seeing as a woman.

It is Willie who first hears and reacts to Willa’s mourning wail wafted up to the top of Linden Hills. He has an idealistic crush on Ruth, he sympathizes with Mrs. Tilson where Lester cannot, he worries about what Winston is doing to Cassandra, he is ashamed of the black Penthouse centerfold that Maxwell Smyth claims as a sign of racial progress, he is a witness to Laurel’s suicide and is deeply disturbed by it, and he first wonders about Mrs. Nedeed and suspects foul play. Near the end he has nightmares about women that he can exorcise and reduce to order only by creating the first line of a poem: “There is a man in a house at the bottom of a hill. And his wife has no name.” (LN, 277) in juxtaposing his and Willa’s scenes Naylor
suggests an intuitive bond between them. He is the link between the crushed "no-face" of Laurel and the "no-face" of Priscilla in Willa's thoughts. His nightmare phrase "Willie eat it" echoes Willa's thought about Evelyn's cooking, "Will he eat it?" Even their names-Willie and Willa-seem mysteriously connected.

The last poem in the novel is one that Willie is trying to compose to make sense of his Linden Hills experiences. Having memorized 665 poems to date, this one will be number 666, the biblical sign of the beast, and thus promises to make sense of the inverted inferno of Luther Nedeed, who lives in house number 999. Willie's path of understanding here recalls that of Luwana Packerville, the first Mrs. Nedeed, who, having made 665 cuts on her body to represent the times she has been called on to speak over the course of a year, records as the next entry in her bible/diary, "There can be no God." (LN, 93) After much anguish, Willie finally arrives at the first line of his poem, "There is a man in a house at the bottom of a hill. And his wife has no name," (LN, 291) and immediately triggers in the narrative of Luther's wife the discovery of her own name and identity as the last in a line of Mrs. NedDeeds: Willa Prescott Nedeed. This name constitutes the final blow to the reign of the NedDeeds, both through its disruptive power within the line of Luther NedDeeds and through its articulation at the level of 'Willie- Willa' with the disruptive powers associated with Willie. Willa reasserts her identity and image and seizes the power of naming from Luther by naming their son "Sinclair" just before she emerges from the basement on Christmas Eve. This name signifies both the 'clear sin' of the boy's color and its suppressed etymological meaning of 'sinus clarus,' where 'sinus' can
mean in Latin ‘the interior, in most part, heart, or bosom,’ in short, that place ‘where you supposed to be at home,’ which Laurel fails to find but Willa recovers.

Thus Willie finds himself with Lester on Christmas Eve at Nedeed’s house to help Nedeed trim his tree for pay, having made the entire journey through Linden Hills toward the name of Nedeed’s wife. In a melodramatic twist, Willie accidentally knocks open the bolt to the cellar door just as Willa is heading up the cellar steps, and unwittingly triggers, the final collapse of the Nedeed family and Linden Hills. Carrying the body of the dead Sinclair wrapped in an old lace bridal veil, Willa forcefully emerges to begin cleaning the house and to reclaim her legitimate role within the Nedeed family. As Willie, Lester, and Nedeed finish trimming the tree in the den, Willa appears in the doorway and announces, “Luther, . . . your son is dead,” (LN, 299) returning from her underground grave to confront Nedeed with his white son and the insoluble contradictions of Linden Hills and the Nedeed family as the last laugh from a dead woman’s grave. In the struggle that ensues, the Christmas tree crashes to the floor, its lighted candles setting the house on fire as Lester forces Willie to flee the scene. The burning house sheds light over all of Linden Hills, revealing the resurgent whiteness at the very foundation of the community, as Willie and Lester realize that this scene taking place before their eyes is no longer ‘governed by the rules of . . . black and white.’ The house burns to the ground with the Nedeeds embraced in a single struggling mass inside, while the entire community watches it and lets it burn, denying the very evidence before their eyes – a final act of hypocrisy.
and suppression that is certainly the only possible response worthy of Luther Nedeed and his community. Catherine C. Ward says:

"Thus by basing the structure and the ethic of Linden Hills the *Inferno*, Naylor places the novel at the heart of the American literary tradition, moreover, she forces all the readers, and not just the middle class blacks who are the subject of Linden Hills to apply to their own lives the hard questions the novel rises."

In *Mama Day*, Naylor creates Willow Springs, a fictional island off the coast of South Carolina and Georgia which is separated from the mainland through a fragile bridge, and the inhabitants are unwilling to receive the mainland culture. Mama Day, (originally Miranda Day) the title character is the representative spirit of Willow Springs. She lives in the present tense, as a conjure woman, with powers and authority of a magician grounded by history and directed by instinct. She can tell if life has begun inside a chicken egg by holding it to the light of a candle; she can diagnose internal cysts of a pregnant woman by slipping her hand inside. In a dark forest, she knows every crook and bend, every tree that falls and those that are about to sprout.

Naylor's protagonist Cocoa(originally Ophelia Day), a young woman in her twenties with roots in Willow Spring and, she is the only survivor of Days family, besides her grandmothers Mama Day and Abigail Day. The central issue of her character is her identification with Willow Springs as a rural black woman and her confrontation with urban America, as she tries to establish herself in New York.
From sassy, street-smart, insecure and cynical young woman she might develop into some one more trusting, tolerant and self assured, if Naylor allowed her in the novel. If we are to take this protagonist’s portrait as a representative of urban Black women transported from the South, then they are fearful, defensive, vulnerable. Trying to protect herself from the assaults of the city, Cocoa exhibits a defensive surface to the world, judging it through superficial impressions. From her great-aunt Cocoa has learned ways of dealing with the world that allows her to retain her belief in Black rural superiority. Her perceptions of New York are paralleled by Mama Day’s perceptions of urban America, gleaned by examining the faces in the audience on television shows only the faces. Linda Simon analyses the essence of her character, and the theme of the novel as:

At mid-point in the book she [Naylor] returns Cocoa to Willow Springs, weakens her physically and emotionally (she is near death throughout the book’s climax) and forces changes in her life through supernatural intervention. The message is that in traveling north Cocoa has been a trespasser. Tempted to forget her rural southern past, to reject her ancestors sustaining superstition and belief in magic, she incurs a wrathful punishment—one that has nothing to do with the changes that could have taken place in her if Naylor had decided to opt for character development in a more realistic setting. After Cocoa’s struggle for health she is reborn as a southerner resolved to accept her unbreakable ties to island culture.
Naylor devises *Mama Day* as a black love story. Therefore, in addition to magic and medicine, African American cultural heritage, and folklore, Naylor conceptualizes it as a love story. The male protagonist George Andrews who is alien to the African American communal tradition, contrasts Cocoa, the female protagonist. However, Naylor emancipates Cocoa, and thereby the Days family from their demise through the sacrificial love of George, her husband. In the process of salvaging Cocoa from destruction, George has to end up himself on the altar of love. Naylor explains the two principle themes of the novel as:

Basically the critical appraisals have been favorable what I attempted to do in this work,*[Mama Day]* which was new for me although it is not new in tradition, was to deal with a Black love story. To have a man and woman attempt to work out some of the mundane problems and insecurities that we have to confront is just making a marriage go. That is not the reason for *Mama Day*, but that love story, my *Romeo and Juliet*, if you will, becomes essential to what has to happen dramatically in the work. A lot of readers and critics have responded to the love story quite favorably. The other important element is the issue of magic which I define as a sort of flowering of the human potential. In a sense all *Mama Day* does is get people to reach inside themselves and find the power that is there within them to create miracles.14
Therefore, *Mama Day* accounts for a love story of two black people from strikingly different background—George, orphaned in the urban North, has grown up in an institution run by whites; and Cocoa, doted on by two black mother figures, has been drenched in the traditions of the rural South. Susan Meisenhelder asserts that through the relationship that develops between these two characters, one the product of a white world, the other of an emphatically black one, Naylor deals with the issue of maintaining black cultural identity in the face of attempts by the white world to order, control and define black people.

To help him become such a man, Mama Day fashions a ritual for George that is, in every detail, outside the European tradition of heroic quest legends. Sent with Bascombe Wade's receipt for the purchase of Sapphira and John-Paul's walking stick carved with water lilies, both emblems of male failure to be everything for women, symbols of their futile hopes "that the work of their hands could wipe away all that had gone before (MD, 285), George embarks on a quest designed not to acquire a symbol of his individual prowess but to transcend those very values. Significantly, Mama Day sends him to the chicken's nest, associated throughout the novel with the female creative powers that George fears and misunderstands but needs to respect. In bringing back only his hands the evidence for him of his self-sufficiency and unable to abandon his intense masculine individualism, George perverts this ritual by acting another white male role. Refusing to believe his hands are all he is to bring back, frustrated at what he like the white world sees as only "mumbo-jumbo" (*MD*,295), subconsciously afraid of what the chicken represents, he
reenacts the archetypal white drama of male oppression, transforming the walking stick, “a thing of wonder” (MD, 152) in Mama Day's hands, into a phallic instrument of violence against the feminine that he can neither understand nor control. Like the hero of his favourite play by Shakespeare, *King Lear*, who cannot accept Cordelia's love, George cannot accept shared love from Cocoa. Like his dramatic model, with whom he explicitly identifies, he too becomes a “madman” (301), dying as the fatally flawed hero in a white tragedy.

Like his charts and graphs, George’s constant attempts to accommodate Willow Springs to white cultural myths make it impossible for him to understand its more complex reality. Nothing from the white world, neither Mrs. Jackson's anatomical charts nor the tales of female hysteria from his psychology books, can help him explain the female-centered place he enters. The notion of history as a quilt, more than simply a way of chronicling the past, is a complex weaving of past, present, and future. The quilt Mama Day stitches for George and Cocoa as a wedding gift is, for instance, not just a historical 'document' of a dead past, but a tangible bridge between herself, Abigail, and the children of Cocoa's that neither will live to see. It is not sewn to become merely Cocoa's sole possession but to be 'great grandnieces and nephews when it's time for them to marry.' Significantly, it is Mama Day's understanding of the past as a quilt, her perception of 'the whole picture,' that gives her supernatural powers of divination. Working on the quilt, connecting herself with the experience of the past, she is able to get in touch with the
future, sensing for instance that George will not soon be coming to Willow Springs. 

(MD, 138)

Unable to understand their relationship as one piece in historical and emotional quilt, George further fails to see that his desire for an insular, exclusive, traditionally 'romantic' relationship with Cocoa is as futile as trying to make a quilt with two rags. Mama Day envisions would involve George's recognition that he must become part of a quilt, connected to the past and to both the women and men of Willow Springs. As Mama Day realizes, she needs his hand 'so she can connect it up with all the believing that had gone before.' Unwilling to be the missing piece—she needs, he wants to single-handedly fashion a bridge for Cocoa rather than be part of a communal one. When [she] sees George again, [their] versions will be different still '(MD, 311) and multiple interpretations' . . . each time [she] goes back over what happened, there's some new development. Some forgotten corner that puts[George] in a slightly different light (MD, 310). By thus quilting 'the whole picture' in Mama Day—his side, her side, the inside, and the outside—Naylor has written no traditional tragedy, history, or romance, but rather 'quite a story' (MD, 10) of black experience, one as culturally autonomous as Willow Springs itself.

Naylor's fourth novel Bailey's Cafe is most mythical, and in reality is an eating place. The diner, like a magnet draws a variety of outcasts, each with a story to tell. One would call them 'misfits', but in the magical aura of Bailey's Cafe, as New Year approaches each become a universal creature of biblical stature. Naylor analyses that the novel is inversion of the Judeo-Christian ethic, but contains all the

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major women in the Bible. Naylor juxtaposes the stories of 'fractured' women with those biblical stories, as if the biblical women themselves are fractured. But Naylor's concept of the biblical women is queer that they are always seen through the mechanisms of either God or man, and in the work of a fiction, they are identified through the fractured women. Further, she says, "I used Judeo-Christian women in the Bible because I wanted to address the issue in this novel of female sexuality."15

*Bailey's Café* returns to the loser narrative structure noted in both *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Linden Hills*. Sketching the lives of a host of bizarre characters, it focuses on issues of marginality. Each of the characters while visiting the title setting is in transition having barely escaped lives of not-so-quite desperation in hopes of regaining direction and purpose. The unifying thread is the narrating voice of Bailey himself, the present manager of the cafe, who after relating his own trying tale, introduces the readers to various patrons whose individual life histories constitute the different chapter divisions. The novel's is:

... appropriately set in 1948, a period of significant transition in American history between the aftermath of World War-II and Civil Rights movement to be ushered in with the 1954 Supreme Court ruling of Brown V. the Board of Education of Topeka K.S, which mandated school integration. Like in limbo, having also shed its innocence in the throes of global war, while yet, uncertainly about its ability, Naylor even unwillingness to move forward particularly in regard to racial issues. In this compelling novel Naylor offers a chance for both the
country and her characters to mature and realize their utmost potentials.¹⁶

There are three addresses at the edge of the world which exist everywhere and anywhere for those who need them. One is Eve's boarding house for women, a convent house of ill repute. Eve takes in certain women who come to her, the women she believes will benefit by experience, and they are allowed to have 'gentlemen caller' on one condition that they must bring flowers from Eve's garden. Bailey, like Ben is full of life and enthusiasm, and Naylor presents him as an informed and insightful character and a sympathizer of women who come to Eve for a kind of 'redemption' through his cafe. The third address on the street is Gabe's pawn shop. Old Gabriel, a Russian Jew in America is the next interesting male character of Bailey's Cafe. His pawn shop shows a sign board “Out of Business” or “I'll back in an hour” (BC, 145) pointing to Bailey’s Café. He has led Mariam, the fourteen year old pregnant utopian Jew to Eve's bordello. His significance in the novel is worth that of Angel Gabriel who announced the birth of Christ to Mary. Besides, he is a credited male character with long experience his life offers.

The third lofty male character other than Bailey and Gabe, is Miss Maple, a sensational character whose original name is Stanley. He comes from a rich African-Yuma-Mexican-Irish sort of family and a PhD from Stanford in statistics. He refuses to fight in the World War-II because if his blood was not good enough for the Red Cross to take, then why was it good enough to be spilled as an infantry man? Unable to secure a good job suitable for his qualification he wants to buy a gun at Gabriel's pawn shop.
pawn shop and is ready to commit suicide but ends up as Eve's housekeeper wearing women's dresses. Stanley, who is called Miss Maple at Eve's is a kind of inverted identity, and is amazingly different who under pressure is prompted to lose his identity and conceal his worth. Naylor satirises the corporate America while recognizing the importance of 'self-identity' in Stanley. Stanley is acquiescent enough to give up his 'self' for 'peace' and tries to be comfortable in erasing his original identity as in the case of Ellison's *Invisible Man*. Stanley instead of resorting to extreme decision, or revolting against the oppressor, gives an affirmative signal for male identity and African American manhood.

Naylor is ingenious in presenting the character of Stanley's father who is noted for his mobility of character and love for peace. He never avenges his wife's (Stanley's mother) death in the hands of white men, who gang raped and left her to die. He says about himself as:

-“I am a man of peace. I am a sensitive man.
I can spend hours with Proust and have been known to weep at a sunset. These are the qualities I wanted to pass on to my son. I believe he has the capacity to be a great leader. And I've tried to teach him that a man rules best when he rules with compassion. . . .There is no greater strength than what is found within. There is no greater love than reaching beyond boundaries to other men. There is no greater wealth than possessing true peace of mind . . . ”. (*BC*, 185-186)

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Neurosis and psychic isolation are the themes of African American writings that unfold from male perspectives. The traumatic experiences concerning race, family, religion, class, hostile political policies affect the African American community. Despite all these experiences Ellison's invisible man declares finally: "Even an invisible man has a socially responsible role to play." Naylor shows a close affinity to Wright and Ellison in her depiction of male characters.

Gloria Naylor's the sixth and the latest novel 1996 (2004) is a fictionalized memoir. The novel is a memoir of sort as it is written in the first person point of view. She claims the incidents of the novel as her real life experiences in St. Helena in the year 1996. However, it is also fictionalized as she obviously cannot know what went on the next door across street, or at the NSA, for instance.

Eleanor White refers to Naylor's technique of presenting the fictionalized memoir:

1996 is not a novel, nor is it non-fiction. It is a conflation [blend] of the two genres."

In other words, Gloria's own story is fact, and she uses her powers of observation and intellect to create very believable fictional characters, in the service of
the U.S National Security Agency, to show how these operations might well be organized and carried out."18

The fictionalized memoir 1996 purports to detail what became of Naylor's life after she moved to a secluded stretch of St. Helena Island. Her intention was to spend a year writing in the serene island setting, plant a garden and spend time enjoying the lifestyle she had worked to obtain. But shortly after moving into her home, Naylor has a run-in with an eccentric Jewish neighbour who "had at least a dozen cats." When 'Eunice' refuses to keep the cats out of Naylor's garden, and Naylor ends up taking matters into her own hands, the dispute turns ugly.

Eunice's brother happened to be the head of the National Security Agency and the bad blood between the women leads to Naylor's being investigated as a drug-dealer and labelled as a dangerous anti-Semite. It is not long before Naylor discovers that she is being followed everywhere she goes. When the harassment becomes unbearable, Naylor flees her Southern refuge and returned to New York, where the scrutiny turns into 'mind-control.'

The novel is uncharacteristically marginalized for the heightened intrigue. Naylor's account in the first person point of view and the third person speculation on the motives of her tormenters, question the credibility of the novel. She responds:

"I can't worry about that," Naylor said during a recent telephone interview. "With my entire career, I try to do the best that I can and leave the rest to the reader. It is just like child abuse. There are some
people, when the child comes to them and says 'Uncle Johny did X, Y, Z,' there will be some parents who will not believe the child, and there is no amount of evidence that will make them change their minds.”

Writing the book was a “real catharsis,” Naylor said. “It was like purging. But really, it was no different from the other books I have written in that each of them exorcised from me some sort of demon.”

Naylor, in support of her claim includes an addendum with research and litigation regarding governments experiments with 'mind control'. They are:

The Mind Control Forum: www.mindcontrolforums.com

Eleanor White: www.raven1net.

Cheryl Welsh: www.indjustice.org

and analyses mind control device as:

Basically, what 1996 is about is our loss of privacy in this country that the government moved well beyond just the simple following of people and the tapping of their phones, but they now have technology that is able to decode the brain patterns and to detect what people are actually thinking. And they have another technology called microwave hearing where they can actually input words into your head bypassing your ears. Now, both these technologies are documented and people having patents for part of the process, so what I wanted to do with 1996 was to say to my fellow Americans that we have to be vigilant about any
attacks on our civil liberties, even innocuous attacks, because they can snowball and lead to other things.  

1996 though modern in setup has the concept of developing a brooding atmosphere of gloom and terror. It shows the aberrant psychological state of Naylor. In one of the letters to the Research scholar (P.H. Manorama) Naylor describes 1996 as 'scary'. The impulse of horror and fear has been created effectively by Naylor with considerable literary skill already familiar to the readers from some of her previous works.

Naylor's 1996 conveys the possible danger and disaster awaiting the modern world with the advancement of science and technology. In this regard, it can be best interpreted as a dystopian work on the lines of the three dystopian novels: George Orwell's 1984 (1949) Anthony Burgess' A Clock Work Orange (1962) and Aldous Huxley's Brave New World (1932).

The relevance of Naylor's 1996 is to provide the fair chances of informed debate on mind control as Mitchell comments: “Given the continued debate over some prevision of the Patriot Act, Naylor’s ‘fictionalized memoir’ raises the right question at the right time.”

The signature trait that connects each of Naylor's five novels is transcendence of boundaries. Forever challenging the arbitrary limitations that society imposes on the individuals, whether racially motivated, gender driven, or caste-generated, Naylor demands that her characters question their circumstances in order to change them. Naylor argues for vigilance in dismantling any and all
imprisoning forces. "Likewise", Charles E. Wilson Jr., remarks "Naylor's life from the very beginning is a testament to the act of defiance."\textsuperscript{22}

While analyzing her 'writing life' Naylor too explains:

It can't be anybody's life, but to do it well you have to be aware of the sacrifices. And you sacrifice a good deal of your life to be with these characters, writing is a solitary existence. You need a lot of quite around you and within your body. That's how you get the opportunity to listen to those voices that want to break through. If you are quite inside yourself, those characters are going to talk. There are many things I could have chosen to do with my talents and my intelligence, but I find writing the most fulfilling. The writing life, all these years, is indistinguishable from my own life. And when I look back, I would not have it any other way.\textsuperscript{23}

Naylor's novels are among those criticized for disparaging representation of black male characters, her reliance on Western cultural narratives, and even valorization of western literary icons. For instance, regarding the male characters of the first three novels in the quartet Peter Erickson says: "The legacy from the first three novels in the quartet is a line of failed, incomplete or uncertain male characters: from the negative instances of the brutal young rapists and the helpless alcoholic Ben in \textit{The Women of Brewster Place} to the shaky efforts of Lester and Willie in \textit{Linden}
Hills and George in *Mama Day* to break out and seek alternative modes of masculine identity."²⁴ Whereas, in *Bailey's Cafe*, he notices a positive model of masculinity in the character of Stanley.

Naylor counters such criticism related to her male characters, stating: "When you get writing about black men, normally it's directed at men struggling with the white world for something—for dignity, for self-respect, for some gains, financial or psychological. Their opponent is always the white world."²⁵ Hence, they might look like negative forces to their families in particular and to the society, in general.

Regarding the valorization of Western icons and the influence of western cultural narratives in Naylor's novels, Margot Anne Kelley argues that Naylor's project is not simply a capitulation to alien discourse but only to 'decenter' it. More recently, Missy Dehn Kubitschek remonstrated Naylor's critics, claiming that they 'over emphasize the Euro-American sources' and consequently fail to see how *Mama Day* simultaneously appropriates and signifies on earlier texts, from both the western and the African American literary traditions in order to forge a new liberating social and sexual order.

Many critics credit Naylor as: "she [Gloria Naylor] is the first among the current generation of African American women novelists to have made (such) a study of her literary predecessors."²⁶ and for: "updating the works of great writers of the past (allows Naylor) to more carefully 'educate(s)' readers of future."²⁷
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