Chapter Two

MALE REDEEMERS

IN

BREWSTER PLACE
Gloria Naylor’s fifth novel *The Men of Brewster Place* (1998) is a sequel to her first novel *The Women of Brewster Place*, where we find the male characters of the earlier novel reconnected. The male characters of the women’s stories are developed beyond just playing the roles of antagonists in *The Men of Brewster Place*. In other words, they are given an opportunity to redeem themselves of the sins they had committed earlier. Naylor revisits Brewster Place the decaying urban housing project mainly of blacks in *The Men of Brewster Place*. The stories of the male residents of Brewster Place are told with the same grace and humour we find in the stories of women in *The Women of Brewster Place*. She breathes new life into the male residents who had once wrecked the lives of their women.

Naylor wrote *The Men of Brewster Place* fifteen years after the publication of *The Women of Brewster Place* as a response to many who wonder as to what had happened to the male characters of her first novel. Besides, it depicts her concern for black men who are like her father. She explains why she writes exclusively about men:

It has taken me these many years to decide finally that I wanted to give the men who had appeared briefly in the Women (stories) a voice of their own. Like in this country I was profoundly moved by the Million Man March and the images of all those black men calling themselves to test, promising to return home and be better citizens by concentrating on being better fathers and brothers. The march provided an alternative to the popular media image of the troubled black men . . . But
above all, I wrote *The Men of Brewster Place* as a testament to the hidden majority, men like my father who worked hard all their lives, who struggled to keep their homes together against incredible odds and who remained even their deaths unsung, unknown.¹

Naylor's first novel *The Women of Brewster Place: A Novel in Seven Stories* has a simple structure. Most of the scenes take place in the decaying apartment complex, Brewster Place. The novel includes seven narratives, each focusing on a woman with her present story and her earlier experiences recapitulated in flashbacks. The main character in one chapter becomes less important in the other chapters. This technique of interconnection helps the work emerge as a novel rather than a collection of stories. Each episode has its own climax, building the novel's final climax of the most threatening crises faced by the Brewster Place community. Further, she tries to induce in its members a need to identify with the community first, and then join the main society.

The brick wall that closes the Brewster Place separates the inmates from the rest of the city. Naylor emphasizes the separation of Brewster Place from the rest of the city as the most significant aspect of the novel. It suggests that the residents of Brewster Place are psychologically and spiritually isolated. Brad Leithauser cites Naylor's suggestion as to how to better the race relations in the United States and how it can best be settled:
I think the best way to increase racial harmony is to get to know each other. Blacks and whites in this country now live in separate neighborhoods, worship in separate churches etc. with people so isolated from each other, it is difficult to get tolerance. The first step is simply to get to know each other.²

This has been very well worked out in the concluding part of *The Women of Brewster Place* in which one woman removes a brick, she thinks is stained with the blood of a resident, Lorraine who had been gang raped, and left to die. The other women impulsively join her and collectively, they tear down the wall that isolates the Brewster Place from the rest of the city. While doing so, they experience an inner regeneration, a sense of community, solidarity and a rebirth of hope.

Naylor persuades similar conviction in her other novels like *Linden Hills* and *The Men of Brewster Place* also. But, in *Linden Hills* she shows how impossible it is to attain the sense of community and solidarity among the residents as they have forsaken their ethnocentric identity under the pressure to get into the main stream society. Hence, they are assimilated upper middle class educated blacks, seeking the rewards of a society which is not their own. Such people, therefore, are devoid of any sense of belonging towards their community. Also, in *The Men of Brewster Place*, in the last part ‘Barber Shop’, Naylor points out at the lack of sense of community among the men. She attributes the deeds of the black men, mainly, to the failure of the communal solidarity. In *The Women of
Brewster Place, the male characters are insignificant; Annie Gottlieb observes them as “incalculable hunters who come and go. They are attractive but weak and dangerous representatives of nature and violent who both fertilize and threaten the female core.”

In fact, Mattie Michael, the chief character in The Women of Brewster Place, comes to Brewster Place because of the selfish and fiendish men involved in her life. Her lover Butch Fuller is indolent and persuades her into sex. Her father Samuel mugs on her, when he comes to know about her pregnancy, and her son Basil Michael forfeits the bail resulting in her losing her house. She is made to live in Brewster Place as she is left without an option. Reverend Moreland T. Woods, in the story of Etta Mae Johnson, is phony. Eugene frequently abandons his wife, Ciel and their daughter, Serena. Naylor portrays young male rapist, C.C. Baker in the story of Lorraine and Teresa. Jill L. Matus analyses the characters of The Women of Brewster Place:

Brewster Place is largely a community of women; men are mostly absent or itinerant, drifting in and out of their women’s lives, and leaving behind them pregnancies and unpaid bills. [The males] Basil and Eugene are forever on the run; other men in the stories (Kiswana’s boy friend Abshu, Cora Lee’s shadowy lovers) are narrative ciphers.
In addition, there is Ben, a fatherly veteran, who is sixty eight when he dies in *The Women of Brewster Place*. He is also a no better character and does not compensate for the other male characters in anyway. He is a desperate male character that is powerless and therefore, a failure. Yet, he is the hero of the novel. Naylor gives a valid explanation of her male characters:

> When I was writing *The Women of Brewster Place* I had not developed these male characters beyond playing the roles of antagonists for the women who were my central concern. At that time the men were used as dramatic devices to bring conflict, of some sort, into the lives of the women.

At the same time, Naylor is anxious of the criticism about her depiction of the male characters. She is worried that her readers, particularly men might misunderstand her treatment of them as ‘negative forces’. She says:

> I bent over backwards not to have a negative message come through about the men. My emotional energy was spent creating a woman’s world, telling her side of it because I knew it hadn’t been done enough in literature. But I worried about whether or not the problems that were being caused by the men in the Women’s lives would be interpreted as some bitter statement I had to make about black men.
Naylor, in heart of hearts, is also conscious of the kind of criticism Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* received. But critics like Jill L. Matus dismisses Naylor's novel as an advocate of feminist ideology in terms of Walker's. According to Matus, Naylor's novel does not meditate on feminist solutions as in the case with Walker's *The Color Purple*. She argues:

There is little of *The Color Purple*'s celebration and rejoicing in the discovery of self, sexuality, and creativity in the face of male abuse and repression. Celie is encouraged to trade her razor — she wants to slit Albert's throat for a needle, the implement of her autonomy and creativity. If *The Color Purple* meditates a feminist solution to the problems of the oppressed Celie, Naylor's novel is far more tentative about celebrating efficacy of female friendship, lesbian relationships, and self—affirmation through sisterhood.  

Naylor thus, is anxious whether her novel would be seen as a deliberate slighting of men. If the novel is viewed as a contest on gender issues, it is to oversimplify the theme. Matus quotes Joyce Lander who contends, "The enemy wasn't Black men, but oppressive forces in the larger society". It can be said that the novel is about African American women, who are invariably poor, but noted for the spirit of the street Brewster Place.

Most of Naylor's central women characters, Mattie Michael, Etta Mae Johnson, Luciela Louise Turner, Cora Lee, live in Brewster Place because their possibility for controlling their own lives has been blocked by societal mores
about women’s sexuality and their individual response to these restrictions. Although poverty is a condition that they all share, they have been condemned to that state because of society’s view of them as women, and their response to that view. They are presented as sets of counterpoint, so that Naylor can demonstrate how individual personality is not the determining factor that brings them to this street. Both Mattie Michael and Etta Mae Johnson come from the same Southern community. But while Mattie is a sweet girl, domestic in her orientation, Etta Mae Johnson is rebellious, yearning for adventure. Still both women are wounded by the fact that they are women. Mattie Michael is “ruined” by a single sexual encounter; her pregnancy results in her estrangement from her doting, then enraged, father who feels she has betrayed him. Mattie makes up for that loss by doting on her son Basil, only to receive from God what she prayed for, ‘a little boy who would always need her.’ The son’s betrayal of his aging mother depletes her savings and precipitates the necessity for her move to Brewster Place. Etta Mae, too, is estranged from her community. Whites force her to leave because she is too uppity. She lives, however, primarily through hitching her wagon to a ‘rising black star’ to a succession of men; she too never discovers that she can live through herself. Naylor comments on the effect of sexism and racism on her is so astute: “Even if someone had bothered to stop and tell her that the universe had expanded for her just an inch, she wouldn’t know how to shine alone.”(WBP, 60)

Although they have had opportunities to avoid a dead-end street like Brewster Place, both Mattie and Etta Mae end up there because of their concept of themselves as women. Mattie sacrifices herself to her son. Etta Mae will not put
up with the nonsense that men bring with them, but neither is she able to see that she can make up her own life. As a result the sweet Mattie and the adventurous Etta Mae arrive at a certain period in their lives without sufficient economic or psychological resources.

Both these middle-aged women Mattie and Etta Mae, live through others; but that is also true of the younger Lucielia and Cora Lee. Their lives complement Mattie’s and Etta Mae’s for Lucielia will do practically anything to maintain her relationship with her husband, while Cora Lee is obsessed with having babies. Their stories are counterpoint to each other in that Lucielia’s relationship with her husband is damaged because she does get pregnant while Cora Lee does not care about men except to get pregnant. Lucielia’s husband sees her womanhood as a trap: “With two kids and you on my back, I ain’t never gonna have nothin.” (WBP, 95) Children for him are a liability since he is a poor man. When Ceil aborts her second child only to lose her first while she is pleading with her husband to stay with her, she almost loses all sense of herself. On the other hand, encouraged by adults in her childhood to desire baby dolls, Cora Lee wants nothing more than to take care of babies. No longer concerned with her children when they naturally grow beyond babyhood, Cora Lee lives in a fantasy world, interrupted only by the growing demands of the human beings she has birthed.

Because of their lack of economic resources, these four women must live in Brewster Place. However Kiswana Browne and “the two” choose to live there for different reasons. Kiswana feels repressed, both communally and sexually,
her natal home, Linden Hills. She sees her sojourn in Brewster Place as bonding with her true people, black people. As well, her interaction with her mother, the major event in her story, demonstrates quite clearly that Kiswana sees Linden Hills' morality as hypocritical and narrow-minded. Her prim mother characterizes African sculpture, the heritage Kiswana proudly displays, as obscene, too blatantly sexual. Yet these two women have much in common in that they both enjoy their sensuality, the younger quite openly at least in Brewster Place, the older more covertly. Naylor's use of their adornment of their feet, a part of the female body that is usually hidden and which is not considered particularly sexual is an indication of their own pleasure in them. But finally it is Mrs. Browne's willingness to visit Kiswana in Brewster Place, the fact that she is concerned about her daughter's welfare despite their disagreements, which is an indication of the strength of their bond. Kiswana understands that her mother is there for her.

Kiswana's meeting with her mother is an amplification of a major chord sounded throughout this novel, for Brewster Place women mother one another. Perhaps these women are sometimes labelled "matriarchs" because together they are able to endure so much. There is no question that their stories in this novel are interconnected because of the caring bond they assume for one another, a bond that does not, however, preclude disagreements, falling-outs, even ineffectiveness.

Although Mattie's mother is ineffectual in her dealings with her father, it is she who, through threatened violence, prevents him from beating the pregnant girl to a pulp. It is a stranger, Miss Eva, who mothers Mattie and her son, giving
them a secure and happy home. Miss Eva may, as she says, be partial to men, but in the novel it is Mattie she treats like kin. The same attitude is evident in Mattie's friendship with Etta Mae Johnson. First mothered by Billy Holiday's music which articulates her spirit for her, Etta may believe that men are her means to success. But it is to Mattie she perennially returns for renewal. In the case of Cora Lee the children to see Shakespeare in the park, and it is on that occasion that this lover of babies begins to think about possibilities for her children who are no longer babies. Ciel mothers her child Serena and in turn is mothered by Mattie. In one of the most moving scenes in the novel, Mattie bathes the numb, grief-stricken Ciel, bringing her from death into life as she reawakens her senses in a ritual of shared womanhood, a ritual still practised in voodoo and derived from African religion.

A woman mothering other women is consistent throughout the novel as they hold each other in survival. Such mothering, though, does not extend to "the two" the lesbians who for the most Brewster Place residents do not even have specific names. Ben, the wino who had lost his crippled daughter, is the only one who befriends Lorraine one of "the two". Ironically, it is Ben who Lorraine kills in her frenzied effort to defend herself from her attackers. Ben is the first black resident of Brewster Place, and his death at the wall is a sign of Brewster Place's death as a community, of its inability to hold together much longer. Even as the women in the final scene of the novel chip away at the wall that imprisons them, we are aware that this is someone's dream, for such an act would be the prelude to
a community rebellion, a step that these nurturing restricted women cannot take if they are to survive as they have.

Similarly, Naylor explores several experiences of black men in *The Men of Brewster Place*, in its ten chapters. It begins with “Dusk” and ends with “Dawn”, and each chapter portrays the life of a single character from the list Ben, Brother Jerome, Basil, Eugene, Moreland T. Woods, C.C. Baker and Abshu, the sons of Brewster Place. Most of them are already known from *The Women of Brewster Place*.

In *The Men of Brewster Place* Naylor resurrects Ben’s spirit who died in the earlier novel to narrate the stories of men. In the ‘Author’s Note’, Naylor states that she takes poetic license to resurrect his spirit and voice to narrate the major portions of the novel. Maxine Lavon Montgomery points to this appropriation of male voice as a literary device in Naylor’s fourth novel *Bailey’s Café* (1992) also. She says, “Much like a Greek chorus, the voice of Ben, the fatherly alcoholic janitor, leads its way in and out of each story, establishing the time, place and moods, introducing the characters.”9 Naylor adds a supernatural feel to the stories of *The Men of Brewster Place*, since the amazing fact is that the narrator is a ghost. However, he cannot escape from the life he had led. He lets the readers know about his life and his addictions. This shows that he wants to be seen as an imperfect character, not fit to judge the lives and actions of the men whose stories he tells. But his significance in the novel is evident from what he says about himself. “If Brewster Place could talk; it wouldn’t tell you nothing much different than what I have said” (*MBP*, 8). The theme, according to him, is
the human relationship and conflict between the genders, which he considers as
the ‘whole’ ‘human story’. He analyses, “I don’t know a man who would be
anywhere without a woman. And don’t know a woman who’d be anywhere
without a man. It’s how God did it; and we sure can’t undo it. (MBP, 7) Naylor
refers to passages from her first novel to establish intertextual relationship between
the two novels.

In The Women of Brewster Place, Ben is seen as a fatherly figure,
especially to Lorraine. Her story interests him in many ways. Lorraine’s father
hates her for her social misbehaviour of being a lesbian. Consequently, she is sent
away from her house. Ben, at once, is reminded of his daughter who had turned to
prostitution because of a white landowner, Mr. Clyde’s sexual exploitation. Ben
fails to avenge the cruelty the white world has visited upon his daughter. Ben’s
daughter, who is crippled from her birth, tells Ben about the sexual improprieties
she has been forced into. Instead of avenging, Ben resolves to booze, “that if he
sat up drinking all night Friday, he could stand on the porch Saturday morning
and smile at the man who whistles as he drops his lame daughter home.” (WBP,
154) It is expected that he could have done something to stop his daughter flee to
Memphis in order to earn money in prostitution. But, it is clear that he is not able
to withstand the social inequities in force between black and white men.

Naylor joins Lorraine, a banished daughter and Ben, a bereft father.
Ben asserts, “You remind me lots of my little girl” (WBP, 147) when they
discover each other, they at once fulfill the role of the absent family. They no
longer feel that they are living in a world without an address because they draw
courage and solace from each other. Lorraine achieves firmness in her spirit that hadn’t been there in her before joining Ben. Ben narrates his past to Lorraine showing his daughter’s snapshot. Lorraine, in return, tells him her story recollecting how her father had sent her away from home after finding one of her girlfriends’ love letters. When she admits that she is a lesbian, she is driven away. Every year she sends her father a birthday card which is returned unopened. Then, she starts sending him cards without the return address with a hope that sometime, before his death, her father would open them. Michael Awkward observes the relation between Ben and Lorraine “[is] based primarily in their feelings of difference, absence and loss”.

Naylor puts a story in the background in Ben’s story which is narrated in the first person point of view. He was seven when his grandpa Jones died and seventeen when his grandmother died. Though the World War-II was in full swing, he was never drafted for. Had he not met Elvira, he would have been settled in the city of Memphis as a shoe-shine boy. He admired her for her self-respect, and her ability to read and write. When they had decided to marry they had to leap back to get settled as share croppers in a village with suitable air for her better health. Their only daughter is crippled from birth. She is ill treated by Elvira who had been a bigot. In order to save the little girl from Elvira’s anger Ben sends her with Mr. Clyde to work in his house. Subsequently, she is sexually assaulted by Mr. Clyde, the injustice at which Ben could never avenge, the story with a general appeal for African American men:
Ben's story is a sequel to that of his grandpa Jones's. Grandpa Jones is also unable to protect his sister of twelve from the sexual assault of a white man. Both the stories unite the past, present, and future to direct the attention to the "timelessness" of the black situation. Grandpa Jones's story deals with an orthodox religious perspective, which as Montgomery says holds up scrutiny through Naylor's canon. He is repulsive towards the religion that fails to address and redeem the black men of their problems. Besides, it furthers oppression by expecting them to suffer in silence while awaiting divine retribution for the social wrongs. Grandpa Jones's story eloquently speaks of his candour regarding the white man's religion, Christianity. Grandpa Jones retrenches himself from religion since it denied him justice. He turns away from his faith in God and a bitter man, waiting as a recluse for response. "I am opening the Bible when someone shows me the place that say white people is going to hell". (MBP, 12)

Naylor focuses on the repressed anger that prompts Grandpa Jones to close his Bible and shun the church forever, "sitting in his porch rocker with a closed Bible in his lap" (MBP, 12).
Critics opine that Naylor might have suggested a substitute for Christianity in the character Grandpa Jones. But she does not do so, since she often confesses her strong faith in the already established spiritual realm. She answers to one of the questions in an interview on her faith in God:

Well, I’m a spiritual person. I no longer belong to a formalized religion. But I do believe there are powers beyond ours right here on this earth. I believe that, and if you want to call it a God you can. I am from a people in whom spirituality plays a huge role. The black community respects the spirituality.\textsuperscript{12}

Ben and Grandpa Jones represent the African American male experience of suffering from manhood inadequacies. Ben’s wife Elvira points out his powerlessness:

If you was half a man, you coulda given me more babies and we would had some help work in this land instead of half grown woman we gotta carry the load for. And if you was even quarter a man, we wouldn’t be a bunch of miserable share croppers on someone else’s land – but we is, Ben.\textit{(WBP, 153)}

Michael Awkward finds Elvira’s assessment of Ben reasonable.

His wife measures Ben’s masculine and human worth by his abilities as a provider of both babies and of moderately good economic stability
and finds him seriously lacking. He is not in Elvira’s economically pragmatic perception, “even quarter a man.”

Elvira’s assessment of manhood is to provide babies and money. Ben’s failure to do so is reflected in his secret impulse to murder her. Realizing the truth in her conceptualization of manhood, he says: “But the gram of truth in her words was heavy enough to weigh his hand down in his pockets and keep his feet nailed to the wooden planks in the porch, and the wounds healed over by themselves.” (WBP, 153-154)

Naylor sketches Ben’s human failings – his alcoholism, his inability to live up to Elvira’s concept of masculinity and the secret violent impulses in him to kill her. But his death in the hands of Lorraine, his surrogate daughter though accidental comes as a kind of unavoidable punishment. When he is resurrected in the sequel, he is still at the cross roads of life, and does not understand what it is to be a man.

In this connection, Ben is best studied from the character analysis of the protagonists of two African American classics, Bigger Thomas from Richard Wright’s Native Son (1940) and the invisible man from Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man (1952). Critics like Charles Wilson Jr., establishes the influence of the above classics on Naylor in creating the male characters, particularly in The Men of Brewster Place.
Native Son tells the story of twenty year old Bigger Thomas, an African American living in utter poverty. He lived in Chicago’s southern ghetto in the 1930’s. He gets into trouble as a youth, but upon receiving a job in the Dalton’s Home, he experiences an identity. He accidentally kills a white woman, runs from the police, rapes and kills his girl friend, Bessie. Finally he is caught and tried.

Naylor like Wright does not infuse Bigger with any of the romantic aspects or trait common to literary heroes in the male characters. Rather given the social conditions they must live, they are what one might expect them to be sullen, frightened, violent, hateful and resentful. They view white people as a collective overwhelming force that dictates them, where to live, where to work, and what to do. While not apologizing for Bigger’s crimes, Wright is sympathetic to the systemic inevitability behind him. The novel is a powerful statement about racial inequality and social injustice. It is so deep that it becomes nearly impossible to determine where societal expectations and conditioning ends and free will begin. As Bigger’s lawyer points out, there is no escape from this destiny for his client, or any other black American, since they are the necessary products of the society that forms them. The society also tells them who exactly they are supposed to be. Wright is of the opinion that no African American exists who does not have his Bigger Thomas living in his skull.

Bigger Thomas, Ben, or any other African American character of Naylor it may seem ironic to call them native son(s) because the reality of their lives is that they always struggle to be accepted in a world that they view as
hostile. Wright gets inside the head of brute Negro Bigger, revealing his feelings, thoughts, and points of view as he commits crimes. He justifies his character Bigger as an outcome of his (Bigger's) confrontation with racism, violence and debasement. Wright defines Bigger as:

But what was he after? What did he want? What did he love and what did he hate? He did not know. There was something he knew and something he felt, something the world gave him and something he himself had: something spread out in front of him and, spread out in back; and never in all his life with this black skin of his, had the two worlds, thought and feelings, will and mind, aspiration and satisfaction, been together; never had he felt a sense of wholeness.14

Ben, too confronts similar situation like Bigger, but is conscious of the punishment he would receive in case of violence:

What does it mean to be a man? Even now at sixty eight I'm still wondering. If I had killed Clyde Haggard, the law kills me. If I had killed Elvira, the law puts me in jail for life. If I killed myself, there was no one but an understanding God to face. So, I settled in killing myself slowly with booze.\textit{(MBP, 13)}

Almost, none of Naylor's male character subscribe to violence as means and methods of exhibiting their resentment of racism as Bigger does. The instance of Ben in both the novels and Grandpa Jones in \textit{The Men of Brewster}
Place, and almost all other male characters are a fusion of African American men’s experience in America. Naylor, like Wright might have known people like them personally, while growing up along with the oppressed masses. But Naylor’s suggestion is contrast to that of her predecessor, Wright. Naylor’s characters also might have been shown displaying anti-social and violent attitude toward the oppressor. Instead, they remain capitulated and acquiescence.

Naylor’s male characters do not avenge the oppressors. The mind set is mostly for obsequiousness. Ben, the fatherly figure and the bridge between both the novels of Naylor, The Women of Brewster Place and The Men of Brewster Place suffers from male inadequacies. So much so, he fails to gain a family for him. His choice of Elvira is unfortunate. Naylor sees her responsible for Ben’s failures, but she is traditional in her opinion of manhood. Elvira’s ideal man should earn her money and children. Naylor’s depiction of Ben is capable of neither of them, hence his failure comes no surprise. His ultimate failure is to save his daughter, first from the sexual harassment of white landlord Clyde, and next from turning her to prostitution. Therefore, he is not a redeemer figure. Instead, he is suicidal in his solutions. He watches himself dying. His death in the first novel, though unintentional, is inevitable. The resurrected ‘Ben’ in the later novel awaits death but knows what it is. Naylor is clear about the philosophic undertones of Ben’s character. In a hostile, oppressed society death is most sought after solution. If he had killed Mr. Clyde he would have saved his daughter and family. If he had been able to satisfy his wife Elvira he would have been a family man. But it is not so Ben is sensible to the punishment he would receive in
case of violent killing. He is left with no option, but to remain passive. Ben and
Bigger are different in their reflections of the similar situation.

Grandpa Jones is contemptuous like Ben. Naylor shows them together
as the timelessness of black males suffering. The oppression of the blacks
continued from generation to generation. The story of Grandpa Jones is found in
flashback of Ben’s. Ben tells that his grandpa’s retaliation at the injustice done to
his (Grandpa’s) sister of twelve is personal but not against the oppressor. His
understanding of God as brimstone and vengeful made him wait upon God to
punish the oppressor. When it is not so, he is skeptical of God. So, he shuns God
and religion and has been isolated. This, Naylor declares as the most common
experience of African Americans in the United States. There is always a
suggestion for a substitution in religion in the lives of many African-Americans in
America. As it is the character of Grandpa Jones and Ben stand in contrast to
Wright’s Bigger Thomas.

In The Women of Brewster Place, Mattie’s girlhood friend Etta Mae
Johnson was driven out of the small town from which Mattie had come out. She
is a rebel like, “who is unwilling to play by the rules, but whose spirit challenged
the very right of the rules to exist” (WBP, 59) and “she was just being herself”
(WBP, 60). Moving from man to man, Etta Mae seeks to better herself
economically and socially. She tries to entice Reverend Moreland T. Woods into
marriage. But, she is abandoned by him after their sexual encounter. Then, she
realizes that she should live in Brewster Place with Mattie and other women.
Naylor in both The Women of Brewster Place and Linden Hills portrays ministers
who infringe the central principle of their religion through self-indulgence. Moreland T. Woods is one such minister whom we come across in Etta Mae Johnson’s story. He is further reconnected in The Men of Brewster Place as a minister casual in his faith in God and religion. Naylor comments, “well, his faith was still in himself, where it had always been. And may be that was the real answer, just trust in himself and God would take care of the minor details”. (MBP, 102) The Brewster Place residents show special concern for religion since they wish to find consolation for their sufferings in God and religion. Ben comments, “There are two things that the folks on this street take dead serious: their children and their religion. ‘Cause any hope they have for the future is all wound up in them two things” (MBP, 97)

The story of Reverend Woods continues in the chapter “Abshu” also. He is elected to the city council with his roots in Sinai Baptist Church like Martin Luther King, Jr. It was his ambition and he worked out for it from the moment he became a minister:

There was a bottom in the Baptist Church, but there was definitely no top. And when he looked at the great men of his race – the Martin Luther King – all had come out of the Baptist Church to go on to a national spotlight. Was he as great as Martin Luther King? No, but with enough work he could get there (MBP, 103).

Reverend Woods is the first and the only black elected to such a position. But, when the time comes, he betrays his community, and votes to bring
down Brewster Place. He is lambasted for his denial, and Jackie Thomas in his review describes him as a ‘sell-out.’ The minister, Moreland T. Woods, succeeds at getting his new church and a political office but eventually, he is viewed as a sell-out.

Abshu, a social worker, with his friend B.B plans to oust Reverend Woods from his office and teaches him a lesson for being treacherous. They produce a group of young actresses before the City council and make them act as pregnant women. They see the council believe that they are gulled and later disowned by Woods. As a part of conspiracy it aims to bring dishonour to Reverend Woods. Consequently, he gets caught in the labyrinth and is removed from his office. The melee between Abshu and Woods cannot stop the Brewster Place from meeting its end. It does no good to the community, anyway.

The bottom line in the story of Basil Michael in The Men of Brewster Place is the concept of family and the state of fatherhood which had been endangered in the modern American society, particularly in the African American community. The root causes of the problem lie in the legacy of slavery, discrimination in educational opportunities, and employment, and the tradition of matriarchy. Slavery has its own impact on black men and their families. As a result, the community has no family history. Naylor offers to resolve the crisis through political activism:

I think we are still struggling under the scar of slavery, and I think that the civil Rights Movement did not work. The country is almost as divided as it was before.
Okay, there are a few things that have changed and certain blacks have gained ascendency. But, for many, it remains the same if not worse. The different tenants that we used to have, which were the family, and the community, and the church; those things are playing less and less a part in the raising of young black children. Therefore, we see this vicious cycle that goes on a vicious cycle of... babies having babies; of people living in the same poor area, living and dying within sometimes fifty miles of where they were born, never really seeing the outside world and never understanding the opportunities that are there and how to access them. We see a middle class that is isolated geographically... as well as psychologically from the black poor. So I think there is a great need for healing. I don’t know if such healing can be done through novels though I think it has to be done through political action. 

The story of Basil Michael, in *The Men of Brewster Place* is narrated in the first person. He turns out to be just as miserable as he was in the earlier novel. He is the runaway son of Mattie Michael. He grows up to be a troubled young man who is unable to claim responsibility for his actions. One night, in a bar fight, he accidentally kills a man and is arrested. Mattie uses her house to get him out from the jail on bail. He runs away from Mattie once for all. Mattie, being insolvent, is forced to end up in the Brewster Place.

In *The Men of Brewster Place*, Naylor gives Basil a better conscience and character. He desperately tries to find atonement for his past sins. He
devotes himself to an honourable cause in order to assuage the guilt of running away from an issue that had destroyed his mother. In a philosophic tone he confesses that he is determined to get redemption, "I can’t undo the past, but I would find someone, somewhere and make her life happy. I would be a father I never had" (*MBP*, 46)

Naylor does not let Basil compensate for his previous misdeeds. He looks for reprisal in a contemptuous ‘trash bag’ named Keisha an irresponsible mother of Jason and Eddie. First, he proposes to marry Helen, his girl friend and adopt Keisha’s two sons, six and four year old Jason and Eddie. Keisha is a single mother, living on her own. Helen disposes his proposal by saying, “so what, if welfare has became her [Keisha’s] permanent man? It was like that with her mother, and it's going to keep going” (*MBP*, 57) Basil is concerned about the future of Keisha’s sons, and says:

You know, Helen, we keep talking and talking about the situation with young black men. They are an endangered species; they are a lost generation; on and on… I can’t solve the problem of a whole generation; but there are two little kids right here who I can help. So why not? Why couldn’t I stay in their lives forever—why could not we both? (*MBP*, 56-57)

Basil is apprehensive about the future of Keisha’s sons. He strives hard to bring about a change in their lives. He also contemplates on the purpose of his life on the earth since his birth was a miracle. Butch Fuller who had
seduced his mother Mattie was not for marriage because of his problem of low sperm count. The same has been passed on to Basil from his father, Butch Fuller. He knows that he can never father children. His ultimate wish was to be 'a solid family man'. So, he wants to accept Keisha's two kids as his own for they desperately need a father. Basil wants to find redemption from his former sins towards his mother by bringing about 'some difference' for better in the lives of Jason and Eddie.

Little Eddie's notion, regarding a father makes everyone think about the concept of father in the black community:

He is [Basil] not our daddy", little Eddie said, "He is our best friend."

"No", Jason said, "he is a daddy".

"No, no", - little Eddie was close to tears.

"Daddies go away. Daddies go away" (MBP, 58-59)

Though short lived, Basil is gratified in the role of a father to Jason and Eddie. He sees it as a moral obligation towards his community to prevent children from becoming perverted due to broken family relationships. In his case, he makes a wrong choice by marrying an unfaithful woman like Keisha. After serving six years in prison for forfeiting the bail after unintentional killing of a white man, Basil finds Jason and Eddie on their route to anarchy. He realizes that he had rejuvenated none. Naylor suggests that Basil is not the quintessence of the social order of broken family systems in black community. At the best, he serves as an apostle to the cause of established strong family unit. Abshu is an altruist of
black community like Basil. Naylor deals with similar themes in the stories of Basil and Abshu, but, the difference is she moves from individual to societal level.

The story of Eugene comes from the story of Lucielia Louise Turner in *The Women of Brewster Place*. She is the granddaughter of Ms. Eva Turner and known as Ciel. She is brought up along with Basil Michael. She has a daughter called Serena by Eugene. Eugene is found to be unhappy and was complaining about lack of opportunities for black men. In an extreme situation, he forces Ciel to get aborted when she was pregnant. Shortly afterwards, he says he should leave for Maine on a new job and is obviously lying to his wife. A serious altercation takes place when Ciel tries to stop him. Meanwhile, their daughter Serena chases a roach into an electric socket with a fork. She is electrocuted and dies instantaneously. Ciel becomes lifeless with grief after her daughter’s death, the gruesome incident of *The Women of Brewster Place*.

Ben, introduces Eugene’s story in *The Men of Brewster Place*. He is not sure why Eugene leaves his wife and daughter often. Naylor rephrases the episode from Eugene’s point of view. Ben lets him tell his harrowing story by himself. Eugene directs it to Ciel even though she is absent. Surprisingly, Eugene is found to be a well intentioned husband and father. He confirms his love for Ciel and Serena by saying “Why did I keep leaving? Baby, that’s not the right question. It never was the question, why did I keep coming? (MBP, 70) He asserts that his love for his wife and daughter brings him back to them. He further explains the reason for his separation from them. It is his intuitive desire to be a homosexual which he is unable to conquer. His marriage to Ciel is unfortunate.
“After that first night at the Bull and Roses, when I opened up that part of myself, I'd been running from most of my life. I saw our marriage as a trap. You and I both caught in the web of my denial” (MBP, 82)

Eugene, thus, is a freak and suffers from a conflict due to his inability to fight his situation. “The first time I went home with another man from the bar, it felt so complete. At least, for a short while until the guilt of what I was doing to you came back to wrap itself around my chest and tighten into an iron knot.” (MBP, 84) In summary, Eugene the second time is a million times worse than the first. In the end he wants to wash off the blood of his daughter which is on him, by shedding his own. Jackie Thomas analyses him as confused and has forsaken his family because he has explored another side of himself that he still does not understand.

Jill L. Matus describes Abshu, Kiswana’s boy friend as ‘a narrative cipher’. In The Women of Brewster Place, he is in the story of Kiswana Browne. Kiswana is different from the rest of the residents of Brewster Place. Unlike other women, she gets down there by choice. She intends to bring about a real social change in the lives of the black community. She wants to live closer to the community to better understand and answer the problems of them. She comes from the affluent community of Linden Hills but alights at Brewster Place to effect a social change in the residents of Brewster Place. She is a serious and thoughtful woman. Her approach to the social problems of the black community is also different. She attempts to solve them politically i.e. by fighting for rights and demanding justice. She has a choice to leave Brewster Place as survival is not
a problem for her. While referring to the issues of community, class, and patriarchy in Naylor’s novels, Barbara Christian terms Kiswana as the link between Naylor’s first two novels. She points to her unique character:

Naylor’s inclusion of Kiswana as a pivotal character in The Woman of Brewster Place indicates the great distance between women who must live in women-centered communities and those who have the option to live in them. For Kiswana’s choice to live in Brewster Place is already a sign that, in relation to the other women, she has some privilege in the society. She is an ‘exception’, while they are the majority. And her privilege comes from the fact that she was raised in a wealthy community.¹⁶

Kiswana’s boyfriend Abshu is introduced in The Men of Brewster Place whose original name is Clifford Montgomery Jackson. He prefers to be called Abshu since it makes him feel closer to the African tradition. He is a community activist and a playwright. He intends to bring about a change in his community by organizing plays and dramas. As the head of the Community Centre he manages the centre with the help of the government funds and educates the street children. He believes in the universal significance of Shakespearean plays. He organizes them in park for the benefit of the public. It is to one of these shows Kiswana invites Cora Lee and her children in The Women of Brewster Place. The children in the Community Centre like him for the interest he takes in them.
Other than these activities, Abshu takes keen interest in retaining the survival of Brewster Place. He counters Reverend Moreland T. Woods who is the first black to get elected to the City council. Abshu later tricks him to resign the position on grounds of betraying the community. The second part of Abshu’s story is his foster childhood experiences in a care centre. It speaks the plights of such children, in general. There are four of them in his family; his two younger sisters and a baby brother. Unfortunately, all of them end up in foster care. His father is unemployed and an eccentric. Often his wife is made a victim of his anger and frustration. When he is drunk he apologizes her for ill-treating. Paradoxically, little Abshu would pray to God to keep his father drunk all the time so that he would not beat his mother. His mother sends Abshu and other children to Mason’s foster care where Abshu stayed for nine years. Finally, he wins a scholarship at a local college, and starts supporting himself, working in a doughnut shop. As he grows up into a youth, he tries his best, and works for street children. His ultimate dream, Ben declares, “Lose no child to the streets.” (MBP, 140)

Abshu struggles in vain to rescue the ill fated community from its inevitable demise. He cannot, with all his noble ideals, prevent children like C.C. Baker from ending up as goons and gangsters. C.C. Baker in The Women of Brewster Place inflicts the patriarchal structure back into the lives of Lorraine and her lover Theresa, the lesbian couple. They flee to Brewster Place from a more affluent neighbourhood only to discover the same kind of homophobia they had wanted to escape from. The gang rape on Lorraine by C.C. Baker and his
accomplices is an imposition of patriarchy on her. As Celeste Fraser says, “The 
Young men do not rebel against the social forces that build the constructing wall, 
but rather resort to terror against black women to assert themselves as 
patriarchs.” 17

In the later novel, The Men of Brewster Place also, C.C. Baker is 
vViolent causing much fear and anger. He is of an exceptional human nature that 
does not change even with the time. He is involved in drug trafficking, and is 
guilty of fratricide and keeps the truth of killing his step brother from police. 
Naylor says about him:

*The Men of Brewster Place* is about both race 
and gender because you cannot separate the two 
when dealing with the black community or any 
community’s experience. I wrote about a cross 
section of black men – some who were powerful 
like Moreland T. Woods, and on the other end of 
the spectrum some who were powerless like C.C. 
Baker. 18

“The Barber Shop”, the last section of the novel, is provided as an 
addendum. This has traces to “The Block Party” of the earlier novel, *The Women 
of Brewster Place*, but not the characters. Both conceptualize human solidarity 
“The Block Party” avenges the death of Lorraine, where all seven of Naylor’s 
women characters resist the oppression. In Mattie’s dreams they unite to bring 
down the wall that separates Brewster Place from the rest of the city. Celeste 
Fraser opines that the Block Party replaces the myth of black matriarchy created
by the Moynihan, Murray, and Moyers, who dictate a derogatory definition to the African American family.

“The Barber Shop” in *The Men of Brewster Place* is significant for the male bonding and brotherhood. It is a well defined place for men. Ben says it is a place where “a woman would have no reason to come. It is clear just by the smell and the look of the place that “this is where men have a chance to hang out and talk.” (*MBP*, 157) The characters in the “Barber Shop” are mainly Greasy, Max, Henry, and a few others. They gather there for reading papers, playing checkers or just to make friends, besides having a shaving or haircut. It is a place where debate and understanding take place among the men who gather there. Greasy the crack, because of his nightmarish hallucinations kills himself in the presence of others in the Barber Shop. They do not own the responsibility for Greasy’s death. The Barber Shop, with its emphasis on male bonding, fails to save Greasy from his death and that makes his death more tragic. Ben’s death in *The Women of Brewster Place* draws a parallel to that of Greasy’s suicide. They both depict the powerlessness of masculine identity. Ben, Greasy, and the other men in the barber shop lack proper action when it is needed. It is their collective denial of male identity.

Like Greasy, Brother Jerome is cursed with the limitations of retardation. His male identity is challenged by rickets. But he is able to put things together through his music. He is a music genius and, a gifted piano player. He captures the plight of all black men through his playing of the blues. This ‘retarded child’ has his own sufferings in the form of , first his miserable
state of retarded mind and body, next his hedonistic mother, Mildred. She decides not to institutionalize him. She makes money by charging for his performances. Like all other men in the novel Brother Jerome also serves to direct our attention to the perennial sufferings of poverty, isolation, and powerlessness. Like Greasy’s, Brother Jerome’s isolation is both psychic and physical. Naylor tries to illustrate that at some point of time all black men perhaps, are transcended into retardation of gender and race in the white world. The men in The Men of Brewster Place through the generations elucidate the timelessness situation of the blacks. The intense sufferings of black men stand in the way of achieving conscious manhood. It has been passed on from Grandpa Jones and Ben to Brother Jerome. Brother Jerome’s music continues to the part ‘Dusk’ in the novel, in which Brewster Place’s demise is celebrated on a note of eternal hope. And this is the hope which Naylor has been craving for to revitalize the community in the new millennium.

Naylor in both the novels meticulously instills hope in the concluding sections. Naylor in an interview speaks about concluding them on a note of eternal hope:

I don’t see The Women of Brewster Place ending on a note of despair. The spirit of the street is still there even though the physical place is now deserted. So both the novels end on a note – however small – of survival. This is because I believe that no matter how bad things might get, if there is still life within our bodies than there is hope. 19
After an indepth study of the male characters of Naylor, in her fifth novel *The Men of Brewster Place*, it may seem to find similarities between Ralph Ellisons *Invisible Man* and Naylor’s male characters. As the novel is a powerful study of masculinity, particularly of the African Americans by Ellison, a similar conceptualization is found in Naylor’s male characters also. *The Men of Brewster Place* is well interpreted from Ellison’s novel since both of them represent the cultural context of African American male situation. All the male characters from the list, Ben, Grandpa Jones, Brother Jerome, Basil Michael, Eugene, Abshu, C.C. Baker, Moreland T. Woods, Greasy imbibe the qualities of invisible man, the protagonist of Ellison, whose name is not known and whose identity is Obscure.

*Invisible Man* is the only novel that Ralph Ellison published during his life time. It won him the National Book Award in 1953. The novel addresses many of the social and intellectual issue of African American identity, including the relationship between the self and society. F.H.Langman says:

-“Although *Invisible Man* tells the story of a blackman’s search for himself his name is never given. It represents more than the quest for black identity. It is at once more specific, a very individual story, and more general, dramatizing the identity crisis of a whole society.”20

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The hero of *Invisible Man* is appropriately nameless. He is an African American, and is invisible in a society where visibility is essential. As a young man, he regenerates hope for future. His grand father cautions him of white people:

"... overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction. Let them swallow you till they vomit or bust wide open." But he changes this opinion of them in course of the novel. He moves to North with a hope to achieve visibility or identity. He plunges into a manhole and goes through a period of 'hibernation'. As a good 'Negro', he has tried the path of 'humility'. He attempted to fit into American industry, the paint factory. He has tried leftist politics the Brotherhood and, thus into American political stream. He tried all the possibilities opened to him in order to achieve visibility. When failed in all his attempts, he decided to be an underground man. He attaches his failures and frustrations to his blackness.

The town leaders dictate terms to invisible man. They say, "We mean to do right by you but you've got to know your place at all times." In fact, there is no benevolence included in their wish but only to dominate. Upon his arrival in New York invisible man observes: "a new world of possibility suggested itself to me faintly, like a small voice that was barely audible in the roar of city sounds." He wonders what value personal integrity can have in this cynical world. Since people refuse to see him he is invisible. He feels stifled by the stereotypes of his race and believes that when people look at him, those stereotypes are all they see because they do not look any deeper than that. In his opinion the outside world,
what men call reality is chaos. Further, he explains that light is an intellectual necessity for him since ‘the truth is the light, and light is truth’.

From the underground perspective, the invisible man attempts to make sense out of his life experience, and position in American society. The irony is, he is invisible, and confined himself to a basement, and is full of vision for life. The vision and hope for future enables him create poetry. His poetry is painful. It comes to his rescue in his frustration for life. The underground man is alienated, isolated, neurotic, therefore, a product of disorder. These are the American themes with another important theme of initiation. The narrator is initiated through a series of traumatic experiences into the world of reality – black, white, South, North, militant, and political.

Naylor’s male characters reflect the African American male situation in America as found in Ellison’s Invisible Man. Of course, Naylor’s The Men of Brewster Place explores the other side of gender issue; men shown rational who are able to think for themselves and who realize that they have problems they must solve. But all of them have critique situation-the gifted piano player Brother Jerome captures the plights of all African American men through his playing of the blues. Although he is a retarded child in isolation, he is the silent brilliant force that is able to put things together through his music. There is Basil who tries to recapture all that he has missed in life by attempting to be a father to two boys whom he adopts. However, he ends up in confusion when the boys do not turnout the way that he had wished, hence, is a failure. Along with Basil, Eugene, Moreland T. Woods, C.C. Baker all testify the African American male situation,
therefore, initiates through traumatic experiences. The invisible man similarly encounters the male situation in isolation, and discovers selfhood he has never known before. He seems to search for his relationship to the reality, the world and the visibility. The result he finds is diversity. He declares at the end in an epilogue:

Whence all this passion toward conformity anyway? Diversity is the world, let man keep his many part and you’ll have no tyrant states. Why, if they follow this conformity business they’ll end up by forcing me, an invisible man to become white which is not a color but the lack of one... America is woven of many strands; I would recognize them and let it so remain. It’s winner takes nothing that it is the great truth of a country or of any country. Life is to be lived, not controlled, and humanity is won by continuing to play in face of certain defeat. Our fate is to become one, and yet many – This is not prophecy, but description.  

Hence, it is felt that the novel conceptualizes masculinity. The novel also depicts the identity crisis of a whole community from which the members invariably suffer. Naylor discusses the technique and her expectations of The Men of Brewster Place:

(Well), I don’t know if I can write a whole novel, but I can write a story and then I can write another story. That’s sort of how it happened. Now what’s going to be interesting for me is to see now The Men of Brewster Place finally comes out to being. I’m pretty sure it’s
going to be looking as relationships between men and their families. When you do 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. I would love to look at black men in relationship to their families... Add that to the fact that I'm a very different woman from the woman who wrote 'The Women of Brewster Place'.

Like Ellison, Naylor is also aware of the similar conflict, related to her identity as an African American. In this regard, she says:

"I am a black female writer and I have no qualms whatever with people saying that I'm a black female writer. What I take umbrage with is the fact that some might try to use the identity-that which is me-as a way to ghettoize my material and my output. I am female and black and American. No buts are in that identity. Now you go off and do the work to somehow broaden yourself so you understood what America is really about. Because it's about me."

It fairly sums up, Naylor's dismay at the marginalization of black literature by American mainstream literature. She expresses the urgent need to identify with the community in her novel Linden Hills. In a sense, it can never become a community since the members do not identify with one another. Of course, they are affluent but assimilated Americans, void of special identify for
themselves. They are viewed through the eyes of the whites. In most of her novels she urges her community to identify with its culture.

Charles E Wilson, Jr. examines The Men of Brewster Place as a post colonial novel:

Post colonial criticism examines a work using the oppressor-oppressed model, whereby a colonizing group encroaches upon the physical and cultural space of another group, the colonized, and forces that latter group to adopt the value system, language, cultural practices, and the sensibility of the colonizer. The Post colonial theorist, however is concerned with the oppressed group's rejection of previous subjugation and restoration of its own agency and purpose, hence Post Colonial. 27

Wilson further says that these critics focus on issues of critical difference in literary works. Instead of ignoring the tensions these differences may create, the post colonialist will analyze such tensions in order to learn more about each cultural position. Concern matters of imperialism, this process often involves initiating discussions on difference that have often remain unvoiced.

Naylor is reprimanded for just addressing issues related to the plight of black men and for failing to provide solid solutions. Maxine Lavon Montgomery comments on Naylor's failure in this regard and says:“Naylor presents no pat answer to the complicated socio – political questions she raises. 87
Instead, she merely foregrounds the experiences of contemporary black men struggling for manhood in hope that society will act to bring an end to injustice.”

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Naylor seems to be conscious of the Nationalists’ ideology in both the novels. But she is faulted for not being clear about attaining the result. Internal strife does little for the uplift of the community. Also, Naylor does not induce interracial unity with the rest of races including the dominant race. It helps to establish harmony among themselves, development and growth within the black community. Even within the black community women should be viewed as collaborators to work for the betterment of the community. Instead, the female characters in *The Men of Brewster Place* are demonized as their male counterparts in *The Women of Brewster Place*. Kiswana is not allowed to join Abshu, Elvira is a virago being incompatible to Ben. Helen, in Basil’s story, is irresponsible, rather selfish. Keisha is both indolent and disloyal. Mildred, Brother Jerome’s mother is hedonistic. Naylor depicts them as ignominious characters. Hence, tension between genders remains unresolved for the second time also.

Regarding Naylor’s fictional art Montgomery makes two important observations from the novel:

In Naylor’s latest novel there is little, if any, of the lyrical prose which readers have come to expect from this gifted novelist. Noticeably, absent as well as the intriguing significations upon texts within and outside of the black literary tradition. The male characters,
although vividly drawn, lack much of the emotional involvement and depth that make Naylor’s female characters so memorable.\textsuperscript{29}

Margaret Earley Whitt is also of the same view: “\textit{The Men of Brewster Place} lacks the lyricism and character depth of Naylor’s earlier novels.”\textsuperscript{30} But both, Montgomery and Whitt appreciate Naylor for her literary contribution to the understanding of the contemporary black male situation. Naylor is recognized for her efforts to create a literary space for black man’s story. Despite much criticism Nikki Giavanni has lots of praise for the novel \textit{The Men of Brewster Place}:

Gloria just gets smoother and better, doesn’t she? \textit{The Men of Brewster Place} is sort of like clear cool mountain stream; too cold to wade in; too swift to dove take a drink from; yet clean and inviting nonetheless; sort of like black men. ‘Difficult and dangerous; dedicate and deep,’ in the words of James Baldwin. May be more like a winter day with that clear blue sky and though the scene is shining we know we need protection before going out. A natural precaution that in no way spoils the adventure that, indeed allows us to interact with varying phenomena. I’m so glad to know what happened to Basil and why he didn’t return. Ben needed to tell his story. C.C. Baker has reason for rage albeit misplaced. The men are standing on the mountain top looking over into the valley. They, too, have dreams that are being deferred, no, destroyed. Gloria was very brave
to once again low this trail into the uncharted territory of the heart.  

Thus, *The Men of Brewster Place* offers a much needed glimpse of contemporary African American literary world in fiction writing. About her position as a writer, Naylor says, "I still see my role as a writer to be a guardian of the lives that were entrusted to me. I am still obligated to tell the best story that I know how."
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