

Symbolism Mirroring in Gloria Naylor's Linden Hills

P.K. Selvaraj and Dr. K. Rajkumar

Abstract-- Gloria Naylor ranks among writers like William Faulkner who popularized social issues including slavery that many American writers may not prefer to talk about. Naylor was very unapologetic in writing about racial and class discrimination, gender issues, sexuality and urbanization. Through her characters she showed how a black person could recreate real life images and stories. She utilized the redemptive power of language by revealing humiliation of the blacks. While the whole world mourns her death (September 2016), it would be a tribute to write about her artistic work. No doubt, Gloria Naylor was praised by literary critics for the richness of her language, depth and the variety of her characters. In addition, Naylor bravely took the black community to write for its development and color racism and at times, unhelpful nature of black male and female relationships.

Index Terms-- discrimination, humiliation, popularized, recreate, redemptive, sexuality, and unapologetic.



1 INTRODUCTION

Each Gloria Naylor novel is a complication of feminism, spirituality, and Afro-American literary and artistic tradition. The author's first feminist declaration in novel form, *The Women of Brewster Place* is asserted of Naylor's impressive body of literature. This collection of short story reveals much about the self-searching of black women towards life and discusses the issues about gender, race and class. In her second novel *Linden Hills*, Naylor exerts a rasping critique of the Black bourgeoisie and structures it around the structure of Dante's *Inferno*. She uses a restrained geographic setting to create a tale about the organized lives of a group of black characters. Mama Day overlaps the soil of the Afro American south and Western environmental space to form a legacy-rich tale.

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She uses alternating narrators, who are the soul of the novel to mirror and strengthen the novel's thematic concerns with reality and truth. The novel is genuinely concerned with examining, reconstructing and redefining the past events. Its strongest rudiments are the bonds shared within the female society and between the generations of women.

The quartet of Naylor's novels is *Bailey's Cafe*, a matriarchal rewriting of the Holy Bible. Sacrifice, love, tragedy, and the continuing strength of women is the central theme in Naylor's novel. The last addition to the author's framework of novels is *The Men of Brewster Place*, a collection of detailed life accounts of the men who were introduced in *The Women of Brewster Place*. Once again, Naylor revisits the neighborhood of her first novel to connect her fifth novel with the sequences of her first novel. The first novel *The Women of Brewster Place* gives a methodical study about the seven women of Brewster Place with some variety, which in some way resembles this current novel yet it stands expertly on its own terminology.

2 NARRATIVE SYMBOLISM

In an allegory reading, symbols addresses suggest sins of the characters. First Crescent Drive is Dante's first circle of the unbaptized Lester Tilson, Second Crescent is the second circle of the lustful Winston Alcott, Third Crescent is the third circle of the Gluttonous Xavier Donnell, Fourth Crescent is the fourth circle of the misers and the wastrels Chester Parker, Fifth Crescent is the fifth circle of the delivering angel Rev. Michael Hollis. Tupelo Drive is a combination of the last three of Dante's circle - a place for suicides Lural Dumont, hypocrites Daniel Braithwaite, and traitors Luther Nedeed.

The outside world perceives Linden Hills as a symbol of black achievement and is, "...precariously kept in place by the machinations of a wealthy black patriarchal family". The residents of Linden Hills know that Luther can make any changes on his house, building extra rooms and a third level. The people are heading for him, he succeeds because they bring their sweat back to his land and his hands and they believe that heaven is still waiting to be in new dimension "...a beautiful, black wad of spit right in the white eye of America". Luther's grandfather's dream is to make the Linden Hills a showcase... into a jewel --- an ebony jewel" that would mirror the soul of Wayne County as well as the pride of his people.

Just as in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Jody Stark refuses to eat Janie's cooked food apprehending poison in it, Luwana is also denied to cook for her husband and son, once when Nedeed comes to know of a slave who kills his owner by poisoning his soup. Even she is refused to communicate with her son, only the habit of writing letters results in awakening her consciousness. When the law decrees that a child must follow the condition of its mother bondage, Luther first decides to celebrate manumission for his son by visiting the solicitor to draw up free papers for his son. The exact 665 times which Luwana's needed to open her mouth to speak - 332 times to answer

their good morning's and 333 times to do the same in the evening.

The author sensitively has made the mark on the body of Luther's bonded heroine. Luwana used the silver hat pin to carve a line on her chest and stomach, which then she rubs with ink until the bleeding stops, for each time she calls upon to speak throughout the year. And she carefully counts them all just before she sat down to write. There is no record of the happenings to Luwana Packerville in the morning, she made her six hundred and sixty-sixth utterance. Willa goes back to Luwana's last words ---

"There can be no God."

She puts down the Bible, goes over to touch the edges of the lace covering her son's body, and she starts crying. The last words of Luwana reveal the religious literate Afro-American women's slavery in the same Black society. Willa is on her knees, surrounded by piles of dusty, yellowing cookbooks. She has hoped to find some other records left by Luwana, but the woman seems to have disappeared. She opens the third card box and finds another stack of wire-bound recipes. She finds another ancestor, Evelyn Creton Nedeed and there is no need to open the covers and see that name written in large block letters on the inside. But she still digs into the box, hoping that something of Luwana may wedges in heavy cookbooks. Her heart quickens when she sees a wad of papers but finds only the columns of canning dates,

"Thirty quarts of snap beans, May 1892.

Twelve quarts of pickled tomatoes,
September 1893.

Twenty pints of blackberry jam,
August 1896."

Evelyn Creton has even documented the dates on which she has purchased and used the components for each recipe. Willa thinks her search is futile, but she still empties the box. At last she discovers two slim volumes covered in black silk. They are also recipe books, but the content confuses her, most of the ingredients are measured in

ounces and pinches, and the dates are crammed together,

June 14th – Add: 2 pinches powdered
dove's heard
6 amaranth seeds
1 pinch snakeroot

Naylor has said that the treatment of the Nedeed women symbolizes the way that men have regarded women throughout history, as means of generation that have no value in themselves. As far as men are concerned, women have no history because they do not really exist. Naylor through Willa's character not only shows the crucial life of a black woman but also tries to show the suffering, male dominance and the black male chauvinism. At the same time, she tries to raise her females to resist and revolt against male torment and gives them inspiration for re-shaping their life.

Two days are remaining for Christmas Eve, Luther thinks why he is alone? There is something so terribly wrong about people being alone on Christmas Eve. He will not have his family ending up like the Dumonts who are totally lost to Linden Hills. His own thought depresses him. Luther decides to bring his wife out of the basement on Christmas Eve.

Luther gets up from his chair and headed for the kitchen. He turns the valves on under the sink full force before pressing the intercom, "It's Christmas Eve, Mrs. Nedeed." He moans through intercom. On Christmas Eve, Willie and Lester come to Luther's house to decorate the Christmas tree. Luther invites them, "Gentlemen, come in". As they step over the threshold and Luther closes the door against the freezing wind. They start to decorate the Christmas tree. Luther says Willie to place candles on the Christmas tree because there have always been candles on their trees, he couldn't imagine Christmas without candles on tree though candles are harmful. Luther begins to tell them as they fill up the rest of the tree.

However cleverly Luther Nedeed had manipulated others, whatever the depth of his understanding of human nature with its ambitions, blindnesses and desperations, Luther had never fully understood women. For Luther, providing his wife with money and material comforts justified his demand that she repays his generous input into her with obedience and a son the image of himself.

There is a language Willie and Lester communicate in, which Mrs. Tilson doesn't like it. Mrs. Tilson wishes her son to speak in the formal, standard, connect English of the majority of the Linden Hills residents, a form of English which signals good education, civilized manners and higher status in society. Luther Nedeed who is at the top of the social ladder and therefore at the geographical bottom of Linden Hills takes it one step further and speaks even more formally. The firm formality and rigidity of Luther Nedeed's language reflects his inflexibility of character and purpose. There is another type of language in the novel, which is the language of women. It is a wholly feminine language which may not communicate wholly by the expected rules of logic and rationale. It is a language Willa has to learn to read before she can find herself and her voice. This is a feminine language unheard by men and buried under time and silence. This is a language which requires understanding because it has lain forgotten and unappreciated for years, the language of all the past Mrs. Luther Nedeeds.

Braithwaite, the historian of Linden Hills, would have sold his soul for the key to this language had he known it existed. He had boasted that his is "the whole story, the real story" and had not realized that a essential part of the story lay in a bible, recipe books and a photo album. Braithwaite claimed to have had a whole series of checks and balances from numerous sources never knowing that his historical account of Linden Hills and the Nedeeds is necessarily an uneven description

in the story because it lacks the records of the Mrs. Nedeeds.

3 CONCLUSION

The conclusion of Linden Hills had caused the patriarchal Lutheran tradition to delight the hearts of feminists, Willa simply desires to take up her life as a housewife and to do so in the Nedeed house, no less. Naylor lets the personality learn and live in her own way, thus showing that as Willa's author and creator, she is the first who must learn to respect the principles Willa chooses for herself. It is not by cutting down her husband's individuality that Willa assumes a personality of her own. Her lack of desire for revenge is her way of showing that she is strong enough to wrestle an identity for herself without infringing on that of others. The ultimate collapse of the Nedeed Kingdom brings to mind the fact that those who place entity wealth over collective being can never create a community that endures. The culture of sharing and promotion in Brewster Place is absent among the residents of Linden Hills because they take no pride in their cultural heritage and most of their efforts are spent in the deliberate removal of the vestiges of black cultural identity in the process of accumulating wealth. They, therefore, cannot create a community. But Naylor's main objective is not presenting a miserable picture of the Linden Hills society, rather she wants to depict awareness to the fact that society bonding is of supreme significance for the Afro - American people's search for empowerment.

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