

A Study Of Self-Destruction In An Imaginary Setting In Gloria Naylor's *Linden Hills*

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Gloria Naylor was a prominent female writer in African-American literature. She was published six novels which were highly reputed in the American society. Her unique style of writing and settings in the novels were highly recognized. She used to have plots in her novels. She adopted flashback techniques in all her novels. She revealed the truth of life by using magical elements. Her characters dealt with mysterious and miracles. One among the novels is *Linden Hills* which is originally published in 1985. The novel concentrated on slavery, black community, domination, house arrest, suicide, colour discrimination and poverty. The people in the place of Linden Hills were entirely middle-class black community. Naylor was beautifully maintained character development and narrative arrangement. The novel was her thesis when she pursued her post graduate.

Willie Mason and Lester Tilson were young boys who were non-professional poets. They were spending few days in the month of December for the gifts of Christmas celebration. While they were walking through the Linden Hills, they experienced people who lived in distressed feelings. They were tried to make them happy. As they were continued their journey, Willie had a deep thought about his own existence and felt regret of his earlier education, because he left out from his graduation without completion.

Gloria Naylor gave another journey as subplot in the novel. The wife of Luther Nedeed was Willa Prescott Nedeed had been arrested in the underground of the Nedeed home, along with her boy baby called Sinclair, a five year old. It was gone for several weeks because her husband believed that someone else was the reason for the birth of the baby, because the boy baby was not a dark black in colour. Few days before Willie and Lester had begun working in Linden Hills, unfortunately Sinclair was died. His mother mourned alone for the death. Emotionally, the house arrested Willa scrolled out of old trunks and boxes with furious. In those materials she found out the letters, books of cook, diaries and other possessions of the Nedeed women who were preceded Willa. In analysing those things, Willa got to know that these wives and mothers had suffered emotional hardships. They sacrificed their own happiness for the betterment of the Nedeed legacy.

Willa acknowledged the journey of Willie and Lester then made herself in peace. Her predecessors rejected the status of loss, helpless or ill treatment. Willa also decided to recover the life by control over her emotions. The Nedeed house located at the farther down the hill and detached from the other neighbourhood houses on esteemed Tupelo Drive. Since 1820, the Nedeed family headed the land in Linden Hills for 160 years. The family originally carried over the name as Luther Nedeed on purchasing the land which had a proper black community and all of its would-be inhabitants to support the same vision. The residents of the place were mostly conservative sense of black unity. The Nedeed members were owned Tupelo Realty Corporation which leased the land to possible home buyers for 1000 years with an agreement. In any case, if the buyers were against the land agreement, then the land would be taken back by the Corporation. Every Luther Nedeed generation felt proud of himself on keeping the legacy and vision. Also the wives of Nedeed were to support the same vision and to maintain honour by reproducing a black colour heir in contrast Willa Nedeed made the remarkable mistake of producing a light-coloured son.

Before Lester and Willie had started journey, they met a married couple who were their close friends, suggested finding job in Linden Hills. Ruth and Norman were basically poor like Lester and Willie. They were contrasted to other minor characters in the novel. The travellers enquired Ruth about her living in the residence. Ruth was a former resident of Linden Hills but left Linden Hills for her husband, Norman. Even though they were fitted enough to went back to the place, she did not go back. Norman was affected with an

emotional disorder that prevented him from maintaining a particular job for a long time. For every few months, he suffered from hallucinations that resulted in his mutilating his body because he thought he had seen pink organisms overtaking his body. For six years, Ruth had taken care of Norman in managing with the financial burden and realization that they might never enjoy a better life. The story of Ruth and Norman observed a level of humanity that seemed lost in Linden Hills. As Ruth had sacrificed her own financial stability and social status, she never lost her love of Norman. The marriage life of six years prevented them to move towards Linden Hills where upper-class man Luther Nedeed suspected his wife and imprisoned. Such cruelty would never be occurred among poor people. Whereas Ruth lived a material life with her husband, she remained constant in her devotion. Even then Norman promised his wife that one day they would live in Linden Hills but she replied that she would never return there. The poor characters such as Lester, Willie, Norman and Ruth were presented as more humanitarian, more compassionate than the wealthy people in Linden Hills.

The traveller's first job engaged in cleaning up on the occasion of the social event of the season was the wedding. Lester and Willie were to work in the kitchen and stay clear of the reception party. They kept on watched the behaviours of the party and the middle-class guests. According to them, those blacks were unreal, they seemed mechanical and unnatural, if they laughed too heartily, but fearful was inside them. Wedding ceremony was gone with a mockery. Winston Alcott was the most eligible bachelor who was going to marry a man himself. The marriage couples were Winston and David both were lovers and exchanged a fake marriage. The exchange of a fake marriage clarified Willie and Lester about their heterosexual relationship. When Willie explained that survival in Linden Hills required people to lie not only to others but also to themselves. The people in the Linden Hills had to sacrifice their natural selves to accept the community conditions.

Luther Nedeed started the entire debacle but he unknowingly alerted the father of Winston Alcott that his son just might be gay, threatening as well to forward blaming evidence should the matter be ignored. Luther thought his greater duty was to uphold the traditions of the community which imposed regulating a heterosexual family and producing offspring.

Laurel Johnson Dumont's depressions covered her entire life roughly from age four to thirty years. It was the tale of a woman who fulfilled her dreams in her childhood days. Practically every childhood dreams would be filled but later her life transformed into nightmares. When Laurel was a child she had spent her summers in rural Georgia with her father's mother's house whose name was Roberta Johnson. She generally accepted everything of Laurel's wishes. The grandmother allowed the girl for swimming classes. Laurel had grown up to become a champion swimmer and even won a scholarship to Berkeley for synchronized swimming. Her grandmother rejected everything about the state of California, even though she received the money of insurance policy to pay tuition fees. At the age of twenty-four, Laurel seemed to be wasteful in depression after being married to Howard was failed and she was not satisfied in her position of executive officer at IBM. Roberta attained the age of eighty travelled to Linden Hills to rescue her grand-daughter.

Roberta arrived in mid-December, several days before Lester and Willie had begun their journey. After some quarrel with her husband, Laurel tried to renew some holiday spirit which was not for herself at least for her grandmother, Roberta. She had decided to call her neighbourhood friends, Ruth and Willa. Laurel started to put her house in order. Laurel had a thought to restore the sisterly-bond with those women could recollect her happiness from regressing emotional state. Roberta was decided to prepare food and adorn her away back to regularity. Finally Laurel could not find Willa because she was locked in her base-room. Due to illness, Ruth also could not visit Laura's house. Once again Laurel had undergone to exertion. In that condition, Luther Nedeed alerted her to the fact that since her husband had filed a case for divorce, they had no children, the house and land was originally leased to the Dumonts and he insisted to vacate the house. The entire life of Laurel in Linden Hills had been a farce comedy. The unpleasant condition was built up in her mind and soul which made her to commit suicide. During the December day on a snow-laden, while Lester and Willie were excavating snow in her front yard, Laurel jumped topsy-turvy into deep empty pool. Her terrible death expressed the potential horrors that awaited everyone who lives in Linden Hills.

On the end of their journey of Willie and Lester, they went to the Nedeed house on Christmas Eve to the vacation preparations. Willie and Lester were ready to accept the tasks given by Luther because he would offer double whatever they had earned at the other houses in the Linden Hills. Luther Nedeed explained to the two men that his wife and son were gone

to other relative's house for the celebration. Also he pointed out that he would like to enjoy some holiday fun in their absence.

Luther Nedeed insisted the two men to decorate the Christmas tree with various family's traditional possessions and things. The two men were wondered that Luther was so sentimental about all those materials which were associated with the Nedeed name was admired but not fully worshipped. While Lester, Willie and Luther were engaged in adorning the tree, Willa, wife of Luther from basement room made arrangements to come back upstairs and to put her life again in order. She was tried to break down the door of underground room.

In the last chapter of the novel, both the main-story and sub-story drew together. When Willie completely was not aware and unlocked the door in which the way Willa approached one more time to the house. Throughout the novel, Willa had been invisible character. Her arrival of Luther's house showed a rehabilitation of self-identity. Willa with much anger cleaned the basement area and intentionally wanted to clean the entire house of Nedeed. Through the activity, she hopefully re-established herself by removing the past memories. She reformed herself as Mrs. Luther Nedeed. She made her small attempt to enhance the power and ability of her life.

Willa reached the house by carrying her son's corpse. Immediately Luther dismissed Willie and Lester and then with rage blocked the path of Willa by showing a gesture. Accordingly, she crossed out of Luther. During the struggle, the silk material covered the corpse, which was thrown on the fire. All of a sudden Luther, Willa and Sinclair were consumed that ultimately burnt the house of Luther. Willie and Lester were looked with shock, primarily at the roaring fire, destroyed the windows of another estate of Tupelo Drive where the residents then watched the burning houses without offering a bit of assistance. Willie and Lester were gone with the terrible occurrence in their minds and later they discussed about the next survival of their own lives.

In the novel, *Linden Hills* explored the major issue of freedom of black community. One of the main characters was Willa who was always been hidden throughout the novel but she came out to live without remembering the past unfortunately she was burnt alive. Laurel Johnson was strived to live without her husband and tried to get relaxation from neighbourhood for the Christmas celebration but that too failed and ended up with suicide. Ruth and Norman were not the residents of Linden Hills but Norman wanted to settle in the

place. Due to his psychological weakness and instability in his career, he could not attain his achievements. Roberta was an age-old woman whose dreams were unfulfilled similarly Normans' health also deteriorated and his dreams were remain the same. In a nutshell, the characters in the novel were tried to find out their own identity but finally it endured with destruction or failure in an imaginary setting of Linden Hills.

Work Cited

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