

Queer Perspective through Female Kaleidoscope in Gloria Naylor's
The Woman of Brewster Place

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Abstract

Queer Studies plays a provocative role in the African American literature. In *The Woman of Brewster Place*, Naylor boldly introduces a lesbian couple and their struggle for identity. Naylor highlights that every action that men engages is in some way indicative of their need to explore their sexual energy. Naylor treats men as sexual predators, who suppresses the woman in order to satisfy their sexual desire.

Keywords: Queer, lesbian, community, sister – friend, feminine

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The Woman of Brewster Place opens with the 'Dawn', which recounts the birth and development of Brewster place in an unnamed northern city. The building that is now a dead end to many becomes a beginning filled with possibilities for the women of Brewster place.

The Woman of Brewster Place displays incidents of a masculine threat and the pressure of the enduring threat, initiates their individual and collective experience of dejections. In *The Woman of Brewster Place*, Naylor highlights the relationship and the scholarship concerning women. It also focuses on the most significant female – female hand in the novel the Mattie – Etta loved and draw a parallel between this “sister friend” relationship and the hand shared between Ben the drunker handy man and Lorraine one of the lesbians from 312. Lorraine's violent gang rape and the physical dismantling of the wall and the fall of the rain ultimately helps the women to construct a Queer community which enables them even at the time of their dejection.

The female – female relationship of the Brewster community produces uncertainty about the new emerging identities fostered in their feminine connections. The chapter that contains the

two narratives opens by stating that “at first they seemed like such nice girls” (Naylor 129). However the two “nice” female roommates reveal the true nature of their relationship on the stairs one afternoon: “ And they had started up the steps when the skinny one tripped over a child’s ball and the darker one had grabbed her by the arm and around the wart’s to break her falls. “Careful don’t want to lose you now” And the two of them had laughed into each other’s eye’s and went into the building” (Naylor 130). Sophie, the community gossip monger observes the interaction between the two and although she may not have started the rumors’ she becomes the biggest critic of the two women living in 312. The rumours “spread through the block like a sour odor that’s only faintly perceptible and easily ignored unfit it starts growing in strength from the dozen mouths it had been lying in” (Naylor 130). Spreading through the community of women is both the reality of women, relationship and the fear of their lesbianism. It is not that the lesbians do not fit at Brewster place, “Argues farewell”, “they fit so well that they are threatening” (161). The sexual nature of the relationship between the two just beyond their lowered shades is threatening, in Miss Sophie’s and other’s minds, to the community and its morality.

Miss Sophie hates and fears Lorraine and Theresa and this discomfort is found in Mattie when Miss Sophie interrupts the first meeting at the Brewster Place. Block Association, insisting that they discuss the “bad element that done moved in this block amongst decent people and Etta quickly moves to defend Lorraine & Theresa but it is stopped by Mattie (Naylor139-40). After leaving the community gathering, Mattie and Etta have a discussion about the discomfort they

feel about the barbarism and the nature of their own female relationships”. Mattie was thinking deeply:

“Well I’ve loved woman too, there was Miss Eva and Ciel, and even as ornery as you can get I’ve loved you practically all my life.” “yeah, but it’s different with them.” “different how?” “well Etta was beginning to feel uncomfortable. “They love each other like you’d love a man or a man would love you --- I guess.” “But I have loved some women deeper than I ever loved any man,” Mattie was pondering..... I can’t exactly put my finger on it, but....” (Naylor141).

Mattie, reflecting on her past “sister – friend” relationship recognized the intimacy she herself has had with other women; however these bonds are still different from the connections the two share. Etta begins to feel uncomfortable, because this answer moves from the homosocial realm to the homosexual realm.

The Challenge the woman now face with the presence of a lesbian couple is to distinguish their intersubjective relationships with woman from the erotic relationship the two shares. As Mattie continues to ponder the difference between her love of Etta and Lorraine and Therese’s love for each other, she discovers sameness more than differences. Mattie continues, stating quietly as if to her, “Maybe it’s not so different” (Naylor141). The hesitancy in the woman’s voices and the extended pauses are signs of the unspeakable. The love the two faces for each other is not as different as they initially imagined, if not hopes Lorraine and Therese share a love that is similar to the love Mattie & Etta have shared with men. The two relationships are filled with the same emotional and sexual intimacy these straight women share with men. “May

be that's why some women get so riled up about it, cause they know deep down it's not so different after all", concludes Mattie (Naylor141). However it is not the difference between this homosexual relationship and heterosexual relationship that make the women nervous; it is the sameness the lesbian relationship share with "sister friend" that makes Mattie whisper her final thoughts. Ultimately it seems all characters in this book, Lesbian or "sister friend" perhaps all in life, are connected by the desire to be seen instead of splintered by the eyes of another. The emergence of sameness is what drives the women to tear down the wall. Their final image, although a dream, is a vision of queer community. Although a queer community is forming in the street, the patriarchal gaze peers into the queer community, waiting to assert its power.

In "Dust" Naylor concludes her word with a building waiting to die; however as the women continue to dream, the queer community live. The women who continue to occupy Brewster place as the days fade from dawn to dusk continue to share the same experience of the masculine threat and struggle for the "sister friend" bonds. The women strive to form intersubjectives are not defined by their relationship with men children & their domestic activities of laundry, cooking and childcare. The continuation of female feelings allows Brewster place to woman yet queer community while these woman "over the carrier of time" Brewster plan's last breath, however is not the destruction of a home but the construction of a queer community that transcends the boundaries of space & time.

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