
**DOMINANCE OF AFRICAN HEALING: UNDERSTANDING GLORIA NAYLOR'S
*BAILEY'S CAFE***

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Abstract

In contrast with the western medicinal practices Naylor uses African healing method to heal the pain inflicted upon African women. In the novel *Bailey's Café*, Naylor showcases the dominance of African healing through Eve's healing of Jesse's drug addiction in an illusionistic way, which includes repetition and self-realization. Repetition meaning life/something circulates in African culture plays a imperative role in African healing, whereas the Americans' consider it to be absurd. When, Jesse, a drug addict, could not come out of drug addiction through western medicinal practices, Eve takes Jesse out of the addition through African healing practice. This article proves the dominance of traditional African healing methods over the modern western medical practices.

Key Words: African, healing, medicine, drug addiction, traditional

African healing has a cultural value. There are two types of healing; the folk culture refers to the first type, which is healing a person from the spell cast upon them. In the process the conjurer removes the spell on the person and restores his physical and mental health. The second type is that of healing a person from natural illness or psychological pain. In her novels Naylor employs both types of healing process in contrast with the western practices. Healing plays an important role in African culture. Naylor emphasizes that all sorts of pain inflicted on women can be healed through love between themselves.

In the novel *Bailey's Café*, Jesse Bell is a courageous woman from the docks who is married to the king. The king's family does not give equal respect to her, so she searches for an answer in the clubs. She longs to get a woman as an answer but what she sees in the clubs are dykes who are dressed in men's clothes. She has no interest in them because if she is in need of a man she knows how to get him; even she does know what to do with him. While wandering in the clubs, someone drops heroin in her hands, which she considers the best answer at that time. It

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takes her high and so she can see everything about life. She knows the question and the answer too. She even understands why she has asked such questions. When the intoxication comes down she has to use it again to go a little higher: “If you got a little higher than the time before, you’d have more of the answers in your mind when the ride was over. So you sniff the horse. Then you pop the horse. And after a while the only decent ride is through the mainline” (BC 131).

She does not regret being a junkie. She likes the support of heroin because Uncle Eli uses his power to raid the dyke club and gets her name published in the paper. Finally everyone waits for her fall but she comes out of the king’s family with the support of heroin. Now Jesse lives in Eve’s boarding house but still as a junkie. When Jesse meets Eve she informs her that she has become a junkie in a bad situation. At that time no one was there to support her other than heroin.

Eve takes her to the back of the café. She opens the door and shows her the empty space. Jesse looks at the empty space and thinks why this crazy woman is showing her the empty space. Eve asks her to see the things there. Jesse becomes agitated and shouts that she cannot see anything. Eve cannot leave her that way. She points out that if she wants to quit dope she can see things: “The first component in her strategy for enabling the women to heal is, then, to let them begin to believe in their own inherent value” (Fowler 125). Now she can see the things of her childhood: “Her bed with the chenille spread. Her secondhand dresser. Her movie-star posters torn from *modern screen* and tacked on the mildewed wall: Bette Davis. Irene Dunn. Clark Gable. Ioan Crawford” (BC 138). She can even hear her mother’s efforts with the store, but she knows that she is hallucinating.

Eve prepares her for the bath. She brings a towel and linen. Jesse sees a rosewood rocker and a box: “She stepped off the back steps, just to touch it all, because it couldn’t be real” (BC 138). She enters her dream bathroom; it has a claw-foot tub with a swan shaped tub and has cool blue tires. There is also a porcelain tray with a French soap and a crystal jar with bath salts. She informs Eve that she has dreamt of a bathroom like this in her childhood. The latter replies that she even has dreamt of such a bathroom.

Eve heals her heroin addiction in an illusionistic way. It is like taking her to cold Turkey, making her ski at a speed of seventy miles per hour and with that speed suddenly crashing over a big brick wall but she remains conscious so as to feel the pain of her “crushing pieces of your skull stabbing back into your brain, your lungs collapsing in, each bone snapping and crumbling, your insides busting open as your guts rip apart. That’s how much it hurts” (BC 139). Eve makes her stab the wall again and again, one time in hot bricks and another time in blocks of ice. She continues this for four days. When all of this is over, Eve again continues everything.

The room looks like a place hit by a hurricane with Jesse as a victim. She is very tired and so Eve wipes her sweat with her towel and keeps a cardboard in her mouth in order to stop

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her from biting her tongue. Jesse falls into deep sleep. When she wakes up she is completely free. Eve gives her a cup of water and bathes and powders her. She asks her not to thank her. She then gives a gift to her. It is a box made of crystals; it has a teaspoon, a pure silver syringe and a match box. Jesse is surprised to see the gift.

Jesse “shoots up with the silver needle for another four days” (BC 141) and then she agrees it is all her fault: “she agreed that life was one big stinking server” (BC 141). She begs Eve not to put her in hell again as she will die. After that Jesse never tries dope. At the end of the four days Eve sponges and powders her. It takes another four days for her to sit in the bed. Eve then presents her another velvet case with a gold needle. She informs her that if she goes through that again, then she will get a platinum needle and that is the end of the line.

Kelley opines the importance of repetition in African healing: “Black culture highlights the observance of such repetition, often in homage to an original generative instance act.... In black culture, repetition means that the thing circulates... [that] there is an equilibrium” (xviii). Repetition in African culture means life whereas Americans undervalue repetition. In contrast with western culture Naylor heals the pain of her characters through repetition. In *The Women of Brewster Place* Mattie rocks Ciel to and fro to heal her pain. Mama Day gives pepper candy and choke bark again and again to heal the pain of Bernice. Eve succeeds in healing the drug addiction of Jesse through crashing her over hot and cold bricks again and again. Thus Naylor succeeds in proving the superiority of African healing.

Eve heals the drug addition of Jesse through self-realization. Once Jesse realizes her mistakes she comes out of heroin. She has tried the western method of healing at Lexington in vain. African healing power triumphs over Western medicine.

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