HEALING IN ALICE WALKER'S THE COLOR PURPLE, GLORIA NAYLOR'S
THE WOMEN OF BREWSTER PLACE, AND TONI MORRISON'S BELOVED

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION .......................................................... ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ................................................ iii
VITA ................................................................. iv
INTRODUCTION .................................................... 1
CHAPTER I .......................................................... 4
CHAPTER II ......................................................... 30
CHAPTER III ....................................................... 51
CHAPTER IV ......................................................... 71
WORKS CITED ..................................................... 74
INTRODUCTION

In the 1980's, novels by black women have increased in popularity and production. As proof of a rising public interest, novels written in the first half of this century, such as Alice Childress' Like One of the Family and Ann Petry's The Street, have been re-published. Our Nig, by Harriet E. Wilson, was "re-discovered" by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and published for the first time in this century in 1983. One topic that black women novelists have always addressed is the relationships between black women, but never with the intensity and detail of recent fiction. The exploration of womens' relationships is especially evident in The Color Purple (1982) by Alice Walker, The Women of Brewster Place (1980) by Gloria Naylor, and Beloved (1988) by Toni Morrison.

One aspect of these relationships among women is healing, which contains physical, emotional and spiritual aspects. Healing can originate solely from physical acts, like holding, massaging, bathing, making love, feeding, clothing, and combing another woman's hair, acts often combined and reinforced with a verbal expression of love and support. A woman can also heal simply through her physical presence, as in The Women of Brewster Place. The Color Purple exemplifies the way women heal each other spiritually, when they share with one another
their view of, and experience with, religion. *Beloved* expands on the spiritual healing presented in *The Color Purple* and shows how one woman can spiritually heal an entire community. Emotionally, women are healed when they receive empathy and emotional support from other women, as with Shug and Celie in *The Color Purple*, Mattie and Ciel in *The Women of Brewster Place*, and Baby Suggs and Sethe in *Beloved*. Women can also receive comfort, love, and a sense of self-worth from physical healing. However, even though emotional healing often springs from physical healing, it is not bound to a physical act. A woman may continue to be healed emotionally long after she is healed physically. However, there are instances when emotional healing is so integrated with physical healing that it becomes difficult to distinguish where emotional healing begins and physical healing ends, hence, the inner construction of each of the following chapters, whereby the instances of healing are not organized in terms of purely physical or emotional healing.

Virtually all the women discussed in this thesis are healed from the trauma inflicted by oppressive males, representing various sectors of society. In *Beloved*, white slavemasters destroy Sethe's and Baby Suggs' physical and emotional selves. Sofia in *The Color Purple* experiences white male oppression as well when she is beaten by the mayor. Celie, abused by both father and husband, experiences male familial oppression. Sofia is also abused by her husband, suffering not only from racism but sexism as well. In *The Women of Brewster Place*
Eugene, Ciel's irresponsible and selfish husband contributes greatly to her breakdown.

Healing helps these characters assume responsibility for their emotional, physical and spiritual well-being, enabling them to survive and surmount the acts of male oppression inflicted upon them. Hence, healing is a powerful political act. Through healing, women share and reinforce an understanding and knowledge of their physical, emotional and spiritual selves; they know what to give each other in order to endure. In fact, this is the clear, vital message these novels present: through healing one another, women can successfully fight and survive oppression in its various forms, and male oppression in particular.
Chapter I

In Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, Celie is the epitome of a woman who is both healed and healer. The novel is a detailed chronological history of Celie's growth through the efforts of two women, Sofia Butler and Shug Avery towards and Celie's ultimate ability to give and receive healing. As a young woman, Celie displays strong nurturing abilities and cares deeply about the women in her family. Celie compassionately nurses her mother when she is ill, and when she dies, becomes a surrogate mother to her younger sister Nettie. When their father makes sexual advances toward Nettie, Celie seduces him, offering herself in Nettie's place.

However, Celie's ability to heal does not become fully apparent until she is an adult, and forms relationships with Shug Avery and Sofia Butler. When Sofia, Celie's friend and daughter-in-law, is beaten and jailed, Celie heals her, a moment indicating the culmination of several important events in their relationship. Celie is able to heal Sofia because shortly after they met, Sofia initiated Celie's self-awareness and an awareness of other women, aspects of Celie that needed development in order for her in turn to heal women successfully. In addition, Celie, for the first time, forms a relationship with a woman who openly
defends and supports other women—even against men. Sofia’s stance against male oppression leads her to confront Celie and, thereby, to initiate Celie’s growth.

When Sofia comes to meet Mr.——, Celie is surprised that Sofia is not intimidated by him. Harpo and Sofia marry and enjoy a few years of relative peace. However, pressured by the shadow of his father’s control over Celie, Harpo is increasingly compelled to dominate Sofia, and becomes frustrated and humiliated when he cannot. Desperate, Harpo asks Celie how to make Sofia “mind” (38). Although she likes Sofia, Celie remembers how annoying it was that Sofia “don’t act like her at all,” meaning that Sofia rejects the role of the martyred victim which Celie portrays so readily. (38) Celie, stung by the pity on Sofia’s face when she “jump[s] when Mr.—— call[s],” chooses not to remind Harpo of his happiness with Sofia, which Celie knows would dispell his need to control Sofia. Intimidated and perhaps even jealous of Sofia’s demeanor with men, Celie advises Harpo irresponsibly, even cruelly, to abuse Sofia: “Beat her, I say” (38).

What follows for Celie is more than a month of sleepless nights. Finally running out of sleep remedies, Celie is forced to admit why she cannot sleep: “A little voice say, Something you done wrong. Somebody spirit you sin against. Maybe” (41). Celie intuits that she has harmed another woman, but does not know to whom until “way late one night,” she realizes: “Sofia, I sin against Sofia spirit” (41). Well aware of Sofia’s open and confrontational nature, Celie “prays that Sofia don’t find out”
Predictably, Sofia finds out and comes "marching" up the path to Celie's house (41). Angry and hurt, Sofia returns some borrowed household items, then demands to know why Celie has told Harpo to beat her. Celie admits she "didn't mean it" (42). Sofia stares Celie "straight in the eye," forcing Celie to explain further: "I say it cause I'm a fool. . . . cause I'm jealous of you. . . . cause you do what I can't. . . . Fight" (42).

As Sofia realizes Celie is both simply a victim of her own advice, and unaware of the harm she has caused, Sofia's confrontational demeanor disappears. Sofia then explains to Celie why she can "fight" men (42). Throughout her childhood, Sofia was forced to defend herself against her father, brothers, cousins, and uncles because she was a "girl child" not "safe in a family of men" (42). However, as an adult, Sofia did not expect again to have to "fight in her own home" (42). So, even though Sofia loves Harpo, she is prepared to "kill him dead" rather than succumb to more of his abuse (42).

When Celie admits that her shame has been ample punishment for her behavior, the tension dissipates. Celie then seizes the opportunity to confirm what she senses is Sofia's opinion of her submissive behavior: "You feels sorry for me, don't you?" (43). Here, Celie begins to realize her behavior towards Mr. may not be acceptable to other women, including Sofia. Sofia answers by comparing Celie's behavior to that of her own mother, a woman who lived her whole life "under her
father's foot," "never say[ing] nothing back . . . never stand[ing] up for herself" (43). The crucial difference between Sofia and Celie is how they learned to handle male abuse. Despite her mother's submissiveness, Sofia and her sisters bonded and took control of their physical selves: "[We had] Six boys, six girls. All the girls big and strong like me. Boys big and strong too, but all the girls stick together . . . Us git in a fight, it's a sight to see" (43). Sofia shows Celie that it is vital that women must defend each other—even physically, if need be—against the physical abuses of men. By sharing with Celie her different experience with men, Sofia helps to "re-educate" Celie, showing her an assertive way in which to handle male abuse.

Compelled to examine her own behavior, Celie compares her weakness to Sofia's display of strength and admits that she has "never struck a living thing. . . ." (43). Unimpressed, Sofia wonders how Celie handles her anger. Celie then describes a history of emotional repression so severe she cannot even remember "the last time" she "felt mad" (43). As a child, when Celie got angry, she: "Felt like throwing up. Terrible feeling. Then I [Celie] started to feel nothing at all" (43). In order to survive, Celie has learned to internalize her anger instead of giving it physical or emotional release.

As an adult, Celie continues to suppress her emotions, this time with her husband: "Well, sometime Mr.____ git on me pretty hard. I have to talk to Old Maker. But he my husband . . . . This life soon be over . . . ." (43). Sensing that Celie's behavior is unnatural and
unhealthy, Sofia advises Celie to fight back: "Bash Mr.____ head open. ... Think about heaven later" (43). Here, Sofia humorously makes clear to Celie that submissiveness is not the only way to handle her husband's abuse, she can fight back as Sofia and her sister did. On this note, both women collapse with laughter, then express a commitment to their relationship by agreeing to make a quilt.

Sofia's confrontation with Celie is important because it creates an opportunity for them to begin to form a relationship and thus lay the emotional groundwork which will make it possible for Celie to heal Sofia. Celie is forced to examine her behavior towards Sofia, and she is deeply remorseful--Celie is developing a sensitivity towards other women. For the first time, Celie is forced to be accountable, responsible, and aware of other women, especially of the harm she can cause another woman if she aids men in their abuse of women. Celie's advice to Harpo stems not just from her jealousy and insecurity; it also signifies Celie's subservience to men, even to the extent that she hurts other women. Furthermore, Celie has never seen a woman assert herself against men; nor has she heard of women who band together to defend themselves against men, as Sofia and her sisters do. Through her example, Sofia makes clear to Celie her alliances must lay with women, especially those within the same household. Celie has experienced a form of self-sacrifice only for the women in her household, and she now has to learn how to support other women in a healthier manner, whereby her dignity and self-esteem are left intact.
Harpo continues his efforts to control Sofia, this time through sexual abuse. Though not sexually violent, Harpo tries to obliterate Sofia's sexual needs and identity: "You know the worst part? . . . The worst part is I don't think he notice. He git up there and enjoy himself just the same. No matter what I'm thinking. No matter what I feel. . . ." (68). Consequently, disgusted and disappointed, Sofia cannot submit further to Harpo's abuse: "Don't like to go to bed with him no more . . . feels tired all the time. No interest" (69). For the first time, Celie interacts with a woman who asserts herself sexually instead of submitting to physically and mentally abusive sex, as Celie had done with her father and continued to do with her husband.

Though the disintegration of Sofia's marriage causes Sofia pain, it indirectly benefits Celie. For the first time, Celie is able to compare her sexual experiences to another woman's and finds that she has never had a positive sexual experience: "Now, now. . . . Sleep on it some, maybe it come back. But I say this just to be saying something. I don't know nothing about it" (69). When Sofia confides to Celie her experience of dehumanizing and insensitive marital sex, she unconsciously strikes a chord of similarity between her sexual experience and Celie's. When Celie realizes this similarity, she is forced to recognize and articulate the absence of passion, pleasure, and even simple sexual courtesy in her marriage: "Mr. . . . clam on top of me, do his business, in ten minutes us both sleep" (69). This realization is important, because Celie must first admit she lacks any positive sexual experiences in order to later seek
and accept emotional and physical fulfillment. Furthermore, Celie hints that her sexual fulfillment may lie with another woman: "Only time I feel something stirring down there is when I think bout Shug" (69). However, Celie is not ready to venture further in self-revelation, and cursorily dismisses her painful and empty sex life. Never having been taught to pay attention to her own needs, Celie has grown callous towards them.

The culmination of Celie’s emotional growth and awareness of other women through Sofia becomes powerfully evident when Celie heals Sofia. During her relationship with Sofia, Celie has been awakened to a sincere and powerful emotional vulnerability. When Celie explains to Mary Agnes that Sofia was beaten and put in jail, she is deeply distraught, barely able to speak: “This far as I can go with it, look like. My eyes git full of water and my throat close” (91). Here Walker illustrates clearly that Celie has regained the ability for emotional expression lost since her childhood and teenage years. Celie’s healing will spring from the love and admiration she feels for Sofia, and represents an emotional breakthrough for Celie because she has overcome the grip of a life-long emotional paralysis to reach this point.

Entering Sofia’s jail cell, Celie is so stunned by the extent of the damage caused by the beating that every detail of Sofia’s body imbeds itself in Celie’s mind: “When I see Sofia I don’t know why she still alive. They crack her skull, they crack her ribs. They tear her nose loose on one side. They blind her in one eye. She swole from head to foot. Her
tongue the size of my arm, it stick out tween her teef like a piece of rubber. She can't talk. And she just about the color of eggplant" (91-92). Though shocked and frightened, Celie finds the courage to heal Sofia, a process she begins by methodically listing the tools she will use: "Scare me so bad I near bout drop my grip. But I don't. I put it on the floor of the cell, take out comb and brush, nightgown, witch hazel and alcohol and I start to work on her. The colored tendant bring me water to wash her with, and I start at her two little slits for eyes" (92). When she faces Sofia's near-destruction, Celie is able to articulate a new-found courage. In this quiet yet powerfully dramatic moment, Celie has entered the community of healers.

As she washes Sofia's body, Celie bestows on Sofia a gesture of love and care Sofia desperately needs. Celie will use the nightgown, comb and brush to restore some order to Sofia's appearance. By washing, dressing, and grooming her, Celie helps Sofia regain some of her physical dignity and equilibrium, a composure which will hopefully grant Sofia the emotional strength to survive her situation. When Celie enters Sofia's jail cell to give Sofia the emotional support and physical healing she needs, Celie displays the courage to witness Sofia's pain and to experience some of it with her. Furthermore, Walker shows that healing is reciprocal, as Celie finally has the courage to express the love and empathy towards other women that Sofia initially brought into her life.
Through Sofia, Celie begins to realize the need for, and the possibility of, emotional and sexual honesty with herself and other women. Though Celie cannot respond in kind when Sofia confides her sexual experiences to her, Celie is forced to honestly face her own sexual and emotional experiences. In addition, Celie learns what it means to emotionally suffer for, and physically heal, another woman. However, Celie will experience the most powerful relationship of her life with Shug Avery. Celie will be able to accept healing from Shug only because Sofia has already begun to awaken in Celie an awareness of her physical and emotional needs and the realization that these needs have never been met. Sofia initiates Celie's growth towards giving and receiving healing, a process that is then strengthened and continued through Shug.

When Celie meets Shug, she expresses a need, capacity, and readiness to heal her. Shug arrives at Mr____'s house, and Celie cries out: "Come on in, I want to cry. To shout. Come on in. With God help, Celie going to make you well" (47). Celie is overjoyed at the prospect of nursing Shug back to health. Instead of being jealous or insecure, as she was towards Sofia, Celie welcomes the opportunity to form a friendship with Shug—a sign of her readiness for emotional growth. In addition, Celie expresses the intuitive knowledge that Shug is in large part the key to her self-development, hence her healing.

On the other hand, Mr____ is so overwhelmed and incapacitated by Shug's illness that he cannot function. Celie notices that "Mr____ don't
smoke. Don't drink. Don't even hardly eat” (50). Celie sees a part of Mr.____ never revealed to her before: "I look at his face. It tired and sad and I notice his chin weak. Not much chin there at all” (50). Mr.____ lacks “chin” or the courage to withstand Shug's illness and give her the healing she needs. Instead, Mr.____ becomes somewhat ill himself, unable to eat, sleep, or take care of himself: “And his clothes dirty, dirty. When he pull them off, dust rise” (50). For the first time, Celie thinks she may be stronger than her husband: "I have more chin, I think” (50). Celie asserts herself for the first time against her husband when she proudly realizes that she is much more capable of taking care of Shug than he is. Here Walker shows that Celie is gaining strength in her identity as a healer---and the strength Celie displayed when she healed Sofia is revealed again with Shug.

Celia begins to heal Shug by attending to her physical needs. When Celie prepares to bathe Shug, she notes Mr.____'s fear and avoidance of the task: "They have made three babies together but he squeamish bout giving her a bath. Maybe he figure he start thinking bout things he shouldn't” (51). Though Celie also desires Shug, the longing does not deter her from healing her: "First time I got the full sight of Shug Avery long black body with its black plum nipples, look like her mouth, I thought I had turned into a man” (51). Shug goads Celie: "What you staring at?" She adds mockingly: "You never seen a naked woman before?" (51). Unnerved, Celie can hardly believe Shug's audacity: "She have the nerve to put one hand on her naked hip and bat her eyes at
me" (51). From the onset, Celie's healing of Shug contains strong sexual overtones, as Celie, for the first time, is forced to become aware of her own sexual needs. In addition, Celie is faced with a woman who is proud and assertive of her sexual self, as Sofia was.

When she depicts Celie bathing Shug, Walker emphasizes the power of Celie's arousal by describing it as a kind of religious "ecstasy," probably the closest Celie has ever gotten to the actual physical enjoyment of sex: "I wash her body, it feel like I'm praying. My hands tremble and my breath short" (51). Celie is in a sense baptized by her own desire. As she bathes Shug, she baptizes her own body and experiences a tremendous sexual arousal.

Continuing to nurse Shug back to health, Celie enters Shug's bedroom to offer her breakfast, and is bewildered by an almost overwhelming desire: "She wearing a long white gown and her thin black hand stretching out of it to hold the white cigarette looks just right. Something bout it, maybe the little tender veins I see and the big ones I try not to, make me scared feel like something pushing me forward. If I don't watch out I'll have hold of her hand, tasting her fingers in my mouth" (53). Celie continues to articulate her attraction to Shug, thus becoming more and more aware and accepting of her own sexual capabilities and needs. Shug cruelly rejects the food Celie offers, but Celie unflinchingly asks if she can sit with Shug while she eats. Celie then cleverly tempts Shug to eat: "I lavish butter on a hot biscuit, sort of wave it about. I sop up ham gravy and splosh my egg in with
my grits” (54). Shug feigns indifference to Celie’s delicious food and “blow[s] more and more smoke” Celie’s way. Finally unable to resist, Shug pretends to need a glass of fresh water, and Celie gets it for her, but not before she places her plate next to Shug’s bed. When Celie comes back, she notices: “a mouse been nibbling a biscuit, a rat run off with the ham” (54).

As Mr____ anxiously wonders how Celie convinced Shug to eat, Celie, eyes fixed on him, watches her husband crumble in the face of his lover’s illness: “I notice something crazy in his eyes. I been scared, he say. And he cover up his face with his hands” (54). Totally unaware of his own ability to heal, Mr____ does not have the power or capacity to nurse Shug back to health. When Walker characterizes Celie as a woman who becomes stronger and more self-assured in the process of healing another woman and Mr____ as a man who is incapacitated, she is emphasizing that healing continues to be an experience unique to the relationships between women; men cannot yet be depended on to heal women—women must depend on each other for this. As the healing between Celie and Shug continues and grows stronger, Mr____ is rendered powerless because he can neither enter, nor partake of, nor understand the healing dynamic they share. Even though Mr____ sits in Shug’s room day and night, her cannot handle Shug’s cantankerousness, nor accurately assess and meet her needs: “Turn loose my goddam hand . . . What the matter with you, you crazy? I don’t need no weak little boy . . . hanging on me” (49). Mr____ can only ineptly hold Shug’s
hand, since he lacks the courage and knowledge to nurse Shug back to health. In a sense, Shug is explaining to Mr.____ that she needs someone with the strength to heal her--Mr.____ does not contain that strength.

Eventually, Shug accepts Celie's care and attention and allows Celie to wash and comb her hair. Celie notices and enjoys every detail: "I wash and comb out her hair. She got the nottiest, shortest, kinkiest hair I ever saw, and I loves every strand of it" (55). Celie becomes a mother caring for her child: "I work on her like she a doll or like she Olivia—or like she mama. I comb and pat, comb and pat" (55). Celie remembers the care she took with her dolls, as some children do in imitation of their mothers. Celie takes the same thorough, loving care with Shug's hair, who is as vulnerable as a doll in a child's arms at this moment. Celie remembers the care and love she expressed to her child, Olivia; she also recalls how, in a momentary role-reversal, she nursed her own dying mother. Thus, Shug is placed in the context of Celie's former acts of healing, bestowed on doll, child, and mother. With this image, Walker illustrates how Celie heals Shug through the maternal acts of washing and combing her hair. As Shug succumbs to Celie's soothing and healing ministrations, the pleasure Shug experiences is not lost on Celie: "First she say, hurry up and git finish. Then she melt down a little and lean back against my knees. That feel just right, she say" (55). Shug remembers the nurturing she received as a child: "That feel just right. That feel like mama used to do. Or maybe not mama. Maybe grandma" (55). Thus, Celie heals Shug by attending to her basic physical needs, leaving
Shug feeling strong and good about herself. However, Celie begins to experience healing as well because as Celie becomes comfortable with Shug's body, she grows aware of her own physical self and its sexual needs.

In turn, Shug begins to heal Celie, a healing that will spring from her love and appreciation for Celie. Able to sing again, Shug dedicates a song to Celie at Harpo's bar: "She say this song I'm bout to sing is call Miss Celie's song. Cause she scratched it out of my head when I was sick" (77). Shug tries to share with Celie the mutual pain suffered at the hands of men, but Celie dismisses that aspect of their lives: "It all about some no count man doing her wrong, again. But I don't listen to that part" (77). Celie acknowledges the song as Shug's gift to her: "First time somebody make something and name it after me" (77). Shug articulates the bond they now share, and Celie understands: "I look at her and I hum along a little with the tune" (77). Shug publicly expresses her gratitude and love to Celie, thus recognizing Celie's worth and gentleness and greatly bolstering Celie's self-image. In addition, through Celie's care and attention, Shug has perhaps begun to realize that her fulfillment may not lie totally with men, especially since Celie has provided Shug with a powerful contrast to the treatment she was used to, such as the treatment she received from Mr.____

Regaining her strength completely, Shug decides to go on tour. She breaks the news to Celie who, shocked and hurt, can say nothing. Sensing Celie's disappointment, Shug comforts Celie by placing her hand
on Celie's shoulder. Desperately afraid to let go of the stability and protection Shug has brought to her life, Celie confides in Shug: "He [Mr.____] beat me when you not here" (79). Shocked, Shug demands to know why, and Celie answers, "For being me and not you" (79). Protectively and compassionately, Shug puts her arms around Celie and holds her for "maybe half an hour" then, standing up, "kisses" Celie on the "fleshy part of her shoulder," resolving to protect Celie from Mr.____'s abuse: "I won't leave... until I know that Albert won't even think about beating you" (79). Thus, Shug continues to heal Celie by establishing contact with Celie's physical self, as well as resolving to protect it from abuse. Shug is making a commitment to Celie's physical self, and begins to pay more attention to Celie and her needs. By making sure that Mr.____ will not abuse Celie, Shug continues to build Celie's self-esteem by showing her, as did Sofia, that she does not deserve such treatment. For Celie, it is the first time she articulates her pain to another woman, and seeks protection and healing.

Shug's departure looming, she and Mr.____ begin to sleep together every night. Concerned, Shug asks Celie if this bothers her, a question which creates the opportunity for them to compare their sexual experiences with Mr.____. This opportunity is important because it presents the avenue through which Celie is able to articulate her sexual needs and how they have never been met. Shug "love" having sex with Mr.____, while Celie simply succumbs: "He git up on you, heist your nightgown round your waist, plunge in. Most times I pretend I ain't
there. He never know the difference. He never ask me how I feel, nothing. Just do his business, get off, go to sleep" (81). Shug laughs at Celie's apparent exaggeration: "Do his business . . . Do his business. Why Miss Celie. You make it sound like he going to the toilet on you" (81). Celie, though, is very serious: "That what it feel like" (81). As puzzled by Celie's humiliation and lack of sexual pleasure as Sofia was by Celie's lack of emotional expression, Shug insists: "You never enjoy it at all? . . . Not even with you children daddy?" (81). Celie replies: "Never" (81).

However, the subject of Mr.____ quickly fades, as he is only an avenue through which Celie and Shug begin to discuss their disparate sexual experiences. The commonality of Mr.____ makes it easier for Celie to confide in Shug her sexual history, an important part of her healing. Shug then educates Celie about Celie's physical sexuality, and shows Celie how women feel pleasure through their bodies. By showing Celie this, Shug makes Celie view her body in a different manner, one that is not negative, or sexually repressive. According to Shug, Celie is a "virgin": "Listen, . . . right down there in your pussy is a little button that gits real hot when you do you know what with somebody. It git hotter and hotter and then it melt. That the good part. But other parts good too . . . Lot of sucking go on. . . . Lot of finger and tongue work" (81). Celie is so embarrassed at this frank discussion of her body and its sexual workings that her flushed face is hot enough to "melt itself" (81). Shug realizes that Celie does not even have an accurate idea of what her
genitalia look like, so she gives Celie a mirror and insists that she "go look at herself down there" (81). Celie hesitates, but Shug is adamant: "What, too shame to even go off and look yourself in the mirror? And you look so cute, too . . . . All dressed up for Harpo's, smelling good and everything, but scared to look at your own pussy" (82). Like two little "prankish" girls, they both run to the bedroom, where Celie has Shug "guard the door" (82). Celie examines herself: "I lie back on the bed and haul up my dress. Yank down my bloomers. Stick the looking glass tween my legs. Ugh. All that hair. Then my pussy lips be black. Then inside look like a wet rose" (82). Shug urges Celie to see the beauty of her genitals: "It a lot prettier than you thought, ain't it?" (82).

In one of the most important and liberating moments of her life, Celie recognizes the physical origin of her sexuality and takes ownership of it: "It mine" (82). Wanting to understand and possess her body further, Celie asks: "Where the button?" (82). Celie looks to Shug for approval and courage, then touches herself: "I look at her and touch it with my finger. A little shiver go through me. Nothing much. But just enough to tell me this the right button to mash. Maybe" (82). Celie's physical reaction helps her begin to realize that her genitalia can be a source of pleasure rather than pain and humiliation. Later, Celie tries to seek sexual satisfaction for the first time: "I . . . pull the quilt over my head and finger my little button and titties" (83). Celie can no longer ignore her sexual needs and tries to fulfill them in a healthy manner.
Encouraging Celie to explore her body fully, Shug tells Celie to "look at your titties too" (82): "I haul up my dress and look at my titties. Think bout my babies sucking them. Remember the little shiver I felt then. Sometimes a big shiver. Best part of having babies was feeding 'em" (82). By using the image of Celie breastfeeding her children, Walker illustrates how part of Celie's acceptance of physical self, and self-discovery comes from remembering the only sexual pleasure she ever had. As these memories become present, as they did when Celie combed Shug's hair, it becomes evident that part of Celie's healing process is the reconciliation of her ability to nurture, as well as the physical and emotional pleasure it gives her.

Shug finishes her tour and returns to Mr.____'s house for Christmas, where she and Celie spend time getting to know each other the way women traditionally have done: cooking together, cleaning, and talking. One night, Shug climbs into Celie's bed, and they begin to talk about their sexual experiences with men. Shug asks Celie how it was with her children's "daddy" and for the first time, Celie confides in another woman the frightening experience of being raped by her father (116). Celie, only fourteen, had "never even thought bout men having nothing down there so big. It scare me just to see it" (116). Extremely embarrassed and afraid Shug will think less of her, Celie "sneak[s] a look at Shug," who immediately comforts Celie: "I start to cry too. I cry and cry and cry. Seem like it all come back to me, laying there in Shug arms. How it hurt and how much I was surprise. How it stung while I
finish trimming his hair. How the blood drip down my leg and mess up my stocking" (116–117). Celie is finally able to express the extent to which being raped traumatized her, and experiences an emotional catharsis, a therapeutic release possible only through emotional and physical intimacy with another woman.

Furthermore, Celie remembers the powerlessness and abuse her father’s sexual whims subjected her to: "It get to the place where everytime I saw him coming with the scissors and the comb and the stool, I start to cry" (117). Celie’s sense of shame was compounded by her father’s avoidance: "How he don’t never look at me straight after that" (117–116). Shug consoles Celie with words, followed by a heartfelt embrace: "Don’t cry, Celie . . . Don’t cry" (117). Celie remembers how Shug: "start kissing the water as it come down the side my face" (117). For the first time, Celie shares her experience with another woman, seeks comfort, and affirms that her father’s assault on her was wrong. Part of Celie’s healing is an acceptance of all she has experienced through her physical self. In addition, Shug grows in compassion towards Celie, and thus is able to repay, in turn, some of Celie’s healing efforts.

In this process of emotional catharsis, Celie admits a painful lifetime of abandonment: "My mama die . . . My sister Nettie run away. Mr____ come git me to take care his rotten children. He never ast me nothing bout myself. He clam on top of me and fuck and fuck, even when my head bandaged. Nobody ever love me" (117). Celie finally
expresses her anger towards Mr.____, her sister, and mother and the pain their leaving brought her. Reassuring Celie that she is in fact loved, Shug kisses Celie, then begins to make love to her. Walker again draws on the image of Celie nurturing her children. Celie accepts Shug's child-like advances and "nurtures" Shug: "Something real soft and wet on my breast, feel like one of my little lost babies mouth" (118). Walker further emphasizes, as she did when Celie healed Sofia, that Celie has grown strong enough to nurture another woman. But, Celie can also finally express and fulfill her needs as well: "Way after while, I act like a little baby too" (118). As she is healed, Celie becomes more and more child-like: Celie combs Shug's hair as if combing her doll's hair and, discovers and explores her genitalia in the same way a child does. These moments of child-like behavior symbolize personal growth and change for Celie whereby she becomes more aware and expressive of her strong ability to nurture.

When Shug makes love to Celie, and treats her with sexual sensitivity, she affirms Celie's beauty and worth and begins to heal deep psychic wounds that were inflicted by Celie's father and deepened by her husband. However, it is not until Shug and Celie share large parts of their lives together and are physically and emotionally comfortable with each other that they make love. Hence, this moment of healing indicates an already established closeness and familiarity. Furthermore, it is important to note that Celie does not accept healing in a merely passive manner; Celie actively seeks to be healed, therefore assuming
responsibility for her needs and their fulfillment.

Shug also heals Celie when Celie is traumatized by the discovery that Mr.____ has been hiding Nettie's letters from her. Overwhelmed and enraged by the irony in her belief that her sister is dead, Celie loses an awareness of her actions, and becomes physically violent towards Mr.____: "I watch him so close, I begin to feel a lightening in the head. Fore I know anything I'm standing hind his chair with his razor open" (125). Quickly realizing Celie's state, Shug deftly and discreetly takes the razor from Celie, who becomes insensible: "All day long I... stutter. I mutter to myself. I stumble bout the house crazy for Mr.____ blood. In my mind, he falling dead every which a way. By time night come, I can't speak. Every time I open my mouth nothing come out but a little burp" (125). Telling everyone Celie has a fever, Shug secludes Celie and stays with her all night long. Celie, inert, has finally broken in the face of Mr.____'s abuse: "I don't sleep. I don't cry. I don't do nothing. I'm cold too. Pretty soon I think maybe I'm dead" (125). Shug patiently grants Celie time to accept what Mr.____ has done, and holds Celie "close to her" all night long, and they "sometimes talk" (125).

Moved by Celie's pain, Shug confides to Celie her past with Mr.____, a sexual and emotional history involving jealousy and cruelty, which drove Mr.____'s first wife, Julia, into the hands of the man that eventually murdered her: "Hell... I like her myself. Why I hurt her so? I used to keep Albert away from home for a week at the time. She'd come home and beg him for money to buy groceries for the
children" (127). In a frighteningly revealing moment, Shug realizes and admits she has helped create the brutality of Mr.____. As Celie has realized her irresponsibility and cruelty to Sofia, Shug cries as she remorsefully realizes the pain she has caused by helping a man abuse other women. Shug takes responsibility for her early treatment of Celie: "And when I come here, I treated you so mean. Like you was a servant... And all because Albert married you" (127). Though Celie cannot react to Shug's confession, part of the healing Shug bestows on Celie is to confess and apologize for her part in creating a man who would later deeply hurt two women. Through the catharsis of her confession, Shug experiences emotional healing.

Celie remains depressed and loses her sexual desire: "Us sleep like sisters... much as I love to look, my titties stay soft, my little button never rise" (152). Shug's healing of Celie then continues to evolve into a new dimension, one where healing is not only expressed sexually but through emotional support as well: "Nothing to worry about... I loves to hug... Snuggle. Don't need nothing else right now" (152). Shug puts her sexual needs aside in order to comfort Celie through her shock and grief. The sexual element in Celie and Shug's relationship never takes precedence over their friendship, nor over the love and support within that friendship. This is also seen when Shug and Celie are separated by Shug's affair with Germaine, and neither is able or willing to end their friendship.
When Celie loses her faith in God as a result of all the trauma suffered through Mr.——, Shug is called upon to heal Celie spiritually as well as sexually and emotionally. Celie feels betrayed and abandoned by a God who behaves as all men have: "trifling, forgetful and lowdown" (199). However, Celie misses her usual source of strength: "But it ain't easy, trying to do without God. Even if you know he ain't there, trying to do without him is a strain" (200). Celie views God in a traditional manner, as an entity that must be appeased by "go[ing] to church, sing[ing] in the choir, feed[ing] the preacher" (200). In her mind, God is a "big, old, tall, gray-bearded white" man "[who] wear[s] white robes and go[es] barefooted" (202). Sharing her view of religion, Shug shows Celie why her God does not stand up to scrutiny, and cannot be a true source of faith and strength. Shug points out that God is not causing Celie pain; rather it is her perception of God that pains her. Shug offers Celie a God that is holistic—part of everything created. God is genderless; neither a "him" nor a "her." Shug frees Celie from her belief that God is a male entity who has to be served. Because male society and its image controls and predominates in society, it can also influence one's vision of God: "Man corrupt everything... He on your box of grits, in your head, and all over the radio. He try to make you think he everywhere. Soon as you think he everywhere, you think he God. But he ain't" (204). Celie is encouraged to conceive of, and regard God as nature: "Whenever you trying to pray, and man plop himself on the other end of it, tell him to get lost... Conjure up flowers, wind, water,
a big rock” (204).

The Color Purple emphasizes the power and healing women can achieve through their intimacy with one another. Yet, in reality, there is no guarantee that women can and will gain ultimate power over their lives through process of healing or intimacy. These processes can require a never-ending effort; at times they will merely be a means of survival, especially when the patriarchy exerts its extreme power. For example, though it helps Sofia survive white male oppression, healing never frees her from this oppression. In addition, Sofia is oppressed not only by white male society but also by white women who act as instruments of white male society, namely Miss Eleanor Jane and the mayor’s wife. Though Miss Eleanor Jane treats Sofia in a relatively humane manner, she oppresses Sofia as she herself is oppressed. Furthermore, when Miss Eleanor Jane needs to be healed of the pain inflicted by her family, Sofia cannot--they are simply too deeply separated by white society. Walker makes clear that women cannot surmount their racial differences in order to heal one another. White male society has torn Sofia and Miss Eleanor Jane too far apart, and the damage is irreparable.

In The Color Purple, healing is expressed and revealed through relationships. Healing can celebrate and signify the physical and emotional closeness that already exists between women; or it can be the way women begin to know and love each other. The healing within these relationships reminds women that they are responsible for
another woman's well-being and self-awareness. For Celie, healing and being healed entail a burgeoning knowledge and acceptance of her physical, emotional and spiritual self, a knowledge and acceptance attained through her interaction with Shug and Sofia. Both Sofia and Shug confront Celie in a compassionate, honest manner, and they refuse to allow Celie her negative self-attitude. Celie is not simply healed; she is given life-saving knowledge of herself and prodded to take responsibility for her physical, emotional and spiritual self. When called upon to heal Celie, Sofia and Shug are reminded that not all women have attained their level of self-awareness and freedom from male oppression.

Further proof that Walker's definition of healing is presented through female relationships is the character of Squeak. Even though Squeak is supported and accepted by the women around her, she never forms a strong personal relationship with any of them. As a result, Squeak's healing is never discernable, whether it occurs at all. How is Squeak healed after she is raped by the mayor? Squeak never seems to achieve the kind of stability that Sofia, Shug and Celie do, though she does gain a measure of pride from them. Perhaps Squeak does not need to be healed the way these women do. At any rate, though Walker does develop Squeak's character throughout the novel, Walker gives the reader few clues as to the healing Squeak experiences. Through portraying Squeak as a woman who expends most of her time and energy on relationships with men, and who thus does not experience
healing, Walker strongly implies that as long as women devote most of their time and energy to relationships with men, they will remain un-healed, as men in general cannot heal women.
Chapter II

In *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982), Gloria Naylor emphasizes not only the physical and emotional aspects of healing, but the political aspects as well. Naylor is politically concerned with the oppression of women from various cultures and the universality of healing.

The first instance of healing in *The Women of Brewster Place* takes place between Mattie and Lucielia Turner, or "Ciel." Ciel lives upstairs from Mattie with her husband Eugene and small child, Serena. One day while Ciel and Eugene are arguing, Serena, alone in the living room, electrocutes herself with a wall socket. Ciel is traumatized by a pain so great: "she stopped eating and drinking water unless forced to; her hair went uncombed and her body unbathed" (101). After Serena's funeral, the neighborhood women visit Ciel, who unable to respond, lies speechless and paralyzed, with eyes that "raw fires had eaten . . . worse than lifeless--worse than death" (102). Mattie also visits Ciel and is stunned: "Mattie stood in the doorway, and an involuntary shudder went through her when she saw Ciel's eyes. Dear God, she thought, she's dying" (103).

Mattie "surged into the room" and, "pushing . . . the others out of her way," takes Ciel in her arms and begins to heal her: "[Mattie] sat on
the edge of the bed and enfolded the tissue thin body in her huge ebony arms. . . . She held Ciel so tightly she could feel her young breasts flatten against the buttons of her dress. The black mammoth gripped so firmly that the slightest increase of pressure would have cracked the girl's spine" (103). Mattie gets as physically close to Ciel as she can, virtually blurs their physical boundaries, and powerfully infuses Ciel with her physical self. Unlike the neighborhood women, who are uncomfortable with the depth of Ciel's pain, Mattie is able to withstand Ciel's emotions. Together they return to the origin of Ciel's pain: "[Mattie] rocked [Ciel] into her childhood and let her see murdered dreams. And she rocked her back, back into the womb, to the nadir of her hurt" (103). Mattie understands Ciel's pain because she has also lost a child whom she loved intensely; Mattie also has "murdered childhood dreams" to mourn (103).

With Mattie holding and comforting her, Ciel is able to express her pain, which has become part of her physical self: "And somewhere from the bowels of her being came a moan from Ciel . . . agonizingly slow, it broke its way through the parched lips in a spaghetti-thin column of air that could be faintly heard in the frozen room" (103). Together, Mattie and Ciel "find" the nadir of Ciel's pain, so powerful it has become part of Ciel's physical self, a "slight silver splinter, embedded just below the skin" (103). Mattie reaches into Ciel's psyche, and begins to remove her pain: "And Mattie rocked and pulled--and the splinter gave way, but its roots were deep, gigantic, ragged, and they tore up flesh with bits of fat
and muscle tissue clinging to them" (103). Mattie is relieved when she sees that Ciel will survive: "They left a huge hole, which was already starting to pus over, but Mattie was satisfied. It would heal" (104). Ciel then begins to release the physical symptoms of her pain: "The bile that had formed a tight knot in Ciel's stomach began to rise and gagged her just as it passed her throat . . . Ciel retched yellowish-green phlegm, and she brought up white lumps of slime . . . after a while, she heaved only air, but the body did not want to stop. It was exorcising the evilness of pain". Mattie carefully guides Ciel: "Mattie put her hand over the girl's mouth and rushed her out the now-empty room to the toilet . . . cupped her hands under the faucet and motioned for Ciel to drink and clean her mouth" (103, 105). Naylor shows in this moment how Mattie is healing Ciel of a pain that is both physical and emotional; each pain is indistinguishable from the other. Ciel's physical reaction is a reflection of her emotional vulnerability and pain.

Naylor shows how Mattie's healing process begins: "Mattie drew a tub of hot water and undressed Ciel. She let the nightgown fall off the narrow shoulders, over the painfully thin breasts and jutting hipbones. She slowly helped her into the water, and it was like a dried brown autumn leaf hitting the surface of a puddle" (104). Mattie lovingly and thoroughly begins to bath Ciel, thus removing the remnants of Ciel's pain: "And slowly she bathed her. She took the soap, and, using only her hands, she washed Ciel's hair and the back of her neck. She raised her arms and cleaned the armpits, soaping well the downy hair there."
She let the soap slip between the girl's breasts, and she washed each one separately, cupping it in her hands. She took each leg and even cleaned under the toenails" (104). Mattie does not neglect an inch of Ciel's body. In Mattie, Naylor presents a healer who does not recoil from the difficult, perhaps what some would even consider distasteful, task of cleansing another woman's body. Naylor, like Walker, depicts cleansing and curing another woman as a task requiring thoroughness, patience and emotional strength.

Mattie allows nothing, not even the slight roughness of a washcloth, to touch Ciel's body. Her bathing of Ciel is a direct, physical "laying on of the hands"; nothing comes between her hands and Ciel's body: "Making Ciel rise and kneel in the tub, she cleaned the crack in her behind, soaped her pubic hair, and gently washed the creases in her vagina--slowly reverently, as if handling a newborn. She took her from the tub and toweled her in the same manner she had been bathed--as if too much friction would break the skin tissue" (104).

At the onset of healing Ciel, when Mattie takes Ciel in her arms and rocks her back and forth as mothers do with children, it is apparent that Ciel's pain has reduced her to a child-like state. When Mattie bathes Ciel, cleans her genitals, makes her raise her arms, lift each leg, and rise and kneel in the tub, Mattie handles Ciel's body the way a mother would a young child. At this moment, Ciel's body is totally controlled by, and vunerable to, Mattie. Ciel can afford this vulnerability and Mattie can take such liberties, because they established a mother-
daughter relationship many years previous. As a child, Mattie and her son Basil lived with Ciel and her grandmother Eva, and both Mattie and Eva shared in the raising of Ciel. Mattie's healing of Ciel exemplifies not only her love for Ciel, but their existing relationship and knowledge of each other, seen when Mattie bathes Ciel: "All of this had been done without either woman saying a word" (104).

As part of being healed, Ciel experiences a physical "re-birth": "Ciel stood there, naked, and felt the cool air play against the clean surface of her skin. She had the sensation of fresh mint coursing through her pores" (104). Her pain is now greatly diminished: "She closed her eyes and the fire was gone. Her tears no longer fried within her, killing her internal organs with their steam" (104). Naylor thus establishes a connection between Ciel's physical cleansing and the beginning of her emotional healing. When Mattie re-awakens Ciel's capacity for physical sensation, Mattie is helping Ciel become aware of her physical self again, an awareness she lost in her depression.

Ciel releases her emotions in earnest when Mattie finishes bathing her. Instinctively, Mattie allows her to cry, because she knows this is part of Ciel's healing process: "So Ciel began to cry--there, naked, in the center of the bathroom floor. She led the still naked Ciel to a chair in the bedroom. The tears were flowing so freely now Ciel couldn't see, and she allowed herself to be led as if blind" (105). Ciel's ongoing emotional catharsis has given her a new awareness of her physical self: "And Ciel sat. And cried. The unmolested tears had rolled down her
parted thighs and were beginning to wet the chair. But they were cold and good. She put her tongue out and began to drink in their saltiness, feeding on them" (105). Ciel takes a measure of satisfaction from the release of her emotions, and almost revels in them. Mattie is then confident Ciel will survive: "She lay down and cried . . . But Mattie knew the tears would end. And [Ciel] would sleep. And the morning would come" (105). Again, because Naylor has constructed such an intricate connection between Ciel's physical and emotional self, it becomes apparent how Mattie's healing of Ciel so aptly addresses both aspects of Ciel.

Naylor constructs a symbolic healing for Ciel as well as a physical and emotional one, whereby Ciel's "virginity" or sexual "health" is restored. Naylor illustrates this restoration when Mattie changes the sheets on Ciel's bed and makes them "tight" and "fresh" and "beat[s] the pillow cases into a virgin plumpness and dress[es] them in white cases" (105). Ciel's bed is restored to a state of virginity, and Ciel, as she is led to it, becomes virgin also: "[Mattie] led her freshly wet, glistening body, baptized now, to the bed" (105). To emphasize the depth of Ciel's healing, and her "re-birth" within this healing, Naylor describes Mattie's bathing of Ciel as a kind of baptism, in which all Ciel's past "sins" or negative experiences are "washed away." As healer, Mattie is so powerful that she assumes religious significance herself; she has the power to "baptize" and to restore virginity.
In addition to showing the love and touching healing involves, Naylor also uses this moment between Mattie and Ciel to present an example of how women survive and share the burden of male oppression through healing. Ciel's experience is timeless, indicated by Naylor's reference to Greek mythology: "Mattie rocked her out of that bed, out of that room, into a blue vastness just underneath the sun and above time... over Aegean seas so clean they shown like crystal, so clear the fresh blood of sacrificed babies torn from their mother's arms and given to Neptune could be seen like pink froth on the water" (103). Naylor then places Ciel's experience in the context of the Jewish holocaust, where yet more children were "torn from their mother's arms" and killed (103): "[Mattie] rocked her on and on, past Dachau, where soul-gutted Jewish mothers swept their children's entrails off laboratory floors" (103). Finally, Ciel's pain is placed in the closer cultural context of slavery: "They flew past the spilled brains of Senegalese infants whose mothers had dashed them on the wooden sides of slave ships. And she rocked on" (103). Mattie has the power, as healer, to connect Ciel's experience with that of women from all cultures.

Because Naylor is concerned with female oppression that is timeless and universal, she uses different historical and cultural examples of women. Furthermore, women, no matter their cultures, are not so different; all are oppressed, powerless, and in a sense, experience a kind of "slavery." Through these examples, Naylor suggests that
women, whether or not they share the same ethnic culture, can, in a moment of healing, bond to withstand and rebuff male oppression, as Mattie and Ciel do. Oppressed women share a culture that transcends that of the "ethnic"; they share the culture of healing.

Naylor also uses this image to comment on how male society traditionally does not sufficiently acknowledge or take responsibility for its part in the sexual experience of women, a commentary Naylor makes with her characterization of Eugene. When Ciel tells Eugene she is pregnant, he makes clear that he will not assume responsibility for another child. In order to appease Eugene, Ciel has an abortion, thus placing his needs above her desire to have a child. Ciel’s mistake becomes apparent when Eugene is leaving her: "She realized that to answer that would require that she uncurl that week of her life, pushed safely up into her head, when she had done all those terrible things for that other woman who wanted an abortion. She and she alone would have to take responsibility for them now. He must understand what those actions had meant to her, but somehow, he had meant even more" (100). Ciel has allowed Eugene’s needs to destroy her unborn child: "Very soon, I will start to hate you. I promise--I will hate you. And I’ll never forgive myself for not having done it sooner--soon enough to have saved my baby, Oh dear God, my baby" (100). When Serena dies, Eugene does not take any responsibility for her death, nor for Ciel’s traumatic state or the healing Ciel needs.
In this respect, Naylor's characterization of Eugene is similar to Walker's early depictions of Mr.____ and Harpo, both of whom have refused to assume responsibility for the pain they inflict on women. Eugene is also similar to Celie's father in *The Color Purple*, who takes Celie's children from her, and Mr.____, who keeps Celie from finding out that her children are alive. Of course, each of these men is depicted somewhat differently, but nevertheless, all have, and exercise, the power to come between a woman and her child. Though these men do not separate these women from their children in a violent manner, it is still a painful violation. Naylor emphasizes the pain of this violation by drawing the separation of a mother and her child in graphic imagery, applying descriptions such as the "fresh blood of sacrificed babies", "children's entrails", and "spilled brains of Senegalese infants" (103). With these horrific images, Naylor pointedly sets out to disturb the reader into understanding the depth and reality of Ciel's pain, and to recognize that male oppressors have the power to "destroy" a woman's child, and thus control and subdue her.

However, Naylor begins her criticism of the patriarchy earlier when she depicts Ciel, deep in pain, receiving no comfort from God, a firmly-entrenched extension and expression of patriarchy. For Ciel, God has become an empty entity, whose "melodious virtues floated around her sphere, attempting to get in" (101). Ciel rejects God, and is determined to end her life, thereby taking control of her life away from God: "Obviously, He had deserted her or damned her, it didn't matter
which... Ciel... was simply tired of hurting. And she was forced to slowly give up the life that God had refused to take from her" (101). When Mattie begins to heal Ciel, she challenges the belief that to be "healed," a woman must submit to God's will and accept that perhaps God does not "want" a woman to be healed: "Merciful Father, no!... There was no prayer, no bended knee or sackcloth supplication in those words" (103). Instead, Mattie sends a "blasphemous fireball that shot forth and went smashing against the gates of heaven, raging and kicking, demanding to be heard" (102). Mattie rebels from the belief that for a woman to be "healed," she must patiently wait to receive such healing from God. Instead, Mattie takes control of the situation, discards submissive prayer, and becomes "blasphemous."

When Mattie refuses to pray, to allow God to "take" Ciel, God, along with the Greek, Jewish, and Senegalese oppressors, is not accepted as, nor granted the power to be, the arbiter of women's pain and hopelessness.

Healing can originate from more than touching or cleansing, as Naylor shows with Etta Mae and Mattie. Etta Mae sleeps with Reverend Woods in hopes that it will lead to prestigious marriage, but she is mistaken: "All evening Etta had been in another world, weaving his tailored suit and the smell of his expensive cologne into a custom-made future for herself. It took his last floundering thrusts into her body to bring her back to reality" (72). Etta Mae returns from her date with Reverend Woods needing comfort, security, and emotional replenishing; her self-worth is barely intact, "never had she walked among them with
a broken spirit. This middle-aged woman in the wrinkled dress and wilted straw hat would have been stranger to them” (74). Such emotional healing will help Etta Mae deal with, and survive, the emotional repercussions of trading her body in return for nothing: “And the expression on the face of this breathing mass to her left would be the same as all the others . . . she wanted just one more second of this soothing darkness before she had to face the echoes of the locking doors she knew would be in his eyes” (72).

Mattie intuits the outcome of Etta Mae’s date, and waits up for her: “When Etta Mae got to the stoop, she noticed there was a light under the shade at Mattie’s window, and she strained to hear what actually sounded like music coming from behind the screen. Mattie was playing her records!” (74). Etta Mae is comforted by this: “Etta stood very still, trying to decipher the broken air waves into intelligible sound, but she couldn’t make out the words. She stopped straining when it suddenly came to her that it wasn’t important what song it was—someone was waiting for her” (74). Mattie offers her presence to Etta Mae and within that presence, there is an implicit statement of love and caring: “Etta laughed softly to herself as she climbed the steps toward the light and the love and the comfort that awaited her” (74). Rather than present healing that is initially expressed physically, followed by emotional healing, Naylor has chosen to focus on the emotional dynamic of their relationship and the healing within this dynamic. Perhaps physical healing does not need to be explored, has already been established
during the course of their relationship. Further, merely physical healing is simply not what would be most effective for Etta Mae; Etta Mae needs love, support and acceptance, which Mattie implicitly gives her not only through her physical presence, but by playing Etta Mae's records. Etta Mae's records are a very important part of her, symbolizing her identity and attitude. When Mattie plays them, she is displaying her acceptance of Etta Mae. Because Mattie respects and values Etta Mae's physical and emotional self, Etta Mae is much more fulfilled by Mattie's presence than by having sex with Reverend Woods. Through Mattie, Naylor has provided an apt healing in answer to Etta Mae's pain.

Another instance of emotional healing in *The Women of Brewster Place* occurs between Kiswana Browne and Cora Lee. Through their interaction, Naylor broadens and makes more complex her own and Walker's definition of healing. Unlike most of the characters previously discussed in *The Color Purple* and *The Women of Brewster Place*, for whom healing is an expression of love, there are no emotional ties between Cora Lee and Kiswana Browne. Furthermore, Naylor has juxtaposed two women whose sharp differences, socio-economic and otherwise, and the widely disparate views and experiences such differences create, seem to make it difficult for healing to occur. These differences make their first meeting awkward, almost fruitless: "Cora Lee listened to Kiswana’s musical, clipped accent, looked at the designer jeans and striped silk blouse, and was surprised she had said she lived in this building. What was she doing on a street like Brewster?" (116).
Initially, Cora Lee is suspicious of Kiswana and, try as she might, Kiswana cannot hide her middle-class background. By placing these women in a dynamic of healing, Naylor challenges the idea that women must have personal and substantial commonalities for healing to occur. Through healing, women can surmount even their socio-economic differences.

With a background sketch of Cora Lee, Naylor reveals Cora Lee's motivation for having children. Initially, Cora Lee seemed to be a normal child who simply liked dolls very much. As she grew older, her obsessive need to physically nurture a baby becomes evident: "Their laughter [her family's] grew hollow and disquieting over Cora's Christmas ritual with the plastic and flannel because her body was now growing rounded and curved" (108). Her parents try to jar her from her obsession with dolls, but every Christmas, Cora Lee insists on new baby dolls, because the old ones: "don't smell and feel the same as the new ones" (109).

As a young teenager, Cora Lee transfers her obsession with baby dolls to newborn babies. When Cora Lee discovers how to replicate the baby dolls, she becomes pregnant. As an adult, Cora Lee still cannot distinguish between baby dolls and human babies: "Why couldn't they just stay like this [her latest newborn]--so soft and easy to care for? They stayed where you put them and were so easy to keep clean" (111-12). Cora Lee views her children as a child would--babies are "fun," "cute"; she is emotionally mired at the stage of "playing-out," or
"acting out" taking care of babies. Cora Lee has not formed a real emotional attachment to her children, has not accepted that they are not "toys," but humans. She becomes bored and frustrated with them when they are no longer newborns, and refuses to accept responsibility for their health and welfare. Cora Lee does not view her children as an adult would, in which she would allow and encourage her children to become adults themselves. Cora Lee's obsessive need to physically nurture a baby seems to be a symptom of deep emotional immaturity, so extensive that she seems mentally unbalanced.

Kiswana and Cora Lee meet when Kiswana visits Cora Lee to encourage her to attend a tenants' meeting. Despite Cora Lee's obvious disinterest, Kiswana tries to engage Cora Lee in community activities and invites her to attend an upcoming play for children in the park. When Kiswana shows interest in Cora Lee's newborn, Cora Lee wonders why Kiswana does not have children of her own. Kiswana then replies she is not married and does not have a suitable home, to which Cora Lee answers simply: "Babies don't take up much space. You just bring in a crib and a little chest and you're all set" (120). Kiswana reminds Cora Lee that babies grow to be individuals who need more than a crib and a chest: "But babies grow up," Kiswana said softly and handed the child back to Cora with a puzzled smile" (120).

The remnants of Kiswana's physical self immediately provide a contrast to the environment Cora Lee has created: "Kiswana's perfume, lingering in the air mixed with the odor of stale food and old dust, left
her unsettled and she couldn’t pinpoint exactly why” (120). As Kiswana’s gentle admonition, “But babies grow up,” resounds in her mind, Cora Lee begins to awaken from the mentality that disallows her to view her children in a realistic manner: “Why didn’t her babies go to school? She shook her head confusedly. No, babies didn’t go to school. Sonya was her baby and she was too little for school” (121). Cora Lee is angered, then challenged by Kiswana’s visit and demeanor: “That girl probably thought she didn’t want to take her children to that play. Why shouldn’t they go? It would be good for them... coming in here with her fancy jeans and silk blouse, saying she was a bad mother. Yeah, she’d have her babies ready tomorrow” (121). Motivated to take better care of her children, Cora Lee starts supper early that night and the next day cleans her apartment, to the surprise of her children: “The children had never seen their mother so active. The feeling had begun after breakfast when she took their plates from the table, washed and stacked them, and swept the kitchen floor before moving into the living room to leave it dusted and in some semblance of order, and then on to the bedrooms, where she had even changed their sheets—there was something in the air” (122).

The healing Kiswana bestows on Cora Lee manifests itself physically on Cora Lee’s children, as Cora Lee nurtures and touches them like never before. She carefully dresses and bathes them for the play, and when they return: “No one questioned it when she sponged them down and put them each into bed with a kiss... Cora Lee took their clothes,
folded them, and put them away” (127). Kiswana’s presence has motivated Cora Lee to take responsibility for her family’s physical environment, and make it a pleasant, clean place to live. Through the implicit confrontation of Kiswana’s visit, Cora Lee is awakened to the responsibility of motherhood. It is important for Cora Lee to show love and affection to her children; they desperately need it, and it verifies their identity as her children and Cora Lee’s as their mother. Before Kiswana’s visit, Cora Lee and her children had a biological relationship, but not an emotional one. Instead of viewing them as dolls who do not want to “behave,” Cora Lee now sees them for what they really are—her children. When Cora Lee begins to nurture and express love for her children, it becomes evident how Kiswana has not only healed Cora Lee, but her children as well. In that sense, Kiswana is creating a generation of healthy black children, ready to cope with the negative inner-city experiences to which places such as Brewster Place subject children.

During the play, Cora Lee continues to gain an awareness of her responsibilities as a mother. Her son Bruce reminds her that she verbally abuses them, calling them names such as “dumb asses”: “Mama, ... am I gonna look like that? Is that what a dumb ass looks like when it grows up?” Confronted by her son’s poignant questions, Cora Lee is faced with the way she treats her children: “Cora Lee felt the guilt lining her mouth seep down to form a lump in her throat. “No baby.” She stroked his head. “Mama won’t let you look like that” (125).
Cora Lee guiltily remembers how she neglected to nurture her oldest daughter's academic promise: "The next scene was blurred in front of her. Maybelline used to like school--why had she stopped? The image of the library books and unanswered truant notices replaced the tears in her eyes as they quietly rolled down her face" (126). Cora Lee realizes she must take responsibility for the education of her children: "School would be over in a few weeks but all this truant nonsense had to stop. She would get up and walk them there personally if she had to--and summer school. How long had the teachers been saying that they needed summer school? And she would check homework--every night" (126). Like never before, Cora Lee is moved to envision her children as adults: "Junior high; high school; college--none of them stayed little forever. And then on to jobs in insurance companies and the post office, even doctors and lawyers. Yes, that's what would happen to her babies" (126). Cora Lee realizes that her children need her attention, guidance and nurturing. Cora Lee is healed when she finally accepts that her children will become adults, and takes pride in how they will eventually be successful and leave Brewster Place.

Through her depiction of Kiswana and Cora Lee, Naylor implies that even though healing is, and can be, a deeply personal and emotional display of love and bonding between women, as with Mattie and Ciel, healing can also move beyond to encompass the idea that healing is helping women "on the street," and universally. Kiswana functions as a "universal" healer in the sense that she wants to heal all the women and
children of Brewster Place. Granted, when healing is viewed in this manner it seems impersonal, but because of its very attempt at universality, it is in a sense more giving, more risk-taking than personal, intimate, healing between two women who are familiar with each other. Naylor's message challenges complacent women indifferent to the plight of other women: Healing needs to be, and ultimately will be, a universal act, whereby individual women must take responsibility for any and all women that need to be healed, as Cora Lee does. Naylor has already hinted at this expanded definition of healing in her depiction of Mattie and Ciel, where the underlying message for women is one of unity through healing in an almost mythical, universal manner.

Naylor problematizes the issue by making it difficult to draw any firm conclusions as to whether or not Cora Lee is in fact healed. One reason is Naylor's characterization of Cora Lee herself. Cora Lee is mentally imbalanced: she is totally obsessed with her latest infant to the serious exclusion of her other children, watches soap operas all day, does not work outside the home, and has not successfully formed any relationships with the women in Brewster Place. However, how sane or mentally complete does a woman have to be in order to be healed? Furthermore, Cora Lee's mental state cannot be ignored and dismissed as part of the overall "real" existence of poor, ignorant "welfare" inner-city Black women in general: Cora Lee does not set out to be malicious to her children; she was liked and did well in school; brought
homework home; had a loving family life and was the most obedient of her siblings.

To add to, and complicate, her previous characterization of Cora Lee, Naylor closes the chapter on Cora Lee with the image of her going to bed with yet another stranger, presumably to produce another child, also to be neglected. Does Cora Lee sleep with this man with a new sense of awareness and responsibility, or is she healed only enough to get through the play, immediately succumbing to her old habits afterward? Naylor problematizes the issue further by shrouding Cora Lee in a dream-like aura as she goes to bed: "She turned and firmly folded her evening like gold and lavender gauze deep within the creases of her dreams, and let her clothes drop to the floor" (127). Is Cora Lee going to relegate this "magical" evening as simply a dream never to be replicated or realistically achieved? Or is Cora Lee ready to accept it as reality? As her new life? Naylor poses the large question of whether or not Cora Lee is ever healed of the way in which she treats her body--with seemingly mindless sexual encounters and frequent pregnancies. Therefore, is promiscuity not the root of Cora Lee’s un-healthiness, as much as how she treats her children?

In addition, through Theresa and Lorraine, Naylor further proves that healing is not necessarily an aspect of personal relationships between women. In contrast to the relationship of Celie and Shug in The Color Purple, which does not depend on sex for physical or emotional intimacy, sex seems to be all that Lorraine and Theresa share.
In the character of Theresa, Naylor for the first time portrays a woman who actively refuses to heal another woman. Furthermore, through the dynamic of this relationship, Naylor challenges the assumption that women, because they are lesbians, are automatically in tune with women's needs and issues; they too can lack the awareness and sensitivity to be healers.

Through healing, the female characters in *The Women of Brewster Place* either gain or express a responsibility for their lives. Ciel survives the physical and emotional trauma of her child's death, and Cora Lee finally assumes responsibility for her children and household. Etta Mae survives her rather devastating interlude with the preacher and returns to Mattie's sustaining and permanent love. For Kiswana, the healing she bestows on Cora Lee informs, and perhaps helps her in achieving understanding and compassion for another woman. Through these characters, Naylor shows how women gain strength, unity, and a knowledge of each other through healing.

With Naylor, healing is freed from the necessary medium of personal relationships, and becomes an act an individual woman bestows on women in general, as with Kiswana and Cora Lee. In the same expansive vein, Naylor portrays healing as being part of a personal relationship as Walker does, but then uses that moment to comment on the universality of women's pain and healing. In addition, Naylor stresses the immediate physical and emotional effects of
physical healing more than Walker does. Naylor never fails to create a
direct, immediate relationship between physical and emotional healing,
as with Mattie and Ciel, Kiswana and Cora Lee, and Mattie and Etta Mae.
Chapter III

The healing in Beloved (1987) as in the previous novels, encompasses physical acts, combined with words of support, if not always with love. A unique and challenging feature in Beloved is that for the first time, a white woman Amy Denver, is portrayed as one of the most significant healers. In addition, through Baby Suggs, Morrison re-introduces and elaborates on the idea of spiritual healing between women, initially presented by Walker in The Color Purple. Morrison elaborates as well on Naylor's idea of universal healing.

The first instance of healing in Beloved centers around the slave woman Sethe, who escapes slavery and gains her freedom and that of her children at a steep physical and emotional price. Sethe lives on a farm called Sweet Home, overseen by a man referred to as "school-teacher". Sethe, her husband, and the other slaves decide to escape. However, the plan fails, and even though her children escape, Sethe chooses not to leave without her husband. Sethe refuses to divulge the whereabouts of the other slaves, and though pregnant, is brutally whipped by schoolteacher. Nevertheless, Sethe escapes alone, and manages to get to a ridge of pine near the Ohio river, before she is
reduced to crawling.

Sethe is discovered there by a white woman who introduces herself as Amy Denver. After it becomes clear that Amy does not mean to harm Sethe, she then persuades Sethe to crawl to a lean-to down the road. Amy's ability to heal immediately manifests itself through her voice, which soothes and encourages Sethe, and enables her to crawl to the shelter: "It was the voice full of velvet and Boston and good things to eat that urged her along and made her think that maybe she wasn't, after all, just a crawling graveyard for a six-month baby's last hours" (34). As is the case with most of the healers in the novels previously discussed, Amy decisively assumes control of the situation, and once they reach the shelter, quickly and resourcefully begins to search for the means to heal Sethe: "The lean-to was full of leaves, which Amy pushed into a pile for Sethe to lie on. Then she gathered rocks, covered them with more leaves and made Sethe put her feet on them" (34). Without ceremony or distaste, Amy begins to massage Sethe's swollen and bloody feet: "It's gonna hurt, now . . . Anything dead come back to life hurts" (35). Amy then "did [does] the magic": "[she] lifted Sethe's feet and legs and massaged them until she cried salt tears" (35). The next morning, Amy continues to resourcefully and thoughtfully cure Sethe's feet when she fastens a pair of shoes out of leaves and cloth which enable Sethe to walk.

Amy opens the back of Sethe's dress, and is immediately silenced: "Amy unfastened the back of her dress and said 'Come here, Jesus,'
when she saw. Sethe guessed it must be bad because after that call to Jesus Amy didn't speak for a while. In the silence of an Amy struck dumb for a change, Sethe felt the fingers of those good hands lightly touch her back. She could hear her breathing but still the whitegirl said nothing" (79). Amy finally rouses herself to speak, and is moved to describe Sethe's back as a magnificent "tree," whose "trunk" is "red and split wide open, full of sap... with a mighty lot of branches... and leaves... and blossoms" (79). Amy proclaims Sethe will die, but nevertheless sets about to cure Sethe's back: "Well, spiderwebs is 'bout all I can do for you. What's in here ain't enough. I'll look outside. Could use moss, but sometimes bugs and things in it. Maybe I ought to break them blossoms open. Get that pus to running" (80). Like the healers in the previous novels, Amy is not squeamish about touching and curing another woman's injured body, and even displays a gentle humor as she thoroughly attends to Sethe's wounds, returning with "two palmfuls of web, which she cleaned of prey and then draped on Sethe's back, saying it was like stringing a tree for Christmas" (80).

To emphasize and symbolize Amy's ability to heal, Morrison laces this entire sequence of healing with references to the image of Amy's hands; her hands "magically" rub Sethe's feet, and Sethe lets "the good hands go to work" (82). Morrison also uses this image to connect Amy with Baby Suggs, thus reinforcing Amy's healing abilities, as Sethe remembers each of them: "If she lay among all the hands in the world, she would know Baby Suggs just as she did the good hands of the
whitegirl looking for velvet" (98).

In the previous chapter, it was shown how Naylor, through an instance of healing, establishes a connection between a black woman's experience, and the experience of Greek, Jewish, and Senegalese women. In a similar effort to connect female experiences through healing, Morrison has constructed two characters Amy and Sethe, with strong socio-economic similarities. Both Amy and Sethe have experienced forms of slavery--indentured and black. From the onset, Amy's position is accurately assessed by Sethe: "It wasn't no whiteboy at all. It was a girl. The raggediest-looking trash you ever saw" (32). During her short time with Sethe, Amy reveals a brutal life of indentured servitude; her emaciated appearance comes from being locked in a root cellar for long periods of time, and back-breaking labor: "Most times I'm feeding stock before light and don't get to sleep till way after dark comes" (80). As Amy later confides to Sethe, she received periodic whippings and punishments. By presenting the black and white female experience with slavery, Morrison is placing these women in as close proximity as she can--and shows, as Naylor did, that all women share oppression no matter their culture. In addition, the significance of Morrison choosing a white woman to heal Sethe cannot be ignored. Morrison strongly implies that white women can heal the pain that white male society has caused black women through slavery.

To further connect their social positions and experiences, Morrison depicts Sethe and Amy as women who have both lost their mothers at
an early age, and neither knew their fathers. Amy hints that she may be the illegitimate daughter of Mr. Buddy, her "owner": "Joe Nathan said Mr. Buddy is my daddy but I don't believe that, you? ... 'You know your daddy, do you?' 'No,' said Sethe. ... 'Neither me. All I know is it ain't him'" (80). Sethe knows nothing of her father, except that he was the only man her mother chose to have sex with, as Sethe was told by [Sethe's wetnurse]: "You she gave the name of the black man. She put her arms around him. The others she did not put her arms around. Never. Never" (62). Furthermore, both Sethe and Amy know little of their mothers. Sethe only remembers that her mother was virtually unknown to her because of the intense labor demanded of her, the brand on her chest, and her death by hanging. Amy remembers only a song, which she shares with Sethe: "She stood up then, having finished her repair work, and weaving about the lean-to... she sang... 'That's my mama's song. She taught me it'" (81). The pain of Amy's loss becomes apparent as she poignantly remembers her mother: "Amy sat quietly after her song, then repeated the last line before she stood, left the lean-to and walked off a little ways to lean against a young ash" (82).

However, even though Amy and Sethe's experiences are connected with strong similarities, Morrison has also complicated and contrasted these similarities with subtle but important differences. For example, Amy possesses the power to escape their situation in the woods, whereas Sethe remains vulnerable: "I got more business here'n you got. They
cut your head off. Ain't nobody after me but I know somebody after you" (78). Morrison illustrates the way in which Amy at this moment, being a member of white society, can operate with the power of white society. However, unlike Eleanor Jane and Eleanor Jane's mother in *The Color Purple*, Amy does not act as an instrument of white male society.

In addition, Amy's racism ass exemplified through her language, is itself a constant reminder of the power structure that exists outside their immediate situation. Through the way in which Amy and Sethe address one another, Morrison emphasizes their disparate social positions. Amy frequently refers to Sethe as a "nigger" and "gal," with an "ugly black face," who is "dumb": "We got an old nigger girl come by our place. She don't know nothing. . . . Sew. . . . real fine lace but can't barely stick two words together. She don't know nothing, just like you. You don't know a thing" (82). Sethe, on the other hand, never deviates from addressing Amy as "miss" (82). Amy's references to Sethe at one point are even dehumanizing, as when she congratulates herself on enabling Sethe to walk, and refers to Sethe as a "thing": "Come down here, Jesus, Lu made it through. That's because of me. I'm good at sick things ain't I?" (82)

Furthermore, even though Morrison has depicted Amy as an indentured servant, Amy's experiences were never as harsh as Sethe's; Amy recalls being punished, but never as severely as Sethe: "I had me some whippings, but I don't remember nothing like this. Mr. Buddy [Amy's owner] had a right evil hand too. Whip you for looking at him
straight. . . I looked right at him one time and he hauled off and threw the poker at me. . . Whoever planted that tree [Sethe's deeply lacerated back] beat Mr. Buddy by a mile" (79).

At any rate, Morrison's overall characterization of Amy as a woman who "talks tough" but heals gently, presents an interesting challenge when defining Amy as a healer. Though Amy is a racist, and refers to Sethe in racist terms, her healing qualities must not be disregarded. Despite her demeanor, Amy heals Sethe gently and compassionately, and Sethe, despite any fear and initial mistrust of Amy, accepts Amy's healing. Their interaction seems to represent an acknowledgement and adherence to their social positions, an acknowledgement which does not create animosity or interfere with healing. However, is the healing between these women able to occur because neither totally deviates from her social position? Is Amy able to heal Sethe only because they are away from white society? After all, when daylight comes and white society threatens, Amy flees, and Sethe is left to face her fate alone. Even though Amy is able to heal Sethe, white male society still contains ultimate power and hence Sethe and Amy can only survive male society, rather than actually subdue it, through healing.

Morrison has created two female characters who, even when secluded from society, verbally acquiesce to the social protocol between whites and blacks at this time. Yet, this is where their adherence to protocol ends. Given the social and cultural climate in America at this time, it is radical and unheard of for a white woman, indentured
servant or not, to massage a black woman's feet and to care for her. Likewise, Sethe undertakes a grave risk when she trusts Amy and places her life in Amy's hands. Sethe and Amy are able to surmount any prejudice and mistrust of each and enter into a dynamic of healing. Morrison thus implies that when women need healing, the conflicts that exist due to their cultural differences are irrelevant. In this respect, Morrison advances an idea presented by Naylor: women, even if only to heal each other, have the ability to transcend their social and cultural situation. Walker, through the characters of Sofia and Miss Eleanor Jane, initially presents the idea that women cannot surmount the prejudices surrounding them and enter into a dynamic of healing. Naylor begins to contradict Walker on this point through a moment of healing between Mattie and Ciel, by referring to the connections between Greek, Jewish and Senegalese women and by the healing between Kiswana and Cora Lee. Morrison then develops the idea of women transcending cultural differences and prejudices to its fullest extent through her depiction of Amy and Sethe, where not only minority women are encompassed in a moment of healing, but a white woman, a member of the dominant, oppressive society.

Amy's healing of Sethe is successful, and Sethe is able to walk for a brief time. Suddenly, Sethe is struck by labor pains, and quickly crawls into a small boat moored by the river's edge, but the birth is difficult: "It was stuck. Face up and drowning in its mother's blood" (84). Amy and Sethe work together to deliver the baby: "'Push' screamed Amy.
'Pull' whispered Sethe. . . And the strong hands went to work a fourth time. . . She reached one arm back and grabbed the rope while Amy fairly clawed at the head. When a foot rose from the river bed and kicked the bottom of the boat and Sethe's behind, she permitted herself a short faint" (84). While Sethe is unconscious, Amy takes care of the baby: "Coming to, she [Sethe] heard no cries, just Amy's encouraging coos. . . Amy wrapped her skirt around it and the wet sticky women clambered ashore" (84).

Through the birth of Sethe's child, Amy and Sethe are joined further, whereby their common experiences are emphasized. Sethe and Amy become two women who "did something together appropriately and well". Morrison again implies that because of their social positions, they are able to join together in the birth of Sethe's child. Sethe is a slave, and Amy is similar in social value, a "barefoot whitewoman with unpinned hair"; they are two "throw-away people," "two-lawless outlaws" (85).

Sethe is rescued and arrives at Baby Sugg's house. Amy helped Sethe complete her escape, and Baby Suggs will help Sethe survive the physical and emotional consequences of such a journey. When Sethe appears on Baby Suggs' doorstep, Baby Suggs "kisses her on the mouth," immediately establishing intimacy between them. (92) With the same decisiveness displayed by Amy, Sethe quickly sets about to cleanse and cure Sethe: "She led Sethe to the keeping room and, by the light of a spirit lamp, bathed her in sections, starting with her face. . . Sethe
dozed and woke to the washing of her hands and arms . . . When Sethe’s legs were done, Baby looked at her feet and wiped them lightly. She cleaned between Sethe’s legs with two separate pans of hot water and tied her stomach and vagina with sheets. Finally she attacked the unrecognizable feet . . . She helped Sethe to a rocker and lowered her feet into a bucket of salt water and juniper . . . The crust from her nipples Baby softened with lard and then washed away“ (93). Though Baby Suggs does not assume the role of midwife as directly as Amy does, she does complete the work begun by Amy, by washing Sethe with hot water, clean sheets and juniper.

While bathing Sethe, Baby Suggs notices Sethe’s back and is stunned: “Baby Suggs caught a glimpse of something dark on the bed sheet . . . Roses of blood blossomed in the blanket covering Sethe’s shoulders. Baby Suggs hid her mouth with her hand“ (93). Baby Suggs regains her composure: “When the nursing was over and the newborn was asleep . . . wordlessly the older woman greased the flowering back and pinned a double thickness of cloth to the inside of the newly stitched dress“ (93). Sensibly, Baby Suggs realizes that Sethe it would not help Sethe to witness Baby Suggs’ reaction. As Celie did in The Color Purple, and Amy, Baby Suggs puts her fear and shock aside, and courageously attends to the physical injury of the un-healed woman. At times, it is emotionally taxing to heal, as the healer is deeply affected by the un-healed woman’s pain. Nevertheless, the healers in these novels do not remain emotionally safe, and refuse to allow the un-healed
woman to experience her painful state alone. Years later, Sethe is sure that her physical state affected Baby Suggs' irreparably. Sethe remembers that part of the reason Baby Suggs died was living through Sethe's painful experience: "showed up at her door, with her child in her hands, wrapped in the underwear of some white woman that finally did her in".

Baby Suggs not only heals Sethe physically, but spiritually as well. When Sethe needs comfort and advice after Paul D recounts to her Halle's breakdown, she seeks the solace of Baby Suggs' company in the Clearing. Baby Suggs makes herself known to Sethe, and offers Sethe physical soothing and emotional support: "Just the fingers... just let me feel your fingers again on the back of my neck and I will lay it all down, make a way out of this no way. Sethe bowed her head and sure enough—they were there. Lighter now... but unmistakably caressing fingers" (95). Through touch, Baby Suggs communicates to Sethe a message of comfort and support. In this case, it is difficult to discern when physical healing becomes emotional healing, as they become one: "Still she was grateful for the effort; Baby Suggs' long-distance love was equal to any skin-love she had known. The desire, let alone the gesture, to meet her needs was good enough to lift her spirits" (94).

Baby Suggs not only heals Sethe, but the community as well. In this sense, Baby Suggs is similar to Kiswana in *The Women of Brewster Place*, whose healing is also bestowed in a public manner. Baby Suggs heals the community in a way that helps it individual members deal
with their past legacy of slavery, which is exacerbated by the present
day prejudice that surrounds them. Baby Suggs prepares the
community for her sermons by encouraging those gathered to express
love and support for each other, thus bringing about unity through
emotional catharsis: "It started that way: laughing children, dancing
men, crying women and then it got mixed up. Women stopped crying
and danced; men sat down and cried; children danced, women laughed,
children cried until, exhausted and riven, all and each lay about the
Clearing damp and gasping for breath. In the silence that followed,
Baby Suggs, holy, offered up to them her great big heart" (88).
Then, through sermons that aptly address the painful experience of
slavery, Baby Suggs heals the surrounding community of former slaves.
However, she does not mouth the messages of organized, traditional
religion: "She did not tell them to clean up their lives or to go and sin
no more. She did not tell them they were the blessed of the earth, its
inheriting meek or its glorybound pure" (88). These messages from
traditional, organized religion do not address the pain and spiritual
needs of former slaves, because these messages are judgemental and
indirectly urge an acceptance of slavery--rather than one of strength.
Baby Suggs does not placate the people of the community with visions
of salvation and rewards for "meekly" accepting their enslavement.
When traditional, organized religion (by and large adopted by black
american culture) advocates an acceptance of oppression, it thereby
becomes a force used by the dominant society to control minority
Rather than encourage the members of the community to wait and expect to be healed in the indefinite future, even after death, Baby Suggs offers them a method that realistically helps them combat their present situation: "She told them that the only grace they could have was the one they could imagine. That if they could not see it, they would not have it" (88). Rather than urge them to submissively place their salvation and well-being in the hands of God, Baby Suggs makes each member of her congregation responsible for their salvation or state of "grace." Baby Suggs forces the un-healed members of the community to assume a responsibility for their physical selves.

In addition, by giving these former slaves a religion that respects their physical selves and restores their dignity, Baby Suggs offers her congregation the powerful means to fight white oppression—a positive self-image: "Here . . . in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don't love your eyes; they'd rather just as soon pick 'em out" (88). Like the healers in this and the previous novels, as healer, Baby Suggs forces the un-healed community to acknowledge and assume responsibility for their physical selves. Baby Suggs warns the community not to expect
white society to allow them to have or attain any form of physical
dignity. Baby Suggs' preaching is a way to fight and survive white
oppression.

In addition, Baby Suggs importantly teaches the community that its
individual members have and must exercise the power to heal one
another, thus creating a community of healers: "This is the flesh I'm
talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved. Feet that need to rest
and to dance; backs that needs support; shoulders that needs arms,
strong arms I'm telling you" (88). At this point, a valid comparison
could be made between Kiswana in The Women of Brewster Place and
Baby Suggs. Kiswana is also a healer of an entire community, beginning
with and through Cora Lee and her children. At the end of her sermons,
Baby Suggs and the community bond, as she emphasizes her message
by example: "Saying no more, she stood up then and danced with her
twisted hip the rest of what her heart had to say while the others
opened their mouths and gave her the music" (89).

In some ways, Morrison's portrayal of Baby Suggs is similar to
Walker's depiction of Shug Avery in The Color Purple as both heal
spiritually. In both instances, spiritual healing is transformed into
physical healing, as Shug's view of God allows Celie to accept and revel
in her physical self, as does the community with Baby Suggs. Both Shug
Avery and Baby Suggs dismiss traditional, organized religion and
replace it with one that is a form of protest and empowerment—Shug's
for black women, and Baby Suggs' for the black community. Baby Suggs
urges her congregation to assume a control and responsibility for their physical selves, which was taken away by slavery. Likewise, Celie must also accept her physical self, and cease her mindless and oppressive subservience to the image of a white male god. Like Shug Avery, Baby Suggs dispenses with the "middle-men" of religion, the reverends and preachers, because neither Shug nor Baby Suggs needs or depends on male society to interpret God or religion. This spiritual independence is seen when once freed, Baby Suggs settles in Cincinnati and is advised to "reacquaint" herself with God through Reverend Pike: "I won't need him for that. I can make my own acquaintance" (146).

Many years later, the community reciprocates Baby Suggs' healing when the community heals Baby Sugg's daughter-in-law and granddaughter, Sethe and Denver. The community will heal Denver out of their respect, love and appreciation of Baby Suggs and her healing qualities. Denver is healed when the female community accepts her as its own, and therefore finally grants Denver her womanhood—something Sethe cannot help Denver attain because she is too preoccupied and emotionally depleted by Beloved. Compelled by Sethe's starvation, Denver decides to seek help from the community, and can think of no one else to turn to except Lady Jones, her former teacher. Lady Jones gives Denver not only food, but compassion and tenderness, and the community soon follows suit: "Denver did not know it then, but it was the word "baby," said softly and with such kindness, that inaugurated her life in the world as a woman. The trail she followed to get to that
sweet thorny place was made up of paper scraps containing the handwritten names of others”. The rest of the community soon follows suit: “Two days later Denver stood on the porch and noticed something lying on the tree stump at the end of the yard. She went to look and found a sack of white beans. Another time a plate of cold rabbit meat. One morning a basket of eggs sat there” (242-49). These parcels contain not only food, but signals of the community’s readiness to accept Denver as one of its own.

As Denver becomes part of the community of women, she grows in social skills, and in knowledge of her past history and the women of her family, Sethe and Baby Suggs: “All of them knew her grandmother and some had even danced with her in the Clearing... One said she wrapped Denver when she was a single day old and cut shoes to fit her mother’s blasted feet” (250). In addition, Denver and the community begin to establish a relationship: “Some even laughed outright at Denver’s clothes of a hussy, but it didn’t stop them caring whether she ate and it didn’t stop the pleasure they took in her soft ‘Thank you’ “ (250). Proof that Denver has become part of the community is that when the community women come to Sethe’s house to heal Sethe, Denver will join with them to keep Sethe from attacking Bodwin. In addition, Denver becomes self-assured and well-adjusted as a result of her interaction with the community, as Paul D notices: “Paul D saw her the next morning when he was on his way to work... Thinner, steady in the eye... Her smile, no longer the sneer he remembered, had
welcome in it and strong traces of Sethe's mouth" (266).

As Naylor connected the experiences of women in a moment of healing between Mattie and Ciel, so does Morrison in a moment of healing between Sethe and the women of the community. When the women gather in Sethe's yard, this represents the way in which women can heal each other of the pain that can arise from bearing and raising children. As shown by Ella's reaction to Sethe's situation, the community women understand the hardships and heartaches of motherhood: "Whatever Sethe had done, Ella didn't like the idea of past errors taking possession of the present. . . . she could not countenance the possibility of sin moving in on the house, unleashed and sassy" (256). Though Ella may not agree with Sethe's earlier attempt to kill her children, she does not believe Sethe's children have the right to take revenge on Sethe, as she tells one of women of the neighborhood: "the children just can't up and kill the mama" (256). The community women place their animosity towards Sethe aside in order to heal her, and come as warriors, ready to defend their own: "Some brought what they could and what they believed would work. Stuffed in apron pockets, strung about necks, lying in the space between their breasts. Others brought Christian faith—as shield and sword. Most brought a little of both" (257). The women bring their own brand of faith, one not based on traditional religion. The women do not rely on God's power to heal Sethe—they bring the power of their own faith.

Led by Ella, the women project their healing powers on Sethe: "A
woman dropped to her knees. Half of the others did likewise. Denver saw lowered heads, but could not hear the lead prayer—only the earnest syllables of agreement that backed it: "Yes, yes, yes, oh yes. Hear me. Hear me. Hear me. Do it Maker, do it, Yes" (258). The women hold an unconstructed and impromptu prayer meeting, and through their voices, project their emotion and power of will. However, as their healing quickly becomes instinctive and primal, words are abandoned because they cannot express the pain of motherhood: "Instantly the kneelers and the standers joined her. They stopped praying and took a step back to the beginning. In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like" (259). The women delve deeply into their common experience of motherhood, and offer the shared pain and support from this experience to Sethe, thus exorcising the ghost from Sethe's home. In a manner similar to Naylor's in The Women of Brewster Place, when Mattie is instrumental in exorcising the "evil" pain within Ciel, Morrison as well draws on the image of exorcism. Sethe's "pain" and the ghost that controls Sethe by manipulation and guilt, is exorcised by the community women.

Sethe welcomes the community's healing: "For Sethe it was as though the Clearing had come to her . . . where the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code . . . Building voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did it was a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chesnut
trees. It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash" (261). With their collective voice and its healing that rivals the power of nature, the women imbue Sethe with their empathy and support. As Mattie in The Women of Brewster Place imbued Ciel with her physical self and love, so do the community women imbue Sethe with their physical presence and support.

For the women, returning to Sethe's house and yard reminds them of how they formed community and enjoyed themselves with Baby Suggs: "There they were, young and happy, playing in Baby Suggs' yard" (258). By healing Sethe, the community shows its appreciation of Baby Suggs and her healing qualities. The community is healed as well when they harken back to when their animosity towards Sethe did not exist—when they were united by Baby Suggs' love and generosity. By accepting Sethe as one of their own, the community becomes whole again and heals itself.

Yet, despite the healing Baby Suggs bestows on Sethe and the community, she, like Sofia in The Color Purple, is never healed of the pain caused by white society. Ultimately, Baby Suggs is destroyed by white society: "Those white things have taken all I had or dreamed... and broke my heartstrings too. There is no bad luck in the world but whitefolks" (89). Eventually, Baby Suggs cannot preach any longer because she is simply too emotionally and spiritually depleted to heal others any longer, or herself. Like Amy and Sethe, for whom healing was only a means of surviving their situation in the
woods, but not white patriarchial society. Baby Suggs as well is ultimately rendered powerless.
Chapter IV

These novels share strong similarities in their attempts to define healing. One image that consistently occurs throughout these novels is the mother/daughter image, whereby the un-healed woman becomes child-like in her physical and emotional vulnerability, and the healer becomes protective, maternal, and nurturing. In addition, these novels at one point all contain religious imagery within instances of healing. Celie in *The Color Purple* experiences a kind of religious ecstasy when bathing Shug, and Ciel in *The Women of Brewster Place* is "baptized" by Mattie. However, though these instances of healing utilize religious imagery, God and traditional Christian religion, to varying degrees, are rebuffed. Instead, women replace, or at least stand next to, God as spiritual healer. In a further rejection of male society, none of the healers depend on male-dominated and created facilities and therapy, nor expensive medicines, in order to heal. Instead, home remedies are used and additional healing is received from other women. The implied message within these novels is that women understand best their mutual experiences and trauma, and therefore, can offer each other a more sympathetic, and perhaps even realistic, method of healing than male society.
Morrison, Naylor, and Walker all portray healers as women who use all and any materials in order to heal, such as natural or home remedies. Celie in *The Color Purple* uses water, alcohol and witch hazel to heal Sofia. In *Beloved*, Amy uses leaves and spiderwebs to heal Sethe, and Baby Suggs uses lard, salt water and juniper. In *The Women of Brewster Place*, Mattie heals Ciel using only water. When Walker, Naylor and Morrison allow the healers and un-healed women only a basic, extremely inexpensive means of healing, their poverty or destitution is illustrated. Healing is the act of poor or destitute women helping one another. Hence, healing is a very political act—because it is restoring power to socio-economically disadvantaged women, who most need the power of healing.

In terms of healing, what message do these novels deliver to their male audience? Though the presentation of men as healers is not the primary focus of these novels or this thesis, male characters portrayed as healers should not be ignored. For example, in *The Color Purple* Harpo nurtures his children, and eventually grows as a healer to comfort, bathe, and feed his father. Ben in *The Women of Brewster Place* comforts and listens to Lorraine after none of the neighborhood women do. Paul D in *Beloved* has the ability to "touch" women both emotionally and physically.

However, these male characters never heal with the intensity or consistency of the female characters. In *The Color Purple*, neither Harpo or Mr.____ are able to heal until they have suffered through their own
misery, without the support and presence of their wives. Clearly, Walker’s message to men is that they should learn and assume the responsibility of healing other men, before they turn to healing women. In addition, men, like women, have to succumb and experience their own pain in order to gain a sensitivity and self-awareness needed to heal. Ben in *The Women of Brewster Place* is unable to successfully survive and exist as a healer. In *Beloved*, Morrison presents Paul D with the ability to heal, but then places him outside the realm of healing and personal relationships in Sethe’s household, thereby effectively containing his healing qualities. However, Morrison towards the end of the novel portrays Paul D as entering Sethe’s life, ready to heal her. Sethe challenges his healing abilities: “will you care for me, rub my feet, the way Baby Suggs did?” It is a challenge not only to Paul D, but to men in general. Or, that they should learn how to heal from women, something that Paul D seems ready to do when given Sethe’s ultimatum. The message for men is one of growth and awareness of self and women before being able to heal, and the willingness to learn healing from women, as Paul D is ready.
Works Cited

