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Chapter 5

N'YA-HAP ME-YE-MOOM: CHAUCER, CALIFORNIA, AND THE LITERARY LANDSCAPES OF BAILEY'S CAFE

JENNY ADAMS*

Black women's histories, lives, and spaces must be understood as enmeshing with traditional geographic arrangements in order to identify a different way of knowing and writing the social world and to expand how the production of space is achieved across terrains of domination.

—Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*

Close readers of Gloria Naylor's 1992 *Bailey's Cafe* often focus on the novel's rich biblical allusions; its modes of feminist critique; and its intersections with other literary texts.¹ Yet less commented on is Naylor's consideration of national space and her restorative feminist vision of it, one which intertwines literary history and canon formation with geographies, land ownership, and literary landscapes.² Naylor signals her interest in national space in the early pages of her framing narrative, "Maestro If You Please," a section that recounts the life of the bi-coastal narrator, Bailey, from his upbringing in Brooklyn, New York to his post-war return to San Francisco, his departure point into the café's space of the literary imaginary. In the novel's closing story, "Miss Maple's Blues," Naylor neatly reverses this geographical trajectory with the narrative of Miss Maple, whose childhood in California's Central Valley and college experience at Stanford University precede his departure to the East Coast, and his eventual exit, like Bailey's, from any mappable geography. Their stories bookend narratives set in (among other places) Detroit, Chicago, New Orleans, and Harlem, cities that Naylor describes in vivid detail.

In this chapter I argue that Naylor uses these characters and places to call attention to the patriarchal structure of land ownership and its deleterious effects

* Jenny Adams is Professor of English at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. She is the author of *Power/Play* (2006) and journal articles in, for instance, *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, *JEGP*, and *The Chaucer Review*. Her previous work on medievalism has been published in the *Journal of Popular Culture*. Her forthcoming book is provisionally titled *Degrees of Collateral*.

1 For biblical allusions, see Alexander, *Signifyin(g) Sex*; Buehler, "Below the Surface"; Ivey, "Beyond Sacrifice"; and Swindell, "Latecomers." For its modes of feminist critique, see *Signifyin(g) Sex*; Marinšek, "Female Genital Mutilation" and Vernon, *Black Middle Ages*, 203–45. For its interactions with other works of literature, see Edwards, "'Burn all he has'"; and Han, "Excessive Religiosity."

2 Readers tend to focus on questions of space and geography in Naylor's other works. Particularly ripe for this discussion are *Linden Hills*, which takes place in a Black suburban community produced through exclusion from white space, and *Mama Day*, which takes place primarily in Willow Springs, a fictionalized Gullah community on an island off the coast of Georgia and South Carolina.

on Black women's bodies in the United States (US). The novel begins in earnest on the South Side of Chicago, where Sadie trades a life on the streets for a home with a small house and garden that thrive under her nurturing care. But she loses her legal claim to this property when her husband dies, and his children inherit the land. A later narrative transports us to rural Louisiana, where Eve enjoys a sensual connection with the earth, which she uses to "harvest" her own sexual pleasure. Yet when her Godfather catches her, he casts her out naked and severs her tie to the land. Deep in the novel, Naylor looks beyond US geographical space to think more broadly about nationalism and belonging through the character of Mariam, whose tale takes place in Ethiopia. Yet Mariam's childhood reflects the same moral underpinnings of a juridical national order that regulates the bodies of Black American women and the property they inhabit. In all cases, tenets of civic and national space erase women's own labour, pleasure, autonomy, history, and ancestry, casting them out of the fabric of nationhood.

It would be a stretch to say that Naylor imagines a full-throated alternative to this patriarchal nationalism. Nevertheless, in the novel's closing story, Naylor offers a brief glimpse of an alternative, restorative model of land stewardship and possession, one that looks not to a utopic future but to a pragmatic medieval and early modern past. This moment of "workable geography" (to borrow from Katherine McKittrick) appears in the form of Miss Maple's Black-Indigenous family, which provides an alternative to the nation-state. Rather than in traditional, patriarchal property ownership, Miss Maple's family farm has its origins in *matriarchal* authority, with family land passing through a ganancial legal system, a legal framework with origins in medieval Spanish law. Originating from the verb *ganar* (to earn), ganancial legal codes posit that spouses come to their property with equal claims to ownership, which they earn through their labour. Naylor's final story, "Miss Maple's Blues," embraces this legal structure, and it provides the basis for a Black-Indigenous feminist heterotopia of crops, people, and wealth in an Edenic abundance. Even though Miss Maple leaves this land for the "nowhere" of the café, his family persists, offering the promise of a restorative, feminist social order that he carries with him through his changed name, his non-binary identity, and his absorption into the café's female collective.³

In "Miss Maple's Blues" Naylor thus anticipates Katherine McKittrick's argument that the "relationship between black women and geography opens up a conceptual arena through which more humanly workable geographies can be and are imagined."⁴ Yet I will also argue that Naylor's model for this type of restorative geographical work

3 In articles about Naylor's novel, Miss Maple's non-binary identity is sometimes obfuscated in discussions of Naylor's intersectional feminism, with "feminism" implicitly assuming cisgender political investments. See Montgomery, "Gloria Naylor's *Bailey's Cafe*"; and Vijayalakshmi and Padmavathi, "Gender and Ethnicity."

4 McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xii.

is inseparable from her restorative literary practice, which takes the form of a dialogue with Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.⁵ In this way Naylor's work foreshadows more recent engagements that authors have had with the *Canterbury Tales*, which have served as a site of Black feminist critique. Writers like Patience Agbabi and Zadie Smith have repurposed a Chaucerian framework around a Black feminist experience, reworking and updating medieval models to their own ends. Yet unlike Agbabi and Smith, Naylor does not so much repurpose as replace Chaucer in his own model and, along with him, the very idea of patriarchal literary succession and lineage. In imagining Chaucer out of his own poem, she performs her own ganancial redistribution of narrative property and opens space for shared literary practices.

It is thus fitting that Naylor's tale of feminist land practice and literary appropriation takes place in Southern California, near to the estate of Henry Huntington, the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century railroad magnate. Huntington's construction of the Central Pacific Railroad contributed to the expansion of America's land claims, displacement of Indigenous peoples, and exercise of sovereign power. Huntington and his companies controlled one thousand miles of trolley lines; provided roughly 20 percent of Los Angeles's power needs; and managed thousands of acres of land in Southern California. As Huntington worked to expand his geographical claims, he was also laying claim to a European literary past as he began to acquire entire libraries from overseas. It was at this time that Huntington purchased the most important manuscript copy of Chaucer's poem, the Ellesmere Chaucer, and it has resided on his estate ever since.

Naylor's silence about Huntington and the Ellesmere manuscript is in keeping with her silence about Chaucer's *Tales*. It is a silence that rejects the paternalism of literary heritage and lineage. It is also a silence that opens space for a different engagement with the medieval world, one that enters at the novel's end where it offers a corrective to the literary and geographic patrimonies represented by Huntington's estate and by the "Father of English Poetry" whose most famous work resides there.

"Outcasts in Their Own Nation": Black Land Dispossession in *Bailey's Cafe*

As noted above, the stories in Gloria Naylor's *Bailey's Cafe* stand out for their iconic geographical locations, with characters shaped by New York City neighbourhoods, Chicago alleyways, Detroit streets, San Francisco piers, and the thriving bustle of the New Orleans French Quarter. Uniting these cities, both in historical record and in Naylor's novel, are their roles in the Great Migration, a period when Black Americans moved from southern to northern cities to escape violence and humiliation (lynching, physical beatings, threats, and racial segregation) enacted on them.⁶ In making this geographical

⁵ It is worth noting that Naylor did not refer to herself a feminist writer, although readers of Naylor typically consider her such. See Montgomery, "Gloria Naylor's *Bailey's Cafe*."

⁶ On its part, New Orleans, although not a destination site for migration, housed a Creole community that provided an alternative to other Southern cities.

change, Black Americans sought basic rights of citizenship, including the ability to own land and tend to it without the fear of violence. Yet most found a continuation of the racism that plagued the South with white residents creating political, economic, and legal barriers such as redlining to block Black land ownership and civic participation. This patriarchal structure of land ownership and succession proved particularly exclusionary to Black women, who found themselves subject to masculine and juridical control.

The violence of this property dispossession is readily seen in the opening story of Sadie. Sadie's tale takes place on the South Side of Chicago, a majority-Black community produced by the Great Migration and ensuing urban segregation. It is thus predictable that Sadie's life starts with one of multiple dispossessions; the product of a failed abortion, she is the unwanted daughter of a prostitute on this segregated city's South Side. She owns nothing, not even her own body, which her mother sells for sex. She attains some amount of stability when she marries Daniel and moves into his home, although his nightly alcoholic rants perpetuate the abuse that she has experienced her entire life.

Daniel's house also provides Sadie with her first connection to land and sense of belonging. Although Sadie does not (and cannot) produce children, she produces and nurtures a garden of geraniums:

She grew the red geraniums on the back porch in any sort of container she could salvage: Mason jars, dented tin buckets, fruit crates, a few real clay pots that she scraped from the house money to buy....She used garbage peeling and horse manure to enrich the soil she took from public lots on the other side of town. And she nourished the new blooms with water that she'd soaked eggshells in.⁷

With this Mason jar garden, Sadie makes the house her home. Grown in "fruit crates" and nourished with "eggshell" water, the geraniums testify to Sadie's generative power. And when, after Sadie spends a week sick in bed, Daniel threatens to destroy them, she unleashes a maternal fury when she makes her final stand: "They leave, I leave" (55). Daniel backs down and allows Sadie to assert even more control over the house. She puts up new curtains, adds a rug, covers the easy chair, and prompts Daniel to paint the entire structure.

Here, Sadie engages in a restorative relationship to land. Her small garden, which thrives under her care and attention, points the way to a larger repair of the land outside her window, which has been devastated by the railroad tracks that cut through the soil outside her yard.⁸ Yet her stewardship comes to an end when the patriarchal laws that produce these tracks assert control over her home. When "the laws of nature" make her a widow, the laws of man dictate that Daniel's property must pass to his children, who inherit the deed to the house (56). When they give her the ultimatum "buy it or get out,"

⁷ Naylor, *Bailey's Cafe*, 55. Subsequent references to *Bailey's Cafe* appear parenthetically within the text.

⁸ The novel repeatedly draws attention to this stark division between industrialism and capitalist expansion and feminist agrarian land stewardship.

her only option—to sell her body for sex—results in her arrest, a reminder that the “laws of man” also govern her body (56). After a two-week stay in a women’s detention centre, she returns to Daniel’s house one last time only to find “the velvet leaves of the geraniums...brittle and covered with a thick layer of dark cinders and ashes” (64). This vision of flowers covered with the soot from the nearby railroad offers a stark image of the juridical framework that has governed Sadie’s body. In this way, Sadie’s story graphically links exploitative landownership to Black women’s curtailed ability to move through and/or cultivate space.

Sadie’s restorative model of land stewardship flows through to the story of Eve, whose body is so united to the earth that she still “finds a few grains” of dust in the stopper every time she takes a bath:

I don’t know why I keep thinking I can [wash it off]; it’s no more possible than washing away my fingerprints or my color. I guess because it’s only dirt, and there’s something that makes you believe you can wash away dirt. But it’s not a part of me—*it is me* (82, italics added).

Here, Eve’s body becomes more than an extension of the earth; it is the earth itself with its full and fecund potential. It is also united with her “colour,” the Blackness that defines her body and amplifies her strength. Her garden in her boarding house at the “edge of the world,” reflects this restorative power, and Eve keeps her plants “blooming” even in cold weather (92). At the centre of her garden are “circles and circles of lilies,” whose vaginally shaped blooms are Eve’s alone; “[N]one of them have a price,” which means that no man can buy them (92). Rather than growing flowers for utility or beauty, Eve uses her garden to showcase women’s sexual autonomy as opposed to (as in Sadie’s story) denying it. Whereas Sadie’s Mason jars contain only a single type of flower, Eve’s expansive garden contains a variety of blooms that men must purchase if they want to “call on” the women in Eve’s boarding house.

These flowers also capture a feminine sensuality and potential for pleasure that Eve discovers in her own body as she comes of age in the river delta of Louisiana. As her body matures, she often finds herself pressed against the earth and she takes sexual pleasure in contact with it: “I felt the warm earth against my warm flesh, pressed so hard into the ground that I could hear my heart beating in my ears” (86). Her pleasure heightens when she begins to play a game with her neighbour “Billy Boy”:

A new game that none of the children but us wanted to play. On the edge of the cotton fields. In the crepe myrtle groves. In blind Miss Lemon’s backyard. *Stomp, Billy*. And after my breasts began to round out the top of the brown sack dresses, the tremors would scrape the course cloth against my small, aching nipples, against the tight throbbing between my spread legs. The earth showed me what my body was for (87).

Aroused by its contact with the earth, Eve’s body extends the land it touches and repurposes it for her pleasure. The pleasure Eve derives from the earth in turn fuels the land itself, which responds to her desires with fecundity. If this is what her body “was for,” this is also what the earth was meant to do.

Yet ultimately, Eve's use of land and of her own body, like Sadie's, becomes subject to patriarchal law. Eve's paradise, one produced and maintained through Billy's marching and his straining "Adam's apple," ends when Godfather catches her communion with the earth and casts Eve naked out of his home and lands (87). Even before the "Fall," Godfather had hidden Eve's developing body in "dark brown homespun" and refused to expose her underwear on the laundry line "because of the stains that wouldn't wash out" (83). This control over Eve's body extends Godfather's governance of the town itself, which is organized around three buildings: "[S]chool, the cotton exchange, and the church. He was the preacher in one, the scale foreman and bookkeeper in another, and no one attended the drafty school past the ninth grade" (85). Here, Naylor rewrites the original Edenic expulsion as a masculine regulation both of female sexual desire and of the land that nurtures it. Godfather controls both "the cotton exchange" and Eve's body. His single crop, one that arose from the subjugation of enslaved bodies, fuels a large, commercial industry, and this economic-juridical framework cannot accommodate Eve's use of land to satisfy her sexual desires, desires that, once outside the confines of national space and in her garden next to the café, will later lead to her own varied, rich harvest.

Mariam's story, "Mary (Take Two)," offers a direct response to this image of female desire, and in it, male juridical control exerts an even more violent control over women's bodies. This violence takes the form of female genital excision, which Mariam undergoes in her childhood home of Ethiopia. Although performed by women, this procedure is part of a masculine framework that works to eradicate sexual pleasure and recast female bodies into sites for male-controlled reproduction.⁹ When Mariam gets pregnant and yet remains unable to identify a father, she falls outside this patriarchal structure and is promptly exiled from her community where she effectively becomes stateless. This expulsion mirrors the larger geographic displacement of the community itself. As a member of the Ethiopian Beta Israel community in 1948, Mariam enters the world with a compromised claim to national belonging; the Beta Israel are, as Bailey notes, "outcasts in their own nation and only allowed to be tenants on their own land" (146).¹⁰ This word choice ("tenants") links Mariam's story to that of Sadie, a product of the Great Migration—and of the sharecroppers that replaced enslaved labourers in the US South. In this world of dispossession, Mariam is doubly expelled, her departure from her community leaving her to wander the streets of Addis Ababa, where she is cut off physically and linguistically from all those around her.

Yet Mariam's story also hints at feminist restoration, and the "backward" nature of the community's practices are reversed when the novel ultimately returns to a deep

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⁹ In this reading I do not deny the potential for restorative feminist readings of female genital excision. For a different perspective on this, see Bekers, "Globalization."

¹⁰ Even when permitted to come to Israel in 1977, Ethiopian Jews continued to face hostility, racism, and denials of rights.

past to model cohesion rather than fragmentation. Mariam's is the only story in the novel narrated by Eve and Nadine, and these female narrators deny male control of the narrative: "this isn't a story that any man can tell" (143). Eve and Nadine also redirect our gaze to the "seed," namely Mariam's reproductive capacity, which she takes with her in her exile. This seed lies at the heart of the violence done to Mariam's body—a fact made graphically clear when Eve simulates genital excision by cutting the flesh of a plum to expose a naked pit. At the same time, this seed functions symbolically as the source of Mariam's miraculous parthenogenesis, and Nadine ends Mariam's story with this optimistic look to the future: "[M]aybe it's meant for this baby to bring in a whole new era. Maybe when it gets here it will be like an explosion of hope or something (160)." Like Sadie's geraniums and Eve's garden, this baby holds a restorative promise of a new order that will replace the patriarchal framework that has left its marks on them all.¹¹

***N'ya-hap me-ye-moom: Miss Maple's California*¹²**

This return to a scriptural past, intimated in Mariam's story, anticipates the medievalism of "Miss Maple's Blues," the story that directly follows Mariam's and one that fleetingly realizes Nadine's desire for a "whole new era." Here, Naylor returns to California, a *terminus ad quem* for the continent and the *terminus a quo* for the novel's opening into *Bailey's Cafe*. To borrow from the cheeky, early twentieth-century writer Ross Macdonald, California is "a state of mind," a sobriquet that aptly describes the café's own space. Yet the "Golden State" is a very real place, one tethered to the rest of the nation and a key territory in US national expansion. While the settings of Naylor's other tales—in particular Chicago, New Orleans, and Ethiopia—feature dispossession, at least one part of California offers a space of belonging and the potential for a medieval feminist, Indigenous, Edenic heterotopia.¹³ This different way of knowing and writing

11 By the time we meet baby George, we know that he, too, will fall prey to the masculinized structures of his own heritage: adult George, the protagonist of *Mama Day*, ends his life in the otherworldly island of Willow Springs, where his inability to adapt to its feminized power ultimately destroys him.

12 "I am going to California." Naylor likely found this phrase in a historical report made to the US Senate in 1851. In addition to an appended dictionary of the Yuma language, the report describes an encounter between white ambassadors of the US government and part of the Yuma population. Other parts of this report, including the use of shells for as a kind of currency, are reflected in Naylor's descriptions of the Yuma people (US Government, *Report of the Secretary*).

13 Readers of Naylor more commonly find this heterotopia in *Mama Day*'s island-community of Willow Springs. Writing about this civic space, Soumia Bentahar and Algeria Noureddine Guerroudj cite Foucault, in particular his distinction of heterotopias from utopias: "There are...real places, actual places, places that are designed into the very institution of society, which are sorts of actually realized utopias in which the real emplacements that can be found within the culture are, at the same time, represented, contested, and reversed, sorts of places that are outside all places, although they are actually localizable" ("Reading Heterotopia," 97).

shapes Miss Maple's world, a world that does *not* reject him; it is Miss Maple (né Stanley) himself who leaves it behind.¹⁴

The origins of Stanley's childhood heterotopia lie in his ancestors' Indigenous-Black union. Stanley traces his family tree back to his grandfather, who moved west during the Civil War in a geographical displacement resembling those of the café's patrons. Yet rather than going north, Stanley's grandfather's journey led him west to Stanley's grandmother, an Indigenous woman living in the Yuma civilization near the Gila and Colorado Rivers (now present-day Arizona). Although her ancestors had long held that land, they were being displaced by the United States government, which was expanding its land claims in the wake of the Mexican-American War. (Under the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the US acquired the land that now comprises California, Nevada, Arizona, and Utah as well as parts of Colorado and Wyoming.) As a Yuma and Black couple, neither of Stanley's grandparents was, as Stanley puts it, "an American." His grandmother "was to live and die an alien," and his grandfather's claims to citizenship were only marginally greater (169). Their alienation from national space is underscored by the couple's continued movement west to lands that Stanley describes as an unpopulated and barren "desert" (168).

Stanley's grandmother drives this movement, and her autochthonous ties to a geographical space claimed by the United States authorize her land claims. Her relationship to the land becomes clear the night before her wedding when she dreams of "the meeting of the red river and black river, the waters swirling and forming straight as an arrow to leap through the hills and spring up, flooding the desert" (168). Inspired by this prophetic dream, she assumes control of the family unit and drives Stanley's grandfather farther west. Whenever Stanley's grandfather resists this movement, Stanley's grandmother fights back, first by refusing to cook for him and then by denying him sex, an act that not only underscores both her control of her own body but also drives home the links between reproductive power and land control. After they arrive in California, she "drew a circle on the ground, sat through the bitter night as meteors lit up the southwestern sky, and arose at dawn to say: We must claim this land" (168).¹⁵ "This land" eventually becomes three thousand acres of crops with ten children to farm it. These land claims are "legitimized" when Stanley's grandfather finally gains the right to buy public property from the federal government, making him "a real American—on paper" (169).¹⁶ Yet while Stanley's grandfather offers juridical legitimacy, the ancestral

14 Miss Maple's birth name is Stanley Beckwourth Booker T. Washington Carver, and he identifies as male in the novel. Only when he reaches Bailey's Cafe is he given the moniker "Miss Maple" by his employer, Eve. When discussing Miss Maple's story, I thus refer to this character as Stanley as he identifies himself by this name.

15 Although Naylor here makes a point about the legitimacy of Indigenous land claims, it is unclear whether her accounts of Native ritual culture reflect historical practice.

16 Although the 1866 Civil Rights Act gave citizenship to most Americans, it denied that right to many groups of Indigenous Americans, banning them from property ownership, voting, and other juridical rights.

ties and prophetic vision of Stanley's grandmother give her an equal right to it. As on the land governed by Eve's grandfather, the farm's main crop is cotton. But in this case, the crop is tended by a collective united through family ties and founded on the equitable relationship of Stanley's grandparents, a union of mutual respect.

Shared stewardship of the land continues through Stanley's large family of uncles who marry "women who could straddle a row of cotton all day and still straddle a man at night...there had to be a lot of babies; we had a lot of land" (171). Here, Naylor once again links crop production to reproduction, and in doing so imagines an alternate American social order, one defined not only by matriarchal power but also by diversity:

I had aunts of all assortments: pure-blooded Yumas, full blooded Mexicans, Yuma-Mexicans, Mexican Irish, Negro-Mexican, and even one pure-blooded African who still knew some phrases in Ashanti (171).

This polyglot community is united both by their family ties and by their stewardship of the land. But it is the women who take charge, "straddling" their men as easily as they straddle "a row of cotton." This description once again crisply links sexual desire, bodily autonomy, and land stewardship. The family's cropland stands in sharp contrast to the prospectors, who come with "pickaxes, shovels, and dynamite" intent on exploiting the land for mineral extraction rather than coaxing it into production. When these men fail and leave, Stanley's grandmother insists on his "grandfather paying them something" for their property, "if only a penny a parcel, to make the sale papers legal" (170). The grandmother's prophetic "vision of water flooding the desert" comes true when the Imperial Canal is built, and this sudden access to irrigation turns their three thousand acres of desert scrub into a land that can produce "white gold" (170).

Although Stanley's grandmother's land claims originate in her Yuma heritage, they are bolstered by the lingering medieval structure of California's legal system. For even after its admission in 1847 as a state, California retained ganancial legal tenets, which upheld the ideal of community property within marriage. Ganancial law dates back to Visigothic statutes, which found their way into legal codes in Rome, in Spain, and ultimately into California's property law, which dictates that a wife cannot be considered a husband's property (the position she held under English law) but is legally a property co-owner in her own right. To quote from Caroline Bermeo Newcombe, one of the few legal scholars to write about the ganancial legal framework, this form of community property law views the "relationship between spouses 'in much the same way as...a commercial partnership'" with spouses "subject to the same rights and duties of nonmarital business partners."¹⁷ For Newcombe, the origins of this legal system are directly traceable to a medieval past:

When a California wife scared hogs out of her mud kitchen in 1832, she had some things in common with a Visigothic wife living in fifth century Spain. Both women worked "shoulder to shoulder" with their husbands to survive in harsh conditions. Both

¹⁷ Newcombe, *Origin and Civil Law*, 9. Newcombe in turn cites Lobingier, *Conjugal Partnership*; 63 US L. Rev. 250, 251 (1929); and CAL.FAM.CODE 721.

women enjoyed a community property system which regarded the relationship between husband and wife as an economic partnership.¹⁸

In this way Stanley's family, through its restorative feminist medieval practice, harmonizes its land stewardship with a juridical framework that positions women as legal equals to men; their family's land offers a heterotopic enclave that counters the narratives of land dispossession that started with Sadie's geraniums.

Yet Stanley's family Elysium, one that has borrowed from a medieval past to fashion a vision for the future, has its limits. It remains severed from the larger nation-state that surrounds it, and thus distinct from the white patriarchal, juridical system that governs the rest of the country. The contingent nature of the family's land claims becomes explicit in the second part of Stanley's narrative, which centres on the day Stanley and his father drive to town to retrieve the deluxe copies of Shakespeare's works that Stanley's father has ordered as a graduation gift. Once there, they are attacked by the Gatlins, three white brothers, who beat them, lock them in a closet, and set fire to the leather-bound collection.

This book burning throws into relief the potential of masculine violation to threaten the restorative feminist practices undergirding Stanley's upbringing. This violation has happened once before: when Stanley is a small child, his mother is raped and left "to die in a ravine" (171). Now, years after this act, a similar form of masculine violence reappears as the brothers attack the supine body of one of the books in their hands:

The silk cover was gouged with holes, the spine busted and bent over double. They'd torn out handfuls of pages, crushed what was left between their fists, and then urinated on the whole thing. The stench of *The Tempest* was quickly filling that closed room (183).

Bent over with its broken spine and ripped silk, the brothers violate this feminized copy of *The Tempest*, and their exposed genitals, which they use to "[urinate] on the whole thing," underscore this as an act of sexual violation. This reclamation of a white canonical text operates under the same logic as the violation of Stanley's mother, each an assertion of power that ultimately destroys the body it claims.

Naylor's choice of this particular early modern play deftly underscores the consequences of patriarchal, juridical force as *The Tempest* directly confronts the violence of European colonization.¹⁹ From the play's opening pages, Prospero rules over the island's occupants, asserting his claim over the Indigenous and magical Ariel, his own daughter Miranda, and the enslaved Caliban, who, along with his mother Sycorax, previously had dominion over the island. The play works through these internecine conflicts and familial battles before it restores "proper" male patriarchal control over Naples and Milan, and over Miranda's sexualized body, one designated to provide a male heir. Yet when the play ends and the characters prepare to abandon the island, their

¹⁸ Newcombe, *Origin and Civil Law*, 9.

¹⁹ For more on Naylor's use of Shakespeare, see Erickson, "Shakespeare's Naylor"; and Traub, "Rainbows of Darkness." Other scholars who have written about the play's colonialist impulses include Cefalu, "Rethinking"; and Willis, "Shakespeare's *Tempest*."

departure holds the promise of a return to the island's original state. The gender-fluid character Ariel embodies the harmonious nature of this territory and its feminized stewardship; Ariel knows the island's hidden groves and lands, often coaxing the island into a fecund splendour. Prospero confirms Ariel's unique relationship to the island in the play's closing act as Ariel tells Prospero about the island's other inhabitants. As Ariel argues, Prospero's feelings "would become tender" if he saw them.²⁰ When Prospero presses Ariel on this point—"Dost thou think so, spirit?"—Ariel responds: "Mine would, sir, were I human."²¹ Here Ariel empathizes with Prospero's own capacity for feminized tenderness yet also elevates himself as having surpassed Prospero's weakened human state. This proclamation paves the way for Ariel to sing the play's most famous song, a paean to a land he will once again inhabit alone:

Where the bee sucks, there suck I.
In a cowslip's bell I lie.
There I couch when owls do cry.
On the bat's back I do fly
After summer merrily.
Merrily, merrily shall I live now
Under the blossom that hangs on the bow.²²

In this song, Ariel reconfirms his relationship with the island, which under his watchful eye becomes an Edenic pre-fallen world. In an echo of Stanley's family, Ariel practices an island husbandry, sucking nectar from the blossoms like the bees, taking shelter from the bows, and moving across the terrain "on a bat's back." As the play's lone Indigenous character (or at least the only who is named), Ariel holds the promise of land restoration, and his non-invasive occupation works in harmony with the elements. The Gatlins' destruction of *The Tempest* takes direct aim at this vision, with urine and fire landing on the book's outer covers and destroying it from the outside in, meaning that Ariel's unleashed power in Act 1, along with his recovery of the island in Act 5, are the first to go.

This attack also recasts these imagined patriarchal battles for land as battles over the literary canon, with the final result mirroring the fractured land. Rather than claiming control of Shakespeare's play, the fight results in a textual fragmentation. In the play, textual fragmentation is found both in Prospero's promise to "drown my book" (5.1.65) and, metatextually, in Miranda's evocation of a "brave new world," a line fragment later pressed in service as the title for Aldous Huxley's dystopic America novel whose imagined world is, tellingly, built on Native lands.²³

²⁰ Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, act 5, scene 1, line 25.

²¹ Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, act 5, scene 1, lines 25–26.

²² Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, act 5, scene, lines 98–104.

²³ Although *Brave New World* offers a fetishized vision of America's Native past, it nonetheless drives home the dispossession of land that Native civilizations endured as a direct result of European colonization. John, the white anti-hero of that novel, is raised in New Mexico, a location that houses people who reproduce without machines, practice religion, and experience disease and old age.

In Naylor's novel, textual fragmentation takes the form of burning and tearing, and it stops only when Stanley's father beats the Gatlins, an act that re-embeds the play within feminist frameworks. Having been locked naked into the shop's storeroom, Stanley and his father resort to the only clothing they find therein, a corset (Stanley) and a red taffeta dress (Stanley's father) "with spaghetti straps and a huge circular skirt" (184). Stanley's father wears this dress as he beats the Gatlins and delivers his own Shakespearean-inflected monologue:

I am a man of peace. I am a sensitive man. I can spend hours with Proust and have been known to weep at a sunset. Those are the same qualities I wanted to pass on to my son. I believe he has the capacity to be a great leader. And I've tried to teach him that a man rules best when he rules with compassion. (185)

This violence is made distinct from the Gatlins' own form for physical "communication" (182) both by its accompanying poetic lecture and by its reflection of the family's feminist power. When Stanley's father delivers his decisive uppercut, his taffeta skirt whirls as he drops low in "an old Yuma war tactic." The same matriarchal power that undergirds Stanley's family's property claims also authorizes Stanley's taffeta-draped father to reclaim Shakespeare's final play for his family.

As Stanley soon learns, his family's feminist-medieval model of community does not work outside his family's three thousand acres. In particular it does not work at Stanford, Stanley's college of choice. An institution founded on railroad magnate Leland Stanford's own patriarchal land claims, the school embodies its founder's racist and exploitative legacy, and it is (unsurprisingly) inhospitable for Stanley, who faces the biggest struggles in his literature and philosophy classes.²⁴ Unlike the Gatlins, who try to deny Stanley the ownership of any physical copies of Shakespeare's plays, the Stanford faculty lay claim to the narratives within a book's covers, giving Stanley "D's and C's" when he does not interpret stories with "the same innate understanding" that they have (187). Stanley soon changes his major to mathematics and, upon graduation, strikes out "east of Colorado" on the very railroads that Leland Stanford himself financed (196). When he continues to experience expulsion from national spaces, Stanley discards his suits, puts on a dress, and eventually makes that by-now familiar leap to the space of the café, leaving behind a nation that has rejected him. He earns the name Miss Maple in the transition, and his assimilation into Eve's garden highlights rehabilitative power of matriarchal land stewardship, one he left behind in his childhood home.

24 Leland Stanford created his university in 1891. To build it he used his fortune, one made through his involvement with the Southern Pacific and Central Pacific Railroads, companies that displaced Native civilizations and depended on underpaid and indentured Chinese workers.

From California to Southwark

If *Bailey's Cafe* depicts the ways patriarchal land succession disempowers Black women, so, too, does it demonstrate the ways language and narrative bolster masculine geographical control. National stories (of pioneers, of a revolutionary war, of "Manifest Destiny"); the erasure of non-English languages (Indigenous, Spanish, French); and the propagation of a mono-lingual literary canon that highlights English ancestry: all buttress patriarchal, and specifically white, geographical claims.²⁵ It is thus not enough to reimagine land claims through a medieval and early modern framework. Any feminist restorative project also requires a commensurate reimagining of the literary canon and its relationship to contemporary literary production.

While such a reimagining is present in all of Naylor's works, *Bailey's Cafe* represents her most provocative engagement with both the geographical imaginings of a canonical text and her most ambitious revision of her own relationship with textual tradition.²⁶ Chaucer's poem and Naylor's novel both have a "Host" named Bailey; both organize themselves around a series of tales; and both are deeply interested in nationhood. Indeed, this subject of nation formation is an area where one might plausibly argue for Chaucer's "influence." In his *Tales* Chaucer imagines national space as produced through a combination of patriarchal geographical control and storytelling, and his characters conjure "England" into being. Canterbury looms over Chaucer's eponymous poem. Home to the relics of (the very English) Saint Thomas Becket, this fragmented body provides the goal for highly diverse pilgrims united by their faith. Chaucer's Host drives home their shared geography as he calls out landmarks—Southwerk, Depeford, and Grenewych, Boghtoun under Blee—along the way, reinscribing the journey in a proto-national English landscape.²⁷ On their part, the pilgrims hail from English towns and have occupations—wool trader; sea merchant, cook (with a knowledge of local ingredients)—that double down on the poem's national claims. There is a red-haired Miller whose bagpipes suggest ties to the island's northern regions; a Man of Law, who knows every English statute "from the tyme of kyng William" (1, 324); and a Prioress who shuns (or does not know?) the French of Paris and instead speaks the French from "the scole of Stratford atte Bowe" (1, 125). In sum, these pilgrims are marked with *English* identities, and they unite and traverse an *English* landscape to pay homage to an *English*

25 For more detailed exploration of the ways medieval studies has contributed to white, masculinist articulations of power, see Hsy, *Antiracist Medievalisms*.

26 In this, Naylor diverges from other Black feminist authors who engage with Chaucer in more straightforward ways. In her creation of the *Wife of Willesten*, for instance, Zadie Smith tries "to maintain as many Chaucerian elements as possible in her adaptation...and the contours of the story remain the same, while the play's dialogue is written in verse couplets" (Ibekwe, "Zadie Smith's First Play").

27 These names are also notably of English rather than Norman origin. For the above place names, see Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*: fragment 1, line 20; fragment 1, lines 3906–07; and fragment 8, line 556.

saint. It is little wonder that centuries later, Chaucer's poem became a cornerstone in England's colonial project.

At the same time, the poem's seemingly firm national claims ultimately prove illusory. Specific landmarks appear only to be left behind, not yet attained, or merely passed through. When the Host names a town, he either observes that the group has just left it or that it has not yet arrived. Even the named destination of Canterbury undoes the poem's claims to specifically English geography, and Becket's relics defer their own geographical situatedness by redirecting the gaze of any visitor out of this world altogether. If the pilgrims ever do get to Canterbury, they will use the shrine to access the world beyond it.

Yet whereas both Naylor and Chaucer both deploy literary narrative to reinforce and question nationhood, Naylor refuses to borrow from Chaucer in order to mount her own critique of nation-building. As Matthew X. Vernon and Suzanne Edwards warn us, readers who focus on "lines of influence" both reproduce a chronological patriarchy and fail to capture the ways Naylor "simultaneously evokes and undercuts references to the *Canterbury Tales*."²⁸ In her collected papers Naylor never once mentions Chaucer as an influence for her novel and invokes the *Canterbury Tales* in *Bailey's Cafe* precisely by imagining Chaucer out of his own literary works.²⁹ Her repudiation starts in the opening story, where we learn that Naylor's "Bailey" is not actually named Bailey but assumes this name when he finds himself unwillingly thrust into the abandoned café. This is not a representation of willing engagement so much as an entrapment. The cover art for Naylor's first edition of her novel doubles down on this image of a rejected, abandoned work. On it we see a picture window with "Bailey's Cafe" stencilled in "red letters trimmed with gold" that call out to past medieval manuscript culture.³⁰ Yet the placement of these red-gold letters on to a transparent glass window invites us to read through them, in this case into the darkened no-place of the café. Naylor's negation of influence thus undoes any temporal linearity and the lines of literary heritage. It also makes possible the reversed reading Edwards imagines when she reads Naylor's influence on Chaucer's own *Franklin's Tale*. To quote the narrator, "I guess whoever Bailey was—if there was a Bailey—he knew this place had to be real mobile" (28). Maybe there was a Bailey. Or maybe Chaucer's Harry Bailey is produced through Naylor's own Bailey, who is, after all, now the one telling the story.

Which brings me back to California, home to the most famous copy of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, which resides at the estate of former railroad magnate Henry Huntington. Like the internal space of the novel's café, Chaucer's manuscript lies behind glass, and its close proximity to Miss Maple's childhood estate drives home the ways land ownership and literary tradition follow patriarchal succession to the specific

²⁸ Edwards, "Burn all he has," 232.

²⁹ Or at least I have not seen such a reference.

³⁰ Notably, the sumptuous Ellesmere Manuscript, considered for well over a century to be the ur-text of Chaucer's *Tales* has many red letters illuminated with gold.

exclusion of Black and Indigenous women. Huntington was known for two things. The first was land. Or to quote from one of several short biographies: "Huntington's real estate holdings, largely concentrated in the northeastern portion of Los Angeles County, made him one of the area's largest landowners."³¹ When he realized that the value of his land would go up if made more accessible, Huntington began to spend much of his personal wealth on "street railways, real estate development, and electric power generation and distribution."³² Yet Huntington also retained substantial land holdings for personal use, and his estate today continues to reflect a fantasy of land control that far exceeds his local holdings. The current Huntington grounds include (among others) a "Chinese Garden," "Japanese Garden," "Jungle Garden," "Desert Garden," "Palm Garden," and "Australian Garden."³³

Huntington's other passion was collecting rare books, specifically those of canonical English literature.³⁴ He purchased entire libraries, which included early modern plays like *The Tempest* and the Ellesmere Chaucer. But Huntington did not confine himself to English texts. His holdings of American texts include papers by three Presidents—Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln—and the original manuscript copy of Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*. This collection pattern is one that confirms the exact "model of literary succession between men" that Naylor rejects.³⁵ It also subtends and authorizes Huntington's land acquisitions, which were performed in the name of civilization and national expansion. This unity of literature and land is made clear in yet another part of the Huntington estate, the "Shakespeare Garden."³⁶

This is the self-reinforcing patriarchal lineage of literature and land that Naylor rewrites through her imagined Black-Indigenous model of matriarchal land stewardship, one that engages a medieval juridical past reframed on her own terms. She does not linger in this imagined space, nor does it prove enduring in the novel itself; Stanley leaves it behind. But that little sliver of California remains in the novel, waiting to be read and reread again and again. Tarren Andrews has recently invited scholars not only to indigenize the medieval past but also to use it to explore Indigenous futurity.³⁷ Back in the 1990s, Naylor was already starting along this path, mining Chaucer and a medieval

31 Friedrichs, *American National Biography*.

32 Friedrichs, *American National Biography*.

33 Huntington Library, Website.

34 To quote from his biography: "In 1911 he purchased the E. Dwight Church and the Robert Hoe libraries. From 1914 to 1917 he acquired the Kemble-Devonshire collection of English plays, the Frederick Halsey library, part of the Pembroke library, and the Bridgewater library. He eventually held one of the largest collections of English literature in the world." (Friedrichs, *American National Biography*, n.p.).

35 Vernon, *Black Middle Ages*, 210.

36 For a poignant reflection on what it felt like for a mother of colour to occupy Huntington's estate, see Caballero, "Mothering While Brown."

37 Andrews, "Indigenous Futures," 2.

past in a way that resists an ancestry model and using “multivalent allusions to the *Canterbury Tales*” to open a reflection not only on Black female identity but also on its intersectionality with Native experience.³⁸

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³⁸ Edwards, “Burn all he has,” 245.

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