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The Plight and Tribulation of Black Women in Gayl Jones' *Corregidora*

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Abstract

Gayl Jones describes the devastating, ongoing effects of slavery on African Americans over several generations. Her book gives the reader greater levels of bravery, empathy, and maturity. Corregidora is set in the American South in the middle of the 20th century. Corregidora demonstrates how slavery had a negative impact on Black people's psychological and sexual development in addition to their physical and economic confinement. The lyrical blues style is used throughout the book.

As a result, Corregidora conveys themes like suffering and the psychological comfort that African Americans felt long after the United States issued the Emancipation Proclamation. But in addition to depicting the horrific history of slavery, Gayl Jones makes an effort to humanize the experiences of multiple generations and provide a glimpse into the thoughts of African Americans.

Keywords: Gayl Jones, Slavery, Brutality, Racism, Classic Blues, Diaspora, Black, Trauma.

Introduction

Gayl Jones is a Black American poet, novelist, playwright, short story writer, professor, and scholarly critic. She was born on November 23, 1949, in Lexington, Kentucky, to Franklin and Lucille Jones. Her early ties to the South are clearly reflected in both her life and her writing, which often revitalizes Kentucky culture and characters for readers. In the 1970s, Gayl Jones stunned the abstract world with her books about African Americans struggling to conform to the traditions of race, violence, slavery, and female subjectivity. She was a striking novelistic voice that seemed to be progressing with her calm, perplexing persona. Her work's topic and structure are both influenced by the dark oral tradition.

Gayl Jones explores black women who have not come to terms with the womanist position. Through her bitter and poignant novels, Corregidora.and Eva's Man. Jones portrays black women's quest for self--a self that has been too long submerged and lost in enforced gender roles and stereotypical heterosexist assumptions. Jones shows how "myths or the ways in which men perceive women actually define their character" (Tate 97).

These two novels' protagonists are ready for a lesbian experience because of their frequently violent and self-destructive relationships with men, but they resist the lesbian embrace and even a non-sexual lesbian friendship because they are so deeply ingrained in heterosexist presumptions. These women have been conditioned to accept this dehumanizing view of them because they live in a male-dominated, male-oriented society that views women as whores and bitches at worst and as nothing more than objects for male pleasure at best. The lowest of stereotypical gender roles are imposed upon these women by sexist and heterosexist presumptions. These women are in need of love but are unsure of who to ask.

Eva's Man. Corregidora. and the short story "The Women" represent Jones's working and reworking the problems of women held in ethical and psychological thrall to heterosexism. As she explores the issues of the proper relationship of men to women, women to men, and women to women, the duality of pleasure and pain, love and hatred, and the quest for self, Jones reveals the extremely detrimental effect that enforced gender roles and sexual abuse have on society and people in general. Jones has been accused of giving only token treatment to the lesbian character because she is "afraid to touch lesbianism with a heavy pen" (Shockley 89). In fact, in the novels, she sketches lesbianism with an artful delicacy that is a marked contrast to the dark strokes with which she delineates the heterosexual relationships, and "The Women," is a strong portrayal of the effect of her mother's promiscuous lesbianism on a growing daughter.

Jones's works can be effectively read from a womanist perspective. Many of the womanist principles are applicable to Jones's novels. There are nurturing women, and in some stories, intense friendships between the women. The women are conditioned by gender roles and stereotypes and eventually rebel against them. They suffer not only from oppressive

men but also from heterosexist oppression. Quite frequently, the relationship with the foremothers affects the women's sexual orientation and bonding. There are strong women characters.

Jones does offer a thorough examination of the lesbian theme, despite what critics claim. She poses insightful queries about the existence of lesbians and how other people view them. Despite her exploration of the lesbian theme, Jones's writings neither support nor denounce lesbianism. "Lesbianism exists, and that's the only way I include it in my work," Jones says in an interview with Claudia Tate. Characters may react to it in a positive or negative way, or they may just accept it as true (Tate 98).

Each of Jones's works treats the idea of lesbianism in a different way. in Corregidora. The main female character, Ursa, declines the lesbian embrace. But in Eva's Man, the protagonist Eva Canada is successfully seduced by the lesbian Elvira. In "The Women," a short story by Jones, it's not clear if the protagonist will eventually accept or reject lesbianism. Jones's short story "The Women" tells the story of a practicing lesbian and her perceptive daughter, neither of whom has come to terms with lesbianism. This is probably due in part to the influence of heterosexist stereotypes, but it's also possible that the mother has never experienced true female bonding.

"The Women" is a story told from the daughter's point of view about Winnie's sexual growth and education from the age of three to fourteen, set against the backdrop of her divorced mother's string of lesbian encounters, all of which result in resentment. Winnie only shares two recollections of her parents' union. In contrast to the lesbian bedroom, which is off-limits to Winnie, the first—of "climbing in the bed and sleeping between the two of them" in the early morning" (25)—seems perfect. In the second, her mother's first post-divorce lover's departure is compared to her father's departure.

"It was just like when my mama and daddy have the fight, and
Then my daddy didn't come back" (26). Perhaps from her husband,
Certainly from the heterosexist society, Gertrude Flynn gets her image

of herself and her kind; she labels each ex-lover a “bitch's whore” (26, 31).

Jones “should have said more” (89) with “The Women,” according to militant black lesbian Ann Allen Shockley. Schockley would undoubtedly have had Winnie easily discover her own sexual orientation and Gertrude find fulfillment with less “nebulous characters” (89). Rather, Jones has demonstrated the importance of the parent-child bond and the impact of heterosexist and sexist attitudes on the developmental process in a non-linear way. Jones leaves us to wonder if Winnie will ever embrace a lesbian or become heterosexual, and if so, whether she will grow to value herself and form mutually beneficial social relationships.

In Jones’s first novel Corregidora, a black woman experiences a 22-year journey toward her own identity and fulfillment in a world where she is stereotyped by her black husbands and subsumed into the personhood of her great-grandmother and grandmother. The first-person account is sometimes an oral story, sometimes a confession, sometimes a meditation, and sometimes a meditation. It is essentially chronological but in fact extremely complex in structure. It is also a meditation, where free association and memory intrude upon conversation. It is a circle and within the circle, back in forth in time. It is the conclusion that reconciliation is achieved. Without a doubt, Corregidora is a black feminist novel rather than just a novel by a black woman. It examines the horrors of slavery, sexual oppression and interracial rape, the relationship between love and hatred, pleasure and pain, and the aforementioned traumatic female bonding. Ursa Corregidora, the protagonist, is heterosexual and even heterosexist, but at every crucial juncture of Ursa’s quest, a wise lesbian appears in action or thought.

The framework quest story starts when blues singer Ursa Corregidora, “the daughter of the daughter of the daughter of Ursa of currents, steel wool and electric wire for hair” (67), marries Mutt, who wants to turn her into a conventional wife despite not understanding the need for her to pursue her art. Mutt, envious of her singing and the attention she receives from other men, pushes her down a flight of stairs, causing her to lose both her womb and her unborn child. This is the first crisis of her adult life. Because of her ancestors' past, Ursa finds sterility to be even more devastating than it is for most women.

Ursa is descended from a long line of mistreated women. Her Great Gram was the concubine and slave of Corregidora, a Portuguese seacaptain who later became a whoremonger and plantation owner in Brazil. She gives birth to a child who later becomes his mistress; this daughter also gives birth to Ursa's mother. The "papers" are burned by the slave owners upon emancipation.

> "They didn't want to leave evidence of what they
> done .... And I'm leaving evidence. And you got to leave evidence
> too. And your children got to leave evidence" (14).

Ursa and her mother are actually enslaved by the foremothers' determination to preserve the brutality and moral repugnance of their history for ultimate judgment. In order to keep us afloat, the younger Corregidora women have been taught to reverse the machismo doctrine, use men as breeders of female children, and make their sole function in life the continuation of the memories of the foremothers. My great-grandmama told my grandmama the part she lived through that my grandmama didn't live through and my grandmama told my mama what they both lived through and my mama told me what they lived through. Ursa is afraid to befriend a lesbian who has never asked anything but friendship because she is so caught up in the heterosexist presumptions surrounding lesbians. Jones's depiction of a woman reaching out to another woman for acceptance, affirmation, and understanding is among the novel's most poignant moments. After witnessing Ursa's marriage to Tadpole, Cat tries to explain why she is so drawn to lesbian love.

Conclusion

Here, Jones skillfully illustrates how society's imposed gender norms victimize the character. Ursa questions her own sexuality instead of Mutt's because she is so consumed by the idea that women should satisfy men. "And all those dreams I had lying there in the hospital about being screwed and not feeling anything" is how Ursa addresses her own desires and satisfactions in her monologue. She believes that her need for clitoral stimulation indicates a latent lesbianism, which she is unable to accept due to heterosexist teachings.

A review claims that the context and style of these works are womanist. The characters who have finished their quest have learned to love themselves, have become "committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female," and have joined a transformed universality, even though some of them have not successfully concluded their struggles.

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