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## Racism and Traumatic Memory in Gayl Jones' Novels

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### Abstract:

Gayl Jones tells the story of the continuing, destructive effects of slavery on the several generations of African Americans. Her novel lends the reader added degrees of compassion, courage, and maturity. All the events in *Corregidora* take place in the American South in the middle of the twentieth century. *Corregidora* shows that the effects of slavery were not only in confining blacks physically and economically but in destroying their psychologically and sexually. The book is written in a lyrical Blues style. Thus, *Corregidora* expresses such things as misery and the emotional relief that black people continued to experience long after the Emancipation Proclamation was issued in the United States. However, Gayl Jones tries not to just portray the terrifying history of slavery, but she attempts to humanize the experiences of several generations, to give the insight into the minds of black people.

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

### Introduction

Jones' first novel, *Corregidora* (1975), anticipated the wave of novels exploring the connections between slavery and the African-American present. Ursa Corregidora, the novel's protagonist, is the great-grandchild of the Portuguese Brazilian slaveholder Simon Corregidora, who also raped her grandmother. Both Ursa's mother and grandmother make it their lives purpose to keep alive the history of their abuse and torture and by extension that of African slaves in the New World. But their obsession with the past burdens Ursa, who struggles, as a singer, to find her own purpose in life. Her first novel appeared when she was twenty-six years

old. Romantic story expose the intimate family history of their generations of black women in rural Kentucky. The novel's conclusion, however, confirms its classification as a "Blues" narrative that examines the suffering and beauty of relationships by hinting that psychological struggle and an unreserved face with the past may result in rehabilitation.

The suffering experienced by African American women and men is further explored in Eva's *Man* (1976), Jone's second book, but this time with an even deeper sense of hopelessness. Similar to *Corregidora*, *Eva's Man* relies heavily on interior monologues and sparse dialogue. However, in Jones' second book, these monologues are even more crucial because they allow the reader to see Eva Medina Canada's past and her decline into mental illness. This is done by repeating key scenes with slight variations and implying that Eva's memory is fading. At the start of the narrative, the reader first meets Eva at a facility for the criminally ill, where she has been sent after poisoning and castrating her lover. Her flashbacks reveal a life of constant sexual objectification by males, from Tyrone, her mother's lover who molested her, to Freddy, a neighbourhood boy who wanted to play doctor, to her cousin who proposed to her. The males she meets view her as sexual property, and if she rejects their advances, they will get violent. She imprisons Davis, the lover she kills, in a room where he only enters to sleep with her, exemplifying her inclination. She rebels against male authority by killing him, but her spiral into insanity shows that she is unable to. *Eva's Man* is a gripping psychological portrait of a woman unable to love for fear of pain. Imprisoned for the bizarre murder of her lover, Eva Median Canada weaves together memory and fantasy to reveal a life tormented by the brutality of sexual abuse and emotional silence. Brilliantly experimenting with language, Jones infuses her graphic and powerful narrative of the triple yoke of race, class, and gender.

Her next novel *Mosquito*, (1999) which is set in Texas City, an imaginary South Texas town with its own distinctive landscape of poverty grass. In this experimental 'jazz novel' that continuously crosses racial, national, and stylistic borders, the US–Mexican border serves as the site of interracial encounters, where Latin dad is constructed through the musings, opinions, and stories of an African–American truck driver from Kentucky named Sojourner Nadine Jane Nzingha Johnson. *Mosquito*, an Afro- American women and independent truck driver based in Texas, gets involved with the sanctuary movements. It is a late night riff by the signifying monkey, drunk with words and out of control, regurgitating half- digested ideas taken from USA.

Written between 1970 and 1977, the stories in Jones' short story collection *White Rat* (1977) generally address the same issues as her novels: communication, or the lack thereof, insanity, and challenging relationships. Long narrative poetry *Song for Anninho* (1981) breaks new territory. The poem, which is set in 17th-century Brazil, narrates the tale of Almeyda, the narrator, and her husband Anninho, who are living in Palmares when it is taken over by Portuguese soldiers and splits them apart. Palmares was a historic encampment of runaway slaves. Despite the fact that once they are split up, Almeyda can only locate her husband through memory and art, the poem emphasises desire as a good theme and demonstrates the possibility of love. Gayl Jones examines black female sexuality and the lingering effects of slavery's violence in black male-female relationships, her work becomes particularly significant. Actually, Gayl Jones' brutal and stylistically stunning novels masterfully combine two important strands in the history of African-American literature: they examine the psychological scars of slavery as they appear in sexual abuse and other forms of violence, and they experiment with how to give the written word the qualities of oral storytelling. The horrific experiences of black women are depicted in Gayl Jones' works with a feminine sensibility. Understanding the complexities of African-American society, as well as how black people in general and black women in particular are marginalised, is crucial to the study's success. Women are taken advantage of physically and emotionally, even in black families. The study will advance knowledge of the causes of psychic trauma among black women and what can be done to improve their situation. Gayl Jones is a true artist who has exposed the depths of the harsh truths of racial, sex, and class issues in black people's life.

Stereotyping in this novel is explored not primarily through the conventional perspective of white people objectifying non-whites, or the postcolonial emphasis on colonizers representing the colonized, but rather as a cultural practice within and between minority communities. Through characterization, Jones presents two diametrically opposed aspects of storytelling, *Mosquito* and *monkey bread*, with *delgadina* in the model as an aspiring writer who, instead, frequently ends, up conversing with *Mosquito* at the cantina, *But*, like *monkey bread*, who acknowledges that they are all types of characters.

Long narrative poetry *Song for Anninho* (1981) breaks new territory. In the poem, which is set in 17th-century Brazil, the narrator Almeyda and her husband Anninho are living in

Palmares, a former refuge for runaway slaves, until it is taken over by Portuguese soldiers, separating husband and wife. Despite the fact that once they are split up, Almeyda can only locate her husband through memory and art, the poem emphasises desire as a good theme and demonstrates the possibility of love. The author is also known for her short-stories and poetry. In her first person narratives, Jones describes the sexual and racial violence imposed on Black women, highlighting these women's various responses to their suffering. She is celebrated as one of the earlier writers to focus extensively on sexual violence and its relationship to Black women.

Her novels center upon strong and articulate African-American females. She writes in the first person, often in a non-sequential order. Jones claims that her first two novels were based on the Blues form with an emphasis on the wrongs men commit against women and the ways in which women suffer. *Corregidora* is the story of Ursa *Corregidora*, a Blues singer and descendant of women raped and enslaved by a Portuguese slave owner in Brazil. Her ancestors carried down the tradition that their lives must be living testimonies to the violence, incest, and brutality that they suffered. In the novel, Jones explores the limitations that this type of victimization creates as well as the negative consequences Ursa suffers upon trying to break free of the perpetuated victimization. In her next novel, *Eva's Man*, Jones continues to explore these themes. The novel consists of the unordered and, at times, inconsistent ramblings of Eva Canada, who has been institutionalized in a psychiatric hospital for the strange poisoning and dismemberment of her lover. The author Gayl Jones wrote a novel of extraordinary beauty and lyrical sadness.

Jones discusses the varied ways in which Eva and other women respond to extreme sexual and racial violence. In her collection of short stories *White Rat* (1977) and her volumes of poetry published through the first half of the 1980s, Jones discusses and describes the many aspects of sexism and racism from a woman's perspective, coloring all with a dark and disturbing tone.

According to history and fiction they have yielded little about those black slave women who were mistress and breeder to their white owners. There are some facts and figures, but they tell us nothing about the women themselves: their motives, their emotions, and the memories they passed on to their children. Gayl Jones's first novel, *Corregidora*, is a gripping portrait of this harsh sexual and psychological genealog (COR 84).

In Gayl Jones's long poem, *Song for Anninho*, Almeyda, whose narrative voice we hear, undergoes a spiritual journey which highlights both theme and character. In her explorations of memory and history, Almeyda moves beyond her individuality to represent the destiny of the African descendants who were brought to Brazil in the seventeenth century. Through Almeyda's sights and values, we come to see the strength of her people, and we come to hope with her that they might one day establish a spiritual and physical unity which will withstand all oppressors.

The abuse of women and its psychological results fascinate Gayl Jones, who uses these recurring themes to magnify the absurdity and the obscenity of racism and sexism in everyday life. Throughout Jones' fictions, prisons and asylums function as settings for problematic narratives and as clues for the interpretation of outsidership. In the very act of concretizing these fictions as aesthetic objects, readers find themselves caught. The pleasure of experiencing such irony, and of gradually coming to know how accurately it confirms our habitation of an invisible penal colony, is justification for attending to Gayl Jones' achievement.

From the reading, all of Jones's works are carefully wrought narratives developed from her determination to relay a story entirely in terms of the mental processes of the main character, without any authorial intrusion. As her comments indicate that, Jones is keenly aware of her responsibilities as an African-American writer, of how her work may participate in a retrograde politics. Further, she suggests that the contemporary predilection for postmodernist forms, technical innovation, cannot be assessed in purely aesthetic terms but must be held morally and socially accountable. Yet the vocabulary and rhetoric in these statements are an index to the ambivalence and anguish she feels about how these ideological formulations can be artistically constricting.

Jones also focuses on the oral modes of the music literary tradition. The Blues tradition in particular offers African-American women writers a voice from which to explain their experiences in ways that signify both on European American literary traditions and the writings of African-American males. It is through the Blues that the African-American woman writer, like the Blues performer, can empower herself, her sister writers, singers, as well as her audience, for Blues performances serve as codifiers, absorbing and transforming discontinuous experience through the formal expression of song. Moreover, Blues performances resist final or

stable meaning the Blues singer's rhythms suggest change, movement, and action, continuous, unlimited and unending possibilities.

In her novel *Corregidora* the protagonist is literally a Blues performer in a night club, in the latter the Blues performer is more metaphorical or at the level of the narrative itself. Both novels, however, offer a new way of looking at women's oppression, because within the Blues tradition the oppression is named and made tangible. In the process of that naming, however, the Blues performer simultaneously distances her from that oppression to hold it up for scrutiny in order to decide on a course of action.

Jones draws on the Blues in a way that enables the voice of her protagonists and her reading audience. Finding and speaking from that Blues voice in many cases encourages power and change. For Ursa of *Corregidora*, that power and change result from her reconciliation with her slave heritage, and for Eva they follow from her exploring lesbianism. Jones draws from the Blues legacy to address a different audience that of contemporary African-American women as opposed to European Americans. Jones uses the novel, a Western form, and incorporates the Blues as a way of explaining it to enable her commentary on the lives of African-American women.

This analyses aims at studying the problem of racism, violence and female subjectivity of Gayl Jones to examine the optimistic social concerns of Jones' in her writings. There is a lot of criticism faced by the contemporary women writers to the criticism went the extent that it was said they don't have any literary merit and they are betraying the role. Gayl Jones was also attacked on the similar ground. The present thesis focuses on three novels *Corregidora*, *Eva's Man*, *Mosquito* and a poem *Song for Anninho* by Gayl Jones, makes a modest attempt to study the problems of Race, and implications of the African-American struggle for equal existence with the white race.

Jones' novels work against a humanist identity politics by showing the production of the black women within hegemonic discourses to be a colonialist strategy for containing the other in a space constructed according to the desire and needs of the hegemonic self. The idea that identity is a product, rather than a process, has as its corollary the humanist idea that gender and race are essences. If gender and race are conceived in the realm of being, then they become

irreducible facts of identity that place gendered and racial subjects read: women and non-whites in singular positions in relation to hegemonic ideologies. Such singular positioning makes it possible for minority subjectivity to be regulated by the dominant social group who's self – representations are not marked by gender and race. Gayl Jones depicts the tragic experiences of black women in her novels with a feminine sensibility. Understanding the complexities of African-American society and how black people in general and black women in particular are marginalised makes the study that has been performed crucial. Women are abused physically and psychologically even in black families. Understanding the causes of black women's emotional trauma and what can be done to improve their situation will be improved by the study. Gayl Jones is a genuine artist who has exposed the depths of the shocking reality of racial, social, and sexual issues in the lives of black people. She frequently uses violence in her fiction to highlight how slavery still has repercussions for African-American families today, when misogyny and racism are pervasive.

Gayl Jones' investigation of black female sexuality and the lingering effects of slavery's violence make her work so crucial. In reality, Gayl Jones' brutal and stylistically breathtaking novels masterfully combine two important strands in the history of African-American literature: they examine the psychological scars of slavery as they appear in sexual abuse and other forms of violence, and they experiment with ways to give the written word the qualities of oral storytelling.

## **Conclusion**

Gayl Jones is one of the greatest African-American writers and novelists, a true artist who has revealed the depths of the brutal realities of race, class and sex problems in the lives of black people. In her fiction she often portrays violence to illustrate the consequences of slavery for twentieth-century African American families, where Racism, Violence and Female Subjectivity are present even in the most intimate spheres of life, in the Afro-American people which results in humiliation of women and degradation of men. Gayl Jones remains a representative figure of African–American women. Jones writings ever since her pronouncement on women have been considered as the representative voice of the people in America, and everywhere, where they are discriminated for being born women, poor or African, Jones being the women writer and writer of issues relating to women she stands about violence it causes,

effects and solutions will be an interesting study because all her novels structured in a way that they deal with the cause, effects and possible solutions for the problems. Jones has referred to herself as an improvisational, and her compositions support that claim. Jones plays on a specific set of themes, altering them and exploring their potential permutations, much like a jazz or blues artist would. In fact, she has developed a reputation as a writer with a distinctive literary style because to her focus on brutality and how it affects the psychology and personality of black women. One of the recurrent topics in her books is domestic abuse, which is a result of the sociological and economic backgrounds of the African-identified characters. In light of racial criticism and a feminist perspective, Jones' style of narrative that emphasises violence against women or their search for identity merits a critical examination.

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