

## INTERSECTIONALITY IN GAYL JONES' *CORREGIDORA*

S. Maha\* and Dr. T. Jayakumar\*\*

\*Ph.D. Research Scholar, PG and Research Department of English, Periyar EVR College (A), Trichy - 23

\*\*Associate Professor, PG and Research Department of English, Periyar EVR College (A), Trichy - 23

### Abstract

*Corregidora* is an intense exploration of sex, desire, and history. It deals with sexually abused woman and her psychological stress that forces her to revenge at the end.

**Key Words:** Race, Class, Gender Representation of Material, Ideological Reproduction.

Gayl Jones born in 1949 is a controversial African American writer from Lexington *Corregidora* (1975), *Eva's Man* (1976), *The Healing* (1998) and *Mosquito* (1999). Her poetry collections are *Song for Anninho* (1981), *The Hermit-Woman* (1983) and *Xarque and Other Poems* (1985) her other literary works include *Chile Woman* (play) (1974) and *Liberating Voices: Oral Tradition in African American Literature* (criticism) (1991).

Jones was brought up in Speigle Heights, a neighborhood of Lexington, Kentucky, by a father who was a cook and mother, who wished to be a writer but stayed at home. During her graduation in the University of Michigan, Jones met a politically active student, Robert Higgins, her future husband. Her husband in a gay rights parade in the early claimed to be God and that AIDS was a form of punishment for which he was punched by a woman. Aggressively he returned with a shotgun and was put in prison being charged for four years. Without appearing in court to take up the accusation, Jones and Higgins fled to the United States to Europe, and Jones resigned from the University of Michigan leaving the note President "I reject your lying racist [expletive], and I call upon God. Do what you want. God is with Bob and I'm with him." After returning to U.S in 1988, Jones and Higgins held their identities hidden. Following a quarrel with police at their residence, Higgins committed suicide and Jones was put on suicide observation. Dejected Jones communicated only with family and Harper and has refused to face several interviews. Her works mostly deal with slavery, black woman body and sexuality.

In the analysis of *Corregidora* in the perspective the intersection of race, class and gender -- a matrix can also be the situation surrounded by which something must develop -- that is, a matrix can also be a womb. Placing the womb as a form for consciousness, the impossible contradictions of love and hate, perpetuation and eradication, resistance and complicity, and the nightmares of the past as well as the faint, nearly imperceptible glimmer of the future are visibly brought in. Definitely, a threat is developed in the reduction of female consciousness (of any race or class) to a biological function. To a certain extent, it could be argued that black women's fictive discourse regards race, class as well as gender while representing material and ideological reproduction.

*In such representations, the surplus-labor value of the enslaved black woman includes the fruits of both material production and human reproduction. In addition, the reproduction of an exploited labor force is depicted as including the potential reproduction of conscious resistance against hegemonic configurations. The womb, therefore, necessarily becomes a site of ideological struggle regardless of any supposedly "natural" relationship between consciousness and biology. (Mckible 15)*

In her great-grandmother's view the sole function of a woman descended from slaves is the leaving of evidence (children) against a vaguely defined they (the descendants of slave owners? all European peoples?). Ursa is imbued with this primitive belief in the duty of a Black woman, connected as it is to a circumscribed vision of woman's possible development. Ursa never rebels, never seeks alternatives, never breaks free of the constrictive role ordained by others. An arrested personality results from failure to revolt against values received during maturation, and the consequences are devastating.

If Ursa's thinking represents the slavery of consciousness, the thinking in *Eva's Man* shows paralysis of consciousness, the inability to make certain decisions. Eva is forty-three, an inmate of a psychiatric prison, and she tries to account for her condition by remembering portions of her life before she committed a bizarre crime. Eva is the victim of her own passivity, her tendency to accept the Playboy fantasy of what a woman is. Her life history contains a series of sordid, dehumanizing sexual encounters. Although the encounters are linked, neither the pattern nor the debilitating effects of the experiences become meaningful to Eva until abuse drives her to momentary insanity.

Eva is almost the replica of Ursa (*Eva's Man*) but she is more affected as she is harassed from her childhood days. Regardless to age she is physically abused which reflects on her act of violently killing the man with whom she involves in relationship with. Eva's understanding of how self relates to others derives from references to specific events in her life. At a very young age she is fascinated by conversations between her mother and Miss Billie about the queen bee, the kind of woman who "kills" every man with whom she is intimate.

Eva is deflowered with a dirty Popsicle stick. Her ideas about sex are got from the street, from the example of a mother who openly has an affair with a musician, from an endless number of propositions. She learns that marriage is a sadistic-masochistic arrangement by observing the behavior of her neurotic cousin and his wife. Having married a man three times of her age when she was seventeen, simply because she had tender feelings for him, she learns that marriage can be a prison. From the Universe of the Streets, Eva learns that sex is annoying and women are made bitches and men are eternally on the watch for a good lay. She has the will to resist sexual abuse, but the will is stunted.

Eva does not acquire a whole sense of personhood in her formative years. Woman merely responds to the terms presented by the environment in which she is located at any given time. Thinking of this kind is typical for people who feel the effort to become human

(in a restricted Western understanding of what humanity is) is meaningless, absurd. They exercise the dangerous freedom of following biological, and randomly acquired, impulses. Society and its fictions have convinced them that they are detritus; they think and behave accordingly. Low valuation of self is implicit in the vocabulary Eva uses to describe sexual experience, in the way her mind symbolizes womanhood in blood and bread, in private correlatives (man/owl; orgasm/river; power/the Medusa) and establishes resemblances between food and defecation.

In the light of intersection both Ursa and Eva are mere sufferers of multiple forms of discrimination and the triple jeopardy that is race, class and gender wise gives a negative impact throughout their lives. Unlike them Harlan is proactive to all the discriminations and one reason behind her positive approach of looking at life is that she creates her own identity through which she raises her status of poor-lower class-African American woman to a Professional Healer identity. Hence she proves that identities anything may it be either race or class or gender is merely social constructs which could be certainly reconstructed by the individual concern.

Similarly Mona, Helen and Theresa trying to change their Chinese Identity that is Mona by choosing another racial identity that is Judaism, her mother Helen by adopting American ways of approaching sexuality and Theresa by completely transforming to American life style try to overcome their so imposed discriminations. Mona goes a step further by choosing a racial identity for herself. In a way her act mocks the identity fixation category. Jen parodies American norms of racial categories (race is biological inheritance). If race is biological inheritance of physical attributes how Mona could adopt a race that is completely new to her? By doing so she also comes out of model minority image not only a means of escaping from race but class and gender oppressions too. Unlike the African women in the U.S. Chinese women is to some extent better as they fall under model minority category. This in a way makes their task of identity construction easier. These women may it be African American or Asian American they are mere performers of identity. Butler calls gender identity to be mere performance oriented and likewise other identities are mere performance oriented.

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