

BLACK FEMALE SUBJECTIVITY IN GAYL JONES SELECT NOVELS

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Abstract: *Black female subjectivity, the extreme impact of compulsory heterosexuality in African-American culture, particularly the legacy of slavery and how it damages Black female subjectivity as well as black love relationships. Gayl Jones a bold novelistic voice seemingly at success with her quiet, enigmatic persona, stunned the literary world with different novels of African, American, Her first novel Corregidora (1975), Evas Man (1976), White Rat(1977).*

The present study analyses the select novels of author Gayl Jones, a widely known black American writer and activist who grew up in a racially divided south. The author Gayl Jones illustrates, the naturalized heterosexual existence also provides a sense of healing through female bonding. The main focuses of her works are abuse of women, slavery racism, male dominance and power of strong female relationship.

Key words: *Racism, Black Feminism, Discrimination, Heterosexuality, Elective Bonding, Colored Women.*

Black literature has been a continuous series of statements on the Negro's blackness which is the source as well as the resource of his identity. It is basically American in theme and thought, content and spirit, though it has certain unique characteristics of its own. It shares the literary tradition and values of the mainstream American literature. The goal of this journey is elective bonding, in which a woman breaks away from the rigid obligations of compulsory heterosexuality, enters into an existence in which she is an active agent and chooses her partners in all relationships, both sexual and non-sexual.

Negro's or blackness, it represents the black American's total experience over more than three hundred years compressed into a concept of a human being who had no place in the scheme of things in the white world. Blackness is the source of his sensibility and also the material or source of material for creating and developing his manhood, personality and identity.

The concept of subjectivity problematizes the simple relationship between the individual and language, replacing human nature with the concept of the production of the human subject through ideology, discourse a language. The aim of the present chapter is essentializing of the African-American female voice parallels the essentializing of black female subjectivity. And compulsory heterosexuality by showing the way it harms the Black community, and particularly Black female Subjectivity. From this chapter that Black woman is more susceptible to compulsory heterosexuality than white woman since they are doubly bound to Black men: sexually and racially.

Female sexuality is inherently directed towards men limits woman both sexually and emotionally, as evidenced by the portraits of the female characters in these novels. The author Gayl Jones highlights the importance of giving voice to multiple experiences and ideas that are represented in the Black Female community.

The author Gayl Jones portraits of compulsory heterosexuality in the black community as they collectively suggest that such a lifestyle distorts a women view of relationships and sex, ultimately rendering her incapable of any sexual desire. In *Corregidora*, Gayl Jones focuses on the very personal battle that sexually victimized women endure. Through the novel's uncensored treatment of sexuality and abuse and its first-person narrative, Jones' suggests that a woman's battle with these issues ushers her into an obligatory heterosexual life style. In the novel, the Portuguese slaveholder, *Corregidora*, purchases the protagonist's great-grandmother, It is appropriate for Jones to construct her novel of female sexual dysfunction around the sexual abuses of slavery, since bell hooks claims that, "the designation of all black women as sexually deprived, immoral, and loose had its roots in the slave system" (Bell Hooks 52). It is the sexual slavery of Ursa's maternal ancestors that begins the pattern of compulsory heterosexuality in her life. Therefore, the most blatant example of the oppression of women through sexual objectification occurs before Ursa's birth. It shapes her views on men and sex, ultimately propelling her into a compulsory heterosexual existence.

Black female subjectivity is figured in all the works of Jones'. In this novel the author describes of *Corregidora* deriving profit from his abuse of Ursa's ancestors reinforces the concept of forced heterosexuality and suggests that it is normative. The women are used to serve the needs of men and are taught that their worth is derived from their bodies and their sexuality. The female body is exploited for male benefit, and the entire process is constructed around both sex and economics. When buying his female slaves, for example, *Corregidora* closely examines their sexual potential: "They'd have to rise up their dresses so he could see what they had down there, and he feels all around down there, and then he feel their bellies to see if they had solid bellies. And they had to be pretty" (COR 173). The novel states that, for *Corregidora*, a woman's value is ultimately bound to her body. Jones demonstrates the relationship of money and the female sexual body, and how that equation benefits men alone.

Corregidora uses her body for his own sexual benefit, and through this relationship, he impregnates her. Following the impregnation of Ursa's grandmother, *Corregidora*'s financial gain reaches its peak: after paying for just one slave, in the end, he owns three bodies that bring him money. Through this economic abuse of the Black female body, Jones comments on the way sexual relations are for the man's benefit; the woman's wants and desires are not of concern. Jones also presents *Corregidora*'s sexual claiming of his own progeny as an example of the way men enforce compulsory heterosexuality in the lives of women. In *Corregidora*, Jones recognizes the lasting effects of sexual slavery on Black

women, and emphasizes it by associating Ursa closely with women who were subjected to such abuse Ursa and her mother to engage in heterosexual lifestyles in order to reproduce. Thus, Jones shows that Ursa and her mother are still victimized by compulsory heterosexuality even when *Corregidora* is no longer present in their lives.

The novel characterizes the struggle of generations, of a black family to come out of slavery. Gayl Jones speaks to this role of female slaves as accomplices through the *Corregidora* women's impact on Ursa's life. Although Ursa's ancestors attempt to combat *Corregidora*'s wrongs, they instead work to perpetuate the paradigm of compulsory heterosexuality by forcing Ursa to define her womanhood as a sexual machine, meant only to reproduce, and as a sexual object, meant to serve male desire.

Through Ursa's temporarily and flashbacks in the novel, it is clear that, Ursa's inability to feel desire and her obsession with reproduction. Once her ability to give birth is violently stolen from her, Ursa's view of sex becomes even more bored and confused. In one significant flashback, Jones shows the way Ursa represses sexual desire by focusing on her inability to reproduce:

When he got back from work he'd ask me to rub his thighs. Do you feel how tight the muscles are? Yes, My hand on his belly then. The mark of his birth I'd tell him, I have a birthmark between my legs. That's make him laugh. But it's your fault all my seeds are ruined forever. No warm ones only bruised ones, not even bruised ones. No seeds (COR 45).

Ursa's thought process finds transitions immediately from sex to birth. When feeling Mutt's body and touching his abdomen, rather than feeling any sexual desire or even anticipating a sexual act, her thoughts turn directly to his birth. In addition, as she refers to the birthmark between my legs, she quickly associates her sexual organ with its inability to reproduce, and not with any sexual desire or sensation. In this way, Jones shows that Ursa views the female body and hers in particular, as only a reproductive machine; sexual desire is incompatible with it.

Eva's representation of herself, however, is deeply implicated in the way she is represented by others. Paying attention to these other representations of her subjectivity, we need to distinguish, for example, the psychiatric institution from that of the lawyers and police officers. Eva's decision to speak, to speak to one and not the others marks this distinction. We need also to distinguish between institutional discourses and the discourse community represented by Davis Carter and, to a lesser extent, by Elvira. This is a distinction between the public and the private, between the institutional and the individual, between the hegemonic and the "ambiguously hegemonic" (Robinson 20). We must posit this difference if only to return to the continuity that exists, in certain ways, between public and private discourses.

The novel leaves no doubt that the consistent preoccupation is not only with language and representation but also with sexuality and reproduction, most of the criticism of *Eva's Man* does not adequately address these issues. The novel needs a larger conceptual framework, one that addresses, for example, the privilege of heterosexual and genital sexuality, reproductive imperative, and the phallus as privileged signifier. While Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak warns that women cannot fully escape "a uterine social organization favour of a clitoral" (Spivak 152), she does point out that the clitoris escapes reproductive framing" in a way that male orgasmic pleasure normally cannot (Spivak 151). Further, if clitoridectomy has always been the normal accession to womanhood, it might be necessary to plot out the entire geography of female sexuality in terms of the imagined possibility is, in fact, hysterically systematic.

According to Dixon Eva's silence, is yet another sign of her passivity: "Eva remains imprisoned literally and figuratively by her silence that simply increases her passivity and her acceptance of the words and definitions of others" (EM 246). Gayl Jones herself has commented on Eva's silence: "Eva refuses her story coherently. By control-ling what she will and will not tell, she maintains her autonomy. Her silences are also ways of maintaining this autonomy". Eva's acceptance of the words and definitions of others "may not be passive but, in fact, acting to Sally Robinson, an active subversive from of mimicry with which she undermines the dominant discourse. Finally, we have to remind ourselves that Eva tells her own story. Jones makes a conscious, and risky, decision to write *Eva's Man* in the first person (EM 97) and this invests Eva with a certain narrative agency, however compromised and indeterminate it may seem to be.

From the novel *Eva's Man*, the protagonist Eva's response to others' representation of, and dominion over, her subjectivity. Broadly speaking, critical views on the question may be plotted along two lines, those, that see Eva as passive and paralyzed by dominant constructions of her subjectivity and those that see her as resisting, even disrupting, those constructions. This difference is embodied in the distinction Sally Robinson make between two meanings of representation, "The first is a response to form of colonization, an imperial move, and the other is self – representation, the processes by which subjects produce themselves as women and, thus, make 'visible' the contradictions in hegemonic discursive and political systems"(Robinson 190).

Thus, both the novels *Corregidora* and *Evas Man* Ursa, and Eva's subjectivity is is contradiction; she writes across the gaps in hegemonic discourse, moving fluidly inside and outside these discourses, in a doubled narrative movement that puts into play the contradictions between her objectification and her subjectivity. This subjectivity is not a fixed identity—essential, singular, determinate, coherent; Eva's subjectivity is a process of multiple identification with different discursive constructions of the black women that functions to dismantle those constructions. Thus, we notice from her novels that various discourses work to recontain Eva in an essential otherness, and thus to reduce the threat she represents, Eva's narrative works against this kind of recuperation. She remains in a position of excess in relation to hegemonic discourse, not as its essential other, but as a subjectivity that threatens the coherence of the discursive systems that depends on her marginality.

The paper reveals that sum up Black female subjectivity and heterosexuality works to empower women and build female community. However, when black women powerfully demand agency in their relations with black men, they are teaching men how to treat women. This study shows ways in which Black female subjectivity and compulsory heterosexuality impacts both heterosexual and homosexual Black men.

References

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