

BLACK FEMINISM

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By

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MAPPING THE TRAJECTORY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S FICTION

I. Colonialism:

The history of mankind and human civilization is replete with the sufferings and sorrows of turbulent atrocities in the name of the greed of imperialism and colonization. One of the events that gave the impetus to the modern Western civilization was the exploration of America by Christopher Columbus in 1501 for Spain. This greed of expansion of empires led the British and Europeans to settle their colonies in America. But the basic need was strong and sturdy working hands/labourers in the cash crops, plantations of tobacco indigo and cotton, sugarcane on the American soil. Through experiences it was proved that the natives-Red Indian and others could not sustain the rigorous hardships.

The search for labourers led to the importing the slaves from Africa to Europe and American colonies, so the Negroes were imported from the Africa for commercial purpose since as working hands-strong and sturdy as they proved in the course of time and matched the American weather conditions. And thus began the saga of inhuman suffering of objectification and commodification of man by man himself.

Hidden and inherent behind these 'masks of conquest' as Gauri Vishwanathan calls were the nefarious intentions of 'civilizing' the 'uncivilized cultures' the coloured. The ramifications of this process of colonizing and

enslaving were very much entangling. It was not simply looting and marauding the natural resources of that country and exporting them to their own countries and importing finished goods with high prices. Behind the mask was the ugly 'mission' of 'civilizing' the natives or colored through proselytizing' or at least condemning their aboriginal practices. In this process of colonial imperialism and enslaving the natives the ramifications that were involved were not only of material interest but of racism that had devastating effects on human psyche of the slaves.

The 'hunt' of slaves as sturdy labourers with the greed of colonialism, and imperialism led to the American colonizers to the tribal Africa and so the cargo of twenty black Negro slaves including a woman slave was brought to Jamestown, Virginia in 1619. And thus began a tragic saga of insult, agony, humiliation, pain and suffering that continued for near about four hundred years. And synergetic discrimination based on race still continues though it is legally banned.

Slavery was basically the objectification and commodification of the Negroes snatching away all their humanity. This is an internal 'rust' which threatens the 'personhood' of black people (young and old) in all America.

Psychologically the Negro lost his 'wholeness, completeness and became what can be called a 'divided' personality in various ways. Frantz Fanon (1967:17) asserts that this self division is a direct effect of colonialist subjugation is beyond question. Colonial subjugation, divided the complete and whole personality of the slave. The oppressive system of slavery dehumanizes the enslaved persons and wipes out their traditions and consciousness. The Negro-slavery, which began

in 1619, was later institutionalized legally in 1670 in all the colonies of America. In this process institution of slavery brainwashed, the Negroes. It was not only a physical entity but also a psychological devastating phenomenon. It wiped their original African tradition and consciousness and dehumanized them as a beast. By brainwashing their minds and brains of their original native African traditions the slavery began to implant and replace the cultural ways of knowing with the dominant groups' special thoughts. Thus the colonizer achieves its desired effect through instilling its own culture and enslaving the slave.

The effects of this cultural enslaving can be seen in annihilating people's beliefs, in their names, in their languages, in their environments, in their heritage of struggle in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in them. It makes them to see their past as a wasteland or non-achievement. Frantz Fanon (1967:169) argues that the colonizer is not only satisfied merely with holding the people in its grip and emptying their brains of all form and content, but it also distorts, disfigures and destroys the past of the oppressed. The colonized forgets to participate actively in the history. The colonization may be brief but all memories of freedom seem distant and the colonized forgets what it costs or else he no longer dares to pay the price for it.

Paulo Freire (1970:31) argues that the basic relationship between the oppressed and the oppressor is prescription:

One of the basic elements of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed is prescription. Every prescription represents the imposition of one man's

choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of man prescribed to into that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness.

Carter G. Woodson (1969:xxxiii) an African American political thinker and activist argues that when you hold the mind you enslave a person physically:

When the Negro's mind has been brought under the control of his oppressor, the problem of the Negro putting down is easily solved.

In such way the American Negro slavery at it's worst dehumanized the black in America, stripped them of their humanity. Two tools that were used for it were repression and oppression. The less valued qualities are repressed by the dominant group (males, whites, the upper class etc.) and projected on the subordinate groups, (women, minorities, the poor).

Paulo Freire (1970:31) argues that the internalization of the dominant group's values i.e. societal prescription represents the imposition of one man's choice upon another transforming the consciousness of the man prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness. The malady of internalization results out of self hatred and inferiority that the oppressed feels towards him. Racism and white supremacy have devastating effects on the whole extent of the psychic universe of the black person.

Jane Rosemary Clay(1963:9-12) one of the African American poets writes:

You (America) are my country but... but you do not want me. You have belittled and degraded me until I have become little and degraded. You have not believed in me,

until I no longer believe in myself. You have no longer accepted myself.

In the white racist American society the blacks are dehumanized and degraded on accounts of their Negroid features: black skin, kinky hair, thick lips etc. And so with this guilt or inferiority complex in the minds of the blacks always craved for the Caucasian standards of superiority.

Kardiner and Ovesey (1951:304), Grier and Cobbs (1968:34-37), and Calvin Hernton (1965:131-134) hold that the self hatred and self rejection finally leads the black person to internalization of white ideals. It results in psychic suicide and strangulation of one's own culture. 'Passing' for white pursuit for the American dream has been constant thread running into the novels of Jessie Fauset, Nella Larsen, and Dorothy West. Angela Murray in Fauset's *Plum Bun*, Irne Redfield and Helga Crane in Larsen's *Passing* and *Quicksand* Cleo Judson in Dorothy West's *The Living Is Easy* are all victims of internalization.

James Baldwin (1965:18), a noted African American writer comments that Negro in America does not exist except in the darkness of his mind. Similarly Alice Walker (1973:32) also comments:

My struggle was always against
An inner darkness.
I carry with myself
The only key to my death.

The 'death' is a cultural death.

Geyer and Schweitzer (1981:251) argue that :

The loss of identity is alienation...it leads to powerlessness, the lack of control over various aspects of his/her existence.

Eric Fromm (1955:120) argues that:

The alienated person does not experience himself as the center of this world, as the creator of his acts, but his acts and their consequences have become his masters...the alienated person is out of touch with himself.

II. Feminism .

The discourse of the subjugation of black, Negroes in America, stripped of their original African identity can be applied with the themes of suppression, oppression subjection, internalization and alienation to black feminine experience in America also. Woman in patriarchal society is the socially sanctioned 'other'. Simone de Beauvoir (1988:295) a 20th century French existentialist feminist writes:

One is not born, but rather becomes a woman ...It is the civilization as a whole that produces this creature intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine."

The Western Christian theology through the history of genesis pinpoints the inherent 'otherness', subjugation, and subordination of woman. Simone de Beauvoir (1988:172) highlights this phenomenon:

Eve was not fashioned at the same time as the man. She was not fabricated from a different substance, not from the same clay, as was to model Adam. She was taken from the flank of the first male. Not even her birth was independent. God did not spontaneously choose to create her as end in her and

in order to be worshiped directly by her in return for it. She was destined by him for man, and it was to rescue Adam from loneliness that he gave her to him, in her mate was her origin and her purpose. She was complement in the order of the inessential.

The Oxford English Dictionary that first used the term “feminism” in the latter part of nineteenth century describes it in terms of qualities of femaleness. But now it means a “theory of the political, economic and social equalities of the sexes.” Having found this definition inadequate Barbara Berg in *The Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism*, defines feminism as a “broad movement embracing numerous phases of women’s emancipation.”

She comments:

It is the freedom to decide her own destiny; freedom from sex determined roles; freedom from society’s oppressive restrictions, freedom to express her thoughts fully and to convert them freely to actions. Feminism demands the acceptance of women’s rights to individual conscience and judgment. It postulates that women’s essential worth stems from common relationship of her life (bell hooks.: 1984:194).

The Western feminist movement is said to have originated with the British theorist Mary Wollstonecraft’s work. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) Sigmund Freud, Jung and Jacques Lacan contributed to the female psychoanalysis. Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949) is a social and philosophical analysis of how woman came to be defined as “other” from men, who are held to be as norm.

The women's liberation movements of the 1960s grew out of widespread radical protest by students, workers, blacks and women. Consciousness raising groups were established. The motivating idea was of sisterhood united with little recognition of race and class difference. The works like Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1947), Betty Freidan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1969), and Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970) stimulated and caused a debate of feminism. The personal became political.

Neither social equality nor the focus of woman as an autonomous being are enough to rid of society of sexism and male domination. Hence feminism is the ideology of women's liberation as women suffer injustice because of their sex. Feminism is a consciousness raising activity. The objectification of women is thus marked. John Berger (1981: 26) illustrates this point.

Men look at women, women watch themselves being looked at...The surveyor of woman herself is male, the surveyed, female. Thus she turns herself into an object.(Keohane et al).

Thus the objectification of woman as a sexual creature. To be a woman is curse in the society. Simone de Beauvoir (1988 : 16) observes:

Humanity is male and, man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him, she is not regarded as an autonomous being...he is the subject, he is the absolute- she is the 'other'.

Herein lies, for de Beauvoir, (1988-17):

the drama of woman (the) conflict between the fundamental aspiration of every subject (ego)-who always regard the self as the essential and the compulsions of a situation in which she is inessential.

Roseinmary Ruether (1983 : 168-169) comments on the mythological implication that made woman the 'Other':

Male mythology not only makes woman responsible for the advent of evil in the world but it also translates female evil into an ontological principle. The female comes to represent the qualities of materiality and irrationality, casuality and finitude which debase the 'manly' spirit and drag it down into sin and death.

Jacques Lacan believes that the woman is reduced being the 'Other', the mirror, for the self representation of man. Similarly Betty Friedan (1947:16-17) comments:

I feel empty somehow...incomplete to ...I feel as if I don't exist. I...I begin to feel I have no personality.

Simone de Beauvoir (1988-69) writes :

Woman is a female to the extent that she feels herself as such. It means woman can be defined by her consciousness under circumstances dependent upon the society of which she is the member. (ibid.: 80)

Ann Herzog (1989:69) writes:

I would suggest that no biology but ignorance of ourselves, has been the key to our powerlessness.

Eve dared to step out of "her paces." She was aggressive she made a decision and marched into the world of liberation and ceased to be innocent woman, likewise women should step out of centuries 'molding history and redirect their own

destiny, they should exercise their power as rebel, as Albert Camus (1956:17) comments:

Rebellion ...breaks the seal and allows the whole being come into play. It liberates stagnant waters and turns them into a raging torrent.

Women must exit from man's garden for no phallic power, however liberal, will ever allow women their own consciousness, no God, no patriarch will really offer them true freedom. As Michael Foucault (1965:22) comments "Wisdom, like other precious substances must be torn from the bounds of the earth". True emancipations comes only by risking. Similarly Hegel (1957:233) comments:

It is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained...the individual who has not staked his life may no doubt be recognized as a person but has not attained the truth of this recognition as an independent self-conscious

Knowledge of true self must be attained... no matter even if one has to adopt insane means because as Michael Foucault (1965:25) puts it, "madness has something to do with the strange paths of knowledge."

III. Black Feminism:

To be a black woman is to suffer from the two disadvantages of racial discrimination and gender bias. In the history of mankind they (Black women) have suffered from socio-economic, physical, cultural and sexual torment. The black woman suffered from racism, from the white race, sexism from whites and blacks, and they were always at the lowest rung of economy.

The first cargo that brought the blacks in chains reached in 1619 at Jamestown, Virginia. The promised land proved to be a great prison and octopus of exploitation. As a slave the black woman suffered the horrors of slavery, was at lowest place at the wage scale and restricted to most filthy and uncreative jobs, she became the prey of white man's lust, as a mother she was to rear away her own children and nourish the white babes.

Calvin Hernton (1988: 123), a well known sociologist pinpoints the plight of the African American women :

From time to time in America various individuals, and groups besides Negroes have been victims of prejudice, discrimination, injustice, persecution and outright murder...But it has been Negro woman more than anyone else, who has borne the constant agonies of racial barbarity in America from the very first day she was brought in chains to this soil. The Negro woman through the years has suffered (and endured) every sexual outrage.

She was reduced to a breeding animal, body toy or sexpot. Like black male the black woman who was reduced to been animal-wild beasts without souls-wild and savage creatures, naked savage by whites. The black woman resisted to maintain dignity in regard to sex. They were beaten, lynched and burnt alive. The slaves, the black man and woman and children belonged to their masters. They branded the slaves with hot irons the letter of their names on different parts of body. The black women were treated as breeding animals. It was a devaluation of her womanhood. Though the slavery was abolished and the slave become

sharecroppers, the black women were taken to the houses by the whites as home servants.

Black woman tried to regain her denied womanhood. Sojourner Truth in her speech at Arkansas, Ohio raised the question, "Ain't I a Woman?"

"That man over there says women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches and have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddle or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arms! I have ploughed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could help me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much as and eat as much as a man-when I could get it-and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children and seen them most of all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?" (Lowenberg & Bogin 1976:235).

The black woman's life is filled with labour. Even after the abolition of slavery the black man did not give the black woman a fair deal. She is still 'de mule uh de world.' Zora Neale Hurston (1969:29) points out this predicament in her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Nanny, the grandmother explains the status of the black woman in the world to her granddaughter Janie:

Honey, de white man is de ruler of every things as fur as Ah been able tuh find out. May be it's some place way off in de ocean where de black man is in power, but we do not know nothing but what we see, so de white man throws down de load and fell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don't do it. He hand it to his women folks. De nigger woman is de

mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see. Ah been prayin' tuh it tuh be different wid you. Lawd, Lawd, Lawd!"

The kind of pathetic situation as the image of African American in his own eyes is beautifully described by W. E. B. DuBois in *The Souls of Black Folks* (1961:3). He writes:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of ways looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness-an American, a Negro: two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled striving; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

The word 'black' denotes a person of the African origin, but it connotes the ethnic traits of the erstwhile slaves. They were called Nigger or Negro by the Europeans. Nigger was replaced by Negro and Negro by Black due to pejorative connotations. As Europeans are known, by their nationalities-English, French, Dutch, Swedes so the blacks feel themselves want to be called Afro-American, African-American, and now African American to redefine their identity.

Feminist consciousness is consciousness of victimization. For Simone de Beauvoir, "The humanity is male" but for the black woman "the humanity is white and male." The interracial relationship of white supremacy and male superiority has thus characterized the black woman's reality as a struggle-a struggle to survive in two contradictory worlds simultaneously, one white, privileged and oppressive, the other black, exploited and oppressed. Black feminist consciousness, thus

means a kind of awareness of one's own destiny of a black, female and poor in America. Black feminist consciousness is nothing but an overall awareness on the part of black woman about the plight, position and negative aspects of their life from the perspective that the order-patriarchal, racist, and sexist social order has to be changed so as to redress society in such a way that equality of human beings irrespective of sex, race or class is restored. It is a awareness about contradictions that black woman face in their life as a black, female and poor.

Journey from Africa to America is chattel slavery American slavery, through its weapons of economy, polity and ideology stripped the black women/ebony daughters, Youruba daughters of their humanity. A black woman's initial rite of passage from Africa to America-a brief account of the enforced Odyssey bearing social, historical, and above, psychological implications will offer us better insight into the novels of Gayl Jones, Toni Cade Bambara and Ntozake Shange and other African-American woman writers and novelists.

As Aime 'Cesaire (Fanon 1967 b:131) puts it in the African life there was:

No coercion, only mutual assistance; the joy of living, a free acceptance of discipline. Order-earnestness-poetry and freedom-from the untroubled citizen in the almost famous leader, there was unbroken claim of understanding and trust.

There was communal harmony and joy, pervading everywhere and religion had an upper hand in all the matters. John S. Mbiti (1970:1) comments:

Africans are notoriously religious and religion permeates all departments of life.

Women are respected and esteemed in African society and not subjected and subordinated. Chinua Achebe (1957:121) remarks that in African community “mother is supreme.” Women become independently wealthy as a result of their own endeavours in economic field. Olaudah Equiano’s account tells:

“... even our woman are warriors and march bodily out to fight along with the men”. (Bontemps 1989:12)

Some of the African women were queens and they ruled their kingdoms very ably and competently. Along with these, black women were social mentors. Hence women’s consciousness had a free play in African society before Negro slavery.

With the induction /or introduction of the European slave trade in Africa, it turned the African paradise and heaven into the hell.

Frank Tannenbaum (1946:21) accounts that Negro villages were attacked midnight. Human being were treated as objects. The slaves captured in the different parts of the countries were to be cargoed to the various colonies in America. Many died because of the unhygienic condition of the ships. Some starved to death and some jumped off the ships. Some times atrocities were perpetrated on the slaves-the resisting ones were killed or thrown live into the sea. Sometimes women gave birth to babies even chains, which the drunken overseers didn’t care to remove. In many cases weak babies were tossed overboard to save maximum room for the fittest.

Lerone Bennett (1966:41) notes that:

So many people were thrown overboard that it was said sharks would pick up ship off the coast of African and would follow it to America.

It is said that during 1500-1850, 11-30 million people were transported from Africa to America but 2/3 of them perished. Ruth Benedict (1934:19) writes :

In the beginning, God gave the every people a cup of clay and from this cup they drank their life.

But this precious cup was snatched away from the Africans and hurled into the Atlantic. The African queen, the black woman was reduced to “negress”. Calvin Hernton (1965:124) writes:

Being torn from the sexual restraints in her native culture and universally forced to behave like a “naked savage” the relatively restrained African American woman was transformed sexually into a beast.

The Negro woman was forced to do the domestic duties, manual labour in the field-ploughing the land, haul the logs, cut the cane, pick cotton from sunrise to sunset. Slackness caused flogging. The Negro woman was sold on the auction blocks like beasts. Mother and child were separated, so the slave women killed their children to save them from slavery.

Innumerable horrible atrocities were meted upon the black slave women by the white owners. Calvin Hernton (1965:126) cites one such incidence :

One victim was in her eighth month of pregnancy. Members of mob suspended her from a tree by her ankles. Gasoline was poured on her clothes and ignited. A chivalrous white man took his knife and slit open her

abdomen. The unborn child fell to the ground. A member of the mob crushed its head with his heel.

Violence was used to achieve a productive labour force. The black slave woman were raped, men were also murdered, lynched. The black women were reduced to sluts, mammies, negress and they were depersonalized as they were battered physically and psychologically.

The black women lost the “ontological resistance”. (Frantz Fanon 1967:110)

He explains :

The Negro has been given two frames of reference within which he had to place himself. His metaphysics, or less pretentiously, his customs and the sources on which they were based, were wiped out because they were in complicit with a civilization that he did not know and that was imposed on him.

The institutionalization of slavery has a capitalistic drive as its backbone and its mottoes being maximum production through brutalization, destruction of the victims of family unit, rape lynching, flogging, branding, assignment of menial jobs, trumatization of every sort.

Gloria Wade-Gayles (1985:3-4) describes:

There are three major circles of reality in American society which reflect degrees of power and powerless. There is a large circle in which white people, most of them men, experience influence and power. Far away from it there is a smaller circle, a narrow space, in which black people regardless of sex, experience uncertainty, exploitation and homelessness. Hidden in this second

circle is a third-small, dark enclosure in which black women experience pain, isolation and vulnerability.

It was Francis Beale (1970:90) who pinpointed the classic synergetic double jeopardy in which black woman is trapped. Beale focused that black woman is caught in doubly underprivileged jeopardy because of race and gender-being black and woman. The black woman, Beale highlighted was dispossessed of because she was black and woman.

Barbara Smith (1986:80), Calvin Hernton (1990:51) and Deborah K. King further expanded the double jeopardy into triple and multiple jeopardy adding class and sexual preferences to it. The black woman is caught in this multiple jeopardy Barbara Smith called the oppression of the black woman as “geometric oppression”. Bell Hooks (1981:7) comments :

No other group in America has so had their identity socialized out of existence as have black women.

Patricia Collins (1990 : 7) comments:

Black women were socialized through oppression that was structured along three dimensions “economy, polity and ideology”. Economy few opportunities for intellectual work. Equality-politics of exclusion, forbidding any rights or privileges, ideology-qualities attached to black women for oppression.

In economy the black woman is labour force which is “think like a woman” and act like a nigger”. They were expostulated on farm and domestic work.

Leo Kuper (1974:13) points out that it was the objectification of the subject race to animal world. Similarly Jacqueline Jones (1985:16) observes :

Men and women promiscuously run their ploughs side by side and day after day.... The part of the women sustained in this masculine employment is quite as efficient as that of the more athletic sex.

Whereas Angela Davis (1981:6) writes :

Where work was concerned, the strength and productivity under the threat of the whip outweighed consideration of sex.

The plantation owner raped the unguarded black women. Rape is a physical, psychological abuse used to terrorize both black men and women. Moses Grandy (Davis 1971:8) explains :

I have seen the overseer beat them with a raw hide so that the blood and milk mingled from their breasts.

Bell Hooks (1981:19) writes the inhuman treatment of black women :

These methods of terrorization succeeded in forcing African American people to repress their awareness of themselves a free people and to adopt the slave identity imposed on them.

Jean Nobles (1978:56) points out the pathology of the slavery :

Even when told, some were reluctant to be free. Slavery had as it was lulled by many of the victims into a false sense of security. They either feared freedom or adopted the negative attitude of their masters.

Harriet Jacobs (1987:44) in her autobiography observes that “it is the torturing whip that lashes manhood out of him” it lashed consciousnesses out men and women.

Leo Kuper (1974:14) describes slavery and colonization as a process of zombification. A zombie according to a Haitian myth is a person “from whom one has stolen spirit and reason and to whom is left only the force of work” (ibid).

To Zora Neale Hurston zombies are “the bodies without souls. The living dead”. Calvin Hurnton (1990:10) points:

Just as white people have created and maintained a racist culture so have black men created and maintained a sexist culture. Racist culture teaches as all white to be racist in some manner. In and through an elaborate system of masculine versus feminine gender imperatives sexist culture socialized to be sexist.

Similarly Frantz Fanon (1976b:60) observes :

Man of color living is under ‘neurotic condition’ ... There is a constant effort to run away from his individuality, to annihilate his presence.

Prescription or neurotic orientation manifests in the form of symbols, images and myths, and stereotypes. The internalization of white standards or beauty makes the blacks to be ashamed of black colour.

Paulo Freire (1970:49) comments:

Self-deprecation is another characteristic of the oppressed, which derives from their internalization of the opinion the oppressor had of them.

Black psychologists Kardiner and Ovesey (1951:303-301), Grier and Cobbs (1968:39:54), Calvin Hernton (1965:134) now by common consensus comment that black women’s internalization of white beauty ideals ultimately led them to self

deprecation. Commenting upon such phenomenon Grier and Cobbs argue (1968:41):

Her blackness is the antithesis of a creamy white skin, her lips are thick, her hair is kinky and short. She is in fact the antithesis of American beauty ...in this country she is ugly...when to her physical unattractiveness is added to a discouraging, deprecating mother-family-environment into which she is born, there can be no doubt that she will develop a damaged self concept and an impairment of her feminine narcissism.

Calvin Hernton (1965:133) makes a similar observation:

The attempt to become "white" intensifies rather mitigates the Negro woman's frustration in white world. No amount of paint, powder, and hair straightener can erase all the things in black women's back ground that make her femininity and aesthetic appreciation of herself as a beauty capable of attracting man. The Negro woman becomes ashamed of what she is ...

Commenting on the havoc of the neurosis whereas on individual's psychological universe, Frantz Fanon (1967b:116) writes :

I am the slave not of the 'idea' that other have of me but of my appearance...I slip into corners and my long antennae, pick up the catch phrases strewn over the surface of things... nigger teeth are white-nigger feet are big-I slip into corners, I remain silent. I strive for invisibility. Look! I will accept the lot as long as no one notices me.

America is a melting-pot, assimilation into the white cultural pot, flying from Afrocentric roots and acceptance of Eurocentric world. Black women's novels have

effectively dramatized such a phenomenon. Multiplicity of oppression is sometimes neglected due to race. Harriet Jacobs/ Linda Brent (1987:77) remarks:

Slavery is terrible for men, but its is for more terrible for women. Superadded to the burden common to all, they have wrongs, and suffering, and mortifications peculiarly their own.

W. E. B. DuBois (1961:23) proclaimed 'The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of "color line"'. Jean Paul Sartre (1991:XXXV) comments "There are neither good or bad colonists. They are colonists". Albert Camus (1965:14) argues to be silent is to give the impression that one has no opinions, that one wants nothing.

IV. Portrayal of Stereotypical, Negro / Black Men and Women in White Writing: The Treatment of Negroes in White Literature

Commenting on Hemingway, Steinback, and William Faulkner and their misogynist treatment of Negro characters Ralph Ellison (1972:25) comments :

They seldom conceive Negro characters possessing the full complex ambiguity of the human. Too often what is presented as the American Negro...emerges an oversimplified clown, a beast or an angel. Seldom he is drawn as that sensitivity focused process of opposites, of good and evil, of instinct and intellect, of passion and spirituality which great literary art has projected as the image of man.

Anis Pratt (1981:135) holds that stereotypes are :

clusters of symbols that have become rigid and hence restrictive to full personal development.

There are four stereotypes of black women-mammy, mulatto, sapphire, jezebel. Mammy is a big breasted, greasy dirty, having a head rag, with large feet. She feeds not her but white mistress's children. Etymologically a mulatto is a mule. We come across mulatto characters even in African American writers-in the works of William Wells Brown, Frances Harper, Jessie Redmon Fausett, Nella Larsen. The mulatto is a divided soul belonging to the two origins partially but not completely to none of them. The sapphire is considered evil and castrator. Jezebel is bewitching men.

Black women are trying to reclaim their lost womanhood through their art and literature. However they were relegated to a subhuman status. They were projected negatively in the form of stereotypes by the white men, women and also black men. A brief survey of their portrayal will reveal their inclination. Before the abolition of slavery Harriet Beecher Stow's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) highlighted the plight of black slaves. Uncle Tom, Little Eva, Simon Legree and Topsy form the collective experience of the black American people. Topsy a small character is one of the best examples of a conventional comic slave child who wore ragged clothes. Little Eva's mammy is the more ideal mother.

Depiction of black woman as mammy could also be found in William Faulker's *Go Down Moses* (1940) and Lilian Smith's *Killer of the Dream* (1940). And in *Aunt Phillis Cabin* (1852) a novel by E. Eastman Mary is a model of virtue.

Thomas Nelson page depicted mammy Kendra in his *Red Rock* (1898) Joel Chandler Harri in his *Mom Bi: Her Friend and Her Enemies* (1884) projected a

warm mammy, Mom Bi. Junia Peterkin in her *Green Thursday* (1924), William Faulkner in his *The Sound and the Fury* (1929). Katherine Ann Porter in her short stories-*The Leaning Tower and other Stories* (1934), Carson McCuller's in *The Member of the Wedding* (1958) and Henry Van Dyke in *Ladies of the Ranch*, *Maninoff Eyes* (1965) have depicted mammies such as Maum Hannan Dilsey, Nannie, Bernice and Aunt Harry.

Maum Hannah is Julia Petrikins "Ashems in Green Great Thursday" lives a self sufficient but lonely life on land that was once part of her old Master's plantation.

William Faulkner's Dilsey in *The Sound and The Fury* (1929) behaves as if she is a member of the white family. She makes decisions on behalf of the white children. She is typical mammy as on her head she wears the traditional turban but wears a black straw hat above it. She is emotionally attached to the white family but fails to disintegrate it.

Katherine Ann Porter's Nannie in *The Leaning Tower and other Stories* is a neatly turbaned black woman who was a childhood friend of Sophia Jane, her mistress. Both were married at the same time and according to Southern tradition. Nannie nursed her own and the first three of Sophia Jane's children. Nannie fell ill and Sophia Jane became wet nurse for both children.

Carson McCuller's character Bernice, in *The Members of the Wedding* (1958) is a modern representative of a long line of cooks and mammies. Henry Van Dyke's Aunt Harry, whose full name is Harriet Gibbs in *Ladies of the*

Rachamaninoff's Eyes (1965) is devoted to memory of her white child. Some white writers tried to depict the black mulattoes realistically. Melanctha in Gertrude Stein's *The Lives* is a such in example. Her black father and half-white mother put her in a dilemma. Albion W. Towrgree's *A Royal Gentlmen* depicts the story of two tragic mulattoes a mother Belle and her daughter' Toinette. Belle killed her master lover in a jealous rage, thinking that he planned to cast her in favour of a white wife Belle and all the children a except Trinette were sold to different masters.

George Washington Cable widened the dimensions of the tragic with sensitive portraits of the mulatto. His *Madame Delphine* (1874) deals with the tragic circumstances involving miscegenation, the beautiful mulatto successfully won by the handsome and wealthy white man, his death and her later life as a social outcast, and eventually her own tragic death. Ellen Glasgow like Gertrude Stein, is a white woman writer who successfully portrays certain features of black life and black woman. Her presentation of Aunt Mehitable Green in two works : *Barren Ground* and *Virginia* show endurance, compassion to dramatize the tragic socio-economic outcome of the southern story, the central theme of the novel.

One of the earliest account of the mulatto occurs in Richard Hildreth's Archy Moor in *The White Slave* (1836). As the time passed, the mulatto as a character was depicted a tragic figure because of his alienation from both the races. It was true in the case of the mulatto female who was physically prettier than her darker

sister. But her prettiness often generated a lustful responses in the master or made her a more saleable commodity.

Thomas Dixon in the *Leopard's Spots* (1902) has portrayed George Harris, a mulatto. He is the child of George and Eliza Harris. Instead of migrating with his parents he lives in New England. When he asks his patron for his daughter's hand in marrying he is refused because he passes for white he is Negro after all. Thus ashamed, George understood the problem of being a mulatto.

The black female mulatto figures are also found in the literatures of white man. Mark Twain's *Puddin Head Wilson* has a woeful mulatto character. Warren's *Band of Angels* portrays a confused coquette. Faulkner's *Go Down Moses* paints a glamorous but betrayed woman.

Thus white men and women writers have depicted black men and women in the way they understood them from their white perspective.

V. Portrayal of Black Women by Black Men writers

Many black men writers have portrayed the dark lives of black women. Though many black women characters are not central to their themes. Their treatment of the black women differ from men to men. The black woman is delineated in various writers and in many colours in the following works. If the white writer presented black character as devoid of human complexity, then these "gate keepers of black literature" such as Richard Wright, James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison did not portray black female characters any differently. In all their

texts black women like Bessie Mears, Mary Rambo, Esther and other are born just to be brutalized raped and finally destroyed. A study of Black male writers would certainly ascertain the phallic stance these writers have taken against the black women.

William Wells Brown's *Clotel or the President's Daughter* (1864), W. E. B. DuBois's *The Quest of Silver Fleece* (1911), Charles Chestnut in *The House Behind The Cedars* (1900), Paul Lawrence Dunbar in *Sports of the Gods* (1902), Sutton E. Griggs in *Pointing the Way* (1903), Jean Toomer in *Cane* (1923), Wallace Thurman in *The Blacker the Berry* (1923), Claude McKay in *Home to Herlem* (1928), *Banjo* (1929) and *Banana Bottom* (1933), Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940), Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), and James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on The Mountain* (1953) explore black women characters.

William Wells Brown in *Clotel or The President's Daughter* deals with the agony of a black woman filled with problems of caste and colour. The main characters are all tragic mulattoes. Currer a quadroon is the housekeeper of Thomas Jefferson, the father of her octroon daughters Clotel and Althesa. When he is called to government service, Currer supports herself and her daughter as a laundress, giving them the necessary training to attract admirers at 'Negro ballet'. After the death of their owner, they are auctioned along with other slaves, Clotel is bought by an admirer, Currer and Althesa are sold as slaves.

Clotel's new owner keeps her in a pleasant house. After the birth of a daughter named Mary, Clotel requests him to take them to Europe to save from

persecution though agreeable the circumstances force him into marriage. When his wife knows about the concubine she makes him to sell her out of state but keeps Mary, his daughter, as a slave in her own father's house.

When sold out Clotel is subjected to the cruelty of the master. She tries for freedom by escaping with Mary with her and that makes her to disguise. It coincides with the capture of Nat Turner, so every slave is watched. Clotel is caught but again escapes but to avoid security man approaching to catch her on the river bridge she commits suicide by jumping into the river. She meets a tragic end.

In pre-Harlem Renaissance period Charles Chestnut portrays black woman characters inferior to black male characters. In his first novel *The House Behind the Cedars* he presents Rena Walden a half white woman. She is just an appendage to her brother and lovers. She is unsuccessful, incomplete woman victimized by her skin colour .

Charles Chestnut (1900) continues the mulatto theme. It deals with the story of John and Rena Walden, the mulatto children of Southern aristocrat. Rena yearns for the privileges of the whites but does both have courage and conscience to make any meaningful move in that direction. But she eventually passes for white becomes engaged to a white woman. But when his fiancée learns the truth he repudiates her as his prospective bridge but continues to want her as his mistress.

Sutton E. Griggs in *Pointing the Way* (1908) uses black women characters as spokesmen for the upliftment of the black race. Letitia Gilbreath, a wealthy mulatto school teacher advocates assimilation. So distorted is she in her views that she can not admit good in anything. Eina, Letitia, and Clotille are female aspirations through they aspire different things. Eiva identifies with a down trodden race and advocates subsequent uplift of the race through education. Letitia aspires good life sometimes even Clotille desires to obtain good life sometimes even though the denial of pride in one's race.

W. E. B. Dubois's novel *The Quest of The Silver Fleece* portrays the heroine Zora as an educator, leader straight-haired light skinned mulatto of her earlier fiction into a more credible portrayal of black beauty.

Jean Toomer, a black man who could pass as white also gave expression to the problem of the mulatto woman. In one of his stories in *Cane* (1923), Becky, a white woman has two Negro sons. The town people whisper about her and dislike her. Becky is a white outcast. In another story in *Cane*, "Blood Burning" there are more familiar mulattoes in the black literature who overpraise white and under value black ancestry. Wallace Thurman's *The Blacker the Berry* deals with the problems of dark skinned girl, Emma Lou among her people of lighter skin. She is trying to escape the prejudice and discrimination associated with the black skin. Claude Mckay in *Home to Harlem* (1928) presents black female as minor characters and presents sketches rather than completely developed characters.

Congo Rose is a Cabaret singer. The main character in *Banana Bottom* is a black female-Bita Plant, a Jamaican and Banjo the black woman is exotic.

The treatment of black female character by black major black men writers like Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin is also prejudiced and stereotyped as mama or victim. Richard Wright one of the trio with Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin portrays black woman as emotional. To him, masculine values are more important than feminine ones. In his major novel *Native Son*, Bigger Thomas, the protagonist, who is delineated as important, rapes, brutalizes and kills his black girlfriend Bessie Smith, and he no longer repents. He says :

“I wasn’t in love with Bessie, She was just my Girl...I killed Bessie to save my self”. (Wright 1990:390)

Bigger Thomas’s mother is not portrayed as a full human being, she is a mute character. To Richard Wright black women are only bitches and whores.

Wright’s treatment of black female character is also prejudiced and stereotyped as mama or victim as portrayed in his major novel *Native Son*. This novel reminds us of Bessie Smith, a black female character who is drunk victimized, killed by Bigger Thomas and her dead body is used as an evidence in the case concerning Mary Dalton.

Many black men writers praise the black mothers as they act as providers. Mrs. Thomas, mother of Bigger Thomas in *Native Son* also act as a provider but she works as an intimidator in Bigger’s freedom. She plays a negative role in Bigger’s struggle toward a healthy manhood. Wright is emphatic in her

childraising role. She is stern, cold, distant and unsympathetic. Instead of praise she offers prophecies of doom. Not only this, she sometimes grumbles when Bigger doesn't behave. Many a time she repents and expresses her maternal moan: "Bigger sometimes I wonder why I birthed you" (15).

Bessie Smith, another black female character in *Native Son* is girlfriend of Bigger Thomas. She uses liquor to numb her mind. She like liquor and sex and since Bigger provides with both she like him too. However, Bigger thinks she lives in a too narrow orbit of her life. He ultimately uses and kills her in spite of the fact she is his girlfriend.

On the contrary Ralph Ellison puts black woman on the pedestal of divinity. He denies their ambivalent nature. His novel *Invisible Man* like Richard Wright's *Native Son* is concerned with manhood. Mrs. Mary Rambo is a nursing, caring mother. She is a saintly and divine figure. She reminds us of Virgin Mary. In this novel women are not fully developed and assigned limited roles. The male characters are used symbolically, the women operate nothing more than symbols. In fact these women reflect the distorted stereotypes established by white American male. Ralph Ellison's women characters have not been developed as full human beings. Though Ellison uses his skills as an artist; he depicts, explores and evaluates the humanity of black men, but remain blind to humanity of his black women characters. Sybil, a black woman is not a fully developed human being.

James Baldwin's treatment of Black women is totally different. He represents the black women as serving women-as mothers wives, sisters and lovers. Deborah in *Go Tell It On The Mountain* serves for black men for religious ends. She accepts single mindedly and devotedly the prescribed roles without ever challenging the fundamentals of the churches in black community. Florence in this novel symbolizes black women's suffering persons or mute partners in daily life who are marginalized. In the novels of James Baldwin black woman are depicted with varying degrees of complexity, always resented in relations to men. In his novel *Go Tell It On The Mountain* Baldwin explores black women characters with a sensitivity. He is not concerned with black woman as slave, symbol or myth but the black women as black women with her weakness and with her beauty and her ugliness. Naturally the portrait of the character of Elizabeth Grimes in *Go Tell It On The Mountain* is drawn from a different perspective. Elizabeth Grimes is not a welfare mother she does not hold the family together in the absence of a male provider.

As most of the black male writers have failed in depicting black women in the background of their real, genuine and authentic life, hence the black women have to come themselves to the forefront to reveal their own, real, genuine and authentic selves.

VI. Black Feminist Aesthetics

Black women writers have tried to gain their lost humanity and collective and individual self through their art and literature. But the literature written by black women was not so easily received and recognized by the establishment. Barbara Smith in her "Towards Black Feminist Criticism", Deborah McDowell through "New Directions of Black Feminist Criticism", Mary Helen Washington's in her introduction to *Black Eyed Susans : Classic Stories By and About Black Women* and Barbara Christian in her *Black Woman Novelists : The Development of a Tradition 1872-1976* focus the issue how the black women writers were ignored and neglected. It could be understood in terms of ethnic and gender polemics. Barbara Smith laments that black women's writing was neglected by white male and female critics as well as by black male critics. Similarly Mary Helen Washington was worried about how the writing of black women was never anthologized and never taught in literature courses at college or university level in the beginning.

To neglect the black women writing is not only a white women's job but Black scholar's job also. Robert Stepto in *From Behind The Veil : A Study Of Afro-American Narrative* does not include any black woman writer. Same is the case with Robert Bone's *The Negro Novel in America* or David Littlejohn's *Black on White: A Critical Survey of Writing by American Negroes*. In these works of Black men critics, the black women's writing finds no place or is critically misunderstood or summarily misunderstood.

Though black women deal with the African American experience in general their problem are slightly different from black men and white women. Anna Julia Cooper's *A Voice From The South* (1892) first raised the issue of black women. Gender and race, she argues can not be conflated. As stated earlier the black women's writing is a part and parcel of Black American Literature in general although it has its distinct identity. Since the day Phillis Wheatley raised her voice and published her poems on *Various Subjects, Religion and Moral* in 1771, we heard a new and unique voice that came from a black feminist sensibility. The tradition of African American women's literature has its own aesthetics. It is Black Feminist Aesthetics. Various Black feminist Aestheticians, scholars and critics from time and again have expounded the black feminists aesthetics-its uniqueness, its characteristics and its development from eighteenth century till today.

Mary Helen Washington, Claudia Tate, Deborah E. McDowell, Valerie Smith and Barbara Smith have delineated in what way the African American women's literature differs from others groups in terms of their experience and concerns. Michelle Wallace (1979:106-107) points out how black women were seen by others :

Sapphire Mammy. Tragic Mulatto, Wench. Workhorse, can swing an axe, lift a load, pick cotton with any man. A wonderful housekeeper. Excellent with children, very clean. Very religious. A terrific mother. A great little singer and dancer and devoted teacher and social worker.

This was the general understanding about the black women; quite naturally, therefore, when black women thought of writing of something their concern was themselves. In the words of Mary Helen Washington (1976:X) the main concerns of black women's literature was:

Black woman herself-her aspirations, conflicts, her relationship to her men and to her children, her creativity. The black women writers have looked at the black women from an insider's point of view and tried to discover what happened to the black woman as she raised a family under ghetto conditions. Or as a day worker in some white woman's kitchen or as she lived with a man struggling with his own sense of powerlessness or as she looked into the mirror and tried to see beauty in full features and dark skin.

Claudia Tate (1983:XVII) also contributes her ideas about Black Feminist Aesthetics :

Black women writers project their vision of the world, society , community, family, their lovers, even themselves, most often through the eyes of black female characters and poetic personae. Their angle of vision allows them to see what white people, especially males, seldom see. With one penetrating glance they cut through the layers of institutional racism and sexism and uncover a core of social contradictions and intimate dilemmas which plague all of us regardless of race and gender. Through their art they share their vision of possible resolution with those who can't see.

So black woman is at the centre, core of black women's writing. Hortense Spillers also comments :

Women must seek to become their own proper historical subject in pursuit of its proper object, its proper and specific expression in time. (Bell et.al. 1979:105)

As Spillers points out, the black women writers through the revision of history have reclaimed their past but central place in the past. As suggested by Mary Helen Washington with the written word or fashion their own ceremonies. The woman whose image was controlled and distorted by everyone who has taken up pen, and women who once were described as the 'mules of de world' chose for themselves some brand new imagery.

Many black feminist critics argue that the black women writing is a new branch because of the newness of themes and style of writing. Lorraine Bethel
Comments:

I believe that there is a separate and identifiable tradition of black women writers simultaneously existing within and independent of the American, Afro-American and American female traditions. (Gloria Hull et. al. 1982:178).

Barbara Christian calls it "the development of tradition" from stereotypes to character from dependency to self empowerment, from assimilation to autonomy, from innocence to maturation.

Mary Helen Washington (1982:212) concludes that:

The evolutionary process is both historical and psychological and consists of three interrelated cycles: suspension, assimilation and emergence. This three fold pattern of evolution is applied to black women novelistic tradition.

To prove the separate identity and feature of Black women's writing, Mary Helen Washington (1980:XVI) comments :

They (the black women writer) use specific language, specific symbols, specific images with which they try to record their lives....and try to claim their own name and their own spaces.

The different kind of lives that the African American women shaped their unique and different consciousness. Barbara Smith (1982:157) comments:

Zora Neale Huston, Margaret Walker, Toni, Morrison, Alice Walker incorporate the traditional black female activities of rootworking, herbal medicine, conjuring, and midwifery into the fabric of their stories is not mere coincidence, nor is their use of specific Black female language to express their own and character's thought accidental. The use of Black women's language and cultural experience in book by black women about black women results in miraculously rich coalescing of form and content and also take their writing far beyond the confines of white male literary structures. The black feminist critic would find innumerable commonalities in works by black women.

Black women writers share some commonalities with black men writers and white women writers, but they have their own uniqueness deeply rooted in their triple jeopardy of race gender and class-the racial, sexual poverty stricken atrocities.

VII. Foremothers: The Tradition of African American Women's Fiction

The known tradition of the African American Women's writing begins with Phillis Wheatley, a Black slave woman with her *Poems On Various Subjects, Religion and Moral* in 1773. With the recent unearthing or discovery by Henry Louis Gates Jr., Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* proved to be the first novel by a black woman. Previously Francis Harper's *Iola Leroy* was considered to be the first black feminist novel.

The tradition of African American women's fiction falls into three different phases. The nineteenth century novelists Harriet Wilson, Frances Harper and Pauline Hopkins belong to the first phase. The twentieth century novelists during the Harlem Renaissance up to the 1940s belong to the second phase and the novelist after the 1960s belong to the third modern phase.

The first phase consists of *Our Nig* (1853) by Harriet Wilson, *Iola Leroy Or Shadows Uplifted* (1892) by Frances E. W. Harper and *Contending Forces* (1900) by Pauline Hopkins. Frances Harper's *Iola Leroy* talks of race loyalty and solidarity to a white doctor who proposes her. Race and Spiritual upliftment are the key issues before Harper. Spiritual upliftment was central to a race upliftment in these novelist's views. No advancement could be possible without achieving spiritual enlightenment. These writers somehow came around to believing that such an upliftment, racial and spiritual could be achieved through invoking sympathy in the white minds.

Harper's stance-racial and spiritual enlightenment could be achieved only through placing the parameters of white approval. Houston A. Baker Jr. (1991:32)

argues that Harper like Hopkins can be considered the author of a courtesy book intended for white reading and black instruction.

One of the devices these novelists resorted to for gaining white recognition was creation of mulatto characters. Frado in *Our Nig*, Iola in *Iola Leroy* and Sappho Clark in *Contending Forces* are all near white characters who could pass for white. These characters set a stage for long line of mulatto characters which were to pervade in African American women's novels. By presenting such a lot of characters these novelists endeavored not so much to probe into the miscegenation problem prevalent in those days, but to remain assimilated.

The plantation ideology treated them as breeders of live stock, subhumans and the beasts of burden.

Inherent here is the notion of white superiority and black inferiority based in skin color. Barbara Christian (1985:22) writes:

The literary convention of the novel at that time also legislated that the heroine of a story be beautiful, since physical beauty, at least for a woman was an indication of her spiritual excellence by not just any kind of physical beauty...The nineteenth century heroine not only had to be beautiful physically : she had to be fragile and well bred as well.

Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig : Or Sketches From the Life of a Free Black* (1859) explores the life of an ordinary person in realistic detail. It is an autobiographical novel. She points out how northern caste system and southern slavery were interrelated. It is the first black romance published in America that explores the plight of a woman whose life as an indentured servant duplicates that of her

enslaved sisters. Alfredo the protagonist is born to a racially mixed marriage, and is compelled to hire herself out as a servant girl due to the lack of parental support. Alfredo's misfortune places her in a family dominated by a cruel and extremely bigoted woman who regards her black domestic worker as little more than a piece of property. After many hardships she marries a black antislavery lecturer, but is abandoned soon.

The novel is a woman's growing up story. It is a struggle of Alfredo, a young single woman to achieve economic independence and self-respect. A want of money and social connection handicaps Alfredo profoundly.

Some white character are interested in the upliftment of blacks. But Mrs. Belmont and her daughter Mary try to break Alfredo's spirit, but it can't help. So the novel indicates black woman's intellectual and spiritual development. Mrs. Belmont persecution can't defeat Alfredo's spirit. She wins the struggle of her soul, setting out in the quest of economic, intellectual and spiritual "self improvement". Alfredo is the hallmark of self-reliance and confidence of black women's fiction. Alfredo wins her way.

Before the discovery of *Our Nig*, France Ellen Watkins Harper's *Iola Leroy or Shadows Uplifted* (1893) was considered to be the first novel writing by a black woman. *Iola Leroy* is set up against the Civil War when every black man and woman eagerly took up the opportunity to participate in the conflict they believed would eliminate slavery. Twenty years before the war, Iola's mother, Marie has been freed and married to her master. Despite Marie's protest, her husband Leroy

insists on “protecting” their three children from knowledge of their black heritage, thus all three children grow up believing themselves to be white. As soon as Eugene dies, his cousin finds loopholes in Marie’s marriage contract and manumission, takes possession of the Leroy plantation, and remands Marie and her children to slavery. We first meet Iola, who is freed from slavery and is a nurse in war. Later, she rejects a white doctor’s suggestion that she marry and pass for white, because she wants to be identified with her blackness and wants to search her family after war. In the end there is a family reunion and she marries mulatto doctor and pledges to dedicate her life for the upliftment of Black race.

Iola is a beautiful mulatto slave rescued from her cruel master by the Army and sent that to works as nurse in a Union camp. There she meets Dr. Gresham the hospital physician and a wealthy white man, who falls in love with this beautiful dedicated woman, but Iola refuses to marry Gresham because he is white. After the war she is reunited with her family. She goes North where she meets another handsome black physician Dr. Frank Latimer whom she marries and works for the race.

With race loyalty, Iola is assigned a political role-of speaking out against slavery, of refusing to marry a white man. She acknowledges kinship to the black people and insists for the struggle for the race.

Pauline Hopkins’s *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrating of Negro Life in North And South* (1900) written to preserve race memories as Hopkins points out in the preface of novel. In this novel, women develop friendship and live in a

little community in Ms. Smith's house. They are intelligent, and also have work. Dora and her mother run a boarding house, and Sappho who is typing is a stenographer. Sappho and Dora discuss men to politics.

Mary Helen Washington (1987-86) comments that in *Contending Forces* as well as *Iola Leroy*, women characters play a central role :

In contrast to their famous male contemporaries Charles Chestnutt, Paule Lawrence Dunbar, and William Wells Brown-Harper and Hopkins put woman's lives, women's activities, and women's feelings into the foreground of their fiction. They reverse the image of the tragic mulatto heroine, devising ways for their heroines to become political and social activist. The sentimental novel's concept of marriage as an emotional and economic refuge, for the helpless female is rejected. These heroines marry men for support in their work.

Sappho like Iola can pass for white and secure and rich white husband but she chooses the life's mission for black brethren.

The Second Phase of African American women's fiction begins with the Harlem the Renaissance of the 1920s and 30s the African American artists intoning what Alain Locke described as the "New Negro" mood, made conscious efforts to create the works of art which focused unabashedly on black heritage and inherent racial character. They wanted to sing a song of black self:

We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not

their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand up on the top of the mountain, free within ourselves (Langston Hughes 1926: 694).

In Harlem Renaissance the artist emphasized on the truthful interpretation of the black race and overall controlling symbols of blackness. Its major themes were full of self assertion and vitality.

The two black women artists to emerge during this epoch were Jessie Fauset and Nella Larsen. When others were talking of racial solidarity and creative independence and not imitating white literary and cultural models, Jessie Redmon Fauset and Nella Larsen were constructing of "mulatto utopia under the sign of passing". Their attempt to wash the black race whiter than snow indicated that their creative vision was not commensurate with the revolutionary spirit of the age.

Jessie Fauset has four novels to her credit *Chinaberry Tree* (1931), *Plum Bun* (1929), *There Is Confusion* (1924) and *Comedy, American Style* (1933). Her middle class heroines are Laurisentine Strange, Angela Murraby, Joanna Marshall and Oliva Carry. She portrays the experiences of what Franklin Frazier calls "black bourgeois". Her novels unravel the conventional love plot. Her heroines are in search of marriage, men, social standing, clothings, Sunday and ball-room parties. Passing and not passing and sharing love with their lovers. Her heroines are situated in the drawing or ball-rooms as in the novels of Jane Austen. They are designed to be the near Causasian Bourgeois ladies. They are well dressed well fed (*Plum Bun*:22). Women for whom their fair skin is a continual source of pride.

Her family characters not only look white but act white. They attend high school, colleges, art academies and medical schools. They speak standard English with no use of black slang or dialect. They prefer white schools to Negro schools like Howard, Fisk or Tuskegee. They play tennis, bridge, Parcheesi, they go skating and rowing. They talk of the theatre of dances, of small clubs, of hikes of classes, at Columbia or New, York City of classes, at Columbia or New York City college (*Plum Bun* : 211). Being educated, they have a sense of independence and a personal self-confidence which make them feel equal to the whites, (*There is Confusion*: 148,184) and feel also about that “the world’s our as much as it is their”(ibid:182).

Jessie Fauset’s heroines are the victims of ‘passing’. Confronted with the society which offers immense advantage to the white skinned people and incredible hardships and problems to black skinned the light skinned mulattoes in her novels desire to cross the color line, ‘Pass’ as white, and to be totally immersed with white, world. Angela Murray in *Plum Bun* passes for white and her ideology is ‘that the great rewards of riches, glamour, pleasure are for white skinned people only’ (17). Fauset, philosophy that black race can find uplift through assimilation become visible in her portrayal of Olivia Carry in *Comedy, American Style*. The Nordic supremacy makes these heroines to abhor the downtrodden members of black community. Fauset’s female characters are the shadow images of the whites. They are dangling figures belonging to no group, rejected by both. Even the common black folk disown them.

Fauset's creative vision is fraught with delusion and misconceived perception regarding race reality. Her heroine's quest for passing and desire for material acquisition and the American Dream indicates that they have internalized the notions of white superiority and black inferiority.

Fauset created 'unreal women' in the period of identity crisis when Harlem was in vogue and when black artists were crying to understand the meaning of their marginality and grant weight to their cultural and literary voices. Fauset perpetuated the 19th century stereotypical images of black womanhood (Christian : 1985:46). Race upliftment through bourgeois appearance. It is new auction block where they sold not only slave bodies but racial consciousness. Physical slavery ended but psychic slavery continued.

Joanne Marshall, the heroine in *There Is Confusion* is self assured practical, aims to become great. She vows :

I am not sure how, I can't be like those wonderful women. Harriet (Tubman) and Sojourner (Truth), but at least I wont be ordinary" (14).

With these allusion to Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth, both women's rights activists and abolitionists who "won their way to fame and freedom through their own efforts".(14) Though the novel is a love story between the heroine Joanne and her lover, Pater Bye, marriage holds little attraction for Joanne. Fauset defies the cult of domesticity.

In *The Chinaberry Tree*, Lawrence Strange, the mulatto heroine ostracized by the small town in which she lives because of her mothers liaison with white

man. Laurentine wants to marry Phil Hackett, a respectable black community member. Her aim is to prove the decency to the whites. The chinaberry tree is a symbol of the illicit love Aunt Saul and Colonel Hallway.

Plum Bun is anti romantic and mixture of tragic and comic elements. Mattie and her daughter Angela Murray indulge their desire for excitement and freedom by passing for white. Being colored is a curse shown through Angela's colored sister Virginia. There is the melodramatic revelation of Angela's fate after she confesses her black identity. In the end Angela chooses of life of poverty and self-respect with her mulatto sister Anthony Cross, after rejecting a life of wealth with her racist, sexist white, Roger Fielding. She unites with Anthony, who had been passing for white in the United States.

Comedy : American Style is a domestic tragedy dramatizing the result of Olivia Carry's urge to whiteness. Olivia, deeply dislikes her parents for having "made her colored" grow up in New England. Passing as an Italian and married Christopher Carry because he is medical doctor and the father of white children. So she makes her daughter Taresa into a loveless marriage to a Frenchman, her dark skinned son Oliver to suicide and her indulgent husband to depression and bankruptcy. In the end Olivia is dispirited, lonely woman marooned in Paris Pension.

In these novels Fauset portrays the cultural dilemma of passing of middle class mulatto women. She presented the alternative role of womanhood other than marriage and motherhood. Hence Deborah McDowell aptly states that Fauset persisted in her

attempt to correct the distorted but established images of black life and culture and to portray women and blacks with more complexity and authenticity than was popular at her time. Fauset portrays the upper middle class Negro of her days. As per the tradition her heroines are light-skinned who suffer a crisis of mishaps.

Nella Larsen another voice that emerged during the Harlem Renaissance. Her two novels *Quicksand* (1928) and *Passing* (1929) fictionalized mulatto sensibilities. She also continues the tradition of middle class mulatto characters questing for the American Dream, but she does not romanticize them. They suffer from intellectually and emotionally. The “pathos and hollowness of the middle class mulatto image” that makes Larsen different from others (Christian 1985:47). Their racial dualism and mixed heritage produces “psychic confusion” (McDowell 1986:XV) in their minds.

Helga Crane, Irne Redfield and Crare Kendry are the tragic mulatto figures in her novels. Their search is for the meaningful “personhood” and human values through the identification with the black community and their wish to reap the material comforts offered by the dehumanizing white world. Their fractured psyche is the DuBoisean “double-consciousness” looking at one’s self through the eyes of other, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of the world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (DuBois 1961:16-17).

Helga Crane the protagonist in Larsen’s first novel *Quicksand* (1928) is educated by her white uncle after the death of her parents. Helga embarks on a teaching career at Naxos (as anagram of Sexon), a southern Negro college modeled

on Tuskegee Institute. Her middle class behaviour makes her different from other Naxos people. Her bourgeois ideals make her alienated socially and culturally.

Disillusioned by the realities of Negro education south she comes to Harlem. Basically a mulatto bourgeois she clings to the white ways of black folk. Their sophisticated talk parties, clothes. The Harlem of black folks becomes oppressive like Naxos. Unable to form meaningful relations with Dr. Anderson, Harlem activist she escapes to Copenhagen. Denmark promises “no Negroes, no problems no prejudice” (103). Helga wanted “not money but things which money could give, leisure attention, beautiful surroundings. Things. Things. Things. (Larsen 1971:119) She marries to her lover Axel Olson.

Impoverished she return to Harlem. She tries to marry Dr. Anderson. She seduces reverend pleasant Dr. Green, a southern preacher and marries him. And now yoked by marriage the birth of four children and the fifth waiting to be born sap al her energy. She ends in a life of misery, friendliness. Nella Larsen explores psychological contours of black women’s lives. To Cheryl Wall (1986:105) passing is not only a sociological phenomenon of black crossing the color line, it is both the loss of identity and the denial of self.

Nella Larsen deals the problem of black woman middle class through her novels. Her novels are autobiographical.

Passing is the story of Clair Kendry and Irne Redfield. Both are light enough to pass but their lives differ widely. Claire is the product of a battered childhood. She decides to takes risks to get what she wants. She passes over into the white

world and marries a man who is an avowed “Negro hater”. Irne Redfield lives in a middle class family. She marries a doctor and continues the middle class life. Claire and Irne encounter each other in Chicago Claire Confesses to Irne to be around the members of her own race. She requests Irne to visit her house and Irne agrees. Irne finds an attraction between Claire and her husband, but Claire’s husband begins to suspect her blackness. He rushes to her but she falls to death.

The African American women’s fiction during the Harlem Renaissance is emphasized by the thrust of the black woman’s drive towards economic stability and problem of passing. But Zora Neale Hurston concentrated her efforts on depicting the black woman who is neither after passing or hiding her identity, but after self-fulfillment and after attaining her female autonomy. As a prolific writer she wrote novels short stories plays, two books of folklore and an autobiography. She wrote four novels but her reputation as a novelist rests entirely on her classic novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1932).

Hurston is the first Black woman to study black folklore and common speech. She used Southern folk tradition, common, rural Negro speech manners and superstitions as the stuff of her writings. Hurston attempted to bring black women from the towers of white middle class bourgeois and placed them on the pedestal of reality and filled their voice with a tone of commonalities that were missing in Afro-American literature. She was a folklorist, novelist and anthropologist.

The major themes in her novels are search for black women's self-fulfillment through community, quest for ideal relationship between men and women, black women's sisterhood, and significance of fidelity in interpersonal relationship. The thematic pattern so well supported by folkloric oral tone, the language, which is "authentic dialect of black rural life", and characters firmly rooted in black culture not only distinguishes her from her predecessors but also add to the novelty of her fictional design.

Hurston not only preserves black folk culture but even contributes to the definition of women's selfhood. Like Jessie Fauset and Nella Larsen, Hurston does not employ 'Passing' theme. Unlike her predecessors' heroines Hurston's women continually quest for personal freedom and self love by placing themselves in relation to the community they live in. It is in within her Southern black community that Janie Mae Crawford determines her own destiny as she makes decisions and accepts responsibility of the consequence of her actions. Their search is not for things but people. Her stories are not peopled with superhuman or victims but with persons confronted with commonplace situations in life. This ordinariness of their lives interrelated to common folk around which weaves the tapestry of life for Hurstons women.

Hurston's treatment of folk culture and the woman writing it signals/singles her place in black female literary tradition. By presenting women as persons capable of making independent decision and determining their own course of action, Hurston overthrows many stereotypes of black women and

added definitive change to the development of black woman's literature in America.

Their Eyes Were Watching God made Hurston the pioneer of the Black Feminist revolt. (Cheryll Wall 1989:371) thinks that "Hurston was the first to create language and imagery that reflected the reality of black women's lives, while Mary Helen Washington calls Janie as the earliest heroic black woman in the Afro-American literary tradition.

Their Eyes Were Watching God is the story of Janie who is involved in four consecutive love relationships : her first encounter with Johny Taylor her first marriage to Logan Killick and her subsequent marriages to Joe Starks and then to Tea Cake Woods. Each new lover brings about both a change and setting and a new stage in the story of Janie's life.

Though each of the relationship differs from the other, Janie is involved passionately only two of them: her romance with Johny Taylor and her marriage with Tea Cake and unhappy in the marriages with Logan Killicks an Joe Starks.

Nanny, Janie's grand mother arranges her marriage with Logan Killicks because to be the wife of a rich and a self reliant black man is a virtue. Janie is awakened to the possibilities of love and life after sixteen. After spending a spring afternoon watching bees pollinating a blossoming pear tree-the symbol of love, marriage and procreation Janie is seen by her grandmother allowing a boy to kiss her. This event reminds Nanny of her experience during slavery of being impregnated by her master, and also of her seventeen year old daughter's rape, impregnation, and

dissolution and of her own immanent death. This compels her moral imperative to protect her grand daughter so Nanny decides to marry off Janie to Logan Killicks before she dies. Nanny transfers the knowledge about racial sexual and class politics that she has to Janie:

Honey, de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out. May be its some place way off in de ocean where de black man is in power but we don't know nothin' but what we see. So de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He hand it to his woman folks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world. So fur as Ah can see. (62).

Because Nanny was born in slavery, she could not fulfill her dreams as a woman but now Janie can fulfill them.

Janie is a mulatto who attempts to discover her self and tries to express her own being. For the sake of security Nanny marries the sixteen year old girl Janie to old Logan Killicks. But she finds that such a marriage didn't make love. And to she falls in love with Joe Stark, a black entrepreneur, who takes her away from Logan and marries her. Joe Stark develops a black town and become its mayor. But he installs her as a queen in porch and cuts her off form any real contact with other people. She is transformed by him into a showpiece and piece of property.

Thus after twenty years of marriage Stark dies and Janie falls in love with Tea Cake a man many years younger than her. With the arrival of Tea Cake her dream is fulfilled. A fun-loving, guitar-playing knife-carrying, handsome young migrant "he looked like the love thought of women. He could be a bee to a blossom-pear tree blossom in spring...he was a glance from God." (62)

Janie and Tea Cake marry and move to the everglades where they enjoy working playing and living among black workers. But their love ends tragically for Janie has to kill her crazy lover who had been bitten by a rabid dog. Thus, Hurston in the form of Janie crates a new black women character. Barbara Christian (1985:57) comments that for the first time in black literature we feel the growing up of a black girl not from without but from within, Janie as a symbolic character defies her status as the mule of the world. As a black woman she dreams grown lovely. The novel emphasizes the feminine quest. Janie is portrayed as one of the strongest black female characters and projected her search for true selfhood. In this way she differs from the earlier black women heroines in black feminist fiction.

The Great Depression of 1930s collapsed the nation's economy. 'The hungry thirties' witnessed poverty, misery, malnutrition, reigned and gave birth to black protest literature whose father was Richard Wright, who tried to come to grip the harsh realities of the black urban life. His first novel *Native Son* (1940) set the revolutionary tone.

The black women novelist to emerge in this period is Ann Petry. Her reputation as a novelist rests on her novel *The Street* (1946). It is a depressing story of the blacks in the ghettos not having decent and meaningful lives. It introduces Lutie Johnson, "Being a young, charming black and poor woman of twenty five", Lutie becomes the victim of the Harlem society. A motherless child, she is raised by her grandmother who dies when Lutie is unable to find life in the company of

her unemployed alcoholic father, she marries Jim Johnson. A son is born to them. Because of economic depression Jim is unemployed and Lutie has to earn the bread. She accepts domestic employment. Jim takes another women and Lutie loses her house, husband. She comes to New York with her son, but can't escape the ruins of the street. As the novel ends, she forsakes her son, murders the lustful landlord, takes off to Chicago. She is defeated by the circumstances. The street is a wasteland of human suffering.

Ann Petry's prominent novel *The Street* focuses black heroine Lutie Johnson's struggle to hold her family together as a single mother, to create a career as a singer, and to fight against the male domination, objectifying the female. Lutie, a good looking, brown-skinned girl is brought up by her grandmother with a message taught to take care of herself so that "no whiteman put his hand on you".

Though brown skinned she fits the stereotype of the tragic mulatto. She seems to be cut of from the community and although she is a beautiful woman she refuses to use her charms to further her life. In the words of Barbara Christian (1980:65), Petry presents Lutie Johnson as having the soul of Iola Leroy to counteract the prevailing image that lower class black women are whores. As a mother she wants to protect her child's life in ghetto. She works as a live-in-domestic maid for the Chandlers and as a result finds her husband in the company of other black women. Through Jim, her husband, she has a son. But she takes Bud and leaves the family after understanding that she can not improve Jim. Also as a single parent, Lutie desperately seeks to find a suitable job to raise her son.

Everywhere she finds people looking at her as a sex object. William Jones the superintendent of the building harasses and attempts to rape her.

Everywhere she seeks job is looked up on as a whore. The rich white family, the Chandlers where she works as a domestic maid, regards her as workhorse and a sexual threat. After failing to get a job she wanders into white Junto's bar. Boots Smith, the black henchman of Junto tries to trap her. Meanwhile Bud her son is arrested for a crime of breaking a mailbox. Seeking to borrow the unwanted money from Boots, she strikes him back on his abusing her.

The novel portrays a black women trapped in his triple discrimination of race, class and sex. The Chandlers are racist and sexist toward Lutie. Junto is a misfit white man. He controls Mrs. Hedges, who lives in one of his apartments and run a whorehouse. She perceives Lutie as a 'prized catch. The novel depicts the black ghetto is not only a social, political, educational and economic but a sexual colony, where black people are slaves and black women are multiple slaves. The black women are slaves of white racist society which exploits their labour. They are also the slaves of blackmen.

Dorothy West's only novel *The Living Is Easy* (1948) is the story of Cleo Jericho Judson seen through the eyes of her only child, Judy. Cleo, born in South and now living in Boston is the wife of Bart Judson, twenty three years senior and proprietor of a successful business – Bartholomew Judson, Foreign and Domestic : "The Black Banana King" as he is called. Bart is no match to his wife who calls

him Mr. Nigger. Story of strained marriage-Cleo wants more money than Bart can give, and Bart wants more affection, warmth than Cleo can give him.

Cleo Judson is the sense of the tension and disaster that her family confronts. She has ruthless success desire. This is the world of crass materialism. Cleo gives birth to her daughter Judy, who has the coco brown skin color of her husband. She is upset. Her effort to change denial of daughter's nose represent her denial her race and self hatred.

Her quest for material acquisition makes Cleo a manipulative woman. She manipulates her sisters to come to live with them so that they can serve as a barrier between Bart and herself. She demands more money and puts enormous pressures on her husband. The First World War crumbles Bart's banana business making Cleo economically helpless and powerless. She also socially breaks down. At the end of the novel she looks pathetic and tragic. The marriage disintegrates. Her husband alone goes to New York. Her sisters leave her.

From the late forties to the early sixties African American literary scene was dominated by Richard Wright, James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison. The only black American women writer who wrote during this period is Gwendolyn Brooks who wrote her only novel *Maud Martha* (1953). The novel is a female *Bildungsroman* of young urban black girl. While presenting a young black girl coming into womanhood, Brooks never employs the stereotypes used by her predecessors.

Martha's concern is with life itself. It is the tone of commonplaces and touch of everydayness that fills the course of her life. Portrayal of Martha's inner

life, her thought and reflections on the limited world appears to be the authors sole motif. She wants to catch only a human pain felt by an ordinary mind in the small novella. She wants to catch the ordinariness of life, and as the pain of the black women. She is presented as a daughter and then as a mother. She is like Hurston's Janie.

The novel charts out the life of a black girl growing adolescence to womanhood. It singles a departure in both form and content from the conventional novel. Divided into 34 chapters it presents the life of Maud Martha from the age of seven to post World War II, when she is a married woman with one daughter and awaiting her second child. These 34 vignettes ranging from one half to ten pages in length are portrayals of Maud. The novel is set in South side Chicago in the 1930s and 1940s. She wants to be cherished like her beautiful sister Helen. With the birth of her daughter she is a full-fledged womanhood. The novel closes Martha waiting for a second child.

Gwendolyn Brooks autobiographical novel depicts the scars that the blackness creates in the heart of a woman. It is a novel about bitterness, rage self-hatred and the silence that results from suppressed anger. It is a story of Maud Martha an ordinary black woman with color prejudice, a chauvinistic husband. Her "dearest wish" in life is to be cherished by those she loves, especially her husband whom she criticize for his insensitivity and demands.

The color white for her is the paragon of perfection and as she is black she neglects herself, and feels inferior

amongst the inferiors even in her own eyes. Such a state is the most wretched state in the life of individual.

Such a person becomes aware of her deformation and isolates oneself from the mainstream life or feels inferior with one's own self in the presence of other. It is shown through her white schoolmate Charles's visit to her home. For Maud Martha she is the whole "a colored" race and Charles "entire white race".

Maud Martha always experiences negation, as her family members prefer Helen Paul, Maud Martha's husband prepares to dance with Maella, a red haired white. This silences her. By giving birth to a white child Maud understands her own power.

Louise Mariwether's only novel *Daddy Was a Number Runner* (1970) is set in Harlem during Depression. It introduces Henrietta Coffin, who like Luttie Johnson is nailed down with frustration fear, unrelenting struggle and victim like Luttie Johnson, Henrietta is black mother involved in a grim struggle against ghetto conditions and economic insecurity and is busy of the way out. For her "life ain't been a crystal stair". Her husband James lost a job fairly well paid, came to Harlem, and became a number runner. The numbers of black people's stock market. With no support from her husband, Henrietta fights her way out single handedly and emerges as a protective barrier to her children in the midst of destruction. She tells her energy to white women. Her concern to protect her daughter Francia and her son from the surrounding devastation. She sells Rathbones for employing Francie, her little daughter for menial tasks like sturdy

black bridge. She advises her daughter not to do the menial work in white people's houses. Her distant struggle is against poverty and starvation. So Francie has to suffer at the hands of the butcher. Meriwether is the first Afro-American novelist to describe the denigrating effects of the depression on the black family. She fails to save her children from racism and poverty. Her fifteen years old James Jr. takes to the streets, joins a violent gang and is finally imprisoned. Sterling fails in his career and drops out of school and takes a low paid menial job. Each of them is led to the death as the family name Coffin suggests. Henrietta emerges a tragic person, her struggle against economic depression makes her disillusioned.

The Third Phase of African American women's fiction begins with Paule Marshall. Paule Marshall of Barbadian roots wrote *Brown Girl, Brownstone* (1959), *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* (1969), and *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983). In her novels Marshall highlights the dilemma of black woman of West Indian as an African American.

Brown Girl, Brown Stone is concerned with the life of a girl growing up in Brooklyn, the daughter of black immigrants from the Caribbean Island of Barbados. The Brownstone of the title refers to the milieu in which row houses around Fulton Park which, as the action of the novel begins in the year 1939, the last white residents are leaving, renting or selling their houses to the black West Indian and Barbadians in particular. Acquiring the ownership of these Brownstone houses acquiring property and an identity as middle class homeowners in their new country is the main goal and obsession of many of the

Barbadian immigrants and it is for this dream that they go mad and do not hesitate even to kill each other. The novel is based on the Boyce family's disagreement over whether or not to buy the Brownstone in which they are living. Everybody in the Boyce family-Silla Boyce, Deighton Boyce and Selina Boyce is defined by his/her attitude towards this central question. The novel also traces a young Brooklyn girl, Selina. Boyce's growth from adolescence to adulthood. The mother Silla is industrious, her father is a dreamer and handsome. Selina experience the love-hate relationship of her parents.

Divided into four parts the novel begins with the introduction of the family. Later it depicts Selina's adolescence and the atmosphere of World War II is also evoked. Deighton Boyce refuses to sell a piece of his inherited property in Barbados in order to buy the Brownstone in Brooklyn. But Silla manages to sell the land by forgery and without informing her husband. But when money is sent to New York, Deighton spends it on clothes and gifts instead of a payment. Later Deighton enrolls himself as a member of a sect called 'Father Peace' a religious movement that makes people to sever family relationship. Silla is so outraged that she informs the police him to be an illegal immigrant and he is deported. Shortly before his ship docks in Barbodas Deighton goes overboard and is drowned.

Selina Comes to terms with her father's death and her mother's attempts of house ownership. She attends a college, has a love affair. The novel concludes with Selina planning a trip Barbodas and understand her own people.

Paule Marshall's second novel *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* moves beyond the individual self to the collective self. The title indicates that it concerns not with persons but with the people. The principal theme is the clash of cultures and the necessity of the people to know its heritage. The protagonist of the novel is the Bournehills, a remote section of Bourne Island, a Caribbean Island obviously patterned after Barbodas.

The white liberal social anthropologist Saul Amron, his wife Harriet, and his young assistant Allen Puso come to this chosen place. They are backed by the Center for Applied Social Research (CASR). They are going to study Bourne hills and improve it. Their key contact is Marle Kinbona, a woman of mixed blood, who was educated in England. When her Ugandan husband leaves her, taking their little daughter to Africa, Marle returns to Bournehills for healing.

The novel highlights the cultural differences between Euro-America and black. The impact of the white culture is negative. Marle Kinbona, as a young student in England was drawn into a lesbian relationship with a white woman who after their long affair, ruined Marle's marriage by telling Marle's Ugandan husband about the affair. Marle knits the whole novel together: the American, the middle-class professionals from the capital, the night club cronies, the plantation overseers and the "little fellas" of Bournehills.

The major plot is related to Saul Amron, who has deserted a Peruvian wife who died of a miscarriage while out on field with him in Honduras. His self assessed guilt for this incident had taken out of fieldwork altogether until he met

Harriet, who becomes his second wife. But Bournehills resisted change : a little cut off community that had in the days of slavery, conducted a successful slave revolt and had never, forgotten it. It was a community of cane-cutters and fisher folk that strangely clung to its memorial, which is Africa, living it and resisting all efforts to modernized it.

Marle has an affair with Saul, that precipitates Harriet's suicide and Sual's removal from the projects. In the end she leaves the island to seek her husband and daughter in Africa. Marshall has highlighted the predicament of Marle a West Indian woman.

Marshall's third novel, *Praise Song for the Widow*, deals mainly with a black woman character, a widow called Avey Johnson. The widow, Avey (Avatara) Johnson, is affluent ready for retirement from her supervisory job at the State Motor Vehicle Department, and lives in the fashionable section of New York. Her late husband, Jerome, literally worked himself to death to attain this affluence.

The main points of the book is the story of Ibo landing, told repeatedly to the little girl Avey by her Great-Great-Aunt Cuney in the Island of Tatum, a story handed down by Aunt Cunney's grandmother. Avatara, who was said to have been an eyewitness a group of Ibos was brought in chains from a salve ship. Upon stepping out of the landing they looked around looked far into their future and decided not to stay. They turned chain and all, and walked on the water, walked 'singing out past the ship, all the way back to Africa'. The child Avatara no older than young Avey, the avid listener followed them in mind, and from that time

people through her peculiar because her body was in Tatum ,her mind, they said was in Africa with the company of Ibos.

As the novel opens Avey has come from that time of five generations. A widow in her mid-sixties, she is the middle of a Caribbean Cruise aboard a luxury liner appropriately named the Binaca Pride. But she drops at Grenade at the time of annual excursion where she meets Carriacou Lebert Joseph, an elderly proprietor, here she understands the community life as Selina and Merle do. So the underlying principle of the novel is Avey Johnson's reconnection with the racial past through her visit to the island of Corriacou, and her participation in 'Beg Pardon' ritual dance.

Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982), *Linden Hills* (1986) and *Mama Day* (1989) have a strong significance of place on her characters and the setting of her stories. As pointed by Barbara Christian (1990:348), like Toni Morrison, Gloria Naylor too is intrigued by the effect of place on characters. It has some bearing and relationship to the African-American sense of displacement. Displaced from Africa and then through migration from South to North, constant wandering has been a part of history.

Her first novel is set in Brewster Place and second in Linden, geographical fictional worlds, inhabited by blacks. Linden Hills is a posh upper, middle-class settlement and Brewster place is the last stop of the road to the bottom of American society, where the black women live when they can not afford to live anywhere else.

The Woman of Brewster Place is a novel in seven stories divided into seven chapters which focus on different women which have different versions of racism and sexism. Brewster Place, the setting of the novel is a dead end street with four double housing units. The first occupants were Irish, then Mediterranean and then black. The 'colored daughters' living here are poor, black uneducated black women.

The seven women of the Brewster Place are Mattie Michael, an unwed mother, Ella Mae Johnson, a middle aged women; Kiswana Browne, a middle aged woman, Lucille Louise Turner, who tolerates abuse from her husband, Cora Lee, another unwed mother and Lorraina and Theresa "The Two", lesbians. Though these women live in the same locality their plight differs. The novel's prologue and epilogue entitled "Dawn" and "Dusk" bring out how the place came into being out of corruption so that only poor colored females remained and the Mediterraneans moved out.

Mattie Michael, the first woman is seduced by Buch Fuller, a black ruffian. Etta Mae, Mattie's friend who is a sassy rejected the sexual advances of a white male, that resulted in the destruction of her father's property and led her to leave the home down. The third chapter delineates Kiswana Browne, a middle-class black woman who had moved to Brewster place because she rejects her middle-class background in Linden Hills. Luceilia Louise Turner's story deals with the theme of conflicts between black men and women. Because of his limited job opportunities and utter poverty, Eugene frustrated in his attempts to keep a job

which he believes he reflects his manhood often uses hostile and combative language in his interaction with Ciel, but she on the other hand makes adjustments. The chapter dealing with Cora Lee depicts an irresponsible mother. The last chapter deal with two black lesbian lovers, Lorraine and Thersa.

Naylor's second novel *Linden Place* deals with the black man's effort to realize his American dream. Linden Hills is a mini-universe, a housing development area handed down to Luther Nedeed since 1820 by the first Luther Nadeed, a man who purchased his freedom and went to the North, found Lindern Hills. After the first Luther Nedeed, each subsequent generation has a son named Luther who looks exactly like his father. Likewise, each generation marries a light skinned woman who is immediately absorbed into the identity of Mrs. Nedeed. However their wives were not allowed to mix freely with other families. The isolation of wives reflects the life of all the residents of Linden Hills.

Linden Hills centres around the theme of black men's oppression black women. Luther Nadeed's philosophy of life established the rule for the generation that followed. Men are important : they control life and death. Women are not important, they are owned, bred and forgotten. An economically astute mean Nedeed, never saw women as human beings. There are a variety of women characters in the novel, however they grow in isolation from each other. The second generation mother of Linden Hills share as coming together out of a fellow-feeling and creating a genuine community. The young women also tend to fare badly and remain detached from each others.

The novel is the story of a black patriarch who fights against racism thinking that he is a demigod who can rule the life of other inferior African Americans. As women come last in the social hierarchy, he sidetracks, neglects and tortures them believing they have no role to play except bearing children. And once she becomes a mother and helps him in giving a heir her role in this world is finished. Black women for him is a child producing machine.

The life of Willa Nedeed, the wife of Luther Nedeed, is a slavery full of horrors. Willa Prescott Nedeed is a graduate, self-sufficient and an employed person. However, she is conditioned to believe that a woman is incomplete unless she marries, so she marries Luther Nedeed and starts losing her own selfhood. Willa is dark skinned but bears a fair son. Nedeed considers the child a bastard, and to punish his wife he locks her and the six-year old boy in the morgue-basement of their home. Due to this ill-treatment the boy dies. In the basement she learns the history of all previous women such as Luwans Packerville Nedeed, Evelyn Creton Nedeed, Priscilla McGuine Nedeed etc. The record, left for her by former Nedeed wives in their journals hidden in the Bibles, cookbooks and the pictures.

Willa's experience is similar to that of Luwana Packervible , who become insane who kept in solitary confinement. As a slave she was purchased by Luther Nedeed and later married to him. Willa reads the Luwana's diary full of tortures-her child is weaned forcibly from her.

Willa is permitted to perform social functions befitting Luther's wife, but she has no opportunity to develop women friends. She knows that she is trapped like Luwana while Luwana was a slave, Willa is a college graduate with a job and some control over her life. Willa then discovers the history of second Nedeed wife, Evelyn Creton Nedeed. Who killed herself by consuming rat poison. Priscilla McGuine Nedeed, wife of third Luther Nedeed is more sophisticated who reveals her history through photoalbum.

Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* portrays the story of Sapphire Wade and her descendent Miranda or Mama Day. The title *Mama Day* is taken from an insightful practitioner of herbal medicine who is merely hundred years of age. The place is Willo Springs, the island off the coast of Georgia and South Carolina, which was deeded by a slave owner to his slaves in the 1920s at the instance of one them, Sapphira Wade, the man's wife and mother of his seven sons. Georgia and South Carolina then fought to get control of the island but failed the island belong to the foremothers of Cocoa and the black community. Since then the island is dominated by the elderly matriarch "Miranda" or Mama Day. Any thing can happens in Willow Springs. "Miranda or Mama Day can tame lightening and heal wounds through magic or the ingredients of her medicine.

In her previous novel of Naylor, the geographical location of her character Mama Day is promised and dead are as alive in the form of spirits in the island Willow springs. The first half of the book deals with the story of Cocoa and George's stormy courtship. The second half recounts George and Cocoa's fateful

summer visit to Willow Springs. Cocoa is a young woman who has left Willow Springs for New York. However urban her life is, she feels an undeniable pull or love. Each August she returns to the island for a visit. When she brings along her husband George and sees the forces of island, and Mama Day, unleashed.

When George first comes to Willow spring, he knows he is entering another world. In it Cocoa's great aunt Mama Day is a matriarch, living for 90 years. She is a midwife, knows herbal medicine respected by everyone on the island. She also has second sight. She spends time with her dead ancestors. She lives in world of ghosts, ancestors, premonitions and deep communion with nature.

George takes his job as an engineer, own Slaten Island. He does not bear the burden of the kind of heritage that Cocoa has. He was raised in orphanage, so knows self reliance and self-discipline. So he is opposite to Cocoa. The main problem of the novel is to come to terms with ones own ancestral heritage. Cocoa has realized her ancestral heritage like her great aunt Mama Day. In the novel's climax Cocoa's threatened life is saved by Mama Day.

Thus Gloria Naylor tries to project black woman's predicament in America and delineates the way they become aware about themselves and their life.

Alice walker (1983:XI) moving one step ahead defines "womanist," rather than black feminist. She explains the term :

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1. A black feminist or feminist of color.

2. Also a woman who loves another women, sexually and/or nonesexually. Appreciates and prefers woman's culture, women's emotional flexibility. (Values tears an natural counter balance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes love individual men, sexually and/or other women. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people male and female.

Her novels: *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970) *Meridian* (1976), *The Color Purple* (1982), *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989) and her other writings prove this point.

In *The Third Live of Grange Copeland* Walker aims to explore the relationship between men and women and why women are always condemned for doing what men do as an expression of their masculinity. All the major women characters in the novel such as Margaret, Mem, and Josie are abused as whores by their own people. Walker tries to tell their side of the story in the novel.

Though apparently it is the story of Grange Copeland, it is also the story of the suffering, pains and hardships that black women-Margaret, Mem, Josie, face in their life. These three characters-Margaret, Mem and Josie, have been victimized by the black men. Margaret was left behind discarded and abandoned by Grange to die a silent death; Mem was killed at the gunpoint by own husband, Brownfield and Josie was driven out of by her own father, a man who stood for religion. Thus just as the white man becomes a symbol of black man's oppression a black man become the symbol of the black woman's oppression.

The novel indicates that out of the three lives of Grange Copeland the protagonist, the "third life is most significant. First phase places him in the white dominated sharecropper's world that generate in himself hatred and rebuilds in violence that he inflicts on his wife, Margaret and denies parental love and care to his son, Brownfield.

The second phase takes him to the North and hates his oppressor, the white man. The third phase brings him to the South, to self-love and compulsion. In this third phase he repents for the atrocities he has committed on Margaret and tries to provide economic and psychological security to Ruth, his granddaughter.

This is a story of Grange Copeland's metamorphosis as well as the awareness of Margaret Copeland, Mem Copeland, Josie Copeland and Ruth Copeland. Similarly this is a story of three different women: Margaret the most illiterate, and submissive, Mem, literate and ambitious and Josie an enterprising black woman. It is also about Ruth the fourth character who is yet to grow.

We can perceive the plight of Margaret and Grange Copeland through their son Brownfield. Grange is a sharecropper on the farm of a white man named Shipley, he doesn't like his son Brownfield or his wife Margaret.

Because of poverty Margaret is forced to work. Grange rarely speaks to her and when he does insults her. Brownfield is informed by his cousin Angline that his mother wants to leave her because he is not good man. He once tried to "sell her" to Mr. Shipley, due to debt. He has borrowed so heavily that he persuades his wife to take prostitution. Though Margaret works hard, she is neglected.

Grange is a desperate man, he turns to drinking, violence. These insults and beatings lead her to debauchery. After caring on in this manner for some years she gives birth to a light skinned child the symbol of her betrayal.

After the birth of Star, the illicit child of Margaret, Grange threatens her that he will permanently desert her. The moment Grange really leaves her, she poisons her and Star, implying thereby that she has no life without Grange Copeland.

Unlike Margaret, Mem, the educated teacher wife of the illiterate Brownfield does not commit suicide. She is unfortunately killed by her husband. After the disappearance of his mother and the suicide of his mother Brownfield wants to escape from the life of sharecropper. To do so he leaves the field of Shipley and goes to Fat Joise, the owner of Dew Drop Inn. It is her that he meets Mem, daughter of a preacher from the North who comes to the South and carries on an affair with Madeleine, sister of Josie. Madliana conceives and later gives birth to Mem.

Mem is not a match for Brownfield she is educated, sophisticated and teacher in school whereas he is uneducated rough and illiterate and works on a part as a hand. She teaches him to read and write. Gradually he falls in love with her and they marry. But later on after the birth of children he blames her to be unfaithful to him. He degenerates and beats her. So meanwhile their marriage is a total failure. Mem tries to keep her family intact. She refuses the to move on another plantation, and when he tries to beat her she retaliates. But with increased

pregnancies her health falls and Brownfield shifts them to another plantation, where he kills her in cold blood.

Josie is another black woman who is victimized and driven out of her own house by her father, Though unwed, Josie becomes pregnant at the age of 16. Her father a “minister”, refuses to forgive her and humiliates her. After the birth of her daughter Lorene, Josie opens up a business in which she offers both herself and drinks to the male customers with Lorene by her side. When Lorene is sixteen she too becomes a mother without a husband. It is because of this profession that she come across Grange and his son Brownfield. Like other Copeland women, Josie too become a victim. It is Ruth, the granddaughter of Grange Copeland, that Alice Walker perceives the hope of a fully grown up person and also for an independent black woman.

Meridian, Walker’s second novel, is about the female protagonist of the same name who gradually awakens from her subordinate status as a black female, daughter, wife and mother as she tries to become the maternal provider of the large black community. In short she rejects the status of biological mother but tries to become community’s mother.

She experiences motherhood in the initial stages of her life and then decides to get rid of her own baby, Eddie Jr. to seek admission in a college to find out path and identity. This new way of identity enables her to attain “the high-test point of power, prosperity and splendor, health and vigor etc.” As a result she develops a completeness of being. “Hers is a journey from a school dropout to a self

illuminated person who knows what is the purpose and mission in ones life. Meridian's quest is for wholeness and she involves in the civil rights movement.

Mrs. Hill, the mother of Meridian, marries Mr. Hill not out of love, but to appease the community. Like Mr. Hill she is a schoolteacher.

Meridian leaves her son with her mother-in-law. As she is awakened to her true self the movement she learns about the Civil Rights Movement. She starts participating in it on the backdrop of a bomb blast as a volunteer only at seventeen. While voluntary against the town's segregated hospital facilities she is beaten. She does typing work, teaches illiterates to read and write. This brings sea change in her life.

She is sanctioned a scholarship by a wealthy white family for college education. She works as assistant of professor Raymonds as the scholarship is not sufficient. But he is sexist. In first year she is a top ranker and in second comes into contact with Truman but he marries a white girl. She thinks that black girls become secretaries, school teachers, doctors. Meridian is pregnant from Truman so she undergoes abortion. In the end she emerges as a leader of black race inspite of her painful private experiences.

Alice Walker's Pulitzer prize winning novel *The Color Purple* chronicles the life of a black girl Celie who despite poverty, near, illiteracy, physical and mental exploitation, transcends her plight through self-awareness. The novel is in epistolary form, first written to God and later to her sister Nettie. Celie writes to God to help her to survive the spiritual, emotional and physical abuse she suffers

at the hands of her father. Celie considers herself as powerless and worthless. So her journey begins from powerlessness to the state of empowerment and from self abnegation to recognition.

The first letter itself indicates the miserable way she falls a victim to sexual advances and atrocities of her step-father. As Celie is subjected to enforced rape, as a result she becomes pregnant and more over her father asks her not tell about this to anybody. When Celie's mother dies, her father remarries and passes Celie to Albert who beats her.

Celie gets a new outlook of light when she meets Shug Avery, Albert's mistress and Sofia, Harpo's wife. Sofia is a spirited woman.

Celie's journey from a dumb illiterate, ignorant, ugly black girl to the awakened and self-conscious woman is not a random phenomenon. Sofia, and Shug Avery, Albert's beloved are behind it. Shug inspires Celie to celebrate her existence and it transforms her life. Celie is surprised that she is beautiful and precious.

Celie's sister Nettie has gone to Africa with Corrine Samuel and their children. Nettie tells Celie that Alfonso is not their own father and it liberates her from the guilt of incest. But it is Shug who really transforms Celie by making her economically independent. She even rebels against Albert and earns self-esteem.

Alice Walker's next novel *The Temple of My Familiar* is a history written in the tradition of the African griot, who were the living encyclopedias of their

culture in non-literate societies. The griots were mostly men but Alice Walker inserts women into male roles.

The griot in this novel is Lessie. Her life is the story of hundred of lives touched by double concern of race and gender. Because of the saintly convocation in the suffering of in childbirth Mr. Hal, Lessie's friend remains celibate. Lessie runs off with a married photographer.

In her life in Africa when she was two years old her father dies of heart attack. Lessie, her two sisters, brother and her mother, as per the custom become her uncle's responsibility. Being pitiless her uncle sells of all off them as slaves. In order to escape slavery, her mother prostrates before him for mercy but in vain.

The novel beings with the introduction of Zede, a seamstress from South America and her daughter Carlotta who escape the terrorism of their country with the help of Mary Ann a wealthy American woman hooked on drugs and political activism. Zede and Carlotta settle in San Francisco where Zede turns a fashionable boutique. Like Lassie, Zade is also traveler in time who knew many generations of her own. Her ancestors were brought from Africa to Latian American and then on united states.

Another couple in the novel is Suwelo a history professor and his wife, Fanny Nzinglia a women's studies teacher. Fanny is in love with Suwelo, but is not in love with marriage.

Thus the woman centered or womanist world is created.

The only African American Nobel Laureate writer Toni Morrison is another prolific black woman novelist who is writer of novels such as *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1974), *Song of Soloman* (1977), *Tar Baby* (1981), and *Beloved* (1987).

The novel *The Blust Eye* indicates a black girl's quest to attain white standards. It is a story of young black girl, Pecola Breedlove who wants to have blue eyes, a symbol of white beauty. Pecola believes that such eyes could make her beautiful, acceptable and admirable. But in reality her eyes cannot be changed into blue eyes. She wants them desperately, as a result her quest for blue eyes makes her mad.

Pecola Breelove, the protagonist of the novel searches for self esteem. Ironically named the Breedlove, do not give life to love, familiar, romantic, or personal. Peacola is loved neither by her parents nor by friends, nor by school teachers. She thinks that if she has the eyes, blue eyes she would be loved by all. She witnesses white children to be loved both by white and black children. So she decides to achieve beauty and acceptance by acquiring blue eyes. She thinks that only blue eye will help her in restoring her self esteem. As she has no blue eyes, she suffers from self scorn.

The novel is a female *Bildungsroman*, a novel of growing up. The story portrays the two black families the McTeers and the Breedloves. Migrants from the South, living in Lorain, Ohio. But its emphasis is on the children. Claudia and Frieda McTeer and Pecola Breedlove-their happy and painful experience in

growing up, and their formal and informal education that leads them to self understanding.

Pecola is condemned every where, she assigns her rejection by the society to the lack of blue eyes. It leads to madness. The desire for blue eyes is evidence of Pecola's frustration with her identity, with her world, Like Pecola her mother enjoys no states and self worth. Paulina is called "Polly" by white child. Her father, Cholly Breedlove was insulted by the white hunters. By showing Pecola's madness Morrison shows how Euro-centric standards, play havoc with the life of these girls.

Sula depicts the quest of the protagonist Sula for creating her own self and coming to terms with her identity as a black and female. Morrison shows difficulties that black women face when they try to explore different aspects of their self. This theme is centered around a character called Sula who believes that she can create an identity for herself and that she exists "beyond the community and social expectation."

Sula is different from all the black women self-indulgent and arrogant. She sets herself on a mission: "I don't want to make some body else. I want to make myself" to attain-her unified black female self.

The place where the characters live has a unusual history to tell. Sula, her mother Hannah and grandmother Eva Peace live in a place called Bottom, in Medallion City, Ohio. It is called ironically though it is up in the hills. Given by a white master to his slave in bargain of some task.

Sula is born in a family where women's reign is supreme. Eva, her grandmother is the archetypal, "great mother." She reveals to her daughter Hannah Sula's mother that meeting her children's need is her primary concern. Eva Peace, the grandmother of Sula, rules her home in the fashion of a true matriarch. She is the creator and sovereign" of her enormous house where she loves "directing the lives of her children, friends" the unusual thing about Eva is that inspite of having only one leg she presides over the house from a wagon on the third floors. She deliberately amputated her leg by placing it before a moving train so that insurance payments would enable her to support herself and her family. As the name suggests she is primal mother, willing to make any sacrifice for her children. She performs extra ordinary things. She sets her son on fire to death who has come from war defeated. To bring out Sula's personality the character of Nel Wright is introduced, as their friendship Nel gets married.

Sula has embraced the problematic part of her being. She rejects traditional ordering principles like marriage children, grand parents care, and sexual mores. But rejection is rebellion. Sula is basically a women's novel. Sula becomes conscious of being black and female. She comes to terms with her self and defies the male and white and dominated societal norms. No doubt she has to pay heavy cost, but she tries to live up to the standards that she wants to create for herself.

Morrison's next novel *Song of Solomon* is a story of Macon Dead III, nicknamed Milkman, who comes to terms with his identity as an African American, through his aunt Pilate Dead. He is called 'Milkman' because his

mother has nursed him for years. She nurses him until he was old enough to talk, stand up and wear knickers. Besides Milkman's this is also the story of his father Macon Dead II, Mother Ruth Foster, Dead and his sister Megdalene called Lena, First Corinthians and Pilate Dead, her daughter Reba Dead and granddaughter Hager Dead. So Milkman is concerned with his aunt, Pilate and his father. Both Malcom Dead II and Pilate Dead, brother and sister represent two entirely different value systems. Malcom II is a no more white than black. He is thoroughly Westernized and Eurocentric and on the contrary Pilate is Afro-centric in her approach.

Milkman's father is an ambitious black man who has created the world of his own. So he thinks of others not as human being but the commodities. His outlook towards others is materialistic, and so he wants his son to follow his own gospel, but he is disappointed as Milkman follows aunt Pilate.

In his father's house the "ownership principle" has destroyed the lives of his mother and sister but on other hand his aunt's house though poor, flourishes in love affections. So there are two opposite poles. Milkman is torn between these two worlds but follows his aunt.

Milkman comes to know about his family through his father and aunt. He comes from a family of Solomon, who could fly, a man who flew back to Africa, to escape the drudgery and slavery. The name Macon Dead, of his father when free in 1869 was wrongly registered. So Milkman's father never knew his father's real name, though he was called Jake. Macon dead worked with his father and

transformed the piece of land in Pennsylvania into a fertile farm called Lincoln heaven. He wanted to be free but was murdered by a rapacious white family-the Butlers who covered the land. Macon was never to recover this shock.

After his father's death, Malcom and his sister Pilate were hidden by the Butler's servant but they left while wandering they came to a cave where they found an old white man whom Macon killed and found three bags of gold hidden in a pit. Pilate would not let him keep the gold and seizing the knife came out. But when he came back two days, she and gold were gone.

Separated from his sister Macon began his quest for Jakes' dream. He paid homage to his father's life and death by loving what his father had loved: property, gold, solid property, the bountifulness of life, owning buildings.

Macon's materialistic aspirations makes him insensitive to his tenants. This lack of sympathy extends beyond this business to his relationship with the family. As a result he brutalizes his wife Ruth as he suspects her incestuous relation with her father and son.

As Macon owns property he believes he owns the world at least the one which is nearest to him, his wife, daughters, son and also his sister Pilate. He thinks himself to be boss and master of the house and he maltreats Ruth and his daughter. Macon is so money-centered, self centered that he warns Milkman not to visit the house of his own sister, Pilate. She suspects Pilate has taken the three bags of gold.

Pilate is her father's daughter. Her connection with nature is a reminder of Jake's love for peach trees. She has deep reverence for human being like her father.

She is called, 'snake' by her brother. She has no navel and she is born after her mother's death.

Macon Dead II's aim-"love for money" is the root of all evil, it alienates his wife make his daughter afraid of him.

Lena, Milkman's daughter challenges the very power of Milkman. Lena not only, challenges Milkman but also her father who ruled and still rules their household. Milkman also challenges his father. Pilate takes care of every woman such as Reba, Hagar, Ruth Corinthians and Lena-who are related to her. On the other hand, Ruth is dependent on others.

Pilate's daughter Reba and granddaughter Hagar on the one hand and Ruth Corinthians and Lena on the other hand walk own way in quest of fulfillment.

In Tar Baby it is the journey Jadine Child, a grown up and educated version of Pecola Breedlove. Journey of a black woman who struggles to come to terms with her aspiration as a modern materialistic black woman as a metaphor of "tar" indicates.

She has lost her father and mother at an early age, and is adopted by her uncle. Sidney and aunt Ondine. As both of them work for white family Velerine and Marganst Streets she is under the care and protection of the Streets and the Childs. Morrison depicts that the black community is the pariah community.

The title of the novel *Tar Baby* is interesting. *Tar Baby* takes the point of departure from the old folk tale of briar rabbit: "A farmer sets out a tar baby dressed in bonnet and shirt to trap at trouble some rabbit. The rabbit hits the

tarbaby when it does not answer 'Good morning' he gets struck and when caught he begs the farmer "boil me in oil, skin me alive but please don't throw me in the briar patch." The farmer falls for the trick and throws him in the briar patch and the clever rabbit escapes.

Here Jadine Child is a tarbaby who traps, Son, the Blackman who stands for Afro-centric values but falls a prey to the white materialistic values and the world order that is represented by Jadine.

Jadine is missing the quality of tar-to hold things together and acts as a tar baby created by a farmer (the white man) to catch a rabbit (Son, the black man.)

Jadine is a person loses her identity as a black woman, internalizes the white values and forces son, a criminal turned lover, and later on her husband to abandon his identity as a black man.

Jadine though a black woman is the antitheses of the black fold and community values. She is urbane, educated, widely traveled, a leading international model is ashamed of herself and her heritage. Thus by rejecting their history of her race she rejects the real self and in place of it she tries to transplant the white self.

All her education she receives, does not tell her anything about her people and their history. She is trained educated and brainwashed to ignore her own history.

But later on the awareness of blackness that awakens her and generates passions she travels to the island to see her relatives and she learns about the authentic blackness and love Son has for Jadine.

Morrison's major novel *Beloved* deals with the life of a female slave Sethe, who kills her own daughter Beloved, to prevent her from the ancient sufferings. It is an act of mercy killing: an act performed by a mother out of concern for her own daughter and her community. Though the novel is a product of invention of Morrison's imagination, but it is based on a factual story.

Though the novel is about slavery is not a call for the abolition of slavery-it is a story of a black female slave who develops an awareness about her sub-human status on the Sweet Home plantation which awakens her and forces her to develop a quest for meaning and freedom. It records the cruelty, violence and degradation which makes a female slave, Sethe, to understand her situation and awakens her from deep slumber.

Sethe as a black slave has undergone many insults. In the beginning she is brought to Sweet Home Plantation which is neither Sweet nor Home to replace Baby Suggs, another breeding black woman. Baby Suggs is sixty years old and has given birth to eight children. Recently her freedom is purchased by her own son, who has worked for five years on plantation, Baby Suggs has served as a breeding black woman and has attended to Mr. And Mrs. Garners.

Sethe was thirteen when she came to the plantation. For the plantation owners the slaves were in no way different than their cattle. By the time she is nineteen Sethe is

pregnant for the fourth time. In all she gives birth to her two sons, Howard and Bugler and two daughters Beloved and Denever.

With the death of Mr. Garner Mrs. Garner requests her brother-in-law, a school teacher who is 'evil' and uncivilized and barbaric to look after the affairs.

Being a female slave herself well informed about the atrocities by Baby Suggs and her own mother she thinks time and again about the future of her own kids: Howard, Buglar and Baby girls. Everyone Baby Suggs knew and loved, ran off or was hanged was rented out or loan out, brought up, bought back, stored up, most gagged, won and or seized. As a result Baby Sugg's, eight children had six fathers. With stable she was able to live for the longest period of twenty years. Baby Suggs has witnessed no permanent relation with any man in her life. Therefore Sethe decides to runaway.

But at arriving at 124 Bluestone Cincinnati, where Baby Suggs is waiting for her that she understands the length and the power of the slave master. 124 Blustone was the new place of the emancipated Baby Suggs. The sole aim of Sethe to take her children to 124 Bluestone was to protect her children from the suffering she has undergone. The school teacher ultimately arrives in 124 Bluestone.

By killing her own daughter with a handsaw, Sethe commits infanticide but retains her dignity as a human being. Later the dead child visits as a spirit. Infanticide is a sin and immoral but for Seth it was just.

In this noble, long and enriching tradition the three black feminist novelists studied in this thesis, Gayl Jones, Toni Cade Bambara, and Ntozake Shange, are black feminist interventions. They made their unique contributions to this

tradition and added new dimensions with their peculiar qualities and Black feminist visions.



GAYL JONES'S EXPLORATION OF THE BLACK FEMININE PSYCHE.

Gayl Jones as a fiction writer is known for her two exceptional novels: *Corregidora* (1975) and *Eva's Man* (1976). Writing in the 1970s she belongs to what Barbara Christian (1985: 179) terms as the "second phase" of African American Women's fiction writing or the "second renaissance" of African American writing. This phase of early 1970s is marked by the critique of racism and sexism in African American women's literature. What is unique in the case of Gayl Jones is that though she is writer of astounding merits she has been neglected in the critical panorama for a long time due to some prejudiced and biased views of the contemporary critics. Madhu Dubey (1994:2) astutely comments :

Gayl Jones's fiction is conspicuously absent from most black feminist works on the black women's fictional tradition, including Barbara Christian's *Black Women Novelists*, Susan Willis's *Specifying*, and Marjorie Pryse and Hortense Spillar's *Conjuring*. The critical neglect of Jones is not surprising, for her novels do not conform the ideological aims or the formal predilections of black feminist criticism. Jones's fiction cannot be absorbed into a tradition impelled, by the struggle against negative stereotypes into a tradition authorized by black folk practices associated with the rural South.

Only Mari Evan's *Black Women Writers* has two articles on her.

— Gayl Jones can be considered a rebel in this sense who was not carried away by the inundation of the ideology of positive race images of the Black Nationalist Aesthetics and discourse. She defended her stance very bitterly as the question of

stereotypes versus full characterization of black women in the fiction forms, the central concern of early black feminist critics such as Barbara Christian and Mary Helen Washington. It was as if a cleansing and purifying movement having cathartic effects.

Critical reception of Gayl Jones's two novels, *Corregidora* and *Eva's Man*, has been ambivalent at best. Sally Robinson (1991 : 135) also criticizes this aspect in the following words that feminist critics in particular have tended to stay away from these two troubling texts. Hazel Carby in *Reconstructing Womanhood* does not even mention these works in the list at the end of her critical book. Similarly Barbara Christian's works *Black Women Novelists : The Development of a Tradition*, as pointed earlier omits any mention of Jones. Sally Robinson (1991 : 135) further comments :

Written in the 1970s climate of "identity politics" these texts seem to stubbornly defy that context because they work to dismantle the humanist paradigm of singular and definitive identity.

Gayl Jones clarifies her stance in an interview with Claudia Tate about critics' tendency to "castigate" her, in Tate's terms for writing "about characters who do not conform to positive images of women or black women." Jones replies :

I like something Sterling Brown said: you can't create a significant literature with just creating "plaster of paris saints." "Positive race images" are fine as long as they are very complex and interesting personalities. (Tate 1983:97)

What she expects is that images may be positive or negative but they must be "complex" and interesting" or in other terms round and not flat.

In an interview essay with Mari Evans "About My Work" Gayl Jones argues about critical response to Eva's negative image:

To deal with such a character as Eva becomes problematic. Should a Black Writer ignore such characters, refuse to enter "such territory" because of the "negative image" and because such characters can be misused politically by others; or could we try to reclaim such complex, multidimensional contradictory characters as well as try to reclaim the idea of the 'heroic image'? (Mari Evans 1984 : 233).

Defending her stand for her use of negative race images Gayl Jones further elaborates her concerns as a fiction writer. But before dealing with that aspect it would be worth noting how critics are not impartial in dealing with Jones. Madhu Dubey (1994:6-7) throws light on it:

Critics tend to canonize Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, and Toni Morrison as exemplary black women novelists and marginalize compelling writers such as Gayl Jones whose fiction renders urban manifestations of oral forms such as blues.

To depict the urban life in oral form i.e. the urban oral literature such as blues has been the specialty of Jones, and that is quite neglected.

Coming back to Jones's literary concerns along with portrayal of black urban women's lives in black urban oral language, she explores the psychology of women characters, human relationship in which she is quite interested. In an interview essay "About My Work" with Mari Evans, Jones argues :

I am interested principally in the psychology of characters-and the way(s) in which they order their

stories-their myths, dreams, nightmares, secret worlds, ambiguities, contradictions, ambivalences, memories, imaginations, their “puzzles.” For this reason I cannot claim “political compulsions” nor moral compulsions” if by either of these one means certain kinds of restrictions on imaginative territory” or if one means maintaining a literary decorum.” I am interested in human relationships, but I do not make moral judgments or political judgments of my character. I am not a didactic writer, characters and readers have the freedom of moral judgment (Mari Evans 1984 :233).

Jones take a neutral stance in the sense that she does not want to teach anything or give a message through her writing. She mentions that she has no political “stance” but she is interested sometimes in the relationships between history, society, morality and personality. In an interview with Claudia Tate, Jones (1983 :95) reiterates her concerns of being interested in the psychology of women :

“... telling stories that happen to be there ... in relationships that happen to be there ...in relationships between men and women particularly from the view point of a women, the psychology of women, the psychology of language and personal histories.”

In the same interview she further points of that she is also interested in “*abnormal psychology*” (96) which can be applicable to both her novels *Corregidora* and *Eva’s Man*.

Calvin Hernton writes that when black women writers such and Gayl Jones, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker raised gender related issues in their fiction, black nationalist critics “accused (d) these women of being Black men haters, bull dykes and perverse lovers of whites men and women” (Dubey 1994:20)

In 1970s novel emerged as a predominant in black women's literature. Most of the black women's novels published in this period experiment with the oral folk forms in an attempt to liberate a uniquely black narrative voice. Folk-storytelling devices animate the narrative medium of Alice Walker's *Meridian*, and the blues determines the narrative voice and structure of Gayl Jones's *Corregidora*.

Gayl Jones is interested in spiritual and psychological realities of the characters that exceed nationality. Her world is 'abnormal' and insane'. Keith Byerman (1985 :10) comments:

Gayl Jones whose interests in spiritual and psychological realities cause them to exceed the boundaries of realism. She focuses on the non-rational element of human life: madness, sexuality, death. Jones's narrators border on insanity. Her writing contains gothic elements in the sense that they deal with obsession, violence that has a sexual character, and are grotesque.

Gayl Jones creates bizarre, oppressive worlds. The characters seem abnormal because they fail to adjust to the conventions of the social life. They are seen as insane, grotesque, or perhaps merely a bit "crazy." Keith Byerman (1985:171-172) explicates, the specialty to Jones's fiction that it is not only "radical" but also creates most "oppressive" societies. Her fictional world is "beyond realism and 'insane.'" Byerman comments:

Gayl Jones of all writers, creates the most radical worlds. Not only are the societies depicted the most thoroughly and directly oppressive, but she also denies readers a "sane" narrative through which to judge world and narrator. Most frequently, her narrators have already been judged insane by the society...

Given the irrationality of both narrator and world... Jones's stories and novels works because they effectively give voice to those who have suffered by structuring the experiences, the texts become blues performances... the world of Ursa Corregidora and Eva Canada, now matter how disordered are the worlds of human experience.

Melvin Dixon points out that the fictional landscape of Gayl Jones's fiction is the relationship between men and women, full of dishonesty and abuse. Dixon comments :

Jones's fictional landscape is the relationship between men and women, a field her characters mine with dishonesty, manipulation, and mutual abuse. The battleground is sex and Jones uses the right sexual vocabulary to strategize the warfare.

Afro American language and story-telling tradition are the main sources of Jones's development (Mari Evans 1984: 237)

Jerry W. Ward observes that same things when he points out that the abuse of women and its psychological results fascinate Gayl Jones. He comments :

The abuse women and its psychological result to magnify the absurdity an obscenity of racism and sexism in everyday life. The novels and short fictions invite readers to explore the interiors of caged personalities, men and women driven to extremes. (Mari Evans 1984 : 249)

Jerry Ward opines that narratives of Ursa Corregidora and Eva Medina Canada intensify the reader's sense of "terror" in fictions. (246). In an interview with Roseann P. Bell Gayl Jones (1979 : 283) reiterates that her writing has been concerned with the relationship between men and women.

Gayl Jones's two novels have different terrains. While *Corregidora* appeared when she was twenty-six and a student. It is a neo-slave blues novel dealing with the four generations of Brazilian slavery in rural Kentucky. *Eva's Man* is about a young black woman's recollection of the events leading up to her confinement in a mental institution. It is a bizarre saga of turmoil and trepidation. Both of her novels extend and enrich the themes in her stories in the collection *White Rat* (1977). The earlier novel makes the association between racial and sexual domination that "Asylum" makes, while later expands that story's interest in madness. As in "The Women" lesbianism is introduced in both the novels. Both Ursa and Eva confront the problem of *White Rat*: how to achieve a strong sense of identity in a society that devalues individual worth on the basis of race and sex.

(A) *Corregidora* (1975) : A Neo-Slave Blues World Song.

Gayl Jones's first novel *Corregidora* (1975) belongs to the neo-slave narrative tradition like the first African-American woman Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* (1987) and Sherley Anne Williams's novel *Dessa Rose* (1986) quite naturally, therefore it paves that tradition and strengthens it. *Corregidora* has another enchanting dimension of being a blues novel, as the protagonist Ursa Corregidora is a blues singer.

Though Jones's both the novels were "castigated" for the "negative stereotypes" by the critics and had to suffer neglect from them, she received wide accolade for *Corregidora* from Toni Morrison, her publisher's editor at Random

House. Toni Morrison acclaimed Gayl Jones's first novel *Corregidora* as a "story that thought the unthinkable", a radical break in fictional representations of black women:

No novel about any Black Woman could ever be the same after this. *Corregidora* had changed the terms, the definitions of the whole enterprise... Ursa Corregidora is not possible. Neither is Gayl Jones. But they exist. (Dubey 1994: 84)

Gayl Jones emphatically dissociates art from politics and so her work intentionally disqualifies from the Black Aesthetic definition of good art. In an interview with Roasean Bell, Jones replied that "it is difficult to say what *Corregidora* should teach, I don't start of thinking of writing itself as instructive, nor in the sense of message. (Rossean Bell et. al. 1979:86)

In an interview essay "About my Work " with Mari Evans., Jones further develops this argument of her detachment with politics :

I think sometime you just have to be "wrong"; there's lot of imaginative territory that you have to be "wrong" in order to enter. I'm not sure one can be a creative writer and politician - a "good" politician (Mari Evans 1984:235)

When *Corregidora* was first published, black reviewers castigated its "politically incorrect" presentation of "sexual warfare" in the black community.

Grier and Cobbs, Billingsley and others argue that the contemporary black matriarchy is a legacy of slavery. In *Corregidora*, the matriarchy constituted by Ursa's great-grandmother, grandmother, and mother also has its origins in slavery.

Bernard W. Bell coined the term “neoslave narrative in *The African-American Novel and its Tradition* (1987:289). According to Bell neoslave narratives are “residually oral, modern narratives of escape from bondage to freedom.”

Naomi Morgenstern (1996:107) calls the neoslave narratives like *Corregidora* by Gayl Jones, and *Dessa Rose* by Sherley Anne Williams as novels of trauma, she calls *Corregidora* as a novel recording the history of violence a first person narration of a blues singer. It is a novel of trauma she further argues in the sense that though Ursa has never been a slave, but neither can she leave enslavement. Naomi Morgenstern further comments that *Corregidora* does not completely fit Bernard W. Bells’s definition of the neoslave narrative. She observes:

It (*Corregidora*) may be a “residually oral, modern narrative” about slavery, but it does not tell the story of “escape from bondage to freedom”.

But as a blues novel, *Corregidora* is an exquisite rendering of suffering. It is matrix of, violence and oppression. Ursa’s telling her story and her mother’s story is to contrast it with the “epic” almost impersonal history of *Corregidora*.

Claudia Tate (1979 :140) points out that the story comes out in monologues that “seep through Ursa’s consciousness in moment of psychological stress. As the story is told throughout the novel in Ursa’s subconsciousness, Gloria Wade-Gayles (1984 : 172) comments that it is a bizarre and horrifying tale of perversity and abuse, a commentary on the “sickness of slave culture”.

Claudia Tate (ibid :140) observes that the 'internal' drama of Ursa's ancestors and her love to Mutt-the 'external drama' of her relationship are connected by stream-of-consciousness narration. The interior monologues are marked as italicized and non-italicized ones. Italicized monologues recall Corregidora's relationship with his slaves and non-italicized ones mark Ursa's relationship with Mutt. Claudia Tate calls the novel a bizarre romantic story.

Ursa's telling her story and her mother's story is to contrast it with the "epic" almost in impersonal history of Corregidora.

The novel delineates four generations of Corregidora women through the consciousness of Ursa Corregidora, the protagonist who belongs to the fourth generation. We come to know the Corregidora history seeping through Ursa's consciousness, dream sequences and interior monologues. Thus there are two dramas in the novel. Claudia Tate (1979 : 139) explains them as "external" and "internal" dramas. The "external" drama of Corregidora involves Ursa's estrangement from her husband, Mutt Thomas, who in a jealous rage pushes her down a flight of stairs in the spring of 1948. She is injured and in the hysterectomy operation she loses the child and the womb forever. She divorces Mutt and marries Tadpole for a brief period and later reunites with Mutt in the end after the gap of twenty two years. Corregidora's "internal" drama is related with Ursa's conflict with their slave heritage in the nineteenth century Brazil. Her inheritance of slavery of her great-grandmother, grandmother, and mother by Corregidora.

Corregidora opens with an act of violence. When Mutt Thomas insists his wife Ursa Corregidora, a blues singer to stop singing, an argument ensues. In a jealous rage he pushes his newly pregnant wife down the steps of the night club and fall results. Ursa is hospitalized and operated hysterectomy and loses her child and womb. Now she can never fulfill the pledge made by the women in her family "to make generations." The novel details Ursa's attempt to free herself from the guilt imposed by her physical limitation and from resentment against her now estranged husband.

Ursa is singing blues in the nightclub or in seedy restaurant. She is urban, worldly and lives in the black community in Kentucky. The novel takes place in 1948 but the tragedy began during slavery and lasted through three generations, in the nineteenth century. Corregidora, a Portuguese seaman turned plantation owner, turned rapist, turned breeder of mulatto women, enslaved and sexually exploited Corregidora women in Brazil. Corregidora was a slavemonger who slept with his slaves, sired children by them and then slept with his children. The element of incest pervades the novel through the figure of Corregidora and it ascribes the vision of evil predominating in the novel. Corregidora was a breeder who sent his women out to sleep with other men so that he would have mulatto children for the market. According to the legend preserved by the family Corregidora fathered both Ursa's grandmother and her mother. Keeping alive this humiliating experience of incest and passion become the life purpose of these

women and their descendants. Each generation produces the next primarily to protect against the destruction of the truth by those in power.

Mutt, however, is not the only culprit, Ursa learns that she comes from generations of abused women and women abusers. Great-Gram was the slave and concubine of Corregidora, their child becomes his mistress and bore another woman, Ursa's mother. When slavery papers were burned to deny slavery ever existed, that these women may not have ever existed, their sole defence is to make generations to preserve the family.

Melvin Dixon delineates the etymology of the word 'Corregidore' and points its significance. Dixon comments :

Corregidore in Portuguese means 'judicial magistrate. By changing the gender designation, Jones makes Ursa Corregidora, a female judge, charged by the women in her family to "correct" (from the Portuguese verb *Corrigir*) the historical invisibility they have suffered, "to give evidence" of their abuse, and "to make generations" as a defence against their further annihilation. Ursa's name also come from the man responsible for much of this pain, the Brazilian coffee planter and whoremaster Corregidora. Ursa must bring justice to bear upon his past exploitation of Blacks as slaves and women as whores and his present haunting contamination of her life (Mari Evans 1984:239)

The novel uses the flashback technique-using Ursa Corregidora's consciousness through which we know the details. The novel opens, as pointed out earlier with an act of violence. After deadly injured by Mutt, Ursa does not allow him to come to see her at the hospital. The incident takes place at the Happy's Café where she

is singing. During her hospitalization Tapole McCormick looks after her and she begins to stay with him later. There she ruminates over her married life with Mutt, how she fell in love with him, as he used to come to listen her blues singing. She used to sing for him-selected him as her man who “heard” her and other “listened.” But as time went on Mutt become very ‘possessive’ about Ursa after marriage. He does not like her singing in public. As doctor has advised her rest, Ursa after the hysterectomy operation, muses in an interior monologue about her past life with Mutt taking rest on the bed.

Mutt didn't like for me to sing after we were married because he said that's why he married me so he could support me. I said I didn't just sing to be supported. I said I sang because it was something I had to do but he never would understand that (3).

“I don't like those mens messing with you, “he said.

“Don't nobody mess with me.”

“Mess with they eyes.”

That was when I fell. (3)

Ursa's inability to make generations has political cognisance- to resist the invisibility of these slave women in the annuls of history when the entire records of slavery were burned down. And Ursa has been taught to make generations since she is five years old.

Ursa and Mutt don't live together after the accident. She so constantly curses him in the hospital when she is unconscious during the treatment that even the nurses are shocked. She divorces Mutt and begins to live with Tadople

McCormick who now runs the Happy's Café where Ursa sings. He takes care of her in the hospital. There she decides to desert Mutt. So she requests Tadpole to take her to his home when she is discharged from the hospital, because she doesn't want to go back to the Drake Hotel where Mutt and she lived.

After Ursa is somewhat recovered Tadpole asks her about her health :

"What do you feel?"

"As is part of my life's already marked out for me-the barren part."

"You can't expect a woman to take something like that easy." (6)

She feels that something "more than the womb"(6) has been taken out. As if her entire personality is snapped. After living together for some days Tadpole proposes her to marry him and she consents, and they marry. But the marriage does not prove to be fruitful and does not work out. Ursa comes to know that Tad is unfaithful, and is disloyal to her and she deserts him also She is a free woman again.

It was twenty two years after Mutt and Ursa were separated and she has not forgotten him. She is constantly thinking about him but she hasn't seen him again. She recalls how she saw Mutt for the first time when she was singing blues at Preston's. Mutt repeatedly came to hear Ursa singing and their first meeting and how they fell in love with each other. She recalls :

When I first saw Mutt I was singing a song about a train tunnel. About this train going to the tunnel but it didn't seem like they was no end to the tunnel and nobody knew when the train would get out, and then all of a

sudden the tunnel tightened around the train like a fist.
Then I sang about this bird woman, whose eyes were
deep wells. How she would take a man on a long
journey, but never return him. (147)

Another element that Gayl Jones tries to highlight is that of sexism crossing the boundaries of racism. For Corregidora, the slave owner the slave women are commodities, their bodies are economically exploited as prostitutes. But same is the case about Ursa's father Martin and Mutt himself. Both of them though black, behave like Corregidora. It is critique of sexism across the racial issue. It is the gender jeopardy that makes black women to suffer. Black women like Ursa's ancestors had to suffer as slaves at the hands of racist white slave owners like Portuguese Corregidora, or the wife of Mutt's great-grandfather had to suffer from the white racist American slave owners. But here the suffering of black man and women is at par. What makes the difference is that they, the black women had to suffer at the hands of both the white and black men because of gender. The black women are slaves and commodities of both white racist Americans and the black sexist males and they are always downtrodden as slaves. It means that they are trapped in the synergetic multiple jeopardy of race, gender and class in the heterosexual relationship. In two different relationships Ursa's father Martin and her husband Mutt exploit her mother and her respectively on the basis of gender, i.e. being a woman. When Ursa's mother goes to see her husband Martin after many years he slaps and beats her severely black and blue and snapping elastic of her pants insults and humiliates by making her walk naked like a whore in the

street. He said "Get out... Go on down the street, looking like whore..." (120). She walks through the streets head hanging and facing people's insidious taunts and gestures. It is death to her Martin's behaviour is no better than the whoremonger Corregidora who prostitutes Ursa's Great-Gram, grand mother and other black slave women. Mutt also mistreats his wife Ursa in the same way. When Ursa is not ready to stop singing blues Mutt decides to auction and sell her at the café like the slaves who were auctioned at the auction blocks in slavery or like Corregidora, the slaveowner. They argue bitterly. Mutt is tired of hearing about Corregidora women. He asks her why she remembers that old bastard Corregidora and Ursa has no answer to this. He surprises Ursa by saying that she is one of the Corregidora women. He argues with her:-

"If you wasn't one of them you wouldn't like them mens watching after you."

"They don't watch after me, Mutt."

"I wish you'd take that damned mascara off. It make you look like a bitch-" (154)

Mutt prohibits Ursa not only from talking to the men in the audience but that they must not look at her. She pleads.

"Last night you didn't want nobody to say nothing to me and tonight they can't even look at me." (155)

When he declares his evil intention of auctioning and selling her at the café like in the slavery it shocks Ursa :

"That's what I'm gon do," he said.
He was standing with his arms all up in the air. I was on my way to work.

“One a y’all wont to bid for her? Piece a ass for sale. I got me a piece of ass for sale. That’s what y’all wont, ain’t it? Piece a ass. I said I got a piece a ass for sale, anybody wont to bid on it?”

“Mutt, you wouldn’t”.

“You think I won’t. I’ma be down there tonight, and as soon as you get up on that stage, I’ma sell me a piece a ass,” (159)

But he doesn’t do so:

“I’m glad you didn’t, Mutt.”

“It wasn’t on account of you, it was on account of my great-granddaddy. Seeing as how he went through all that for his woman he wouldn’t have appreciated me selling you off” (160)

But later on enraged Mutt knocks and pushes Ursa down the stairs of the café seeing that she doesn’t stop singing at last. And it results fatal-loss of child and womb to Ursa. The possessive Mutt’s argument to stop her singing that she is inviting men in the audience in her through her gaze. And the audience are having scopophilia-enjoying through gaze or watching. That’s why he tells Ursa that they the audience are messing with their eyes. Accordingly paranoid Mutt the audience leeringly lusts for Ursa. The novel also criticizes the commodification and objectification of woman in male gaze.

But when Ursa and Mutt meet again after twenty two years they are reconciled and united. This reconciliation and union of Mutt and Ursa in the blues stanza marks the end of novel.

The “internal drama” of the novel interrelated to Ursa’s life is the saga of her ancestor’s lives in slavery of Simon Corregidora.

It is a bizarre and horrific tell of nineteenth century Brazilian slavery. Simon Corregidora, a Portuguese seaman turned plantation owner is a slave owner and whoremonger who slept with his black women slaves, sired them and slept with his children too. This sinful tale of incest becomes the nightmare of Ursa’s Great-Gram, grandmother, and mother. Corregidora fathered Ursa’s grandmother and mother too who were his daughters. Corregidora also prostitutes these slave women and exploits them spiritually and economically. Selling their bodies become the landmark destiny of their lives. But they resist his oppression by transferring orally the experiences of each generation to the next one so that the memories of atrocious slavery may be alive in their minds. The Corregidora women resist their invisibility in the annals of history when all the records of slavery were burned away as if it never did exist. The racist White Americans wanted the world to forget the crime and sin of slavery. But the barbaric atrocities and scars are permanent in the minds of the black from generation to generation as the Corregidora women want to keep that spirit alive. So it becomes the mission of these Corregidora women to “make generations” so that they give birth to daughters and continue the heritage of slavery. Every generation adds its own part in it and Ursa has been taught to do so since she was small child of

five. She is made to believe it to be true and not raise any doubts about it. This is an obligation that haunts every woman in each generation.

The matriarchs in *Corregidora*, too embody the force of past oppression, as their ideology remain locked within the framework of slavery. Most important is Tadpole McCormick, a male character, who points out that the Corregidora women's: "procreation, that could also be slavebreeders way of thinking" (22)

From the age of five Ursa hears the story of Corregidora women, from Great-Gram first and then from her mother until it becomes the abiding part of their consciousness. Their past becomes her past and in a terrifying way controls her present. For her Corregidora, as Claudia Tate (1979:140) comments is the:

"Symbolic progenitor of all evil. Within Ursa's limited world; much like the serpent in the Garden of Eden."

The story seeping out of Ursa's consciousness is the tragic saga of slavery of black slave woman including her ancestors-her Great-Gram, grandmother and mother. It is crucially horrific as she narrates to Tadpole, her second husband:

"Corregidora, old man Corregidora, the Portuguese slave breeder and whoremonger..... He fucked his own whores and fathered his own breed. They did the fucking and had to bring him the money they made. My grandmamma was his daughter but he was fucking her too. She said when they did away with slavery down there they burned all the slavery papers so it would be like they never had it " (8-9)

Adam McKible (1994:225) comments that in *Corregidora* hegemony effaces its earlier criminality through the destruction of incriminating records.

Richard T. B. Barkasdale (1986:404) comments that *Corregidora* asserts that the black women's sexual slavery began with slavery—a time when the system granted every master and every white male overseer the unchallenged right to use and abuse every female slave on the plantation according to his fancy.

Catherine Clinton (1994:209) argues that rape was an integral part of slavery, not an aberration or dysfunction. (Goldberg 2003:449)

Tadpole finds it difficult to believe and so he questions its veracity. But Ursa replies:

“My great-grandmother told my grandmamma the part she lived through that my grandmamma didn't live through and my grandmamma told my mama what they both lived through and we were suppose to pass it down like that from generation to generation so we'd never forget. Even though they'd burned everything to play like it didn't never happen. Yeah, and where's the next generation.” (9)

Ursa's grief is that she can't make generations as she has lost her womb and made sterile by Mutt.

Tadpole thinks that what Ursa tells may not be true, there must be some interpolations or insertions made in it by Ursa's foremothers. When Tadpole raises the doubt Ursa snaps him.

“Well, some things can't be kept in. What I didn't tell you is old man Corregidora fathered my grandmamma and my mama too”. (10)

To this Tadpole has no answer, so Ursa further continues “

“What my mama always told me is Ursa, you got to make generations. Something I’ve always grown up with.”
(10)

If Corregidora is so atrocious to Ursa’s foremothers and the black slave women there must be a feeling of hatred in the minds of these women and Ursa. Tadpole asks Ursa “I guess you hate him then, don’t you?” to this Ursa replies that to concretize and particularize the hatred for Corregidora Ursa bears a photograph of him smuggled by Great-Gram. She tells Tadpole, “I’ve got a photograph of him. One Great-Gram smuggled out. I guess, so we’d know who to hate...”(10)

From Ursa’s consciousness pours forth how Great-Gram was prostituted as a child. Ursa recalls how Great-Gram told her the mission of “making generations” when she was a child:

... as if words repeated again and again could be substitute for memory were some how more than the memory. As if it were only the word that kept her anger.

What Great-Gram tells Ursa cannot be doubted, and when Ursa raises the doubt the old woman slaps her and admonishes her in strange words by making her aware of the role Ursa has to play:

“When I’m telling you something don’t you ever ask if I’m lying. Because they didn’t want to leave no evidence of what they done-so it couldn’t be held against them. And I’m leaving evidence. And you got to leave evidence too. And your children got to leave evidence. And when it come time to hold up the evidence, we got to make evidence to hold up. That’s why they burned all the papers, so there wouldn’t be no evidence to hold up against them.”

I was five years old then. (14)

Ursa knows very well what all the Corregidora women want. What they have been taught to want is to make generations. Ursa is also taught that:

“...The important thing is making generations. They can burn the papers but they can’t burn conscious, Ursa. And that’s what makes the evidence. And that’s what makes the verdict.” (22)

To this Tadpole replies:

“Procreation. That should be a slave-breeder’s way of thinking.” (22)

Corregidora, a slave owner can be a slave breeder. He wants more slaves to be sold and prostituted. But Corregidora was not the only one to do that, there were many like him. And as Tadpole points out procreation was a slave breeder’s way of thinking.

Now what makes Ursa angry is that she cannot make generations because Mutt’s pushing her down the stairs of the café has caused her to lose the baby and the womb forever. But she vents her anger:

And what if I’d thrown Mutt Thomas down those stairs instead, and done away with the source of his sex, or inspiration, or whatever the hell it is for man, what would he feel now? At least a woman’s still got the hole. (40-41).

Every generation from Great-Gram to grandmother to her mother instructs Ursa to make generations. Her mother also tells her “not to bruise” any seeds in her.

She tells Ursa how her Gram was born. Ursa remembers it in an interior monologue :

..... UrsaHoney, I remember when you was a warm seed inside me, but I tried not to bruise you. Don't bruise any of your seeds. I won't Mama.

Catherine, Lawson, her friend tells Ursa that her voice is changed and it appears that she has been through something-tragic in her life. The voice is a little strained.

Cat comments :

"Your voice sounds, little strained, that's all. But if I hadn't heard you before, I wouldn't notice anything. I'd still be moved. May be moved more, because it sounds like you been through something. Before it was beautiful too, but you sound like you been through more now."

"I know what you mean, but it's still changed."

"Not like the worse. Like Ma (Rainey) for instance after all alcohol and men, the strain made it better, because you could tell what she'd been through. You could hear what she'd been through."

"Well, I don't have to worry about men."

"That'd make you go through more not having a man."

(44)

Ursa thinks how Mutt used to ask her to whom she belonged to him or to Corregidora but now all her seeds are wounded. She muses over this in an interior monologue:

What she (Cat) said about the voice being better because it tells what you've been through. Consequences. It seems as if you're not singing the past, you're humming it. Consequences of what? Shit, we've all consequences of something, stained with another's past as well as your own. Their past in my blood. I'm a blood-*Are you mine*

Ursa or theirs? What he (Mutt) would ask, what would I ask now?...But it's your fault all my seeds are wounded forever. No warn ones, only, not even bruised ones. No seeds... No seeds. Is that what snaps away my music, a harp string broken, guitar broken, string of my banjo belley. ...When do you sing the blues? Everytime I ever want to cry, I sing blues-or would there be glasses of tears? (45-46)

The Corregidora women's lives are so haunted by Corregidora that they have lost their individual identities. They bear his name as they have lost and forgotten theirs. It may be acceptable in slavery but after emancipation also all of them including Ursa's mother and Ursa her self have kept Corregidora's names. After Marrying Mutt, Ursa still clings to Corregidora's name and doesn't accept Mutt's name as his wife, this incenses Mutt and so he comments:

*"Ain't even took my name. You Corregidora, ain't you? Ain't even took my name. You ain't my woman."
(61)*

Ursa like her grandmother and mother is a mulatto. Only her great grandmother was pure, original black woman-a coffee-bean woman. The subsequent generation are mulattos. But on asked about "passing", Ursa refuses to pass and gets benefited and maintains her identity as a black woman.

When slavery came to an end the slaveowners burned all the record to destroy all the evidence of slavery but they couldnot destroy what was instilled in minds of the slaves. Ursa is told by her foremothers:

".... They burned all the documents, Ursa, but they didn't burn what they put in their minds: We got to burn

out what they put in our minds, like you burn out a wound. Except we got to keep what we need to bear witness. That scar that's left to bear witness. We got to keep it as visible as our blood." (72)

Mutt teaches Ursa what Corregidora taught her Great-Grandmother-to use the four-lettered, obscene, bawdy, street language. Mutt is shocked to hear Ursa use such a language but Ursa is not shocked. She replies that it is he (Mutt) who taught her so:

"Didn't I tell you you taught me what Corregidora taught Great Gram. He taught her to use the kind of words she did...." (76)

Ursa asserts that she is a Corregidora woman whose past is so embedded in her blood that she cannot wipe it out. She cannot separate her past from the present it haunts her like a ghost or spirit:

I am Ursa Corregidora. I have tears for eyes. I was made to touch my past at an early age. I found it on my mother's tiddies. In her milk. Let not one pollute my music. I will dig out their temples. I will pluck out their eyes. (77)

The novel reveals a distrust in the white slave owners who destroy the written records and evidence of their misdeeds-may be of slavery in the case of the Corregidora women or destroying the land records of Mutt's father and confiscating the entire piece of land from him as they tore away the page from the past record by making generations and passing the legacy of slavery from one generation to the next, keeping the spirit burning and scar not to be

healed but bleeding. But it is not possible in the case of Mutt's parents who lose their land.

When slavery was abolished people reveled and rejoiced. People-black slaves were free to go anywhere, but the Corregidora slaves didn't go anywhere. They simply clung to him. Same happened in the case of Ursa's mother, but she did something that made Corregidora angry and so she had to run away. Ursa tells these recollections:

".... Naw, I don't remember when slavery was abolished, cause I was just being born then. Mama do, and sometime it seen like I do too. They signed papers, and there wasn't all this warring they had up here. You know, it was what they call pacific. A pacific abolition. And you know people was celebrating and rejoicing and cheering in the street, white and black people. An they called Isabella the Redempt'ress, you know, because she signed the paper with a jeweled pen. And then after that black people could go anywhere they wanted to go, and take up life anyway they wanted to take it up. And that's when the officials burned all the papers cause they wanted to play like what had happened before never did happen. But I know it happened. I bear witness it happened." (78-79)

But what happened in the case of slaves and the Corregidora whores was a strange thing. They had nowhere to go and so they still lived with him. Ursa contunes:

"Mama stayed there with him even after it ended, until she did something that made him wont to kill her and then she ran off and had to leave me. Then he was raising me and doing you know I said what he did. But then something after that when she got settle here, she came

back for me. That was in 1906. I was about eighteen by then." (79)

Ursa met her mother and they came to Louisiana. Ursa was worried what should have happened to her if her mother hadn't come to take her as Corregidora had evil intentions in keeping her too.

Along with the history of Corregidora's and her foremothers Ursa has the legacy of her father-Martin. How he met her mother at the train depot. How they married and after she had Ursa he left her mother. But Ursa's mother never tells these things to Ursa. She comes to know about her parent's relationships from her grandmother.

Ursa wants to know her mothers entire life with her father Martin, so she goes to the place where she is living. She visits her Mama and wants to talk things with her. Ursa's mother tells her how she met her husband Martin at a place across the train depot were she used to have lunch. She didn't pay him any attention because she was looking for 'no man'. But when she had Ursa he married her and then he left. Ursa's mother tells her experience:

"But then I know it was something my body wanted, just something my body wanted," (16)

"It was like my whole body wanted you....."

"I know you was gonna come out a girl even while you was in me." (117)

"When I know about you, Great Gram went and talked to him, I begged her not to, but he came and married and then..... he left me." (118)

Ursa's mother went to see Martin only once after that. He saw Ursa once when she was two years old so she cannot remember him. When Ursa's mother went to see him he beat her and called her a bitch and made her to walk like whore in the street. It was a humiliating experience for her that she could never forget. Martin was basically angry because he was used by the Corregidora women to make generations. He was made to play the role of Corregidora-to make generations. He was given the role of Corregidora. That's what incensed him and made him angry and so he couldn't let Ursa's mother see him. Ursa's mother tells her memories with Great Gram. Great-Gram told Mama how Corregidora wouldn't let her see some man because he was too black.

It was Martin who had the nerve to ask them (Great-Gram and Gram) what Ursa's mother never had to ask, "How much was hate for Corregidora and how much was love." (131). Desire and hate two humps of the same camel. Martin asked the Corregidora women how much they hated and loved him and that made them angry and they disliked him.

The white racism and sexism-gender discrimination surfaces in the novel when the Melrose woman commits suicide. People comment about the inaction of police as she is a "nigger woman". They simply file the complaint and close the file and the case is over. People comment:

"A daddy got the ways the police ain't. anyways, she wasn't nothing but nigger woman to the polices. You know they ain't gon take they time to find out nothing about a nigger women. Somebody go down and file a complaint, they write it down all right, while you

standing there, but as soon as you leave, they say, 'here, put it the nigger file. That mean that they got to it if the can. Naw, they don't say put it in the nigger file they can say put it in the *nigger woman* (emphasis in original) file, which mean they ain't gon never gone to it... (134)

A stark contradiction arises in the two tendencies reflected in the novel. Pregnancy, giving birth to the daughter or a child and "making generations" is not only a biological urge of the motherhood or woman hood for the Corregidora women including Ursa who is made barren by Mutt. It is an obligation of the past abuse of Corregidora that haunts their lives and distorts and perverts them. And in that sense Martin and Mutt are abused from their natural roles. "Making generations" may be a matter of pride in the case of Corregidora women to keep the scar of alive and to avoid the multiple invisibilities caused by multiple jeopardy in slavery and beyond and so Corregidora women insist on "making generations".

But the situation is paradoxical in the case of May Alice and the Melrose woman. For them pregnancy proves to be a matter of shame and not of pride. When May Alice is of shame and not of pride. When May Alice is pregnant and gives birth to a child, Harold who is responsible for it, deserts them and Alice and her mother have to leave the place. The case of the Melrose woman is more tragic in that she commits suicide on getting impregnated. The man responsible is not punished by the police as it is a "*nigger woman*" (emphasis in original) case.

The gender trauma inextricably nags in both the situations beyond the racial oppressions. "Making generations" is to resist annihilation of Corregidora women

and that becomes their mission. But “making generation” is not so pleasant for May Alice and Melrose woman, it endangers their lives. The novel critiques these two opposite phenomena.

Madhu Dubey (1994:78) comments that the Corregidora women mythicize their oppressive history. They mythicize the reproductive ideology and it is demythicized by May Alice and Melrose woman. Both the women react to their pregnancies with guilt; the Melrose women even kills herself.

Grandmamma tells Ursa that Corregidora would have maltreated and abused Ursa’s Mama and Ursa because he was crooked. She continues:

“..... He fucked her and he fucked me. He would’ve fucked you and your mama if y’all been there and he wasn’t old and crooked up like he got..... He raised me and when I got big enough he stared fucking me..... He wasn’t buying up them fancy mulatto womens though. They had to be black and pretty. They had to be the color of the coffee-beans. That’s why he always liked my mama better than me. (172)

This is an incredulous saga of incest and pain and suffering that shatters our imagination. The Corregidora women tell Ursa that her centre is her womb. The limbo even becomes more profound when she is no longer able to make “generations.” Ursa’s mother tells her experience to Ursa:

“Like my whole body or something know what it wanted even if I don’t want no man. Cause I wasn’t looking for none. But it was like I know it wanted you. It was like my whole body knew it wanted you, and knew it would have you, and you’d be a girl.” (116-117)

Ursa's mother use of 'it' for her body suggest the economics of slavery. Hortene Spillers suggests that the economic system defines the black slave as "chattel" on the same level as "livestock" or even household possession. Sally Robinson (1991:159) comments. :

Slavery that produces the slave as object for the master's consumption. This is the experience of slavery described by Jones in *Corregidora* and the impasse in which the Corregidora women find themselves their inability to "transcend" slavish consciousness might be explained by the fact that they have had to produce themselves as object for consumption.

In comparison of Brazilian slavery with the American-one Carl Degler mentions that in Brazil black women slaves were used as prostitutes than as breeders. He points that many a slave owner made his living by selling the bodies of his female slaves. This happens in the case of Corregidora a Brazilian slave owner who prostitutes his black female slaves including Corregidora women-Great-Gram and Gram and treats them for lucrative financial gain. The difference comes into focus when Corregidora rapes these black slave women and make other white customers to do so (Sally Robinson 1991:153)

There is another dehumanizing aspect to it as pointed out by Black Marxist feminist critic Angela Davis who thinks that the rape of black women by white men during slavery can't be seen simply as a cultural construction of white women protected from male lust.

"rather, can be understood as weapon of domination a weapon of repression whose covert goal was to

extinguish slave women's will to resist and in the process to demoralize their men. " (Sally Robinson: 1991:153)

The problem for Ursa as a blues singer is that she is barren because of Mutt's mistreatment. She experiences guilt at being unable to pass on the family story to daughter as Keith Byerman (1985:177) comments:

Mutt seems to have succeeded where the slave owners failed: they could only destroy the record while Mutt can destroy the truth itself by effacing the future.

The tale attacks male domination which assaults female identity and integrity. As she can no longer make "generations" Ursa determines to rewrite the story of Corregidora's "coffee bean woman", Great-Gram...: "I'll make a fetus out of grounds of coffee to rub inside my eyes." (54) ...Her fantasy of rubbing the grounds of coffee inside her eyes suggested her desire to see the world and history a new to subvert the hold Corregidora has over the construction of that history.

Ursa's obsession with Corregidora tends to paralyze her in the present but Mutt and Tadpole do try to help her overcome this paralysis.

Melvin Dixon argues that Mutt's violence against Ursa enables her "to free herself from the pattern of mutual abuse implicit in the pledge (to make generations) itself." (Mari Evan 1984:239). Dixon calls the end of the novel as a "healing communication" (ibid :245)

Melvin Dixon comments that Mutt frees Ursa from the oppressive matrilineage that held men and women captive and forces her " to come to new

terms with her femininity.” (Mari Evans 1984 :239-40) Mutt unknowingly liberated Ursa from this oppressive past as he doesn’t know that she is newly pregnant when he knocks her down and causes her abortion and hysterectomy. Ursa is a new woman now not bound by the chains of past but ready to sing “a new world song.” The Corregidora matriarchy in the novels is only evocation of collectivity sustained by oral cultural transmission. The Corregidora women’s experience of slavery is literally erased when the slave owner burns all written records. The women resist their exclusion from official history by means of oral narrative: “ we were suppose to pass it down like that from generation to generation so we’d never forget” (9). The Corregidora women must produce generations who will carry their version of history in future: “The important thing is making generations. They can burn the papers nut they can’t burn conscious. And that is what makes the evidence. “ (22)

Madhu Dubey (1994:74) points out the significance of these women’s mission of making generations:

As a means of making generations, the womb becomes the site of these women’s political resistance, and their definition of themselves ...for the Corregidora women to claim the power of their wombs is an important oppositional strategy.

The blues element brings the folk element in the novel. It enriches the African American folk heritage. African American women have a rich a classic tradition of blues singing like Ma Rainey, Billie Holiday, Bessie Smith and others and Ursa perpetuates this tradition.

When Ursa began to sing publically her mother opposed her. She even thought that it was singing to the “devil.” She was sitting in the church and praising God and Ursa was singing to the devil. She tries to pull Ursa off the stage. Ursa resists her mother. She now recalls the incidence:

When I first had people liking my singing, it was down at that place that was more somebody’s house than a restaurant. When Mama found out she came and got me. “I ain’t gon have you singing no devil music. Me over there sitting up in church trying to praise God, and you over at Preston’s singing to the devil.”
 “What about Grandmama’s old blue records? You didn’t say nothing to her.”
 She didn’t answer, then she said” That ain’t the devil coming out of your own mouth.” (146)

In *Liberating Voices* Jones (1992:196) observes that “the language of the blues is generally concrete graphic, imagist, and immediate. Jones’s novel have often been described as blues songs or performances (Byerman :1985:172). The blues are very significant the Ursa as she explains:

“What do the blues do for you?”
 They help me to explain what I can’t explain.” (56)

As pointed out by Ralph Ellison in his work *Shadow and Act* 1972: 256-257) in women’s blues, especially the “classic” form recorded by Bessie Smith, Ma Rainy, and others, the lyrics are rich with a mixture of joy and sorrow. The voice rendering the lyrics is always sensual authoritative, and in control of the emotions dissolved.

Catherine Lawson's remarks about the change in Ursa's voice after accident proves what Keith Byerman that this beauty is deepened by Ursa's suffering. But more important is that her singing has acquired a power that it previously lacked:

"You got a hard kind of voice", she said now. "You got like callused hands, strong hand but gentle underneath, strong but gentle too. The kind of voice that can hurt you. I can't explain it hurt you and make you still want to listen." (96)

Ursa tries to defend her blue singing and her foremothers' passing the oral heritage:

...What was their life then? Only life spoken to the sounds of my breathing or a low playing Victrola. Mama's Christian songs and Grandmama wasn't it funny-it was Granmama who liked the blues. But still Mama would say listening to the blues and singing them ain't the same. That's what she said when I asked her how come she didn't mind Grandmama's old blues records. What's a life always spoken and only spoken? (103)

Ursa's blues songs are oral piercing, entrancing, sensuous and entertaining. Claudia Tate (1979:141) comments that Ursa sings the blues because it is her way of turning pain into leisure and freeing herself psychologically from a tyranny of historical oppression.

Ursa's mother opposition to her singing is constant because these songs are devil's and it is her destruction. She scolds and admonishes Ursa who replies :

I'll make a fetus of grounds of coffee to rub inside my eyes. When it's time to give witness I'll make a fetus out of grounds of coffee. I'll stain their hands. (54).

The coffee grounds from the plantation owned by Corregidora or as the text of her pain, provide the raw material for the song she will sing. Ursa is fiercely defensive of her story, her body, and her music. Rather than posing herself as the objectified and “watched” performer, she defends herself from a voyeuristic male gaze.

Ursa believes that “everything said in the beginning must be said better in the beginning.” (54) she thinks that her barrenness has snapped away her music, her harp string is broken, guitar is broken, string of her belly is broken. There strain in her voice. (46) On asked when does she sing the blues, Ursa replies:

Every time I ever want to cry, I sing blues. Or would there be glasses of tears? (46)

When Ursa sings she picks out a man to sing to. And when Mutt starts coming in, she keeps picking out him to sing to. And when they are married she has him a man to sing to. She thinks that the others only “listen” but Mutt “hears” her (52)

In a prophetic way Ursa replies Tadpole that the blues are very significant to her. Through blues she is able to communicate what she cannot do through the words. Blues singing is the trajectory of Ursa’s life a blues artist:

What do the blues do for you?
It helps me to explain what I can’t explain. (56)

Through blues Ursa wants to sing a “new world song” a universal song that will appeal to everybody. It will encompass not only her life but also lives and of Corregidora women and all his black slave women. It will be a Portuguese song but it wont be a Portuguese song. It being a song of new world will not only cover

the pathos of the (Corregidora) black slave women but it will also sing of their emancipation, freedom and new life in the new world from slavery. In a very significant interior monologue Ursa confesses her religion of blues music, her spirit of blues singing that is the very soul of the novel. It is the yearning of her spirit:

I wanted a song that would touch me, touch my life and theirs. A Portuguese song, but not a Portuguese song. A new world song. A song branded with the new world.
(59)

For some black nationalist critics like Amiri Baraka, the blues is the only cultural form that is free of white ideology, it communicates therefore an authentic black voice that literary texts have been unable to achieve. Only in the blues mode did black artist maintain “their essential identities” as blacks. The world projected in the blues music is “the Blackest and potentially the strongest” (Madhu Dubey 1994:83)

Houston A. Baker, Jr. writes about the significance of the folklore in Black American literature:

What is genuinely new in contemporary works of Black American literature is their use of folklore as the foundation of a uniquely black cultural tradition.
(Madhu Dubey 1994:84).

The arguments made by Amiri Baraka and Houston A. Baker Jr. support the thesis made by the novel of using the folk-lore of blues music. Gayl Jones presents Ursa Corregidora, the protagonist of the novel as a blues singer.

Madhu Dubey (ibid.:84) assesses the significance of blues to Ursa:

In a difficult double move, Ursa's blues voice allows her to express a feminine sensibility that is at least politically free of the oppressed and oppressive collective tradition represented by the *Corregidora* women's narrative. In appropriating the blues form, *Corregidora* satisfies the Black Aesthetic injunction that black writers should use oral forms to express a distinctively black consciousness.

In a unique and tragic incantation the interior monologue brings out the suffering of all *Corregidora* and black slave women. Ursa continues her musing.

I thought of the girl who had to sleep with her master and mistress. Her father, the master, her daughters. The father of her daughter's daughter. How many generations? Days that were pages of hysteria. Their survival depended on suppressed hysteria. (59)

That was the hysteria of slavery the negro slavery but particularly of more tragic slavery of black women. The *Corregidora* women of four generations are the victims of that hysterical system embedded in sinful, lustful and incestuous relationships, prostituting them not only for procreation but for monetary gains.

When Ursa reconciles and unites with Mutt after twenty two years, she is forty eight year old. She goes back with him it is not the same room but the same place-Drake Hotel. The same feel of the place. Ursa thinks that their union after a long time should be like that of Great-Gram and *Corregidora*:

It wasn't the same room, but the same place. The same feel of the place. It had to be sexual. I was thinking, it had to be something sexual that Great-Gram did to *Corregidora*. I knew it was to be sexual: "What is it a woman can do of a man that make him hate her too bad

he went to kill her one minute and keep thinking about her and can't get her out of his mind and next?" In a split second I knew what it was, in a split second of hate and love I knew what it was, and I think he might have know too. A moment of pleasure and excruciating pain at the same time, a moment of broken skin but not sexlessness, a moment just before sexlessness, a moment that stops before sexlessness, a moment that stops before it breaks the skin: "I could kill you" (184)

In the final act of reunion with Mutt, Ursa performs fellatio on him and that gives her power and control over him in the heterosexual relationship and she says "I could kill you". Ursa's transfiguration in *Great-Gram* and Mutt's in *Corregidora* is ambivalent. Ursa continues:

It was like I didn't know how much was me and Mutt and how much was *Great-Gram* and *Corregidora* like Mama when she had started talking like *Great-Gram*. But was what *Corregidora* has done to *her*. (emphasis in original) to them, and any worse than what Mutt had done to me, than what we had done to each other, than what Mama had done to Daddy, or what he had done to her in return making her walk down the street looking like whore (184).

Corregidora ends on the note of what Faith Pullin calls reconciliation or "happy ending" (Dubey : 1991:74) of the union of Ursa and Mutt after a long gap of twenty two years. The novel depicting this union ends also on the note of a sequence of three lines blues stanza, representing *Great-Gram*, *Gram* and *Mama*:

"I don't want a kind of woman that hurt you." He said.
 "Then you don't want me."
 "I don't want a kind of woman that hurt you."
 "Then you don't want me"

"I don't want a kind of woman that hurt you."

"Then you don't want me."

He shook me till I fell against crying. "I don't want a kind of man that I'll hurt me neither." I said. He held me tight (185)

Ursa leads from blues solo to duet in the end between her and Mutt that produces mutual consent and authority. The end of the novel reveals the rhythmical blues stanza of six lines. The tragic saga, full of pathos and pain of *Corregidora* women, and "internal drama" is related to this "external drama" of Ursa's life with Mutt and Tadpole which has a silver lining of reconciliation.

Deborah Horvitz (1998:257) observes that *Corregidora* is a psychological journey and draws parallels with that of Sophocles's *Oedipus* in the sense of both Ursa and king Oedipus suffer psychological trauma and their past haunts both of them. In the case of Ursa she is aware of the past legacy, and in the case Oedipus it irrevocably dawns on him in a thunderous way.

Sondra O'Neele (1982:25-37) defines *Corregidora* in the Western *Buldungsroman* and *Kunstlerroman* traditions in the British and African-American fiction like Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*, and *Great Expectation*, William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* or Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Richard Wright's *Black Boy* and James Baldwin's *Go Tell it on the Mountain*. It furthers the same tradition in African American Women's fiction of Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brown Stones* or Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters*. It makes the trajectory of Ursa-and African American woman artists-the blues singer to maturity.

Corregidora has Ann Allan Shockley points out the features of latent lesbianism. She point out this trickling of lesbian element in the novel does not depict such over relationships. She comments on this phenomenon:

There is now trickling a Lesbian themes in the fiction and non-fiction by Black Lesbians. Even heterosexual Black female writers and now-women identified women are throwing in for better or worse an occasional major or minor Lesbian character. Unfortunately, within these works exists an undercurrent of hostility, trepidation, shadiness, and in some instances, ignorance, calling forth homophobic stereotypes (Barbara Smith 1983:86)

Ann Allen Shockly further observes that Gayl Jones “always seems to toss a minor Lesbian character or two in her “novels”. (ibid:89) In *Corregidora*, Ursa the principal character rebuffs a lesbian advance made by a young girl named Jeffy (Jeffrine) when she stays with her friend Catherine Lawson who is also implicitly lesbian but her relations are not elaborately discussed in the novel. Ursa recalls:

I was drowsy, but I felt her hands on my breasts. She was feeling all on me up around my breasts. I shot awake and knocked her out of the floor...there was smell of vomit in the room, like when you suck your thumb. (39)

The noise of knocking Jeffry also makes Cat awake. But she is not surprised with what has happened, as both Cat and Jeffry have lesbian relations, as Cat’s husband rejects sexual relations with her and the white master where she works constantly insults her.

Gloria Wade-Gayles (1984:175) comments on the novels uncertain treatment of lesbianism :

Gayl Jones treats two lesbian characters with sensitivity but she steps back from developing them or making clear use of them in the novel. Our failure to get a handle on the novel that does justice to Jones's vision demonstrates the need for clearly defined and tested approaches to lesbian criticism. With such approaches we might find that *Corregidora* belongs to the tradition of latent lesbian fiction.

In *Corregidora*, Gayl Jones employs black urban diction in a town of Kentucky. It shocks with its raw language, using four-lettered, bawdy, obscene, filthy street language. Not only the male characters like Mutt and Tadpole and Corregidora use such language but even women like Ursa also use it.

In an interview with Michael Harper, Gayl Jones points that writing *Corregidora* was a "song... It was a ritual." (Michael Harper 1979:358)

Jones uses Black speech as a major aesthetic device in her works. She uses rhythm and structure of spoken language to develop authentic characters and to establish new possibilities for dramatic conflict within the text.

Both of Gayl Jones's novel, *Corregidora* and *Eva's Man* use the first person narrative technique. We get to know the story through the consciousness of the protagonists-Ursa in *Corregidora* and Eva in *Eva's Man*. The first person narrative technique is direct and immediately appeals the readers. In *Corregidora* we come to know the story seeping through Ursa's consciousness. Both what Claudia Tate calls, the 'internal' and 'external' dramas, are reflected through Ursa's consciousness.

The black urban diction adds the ripeness and maturity to the writing which is very unique in African American women's fiction writing. This oral and folkloric elements are masterfully interwoven by Jones in both her novels.

Valerie Gray Lee (1980:266) points out the use of folktalk in the novel:

Instead of using "conventional English" many blackwomen novelist employ a folk talk that is metaphorical instructive and entertaining ... The use of folk language is used to capture the more subtle dynamics of black life...the folktalk that goes on among mother and daughters center on men folk... many of the writers and turning and returning to one of the oldest, universal themes: love and man/woman relationship. Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) ...and Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* (1975) support this thesis.

In an interview with her teacher and poet Michael Harper, Gayl Jones delineates another phenomenon of her writing She further comments:

I learned to write by listening to people talk ... the best of my ...writing comes from having *heard* (emphasis original) rather than having read ...my language foundations were oral rather than written (Michael Harper 1975 : 352-53)

She points out the source of her writing and establishes her self in the African-American literary tradition:

I made connections with slave narrative tradition.

There are two types dialogues in the novel. Some of the dialogues are ritualistic and some are naturalistic...most of the italicized dialogues between Ursa and Mutt are ritualistic.

Commenting on the thematic concern of the novel that is relationships between men and women, Jones explicates that she explores the women-women relationship but not really men-men relationship in the novel. The relationship between men and women she is dealing with is a blues relationship but there is close relationship connection between her poem "Deep Song" which is a blues poem, and *Corregidora* which is a blues novel :

The blues calling my name
 She is singing a deep song
 She is singing a deep song
 I am human.

What Gayl Jones in an interview with Michael Harper calls *Corregidora* a metaphor is deeply related with this poem of hers, as both the poem and the novel are deeply rooted in blues tradition (Michael Harper 1975:374)

Madhu Dubey (1995:253) points out *Corregidora* women become imprisoned in history and Ursa is defeminised by hysterectomy. Elizabeth Swanson Goldberg(2003:447) comments that *Corregidora* deals with pain and torture . Prostitution of female slaves in Brazil amounts to an institutionalized practice of rape. Some critics like Dubey (1995:102) suggest that Gram and Great Gram may have enjoyed or more precisely desired -their torture even as they hated at/him,:

"They were with him. What did they feel ?you know how they talk about hate and desire . Two humps on the same camel ?Yes .Hate and desire both riding them ,that's what I was going to say?"

Corregidora ends where Jones's her second novel *Eva's Man* (1976) begins. Eva's action can be said a sequence to Ursa's. In the reconciliation with Mutt Ursa performs fellatio that empowers her over him and she says, "I'll kill you"! (1984) Eva continues further as she not only poisons kills her lover Davis Carter and performs fellatio but castrates him. Eva uses the power that Ursa gets and kills and castrates Davis. Both the novels portray the bizarre and insane worlds and delineate the "negative stereotypes" as critics castigate them, though illogically.

(B) The Gothic and Grotesque World of *Eva's Man* (1976)

Gay Jones's second novel *Eva's Man* (1976) is equally bizarre, stunning, and profound like her first novel *Corregidora* (1975). Both the novels portray the bizarre worlds in which their protagonists and characters are mired in the worlds of sex, violence, and insanity. In this thematic sense *Eva's Man* can be considered a sequel to *Corregidora*,

Eva's Man begins with the fait accompli of what Ursa only fantasized about. In this thematic sense both the novels delineate the quite wild, bizarre and unbelievable worlds. We find that Eva, the protagonist of the novel is subjected to sexual abuse/molestation from time to time by the various black males since she is five year old to the age of forty three when she is twice put in prison of her heinous crime of poisoning and castrating her lover Davis Carter. She is not the only victim in the society but the fates of her mother and her relative Jean and her mother's friend Miss Billie are no more different. They also face and suffer the gender exploitation from black men.

Critics and writers like John Updike also criticized Jones in creating negative characters like Eva who they think are against males and particularly black male community. Another two similarities between the two novels are the themes of blues and lesbianism.

Gayl Jones's interest in 'abnormal psychology' of the characters is found reflected in *Eva's Man* like *Corregidora*. The incestuous relationship of Corregidora with Ursa's foremothers is a piquant sign of the hysteria of slavery and white racism, and the central action of the novel-Eva's poisoning and castrating her lover Davis Carter is equally abnormal. Both the actions in these two novels are pervert. But in the case of *Corregidora* this abnormality is beastly in nature and signifies the demonic form of white racism. In *Eva's* case her act is the culmination of her lifelong and recurring subjugation of sexual victimization and molestation in the sexist male dominated patriarchal African American society. In both the novels women have no identity of their own but they are the prey of the lust of men in the male dominated society.

Both the novels-*Corregidora* and *Eva's Man* are first person narrations using the flashback techniques of interior monologues and stream of consciousness techniques. *Corregidora* seeps through the consciousness of Ursa Corregidora, the protagonist of the novel. Similarly *Eva's Man* is narrated by Eva Medina Canada, the heroine of the novel who is now twice in jail for her crime. So both the novels lack the authorial intrusion in them, as she does not make any moral authorial judgments in the actions of the characters.

Both the novels use Black dialect as the medium of narrations instead of standard English. This use of black dialect enriches the texture of the novel and proves its uniqueness.

Madhu Dubey (1994:89) comments that unlike *Corregidora*, *Eva's Man* cannot be even partially recovered into Black Aesthetic critical mode. The novel's salient thematic and formal features, such as its treatment of castration, its use of black dialect, stereotypes, and incoherence jeopardize us from distilling any clear didactic meaning. So the contemporary critical perception of *Eva's Man* was unanimously unfavorable.

Richard Stookey eulogized the novel for not aiming its anger and violence against racial oppression and found it "refreshing" and "elevated" above the genre known as the "black novel" and into the realm of universal art. Stookey dismisses racism as a narrow parochial concern and states the dynamics of sexual oppression constitute a literary theme of universal interest (Madhu Dubey 1994:89).

Black Aesthetic critic Hairston writes that the novel was accepted by white reviewers because of its critique of black men rather than of white society. The feminist focus of the novel is on sexual rather than on racial oppression (Madhu Dubey 1994:89-90). The Black Aestheticians like Keith Mano (1976:66) argued that the novel lacks any merit.

Toni Morrison's comments that "all her (Jones's) novels are about women tearing up men", points to the one feature of *Eva's Man* that drew the most

extreme negative reaction from the contemporary critics on Eva's castration of Davis which constitutes the climax of the novel (Dubey 1994 : 90)

The narrative of *Eva's Man* is composed of dreams, memories, interrogation scenes and exchanges between Eva and her cell-mate Elvira; it is a narrative originating in Eva's consciousness and is fragmented and disjointed. As Jones remarks in a interview with Claudia Tate that Eva is an unreliable narrator who takes control over her story, but does not put the pieces of the puzzle together (Claudia Tate 1983: 95)

The novel reflects with the flash back technique. The novel begins with the climax scene. Eva has poisoned and castrated Davis. On being informed by her, the police arrest and imprison Eva. It is from the psychiatric prison cell that Eva recalls the tragic incidents of molestation and sexual abuse in her life and in the lives of her mother and other women that culminate in her heinous crimes. She also comes into contact with the different authorities and institutions in the society including the police, the law, the psychiatrists and the media (the press).

Gloria Wade-Gayles (1984:175) observes that Jones's vision of black womanhood is more developed in this novel. She comments:

Gayl Jones's vision of black womanhood is more developed in her second work *Eva's Man*. In fact, in some ways, *Eva's Man* is a companion work. The theme of hate and the desire are repeated and the themes of sexual exploitations and oral sex are reflection of a woman's hostility and her power to kill. The vision remains one of horror.

Toni Morrison is therefore correct in saying that Jones's writing is "an exception to black women's writing" in that it is "never about joy." (Wade-Gayles 1984:175)

Gloria Wade-Gayles (ibid: 175) further comments about the tragic element in the novel :

There is not only absence of joy..... there is also preoccupations with raw and crude sexual lust, sexual profanity, and mirror is broad enough to reflect everything that happens in the netherworld of sex. Like an female erotic novel, it reads like the script of X-rated movie.

Gloria Wade-Gayles (ibid :176) further argues, that the novel reveals the victimization of black woman by black man:

The novel is an exception to black women's writing also because it emphasizes sexual victimization almost to the exclusion of any interest in racial oppression. The black man's brutal victimization of the black women is the major chord in her work.

In an interview with Michael Harper in the *Massachusetts Review*, Gayl Jones describes her novel as a "horror story" that starts with "the telling and some times the answers come out of the telling" (Michael Harper 1977:701)

Eva recalls from the prison cell the scene that opens the novel with the arrival of the police on the spot who find proofs of Eva's crimes and the horrified land lady of the hotel. It also reveals how a press article showed Eva with an uncombed hair like a 'wild woman.

The novel opens with the representation of Eva's crime in the media and its popular reception.

Like Trueblood in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible man* (1973) the site of Eva's violent and aberrant sexuality becomes a space for occult ritual. Her crime undergoes a bizarre reenchantment, or retelling. The repetition of telling her crime acts like a narcotic. Eva grumbles, "They (the people) want me to tell it (the crime) over and over again" (4)

Elvira is the woman in the same cell with Eva. Eva's cellmate at the psychiatric prison. Eva is not allowed to go out like Elvira and other prisoners because they've got more control than her; and because of the nature of the crime that Eva committed before she was brought here.

The details submitted by the captain in the court throw light on her earlier life. The captain looked at the paper and then said:

Eva's been in the trouble before, when she was seventeen she stabbed a man she wouldn't talk them either, wouldn't say anything to defend herself. She was given a six month sentence. She spent the first three months in a girl's reformatory, and then she was old enough to be fingerprinted and put in prison for the remaining three months. She wouldn't even tell why she stabbed him. The man claimed, 'I wasn't doing anything but trying to buy the woman a beer' She was married in 1955 to a man named Hunn. Last job she had was in a tobacco factory.

Some people who were at the trial thought Eva a whore because of her crime. But that was the easiest answer according to Eva. Many people including the psychiatrists and people from newspapers approach her and ask her the

reasons behind the crime. Eva tells the reader at the beginning of her narrative how her questioners want to hear about ;

At first I wouldn't talk to anybody. All during the trial I wouldn't talk to anybody. But then, after I came in here, I started talking. I tell them things that don't even have to do with what I did. But they say they want to hear that too... I know I am not getting things straight, but they say that's all right, to go ahead talking. Some times they think I'm lying to them, though. I tell them it ain't me lying, it's memory lying. I don't believe that, because is still as hard on me as the present, but I tell them anyway. They say they're helping me. I'm forty three years old and I ain't seen none of their help yet. (5)

But the psychiatric institution finds an "easiest answer' for her aberrant acts of madness. The psychiatrists try go after same predictable motivation for human behaviour .

Eva resists the straightforward interpretations the official speakers want to impose on her. As her cell-mate Elvira observes, the authorities, need to see her as crazy, to explain her in this way:

"Now, you ain't crazy. When you first come you was crazy, but you ain't crazy now. They gon keep thinking it, though. 'Cause its easier for them if they keep on thinking it. A woman done what you done to a man".
(41)

From this psychiatric prison cell Eva recalls the memories of her life. She remembers the crime that she committed five years ago when she was thirty eight years old. But too Eva it doesn't seem that long..... It doesn't seem like five

months ago. She remembers the last event of sexual exploitation that led her to the heinous crime of poisoning and castrating her lover Davis Carter.

Eva comes to know Davis in a hotel where she is listening to a blues singer. Eva is married but now a free woman and lives in Kentucky. When they are introduced to each other, Davis, who is from South asks her if she is afraid of him like the old woman of thirty was scared of Davis who was only fourteen. This question sets Eva on the trail of various memories of molestations in her as well as the lives of other women related to her. Davis's question reminds her the first molestation by a boy who deflowered her with a dirty popsicle stick when she was just five years old.

Davis's question also reminds Eva the male gaze or attitude towards looking Eva. It is Eva who first noticed Davis, who looked like her husband in his youth. Davis thought that Eva was sitting in the dark corner of the hotel is a whore. Elvira also tells Eva that these people think Eva a whore. They think that Eva as a whore attracts, bewitches the people. Davis also thinks that Eva is probably in the habit of sitting there in the dark corner just so men would come to her. This idea brings to her mind another incident of molestation by a car owner who thinks Eva to be a 'bitch.' The car owner brings his car to the corner of the street where Eva is standing lonely. He thinks Eva a whore and opens the doors of the car thinking she may come in with him. But Eva's cold response enrages him and slamming the door of the car he drives away quickly. Eva experiences and witnesses the car owner's evil way of looking at her when the buses were on strike.

Sometimes the molestations and abuse that Eva suffers from the black males is interrelated with other black women. Gayl Jones is representing Eva and other black women who suffer from sexism as tokens or representatives of entire black womanhood and the different black male abusers are representatives of black community. Gayl Jones was castigated for such negative stereotypes of black feminism. She was criticized for the negative portrayals of characters like Eva who poisons and castrates her lover, Davis Carter, a black man. The simplest possible answer that was deduced or inferred that Davis represented all her black male abusers. Here again Gayl Jones was criticized for the negative delineation of black males as rapists. The predicament of Eva and Miss Billie, her mother's friend for example is similar in the sense that both as black women have suffered sexual abuse from the same black man Mr. Logan.

Miss Billie describes how Mr. Logan, who was a carpenter, molested her when she was a five or six years old. She further advises Eva not to let that old man mess with her. She tells Eva that one cannot forget the first man that abuses you.

Eva thinks about the first male that abused her. He was a little boy called Freddy Smoot. He lived in the same building. He deflowered Eva with this dirty popsickle stick when they were playing in the empty apartment. Eva was five years old at that time. Eva is always afraid of Freddy after that. Whenever he finds a chance he molests her. Miss Billie says that the boys are 'bunch of wild

horses'. When Freddy leaves New York for Jamaica with his mother, a woman of loose character, he presents Eva a little pearl handed pocketknife.

The next man that comes in Eva's life and abuses her is Tyrone, a musician, when she's twelve years old. Here Eva's story is related with her mother. Tyrone comes in Eva's life through her mother. Eva's mother has illicit relations or an affair with Tyrone. He was ten years younger than Eva's mother. Eva's father comes to know of it but keeps silent for proof as he worked at a restaurant and come home late. These relations had an adverse impact on Eva. But when Tyrone began to come home with Eva's mother he molested her whenever he found her alone in the house or on the stairs. When Eva's mother is busy in the kitchen and his is also with Eva and playing the game of jacks he abuses her. But when he finds that there is no response from her he starts bringing gifts to seduce her. When he tries to grab her below the stairs Mr. Logan who sees them and cries, "Hoot." As he was also an evil eye on Eva. She escapes from Tyrone.

Eva's father is incensed to find her mother's adultery with Tyrone. When he finds both of them sitting together he makes Tyrone to go out and vents his anger on his wife. Eva describes the incident vividly that depicts the domestic abuse in the married relationship of her parents :

But now he was tearing that blouse off and those underthings. I didn't like hear nothing from her the whole time. I didn't hear the thing from her.

"Act like a whore, I'm gone fuck you like a whore. You act like a whore, I'm gonna fuck you like a whore".

He kept saying that over and over. I was so scared I kept feeling that after he tore off all her clothes off and there wasn't any more to tear, he'd start tearing her flesh. (37-38)

When Eva is seventeen years old another similar incidence happens. This incidence is related to Eva and Jean. Here the culprit is Alfonso her cousin. Alfonso and his wife Jean and his brother Otis come to live in New York, from Kansas city and they stayed at a hotel.

When Alfonso is trying to mess with Eva at the restaurant, they come across a man in the late fifties...the thumb of his left hand is missing, having evil intentions. When Eva resists Alfonso's advances he leaves her alone in the hotel. So finding her alone at a table, the man with the thumb of his left hand missing approaches her. He is old enough to be her father, to be her grandfather. He is Moses Tripp.

Finding her alone Moses Tripp tries to molest her so Eva defends her self with the knife that Freddy Smoot has gifted her. She stabs Moses Tripp's wrist. Eva is arrested and sentenced for six months imprisonment. She is sent to a reformatory and then to prison. She didn't defend herself in the court but simply accepts the punishment.

The next man Eva comes to know and who maltreats her in her husband James Hunn'Hawk'. Eva is sent to a reformatory under the charge of attacking Moses Tripp, because she is a minor. But later on she is sent to a prison where she comes to know James Hunn, who is fifty two years old when Eva marries him after the completion

of her imprisonment and Eva is eighteen years old. When Eva is imprisoned her parents come to see her regularly in the beginning but later on they stop coming as the relations are strained. So James Hunn, who is imprisoned under the charge of murder of man over a woman is the only man she can talk to. James Hunn continues to visit Eva after his imprisonment is over. So they get close to each other and the result is their marriage.

But the real trouble didn't start until Eva and James Hunn moved down to Kentucky. Eva was enrolled in a school. Nothing went wrong till they moved to a house where there was a telephone. James Hunn wanted the telephone to be disconnected but Eva wanted it. Having been asked the reason he said that he didn't want Eva's lovers calling her. So finally the telephone was disconnected. That was the first sign of his anger and possessiveness. Eva lived for two year with him. But Eva began to notice that he was an old man older then the teacher in the school. He was a watchman. He argued that he was too old to have children.

James Hunn vented his real anger when he finds Eva talking to her schoolmate at home. He told the boy to get out. Then he reached over and grabbed her shoulder and started slapping her and shouted:

"You think you a whore, I'll treat you like a whore. You think you a whore, I'll treat you like a whore.

...

Think I can't do nothing. Fuck you like a dam whore.

"Naw I'm not lying. "He said, "Act like a whore, I'll fuck you like a whore. Naw, I'm not lying." (163)

This reminds us of the abuse of Eva's mother by her father.

Another character that bespeaks the sexual abuse is Joanne, a case of child molestation, who said :

"You know the first time they discovered me in a truck with an old man. He asked me to get up in the truck and he said he would give me money. He didn't do nothing but 'handle me'. That's what the court said, 'handle he and gave her some money.' I wasn't nothing but four years old." (151)

Eva also comes across a passenger in bus who tries to seduce her. He also tries to offer fruits and sweets to her but Eva does not respond positively so he gets off the bus.

The man in the office also tries to molest Eva and so do children in the streets.

Fascinated by the intercourse but too young for actual physical intercourse. Freddy substitutes a dirty popsickle stick to explore Eva's genital area. Freddy a prepubescent boy uses pocket knife as a gift which is a symbol of dangerous potency of male. Each scene after Freddy's points man's domination of women.

John Updike (1976:74-77) and Addison Gayle (1976: 48-52) argue that *Eva's man* is a feminist attack on men ...on black men. To prove their manhood is to read the book too narrowly. Each encounter builds and reflects earlier ones and makes the involvement and the repulsion more intense.

It can be argued that the culmination of these recurrent events of sexual victimization and molestation in Eva's life and in the lives of her kith and kin and the other black women she knows is her poisoning and castrating her lover Davis Carter. He epitomized and symbolized all the women abuser in her life as well as other black women. As has been noted, it is Eva, who is sitting in the dark corner of the restaurant, notices Davis, who looks like her husband James Hunn in his youth. She is alone after leaving her husband. Eva thinks that Davis has taken her to be a whore as most of the men did in her life. He brings her to a hotel room and waits for three days to make love to Eva as she is menstruating. He encloses imprisons her for five days. He does not even allow her to comb her hair and clean the room. When Eva is imprisoned for poisoning and castrating Davis the press has released news in the newspapers having Davis's and Eva's photographs. Her cell-mate Elvira shows her the picture to Eva like a 'wild head'. Eva recollects :

He wouldn't let me comb my hair. I don't know why but he kept me in the room and wouldn't let me comb my hair. Took my comb and kept in his pocket.
"What's the shit you won't to comb your hair for. Ain't nobody see you but me". (10)

Eva's memories about the different women abuser are mixed with each other. As she thinks in a flash back narration her memories about the climax... i.e. Davis's murder and castration are mixed with her memories of other black men who tries to molest her and other black women. Eva thinks of Davis's comments about her hair:

"You look like a lion, all that hair," he said laughing,
 "Eva Medusa's a lion".
 "Medina," I said.
 "Medina," he said, "How'd you get a name like that?"
 "It was my grandmother's name". (16)

Davis thinks that Eva Medina is Eva Medusa. He thinks her to be Medusa, one of the dominating images he ascribes her to. Medusa having all that dominating mythological and metaphorical relevance-snakes for hair-and her gaze turning men to stones. Medusa has all that destructive force. Eva proves it by murdering and castrating Davis. Here she symbolizes the Evil as she is once called instead of Eva. She represents the evil or the darker forces of death and destruction.

Davies further ascribes Eva to another pejorative metaphor of Eve. He calls her 'Eve' instead of Eva:

"Why did you come here, Eve?"
 "My name is Eva".
 "Why do you get so angry?"
 "I don't know, I just never liked to be called Eve. I don't know why."

Davis calls Eva as 'Eve'. It is the second important image in the novel. Eve has Biblical connotations. Eve, who is seduced by Satan in the form of snake to taste the apple, the forbidden fruit of knowledge to cause the fall of man and made him lose the paradise. Eva, who is called Eve, by later one bites off Davis's apple and castrated him.

Davis said that there was something sinister in Eva's eyes that brought him their with her. He thinks that Eva's gaze is enticing and bewitching. Davis said:

"There was something in your eyes."

"What?"

"I could tell by your eyes how you felt. I could smell you wanted me."

"I couldn't help looking." (46)

These remarks remind Eva of the events in the life of her mother and great grandmother. There is something in their eyes coming through inheritance that attracts and bewitches men. She remembers how the gypsy Medina whose name was given to Eva's grandmother told her great grand mother:

"There's something in my eyes that looks at men and makes them think I want them." (46)

Davis's remark also makes Eva think what her mother told her lover Tyrone:

"Why did you come over and say something to me in the first place?" I heard Mama ask Tyrone.

"There was something in your eyes that let me know I could talk to you."

"Didn't I see anything in the other women's eyes?"

"Naw". (46)

Davis is afraid of Eva's look and so he asks her not to look in that way.

He repeats asks, "Eva, why won't you talk." (16) Eva's silence unnerves Davis. He sense loss of control. "What are you thinking. You're not talking." (126)

— Davis asks "Why won't you talk about yourself?" (67) And "Why won't you talk to me Eva?" Eva simply asserts that she does not "like to talk of (her) self", offers no explanation but a cavalier, "I just don't." Davis responds, "You make

man wonder what's there," and insists that "there's more to you than what I see." (73) He says, "By the time I get through with you, I want to know you inside out." (45)When he fails to draw an answer from Eva he says, "You hard to get into." (76) The quality of hardness is ascribed by Davis, the psychiatrist, Alfonso and Elvira.

When Eva is brought into the interrogation room her hair is uncombed. It was "turning into snakes" (51). Eva's thinking of her hair as snakes reminds us of the earlier image of Medusa termed by Davis. The images of uncombed hair as snakes strengthens the earlier image of Medusa having snakes as hair.

Davis does not allow Eva to sweep the floor of the room in which he has imprisoned her. He is irritated at the thought of cleaning the room.

Eva wants to keep the same image of herself after Davis's murder. During her confinement Davis doesn't allow her to comb the hair, snatches away the comb from her, but after his murder Eva doesn't want to comb her hair too. The detective provides a comb to her but she returns it without combing her hair. Eva remembers that Davis said her hair was: "a woolen halo" (64) and Davis doesn't let her comb her hair after they make love. Eva asks what if they go out but he says that they are not going out.

Davis says her a dragon and makes her dance, she dances, her hair uncombed, her shoulder careless. She dances and laughs and he sits on the bed and he watches.

There is some similarity in these molestations and victimizations. Eva's mother receives a obscene call. The psychiatrist asks Eva in a similar tone, and Elvira has the same motive:

"How did it feel?" Elvira asked.
"How did it feel?" the psychiatrist asked.
"How did it feel?" Elvira asked.
"How do it feel Mizz Canada?" the man asked my mama.
She slammed the telephone. (77)

The climax of the novel is the scene in which Eva poisons and castrates Davis. There are two inferences that led Eva to do such bizarre deed. First, she is fed up of the confinement in which Davis has imprisoned and sexually exploited her for five days, and so she wants to escape from it, to take revenge on him. Second for Eva, Davis is not only an individual who has molested and raped Eva, but represents and symbolizes for all the black persons who molested her and other black women she knows. Eva wants to take revenge on him. Eva's action is pre-planned. She plans to poison him:

"I'm going out" he said.
I went into the janitor's closet and got the rat poison. I tore a piece of sack and made an envelope and shook some powder in and put it in the pocket of my skirt, then I went back and sat on the bed. Then I sat on the floor.
(122)

Eva thus mixes poison in Davis's drink and food and kills him. As if only to poison Davis is not enough for her revenge Eva performs the bizarre deed of castrating him and uprooting the very phallogentric source of female victimization:

I got on the bed and squeezed his dick in my teeth. I bit down hard. My teeth in an apple. A swollen plum in my mouth. (128)

The symbol of 'apple' connects to the earlier Biblical symbol of Eve and thus brings out the collective meaning of Eve biting the apple bearing the mythological connotations and overtones. This scene also brings out the blood imagery:

"I am not good tonight. I'm bleeding."

...

Blood on my hands and his trousers. Blood on my teeth.
(129)

There is blood because of Eva's period. And there's blood due to Davis castration.

Eva's in a mood of euphoria after her crime. She goes to the restaurant and devours her favourite food cabbage and sausage, and returns to the scene of crime. Questions are raised about both her deed but no concrete solution is found. As it has been pointed out earlier, her poisoning of Davis can be ascribed to her revenge either of his confining, imprisoning and sexually exploiting her for five days or she might have taken him as the representative of all the molester in her life or in the lives of her kith and kin and the other black women she knows. But that is the easiest answer found for her crime of poisoning and castrating Davis. But it is not completely logical and convincing. And in this case also the crime of poisoning is enough, as there is no probable answer pertaining to her second crime of castration. Questions are raised if poisoning was not enough for her revenge. Another not very convincing reason is put forward is that Eva's is a "crime of

passion". As there are no marks of wounds and injuries found on Eva made by Davis, it is concluded that Eva killed and castrated Davis because Eva loved him but he couldn't return her love.

In the euphoric mood after killing Davis, Eva enjoys her freedom, and it is Eva herself who informs the police about her crime and gets arrested.

The castration occupies a highly privileged place in the novels plot as the climax, the castration inevitably bears a interpretative weight. The castration scene is marked by the sudden appearance of italics and by a symbolic and metaphorical overload. Eva offers a series of metaphorical overload. Eva offers a series of metaphorical substitutes for the penis, such as sausage, apple, plum and milkweed. The metaphorical substitution further extends to include owl, eel cock and lemon. Eva's comparison of the castration of Eva's biting the apple opens up a rich symbolic field.

There are also possible reasons for Eva's castration of Davis. She killed and castrated Davis because she did not tell her about his wife (129). The reader cannot however, accept the explanation. "That's what they said at the trial because that was the easiest answer they could get." (4) Hence Michel Cooke has described *Eva's Man* a curt, elided whydunit." (Madhu Dubey: 1994:101)

There are several possible reasons for Eva's castration of Davis: his silence about his wife, his physical imprisonment of Eva, his refusal to commit himself to her his stereotypical perception of her as a whore. All these answers are true to a certain extent but do not answer adequately the question of Eva's motivation.

These explanations are imposed on Eva at the trial, by the psychiatrist and by a curious, sensation seeking press and public. Eva herself remains conspicuously silent about her motive, refusing to provide an authoritative interpretation of the castration.

So the castration means everything and nothing: the novel surrounds its climatic incident with obscurity and density, and it is bitterly criticized. Black aesthetic criticism of *Eva's Man* rises to a shrill and almost paranoid pitch when it confronts the novel's presentation of castration. In Addison Gayle's view, literary and even political judgments give way to sheer personal vilification of the author. According to Gayle it is Jones, and not Eva who seeks a personal release from pain, a private catharsis, which could be achieved only when Black man had rendered impotent (Madhu Dubey 1994:101).

In a discussion with Roseann Bell, Gayle goes even further:

"If Gayl Jones believes that Black men are what she says they are, she ought to get a whole man." (Roseann Bell 1979 : 125)

Gayl Jones refuted such criticism. In an interview with Michael Harper she comments:

"I'm sure people will ask me if that's the way I see the essential relationship between men and women. But that man and women don't stand for men and women they stand for themselves, really." (Michael Harper 1979:301)

Jones partly succeeded in her attempt to restrict the meaning of *Eva's Man* to particularly story of particular man and woman. Several critics, such as Larry

McMurtry (1976:5), Margo Jefferson (1976:104) have read the novel as a narrow, concentrated exploration of a single life, that is not representative of the lives of black men and women in general. Another unsigned review of the novel observes:

The novel ...is of interest only for its investigation into abnormal psychology. It does not have the large canvas and social perspective of her previous *Corregidora* (Madhu Dubey: 1994:102).

But Eva remains silent about her crime before the authorities. She is completely silent at the trial and therefore inferences are made about her crime that it was “a crime of passion.” Moreover Eva is considered ‘crazy’ having a criminal background because in the case of assaulting Moses Tripp when he tried to molest her, Eva didn’t open her mouth justify and defend her action. And that’s why she was sentenced six months imprisonment and she accepted it meekly. Her silence leads the authorities to think of Eva as ‘mentally insane’ and she is sent to a psychiatric prison.

Here in the cell of the psychiatric prison Eva slowly opens up before the authorities that the police psychiatrists, media persons and her cell mate Elvira, who is imprisoned on the charge of killing three men by supplying poisonous wine. The authorities representing different institutions in the society claim that they want to help Eva by knowing her confession and truth. But Eva says that she hasn’t seen any of her help in the five years time. And moreover she is not straight in what she tells them. She even tells them unwanted and unnecessary

information and she is charged of telling lies and they listen. But she says she is not lying but it her memory lying.

Another charge that Eva is labeled with is mixing fact and fiction. She mixes truth and imagination. And because of this mixing of truth and imagination the central action of the novel i.e. of castration is shadowed. Eva confesses of doing the crime but her narration puts it in doubt. Eva seems to be telling lies. Eva mixes fact with fiction, imagination and fantasy.

Eva is charged of committing the crime because of her insanity. The lawyer declares:

“I submit the insanity of Eva Medina Canada, a woman who loved a man who did not return that love. Crumbled sheets and blood and whisky and spit.” (150)

She is considered ‘crazy;’ and interrogated even by Elvira:

Why did you kill him?
I did.
...
The police report says you didn’t.
I did ... I wanted to ...
He thought I belonged to the streets. (167-68)

Along with the dominant metaphors symbols and images that pervade the novel like Eve, Medusa, Evil, as are explained earlier having the Biblical and mythological and religious connotations, overtones and references, is the image of Queen Bee. This image of queen bee also has negative shades of meaning. It symbolizes the destructive forces like those of Eve, Medusa and Evil. The queen bee seduced men, stings them and kills them, it is not more different than a

common woman. It is ordinary and common place but specializes in her evil power. Miss Billie tells Eva and her mother about queen bee that she (the queen bee) kills every man she goes with (17). Eva think that the queen bee looks like a bee and goes around stinging men but when Miss Billie shows her a queen bee in the street she is an ordinary women like her mother. (44) Eva tells Davis about the queen bee that she is 'marked'. She had three men and all of them died. When the first man died they started whispering, but after the third one, they were sure. But she was in love with the third man and she killed herself. (71) A women is a queen bee and men are drones (non working male honey bees)

Along with the mythological and Biblical imagery, the images from animal, bird and insect worlds also dominate the novel. They concretize the darker forces already strengthened by the biblical and mythological images. Some of the images from animal and bird kingdom are the wild horses, cockroaches and an owl. All of them symbolize and stand for the wild and evil forces in nature.

To Miss Billie the friend of Eva's, mother Freddy and his friends the children, playing and shouting represent a bunch of 'wild horses'. They represent uncontrolled raw animal energy and passion. These children try to seduce Eva, follow her and pass, obscene comments.

When Eva is lonely in the prison cell, she watches a pair cockroaches on the wall. The female cockroach chased by male cockroach-their mating and copulation. To Eva these cockroaches symbolize molestation of the women by men. They (cockroaches) represent the insect world having the similar animal

passions like human beings, they are the microcosm of the human universe drawing parallels in the animal and human world.

The last image of an 'owl' signifies the evil force of sucking human blood. It originated in Eva's imagination of where she thinks that the owl is 'sucking her blood'. It is an old owl 'that sucks her blood under her nails and she bleeds'. (176)

All these images add a trope of violence and bizarreness to the novel. These wild images and symbolism strengthen and make the novel compact powerful and enriching in its intrinsic structure.

All the metaphors, symbols and images employed make Eva to be delineated a 'negative stereotype' representing the African American women. The metaphor of 'Evil' symbolizing Eva or a woman in set against the dominant and positive image of 'good that the man or male' represents, 'Evil' symbolizes the darker forces of 'night' and 'ignorance' versus the brighter forces of 'light' and 'knowledge'. The metaphor of Eve relates Eva as woman being 'seducer' and 'enchantress' and 'temptress' responsible for the 'fall of man' by biting or tasting the apple, the forbidden fruit of knowledge. These Biblical, mythological, religious metaphors enshrine Eva with destructive forces and powers.

The Biblical and mythological metaphors of Medusa with her hair and snakes symbolizes Eva represents the destructive and demonic forces. It has another Biblical and mythological metaphor implicit in it of 'snakes' standing for Eva's wild hair and Satan seducing Eve to taste the apple responsible for the fall of man. The metaphor of snake implies the overtones of impersonating Satan the

'fallen Angel' and enticing Eve/Eva for biting Davis's apple/or the forbidden fruit of knowledge. These two metaphors symbolize Eva as the destructive deed she did. They help to paint her in black and darker hues.

The imagery from animal, bird and insect worlds also thickens and darkens the negatives shades with which Eva is portrayed. The imagery of 'wild horses' used for children stands for the insatiable lust of black men and also of black women. The owl sucking the blood under Eva's nails concretizes the blood imagery of Eva's menstruation and Davis's castration. The images of copulating cockroaches the male chasing and mounting the female on the wall that Eva watches in the prison cell symbolizes the recurrent lust, sexual exploitation and victimization in the lives of Eva and other black women she knows by black men. Here the human beings are grotesquely reduced to the levels of animals, birds and insects. The dehumanization of the lives of black men and women to the level of this brutal level intensifies the central act of poisoning and castration and adds gothic dimension to it.

In *Corregidora* (1975) for example, the heterosexual experience with Mutt, liberates Ursa, from shackles off her family obligation of 'making generations.' But in *Eva's Man*, Eva's first heterosexual experience with Freddy Smoot, initiates her into violence after molestation with dirty popsickle stick, (one of the many objects in the novel that stand in for a penis). Freddy presents Eva with pocked knife. Eva threatens with this pocket knife when Alfonso tries to molest her, and actually uses it when Moses Tripp takes her for a whore, Eva's stabbing of Moses Tripp leads to

her first imprisonment in the novel, an imprisonment that is later replicated when her husband James Hunn keeps her locked in his home, and when Davis confines her to his apartment.

Madhu Dubey (1994:41) comments that Eva's physical imprisonment parallels her psychological imprisonment:

Eva's literal physical imprisonment parallels her psychological imprisonment in the male created stereotypes of black women as whores and bitches. These stereotypes serve the double function of constructing black women a powerful, dangerous force; and of justifying the black masculine attempt to contain this force.

Madhu Dubey further explicated the implications of these two negative stereotypes about the black women:

The stereotype of the black woman as a whore, for example inverts black women with an excessive disorderly sexual energy, which then become the object of masculine regulation. Similarly, the bitch stereotype endows the black women with destructive power and strength, the subjugation of black women by blackmen is thus rationalized as an attempt to curb this destructive power (ibid.:41)

When Eva occupies the position of the greatest power over Davis, as she kills and castrates him, she is actually submitting to the images through which Davis has perceived her. Soon after they meet Davis misnames Eva Median as Eve and Medusa, thus remaking her in the traditional conception of women as evil corrupters and destroyers of men. Eva seems to acquiesce to

Davis's naming of her even at her moments of greatest resistance. Biting Davis's penis, she casts herself in the role that Davis assigned her to Eve biting the apple:

"I bit down hard, my teeth in a apple." (128)

Immediately after the castration, Eva assumes Davis's second image of her:

"I'm Medusa, I was thinking. Men look at me and get hard-ones. I turn their dicks to stones. I laughed " (130)

Eva also enacts the role of the third stereotype of black women the queen bee, who takes lover and kills them one after another. Similarly Eva takes Davis as lover and kills him. But Eva falls short in the sense that original queen bee commits suicide and martyrs while Eva refrains from doing so.

In his diatribe against *Corregidora* and *Eva's Man* Addison Gayle urges readers to censure these novels' distorted, stereotypical presentation of blacks and demands instead, more "realistic paradigms of black experience (Madhu Dubey 1994 :92)

But Gloria Wade-Gayles (1984:178) justifies **Eva's Man** on the grounds of its realism:

Jones's fictive world mirrors the real world Joyce Ladner and other sociologist have studied.

The press portrays Eva as a "wild woman" (3) and the general public perceives her as "whore" (4).

Moses Tripp tells Eva:

“One of these days you going to meet a man, and go somewhere and sleep with him. I know a woman like you.” (166)

Eva’s encounter with Davis, confirms Tripp’s perception of her as a whore. Madhu Dubey (1994:93) observes that even while the novel militates against the stereotypical perception of black women as whores and bitches it does not offer any alternative authentic definition that exceeds the stereotypes. Dubey further comments that the novels’ exclusive reliance on stereotypical characterization refuses the realist model of character.

The novel’s reliance on stereotypical characterization provoked John Updike’s (1976 :75) comments:

The characters are dehumanized as much as by (Jones’s) artistic vision as by their circumstances.

June Jordon observes:

“I fear for the meaning of this novel. What does it mean when a young Black woman sits down to compose a universe of black people limited to animal dynamics. Such perverse, ambivalence contribute to the understanding of young girls in need of rescues and protection. (Madhu Dubey 1994:94)

The novel posits a narrow presentation of black as sexual creatures. All of the novel’s characters are driven by a sexual appetite that is beyond the control of reason. Eva learns to view herself and other black as sexual animals through the education she receives from Miss Billie and her mother. Miss Billie repeatedly uses animal imagery to describe black males. Freddy Smoot is a “banny rooster” (14)

and other black boys in the neighborhood are a “bunch of wild horses” (20) Miss Billie’s repeated words “Once you open up your legs...it seem you cant close them” (15) suggests Eva her society’s feminine sexuality as uncontrollable natural urge. The entire novel suggests the association of sexual, natural and animal and imagery invoked through food, sex and defecation. When Eve resists Elvira’s lesbian advances she describes Eva’s “sitting on pot, but afraid to shit.” (40) Mustard reminds Davis of “baby’s turd” (8) and vinegar and eggs of feminine sexuality. Moses Tripp calls Eva “sweet meat”. (68) And she looks at the plate of pigfeet before him. Alfonso mocks Eva’s virginity and says “most girls of your age had meat and gravy.” (57) After sex with Davis Eva feels “like an egg sucked hollow and then filled with raw oyster.” (66)

The metaphorical identification of food and sex culminates in Eva’s castration of Davis, “I raise blood, slime from cabbage, blood sausage.” (128)

Madhu Dubey (1994:95) comments on the synergetic relationship between this imagery:

Confining its characters to this restricted orbit of food, sex and defecation in *Eva’s Man* seems to support the age old racist, stereotype of blacks as, primitive and animalistic.

The novel was castigated for the negative stereotypes by black aesthetic critics. In his caustic review of *Eva Man*. Addison Gayle comments that the novel remains trapped in the negative, myth “borrowed from a racist society”. According to Gayle, *Eva’s Man* envisions blacks as :

... a primitive people defined totally in terms our sexuality ...ours is a world of instinctual gratification where sex, not power not humanity reigns supreme.” (Madhu Dubey 1994: 95)

Gayle’s comment is accurate in the sense that *Eva’s Man* does not overtly or thematically resist the primitive stereotype.

John Leonard (1976:17) argues that the novel obliquely targets white racism as the source of sexual black stereotype. He comments:

The whites took everything away from the blacks but their sexuality, and that distortions of that sexuality are responsible for Eva.

Madhu Dubey (1994:95) observes that *Eva’s Man* fails to critique the stereotype of “the primitive black”:

Eva’s Man repeats and recycles a limited number of sexual stereotypes... The problems with *Eva’s Man* then is not that it fails to critique the stereotype of the primitive black, but that this critique is not explicit enough to meet the Black Aesthetic. Gayl Jones was aware that her ambivalent use of stereotypes of the primitive black could not be reconciled with the contemporary concern with a “positive race images” (Claudia Tate: 1983 : 6-7).

Sally Robinson(1991:167) comments that the three images of Medusa, Eva and Queen Bee used in the novel have mythological and racial implications:

In literally castrating Davis, Eva claims a power that mythologies of race and gender have always assigned to women, at least metaphorically. Throughout the text Eva identifies with three mythological females figures who have common in one thing: they hold a deadly power over man. Eva’s identifications with Medusa, the Queen

Bee and Eva literalizes the metaphorical construction of the black women as a victim of her own excessive sexuality who is turn, victimizes men.

Sally Robinson (1991:168) comments the most rational explanation of Eva's behaviour would be to see her a murder then castration, of Davis as a logical reaction to personal history of sexual exploitation. Similarly Keith Byerman (1985:183) supports Robinson's hypothesis that Eva's act is precipitated when:

"the epitome of sexual domination is reached : the actions and attitudes of her father, her husband, her cousin and all other men she and other women encounter culminates in Davis's reification of her.

Sally Robinson (1991:175) argues that sexuality is an arena of power relations in Jones's texts it must be understood within the context of potential violence and exploitation. Alfonso is the man who beats his wife regularly, and one male (his brother Otis) observes their working as some kind of "blues ritual." (131) The "blues ritual" suggests the complicity of husband and wife in which the husband wields power over wife.

In killing Davis, Eva literalizes the metaphor of the queen Bee's power to destroy the drones and in doing so she challenges the ideology that has produced woman as a lethal force. Keith Byerman (1982:447) suggests that Eva is an example of characters who :

become grotesque either by being victims who personify and exaggerate their society's obsessions or by resisting its conventions, sometimes by carrying them to their logical and violent extreme.

In her discussion of black female adolescence Joyce Ladner (1972:109) writes that by the age of eight a black girl in the ghetto has “ a good chance of being exposed to rape and violence” and this experience plays a decisive role in the girl’s definition of womanhood.

The two images of women that dominates *Eva’s Man*. One hardly new and black literature in the image of the ‘whore’. The word is used loosely throughout the novel to refer all women and second is of ‘bitch’. All men use these words loosely for every woman, wives or others. Eva’s father calls her mother as a ‘whore’ and every boy that comes across Eva also takes her to be whore. Davis, and Moses think Eva a ‘whore’.

The exploitation of women that began in slavery continued after it and is commonplace in *Eva’s Man*. In an interview with Claudia Tate Gayl Jones explained that the images in the novel show “how myths or the ways in which men perceive women actually defines their characters (Claudia Tate 1983:146)

There is a curse of sexuality in *Eva’s Man*. Domination is exercised by men. Women are victimized. Virtually every woman suffers some attack on her integrity. Men are promiscuous.

Miss Billie tells that queen bee is cursed, each man she loves dies. Every aspect of society family folklore friendship, marriage is presented infused with sexuality. The element of folklore percolates through three images of queen been, Medusa and Eva, reinforces the view that women by nature are sinful; they are

responsible for the evil in world. Original sin in a cosmic way has attached itself to the female gender.

Eva is taught by her mother and Miss Billie that men are by nature lustful, and that women can't be innocent. This psychological training is complemented by her physical encounters. If Eva resists sexual encounters, then she is labeled silly or criminal. If she even appears to submit, then she will be labeled a whore. She observes such things in her family and marriage also, she notices the father figure dominant and her mother in adultery. In her marriage with James Hunn, he treats her as whore his possessiveness, refuses to allow a telephone to be installed. Eva repeats the mistake of her mother in bringing her school mate at home, and finds her husband behaving with her wife her father did to her mother. It makes her to think that gender is her destiny or what Sigmund Freud said that anatomy is the destiny of a woman.

Davis is another man to rob her of her humanity. There is something in Eva's eyes that attracts Davis like the other man. At one point Eva feels as though there are rusty nails in her hands. This is Christ imagery. She has symbolically liberated all women by poisoning and castrating Davis.

He calls her "Eve" (44) and again she angrily corrects him, but he continues to associate her with women who are fatal to men, women whose gaze is lethal lure: "there was something in your eyes" (46); "Don't look at me that way." (47) Elvira on the other hand accuses her of Salome: "Just like in that Bible story, ain't it? except got his dick on a platter" (47) "My hair looks like snakes, doesn't it?"

(77)... Eva's biting of Davies's penis relates to the event of biting into the apple of knowledge.

Francois Lionett (1993:144) comments on all the cultural symbols in the novel:

All the cultural symbols that construct women as a dangerous temptress, a bewitching snare, are brought together at the scene of Davis castration.

These are cultural images of women.

Eva's silence, tremendous as, Medusa's silence. It is also a culture image.

Helen Cixous explains the silence:

Silence is the mark of hysteria. The great hysterics have lost speech, they are aphonic, and at times have lost more than speech; they are pushed to the point of choking, nothing get through. They are decapitated, their tongues are cut off and what talks isn't heard because it is the body that talks and man doesn't hear the body. In the end, the woman pushed to hysteric is the woman who disturbs and is nothing but disturbance. (Francois Lionett 1993:145)

Eva resists her construction as a zombie. Eva is "little evil, devil bitch" (35) a "sweet (castrating) bitch" (64,127,138,13,173).

There are certain phallic images used in the text-the dirty popsickle stick used by Freddy. The measure with a bubble used by Mr. Logan, a carpenter. They intensify construct the phallogocentric myth of Davis's castrated penis wrapped in a silk handkerchief and presented as a "jewel" (49) in the court as proof against Eva.

The various entrapments that she experienced with Freddy, her father, and James have now become a literal prison with Davis. The physical quality of her incarceration is reinforced by the imagery. The bodily functions of menstruation, sexuality, flatulence, urination, and defecation, all of which the tone indicates are to be considered unpleasant, are accompanied by foods that can be construed as parallel to these function: sausage covered with mustered beer, hard boiled eggs, cabbage woman reduced to the dehumanized object of man's unquenchable sexual desire. Two observation should be made about Eva's act of sexual violence. First, Jones's describes it in graphically realistic terms. Her account of surrounding the act is explicit.

Eva Medina Canada, the protagonist of the novel and her grandmother are named after the white gypsy, Medina and it is very significant. Eva tells Davis:

The gypsy Medina, Great-Grandmama said had time in the palm of her hand. She told Great Grandfather, "She told me to look in the palm of her land and she had time in it." Great Grandfather said, "What did she want you to do, put a little piece over top of the time."

Great grandmother said, "No". Then she looked embarrassed. Then she said, "She wanted me to kiss her insides her hand."

Great Grandfather started laughing. (48)

Madhu Dubey (1994:97) comments that the image of gypsy Medina holding time in the palm of her hand exemplifies her control over time in the palm of her hand exemplifies her control over time, as opposed to Eva's helpless entrapment in

it...Eva tries to recover Mediana's secret power over time by kissing the palm of Davis hand.

In the entire novel Eva tries to affirm her continuity with her namesake. She wanders from town to town has the mobility of gypsy, and also draws attractions to her own wild hair.

Miss Billie, a friend of Eva's mother gives Eva's mother gives Eva one of her ancestors wooden bracelets when she is five years old and impresses upon Eva the importance of being "true to one's ancestors." She said there were "two people you had to be true to those people who came before you and those people who came after you." (22). How can you be true to those that come after you if there ain't none coming after you?" (85-86) She (Miss Billie) is angry at her daughter's lack of interest in marriage. Eva alienation from the ancestral cycle is signaled by her loss of Miss Billie's bracelet when she is eight years old. The bracelet symbolizes a continuity dependent upon reproduction : Miss Billie withholds the bracelet from her daughter Charlotte until she decides to get married and have children.

These metaphors, images and symbolism drawn from the remote corners of the Bible, Mythology, wild insect, animal and bird lives are one of the parts of the structure and style that also includes the language of the novel; as instead of using the "standard English" Gayl Jones uses "Black English" or a 'negro dialect' in this novel also like her first novel *Corregidora* (1975). The four lettered, raw obscene, street language enriching the texture of the novel adds a folkloric dimension to the novel. The first

person narration in the novel has the similar direct effect on the reader. As Gayl Jones does not use authorial intrusion in the narration and does not pass any moral judgments on the characters.

Gayl Jones also points out the difference between the author and the narrator and the absence of political messages in her work in a interview with Charles Rowell:

There are moments in my literature as in any literature, that have aesthetic, social and political implications but I don't think that I can be "responsible" writer in the sense that those things are meant because I'm too interested in contradictory character and ambivalent character and I like to explore them, without judgments entering the work without a point of view entering. (Madhu Dubey 1994 : 102).

The use of the first person narration works to distance the author. The complete absence of authorial intervention closes as within Eva's mind and compels us to read the novel as an effect of a particular character's restricted version.

Diance Johnson remarks that Jones seems to record what people say and think as if it were no fault of her ... Perhaps art is always subversive in this way (Madhu Dubey 1994:102)

The first person narration of the novel helps to contain the novel's controversial thematic material. It is impossible to assessing any truth value to Eva's narration because as the psychiatrist tells her at the beginning of the novel she does no know how "to separate the imagined memories from the real ones" (10). The reader doubts what Eva says, " Naw, I'm not lying". He (James) said,

'Act like a whore I'll fuck you like a whore.' 'Now, I'm not lying' (163). We know that Eva is lying; for she attributes to James the exact words that her father spoke to her mother. The very exactness of the repetition here and elsewhere, robs Eva's narrative of the authority of realism. The use of first person narrative in *Eva's Man* like the other novel in the 1970s is a gesture of revolt against Black Aesthetic.

Eva's unreliability permeates even the central action of the novel, her castration of Davis. The police report and the prison psychiatrist inform Eva that she did not bite off Davis's penis, as she believes : the very truth of the novel's central incident is thus thrown into doubt.

Eva's madness function as a kind of safety valve. The use of mad narrator seems to distance not only the reader but also the author from ideological implications of the work. Keith Byerman (1985:99) discounts reading of *Eva's Man* as a feminist novel on the grounds of Eva's madness, emphasizing that "the ideology, the madness are Eva's, not Gayl Jones's." it make the novel a kaleidoscopic jumbling of time. At the end of the novel Eva tells the psychiatrist:

"Don't explain me. Don't you explain me. Don't you explain me." (173)

In an interview with Gayl Jones, Charles Rowell comments that the first person as a narrative device is a preferred form in the oral tradition. (Madhu Dubey 1994:104)

Unlike *Corregidora*, *Eva's Man* does not use standard English to mediate the dialect spoken by its characters. John Wideman (1983:81) also supports this idea. In

an interview with Claudia Tate, Gayl Jones remarks that Eva is an unreliable narrator who takes control over her story, but does not put the piece of the puzzle together for us (1983:95). The narrative resists unity. Unlike the Corregidora women Eva exercises a certain control over her narrative; while Great Gram and Grandma speak in the kind of automatic repetition beyond their agency.

Sally Robinson (1991:166) comments that the critics like Keith Byerman (1985:184), Gloria Wade-Gayles (1984:175) and Melvin Dixon (1984:235) opine the fact that all Eva's memories and dreams address sexual exploitation of women has led to the novel's critics to see Eva's act as the logical if extreme and violent-reaction to the overwhelming pattern of male domination of women's bodies which describes her experience. But according to Robinson such a view puts the critics on the side of authorities. This view is supported by Gloria Wade Gayes. She writes (1984:82)

Eva understands that she castrated Davis and poisoned him because "he came to represent all the men she had known."

Eva's silence places her in the margin of hegemonic discourse, as a disempowered subject or rather, object, the Other

The technique she uses in the novel is that the story is told in disconnected dialogues, in dream and fantasies, in fractured time sequences and "here about whereabouts" places in memory and myth, in flashbacks, that take the reader into Eva's past. In an interview with Michael Harper in the *Massachusetts Review*, Gayl Jones explains that in using memory and fantasy as well as story telling, she

reclaims Eva Medina's whole past and reveals all the things that led up to ...her relationship with her lover. The skillfully handled first person point of view facilitates this reclaiming and, most importantly humanizes a strange woman as the flashback begins, Eva is resurrected from a comatose state into clarity. (Michael Harper 1977:701)

In the same interview Jones attempts to dispel the notion that Eva and her lover represent a statement on male female relationship in the black community. They (Eva and Davis and Eva's other male abusers) "stand for themselves really." (ibid.:700-1) But this disclaimer is hardly convincing in the light of the heavy emphasis on sexual abuse that characterizes all the flashback and all the dreams. The recurring theme of the novel is that black men see black women as sexual objects "bitches" and "whores" who like to be laid and who will accept abuse and sexual victimization.

Loyle Hairston comments that in her second novel *Eva's Man*, Gayl Jones plunges the readers again into murky depths of her world of sex and violence. *Eva's Man* is a study in male hostility (Madhu Dubey 1994:89-903).

John Updike (1976:74) comments on the thematic concerns:

Femaleness as experienced by American black was Gayl Jones's subject in her first novel *Corregidora* and *Eva's Man*, her second novel continues the exploration with a sharpened starkness, a power of ellipsis that leaves ever darker gaps between its flashes a rhythmic exact dialogue and visible symbol.

John Uplike further comments on the concept of evil in the novel.

Evil is no idle concept to her (Gayl Jones) *Corregidora* concerned the evil that passed from the practitioners of slavery into the women who were its victims and evil permeates the erotic education of Eva Canada (ibid).

The narrative fragments do not add up to coherent picture of the past, and the novel thematizes its structural discontinuities by stressing the gaps and fissures in Eva's memory. On a structural level Jones makes no attempts to placate her readers.

The text is rife with incoherence the central act of the genital mutilation is never confirmed in details. "What I'm trying to say is (35) and "I don't remember" (170) and autobiographical " I don't want to tell my story". (77) What African American writes men and women like Toni Morrison but not only Toni Morrison, have repeatedly stated that what marks black literature is the distinctive language of the text. This is supported both by Gayl Jones's novel *Corregidora* as pointed out earlier and *Eva's Man* in their distinct use of black dialect.

Keith Byerman (1985:181) argues about the Gothic element in the novel: that the structure of *Eva's Man* is not linear but cyclic. He terms it as Gothic structure:

In *Eva's Man* the women does what Eva refused to do, and this difference marks the boundary between sanity and madness. Through the use of this mad narrator, Jones denaturalizes and defamiliarize the system of male sexual dominating. Eva, in her blues performance articulates in extreme form the experience of women and rebels against it. Since Eva is obsessive, she exaggerates the oppression and thereby forces the readers to reconsider this aspect of this social order. The effect is a novel of Gothic and grotesque.

Structurally, the narrative operates as a whirlpool in its downward, evertightening, ever-faster, spiraling moments. Keith Byerman (1985:183) comments that, as in *Corregidora*, so in *Eva's Man*, victimization creates in women significant power. The pattern of the narration are those of madness, time and space displacement, obsessive emphasis on sexuality and violence.

Keith Byerman (1982:447) comments about the grotesque element in the novel:

Eva, the central figure of the novel, who poisons and castrates Davis is, in literary terms a grotesque. But such figure is not used by Jones just to shock or entertain; rather she uses bizarre characterization to examine the even greater grotesqueries of American society.

The grotesque as a literary convention has two aspects found in *Eva's Man*. The grotesque appeals to be something in as that pre-rational, that defies intellectual categories. The grotesque is deliberately extravagant, distorted, violent, and ugly but strangely attractive and repulsive.

Keith Byerman (1982:457) further comments on these phenomena:

The Horror in the novel leads to murder, incest and schizophrenia. Madness of the central character. Eva's act, though violent, is a way of resisting the oppression. Eva is an 'avenging angel.' Her crime is a symbolic liberation from the particular grotesqueness of her society.

Eva's Man applies the conventional use of grotesque. It has some sort of obscenity that shocks our sensibilities. The elements of necrophilia and castration also shock us as the central character's insane and perverse behaviours.

Defining the novel as a Black Vortex, Keith Byerman (1980:93) comments of the Gothic structure of *Eva's Man*:

Gothic literature has long been a vehicle for the expression of the repressed, violent, terrifying, erotic and obsessive aspects of human experience that could not be articulated elsewhere. As a popular form it is used by such Southern writers as Faulkner. As means of treating the themes of violence, sexuality, obsession and power, its patterns and techniques have been found useful by both women and black writers. An especially powerful rendering of the Gothic is found in the novel *Eva's Man* (1976) written by Gayl Jones.

Eva's Man, though not designed as a gothic novel, follows this structure pattern very closely. The central character Eva describes her experiences that are destructive of her sanity through repeated images, scenes, words. Eva response to her victimization in a male dominated society by literally excising the root of that evil: she bites off the penis of her lover after poisoning him. This violence is taken as the evidence of her inanity and her quest ends in the still centre of a hospital for the criminally insane. She is last seen speaking to and uncertainly enjoying sexual favours from mirror image character, Elvira. Her journey has been through a Gothic whirlpool (ibid.: 9)

The structure of *Eva's Man* reflects Jones's interest in abnormal psychology. In an interview with Claudia Tate Gayl Jones explicates it:

The person who is psychotic might spend a great deal of time on selected items, so there might be a reversal in the relative importance of the trivial and what is generally thought of as significant. In Eva's mind, time and people become fluid. Time has little chronological sequence, and the characters seem to coalesce into one personality (Claudia Tate 1979:146)

The story is told only from Eva's point of view, thus there is not only the increasing structural intensity of the events but of the madness of the narrator. The fluidity and coalescence mentioned above are necessary to the creation of this mad narrator and her mad tale. The chapters become shorter and more condensed as the narrative progresses.

Eva's has no faith in the authorities including the police, the psychiatrists and the lawyers. They claim that they want to help her but she has not seen any help coming in five years. She calls the psychiatrists Dr. Frauds. The psychiatrist name Davis Smoot makes her chuckle and reminds her of her two molesters-Davis Carter and Freddy Smoot. When Dr. Davis Smoot tries to explain the things to Eva she sharply snaps him and cries". Eva is angry because the psychiatrist tries to seek some explanation from Eva for her action.

Sally Robinson (1991:178) comments on Jones's exploration of the sexual exploitation of black women:

Jones is more interested in exploring the sexual exploitation of the black women than in looking at the victimization of the black man as rapist. Nevertheless *Eva's Man* contains exaggerated representations of black male sexuality.

Sabine Brock and Anne Koenen argue about Jones's turning of sexuality as a weapon:

Jones suggests..... by her intensive and frequent a exploration of the vagina dentata-myth that women are not only (and not the only) victims of sexual violence and they can turn sexuality into a weapon by exploiting male fears (Sally Robinson 1991:180)

Jones's narrative performs a critique of a masculine and racist discourses and their positioning of women.

Melvin Dixon chides Eva for failing to acknowledge the "part she has played in abusing men..." "Eva persists in acting out with the rules of women predators".

Melvin Dixon states:

Rather than acknowledging the part she played in abusing men..... Eva persists in acting out with Davis the role of women predators. (Mari Evans 1984:247)

Dixon further comments that Eva's silence is yet another sign of her passivity.

Dixon comments:

Eva remains imprisoned literally and figuratively by her silence that simply increases her passivity and her acceptance of the words and definitions of others (Mari Evans 1984:246)

Eva is inarticulate and brutally silent throughout most of the novel as if she is rebelling against language or had just lost her voice completely while filling upon cabbage and sausage and Davis's penis.

Melvin Dixon argues that Eva's refusal to speak keeps her "imprisoned literally and figuratively" (ibid.:118) Eva is exposed to and affected by child molestation at the early age of five. She witnesses sadistic/ masochist relationship between Alfonso and Jean, the sexual abuse of her mother by her father and experiences of sexual abuse from Freddy Smoot, Alfonso, Moses Tripp, James Hunn, and Davis Carter. Eva's sensuality is shaped with environment of abusive men and her negative experiences with them.

Eva is not silent but maintains control. As Jones points out that Eva's matter of fact style is problematic as there is no sign of moral judgment from the author for she believes in her characters autonomy when they narrate their lives. Jones comments:

...they (critics) are bothered by the fact that the author doesn't offer any judgments or shower her attitude towards her offense, but simply has the character relate it. For example, Eva refuses to render her story coherently. By controlling what she will and will not tell, she maintain her autonomy (Claudia Tate 1983:97)

Because of Eva's autonomy and unreliability as a narrator, we are no closer to a rational explanation of her behaviour. Eva pays a heavy price for maintaining the autonomy, she is put in psychiatric prison. What Eva brutalizes by her silence is the coherence of the official discourses which she attempts to recuperate. This is her "rebellion" and it is also her power, it is Eva's discursive power. If Eva is indeed "crazy" she exhibits some surprisingly "sane" insights into the politics of male domination, she call the psychiatrists as Dr. Frauds.

Toni Morrison therefore is correct in saying that Jones's writing is "an exception to black women's writing" in that is "never ...about joy" (Wade-Gayles 1984:175)

Gloria Wade-Gayles (1984:175) further comments:

There is not only absence of joy, there is also preoccupation with raw and crude sexual lust, sexual profanity, and sexual perversion. Jones's artistic mirror is broad enough to reflect everything that happens in the netherworld of sex... Like female erotic novel it reads like the script of X-rated movie.

Gloria Wade-Gayles (1984:176) further argues:

The novel is an exception to black women's writing also because it emphasizes sexual victimization almost to the exclusion of any interest in racial oppression The black man's brutal victimization of the black women is the major chord of her work.

In an interview with Michael Harper in the *Massachusetts Review*, Gayl Jones describes her novel as a "horror story" that starts with "the telling and sometimes the answers come out of the telling" (Michael Harper 1977 :701) In *Eva's Man* a companion text to *Corregidora* Eva uses pocket knife against Moses Tripp and arsenic and teeth against Davis to take revenge. Jerry Ward observes that Eva's life history contains a series of sordid, dehumanizing sexual encounters (Mari Evans 1984:254)

Eva's Man is a Black women's blues song, and it not only "powerful" but "empowering" song. The novel delineates what it is to be woman and to be an African American women.

Gayl Jones two novels *Corregidora* and *Eva's Man* are blues narratives. In former the protagonist is literally a blues performer, an active participant while in the latter, the protagonist though passively listening to blues singing in a restaurant, is more metaphorical or at the level of the narrative itself. These novels offer a new way of looking at women's oppression because within the blues tradition the oppression is named and made more tangible.

Jones uses the novel, a Western form, to incorporate the blues to explain and comment on the lives of African American women. And oral form of blues is use to a literary form of novel. Jones does it by using the analytical quality of the blues.

According to Sharley Anne Williams in blues situation mood or feeling is expressed where it is described, commented upon and assessed. The reader has the exposure to Eva's inner thoughts and one can witness her analytical process as she makes decision throughout the novel (E. Patrick Johnson 1994:28)

Jones explores some of the themes of the aesthetics of oral blues like Eva's imprisonment, sexual innuendo, broken heartedness, poverty racism and sexism along with homosexuality. Jones infuses an oral tradition with a literary one.

E. Patrick Johnson (ibid :30) compares blues with the gospels and comments that the blues does not prepare one to "wait on the Lord", to remove the obstacles of life, rather they prepare one to take stock of his or her situation and ponder the next course of action. Johnson further argues that this "analysis" certainly holds true for Eva, as she assesses her situation with Davis who holds in her as a sexual prisoner. Confronted with a situation in which she must make a decision, Eva

realizes that this is her opportunity to devise a plan of action, so she decides to poison Davis:

'I'm GOING OUT' he said.
'Bring home some brandy. I feel like that instead of beer.'
I hadn't meant to call the place home. He must have noticed it because he laughed and said he would. I nodded. He went out. The door closed hard.
I went into the janitor's closet and got the rat poison. I tore a piece of sack and made an envelop and shook some powder in it and put it in the pocket of my skirt, then I went back and sat on the bed. (122)

The exchange between Davis and Eva before he gets the rat poisoning is reflective of a dialogue between two cordial lovers. But Eva's actions after Davis leaves lets the reader know that all is not well between the two. Eva gives an illustration to Davis that their relationship is amicable but she comes to the critical realization that she cannot remain captive. Thus she plots Davis's murder. Eva articulates her burdensome life having been "done wrong" by the men in her life until she come to the point where she cannot deal with the pain anymore. She evaluates her situation as Davis "symbolically comes to represent every man who has abused her."

E. Patrick Johnson (ibid.:31) observes that the blues does not transcend a problem as in the spirituals, but calls for action. The blues does not look for a resolution in heaven of feel that "the Lord will make way", rather, it searches for answers in the tangible realities of life.

Accordingly, the solution that Eva finds is to kill Davis, does not wait God to deliver her, rather, after analyzing the situation, she takes it upon herself to do what she feels is in her best interest. Eva's behaviour is consistent with the blues ideology in that if a man has "done you wrong" then he must "pay". Davis is the "sacrificial lamb" as he represents for Eva, all of the men who sexually abuse her.

E. Patrick Johnson (ibid.:32) observes that the blues mode empowers African American women and leads them to action like Eva. Eva take the role of Queen Bee.

Eva's narrative also exemplifies techniques such as hesitations, repetitions and exclamatory phrases and sounds. Jones uses this pattern consistently in *Eva's Man* such that the novel can be categorized as what Patrick Johnson (ibid:32) a calls as a "speakerly" text, for the blues is meant to be heard rather than read. The technique is exemplified in this passage:

I said I don't know how anybody else was going to vote.
I said I just knew how I was going to vote. He said there was ten percent more black people since he was a foremen, and that he liked people that should gratitude,
I said I didn't know how anybody else was going to vote.
He asked me how I was going to vote. I said I knew how I was going to vote. I said I knew how I was going to vote.
He said he had some money for me if I wanted it. I said I didn't know how anybody else was going to vote. He said never mind that. He said he didn't mean that. (75)

The lyricism of the text points to the oral nature of African American culture as it intersects with and produces the blues tradition. Language becomes the focus in the novel of Jones emphasizes on what is said but how it is said. Language is

ritualized for the musicality of speech grounded in the blues. The reader has to explore the musicality of text:

We are in the river now. We are in the river now. The sand is on my tongue. Blood under my nails. I'm bleeding under my nails. We are in the river. Between my legs. They are busy with this woman now. They are busy with this woman... (176)

The passage has a deeper meaning caught up in the music. Eva's mixing fantasy and reality is not a symptom of "madness", but represents the repetition of a sounds and words as in the blues aesthetic:

Nothing you wouldn't know about
 Nothing you wouldn't know about
 Nothing you wouldn't know about. (135)
 And
 An owl sucks my blood. I am bleeding underneath my nails. An owl sucks my blood. He gives a fruit in my palms. We enter the river again... together. (176)

Eva moves in and out of fantasy and reality and that creates the musicality of words. Juxtaposing of the two images may heal the painful wounds for African American women of sexism and racism.

Eva's murder of Davis is a self empowering experience rather than a nihilistic one. Melvin Dixon argues :

Eva confuses Davis with Alfonso, Moses Tripp, and James Hunn. When she finally decides to be active in lovemaking with Davis by music hard, deep with my breath, it is too late. She has already poisoned him. Eva's behaviour here is demented and pathetic, a travesty of

the successful coupling Ursa of *Corregidora* finds with Mutt (Mari Evans 1984:119)

Facilitated by the blues traditions, Eva literally and symbolically paralyses the weapon (the phallus) responsible for pain. Like Eva's life the lives of African American women are complex, and are bound between the binary relationship of sexism and racism: rather they are caught in a liminal stage. The blues idiom provides a way to talk about complexity of experience. The blues element enriches *Eva's Man* like *Corregidora* adds an oral and folkloric trope to it.

Like in her first novel *Corregidora* the lesbian element percolates in *Eva's Man* also. But she simply sprinkles it in the novel and according to some critics does not allow it to develop to full maturity. There are some instances of lesbianism in the novel. Some instances of lesbianism are direct and some are indirect.

Ann Allen Shockley comments that the novels inherent treatment of lesbianism is not surprising, given the contemporary hospitality to positive portrayals of lesbian characters in the black fiction. Lesbianism and castration are the two thematic elements of *Eva's Man* (Barbara Smith 1979:95) It is interesting to note that the name Eva is contained within the name ElVirA this would seem to suggest that Eva is meant to be reincorporated into a different economy. It is in that space (prison) that Eva can envisage in a world where a lesbian "continuum" as defined by Adrienne Rich (1986:51,43) can replace the violence of compulsory heterosexuality and female sexual slavery.

Gayl Jones comments on the lesbian element in the novel, a part of blues tradition:

There have always been more responses to the narcotic sensuality in the books than to the lesbianism. I do not recall lesbianism entering into my critical discussions except as part of the overall sexual picture (Claudia Tate 1983:97)

Eva has implicit lesbian relationship with Miss Billie's unmarried daughter Charlotte. Charlotte doesn't think of a boyfriend and of a husband or marriage and behaves like a lesbian with Eva.

Eva's act of fellatio on the castrated and now feminized and defiled body of Davis, a sign of necrophilia, can also be described to the implicit lesbianism. Eva/Eve performs fellatio and takes a bite of Davis apple/penis that causes the "fall of man".

The most explicit act of lesbianism is performed by Elvira, Eva's cell-mate on her, an act of cunnilingus or oral sex at the end of the novel. Elvira who makes lesbian advances and finally, at the end of the novel, Eva succumbs to her advances:

Last night, she got in the bed with me, Davis, I knocked her out, but I don't know how long I'm going to keep knocking her out.....

"Tell me what it feels sweet, Eva. Tell me when it feels sweet, honey".

I learned back, squeezing her face between my legs and told her, "Now". (176-77)

Françoise Lionnet (1993:133) defines the new breed of black heroines like Eva who resist their dehumanization with the violent end:

Though victimized by patriarchal social structure that perpetuate their invisibility and dehumanization black female characters actively resist their objectification, to the point of committing murder...

Gayl Jones uses a female protagonist and the themes as disfiguration, castration, and imprisonment, feature prominently in her work.

For this writer the end justifies the means when the end is freedom from sexual oppression. Unlike Harriet Jacobs, Jones has no illusion about the fate of women who take action to save themselves. Jones's Eva is incarcerated.

A geography of pain that unites Gayl Jones with other Black women novelists. Castration and hysteria are central to the narrative of *Eva's Man*. Gayl Jones's title seem to focus on the man in of the story. It is after Davis's death that the story attempts to explain without however requiring that the murderess have a believable rational motive.

Biman Basu (1996:194-195) points out how the novel suffered because only of its sociological criticism:

Eva's Man suffered in the critical and political atmosphere (that reduces African American literature to mere sociological criticism).... The text goes against the grain politically and is disturbing in the violence of both its language and sexuality.

In an interview with Charles Rowell, Gayl Jones states that she does not make any political statements about her works

Come critics would probably want a greater directness of political statement, I don't like direct political statement..... The conflict between aesthetic, political

and social responsibilities..... involves dilemmas in Afro-American literary tradition (Charles Rowell 1982:42)

One cannot but suspect that she is remained of Zora Neale Hurston's vitriolic responses to the criticisms of Richard Wright, who did "want a greater directness of political statement." Jones however adds, "I don't dwell on it (the conflict) when I'm telling a story" (ibid.: 42)

Gayl Jones recognizes the problem in African American tradition in an interview with Charles Rowell:

That subject is problematic for Afro-American writers even more so women (why many of our early writers scrupulously avoided it) because when you write anything dealing with sexuality it appears as if you're supporting the sexual stereotypes about blacks. So do you scrupulously avoid the subject as the so-called uplift writers did or do you go ahead with it? (ibid.:46)

Critical views differ about Eva's act. Some see her as passive and paralyzed by dominant constructions of her subjectivity and others as resisting even disrupting these constructions.

In an interview with Claudia Tate, Jones comments:

The main idea I wanted to communicate is Eva's unreliability as the narrator of her story (Claudia Tate 1983:95)

By rejecting the coherence of a dominant discourse, Eva maintains a vestigial control. While "autonomy" may seem to be outrageous misnomer for someone in prison, silence and indeterminacy can be understood as resistance.

Eva's Man offers a series of instances of abuse which may credibly culminate in Davis Carter's representing status. Her rebelling in poisoning and castrating Davis is not against an individual but a larger structure of power. The institutional forces-law enforcement, judicial and psychiatric...have specific contours " "domestic abuse," "crime of passion", unfaithful deceitful lover," "unrequited love," "mad women" "parental neglect/abuse" "insatiable lust," and representative" criminal.

Edward Said's postcolonial theory is useful in studying black women's fiction as Eva is racial, gendered and sexual Other.

Eva's Man is not a pleasant novel but an extremely disturbing one. Gayl Jones calls it a "horror story" in an interview with Michael Harper (Michael Harper 1982:361) as a response to oppression murder and mutilation may not be justifiable, but the novel points out how the oppressed subject might negotiate these structures of violence...Dismantling of a phallogocentric structure. Eva's act of covering Davis's penis in a silk handkerchief and further being kept by the authorities in the ice box and presented in the court as a jewel' represent the phallogocentric order.

Eva performs an act of fellatio of Davis after poisoning as Ursa does on Mutt in *Corregidora* but here Eva castrates and defiles his dead body.

The novel uses stream of consciousness technique like *Corregidora*. There are several passages by Eva in the novel that read like interior monologues. Where

Eva says, “ yes I was hurt by my love. My soul was broken...”(143). And in another place, the author describes Eva’s sense of loneliness and neglect:

She stands naked on the street. She asks each man she sees to pay her debt. But they say they owe her nothing”
(144)

Two observation should be made about Eva’s act of sexual violence. First Jones describes it in graphically realistic terms. Her account of surrounding the act is explicit. Eva’s crime reflected a national trend the rise in violent crimes of the sixties. *Eva’s Man* castigated by the critics for its delineation of the negative stereotype of Eva, though illogically is a complex novel portraying a rich and varied life of African American women.

The artistic and tragic vision as reflected in Gayl Jones two novels: *Corregidora* and *Eva’s Man* reflects the multidimensional contours of the lives of African American women. *Corregidora*, a neo slave blues world song deeply embedded in history depicts the tragic lives of Ursa Corregidora and her foremothers. *Eva’s Man* a companion text to her earlier novel in many ways like it vividly critiques the sexual subjugation and victimization of Eva, and other black women by black men. Both these novels are artistic commentaries on the multiple jeopardy of race, gender, class and sexual preference in which the African American women are trapped.

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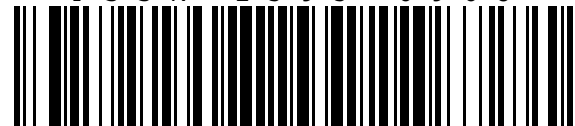
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BLACK FEMINISM