



## The Role of Blues In Gayl Jones Novel Corregidora

\* Dr.N.Seraman \*\* G. Annal

\* Assistant Professor of English, Central University of Tamilnadu, Thiruvavur

\* Assistant Professor of English, GovtArts College, Vridhachalam

### ABSTRACT

*This article is about the exploration of black feminine identity written by Gayl Jones, using the blues as a thematic and structural device. This novel falls short of appropriating the blues made in all its extent. The blues in corregidora works at several inter connected levels. Blues as a theme is at the core of the novel, which focuses on ursa, a female blues singer whose life is patterned according to the blues ethos. In her personal adaptation of the blues, Gayl Jones challenges the genre of the novel, which emerges as a hybrid product of western literary tradition and the traditional oral performance of the blues.*

**Keywords : African - American Literature, BluesAesthetic,Black Vernacular, Community, Series of Experience.**

At the beginning of the twentieth century a new kind of music spreads through the united states from the south, although the orleans is soon identified as its epicenter. Self – taught musicians who played in taverns and street corners in the1890s captured in their songs the disappointment and pain caused by the unfulfilled promises made to blacks about freedom and social mobility after the civil war. African Americans saw their new and cherished freedom limited by racist written and unwritten laws which results in an increasing exploitation and marginalization.

The language of the blues is the black vernacular of ordinary speech focusing on love and sex. In addition, *the blues* uses other vernacular elements characteristic of African American folklore, such as testifying “blues notes”. In the case of female blues singers, these are mostly caused by a mans reflect the mood of a particular painful experience as lived by an individual, but it becomes the musical representation of a mood that permeates the lives of African Americans characterizing their spirit as a community.

In this novel *corregidora*, the main character, ursa, a blues singer who is the fourth generation of *corregidora* women, hates Siman *corregidora*, the Portuguese slave master who fathered her mother and grandmother. Unable to have children and fulfill her charge to make generations, ursa immerses herself in *the blues* as a way to ease the pain of never having children, and find a way to come to terms with the family past that haunts her.

Since the life of a traveling blues women, or man, doesn't make room for a conventional family, it can be assumed that the role of mother was something by those that didn't want a family, but this particular view is far from being true. The lack of mother hood as it is traditionally viewed in the blues. In a similar way, ursa begins to give voice to her own blues. Shortly after her recovery she returns to work and begins to sing her song.

They call it the devil blues. It ride your back. It devil you. I bit my lip singing.

I troubled my mind, took my rocker

down by the river again. It was as if I

wanted them to see what hid down, hear it

All those blues feelings.( 50 )

Similarly in Toni Morrison's novel, *song of Solomon*, Solomon, the African who got fed up and flew back to Africa, subsequently took with him one of his twenty – one children, Like wise when ursa sings about the bird woman, “ how she would take a man on a long journey, but never return him.” (146), this is ursa's way of not just making generations but her way of working through the “blues” in her study of oral tradition in African American literature, *Liberating voices*. (1991), “The language of blues is generally concrete, graphic, imagistic, and immediate”. (11) *The blues* creates an imagery of a way earthy quality, as the metaphors and symbols employed have sexual or physical referents.

But one must also look for a hidden meaning behind the sexual language of the blues. As Angela Davis illustrates with the case of Ma Rainey's blues, the languages of sexual love “metaphorically reveals and expresses a range of economic, social, and psychological difficulties”. (14)

Here in this novel, *The blues* expressive power is derived from the African American oral tradition and enhanced by the simplicity of means it employs structurally woman through repetition with variation, *the blues* song is interpreted by a soloist who establishes a call – and – response relationship with the accompanying instrument or instruments, instead of being interpreted by a group of singers or a choir. In addition, *the blues* uses other vernacular elements characteristics of African American folk lore, such as testifying, “blue notes”, improvisation and compelling rhythms, all of which are put to the service of the plaintive tone of the song.

This novel *corregidora* stands as a major exponent of “a mixed genre that subjects both *the blues* and the fictional modes to a process of mutual enhancement and modification”. Another instance connects again ursa's sorrow to her foremother's past as her music becomes the tool to unveil the tyrants and punish them:

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 mothers tidies. In her milk let no one pollute my music. I will dig out their tem-

ples. I will pluck out their eyes. (78)

In the contrary, and following *the blues* ethos which dwells on the painful details of existence keeping them alive in one's consciousness. Ralph Ellison says that *ursa corregidora* values the past as much as the present, to the extent of seeming obsessed by it. The past, which is eves – present in her life, is the fabric her blues are made from. By bringing slavery to the fore front and making history, an indivisible part of *ursa's* identity, the past, very far from being romanticized, becomes a crude presence. In keeping with the blues themes, *ursa's* final encounter with *mutt* is a sexual one.

However, the notion of a happy ending is complicated by the exclusion of reproduction, as well as by the negation of *ursa's* sexual pleasure. The paradoxical, even contradictory feelings which assault *ursa* at this point liken her to her foremothers when she realizes that this potential violence, the power to give pleasure and pain, the power to castrate or even kill, is also the key to great grams power.

"It was like I didn't know how much  
was me and *mutt* and how much was  
great when she started talking  
like great gram".(72)

*Corregidora* stands as a novel that attempt to convey the black feminine identity by means of the use of the blues as a thematic and structural device. *Ursa corregidora* emerges as a new black woman who eventually Has the capacity to acknowledge both her power and her vulnerability by means of her reclamation and acceptance of the past. The use of the blues form and language in the novel also grounds *ursa's* individual story in a communal background yet, the novel falls short of appropriating the blues mode in all its extend.

Nevertheless, the novel stands as a remarkable attempt at using the blues as the structuring and thematic resource. Like a good blues song, *corregidora* is capable of arousing the readers empathetic feelings a she or she starts understanding *ursa's* position as a castrated black woman who suddenly negotiate her identity taking into account her present circumstances and the inheritance of the past.

Thus, the role of blues is evocative of a series of experience, rather than of a single one. As Houston baker says, "the blues song erupts, creating a veritable playful festival of meaning rather than a rigidly personalized form, the blues offer a phylogenetic recapitulation a nonlinear, freely associative, non – sequential meditation – of species of experience. What emerges is not a filled subject, but an anonymous voice issuing from the black whole".(17) However, the blues does not only reflect the mood of a particular painful experience as lived by an individual, but it becomes the musical representation of a mood that permeates the lives of African Americans characterizing their spirit as a community.

Hence, African music has not only become a thematic element in her work, but it has also been the inspiration for formal innovations in literature. Hence in her personal adaptation of the blues, Jones challenges the genre of the novel, which emerges as a hybrid product, the result of the message of western literary tradition and the traditional oral performance of the blues. Thus, the role of blues plays a vital role in Gayl Jones novel *corregidora*.

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