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Written in the thick of the post-civil rights movement and the emergence of activism for black feminism in 1970's America, Gayl Jones' premier novel *Corregidora* revolves largely around the experience of Ursa Corregidora, the novel's protagonist, whose experiences are permeated by the racial and sexual traumas lived and passed down by her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. The narrative chronicled in *Corregidora* relies heavily on the tradition of oral storytelling and notions about the ways in which familial traumas can span generations through working against the erasure of slave narratives: an idea that is central to our understanding of the novel. One critical aspect of the novel is Jones' utilization of silence—whether literal or metaphorical—and how our examinations and interpretations of these silences inform both our understanding of Ursa's character and the novel as a whole. Much of the literary criticism surrounding feminism and antiracism is rooted in the notion that the power dynamic between voice and silence favors voice as a force more influential than its counterpart, and so Jones' inclusion of silences changes the manner in which readers interact with the text. In her subversion of this dynamic and adaptation of silence as more than just a linguistic muting, Jones creates a sort of counter-narrative in regards to Ursa's engagement with her surroundings, ultimately posing the question of what it means for a novel to nullify the power of voice over silence.

The first few pages of the novel introduce us immediately to Ursa's marriage to Mutt and how a destructive altercation between the two leads to Ursa's hysterectomy, leaving her entirely infertile. After finishing a shift at Happy's, the bar which employs Ursa to sing her blues music, Mutt tells Ursa "I'm your husband. You listen to me, not to them" (Jones 3). A few sentences later, Ursa reveals that "that was when [she] fell. The doctors in the hospital said [her] womb would have to come out. Mutt and [her] didn't stay together after that" (Jones 3). Here, we see an instance of intertwined loss—Ursa's loss of her ability to bear children as well as the loss of her marriage—and how these losses are a product of coerced silence perpetrated by Mutt against Ursa. Mutt's pushing of Ursa is his way of chastising her for singing her music to other people, and so this literal silencing then leads to the metaphorical silencing of Ursa's ability to pass her familial history on to future generations. In her essay "Pregnant Possibilities," Donna Booth Summers discusses Wilson Harris' claim that "the womb [is] a metaphor for the transformative capabilities of the human imagination . . . [and that] the creation vessel of humankind [is] the creative vessel of a new spirit" (Summers 2). We see in *Corregidora* that, while Ursa's womb or the lack thereof hinders her capacity to create generations and thus cannot transfer her familial narrative, the hysterectomy does allow for the production "of a new spirit," which is the new identity formed by Ursa separate from the generational identity ascribed to her by her foremothers (Summers 2). Summers further discusses Harris' "[recognizing] the womb and its rebirthing capacity as a part of women, placing the female . . . in a position devoid of exploitation and degradation, for in these tragic trends, humanity experiences the death of pregnant potentiality," which is a claim that forces us to push against the grain (Summers 2). Ursa is not, in fact, "devoid of exploitation and degradation," as we observe through the idea that

Ursa's body itself is breathing evidence of systemic abuse and rape as perpetrated by Mr. Corregidora against Ursa's grandmother and great-grandmother (Summers 2). Because this event occurs at the beginning of the novel, it positions Ursa's loss of fertility as the thing which silences the narrative of her family as well as situating the rest of the novel as a response to this complicated loss, while simultaneously asserting that the diction surrounding Ursa's womb-loss is representative of the ways in which the body does or does not create language.

If examining the novel on a broad scale, it is possible to reduce *Corregidora* to a testament to the many forms through which the human body produces and carries narratives. With this in mind, we can examine Ursa's dreams as examples of the notion that language does not automatically inform us of the body. Ursa equates her incapacity to bear children to palpable images such as "spilled glasses" of tears and "grounds of coffee," which are images that, like Ursa's womb, are inherently inadequate: liquid outside of its container is undrinkable, and coffee grounds alone are not enough to make coffee (Jones 46-54). While these metaphors do serve the purpose of ascribing corporeal qualities to the abstraction that is Ursa's infertility, they also function as metaphorical silences in that the faculty to consume liquid and generate coffee is removed entirely. The unreached potential of these images to successfully carry out their corresponding actions is suggestive of an anecdotal silence in that there is an unspoken space between action and action potential. Unlike the claim that "although emotional words can convey the emotions we feel, they can be used without subjective experiencing of an emotion, as well," Ursa's dreams do not utilize "emotional words," but rather images central to the context of the novel, further asserting ideas about the kind of silences birthed by this example—this, a linguistic silence (Abbassi et al).

Furthermore, through the subverting of the common conception of voice as intrinsically more influential than silence, Gayl Jones compels readers to engage with the text in a way that does not involve only reading, but listening, as well. Listening to silence—the things which are not said—positions silence as an adequate mechanism through which one can bare witness to events such as trauma. The discourse resulting from the linguistic and metaphorical silences throughout *Corregidora* is then one that gives power to the voices traditionally silenced by oppressive forces, effectively fitting into the novel's dominating narrative of the slave experience.

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