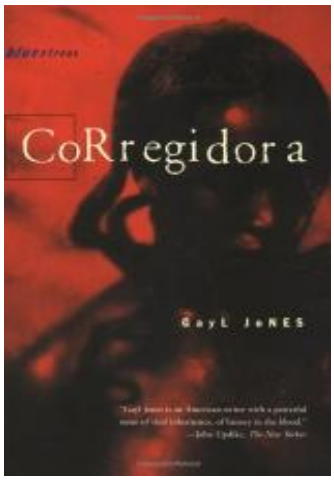
ReadingGroupGuides
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Corregidora

by Gayl Jones



About the Book

Corregidora is Gayl Jones's classic novel: the tale of a blues singer Ursa, consumed by her hatred of the nineteenth-century slave master who fathered both her grand-mother and mother. This is a highly impactive novel wrought with sexual tensions and taboo family secrets. The narrative is interspersed with elliptical stories and memories that bring intense emotions to the surface of the reader's consciousness.

"[**Corregidora** is] a fiercely concentrated story, harsh and perfectly told....Original, superbly imagined, nothing about the book is simple or easily digested....Gayl Jones has presented problems that are living, historical and important additions to the current American?not just black?scene. Her novels are genuinely imaginative creations." ?Darryl Pinkney, The New Republic

Discussion Guide

1. It was as if the words were helping her, as if the words repeated again and again could be a substitute for memory" (11). Like her mother and grandmother, Ursa tells and retells stories and memories from her past. How does this help to mend her own insecurities? Is this practice of telling stories a tradition used in your own cultures?

2. Is the narrator's use of flashbacks (italicized text) distracting or enhancing to the flow of the story? Why do you think that it is such a large part of the novel? (pp. 11, 23, 41, 76, 79)

3. Corregidora is a paradoxically absent and present figure in the novel. How is his identity crafted by others in the novel. Is Corregidora a good title for the book, why, or why not?

4. "I came to you. Why didn't you want me? I lay on my belly waiting" (76). Does Ursa's lack of sexual gratification stem from her past history of abuse (abusive memories), or is it simply a result of the physical trauma her body has

undergone?

5. "My mother married a light man so that her children could have light skin and good hair. But look what happened" (72). In the novel, Jones creates characters who are aware of the effect that the color/shade of their skin has on their place within society. What is she saying about inter-race relations in modern day society?

6. "I am Ursa Corregidora. I have tears for eyes. I was made to touch my past at an early age ... Let no one pollute my music. I will dig out their trumpets. I will pluck out their eyes" (77). Ursa's songs are symbolic, how does she use her music to heal herself and express her own frustrations? What purpose does music serve in your day to day lives?

7. The name, "Corregidora" becomes an emblem of pain and sexual abuse throughout the novel. What do the proper names (or lack thereof e.g. Mama, Grandmama) of the main characters in the novel say about their life-experiences and/or personalities? Do you think that Ursa (Bear), Mutt, Cat, and Tadpole may have animalistic qualities reflected in their names?

8. Margo Jefferson mentions the dichotomy of black slave women as both "mistress and breeder to their white owners." How do the Corregidora women live up to this idea by charging each other to "make generations?"

9. "How much was hate for Corregidora and how much was love?" (131). In some ways, Jones hints towards a connection between desire and sexual abuse. How do the characters in the book make or break a case for this connection?

10. Studies have shown that victims of abuse are more likely to abuse their own children. To what extent do the Corregidora women re-enslave themselves by placing so much emphasis on child-bearing?

11. Writing exercise: **Corregidora** uses an intricate interweaving of character relationships to create a complex family history. Create a genealogy for one of the characters (besides Ursa) in the novel and perhaps develop each relation with a brief character sketch.

Author Bio

Gayl Jones was born in Kentucky in 1949; she attended Connecticut College and Brown University; she has taught at Wellesley and the University of Michigan. The Healing is her first novel published in twenty years?and with it she became a fina list for the National Book Award. Her preceding awards include a Mademoiselle Award, a National Endowment for the Arts Grant, and a Schubert Foundation Grant for Playwriting. Her other books include the novels Corregidora, Eva's Man, and Mosquito; a story collection, White Rat; the book-length poem Song for Anninho; and a nonfiction work, Liberating Voices: Oral Tradition in African American Literature. Jones has reading knowledge of six languages and has been learning Japanese and Indonesian.

Critical Praise

"History and fiction have yielded little about those black slave women who were mistress and breeder to their white

owners. There are some facts and figures, but they tell us nothing about the women themselves: their motives, their emotions, and the memories they passed on to their children Gayl Jones's first novel is a gripping portrait of this harsh sexual and psychological genealogy....Jones's language is subtle and sinewy, and her imagination sure. 'Everything said in the beginning must be said better than in the beginning,' Ursa [Corregidora] vows. Gayl Jones fulfills that pledge."

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