

STRATEGIES OF SUBVERSION:
THE DECONSTRUCTION OF MADNESS IN
EVA'S MAN, *CORREGIDORA*, AND *BELOVED*

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In a number of contemporary African American novels written by women, like Gayl Jones' *Corregidora* and *Eva's Man*, and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, we encounter persistent images of female madness in the form of hysteria, violence or silence. My main thesis here is that madness works in these texts to reveal the oppressive control the ideologies of racism and sexism effect on the black woman. This use of madness transforms the negative construct of female insanity into a necessary affirmation of the female self. However, not all the works are equally successful in achieving this deconstruction of insanity. While the protagonist in *Beloved* claims maternal agency on the same terms of possession and ownership as the white patriarchal ideology, and *Eva's Man* still contemplates violence, not language, as the only possible response to sexism and racism, it is only *Corregidora* that actually uncovers the lost ground of female desire. Yet in their exploration of tenable, black female identities beyond the limits of white patriarchal structures, the novels put forth an alternative to both the black and white male constructions of identity and difference, thus plunging into crisis the patriarchal ideology that allows for gender and racial exploitation.

KEY WORDS: African-American literature, sexism, subjectivity, feminism, postcolonial studies, masculinity, madness, racism.

These three African American novels subvert the patriarchal idea of female madness. The patriarchal, male identity defines itself in oppositional terms to difference, particularly to the racial and gender difference posed by the black woman. Thus, white male identity is identified as the inherent opposite of its negative "other," that which does not exist in its own terms but only in a relationship of inferiority to the white male. As Patricia Hill Collins explains in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*, "whites and blacks, males and females, thought and feeling are not complementary counterparts—they are fundamentally different entities related only through their definition as opposites" (2000: 71). *Beloved*, *Eva's Man* and *Corregidora* dramatize how these structures of domination distort the black female's expression to the point of becoming violent and irrational. From this premise, the works set out to deconstruct the concept of madness by revealing it as yet another societal construct, and a product of society's own binary system of thought.

Indeed, as Foucault explains in *Discipline and Punish*, the authorities exercising individual control also function according to this double mode, "that of binary division

and branding (mad/sane; dangerous/harmless; normal/abnormal, etc.)” (1979: 199). Branding the black woman as mad and “offering” her psychologic treatment is our contemporary society’s mode of containing her difference, providing her with a new identity which is the result of a process of comparing, differentiating, hierarchizing, homogenizing and excluding; as Foucault puts it, of “normalizing” (1979: 183). Society’s array of medical, scientific, and legal discourses become, in this view, the dominant order’s repressive defenses against individuals whose behaviour exposes or even subverts -turns upside down- these rigid polarities. Behaviors of transgression, excess, strength and passion all go against what Ann Goldberg argues, in her book *Sex, Religion, and the Making of Modern Madness*, are our contemporary society’s dominant model of identity (inherited from the values of the “Enlightenment man”): “the unitary, rational, free, self-controlled individual” (1999: 100). Indeed, an extreme power differential between the doctor and the female patient (which may be exacerbated by class, gender, educational and occupational differences) assigns the female patient a minority status. In this sense, the mechanism of labeling a woman mad and enclosing her as such under the control of a hierarchy of policemen, psychologists and doctors, therefore, mirrors and radicalizes the liminal position that the black female already occupies in patriarchy’s dichotomous systems of discourse.

Yet each work carries out this deconstructive mechanism to a different extent, as the protagonists sometimes replicate the ideology they set up to deconstruct. *Beloved* and *Eva’s Man* are less successful in opposing the structures of domination because, as we will see, the protagonists’ violent acts partly replicate the values they aim to subvert. In these works, the protagonists are set in more oppressive environments. *Beloved* is set during slavery times, where the black female’s capacity for self-definition was severely limited both because of her race and her gender. *Eva’s Man* sets its protagonist within a dysfunctional family, showing how the traumatic experiences of sexual domination she both goes through and observes around her will shape and determine her subsequent relationships with men. Its aim is to show how female madness is produced in the early emotional interaction the female maintains with her oppressive, sexist environment. In both texts, though, the experience of oppression is so intense that it can only lead to madness, or female violence. *Corregidora* portrays a more diffused kind of gender oppression, one that corresponds to both black and white, middle-class communities, and which has to do with contemporary, commonly-held views on female sexuality which are phallogentric. Yet this subtle oppression is made particularly intense because of Ursa Corregidora’s race: in *Corregidora* merge the remnants of contemporary sexism together with the long history of domination and abuse that slavery exerted on the black female body and sexuality. On the whole, the characters seem to be more capable of controlling their own representation and discourse to the extent that the African American community’s position in society becomes socio-economically less marginal. Indeed, whilst *Corregidora* explores the effects of both present and inherited oppression in the black female psyche, focusing on the psychological pain of the protagonist, it takes a further step in suggesting how violence and irrationality might be overcome, and black, female desire and identity might be uttered in its own terms. Thus, *Corregidora*’s subjectivity at the end of the book will be put forth as a model of achievement, as an alternative emotional structure to the exploitative male identity that accounts for current sexist discourses, and one that, as we will see, would govern social relations on equal terms.

Both *Beloved* and *Eva’s Man* denounce objectification through a violent act carried out by the black female. As Françoise Lionnet argues in “Geographies of Pain”: “though

victimized by patriarchal social structures that perpetuate their invisibility and dehumanization, black female characters actively resist their objectification, to the point of committing murder” (1993: 133). Indeed, these acts reintroduce the black female into history as a political subject, as in *Beloved*, or they signal and unveil that which patriarchy represses—the female—as Eva’s act of castration of her lover symbolizes. In both cases, the act of violence stands for their active, political voice, which the characters cannot articulate but in violence, in “madness.”

Beloved is set in slavery times, and it is the story of Sethe’s coming to terms with the murder of her baby daughter, whom she kills in order to prevent the enslavement of all her three children. In killing Beloved, Sethe opposes her own reintroduction, and that of her daughter, to their status as property. Within the slavery system, the slave-owner derived his power from a series of cultural oppositions (black/white, male/female, culture/nature, speech/speechlessness, etc.) that exclude Sethe from the realm of ideology and discourse, and relegate her to the realm of nature, to being the reproducer of slavery’s labor force. As Hazel Carby notes in *Reconstructing Womanhood*, Sethe was understood, because of these binary oppositions, as “member of some lower order” (1987: 25).

In the context of slavery’s patriarchal system, child-bearing implies a definite marking or stamping for the black woman. In *Migrations of the Subject: Black Women, Writing, and Identity*, Carole Boyce Davies argues that “the mark of motherhood inscribes the domination of men into women’s bodies” (1994: 137). Davies quotes Jennifer Allen to restate: “Stamped, firmly imprinted on women’s bodies, is the emblem that our bodies have been opened to the world of men” (1994: 137). This inscription excludes women’s voices from the symbolic order, and relegates them to being, in the words of Luce Irigaray, “the substratum who reproduces the social order, who is made this order’s infrastructure” (Whitford 1991: 47). Irigaray’s words point to the link between the repression of what is “motherly” and thus, undervalued, in our culture, and the violent construction of male identity. From this perspective, Sethe’s act of murder expresses her decision to recover her political voice and insert it within history; a decision that prevails over the need to maintain her self-definition as a mother. Davies argues that “Sethe was trying to find a channel for the negotiating which women have to do, between the imperatives of nurture/love for its own sake and the desire to be a complete individual” (1994: 136). It can be argued that Sethe uses violence to express her separate self, and thus, the novel affirms the mother’s need to be a separate, complete individual.

And yet, on the other hand, Sethe reacts to the slave-owning economy and ideology by claiming ownership of another human being, not on the same grounds as the slave-holder, but on the grounds of motherhood. Sethe’s act of murder could be understood as an attempt to affirm a superior agency upon her daughter than the one claimed by the slave-holder. Doreen Fowler argues that slavery is, above all, anti-maternal: “It institutionalizes the repression of motherpower . . . The slave woman had no rights, nothing: neither her body nor her children were her own” (1997: 141). In this sense, Sethe’s murder would also claim, just like the system she defies, the right to possess another human being.

As Collins puts it, “black women’s lives are a series of negotiations that aim to reconcile the contradictions separating our own internally defined images of self as African-American women with our objectification as the Other” (2000: 99). It is precisely in the space of this negotiation that black female agency resides, and where alternative cultural meanings are produced. But because Sethe’s act escapes the definition of woman, it escapes

culture; Sethe's act of self-affirmation cannot be rationalized in patriarchal discourse except by labeling it mad. Shoshana Felman asserts in "Madness and Philosophy or Literature's Reason" that madness can only occur "within a world in conflict, within a conflict of thoughts" (1975: 206); but it will surely occur within a repressive society: the violence, or the madness, of Sethe's act occurs primarily because the discursive channel is closed to her as a black woman.

Eva's Man is the story of a woman who has been declared insane after poisoning her lover in their hotel room and then castrating him by biting his penis off. Once taken to the asylum, Eva refuses all verbal communication; she refuses to enter the language which will label her as mad, excluding and neutralizing her difference, but not understanding it. Instead, it is in the story she tells the reader, which provides glimpses into her childhood, where we observe how male-female relationships are based on the objectification of the female by the male. "Objectification can be so severe," Collins affirms, "that the other simply disappears" (2000: 71). In Eva's childhood, there seems to be a central, traumatic episode, towards which all other experiences of objectification she had lived through converge: her witnessing what for her is the literal dismembering of her mother at the hands of her father. After finding her mother's lover in his own house, the father's masculinity is reasserted through objectifying the mother, through turning her sexuality into his property: "Then it was like I could hear her clothes ripping . . . 'Act like a whore, I'm gonna 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 all her clothes off, and there wasn't any more to tear, he'd start tearing her flesh" (Jones 1976: 37).

This scene is revealing because it manifests the larger patriarchal system that allows and supports the objectification and the rape of Eva's mother. Eva is appalled at the imbalance of power she observes and which the gendered dichotomy speech/silence exemplifies: "I didn't hear nothing from her the whole time. But how he was tearing that blouse off and those underthings. I didn't hear a thing from her" (Jones 1976: 37). But it is also the mother herself who refuses to give, at all times, an explanation for involving herself sexually with her lover. Indeed, to the very last moment, she refuses to enter the realm of discourse that judges her accordingly to patriarchal norms, she refuses to negotiate her actions with her husband, and this allows her to keep a certain amount of autonomy. Eva herself will also refuse, when taken by the authorities to the asylum, to utter a single word that might help "normalize her," as Foucault puts it, or that might help the psychiatrist's way into her. They both manifest a psychologically typified behaviour (clinically termed as *lypomania*) but not in the way Yannick Ripa suggests in *Women and Madness: The Incarceration of Women in Nineteenth-Century France*, that is, by "transposing on to the psychological level the emptiness of their daily lives" (1986: 76), but as a strategy for female integrity in the face of disciplinary violence of institutions. Rejecting language, in the novel, will acquire the symbolic value of protection from male intrusion and of keeping the female integrity intact, both physically and subjectively. We could say that Eva learns from her mother a strategy of survival that, paradoxically, uproots her from the realm of signifying and identity.

The meaning of Davis' castration is directly related to this traumatic scene in Eva's family. In castrating Davis, she makes visible that which male sexual and linguistic domination represses: woman's own space and desire. Through this particularized pointing to that which is not the phallus, Eva uncovers this objectified female Other, and constitutes

herself as a resisting subject in the social reality (Wilcox 1996: 79), and in history, letting her act elliptically speak for the problem of male identity as it is constructed. That is why, according to Byerman in *Fingering the Jagged Grain*, Eva's act must be declared insane by society's repressive mechanism, by its disciplinary institutions, so that the meaning of her act can be "evaded and suppressed": "Through the symbolic significance of her violence, she threatens to expose male domination for the dehumanizing and exploitative system that it is" (1985: 184). Symbolically, Eva puts Davis, by "robbing" him of that around which he constitutes his privilege and his superiority, at her "same" level, thus depriving patriarchy of that which constitutes its narcissism: the phallus. Eva's subversive act and her silence mirror society's representation of the female as "nothing," as that which falls without language and discourse. In a society where the female is the "beautiful object of contemplation . . . in order to stimulate the drives of the 'subject' her sexual organ represents *the horror of nothing to see*" (Irigaray 1977: 26).

Once in the asylum, Eva refuses to speak, to give answers to the curiosity of the investigator, the policeman and the psychologist, who, in their turn, ask her about the most intimate details of her life in order to "master" and close in on her difference: "Even now people come in here and ask me how it happened. They want me to tell it over and over again. I don't mean just the psychiatrists, but people from newspapers and things" (Jones 1976: 4). Indeed, in the asylums and reformatories, the discourses of positivism, law and medicine advance to master madness, to furnish for the patient a new awareness of herself based on the ways in which she fails to submit, to "adapt" to dominant values. Mental institutions do not probe into the language of the female patient as an alternative realm of signification, but rather "construct her in a very careful relationship with enunciation" (Doane 1986: 165). Thus, *Eva's Man* points out, mental institutions do not address madness in its own right and, as such, they serve to erase the female self that society is already repressing. But it also suggests that the fear of contagion plays a part in erecting the boundaries between "moral" society and that which must remain on its margins; that which is "polluted." It is the fear that if madness is left unconstrained, contagion might spread, thus dissolving the values by which society defines and recognizes itself. Eva's act engenders fear, as it threatens to turn upside down the categories by which we read the world. As Foucault explains, madness "puts values at risk" and allows for "strangeness to reside at the heart of the familiar" (1954: 77).

Like Sethe's action in *Beloved*, which constitutes Sethe, if not as an articulate, at least as a resistant subject and beyond the imperatives of nurturing, Eva has also reinserted the female into political history. She has reinserted that Other which is being suppressed in culture, and she can only signal that female Other in terms of her absence from cultural representation: as that silence that signifies "nothing" (Jones 1976: 176), and as that which is not the phallus. Indeed, castration marks, signals, an absence. It is the metaphor of women's exclusion from the realm of signification. In the second part we will observe how the writers' concern is to reconstitute the language that Eva can only resist, and brings the female presence to what Eva can conceptualize only as absence. Both *Eva's Man* and *Beloved* represent strategies of articulation of a political voice, and the shape their articulation takes, that of violence, mirrors the violence of the repression that culture effects on them.

Both *Eva's Man* and *Corregidora* attempt to deconstruct the language of reason by mirroring its madness. In its sexism and the distortion of the female experience it

represents, the language of reason is portrayed as limited and therefore unable to represent the black woman's point of view. In so doing, these authors call for the need to reconstruct language. In *Eva's Man*, Eva detaches herself from the symbolic system of language, pointing to its lack of ability to represent the female. But in *Corregidora* only Ursa is able to conceptualize and utter female sexuality and desire through a self-reflective process, achieving a relationship of equality and authenticity with men.

In *Eva's Man*, Eva reflects society's discourses in their constructed nature by "using the language of reason, its prestige, but limited to the locus of appearance which the image defines" (Foucault 1965: 95). According to Foucault in *Madness and Civilization*, madness begins when the subject becomes prisoner of a segmentation she imposes upon reality, assigning each of these fragments the judgment that constitutes error: "In madness, [reality] is parceled out: not according to elements which constitute that totality metaphysically; but according to figures . . . Fragments which isolate man from himself but above all from reality; fragments which, by detaching themselves, have formed the unreal unity of a hallucination, and by very virtue of this autonomy impose it upon truth" (1965: 93). Byerman argues that Eva's patterns of narration are those of madness, but that "this very insanity makes possible a different discourse" (1985: 184). Indeed, in detaching fragments of reality and projecting society's obsessions with property and possession and sexual domination onto them, the whole logical apparatus of language and reason is parodied: "I lay down and turned my back to her. I watched two cockroaches on the wall. 'What's the matter, Eva, what are you thinking?' I watched the cockroaches and wondered how small cockroach turd was, how much liquid was cockroach piss . . . The cockroaches on the wall got close together" (Jones 1976: 42).

Eva applies the language of capitalism, that is, a language that quantifies and measures, categorizes and compares, to an image that does not bear being quantified and analyzed. Eva applies to the cockroaches the same values and scrutiny that the institutions apply to her. The fragment works as a metaphor for the emptiness of the institutions' efforts to master and control her pathology. The language of madness, therefore, is not devoid of meaning, but detaches itself from its referential quality, from its truth-value, in order to become *pathos*, or suffering.

Corregidora is the story of a process of female self-finding, and the difficulties it entails in a sexist society: a patriarchal society informed by discourses about the black woman that objectify her body and negate her desire. But the kind of responses that women may develop in order to overcome this objectification are deemed in the novel to bear crucial importance for social change. *Corregidora* critiques the historical tendency in women to resolve their marginal position within language and society by taking a stronger hold on their role as mothers, thus claiming ownership of the realm of motherhood and parenting.

In Ursa's maternal ancestry, a woman's claim to power upon the male had been her ability to "make generations," limiting the male presence to that of a reproductive tool. Ursa's mother explains: "It was like my whole body wanted you, Ursa . . . I knew you was gonna come out a girl even when you was in me. Put your hand on my belly, and knew you was gonna be one of us . . . I knew my body would have a girl" (Jones 1975: 117). As Missy Kubitcheck argues in *Claiming the Heritage: African American Women Novelists and History*, "males are intruders and exploiters; *Corregidora* women's sexuality exists only for making generations; intruders will be killed" (1991: 149). However, as Irigaray argues, within a patriarchal society motherhood is but an illusion of power: "Her pleasure will

find, in the child, compensations for and diversions from the frustrations that she too often encounters in sexual relations per se. Thus maternity fills the gaps in a repressed female sexuality" (1977: 27). Reducing one's identity to being a mother is one's willing self-exclusion from the symbolic realm, one's willing self-relegation to being the reproducer of society, never its agent, never its political subject: "In a sense we need to say goodbye to maternal omnipotence (the last refuge) and establish a woman-to-woman relationship of reciprocity with our mothers, in which they might possibly also feel themselves to be our daughters" (Whitford 1991: 50). Indeed, the female appropriation of the mother role in terms of the exclusion of the father and rage against the father contributes to the radicalization of the male and the female spheres, thus perpetuating patriarchy's control of the female. Mutt Thomas responds to Ursa's ambivalence with a sexist comment: "All you act like you want from a man is a little peck on the cheek. Somebody ought to give you a little peck on the cheek, and I don't mean this one" (Jones 1975: 152).

Ursa's identity crisis sets in after a confrontation between Ursa and her husband. Mutt is jealous about Ursa singing in the bar every night and approaching other men, but the discussion ends with Mutt throwing her down the steps of their apartment, in an act that their friends qualify as accidental, but that Ursa insists on qualifying as male abuse, that is, of domestic violence. After the accident, Ursa's womb must be removed, and Jones forces Ursa to redefine her identity in terms other than as an "omnipotent" mother. It is at this point that Jones dramatizes Ursa's encounter with the reality of sexist and racist discourses inherited from her family history of enslavement. Due to the distorted nature of the controlling images society produces for and about the female, this encounter can only take place in terms of hysteria, of madness.

These external, foreign definitions of the female which hinder her possibility to express her own desire alienate the female from her own sexuality: "Afraid only of what I'll become," Ursa argues, unable to feel pleasure on these terms, "because those times he didn't touch the clit I couldn't feel anything" (Jones 1975: 89). Irigaray argues that female pleasure is denied in a civilization that privileges phallogormorphism (1977: 26), and where female pleasure exists for a patriarchal culture only in vaginal terms; that is, "woman is taken only *quod matrem*. Woman comes into play in the sexual relationship only as mother" (Whitford 1991: 102). This is what Ursa realizes in *Corregidora*, and the novel dramatizes her effort to "unearth" female desire, and to transform "silence into language and action" (Collins 2000: 113), thereby also portraying the difficulty of stepping out of cultural meanings and images. This process of realization is also a process of dislocation, whereby Ursa deconstructs the discourses of oppression and objectification by mis-identifying with them and portraying their grotesqueness.

The option Ursa's mother represents, that of an all-female reality passed down by mother to daughter by demonizing the father, is no safe haven for Ursa anymore, once her womb has been removed. Her identification with her mother, therefore, can now only be expressed as an impossible desire, in mourning and madness: "Barbed wire where a womb should be," she complains. She feels compelled to pass on, by becoming a mother herself, her ancestry's hate for *Corregidora*: "Then let me bear witness the only way I can. I'll make a fetus out of grounds of coffee to rub inside my eyes. When it is time to give witness, I'll make a fetus out of grounds of coffee. I'll stain their hands" (Jones 1975: 55). The strategies on which her mother had based her identity now appear grotesque: "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" (Jones 1975: 76-8). And she goes on: "I am the daughter of the daughter of the daughter of Ursa of currents, steel wool and electric wire for hair" (Jones 1975: 67).

On the other hand, the layers of oppression that inform Ursa's present, and from which Ursa must emerge, go back to slavery's controlling images; they have a historical density, and they also present themselves in all their irrationality. Collins argues that during slavery, "black women's sexuality could be reduced to gaining control over an objectified vagina that could then be commodified and sold" (2000: 133). And indeed, as Amy Gottfried points out in "Angry Arts: Silence Speech and Song in Gayl Jones' *Corregidora*," "Great Gram's identity as *Corregidora*'s 'gold piece' resonates in Ursa's identity as Mutt's 'pussy'" (1994: 560).

Ursa also evokes discourses which are uttered as truth in her culture, like the words of her friend May Alice, who submits herself to male sexuality: "But then after you start giving them some . . . you wouldn't feel you had any right to tell them to stop" (Jones 1975: 140). She meditates on the roles that these discourses have forced her and Mutt to adopt, exposing their constructed, enforced and ideological nature: "*A man always says I want to fuck, a woman always has to say I want to get fucked. Does it feel good?*" (Jones 1995: 89). In the contradiction between the presumed truth of these discourses and Ursa's different reality, she realizes that language cannot contain her unless it risks its own dissolution, its being exposed as grotesque. At this point, Ursa's irrationality becomes society's own madness. This way, Jones subverts the idea of madness from being a state that dwells in the black female to being the structure of language itself, which constitutes male sexuality in terms of dominance and the oppression of the black female. Ursa can now realize that her sexual expression does not exist primarily for the phallus; and the recovery of her sexual pleasure on her own terms is the recovery of the feminine in language. We observe Ursa's significant repositioning vis-à-vis Mutt Thomas as she narrates her active involvement in the sexual act: "I was struggling against him, trying to feel what I wasn't feeling. Then he reached down and fingered my clitoris, which made me feel more. He stopped. 'Please, honey.' He fingered again" (Jones 1975: 75). Ursa struggles to take herself, not Mutt's sexuality, as a reference point, but the passage also shows her difficulties in adopting this active position: "He took his hand away. I kept moving with him, not feeling it now. I waited till his convulsions were over" (Jones 1975: 75).

Collins attributes the black female's difficulties with agency and self-definition to "systems of oppression that hold up distorted mirrors of a 'public image' through which black women learn to view ourselves" (2000: 166). Indeed, W. E. B. Du Bois was the first to theorize about the black man's double-consciousness, or his viewing himself through the external look of the white man, who sees him as "racialized" and thus as non-normative. Yet the black woman in America is subject to at least a double marginalization, since she is not only "racialized" but gendered as well. Collins argues for an empowerment strategy whereby black women should disable these "mirrored reflections of a prejudicial gaze" via a reflexive, self-mediated vision of their bodies. "When black women learn to hold up 'mirrors' to one another that enable us to see and love one another for who we really are, new possibilities for empowerment . . . can emerge" (2000: 166). Ursa reflects back these distorted mirrors, and she brings them to their limits by exposing their grotesqueness. She represents the black woman's ability to reshape male concepts such as those of history, language and time, and redefine them according to a female perspective.

Ursa is the only female character who can go beyond the use of violence in order to affirm herself as subject.

And yet, as Irigaray argues, mimicry is a characteristic of hysteria: "Miming, reproducing a language that is not its own, masculine language, caricatures and deforms the language" (Whitford 1991: 138). Ursa does deconstruct sexist discourses by miming and exposing their emptiness, but the episodes of irrationality that respond to Ursa's suffering and her loss of control in her relationship with men and her identity are a testimony to oppression and its distorting effects. Even though, in the final scene, Ursa can communicate her desire for love and gender equality to Mutt, and she is able to regain control over her sexuality on new terms, our contemporary society does not offer Ursa positive discourses through which she can resolve feelings of rage, inadequacy and difference rationally.

Finally, we can state that even if Jones subverts social discourses by exposing their emptiness, displacing the notion of female madness into the contradictions of society's discourses, this deconstructive move is simultaneous with the images of irrationality that account for the suffering and the impact that these discourses cause in the black female.

In conclusion, we can state that the novels show various degrees of success in fully deconstructing madness, because the female protagonists replicate and are partially informed by the ideology they denounce. Each work, nonetheless, contributes to the deconstructive process by suggesting different subversive strategies. By attempting to deconstruct madness, both Morrison and Jones tell us that the dominant patriarchal order labels as madness and insanity those behaviors which contain the power to destabilize this dominant order, to highlight its constructed nature; the emptiness of its attempts to fix a series of meanings. Madness, therefore, is difference confronting patriarchal language and economy, asserting itself as other than what patriarchy has relegated the female to be.

In the light of these novels, the meaning of madness as women's own tendency towards the irrational, or as women's foreignness to the world of reason, is deconstructed. Instead, madness becomes difference, and thus, a sign of the creative, life-asserting female. Its enclosure, its silencing, becomes the paranoid defense of a whole structure of domination. Thus, these writers make us look at madness not as severed from society, but existing as a political response to it. The current treatment and definition of madness as a minority status without right to authority, as childhood "grafted to reason" (Foucault 1965: 256), becomes in these texts an attempt at hiding a plurality of discourses that only allows for patriarchal male identity to continue.

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