

**ENTERTEXT**

*Their Eyes Were Watching God*  
*Color Purple*

*The*

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This essay analyses the representations of the ageing process in Zora Neale  
*Their Eyes Were Watching God* *The Color*  
*Purple* (1982). The primary connection between these two novels of the African-  
American literary tradition is to be found in the matrilineal relationship between the

particular, of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as a pivotal text both for her personal  
life and literary creativity as attested in Wal

<sup>1</sup> This statement is particularly appropriate in

letters [in *The Color Purple*

characterizes its acknowledged predecessor [*Their Eyes Were Watching God* <sup>2</sup>









(usually male) character in his acculturation and successful integration within society, this literary form has nonetheless been productive both in postcolonial and American literature by writers, especially women, belonging to ethnic minorities.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, in

dominant Euro-American society by revising or even rejecting some of its values and

<sup>19</sup> The condition for success in twentieth-century *Bildungsromane* by women of colour  
definition of *métissage*

reev

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The rewriting of the genre by these writers has underlined a context of constant

development as K  
*Street*.

*The House on Mango*

is marked by silence and apparent submission to social demands: actually, in this case, society does not expect from them some kind of integration and success, but

*Bildungsroman*. From this perspective, both *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *The Color Purple* would adhere to the conventions of the female *Bildungsroman*; in fact, as observed by Annis Pratt and Barbara White,

[the protagonist] does not *choose* a life to one side of society after conscious deliberation on the subject; rather, she is ontologically or radically alienated by gender-role norms from *the very outset*. Thus, although the authors attempt to *bildung* or development to the general pattern of

initiation less a self-determined

The task of the *Vollendungsroman* is to discover for its protagonist and for the characters who are circumscribed by the reality of death. But this is felt more strongly in fiction concerned with old age, so that a special intensity, resulting from the darkness to darkness, characterizes the *Vollendungsroman* challenged by the prospect of the character

22

The capacity of the *Vollendungsroman* of dealing with loss marks its connection to the female *Bildungsroman*; as underlined by Carol Lazzaro-Weis, the literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries presents us with heroines dealing with different kinds of losses in relation to their autonomy and creativity.<sup>23</sup> Lazzaro-Weis

from their male counterparts.<sup>24</sup> Both Janie and Celie, in fact, are not expected to actively participate in society and in processes of meaning-making: their personal trajectories in younger years relegate them to subordinate, almost invisible (and mostly silent) roles. The development which has been denied and discouraged has the possibility to occur only when the coordinate of age comes into play not as a further element of oppression, but as a

25

From this perspective, identity is conceived as ageing enters the stage and confronts the character with conceptions of self and culture and material

26

In her study of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Leigh Anne Duck<sup>1.05 171P AMCI26</sup>



reveals that she did not have any kind of decision-making power in her life. At seventeen, she is forced by her grandmother to marry a man she does not love.

eventually encages her within an oppressive relationship where he continually -year-old Janie is finally able to live by herself, run away with a younger partner, and choose a life according to her wishes. The contrast between the first part of her life and the second is striking. In the first part, she always subordinated herself to her

the strain of not wanting to deceive her dear ones, which only led to a scission inside her being; whereas in the second part, she mends herself and takes control of her life. The passage below portrays the transition

-open anymore with him. She was twenty-four and seven

condition closely brings to mind that of the twentieth-century-artist in the *Künstlerroman*, or novel of art

corrosive self-

- being, non- <sup>29</sup> As the position occupied by Janie in the African-American community and in her marriage is already menaced by the risk of annihilation, it is possible to read this representation of division reads like a conscious act of survival and resistance. Moreover, as underlined by Anne M. Wyatt-Br -age

<sup>30</sup> and this seems particularly true in

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32

and to the artistic possibilities of her narrative.

Celie, the main character and narrative voice in *The Color Purple*, lives a very similar experience as Janie. After being abused by her stepfather and mistreated by a husband she did not choose, she finds freedom and independence in a later stage of her life and will enjoy them throughout old age, as highlighted in

*The Temple of My Familiar* (1989). Thanks to the

-lover, Celie speaks up after years of silenced assertiveness, leaves her uncaring husband and becomes financially and emotionally independent. As suggested by the sociologists John Bond and Peter

<sup>33</sup> In the idea of ageing as a process encouraging creation, it is possible to find a further link between *Vollendungsroman* and *Künstlerroman*

fact, it is only in a later stage of life that Janie is able to weave the text of her own story and ultimately provide it with meaning while Celie becomes a tailor, a final

<sup>34</sup> The memory of militancy can

of militancy was already present before the counter-cultural movements of the 1960s.

find that discrepancy between wisdom and anger which, according to Woodward,

marks old a(a)-3(t)-173(d)-3(iscr)5(e)-3(p)6(a)-3(nETC)-n3(nETC)n.06 Tm[( )] TJET E86.65o)-3

*you* kin say. You big-bellies round here and

about *me*

38

ability to find a voice in order to affirm her womanhood throughout the process of ageing constitutes a wise act of rage against the premature annihilation of her

making Janie age at least at the level of language, but she is more skilled than he is at his own game and, ultimately, she is able to reverse the action against him. From that moment on, Jodie considerably ages, and he dies soon afterwards.

A similar movement is present in *The Color Purple* when Celie finds out that

42

ot able  
to represent an effective approach to alternative narratives. Making reference to the  
works by Patricia Hill Collins and Kimberlé Crenshaw, Clary Krekula observes that,  
ower  
relations, rather than being based on additive principles, should be understood as

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<sup>44</sup> throughout

o

experience that is neither essentialist nor the sign of an absence. <sup>45</sup> This idea of

wn fact, Pheoby, you got tuh *go* there tuh *know*

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It  
marks the passage from the *Bildung* stage as adherence to a system silencing their  
subjectivities to *Vollendung*, a later stage of their lives in which they can weave their  
memories and, in so doing, acquire a new sense of their being helping them to  
become active shapers of their later years. The role of language is pivotal for the  
creative potential of this further phase of life because, as underlined by de Lauretis,

orality. In  
*her*

representati

<sup>49</sup> In this kind of

defines itself as a dynamic entity in its interactions with dominant discourses, local variants in their raced, classed, and gendered variations, and individual experience.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, the idea of a possible connection between the elderly and oral history is underlined by Wilbur H. Watson in his analysis of pre-slavery society when he stresses\_t

<sup>51</sup> the further passage which both *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *The Color Purple* make evident are the possibilities inherent in this role for (elderly) women.

This capacity to articulate a reflection on their lives and personal experience valuable form of continuity with younger generations, as the following passage taken from *The Color Purple* suggests:

I feel a little peculiar round the children. For one thing, they grown. And I see



indeterminate position open to multiple possibilities underlines the importance of intersectionality in the analysis of the ageing process as a possibility of empowerment through loss. In fact, the several coordinates constituting the

jeopardy during their lifespan, but intersect in various ways generating possibilities for expression and creation. From this perspective, the representation of ageing both

*Their Eyes Were Watching God*

*The Color Purple*

represents experiences as processes of signification through which identities can be

odds with langua

possibilities for political expression especially important in the representation of





- 34 No. 51 (Spring 2002), 187. *Cultural Critique*,  
35 *ibid.*  
36 *ibid.*, 188.  
37 Hepworth, 2.  
38 Hurston, 75.  
39 Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1983: 1982), 187.  
40 *y and  
Sociology* , Vol. 44, No. 5 (Oct. 2010), 887.  
41 *ibid.*, 879.  
42 *ibid.*, 886.  
43 *Current Sociology* , Vol. 55, No. 2 (Mar. 2007), 163.  
44 Cronin and King, 876.  
45 Lazzaro-Weis, 23.  
46 Hurston, 183.  
47 Lazzaro-Weis, 23.  
48 Cronin and King, 887.  
49 *Oral History*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Autumn 2005), 53.  
50 *ibid.*, 49.  
51 Wilbur H. Watson, *Ageing and Social Behavior: An Introduction to Social Gerontology* (Burlington, MA: Jones and Bartlett Publishers, 1982), 138.  
52 Walker, *Purple*, 251.  
53 Feather and Hepworth, 309.  
54 *Oral  
History*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Autumn, 1989), 16.  
55 Chandler, 55-56.  
56 Bornat, 18.  
57 Alice Walker, *The Temple of My Familiar* (London: Penguin, 1990: 1989), 317.  
58 Rooke, 248.  
59 *-Hamilton, An Introduction to  
Gerontology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 396.  
60 Hurston, 183-184.