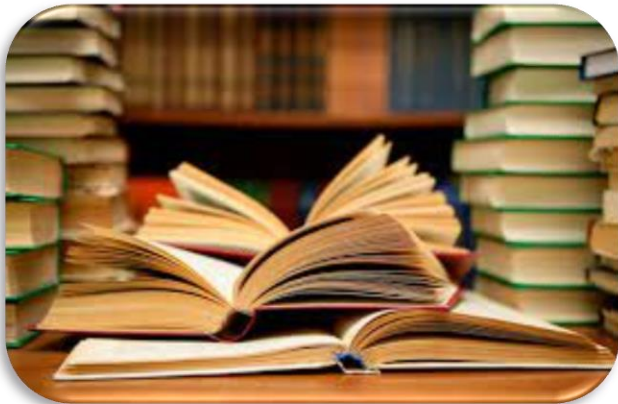


Review Paper



**Narratology: Interchangeable
Focalization in Alice Walker's *The
Color Purple***

Atefeh Karami Torkashvand ^{1*}

¹ Ph.D. Candidate, Department of English
Language and Literature, Kerman Branch,
Islamic Azad University, Kerman, Iran
karamiatefe@yahoo.com

Received: 12 April 2022

Accepted: 09 August 2022

ABSTRACT

An epistolary novel is a novel written as a progression of letters traded among the characters of the story. Centralization or perspective is a critical idea in narratology, alluding to the decision of a point of view from which the story is told. This paper examines Alice Walker's great work *The Color Purple* in the light of the centralization hypothesis created by French narratologist Gerard Genette, who made a turning point outline between the storyteller and the central character. It investigates four highlights of centralization utilized in this work: the constraint of letter essayists, the adaptability of letter scholars, the exchanging of various central characters, and the polyphonic structure in the work. This article contends from the narratological point of view that *The Color Purple* has a place with a cutting-edge standard of awesome epistolary books.

Keywords: Centralization, Focalization, Narratology

روایت‌شناسی: تمرکز قابل تعویض در رنگ ارغوانی آلیس واکر
رمان معرفتی رمانی است که به صورت پیشروی از حروف مبادله شده بین شخصیت‌های داستان نوشته می‌شود. تمرکز یا پرسپکتیو یک ایده انتقادی در روایت‌شناسی است که به تصمیم‌گیری از دیدگاهی که داستان از آن روایت می‌شود اشاره دارد. این مقاله اثر بزرگ آلیس واکر، رنگ ارغوانی را در پرتو فرضیه تمرکزی که توسط روایت‌شناس فرانسوی جرارد ژنت ایجاد شده است، بررسی می‌کند، که نقطه عطفی را بین داستان‌نویس و شخصیت اصلی ایجاد کرد. چهار نکته برجسته از تمرکز استفاده شده در این اثر را بررسی می‌کند: محدودیت مقاله نویسان نامه، سازگاری محققان نامه، تبادل شخصیت‌های مختلف مرکزی، و ساختار چند صدایی در اثر. این مقاله از دیدگاه روایت‌شناختی ادعا می‌کند که رنگ بنفش جایگاهی با استانداردهای پیشرفته از کتاب‌های معرفتی عالی دارد.

واژگان کلیدی: کانونی شدن، تمرکز، روایت‌شناسی

INTRODUCTION

Walker had a sort of behavior which makes her a unique lady, sexism and struggler of the black power development long after it has lost its quality, and she tries to show trust that peaceful change is still conceivable. She and Leventhal were separated in 1977, Walker was named recognized author in Afro-American learns at the University of California. *The Color Purple* (1982) was decided for a National Book Critics Circle Award when it was distributed in 1982 and the next year, got both the Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award. Walker knows herself “a rather ardent feminist” and states that for her the “black women are the most fascinating creations in the world” (Walker 1983:251), she writes novels about the circumstance of black women confronting the brutal effects of prejudice and sexism which prompts to their double exploitation. This arouses her to declare that a black woman is “oppressed almost beyond recognition-oppressed by *everyone*” (ibid 149).

Walker writes novels, poems and short stories keeping in mind the end goal to wakeful the general people’s overlooked chronicled and national values particularly the black smothered women’s. *The Color Purple* is made out of short parts, composed as letters to God, that clarify in the most limited conceivable ways the hardships Celie, and, later, Nettie, encounter. Walker exhibits Celie’s reflections in the language, with poor punctuation and spelling. These accentuate the point that Celie is not an informed woman. Celie’s letters likewise tend to touch upon points quickly and inadequately instead of being created and adorned in long passages. After Nettie and Celie reconnect, Celie’s letters get longer and happier. She is more joyful in her life, and tends to express bliss by composing more.

This article, uses a new kind of narratology, zero focalization, to examine *The Color Purple* from the aspect of its narrator. Since *The Color Purple* appears as a letter from Celie, this novel is cited from her point of view which traditionally was called subjective third person omniscient perspective. In fact, every narration benefits a narrator who narrates the events, and the narrator of *The Color Purple* is well aware of everything happens but there is not any detail about the narrator. One may find narrator’s story accidentally from its setting, but this narrator reveals the story of every character in the novel which shows her perfect information of any aspect of the story. Such a well-aware narrator zero focalized the novel and its incidents. The style of writing addresses a specific person as the reader. This makes a focalized story which makes readers as the addressee of the letters. The narrator states a lot of vivid details about the city, events and characters, so that make the readers to believe the narrator as an omniscient narrator.

DISCUSSION

Focalization and different kinds of it, origin from narrative and narratology. Genette makes a distinction between the traditional meaning of narratives and focalization. Genette as a French narrative theorist, coined the term focalization. This term points the perspectives or point of views from which one can recite a story. One may say that the focalization is the point of view which was traditionally discussed in plot of a story. This term sometimes is related with the information that a narrator has. If this information is omniscient then the narrative is zero-focalized. Genette by relating to the other theories explains a topology for zero focalization:



The first term [zero focalization] corresponds to what English-language criticism calls narrative with omniscient narrator and Pouillon 'vision from behind,' and which Todorov symbolizes by the formula *Narrator* > *Character* (where the narrator knows more than the character, or more exactly, *says* more than any of the characters knows). (Genette 1980: 188)

In this regard, zero focalization used in this thesis is related to the third person omniscient point of view or omniscient perspective. These kinds of stories always tell the readers about the feelings of the characters and their thoughts. They may introduce the characters completely and explain about their behavior, their relative, the quality of their relation, the ongoing happenings in the story. Generally, this kind of perspective which might be called subjective perspective, shows that the narrator knows more than the characters. While the characters are not aware of many things, the third person narrator knows about everything, every feeling, every happening and so many other things which the characters are not aware of.

The other subject used in this thesis is narrative and narratology. Narrative is the citation of some related events whether imaginary or real. Narratology on the other hand is the knowledge of studying the narrative and narrative structure, and internal mechanism of narrative. This word refers to any systematic study of the narrative and it is possible to say that "It is an Anglicization of French narratologie, coined by Tzvetan Todorov (*Grammaire du Décaméron*, 1969)" (Prince 524). Genette distinguishes three types of narrative levels:

The narration of the main (first- level) narrative occurs at the extradiegetic level. The event-story being narrated on this first level fills a second-level position, known as intradiegetic. Finally, the events being told through the second-level narration are metadiegetic (Ibid 230).

For Genette, a narrative is not closed to reality even if it is a realistic story, it is intended to be a fictional act of language arising from a *narrative instance*: "Narrative does not 'represent' a (real or fictive) story, it recounts it – that is, it signifies it by means of language [...]. There is no place for imitation in narrative" (ibid 1988: 43). He then explains that the narrator and his act of narration does not let the act of narrative take place.

Barthes explains another perspective in narratology. He believes that the role of reader specifies everything in a narration. A reader out of his understanding and knowledge specifies his understanding upon a text; who is the narrator, what is the theme, etc. therefore he leaves no room for the author. In his article "Death of the Author," he composes that "it is language which speaks, not the author" (1977: 12). Consequently, the role of language is very important in specifying the elements of narration. He defines some codes based on which the act of reading takes place:

The networks are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one. (Barthes 1974: 5)

Barthes is going to show how plotting, is in fact a retrospective construction. Barthes does not believe in the traditional understanding of a text akin to a plot of opening, rising action and falling action rather he understands narrative as more akin to a collection. Barthes identifies three main



levels of description for a narrative: “function, action, and narration” (1975: 78). Barthes’s clarification of the final level of explanation, narration, becomes characteristically ambiguous, because he turns to the classic problem of reader/writer interaction. There is, of course, clear evidence of the narrator in a narration.

Narrative and Narratology in *The Color Purple*

Narratology refers to the knowledge of studying the narrative based on its narration and structure. Barthes explains that all narratives share structural topographies that each narrative weaves together in dissimilar ways. Despite the differences between individual narratives, any narrative has some codes which helps the readers to find multiple meaning from the texts: the writerly text is *ourselves writing*, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages. (1975: 69)

These affect one’s reading of texts. This conclusion upon the text happens when one reads, and when he makes decisions about a work's genre and its ideological beliefs. However, when one examines any one statement of a work carefully, it is possible to prove just how is influenced with meaning.

The Color Purple is a narrative that goes separate ways with the "conventional" letter novel in various formal angles, and these serve to underscore the differentiations set up in the setting and the character. Celie is not just a lady in an unexpected setting in comparison to the "customary" epistolary champions – she keeps in touch with her story diversely also. In this area, I will dissect the formal parts of the letters in the novel as far as the hypothetical investigations presented in the primary section, and demonstrate that the narrative in *The Color Purple* is not simply formally innovative, however in reality maintains a strategic distance from the absolute most essential narrative characteristics that a significant number of us have generally expected from epistolary narratives.

At first look, *The Color Purple* bears the formal signs of the epistolary novel: it is described in first individual letters straightforwardly tending to a named narratee, its story-line is transiently divided in light of the fact that letters are traded between two gatherings isolated by powers out of their control, its plot is direct, and determination is last when the two are brought together: “He start to choke me, saying You better shut up and git used to it. But I don't never git used to it. And now I feels sick every time I be the one to cook” (CP 11).

In *The Color Purple*, the letter has lost its most fundamental capacity: it neglects to convey. Subsequently, the very reason for the letter trade is missing from the novel, in light of the fact that do letters not achieve their addressees, as well as the essayists are in any event mostly mindful that their words won't be read.

Dear Nettie,

I don't write to God no more. I write to you.

What happen to God? ast Shug.

Who that? I say.

She look at me serious.



Big a devil as you is, I say, you not worried about no God, surely. (*CP* 73)

It is not the get-together of Celie and Nettie that realizes the last determination of the novel; that occurs in the pages going before it. The novel works with two essayists however three addressees, yet this issue is—tellingly—hard to consider, in light of the fact that Celie demonstrates amazing little enthusiasm for it is not identity she writes to. Thinking about Perry's perception about the significance of the connections in numerous epistolary books (Perry 93), and Altman's perception on how the you to the I impact the very talk of the narrative (Altman 118), this point needs investigation.

Celie begins her narrative by tending to God, inquiring as to whether "Maybe you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me" (*CP* 1) and afterward describing the occasions paving the way to her inquiry. This, in the primary passage of the story, is one of just three times that Celie tends to God specifically – that is, with an individual pronoun in the content notwithstanding the "dear God" at the highest point of the page. The second is the point at which she at long last finds a solution of sorts to "what is occurring to her" through Nettie's disclosure that Alphonso is not their dad, after which Celie composes the most brief letter in the novel, finishing it with "you [God] must be rest" before she takes up the pen to keep in touch with Nettie rather than a God that apparently never tuned in. The third time Celie tends to God straightforwardly is the last letter of the novel, where she expresses gratitude toward God (now revamped into an animistic soul instead of the male centric figure of the Bible) and "everything" for having taken Nettie back to her:

What the world got to do with anything, I think. Then I see myself sitting there quilting tween Shug Avery and Mr. _____. Us three set together against Tobias and his fly speck box of chocolate.

For the first time in my life, I feel just right (*CP* 69).

Before the critical dialog with Shug and the amendment of her picture of God, Celie converses with a God that never gives her the sign she requests in the main letter, and unquestionably does not answer her face to face. Celie, thusly, never again requests God's consideration in her letters, however discloses to her story in deliver to him.

When Celie deserts God to deliver her letters to Nettie, it is with a comparable tone and a comparative nonappearance of direct address: Nettie's letters, stolen piece by piece and after that at long last got at the same time, reads to Celie like Celie's letters read to the reader. Celie cannot answer the greater part of Nettie's letters independently, and addresses her sister like she addressed God earlier: by recounting the narrative of her life. Just when Shug has called attention to that Nettie does not know who the general population in Celie's narrative are does Celie present some of them. She never raises Nettie's circumstance or requests news: her letters to Nettie are still just about herself and her life. There is a striking distinction between how Celie and Nettie address each other. Nettie habitually talks specifically to Celie, reminds Celie in her letters that she is conversing with her ("I never acknowledged I was so uninformed, Celie!" [123]), notices things that Celie have stated, regrets the amount she misses her sister and ponders for understanding narrative discourse, one should know about the distance of narrator and story. Genette believes that,



“Whether the text is a narrative of events (tells what the character is doing) or a narrative of words (tells what the character is saying or thinking), there are four types of discourse” (1980: 171). Each of types demonstrate progressively greater distance taken by the narrator with respect to the text:

1. *Narratized speech*: The character's words and actions are integrated into the narration, and are treated like any other event (-distant).

Example: *He confided in his friend, telling him about his mother's death.*

2. *Transposed speech, indirect style*: The character's words or actions are reported by the narrator, who presents them with his interpretation (- + distant).

Example: *He confided to his friend that his mother had passed away.*

3. *Transposed speech, free indirect style*: The character's words or actions are reported by the narrator, but without using a subordinating conjunction (+ - distant).

Example: *He confided to his friend: his mother had passed away.*

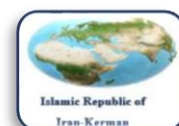
4. *Reported speech*: The character's words are cited verbatim by the narrator (+ distant). (Ibid 172)

Using examples enables Genette to explain the concept of narrative mood as simple as possible. He also categorizes the functions of narrative in five categorizations: “The narrative function” (ibid 255), which is considered as the main function and asserts whenever there is a narrative there is a narrator who tell the story. This narrator can be present in the text or absent from it. The other functions are secondary functions like “The directing function,” claims the narrator as the directing function by putting comments on the narrative, “The communication function” in which the narrator addresses the readers directly, “The testimonial function” in which the narrator affirms the truth of the story based on his narration, events and information, and “The ideological function” in which “The narrator interrupts his story to introduce instructive comments or general wisdom concerning his narrative (involvement)” (Ibid 256).

Zero Focalization and Internal Focalization in *The Color Purple*

Focalization refers to perspective of the story. To which perspective a story is narrated limits the kinds of focalization. Focalization concerns the presentation and perception of attitude in a narrative; it is the “orientation of the reader” based on their understanding of the “positions of the narrator and characters” (1980: 186). He regards concept of “point of view,” into the questions “who sees?” and “who speaks?” (ibid).

There are three kinds of focalization: external focalization, internal focalization and zero focalization. Genette describes the internal focalization when the knowledge of the narrator and the character is the same, “*Narrator = Character* (the narrator says only what a given character knows); this is narrative with ‘point of view’ after Lubbock, or with ‘restricted field’ after Blin; Pouillon calls it ‘vision with’” (ibid 189). In the third term external focalization, the information of the narrator is so little: “*Narrator < Character* (the narrator says less than the character knows); this is the ‘objective’ or ‘behaviorist’ narrative, what Pouillon calls ‘vision from without’” (ibid). There is a third kind which Genette calls it as the zero focalization in which the narrator knows more than the character. This term is defined in details later. Zero focalization readers to Genette’s third category of focalization. Genette divided narrative three ways. The zero focalization is known



as nonfocalized as well. In zero focalization the “narrator ‘saying’ is more than the character knows” (Genette 1980: 188). This term is usually accompanied by omniscient perspective. In this perspective the narrator who tells the story is well aware every happening, every feeling and every detail in the story. The characters are not aware what is going to happen for them while the narrator knows. Genette offers this term based on narratology and narratives. Genette distinguishes “two types of narrative: one with the narrator absent from the story he tells [...], the other with the narrator present as a character in the story he tells” (Genette 1980: 244). The first type he named as “heterodiegetic,” and the second type as “homodiegetic” (ibid 245). The zero-focalization used in this thesis is based on the second narrative form.

In the case of *The Color Purple*, Walker makes use of both internal focalization through which Celie and Nettie recite their own story, and zero focalization when they recite the story of the others. *The Color Purple* is composed in first person point of view, and the voice is predominately Celie's, yet a portion of the letters that contain the book are composed to Celie by her sister Nettie. The story covers thirty years of Celie's life from youth to her development as a free lady. By having Celie write in dark society English, Walker conveys the reader near the quality and rhythms of life that her characters involvement. Celie and Nettie act as both omniscient narrator and this person narrator:

Well, us talk and talk about God, but I'm still adrift. Trying to chase that old white man out of my head. I been so busy thinking about him I never truly notice nothing God make. Not a blade of corn (how it do that?) not the color purple (where it come from?) . . . (CP 112)

One can see when the characters are talking about themselves, the novel benefits internal focalization like when Celie is retelling her sister how Shug has changed her view to God. In the seventy-third letter of the novel, Celie reviews for Nettie this discussion with Shug. Celie has revealed to Shug that she has quit keeping in touch with God altogether.

Obviously, in this scene Celie does not have many information, therefore she is a narrator who knows as much as the character which is coined as internal focalization. In other parts of the novel when Nettie or Celie is talking about the other people and they are more well-aware of the situation that the other characters, Walker has benefits the zero-focalization in her novel:

Shug act more manly than most men . . . he says. You know Shug will fight, he says. Just like Sofia. She bound to live her life and be herself no matter what.

Mr. _____ think all this is stuff men do. But Harpo not like this, I tell him. You not like this. What Shug got is womanly it seems like to me. Specially since she and Sofia the ones got it.

Celie describes this discussion she has with Mr. _____ close to the finish of the novel, in her eighty-seventh letter. Their expressions of compromise concern the acknowledgment of contrasts—in sex parts, gifts, and sexual introduction. *The Color Purple* concerns a universe in which generally manly qualities, for example, self-assuredness, sexual satisfaction, and physical quality are available in female and also male characters.

When I see Sofia, I don't know why she still alive. They crack her skull; they crack her ribs. They tear her nose loose on one side. They blind her in one eye. She swole from head to foot. Her



tongue the size of my arm, it sticks out tween her teef like a piece of rubber. She cannot talk. And she just about the color of a eggplant. (CP 89)

Sofia's confidence and quality are for all intents and purposes magnificent by any of the male characters, though the supporting and care that Harpo shows toward Mr. _____ could be viewed as feminine.

Celie is the main hero of *The Color Purple*. It is Celie's life that is advised, it is Celie's reality that is appeared, it is Celie's musings and sentiments that direct the narrative. In spite of the fact that Celie every so often gives different characters a chance to talk straightforwardly in her letters, Nettie has an exceptional place: hers is the main story that is exhibited in her own particular composed words, and hers is the main voice that the reader can put stock in a hundred percent, realizing that it is not sifted through Celie's memory and introduction. Nettie is an optional storyteller who recounts a story that is autonomously of Celie's (yet depends on it for its distribution), and who lets it know out of various thought processes and under various conditions. In a novel so worried about the class and its narrative voice, it is hard not to see that Nettie additionally keeps in touch with her letters in an unexpected way in comparison to Celie:

It has been a long time since I had time to write. But always, no matter what I'm doing, I am writing to you. Dear Celie, I say in my head in the middle of Vespers, in the middle of the night, while cooking, Dear, dear Celie. And I imagine that you really do get my letters and that you are writing me back: Dear Nettie, this is what life is like for me. (155)

In the event that Celie is a storyteller who transgresses against most informal tenets of the epistolary narrative to the degree where it ends up plainly hard to set her letters in any sort, Nettie is a significantly more conspicuous epistolary storyteller. We can make another correlation with the thought processes that Altman singled out as especially epistolary, and find that they have a substantially more prominent nearness in Nettie's letters than they do in Celie's.

There are two noteworthy narrative contrasts amongst Celie and Nettie's letters to each other: their individual utilization of the English language, and Nettie's voice, which is to a limited extent quieted by the decision of which of her letters are to be incorporated into the novel. I have no motivation to assume that the same was done to Celie. Nettie is a storyteller who relies upon Celie's presence for more than the distribution of her letters in the novel, for where Celie composes and composes apparently paying little heed to whether they are routed to God or to Nettie and whether they will achieve their recipient fit as a fiddle, it is dubious if Nettie would record the tale of her life in the event that she didn't have the inspiration of educating Celie concerning it. With regards to the novel, we would not have read Nettie's letters if Celie had not been there to get them; outside the realm of relevance of the novel, it is dubious that they would have made a lucid story without the foundation learning that the reader already has about their circumstance.

CONCLUSION

Reciting the novel in third person omniscient narrator, focalizes the narrative through the main protagonist. Besides, since the protagonist is omniscient third person the narration is zero focalization. This story is focalized through Celie's thoughts and perspectives through the novel and its incidents. Most of the Walker's works has internal focalization but this novel has zero



focalization which by offering vivid details about the characters and incidents makes the readers to visualize the situation. Walker uses a few sources of such information: the focalizer's personal experiences, his or her direct contribution in different actions or thinking about them, the reality which is driven from the others by their words, their writings and their action.

There is a powerful narrative technique within the structure of the novel. Creating the character of Celie as an omniscient focalizer in the story serves a great function which makes the postmodern structure of the novel. She as a writer in the story know about everybody around her, and their insights. It seems that she is the creator of the story because she knows about every little things in the story but not about herself. The narrative, is told from a homodiegetic viewpoint, and it usually revolves around the main protagonist. Nonetheless, when is supposed to talk about other, secondary characters, they take precedence over the central character in such a way that he or she disappears from the text for a while.

REFERENCES

- Altman, Janet Gurkin: *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982.
- Barthes, Roland. *S/Z*. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Blackwell, 1974.
- . "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative." *New Literary History*. Ed. Roland Barthes and Lionel Duisit. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1975.
- . "The Death of the Author." *Image, Music, Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. London: Fontana, 1977. 142-148.
- Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse Revisited*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988.
- . *Narrative Discourse*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1980.
- Perry, Ruth: *Women, Letters and the Novel*, New York: AMS Press, inc., 1980.
- Prince, Gerald. "Narratology." *Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Michael Groden and Martin Kreiswirth. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1994.
- . "The Diary Novel: Notes For the Definition of a Sub-Genre." *Neophilologus* Vol. 59, No. 4 (Autumn 1975): 477-481. Springerlink, 10. May 2011.
- Walker, Alice. "In search of our Mothers' Garden" *Womanist Prose by Alice Walker*. New York: 1983.
- . *The Color Purple*. New York: Covert art Courtesy WarnerBros, 1982

