



Ten Is the Age of Darkness: The Black Bildungsroman

Geta LeSeur

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In *Ten Is the Age of Darkness*, Geta LeSeur explores how black authors of the United States and English-speaking Caribbean have taken a European literary tradition and adapted it to fit their own needs for self-expression. LeSeur begins by defining the structure and models of the European genre of the bildungsroman, then proceeds to show how the circumstances of colonialism, oppression, race, class, and gender make the maturing experiences of selected young black protagonists different from those of their white counterparts.

Examining the parallels and differences in attitudes toward childhood in the West Indies and the United States, as well as the writers' individual perspectives in each work of fiction, LeSeur reaches intriguing conclusions about family life, community participation in the nurturing of children, the timing and severity of the youngsters' confrontation of adult society, and the role played by race in the journey toward adulthood.

LeSeur's readings of African American novels provide new insights into the work of Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, Paule Marshall, and Richard Wright, among others. When read as examples of the bildungsroman rather than simply as chronicles of black experiences, these works reveal an even deeper significance and have a more powerful impact. LeSeur convincingly demonstrates that such African American novels as Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, Wright's *Black Boy*, and Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* concentrate to a large extent on protest, while such African West Indian works as George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*, Austin Clarke's *Amongst Thistles and Thorns*, Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*, and Erna Brodber's *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* reflect a more naive, healthy re-creation of what childhood can and should be, despite economic and physical impoverishment. She also gives a special space within the genre to Paule Marshall's *BrownGirl, Brownstones* and Ntozake Shange's *Betsey Brown* and the importance of "woman time," "woman voice," and mothers.

While enlarging our understanding of both the similarities and the differences in the black experiences of the Caribbean and American youngsters coming of age, *Ten Is the Age of Darkness* also suggests that children of color in similar spheres share many common experiences. LeSeur concludes that the bildungsromane by black writers provide uniquely revealing contributions to the Afro-World literary canon and point the way for others to examine literary pieces in Third World communities of color.

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