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The Words to Say it: Constructing "Knowable" Moral Development in "Recitatif"

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Research Article

Abstract

In withholding the protagonists' racial identities in her short story "Recitatif" (1983), Toni Morrison prompts the reader to probe into "what are by no means marginal or already and completely known and knowable" (1992, x). Morrison's experimenting with the removal of the protagonists' racial codes originated with her critique of Marie Cardinal's "othering" act as evidenced in her autobiographical novel The Words To Say It (1983). Cardinal's inherent anxiety about Louis Armstrong's jazz inspires Morrison to plumb the reader's predisposition to such type of "othering" act by intentionally concealing the racial identities of Twyla or Roberta. While I agree with critics on the inevitableness of the "conceptualization" of the protagonists' race" (2007, 134), I will focus on how the protagonists access their moral development based on the textual and contextual clues: the repeated allusions to Jimi Hendrix, the gradation of Mary and Roberta's mother's respective impact on their daughters, and the haunting image of Maggie. The allusion to The Wizard of Oz implies both the prospects for and the difficulty of Twyla and Roberta's establishing a friendship. Twyla and Roberta, though not literally orphans as Dorothy is, suffer the deprivation of maternal nurturing. The negative impact of the protagonists' mothers on their identity formation remains prevalent, yet Twyla's potential for moral growth is implied. That Twyla's self-defensive act is caused by Mary's racist education also applies to Roberta whose mother's hostile silence about racial issues hampers her moral growth. Developing from their girlhood to motherhood, Twyla and Roberta have been striving to conduct a dialogue not only between themselves across racial boundaries but also within themselves, which motivates their self-introspection and improves their mutual understanding. In engaging the reader in the act of decoding and exploring Twyla and Roberta's identities, Morrison guides the reader to perceive the limits of stereotypical beliefs and the necessity to carve out a space for imagining the protagonists' moral growth.

Keywords: Toni Morrison, *Recitatif*, Moral, Construction.

In withholding the protagonists' racial identities in her short story "Recitatif" (1983), Toni Morrison prompts the reader to probe into "what are by no means marginal or already and completely known and knowable" (1992, x). Morrison's experimenting with the removal of the protagonists' racial codes originated with her critique of Marie Cardinal's "othering" act as evidenced in her autobiographical novel *The Words To Say It* (1983). Cardinal's inherent anxiety about Louis Armstrong's jazz[1] inspires Morrison to plumb the reader's predisposition to such type of "othering" act by intentionally concealing the racial identities of Twyla or Roberta. About the interconnection between writing and reading, Morrison states that "both exercises require being alert and ready for unaccountable beauty, for the intricateness or simple elegance of the writer's imagination, for the world that imagination evokes" (1992, xi). Critics have consensus on the necessity for the decoding act, though Elizabeth Abel and Lula Fragd attach importance to the protagonists' physical features ("body") and "cultural practices" (474). David Goldstein-Shirley rightly acknowledges Roberta's role in facilitating Twyla's moral growth (89). While I agree with critics on the inevitableness of the "conceptualization" of the protagonists' race"

(2007, 134), I will focus on how the protagonists access their moral development based on the textual and contextual clues: the repeated allusions to Jimi Hendrix, the gradation of Mary and Roberta's mother's respective impact on their daughters, and the haunting image of Maggie.

It is essential for readers to restore the protagonists' racial codes, for in the act of restoring, readers are necessarily engaged in reflecting on any "othering" act. Morrison's purposeful suspending of Twyla's and Roberta's racial identities does not follow that it is of no significance to identify their races. As Morrison states, "a criticism that needs to insist that literature is not only 'universal' but also 'race-free' risks lobotomizing that literature, and diminishes both the art and the artist" (1992, 12). My identification of Twyla as a white ensues from the fact that Mary inculcates in Twyla an attitude of racial discrimination. "Every now and then she (Mary) would stop dancing long enough to tell something important and one of the things she said was that they never washed their hair and they smelled funny" (Morrison 1995, 88). Mary's stereotypical view of blacks' lack of hygiene is an "othering" act. Subject to such racial ideology, Twyla naturally has internalized the stereotypes as evident in her reaction to Big Bozo's arrangement of her domicile: "'My mother wouldn't like you putting me in here'" (Morrison 1995, 88). Twyla's sense of superiority, thus, is derived from Mary's racist education.

The allusion to *The Wizard of Oz* implies both the prospects for and the difficulty of Twyla and Roberta's establishing a friendship. Twyla and Roberta, though not literally orphans as Dorothy is, suffer the deprivation of maternal nurturing. However, Dorothy does benefit from her forthcoming friendship with the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Lion who respectively need a brain, a heart, and courage. Twyla and Roberta, exposed to "homelessness", and confronted with the crisis of identity formation, and the obligation to recognize each other's existence, have similar prospects for a friendship that transcends racial boundaries. Nevertheless, unlike Dorothy whose destiny is not complicated by race issue and whose accomplishment of friendship takes the form of a fairytale, Twyla and Roberta are obligated to overcome the seemingly insurmountable obstacle in the initial form of their mothers' negative impact.

The negative impact of the protagonists' mothers on their identity formation remains prevalent, yet Twyla's potential for moral growth is implied. The only encounter between Mary and Roberta's mother on the visitors' day reveals a matrix of their respective racial prejudices and class consciousness. Reames notes Roberta's mother's "refusal to shake Mary's hands" (2007, 135), yet it has escaped critics' notice that the reluctance to shake hands originates in Mary as Twyla's detailed observation suggests: "Mary, simple-minded as ever, grinned and tried to yank her hand out of the pocket with the raggedy lining--to shake hands, I guess" (Morrison 1995, 93). Given Mary's racial superiority illustrated earlier, Mary's simple-mindedness is deceptive. Furthermore, Mary's attempt to shake hands with Roberta's mother is but Twyla's supposition. It is Twyla's secret expectation that the two mothers should display friendship for each other. However, Twyla also seems to know beforehand about Mary's incapacity for such a responsible act. As she observes Mary: "she smiled and waved like she was the little girl looking for her mother--not me" (Morrison 1995, 92). Mary's identity as a failed adult or a responsible mother is highlighted by her immature physical attributes. Mary is not qualified as a mother to guide Twyla toward moral growth, but Twyla is depicted as an individual with a potential for moral development. Twyla depicts Mary's response to Roberta's mother's departure that bespeaks her snubbing: "Mary was still grinning because she's not too swift when it comes to what's going on" (Morrison 1995, 93). Mary's verbal abuse directed at Roberta's mother points to her deep-seated white superiority, for she assumes it is unacceptable for the blacks to snub whites. Twyla's observation of Mary's moral insufficiency predicts her potential for revising Mary's racial views.

Mary's presence, however, hinders Twyla from realizing her potential for moral

development. Firstly, on the visitors' day, while Roberta undertakes the initiative in greeting Twyla, the latter reminds herself not to display intense excitement: "I smiled back, but not too much lest somebody think this visit was the biggest thing that ever happened in my life" (Morrison 1995, 92-93). Due to Mary's presence, Twyla's newly formed alliance against big bullying girls fails to lead to her acceptance of Roberta as an equal. Secondly, Twyla's refusal to consider Roberta as an equal peer resides in her self-claimed racial superiority despite her knowledge of the class gap between her and Roberta. Morrison disrupts the reader's stereotypical racial ideology by displaying that Twyla has no access to economic or social status. Roberta's mother has brought drumsticks, ham sandwiches, oranges and milk (Morrison 1995, 94), which evidences her material abundance. The myth that blacks signify poverty and whites' wealth suffers the fate of being deconstructed. As Ann Rayson states, this story subverts the reader's conventional expectations of race and class (1996, 41-46). Twyla resorts to compensating for her humiliation by denigrating Roberta's mother's physical appearance. As Twyla consoles herself, "She (Roberta's mother) was big. Bigger than any man and on her chest was the biggest cross I'd ever seen" (Morrison 1995, 93). That Twyla derives pleasure from highlighting the black mother's physical undesirability betrays her refusal to acknowledge her economic inferiority. That Twyla's self-defensive act is caused by Mary's racist education also applies to Roberta whose mother's hostile silence about racial issues hampers her moral growth. Roberta's yearning for the maternal approval of her friendship with Twyla is manifest. Though Roberta enjoys material comforts in a way that Twyla has been denied, she has no easier access to constructing her identity across racial boundaries. Similar to Mary, Roberta's mother would rather avoid confronting the race issue and adhere to their respective racial bias against one another. In effect, only by airing such concealed resentment can the issue be fronted with some possibility for resolution. As Victoria Burrows suggests, "The implication is that silent (or linguistically invisible) prejudices must be consciously confronted, disassembled and laid bare so that they may then be rethreaded in a different configuration, one that makes the knots' figurations a binding of positive strength" (2004, 167). Both mothers' unanimous evasiveness suggests that the two daughters must strive to formulate a dialogue on restructuring their cognition about each other.

The encounters between Roberta and Twyla resonate with the allusions to Jimi Hendrix whose predicament predicts that of Roberta's. That Jimi Hendrix was then performing in California in 1967 when the Black Power movement was in full swing serves to justify Roberta's aloofness to Twyla especially when the latter exposes her ignorance of Jimi Hendrix. Hendrix at the Woodstock Festival in 1969 was "the only black performer of his time to penetrate the largely white world of hard and psychedelic rock"(Henderson 2006, 1039). He was inevitably exposed to the swirling vortex of the Black Power Movement and Black Arts Movement. As Smith asserts, "this conflict between the nationalist impulse to form all-black companies and the pluralist impulse to include qualified people who, regardless of their background, have the talent and disposition to make a contribution reflects a larger tension in the movement" (2006, 251). It is noteworthy that Jimi Hendrix's first trio band, which included himself, a white bassist, and a white drummer, was later replaced with the "all-black power trio"(Henderson 2006, 1039). Hendrix confronted the dilemma of working with whites as an artist and surviving in the movements as a black individual. Indeed, Hendrix "was pressured by black groups to take a more political stance but took no part in formal politics (Henderson 2006, 1038)." When Hendrix was asked in John Burks' interview if he had some ties with the Black Panthers he responded, "I *naturally feel* part of what they're doing. In certain respects. *But* everybody has their own way of *doing* things. They get justified as they justify others, in their attempts to get personal freedom. That's all it is" (Burks 1970, emphasis mine).[2] Words like "naturally feel" and

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"But…doing" betoken his conflicted identity, for he was obliged to both align with and distance himself from the Black Power movement. Torn between his required political commitment and his yearning for professional development, Jimi Hendrix's intense agony can only be imagined.

Roberta's moral predicament of the nature of Jimi Hendrix's e(E)xperience on her first encounter with Twyla results in her disregard for their previous friendship. It is Roberta's nationalistic consciousness that causes her remoteness to Twyla, who becomes confused as a consequence of her ignorance about Jimi Hendrix's metaphorical meaning. For Twyla, Jimi Hendrix is another guitarist, but the name carries political connotations for Roberta. Thus, Roberta's aloofness is justifiable, for she is "naturally" part of the Black Power movement. Roberta, in following the prevalent practice of the blacks' opposition to whites, not unlike what Jimi Hendrix was experiencing, unavoidably adopted the political stance that was only natural to her. Roberta's subsequent explanation for her offensive behaviour on her second encounter with Twyla confirms such reasoning: "'oh, Twyla, you know how it was in those days: black--white. You know how everything was'" (Morrison 1995, 102). Indeed, Twyla, liberated from Mary's influence due to the latter's absence, proposes a different observation: "'You got to see everything at Howard Johnson's, and blacks were very friendly with whites in those days'" (Morrison 1995, 102). This remark evidences Twyla's racial identity as white, for it was Roberta who was unfriendly to Twyla at Howard Johnson. However, as Twyla reflects, her observation might be unreliable because of her relatively limited knowledge about the social discourse outside her remote residence. The allusions to Jimi Hendrix illustrate Roberta's predicament which bears resemblance to that of Jimi Hendrix's.

Since the first encounter between Twyla and Roberta at the restaurant twelve years after their separation, both have become mothers, which allows them to seek a resolution to their racial conflicts. Twyla's dialogue with Roberta reveals the former's invested efforts in learning about Jimi Hendrix to accomplish her understanding of Roberta.

> **"What happened to the Jimi Hendrix date?"**
> **Roberta made a blow-out sound with her lips.**
> **"When he died I thought about you."**
> **"Oh, you heard about him finally?"**
> **"Finally. Come on, I was a small-town country waitress." (Morrison 1995, 100)**

Twyla's addressing the topic of Jimi Hendrix, the root cause of their previous conflict, manifests her efforts to renew their friendship by amending her not sensitizing herself to Roberta's predicament. The narrator deliberately leaves Twyla's psychological activities untraced, leading the reader to infer from Twyla's sparse words about her perceptible changes restoring their previous connection. Although Roberta fails to reveal her political involvement, she does display a pleasant surprise at Twyla's change: "'Oh, you heard about him finally?'" Twyla must have reflected on their failed attempt to resume their friendship, and after keeping herself informed about Jimi Hendrix and his moral predicament, she has become compassionate about Roberta's similar plight. This has been rendered possible due to Mary's absence since the previous incidents indicate her susceptibility to Mary's negative influence. Naturally, the subtle change in Twyla derives from her heightened awareness of the root cause for their continuation of the friendship. Twyla's endeavour to reshape her friendship with Roberta is a compelling argument for her deep potential for moral growth.

Nevertheless, a smooth resumption of their friendship still requires a test embodied in the touchstone-like Maggie incident. On their second encounter when Maggie's falling is referred to, Twyla denies the validity of Roberta's narrative. Twyla's denial in the face of Roberta runs counter to Twyla's previous narration of the incident. The two selves that Twyla's first-person

reminiscent narrative include a reminiscent self who is more mature in recalling her life at the shelter and an experiential self who participated in bullying Maggie. These two selves reflect how Twyla reacts differently to the Maggie incident. "She just rocked on, the chin straps of her baby-boy hat swaying from side to side. *I think* we were wrong. *I think* she could hear and didn't let on. And *it shames me even now to think* there was somebody in there after all who heard us call her those names and couldn't tell on us" (Morrison 1995, 90, emphasis mine). Being a mother of her children, Twyla is capable of a more sympathetic understanding of Maggie. The italicized parts bespeak Twyla's moral growth, for she now feels guilty about her joint bullying of Maggie. However, this process is complicated by a disruption due to the lack of Roberta's reciprocal efforts. "My ears were itching and I wanted to go home suddenly. This was all very well but she couldn't just comb her hair, wash her face and pretend everything was hunky-dory. After the Howard Johnson's snub. And no apology. Nothing" (Morrison 1995, 102). Twyla expects Roberta to be apologetic for her unfriendliness shown in their first encounter. Nevertheless, Roberta's failure to do so exasperates her to such an extent that she purposely "blocks" the memory of Maggie. Thus, on hearing Roberta's reference to the Maggie incident, she flatly denies such a charge. This, as is known, contradicts Twyla's previous recollection of their life at the shelter with the big girls. "They'd light out after us and pull our hair or twist our arms" (Morrison 1995, 89). Once, when Maggie falls down the big girls laugh at her while Twyla and Roberta insult Maggie by calling her an idiot. Since Twyla's narrative precedes that of Roberta's, the objectiveness of the former's account is convincing. Furthermore, Twyla's recollection of the girls' bullying of Maggie is in keeping with Roberta's narrative. Therefore, it is probable that the big girls did push Maggie down. Twyla's efforts to continue her friendship with Roberta have been deferred due to Roberta's failure to apologize for her offensive act.

Twyla's profound reflection is induced only after her involvement with the prevalent racial conflicts occurs. It is after her confrontation with Roberta that she is motivated to ponder her participation in humiliating Maggie.[3] However, before our accessing how Twyla resolves her memory about Maggie, Roberta's overstatement about the Maggie incident deserves scrutiny. Twyla and Roberta, now mothers of their children, meet incidentally by the school gate against the backdrop of the Supreme Court's enforcement of busing to achieve racial integration in the 1970s. Their different opinions on the effectiveness of racial integration intensify their pre-existing conflicts, and the media coverage of "racial conflicts" receives Twyla's scepticism.[4] Faced with the fact that her participation in the protests against whites was expected, Twyla was obliged to reflect: "I knew I was supposed to feel something strong, but I didn't know what" (Morrison 1995, 103). She was sceptical of racial integration which required her son to go to a remote school: "Joseph was on the list of kids to be transferred from the junior high school to another one at some far-out-of-the-way place and I thought it was a good thing until I heard it was a bad thing. I mean *I didn't know*" (Morrison 1995, 103, emphasis mine). As Thomas J. Cottle asserts, the matter of busing "has ignited the impulse to engage in racial warfare...The reality of busing consumes people, gives to some a sense of hope they have never known, to others a feeling of hopelessness they never believed could be so overwhelming" (1976, xii). Twyla's primary concern is for her son's receiving normal education. She seemed able to foresee that her overreaction to the "racial conflicts" will expose her children to the pernicious influence that Mary once imposed on her. Twyla achieved her interrogation of "racial conflicts" only after she underwent a personal experience with these conflicts. Roberta's identity as an activist in both the Black Power movement and Women's Liberation temporarily complicates her development of moral growth. Responding to Twyla's challenge of her protest, Roberta exclaims, "'Picketing, What's it look like'" (Morrison 1995, 104). The ostentation in "What's it look like?" is

unmistakable. Roberta seems to picket for a heroic cause, yet her motivations beg questions. The following dialogue speaks volumes about Roberta's pragmatic motivation for her protest:

> **(Twyla) "What for?"**
> **(Roberta) "What do you mean 'What for?' They want to take my kids and send them out of the neighborhood. They don't want to go."**
> **(Twyla) "So what if they go to another school? My boy's being bussed too, and I don't mind. Why should you?"**
> **(Roberta) "It's not about us, Twyla. Me and you. It's about our kids."**
> **(Twyla) "What's more *us* than that?"**
> **(Roberta) "Well, it is a free country."**
> **(Twyla) "Not yet, but it will be."**
> **(Roberta) "What the hell does that mean? I'm not doing anything to you?"**
> **(Twyla) "You really think that?"**
> **(Roberta) "I know it."**
> **(Twyla) "I wonder what made me think you were different."**
> **(Roberta) "I wonder what made me think you were different." (104, brackets added, emphasis original)**

As is known, both whites and blacks were equally opposed to the court enforcement of racial integration at schools.[5] The above dialogue indicates Twyla's mistrust of the parental protest, for their act, has caused severe consequences to the children. It can be inferred from the dialogue that Roberta's children might be equally indifferent about which schools they attend. Expressing her concern more for individuals than politics, Twyla notes the anxiety in the children who had to watch TV at home while the city was rife with racial conflicts. Roberta makes a similar claim, yet her motive is tinted with her urge to demonstrate her "black power" against the backdrop of racial conflicts that she neglects the imminent quality of the human condition such as the close relationship natural to mothers and children. Indeed, both black and white children are victims of "racial conflicts" on account of their being deprived of sufficient school and home education.[6] Similarly, the bond between Twyla and Roberta disintegrates at this point. Roberta's justification for her picketing lies in the slogan of "It's a free country", yet one must take this with caution. Different reactions of the families of both races to racial conflicts during the 1970s can be found in *Common Ground*, and the slogan "It's a free country" remains a frequent cry.[7] As the participant and observer of this historical event, Twyla makes a sharp note of Roberta's behaviour in the above dialogue. While Roberta claims that she pickets for the sake of her children, she has this written on her board: "Mothers have rights too" (Morrison 1995, 103)! It is Roberta's identity as an activist that marginalizes her love for her children as well as her friendship with Twyla. According to Twyla, in picketing and flaunting her feminism, Roberta has neglected her children, not unlike what Mary and Roberta's mother have modelled for them. Roberta's political identity is soon confirmed when more black women come to her aid by rolling Twyla's car. The confrontation between Roberta and Twyla now is reduced to a battle between two races. Overturning Twyla's car would mean a laudable victory for the protesters. It is crucial to learn that Roberta, instead of preventing the act of protest, emerges as a radical nationalist. She accuses Twyla of kicking "black" Maggie and asserts that both have bullied Maggie. Maggie is not black as both Twyla and Roberta were certain. Roberta's distortion of the fact is a manifestation of her full engagement with the Black Power movement. Her accusation receives challenge when Twyla shows scepticism of her motive of picketing:

> **"She wan't black," I said.**
> **"Like hell she wasn't, and you kicked her. We both did. You kicked a black lady**

> **who couldn't even scream."**
> **"Liar!"**
> **"You're the liar! Why don't you just go on home and leave us alone, huh?" (Morrison 1995, 105)**

Roberta seems to suggest that if Twyla insists on interfering with them, they will seek revenge. In falsely condemning Twyla for her kicking "black" Maggie, Roberta intends to justify her picketing. Blacks have long been known for their subjection to racial oppression, but Morrison warns the reader against the danger of binary opposition of oppressors and the oppressed. Mary's racism does not necessarily mean that Twyla will retain Mary's racist education. Indeed, Roberta justifies her picketing at the expense of Twyla's moral integrity. As is argued, busing "has become a symbol of social engineering based on abstractions, with too little regard for the desires and the feelings of those most directly concerned: the children and their families" (Harris et al. 1975, 262). Roberta no longer exists as a mother nurturing her children or a potential friend to Twyla, but as an abstraction embodied in "racial conflicts" instead.

Roberta's false condemnation does stimulate Twyla to interrogate her conscience, especially in the case of Maggie's incident. In writing about her creation of "Recitatif", Morrison admonishes herself not to beautify blacks or condemn whites. Twyla's reflection on the Maggie incident after her confrontation with Roberta on the occasion of anti-busing protests is an illumination of what this admonition affects. Twyla realizes that although she never kicked Maggie, her indifference implies her acquiescence to the big girls' bullying. Her epiphany at this moment registers her moral growth. "We watched and never tried to help her and never called for help. Maggie was my dancing mother. Deaf, I thought, and dumb. Nobody inside. Nobody would hear you if you cried in the night. *Nobody who could tell you anything important that you could use*" (Morrison 1995, 108, emphasis mine). Twyla's commiseration with Maggie is prominent, for the values of empathy and love start to take shape in her mind. She is awakened to the fact that there is no reliable instruction and that only by being sentient can one achieve moral growth. It is at this moment that she makes a drastic break with the concept of white superiority that Mary passed on to her. Twyla's epiphany triggered by her memory predicts her eventual change in her stance on race issues. In *Remember the Journey to School Integration*, Morrison writes, "remembering is the mind's first step toward understanding" (2004, preface).

Roberta's moral growth is revealed in her last encounter with Twyla. She confesses to Twyla her uncertainty about Maggie's racial identity and her lying about Twyla's abuse of Maggie. She also delivers a belated apology to Twyla: "'And you were right. We didn't kick her. It was the gar girls. Only them. But, well, I wanted to. I really wanted them to hurt her. I said we did it, too. You and me, but that's not true. And I don't want you to carry that around. It was just that I wanted to do it so bad that day--wanting to is doing it'" (Morrison 1995, 109). Twyla's role as the first-person narrator naturally prevents the reader from accessing Roberta's self-reflection, yet Twyla's narrative of Roberta's succinct confession does enable the reader to feel the latter's twinge of guilt and reveal Roberta's equally intense moral interrogation before achieving the honesty with herself. Evidently, after that confrontation where Maggie's fall is repeatedly referred to, Roberta begins to reflect on her past behavior as well as on the relationships between racial conflicts and individual connection. Roberta's urge to kick Maggie betrays her resentment of Maggie's marginal racial status, which she shares and is only increasingly aware of. This realization also partly justifies her active participation in the protest against racial integration. Roberta seems to wish to amend the regrettable mistake committed in her age of innocence. Thanks to Twyla and Roberta's shared experience with Maggie, they can reconsider their fragile friendship. Twyla's moral growth is manifest when she examines her previous indifference to

Maggie who needed her support. Similarly, Roberta develops a growing knowledge that neither a simplistic evasion nor a fanatic embracing of an abstract concept is conducive to establishing a mutual understanding. By the end of the story, both Twyla and Roberta have articulated their compassion for Maggie. Their mothers' absence in the latter part of the story is naturally replaced with the presence of a mother-like Maggie. It is through confronting the memory of Maggie that Twyla and Roberta are engaged in overcoming the obstacles and realizing their potential for moral growth. Their implied recognition of Maggie as their common mother, in the end, confirms that a resolution of racial conflicts might be achieved through specific individual efforts and not abstract slogans. Nothing would prevent them from sustaining their friendship, for they, as the new generations of mothers, have consciously come to terms with their human identities. Roberta's moral growth arrives late, but never too late for herself and Twyla to pursue a firm friendship across racial barriers.

Recitatif, used prior to an aria in an opera, aims to reproduce natural tonal changes in a conversation to show character development either in monologue or dialogue. It is a "principal vehicle for dialogue and dramatic action in opera" (Monson et al.). Twyla's first-person narration of her inner thoughts serves as a prevalent form of monologue, but the dialogue between her and Roberta is omnipresent. Unlike an aria which carries "more lyric portions" (Monson et al.), a recitatif is capable of intensifying conflicts. It can sometimes express more subtle, complex feelings than an aria does. The recitatif in the form of dialogue and monologue functions as a representation of the two protagonists' conflicted feelings about each other and their efforts to reach their moral growth. Developing from their girlhood to motherhood, Twyla and Roberta have been striving to conduct a dialogue not only between themselves across racial boundaries but also within themselves, which motivates their self-introspection and improves their mutual understanding. As Morrison states, her vulnerability "would lie in romanticizing blackness rather than demonizing it; vilifying whiteness rather than reifying it" (1992, x). While Twyla consciously seeks to rekindle her friendship with Roberta by learning about Jimi Hendrix, she is depicted as an individual capable of redressing her wrongs. Roberta, on the other hand, unavoidably subject to the political discourse of the Black Power movement, initially unjustly targets her vengeance at Twyla, but soon we see in our imagination her painful wrestling with conscience. Significantly, Jimi Hendrix and Maggie are employed to furnish the protagonists' arduous journey toward forming a human connection. Hendrix and Maggie consistently serve as twin emotional props for Twyla and Roberta who are on the road to their individualistic moral growth. Jimi Hendrix's death and Maggie's dumb-and-deafness signify their loss of language. However, their deprivation of speech is compensated by the gradual mutual understanding achieved between Twyla and Roberta. In the protagonists' stages of moral growth, they liberate themselves from the boundaries of group politics represented by their mothers' evasive mutual resentment and by the media's frenzy coverage.

Thus, challenging Cardinal's "othering" act in *Words to Say It*, Morrison succeeds in highlighting the significance of comprehending human beings on a personal level. In engaging the reader in the act of decoding and exploring Twyla and Roberta's identities, Morrison guides the reader to perceive the limits of stereotypical beliefs and the necessity to carve out a space for imagining the protagonists' moral growth. According to Morrison, her characters and the language in her fiction are "by no means marginal or already and completely known and knowable" (1992, x-xi). Twyla and Roberta are no exception, especially in this case. Only when both Twyla and Roberta recognize one another as individuals can they achieve their moral growth. The promising ending of the story implies that the protagonists' children will have bright prospects for moral growth. Morrison says, "as with any journey, there is often a narrow path to

walk before you can see the wide road ahead. And sometimes there is a closed gate between the path and the road" (2004, preface). Twyla and Roberta have pushed open the closed gate which points to the wide road ahead.

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Notes

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1. Cardinal recalls in her novel *The Words To Say It* (1983) that while listening to Louis Armstrong's jazz she felt so anxious about being driven to death that she left the concert hall

amid Armstrong's performance.

2. In the interview, John Burks (1970) inquires about Jimi Hendrix's relationship with Black Panthers, but Hendrix gives hesitant responses. First, he flatly denies his involvement with the party. But when Burks rephrases and seeks a more definite answer from him, he acknowledges his ties to the party and explains the party's justification for existence.

3. Sandra Kumamoto Stanley argues for Twyla's identification with Maggie (2011, 81) by pointing out that Twyla works as a waitress just as Maggie cooks, but she has not discussed Twyla's dilemma over the Maggie incident (2011, 71-88).

4. The power of media serves to impact the public beliefs about busing. As Gary Orfield exemplifies, the "urban desegregation through busing" is "described as a costly and rigidly formalistic approach to integration likely to worsen race relations and accelerate the exodus of the remaining white residents from central cities. Polls show most people believe these claims. Public perception has doubtless been reinforced by the way the national media, particularly television, have covered the story" (1978, 103).

5. According to Cottle's research, blacks were not unanimously supportive of busing on account of its bringing more opportunities for their children to get qualified education. In Henry George Macon's account of "Do you see me as a human being or just another black face", he points out that while a black child might be happy that he will go to a better school, he should know that this leads him to perpetuate the belief that "white folks not only have it better than black folks," but that "white folks *is* better than black folks" (1976, 77; emphasis original).

6. It is a fact that those women who committed themselves to antibusing tended to neglect their family members. "If some antibusing women were just extending what had already been socially approved behaviour, others, however, were nudging up to and across the boundaries of convention. The intensity of antibusing commitment usually meant that women were at home far less: husbands, housework, and children were neglected, or husbands took up the slack. Several antibusing women conceded that they saw antibusing activity place a debilitating strain on many marriages" (Formisano 1991, 148).

7. In the 1960s and 1970s, the practice of racial integration could not solve racial discrimination easily in schools in the north or schools in the south. Both black and white women were engaged in protests, and neither would give in even when the schools made efforts to reconcile (Lukas, 1985, 18, 108).

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