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## A Reader-Response On Recitatif by Toni Morrison

In Toni Morrison's *Recitatif*, the author takes the reader on a journey of two women from childhood to adulthood. She leaves the reader to come to their own conclusions regarding the characters race, and motives throughout the story. This style of writing relates to the school of reader-response criticism. The initial meeting of the two girls reveals they are of different races but there is uncertainty of which one is black or white with only stereotypes as a guide. They meet later in life but, are in totally different places and things become awkward. Later they reconnect as mature women who have found their place in life but are pitted against each other due to racial barriers and have trouble remembering a painful past event. This is a powerful piece of literature, a coming of age story that leaves the reader to make their own assumptions about who Twyla and Roberta are and what, and or if anything happened in their shared past.

The story starts with two, eight year old girls Twyla and Roberta meeting at St Bonny's shelter. The author shows that they are of different racial backgrounds. "And Mary, that's my mother, she was right. Every now and then she would stop dancing long enough to tell me something important and one of those things she said was that they never washed their hair and they smelled funny". This was used to have the reader form an opinion based on what this means to them. The way the girls mothers are described is also questionable to the reader. Twyla's mother dancing all night could indicate that she is a exotic dancer, or it could mean that she just parties all night and goes to nightclubs. She is portrayed by the narrator as immature as she seems embarrassed of her. Roberta's mother is described as being sick, which can mean that she is experiencing some sort of health issue, possibly cancer or something similar but, it is later implied that she is mentally ill. "She'd been brought up in an institution like my mother was and like I thought I would be too. They both have mothers who are unable to care for them, but all the other girls there are orphans. The girls bond over this, being the same age and getting bad grades in school. They also dislike the older girls who chase them and twist their arms. They would tease a mute, bow legged, kitchen worker named Maggie. They think she is dumb and they call her names knowing she can not respond because she can not hear them. They part ways and go on with their lives.

When Twyla and Roberta Meet again, Twyla is working as a waitress at Howard Johnson's. She spots Roberta looking very different from the girl she knew as a child. She is dressed provocatively and chain smoking with two bearded men. Twyla approaches her excited that she has seen her after all these years. But She does not seem to feel the same and mocks and dismisses her. "Hendrix. Jimi Hendrix, asshole. He's only the biggest-Oh, wow. Forget it". It is at this point no way for the reader to know why she would behave this way. Her chain smoking and Jimi Hendrix following implies she is a groupie who may be on drugs. During this Era many

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of his fans were. That would be any easy assumption given her company and the way she is dressed. She is being nonchalant and rude to someone who considers her a close friend. This really is really offensive to Twyla. The women meet later in life, when they bump into each other at a grocery store and find out they are living in the same town. They are grown and married with children. Roberta is wealthy and is now able to read and seem much changed than the girl at Howard Johnson. They decide to have coffee and catch up on old times. It seems that Roberta was on drugs at the Howard Johnson 'Maybe, a little. I never did drugs much. why?'. She never apologizes for snubbing her and acts like nothing happened. They also discuss Maggie do not have the same memory of the event. "No Twyla. They knocked her down. Those girls pushed her down and tore her clothes. In the orchard". This leads to Twyla becoming uncomfortable. She does not think she would have sat there and watch something like this happen and do nothing to stop it. In the Fall they find themselves on opposing sides of a racial tension involving their children and what schools they should be able to attend. This leads to them being mean to each other and during an argument Roberta tells Twyla that she not only watched the attack on Maggie but participated in it by kicking her.

The author really has the reader trying to figure out exactly what is going on with them. At the end of story they make peace and accept the fact they neither of them can remember what happened to Maggie. In conclusion this author leaves the reader to rely on their own judgement. There are twists in this story where there seems to be a clear cut answer about what the race of these women are but there is no answer at the end. There are points where one character seems to be the villain but, the author does a good job with Redeeming her, by getting deeper on why she might feel the way she feels. "The reader-response critic observes the expectations aroused by a text, how they are satisfied or modified, and how the reader comprehends the work when all of it has been read, and when it is reread in whole or in part". This Literature is perfect example of this. Toni Morrison does a wonderful job with leaving the reader guessing and trying to pick up cues to who these women are and what really happened to them in their past. She writes in a way where based on the readers thoughts, beliefs and some stereotypes, whether positive or negative can lead to an assumption of who is who and what is happening during the story.

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