

## A STUDY OF THE CHARACTERS IN *RECITATIF*, BY TONI MORRISON, BASED ON SPATIAL CATEGORIES

O PERCURSO ESPACIAL DAS PERSONAGENS EM “RECITATIF”,  
DE TONI MORRISON

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**Abstract:** Toni Morrison is considered a major reference in the African - American literature whose diverse literary production gives the art an essential role in the defense of human rights. In this article we present briefly some contemporary historical facts narrated in "Recitatif" the only short story of the author, published in 1983 in *Confirmation: An Anthology of African American Women*. For a better understanding of the text, we put in evidence some American artistic and cultural movements, that culturally enriched the country and contributed to the emergence of modern african - American literature. Recognizing the potentialities of the studies on the space in the literary work, we aim to identify the main themes of "Recitatif" from the definition of the space in the construction of the characters. We emphasize the ambiguity as a strategy that invites the reader to build the meaning of the text, to question conventions and stereotypes and to value the Other, accepting the differences, crucial aspect in today's global and multicultural society.

**Keywords:** Space; Non-Place; *Recitatif*; Toni Morrison.

**Resumo:** A escritora Toni Morrison é considerada uma das maiores referências na literatura afro-americana cuja produção literária diversificada confere à arte um incontornável papel na defesa dos direitos humanos. Neste artigo apresentamos de forma breve, alguns factos históricos contemporâneos da ação narrada em “Recitatif”, único conto da autora, publicado em 1983 em *Confirmation: An Anthology of African American Women*. Para uma melhor compreensão do texto, evidenciamos movimentos artísticos e culturais estadunidenses que, para além de enriquecerem culturalmente o país, contribuíram para o surgimento da literatura afro-americana moderna. Reconhecendo as potencialidades e a atualidade dos estudos sobre o espaço na obra literária, temos como objetivo identificar as principais temáticas de “Recitatif”, a partir da definição do percurso espacial das personagens. Sublinhamos a ambiguidade como estratégia que convida o leitor a construir o(s) sentido(s) do texto, a questionar convenções e estereótipos e a valorizar o Outro na aceitação das diferenças, aspeto crucial na atual sociedade globalizada e multicultural.

**Palavras-chave:** Espaço. Espaço; Não-lugar; *Recitatif*; Toni Morrison. “

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## INTRODUCTION

Toni Morrison is considered one of the most important African-American writers with a remarkable literary production characterized by a variety of genres including novels, essays, plays, children's texts, literary criticism and the only short story this author has ever written: *Recitatif*.

Daring to write stories about the lives of the black people in America, taking into account their own point of view, assumes, as Nascimento (2012) mentions, a strong social engagement, giving visibility, in writing, to the voice of African-Americans and especially women.

This article reflects in a succinct way on some contemporary historical facts of the action narrated in *Recitatif*, between the 1950s and the 1970s, which allowed us to establish some relations between reality (historical spaces and facts) and fiction, following the study of Dias (2011). This is of interest, especially if we take into account the scarcity of information regarding the description of the spaces where the story takes place that are provided by the narrator.

For a better contextualization and understanding of Morrison's work, we reflect on some artistic and cultural movements that have emerged in America, such as the "Harlem Renaissance" and highlight the value of some writers such as Paul Lawrence or W.E.B. Du Bois, who, by assuming an important fighting for the defense of civil rights and reflecting on black identity, contributed to a cultural change in the country with the emergence of modern African American literature, as Silva (2015) explains.

The black diaspora disseminated African national identities by establishing cultural exchanges with the countries where they arrived, transforming the black identity and, in the case of the United States, contributed to the construction of an African American identity in a long and not always harmonious process. Its literary expression has African roots in close connection with other cultural realities and, being written in English, turns the dialogue between diverse ethnic, cultural and social expressions easier and gives prominence to the present globalized and multicultural society, where it is desirable to value the difference and respect for the Other: "thus we must deconstruct erroneous representations of 'the Other' and reconstruct authentic images (AMANTE, 2014, p.329).

In our analysis of *Recitatif*, we identify the main themes that go through the narrative, namely the musical reference to which the title alludes, the ambiguity

(intentional) as a challenge to the conventions of the readers regarding racial issues, the difference and motherhood, as authors such as Nascimento (2011), Carneiro (2012) and Silva (2015) explain.

Considering the potential of the relation between space and plot to understand the literary text, taking topoanalysis as a theoretical reference, as proposed by Borges Filho (2007), we suggest an analysis of the characters of *Recitativo* based on spatial categories. We explore, in a more particular way, how space contributes to the socioeconomic and psychological description of the characters and, by acquiring a symbolic function, contributes to the representation of feelings experienced by them. We recognize the vitality of space studies in the literary work whose interdisciplinary nature corroborates the interest of this approach.

## NOTES ON AFRICAN-AMERICAN LITERATURE

African-American literature results from a cultural legacy closely related to the black population of the United States and it is characterized by its marginal discourse as Silva (2015) states. It took a long road for African-American literature to acquire its space and be recognized by literary critics.

For a long period in the history of the United States, from the slave trade to the British colonies, that racism against the blacks silenced their voices. Despite the constraints, they produced works (stories, poems, songs) expressing their experiences and demanding their integration in the new continent.

After the independence of the United States, in 1776, a movement began to abolish slavery, only completely finished after the Civil War from 1861 to 1865. However, racism did not disappear, and a racial segregation system known as "Jim Crow Laws" was introduced in the country, which prohibited black people from voting and freely attending places such as schools, public transportation or restaurants. Writers such as Charles W. Chestnut, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Booker T. Washington or W.E.B. Du Bois assumed an important role of social criticism and insisted on the movement of black people in the defense of their rights.

During the 1920s, a period of prosperity was experienced in the United States. A cultural change took place with the popularization of musical genres such as "Blues" and "Jazz", with one of the greatest artistic movements in the country emerging – the

"Harlem Renaissance," which marked the beginning of modern Afro-American literature as explained by Silva (2015). During this decade, black writers gained recognition as a group and played an important role in the discussion of black identity. The 1960s became known by the struggle against racism. In 1964, the "Civil Rights Act" and the right to vote for black people in 1965 were repealed the "Jim Crow" laws. From then on, there appeared a great diversification of works, with different styles, languages, genres and influences. With the publication of T. C. Bambara's *The Black Woman - An Anthology* (1970) and the novel *The Salt Eaters* (1980), black women also began to emerge from their condition of silence and invisibility.

## THE CONSTRUCTION OF CULTURAL IDENTITIES AND THEIR LITERARY EXPRESSION

We must not forget that we live in a postmodern society, materialized and with a mind-boggling rhythm, but where other dimensions that need to be recognized are also possible. The transformations that occur in everyday life arise from a process of globalization (which is not a recent phenomenon) and are reflected, as Hall (2005) explains, in our relation with space, time and the Other.

Time becomes so flexible, corroborates Cresswell (2008), that it seems to reduce space to its ephemerality. Perhaps there is interest in the issue of space in literature, a tendency that has been increasing in the last thirty years, as Borges Filho (2007) states.

Augé (2008) analyzes the notions of "anthropological place" and "non-place", explaining that a transformation of ourselves in others is at stake, as if we were being colonized without knowing for sure by whom.

Hall (2005) considers that identity is not innate, but it is constructed over time through unconscious processes. It questions the idea that national identities have never been as homogeneous as one might believe in our representations of them and refers to three great consequences of globalization: 1) the disintegration of national identities; 2) the strengthening of local or particularistic identities; 3) the emergence of new hybrid identities.

In analyzing the relation of "place" - "non-place", Augé (2008) arises the question of alterity (social, intimate and complete) to the space, suggesting that "non-

places" can provoke a loss of consciousness as a group, community and society, prevailing the isolated individual.

Since globalization is a widespread phenomenon, it is more intensely felt in some places, as it is the case of Africa. For centuries, black people were removed from their place to serve Europeans as slaves, which eventually expanded African culture across several continents.

The black diaspora as Hall (2005) explains has forcibly disseminated African national identities allowing the interweaving of their customs and traditions with the customs of the countries where they arrived, establishing cultural exchanges, transforming the black identity and, in the case of the United States, contributing to the construction of a new identity - the African American identity. The author points out that in the phenomenon of mobility, routes (ways, paths) are "routes" and not the "roots" that determine the process of identity construction.

However, as noted in the previous section, it hasn't been an easy or harmonious process. African-American literature, as the result of ethnic dialogue, enabled the creation of a particular type of literary production. As Carneiro (2012) refers, it is a hybrid production with African roots in interconnection and dialogue with other life experiences, in a different type of society.

## **RECITATIF AND THE LITERARY CAREER OF TONI MORRISON**

The writing career of Toni Morrison transcends all temporal and spatial boundaries given the relevance of her literary work. She sought to give voice to the black people, who in the course of history, had been silenced by the white mainstream. According to Nascimento (2012), her work shows a strong social commitment breaking barriers of prejudice and bringing voices prohibited over time thus becoming a recognized author in a predominantly eurocentric and male cultural activity.

In 1983, in the anthology *Confirmation: An Anthology of African American Women* was published her only short story, *Recitatif*. The word "recitatif" is defined by The Oxford English Dictionary (1961) as: "A style of musical declamation, intermediate between singing and ordinary speech in the dialogue and narrative parts of operas and oratorios".

This definition turns the understanding of the story's plot easier, since it can be, like an opera, divided into several scenes, or spaces that represent the evolution of the characters Twyla Benson and Roberta Fisk in their process of growth and maturation. Twyla, the homodiegetic narrator, recites the story of both, making retrospectives throughout three moments of their lives: childhood, adolescence and adulthood. According to the study of Dias (2011), for a chronologically correct contextualization of the history of the two characters, some calculations were made based on signs provided by the text. Thus, it was possible to situate the narrative in the United States, between the decades of 50 and 80 of the twentieth century.

## SPACE AND PLOT

According to Borges Filho's (2008) topoanalysis proposal, the concept of space is essential in the study of the literary text. All spaces represented in a literary work are fictional. Space is understood in a broad sense and can serve several purposes: 1) describe the characters by situating them in the socio-economic and psychological context to which they belong; 2) influence and suffer the actions of the characters; 3) make the action possible; 4) situate the character geographically; 5) symbolize the feelings experienced by the characters; 6) establish contrast with the characters; 7) anticipate the narrative.

According to the same author, the plot is closely related to the concept of space. It is the totality of the facts, of the actions that occur within the narrative, generally composed of four stages: presentation (or exposure), complication (or development), climax and conclusion (or outcome).

Each part of the narrative is closely related to the space, so the chaining of the spaces that constitute it are compared to a path crossed by the characters. As the relationship between the parts of the plot and the spatial pathway provide many reflections, we propose an analysis of *Recitatif*, based on spatial categories.

## THE SPACE IN *RECITATIF* - PRESENTATION AT ST. BONNY'S ORPHANAGE

The characters are introduced to the reader at St. Bonny's (St. Bonnaventure), a public orphanage. According to Dias's research (2011), Bonnaventure is a county town of Cattaraugus, in the state of New York, but the orphanage of Morrison's work had no real existence. It is, according to the proposal of Borges Filho (2007) an imaginative space, but as the spaces of the real world, it provides the narrative stronger likelihood.

At the beginning of the action, when the two girls get to know each other, it becomes perceptible to the reader that they belong to different ethnic groups (one is white and one is black). Twyla mentions that she would not want to mingle with someone of a different race: "It was one thing to be taken out of your own bed early in the morning - it was something else to be stuck in a strange place with a girl from a whole other race" (p. 243).

A little later in the narrative, when some affinity relationships between the two girls have already been established, a reference to skin color arises: "So for the moment it did not matter that we looked like salt and pepper standing there and that was what the other kids called us sometimes "(p.244).

There are, however, few references to the physical appearance of the characters. As Carneiro (2012) clarifies, it is the reader who follows the socially established aspects that, from his/her point of view, are characteristic of a certain ethnicity, and doing so, it is confined to generalizing racial concepts, which are not enough to point any of the characters as white or black.

Thus, by creating a language that is predominantly neutral to give importance to the realities represented by Twyla and Roberta, *Recitatif* assumes a clear criticism of the social and racial discrimination that involves the two protagonists. It proposes the dialogue of ideas and invites the readers' concern. When raising questions, they actively participate in the construction of the meaning (s) of the text, as explicit Dias (2011).

Twyla makes reference to Bellevue, comparing it with St. Bonny's: "In the big room with one hundred beds like Bellevue" (p.243). This reference becomes relevant by creating in the reader the idea that, before going to St. Bonny's, Twyla would have been institutionalized, given her mother's carelessness, once she danced through the night. Roberta's mother was ill and it was this condition that took her to the orphanage.

The abandonment of the girls by their mothers joins them and differentiates them from the rest of the orphanage children, who are real orphans.

In this first scenario (according to the definition of Borges Filho (2007) as a space created by man, which through culture modifies and builds it) beyond the question of racism, the theme of motherhood is also addressed. As Dias (2011) explains, Toni Morrison characterizes motherhood by using the concepts of preservation (or defense), education (in the civic sense), cultural awareness and healing (conciliation). The mother conveys a set of beliefs, values and traditions of a particular culture that prepare the child to survive in a society strongly marked by social differences and racism, developing a strong and authentic personality.

The mother and the house are comparable as places of meaning: the mother shelters, feeds, and provides well-being. The house protects against external threats. The house is, then, in the physical-empirical world, compared to the intra-uterine house, that is, the initial shell, as Bachelard (1958) refers.

However, in *Recitativo*, the mother's absence results in lack of protection, education, cultural awareness and affection. In addition, the fact that the two children, at the age of eight, placed in an orphanage where they received no affection, quite different from the "protective shell", makes them individuals with difficulties of conciliation with themselves and with serious problems in the construction of their identity, a problem that is present through the whole story.

As explained by Borges Filho (2007), the space where the action is developed can echo social inequalities and represents the socioeconomic context of the characters. In addition to the abandonment at the orphanage, Twyla and Roberta are students with poor school performance and little motivation towards academic learning, indicating a poor socio-family context. "We were eight years old and got F's all the time. Me because I couldn't remember what I read or what the teacher said. And Roberta because she couldn't read at all and didn't even listen to the teacher" (p. 244).

As Lutwack (1984) says, space, in literature, acquires a literal and a symbolic value. Thus, the orphanage orchard is described using visual sensations, with hundreds of small apple trees compared to old and shriveled women, when Twyla arrived, filling with flowers when the narrator left the institution. For Twyla, this space assumes relevance once it is always present in her dreams. She says that nothing important happened there, but the older girls associate that space with sensations of freedom, joy and pleasure, because it was where they heard music and danced.



But for Maggie, the kitchen-maid, sand-colored, old, deaf-mute and legged in parentheses, the orchard turns into a dangerous environment. Because of her physical disability once she fell there. The girls laughed at her, but Twyla and Roberta did nothing to help.

Twyla often recalls this episode that disturbs her. Maggie gradually becomes an inescapable presence in the narrative because it disorganizes the clear spaces of memory, especially when in adulthood Twyla assumes the desire to kick Maggie, who, symbolically, through her disability, personifies the mothers of the two protagonists, absent and unable to love.

### **THE SPACE IN *RECITATIF* - COMPLICATION OR DEVELOPMENT AT HOWARD JOHNSON'S "FOOD EMPORIUM" CAFE**

The narrator leaves her childhood at the orphanage with the image of Roberta fading away: "Little by little she faded. Her wet socks with the pink scalloped tops and her big serious-looking eyes - that's all I could catch when I tried to bring her to mind (p. 248).

Since then, Twyla and Roberta met several times in everyday situations and in different scenarios. In general, the dialogues between the two are based on the childhood memories at St. Bonny's and the lives they have in the present.

Their first encounter, after leaving the orphanage, took place at Twyla's workplace - the Howard Johnson cafe on the Thruway highway, just before Kingston exit.

Twyla worked as a waitress when Roberta appeared with two boys. Twyla recognized her childhood friend. She approached and exchanged a few words with her, realizing that she was going with her friends to a Jimi Hendrix show. In this first meeting, Roberta acted as if Twyla's presence displeased her for not wanting to remember the past at St. Bonny's. Twyla felt uncomfortable for her job and social situation.

Later, Twyla marries James and says she is happy. Like other Morrison characters, Twyla seeks family harmony as a way of reconciling with herself and resolving the past.

The narrator of *Recitatif* understands that the city of Newburgh, where she lives with her family, has changed. The concept of simple life characterized by relations of proximity has become meaningless in an urban space marked by the decadence of old and imposing houses, gradually replaced by new housing of important companies with the inevitable emergence of a shopping center.

The older generations, who represent traditional values, are symbolized by Twyla's in-laws; they remain oblivious to all these transformations of urban space: "Half the population of Newburgh is on welfare now, but my husband's family is still some upstate Paradise of a long time past "(p.251).

In a way, this dichotomy brings us to Augé's (2008) thinking by reflecting on "anthropological places" and "non-places" and his concern to understand how the latter can lead to the feeling of loss of group, community and belonging that define modern societies.

Twyla and Roberta meet for the second time, in a supermarket queue, they agree to have coffee to talk about their lives and remember the past. We have to emphasize that the second encounter between the two women occurs again in an environment of consumption and leisure characterized by the diminution of social relations in public spaces where individuals cohabit without living together, where the subjects are anonymous, identical and deeply solitary, as it is explained by Augé (2008).

It is in this anonymous space that the characters establish an extended dialogue about childhood moments that they lived together in the orphanage. It invites the reader to infer the changes in their social condition. When they talk about their mothers, the episode of Maggie reappears. Roberta clarifies that Maggie had not fallen into the orchard, unlike Twyla thought: "Maggie did not fall, she said. Those girls pushed her down and tore her clothes. In the orchard "(p. 254).

Roberta's certainty disturbs Twyla regarding childhood memories at the orphanage. Facing the desire to return to a known past, with known identities, the uneasiness generated by Roberta's words puts the narrator in search of something that did not exist until then, generating a conflict with herself, with the faces of her identity that she did not dare to face. "Roberta messed up my past somehow with that business about Maggie. I would not forget the thing like that. Would I? "(p. 255).

This astonishment disturbs the character, but, as Fuentes (2011) points out, it pushes her in search of new visions of the past, feeds the narrative and raises the reflection as if it were a game of mirrors.

## **THE SPACE IN *RECITATIF* - THE CLIMAX OF THE ACTION IN THE STREETS OF NEWBURGH**

According to Dias (2011), it is during the 70s that, in the story, the conflict occurs between Twyla and Roberta. Twyla refers to it as a racial conflict: "Strife came to us that fall. Racial Strife" (p. 255). It is noteworthy the existence of racial conflicts in American society at this time, despite the changes introduced in the legislation regarding civil rights. In the 1970s, policies of segregation and racial discrimination were still a reality.

Twyla and Roberta are angered by school-based educational policies that, by bringing together different schools, forced pupils to travel longer distances between their homes and educational establishments, making school buses necessary.

In the narrative, a movement to fight for the civil rights (of children) was carried out by the march of the mothers, in the streets of the city, in an effort to have access to a better education for their children.

In the midst of this (racial) confrontation, the absence of the mothers of the two protagonists of the narrative emerges implacably. Roberta carries a poster where we can read: "Mothers have rights" and Twyla replies with hers: "and so do children". The strength of the posters displayed on the streets of the city suggests the antagonism between the protagonists and emphasizes the memories of the past by showing that fighting for children's rights, they did not benefit from them given the carelessness of their mothers.

Maggie's omnipresent memory interferes with the characters' reunion and intensifies the tension between them, when Roberta accuses Twyla of having kicked her in the orphanage orchard: "You're the same little state kid who kicked a poor old black lady when she was down on the floor" (p. 257).

Twyla feels helpless and confused as Maggie's image becomes so present and real that it forces her to remake the memories of her past. She has doubts about Maggie's color, but not about her disability. In the painful effort of reviewing the past,

she assumes the happiness she felt about the aggressions that Maggie, symbolizing her mother, suffered: “I didn’t join in with the gar girls and kick that lady, but I sure did want to. Maggie was my dancing mother. Deaf, I thought, and dumb. And when the gar girls pushed her down, I (...) was glad about that” (p. 260).

The climax of the action marked by tension (between the protagonists and between different social and ethnic groups of American society) burst forth in the street, a city space, temporarily occupied by the characters, establishing an analogy with their feelings, according to the proposals of Borges Filho (2007).

### **THE SPACE IN *RECITATIF* - THE END AT THE SMALL CAFE DOWNTOWN**

On Christmas Eve Twyla went to the center of the city to buy a Christmas tree. When she finally chose one, she was preparing to return home, but it was beginning to snow. Downtown, the streets were wide and half empty. Only a few people left the Newburgh Hotel party. Feeling tired, she decides to enter a small cafe, decorated with Christmas motifs. There is a new unexpected encounter with Roberta, who wore party clothes and was there with a man and a woman. They all seemed to be a little drunk.

Roberta readdresses the theme of the past raising doubts about Maggie’s ethnicity again but reinforcing certainty about age and disability. When Twyla tells her that none of them had kicked Maggie, she reiterates the desire, already expressed by the narrator, to have done it: “We didn’t kick her. But, well, I wanted to” (p. 261).

Twyla’s confusion and astonishment direct the focus of the narrative to Maggie who nurtures and ultimately brings the conflict to a resolution. As Fuentes (2011) points out, given the presence / absence of Maggie, the game is not controlled. Maggie raises the enormous sense of helplessness as an irreversible loss, which can be seen in the last sentence of the story: “Oh, shit, Twyla. Shit, shit, shit. What the hell happened to Maggie?”

Their mothers are still present in their absences and Maggie, revived, discovered in her importance, is felt as a guilt that they cannot escape. The protagonists may not have kicked Maggie but they had the desire to do so. The final question asks the reader. Indifferent mothers ensured a predictable past. Maggie’s memory, fleeting, interdicted, silenced, erupts in the different encounters and it is impossible to escape the discomfort of her presence.

The physical space is of importance to represent the feelings of the characters as explained Borges Filho (2007) and interacts with the space of memory. The last space of the narrative (a small cafe downtown) is different from the initial space (the orphanage), but in a way, this is taken up by the memory of the characters in a circularity that closes the experienced conflicts.

Just as in the beginning, and despite all uncertainties, the two protagonists try to reestablish the bonds that joined them in childhood. They finally realize that their distinct life paths led them to live different experiences and take different options, but that late Christmas Eve they both conclude that their lives were conditioned by St. Bonny's.

The presence of snow, evoking visual sensations, becomes suggestive since, in its purity and simplicity, it may symbolize for Twyla some possibility of appropriation of the past and reconciliation with herself and with the others.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Literature from the black diaspora is an interesting object of study, with a hybrid literary production, with African roots associated with new customs and new experiences of life in a different society.

From the study, it is concluded that *Recitatif* reflects on the humanizing potential of literature, assuming the space, as proposed by Borges Filho (2007), an essential importance in the existence of the characters with a variety of meanings that matters to reveal in the literary text.

The narrator gives few details regarding the description of the spaces where the action takes place, which may indicate, by emptiness, the uprooting of the protagonists. However, it is possible to situate the action in urban spaces of passage (the orphanage, the cafe, the streets), which, according to Augé (2008) are strongly marked by uprooting, allowing us to establish relations of meaning of the space, the feelings experienced by the characters and the moments of action which allows to understand the evolution of the characters.

This narrative is a opportunity to understand the relativity of truth since it is conditioned by the perspective of the character who constructs it (Twyla), which shows that there is not one truth but several.

The same event (Maggie's episode) is reported five different times and always in different ways, adding or changing some details, showing that the past is a subjective construction. The writing and reading of the story take place in circles searching the restless memories of childhood. Twyla tries to reconstitute the past and her life at St. Bonny's, but the version of Roberta does not always agree with hers which generates the strongest tension in the story.

The omnipresence of the mother in the history of the individuals remains in the course of the narrative and influences the nature of the interactions they establish with the others and with the spaces where they live.

As Lopes (2016) explains, there is no subjectivity or intimate life on the margins of a natural and cultural space, and mother plays an inestimable role, since it is through her that the first relationship with space (social and mainly cultural) is established. This question leads us to reflect on the most devastating of the miseries present in Morrison's work, which consists in the deprivation of love (especially of maternal love) and its consequences in the life of the individuals.

Maggie symbolically represents those who are marginal in any social system. The space where she moves (the orchard) being the only natural space of the narrative, causes suffering and helplessness. The presence of this character strongly contributes to characterize Twyla and Roberta as individuals who experienced pain, but who also wished to inflict it on others, a feeling that disturbs them when they become aware of it.

In an attempt to overcome the shadows of the past, the two main characters propose, along their existential course, the recognition of the value of difference and the Other as something positive and not as an evil to exclude.

The ambiguity of color in the construction of the characters leads to conjectures on the part of the readers, a strategy that leads them to question their own conventions and stereotypes, challenging new possibilities of identities. Thus, as Silva (2015) explains, the author of *Recitatif* breaks with the tradition of unique perspectives by inviting the reader to participate actively in the construction of the meaning (s) of the text.

Through the tension between the two protagonists, who nevertheless, seek dialogue and negotiation, Toni Morrison guides the readers beyond the borders of the space where they live, propitiating the expansion of knowledge about black culture and its existence outside Africa.

Tension and dialogue call for a conception of literature grounded on the search of respect for the differences that bases the identity construction. We conclude the present text with a reflection with which we fully agree:

"The humanizing force of literature would be in its capacity to make the individual more aware of the complexity of beings and of the world, to promote the thinning of emotions and to lead them to the exercise of reflection" (NASCIMENTO, 2012, p.134).

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