

Will the Page Be Colored?: Understanding Toni Morrison's "Recitatif" through the lens of Langston Hughes's "Theme for English B"

Jennifer Hightower

Mentor Professor: Dr. Anastasia Lin

From the Harlem Renaissance to the integration of the school system in the 1950s, America's history has been marked by racial disparity, and despite claims of America entering into the post-racial era, individuals are still being categorized based solely on their race. "Theme for English B" by Langston Hughes and "Recitatif" by Toni Morrison address individuals' tendency to interpret truth through the lens of one's race. The proposed paper argues that "Theme for English B" can be used as a means by which to read and understand "Recitatif." In "Theme for English B," Hughes uses juxtaposition to pose a question, asking whether or not the truth is affected by one's race and asserts that an individual's reality will be colored by their ethnicity. Toni Morrison's "Recitatif" answers the question posed by Hughes in "Theme for English B" through the use of ambiguity. Morrison does not color the page; however, she asserts that the page will be colored at the same time. In "Recitatif," Morrison does not include information that would enable the reader race the characters and forces readers to encode racial biases as they read the piece. Both "Theme for English B" and "Recitatif" challenge the idea that American society has moved into a post racial era and assert that racial disparity exists even as it did during the Harlem Renaissance and the era of racial strife that occurred in the 1950s by exploring the readers' need to be able to identify race to understand their truth.