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### Analysis of Toni Morrison's Nobel Lecture

Many authors use language in an inappropriate manner that confuses the reader rather than helping them understand their point. The meaning behind the text can get lost in translation due to meaningless words, pretentious diction, dying metaphors, etc. I believe Morrison's Nobel Lecture uses a metaphor and language in a clear, elegant way and that Orwell would agree.

Morrison starts off her lecture using a story about an old blind, but wise, woman. These mischievous children come up to her asking her if the bird is dead or alive. Morrison uses this story to compare a writer and language to the children and the bird. What she is saying is that language is left up to children to either keep alive or let it die. She also claims that people misuse language to be oppressive and violent. For instance, Morrison says, "Sexist language, racist language, theistic language—all are typical of the policing languages of mastery, and cannot, do not permit new knowledge or encourage the mutual exchange of ideas" (219). Morrison is stating that language can be used to hurt one another and divide us. Language has been tainted and turned into a form of weaponry.

I believe Orwell would have liked Morrison's use of the story to convey her thoughts on language. In the story Morrison said she read the bird as language and the blind woman as a practiced writer. In the story, the old woman says of the bird, "If it is dead, you have either found it that way or you have killed it. If it is alive, you can still kill it. Whether it is to stay alive, it is

in your hands” (218). The old woman is depicting how it is the children’s responsibility whether to keep it alive or kill it. She is comparing what the children will do to the bird in the story to what people need to decide to do with language. She is saying that what we do with language and how we use it is up to us. Morrison goes on to say, “She is convinced that when language dies, out of carelessness, disuse, indifference and absence of esteem, or killed by fiat, not only she herself, but all users and makers are accountable for its demise” (219). Morrison uses the old women to explain how she believes that language will be lost if it is used to separate and distress one another. One of Orwell’s no-nos was dying metaphors, but a new metaphor, he said, could assist thought by evoking a visual image. I believe Orwell would have found this metaphor to be a creative approach to get Morrison’s point across. It was a new and unique folktale to use to create a comparison between a simple story of an old woman, children, and a bird with our duty to protect language.

Throughout Morrison’s lecture, she tended to speak on how language can create differences if misused and can lead to violence. One thing she did not touch on is how language can be properly used when in times of violence. One thing Morrison could have touched on to take her lecture further is to include the good in using language to go to war. For instance, during World War II, we wanted to stay neutral until we learned of the horrors of concentration camps. In this case our leaders needed to use language to inspire men to come out and fight. What Morrison’s lecture was missing was the use of language to inspire people to fight against evil. I believe if she had included that aspect in her argument it would bring light to how language can also be used in positive ways as opposed to just negative.

I found Morrison’s lecture to be different to many other lectures I have read or heard. It used a newly formed metaphor from a well-known African folktale to explain her observations

on language. Orwell would have seen this as original and inventive and hooks in the reader to be interested in what Morrison is saying. It also helps clear up what she is trying to get across and acts as a guide for the reader. Overall, I felt Morrison's lecture was very well written and did not violate any of Orwell's rules.

**References:**

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