

Toni Morrison, “Whiteness” and the New History of Race in America: A Critical Overview

Ayan Mondal

Abstract

“Whiteness Studies” as critical area of discussion has proliferated since the last decade of the twentieth century and has traversed various disciplines including history, sociology, legal studies, anthropology, media-studies and literature. The first correlation of “Whiteness Studies” with literary discussions was however systematically foregrounded by Toni Morrison in her critical discussions “Unspeakable Things Unspoken” and her book *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. The central idea is to counter the hegemonic critical practice that has repeatedly established the hegemony of the centre by apologetic discussions on the “margin”. The new field of critical enquiry subverts this tendency by focusing on the centre and by establishing that the centre is always already determined by the “periphery”. This paper proposes to critically examine Morrison’s viewpoints and to question how far her thesis can be used as a critical tool to investigate canonical American literature and the literary imagination of white authors.

Keywords: “Whiteness Studies”, centre, margin, hegemony, literary imagination