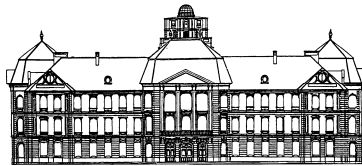


EGER JOURNAL
OF
AMERICAN STUDIES

VOLUME IX.

2005

EDITOR: LEHEL VADON



DEPARTMENT OF AMERICAN STUDIES
ESZTERHÁZY KÁROLY COLLEGE
EGER

ISSN 1786-2337
HU ISSN 1786-2337



A kiadásért felelős
az Eszterházy Károly Főiskola rektora
Megjelent az EKF Líceum Kiadó gondozásában
Igazgató: Kis-Tóth Lajos
Felelős szerkesztő: Zimányi Árpád
Műszaki szerkesztő: Nagy Sándorné

Megjelent: 2006.
Példányszám: 100

CONTENTS

STUDIES

Thomas Cooper: <i>Readings of the Translations of Ezra Pound</i>	11
Jason M. Dew: <i>Filling the “Silence” and Co-Authorship: Steinbeck’s Agapic Invitation in Of Mice and Man</i>	31
Katalin G. Kállay: <i>A Long Row of Books “Read and Reread”: The Significance of By Heart Quotations in Eugene O’Neill’s Long Day’s Journey Into Night</i>	47
Ágnes Zsófia Kovács: <i>Remapping the Jamesian Legacy: Toni Morrison’s Literary Theory in Context</i>	61
Katalin Bíróiné Nagy: <i>Native North America As Reflected in Theories of Colonialism and Postcolonialism: An Overview</i>	75
Zoltán Peterecz: <i>Text and Pretext: American War. Rationales in 1917. The First World War and American Neutrality</i>	93
Judit Szathmári: <i>Wisconsin: A Microcosm of Federal Indian Policy</i>	125
András Tarnóc: “troubles of a deeper dye than are commonly experienced by mortals”: <i>The Definition of the Self and Other in three Indian Captivity Narratives</i>	151
Gabriella Varró: <i>The Figure of the Salesman in American Drama</i>	169
István Kornél Vida: <i>Not Only the “Genie” of the Lamp Can Help: Genealogy and Researching the “Lost” Two Decades of Hungarian Emigration to the United States, 1850–1870</i>	179

BOOK REVIEWS

Tibor Glant: András Tarnóc: <i>The Dynamics of American Multiculturalism: A Model-Based Study</i> . Eger: EKF Líceum Kiadó, 2005. 186 pp.	195
Judit Ágnes Kádár: <i>The 1950s</i> . Proceedings of the 2003 Biennial Conference of the Hungarian Association for American Studies. Edited by Enikő Bollobás and Szilvia Nagy. Budapest: Eötvös Loránd University, Department of American Studies, 2005. 233 pp.	203

- Lenke Mária Németh: Vadon, Lehel: *Walt Whitman: A Hungarian Bibliography*. Eger: Department of American Studies, Eszterházy Károly College, Líceum Kiadó, 2005. 244 pp. 207
- Edina Szalay: Vadon, Lehel: *American Renaissance: A Hungarian Bibliography*. Eger: Department of American Studies, Eszterházy Károly College, Líceum Kiadó, 2005. 230 pp. 211
- András Tarnóc: Samuel P. Huntington: *Kik vagyunk mi? Az amerikai nemzeti identitás dilemmái. (Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity.)* Budapest: Európa Könyvkiadó, 2005. 682 pp. 215
- András Tarnóc: Virágos Zsolt—Varró Gabriella: *Jim Crow örökösei: Mítosz és sztereotípa az amerikai társadalmi tudatban és kultúrában. [The Legacy of Jim Crow: Myth and Stereotypy in the American Social Consciousness and Culture.]* Budapest: Eötvös József Könyvkiadó, 2002. 370 pp. 223
- Gabriella Vőő: Borbély Judit: *The Reality of the Unreal: The City as Metaphor in Henry James and His Contemporaries*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2005. 175, [1] pp. 231

ÁGNES ZSÓFIA KOVÁCS

REMAPPING THE JAMESIAN LEGACY: TONI MORRISON'S
LITERARY THEORY IN CONTEXT

Introduction

Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark* has become a major reference point in contemporary American literary theory. It forms part of the flowering of African-American studies has experienced since the 1990s. The 1993 Nobel Prize winning African American writer examines canonized American literary terminology and the texts that inform the construction of the classical American literary canon. Her intention is to draw a map of a critical geography that opens up space for discovery. In the new critical space African American texts are located as part of the geography of American literature. Morrison is concerned with how Europeanized white American literary practitioners silenced the African American presence in American literature. To counter this process, Morrison contends that the basis of the American experience lies in the dynamic coexistence of Europeanized Americans and African Americans. Morrison's project is to study the dynamism of silencing in American literature and in critical texts about American literature.

Though ambitious, the conceptual map Morrison draws is rather sketchy (although the argument was published in two versions, an article in 1990 and the book in 1992). Nevertheless, the frame can be fleshed out if we pose further questions. For me the weakness of the argument lies in its obscure relation to the contemporary American critical context, a background which remains unexplained: the two existing footnotes in the first essay of *Playing* refer to two interpretations, there is no specific reference to any theoretical text in it. To my mind, this suggests a lack that might be intentional, an awareness of this weakness. Therefore I set

out to investigate the context of Morrison's argument and look into the problem of how the position she explicates fits the directions of American critical thinking in the 1980s. I claim that her concerns represent a growing interest in contextual issues like race, class and gender that characterizes American critical thinking the eighties but is at the same time saturated by the terminology of traditional literary scholarship she professes to reform. This ambivalent connection to traditional American literary scholarship can be articulated best through Morrison's relation to the critical reception of Henry James. Despite the ambivalence, her ideas remain provoking, as one can see in some of the applications of her mappings that represent the most challenging directions in literary studies in the early nineties, within and without the bounds of her initial conceptual frame.

I. A New Model of American Literary Discourse

Morrison claims that American literary criticism needs to be reformed since it traditionally has ignored a continuous African-American presence. The characteristics of American literature can be found in the notion of "Americanness" that excludes an African-American experience. Within this view, American literature is only concerned with the opinion, talent, and power of white men. In contrast, Morrison proposes the view that American literature characteristically responded to a dark African-American presence. "These speculations have led me to wonder whether the major and championed characteristics of our literature—individualism, masculinity, social engagement versus historical isolation; acute and ambiguous moral problematics; the thematics of innocence coupled with an obsession with figurations of death and hell—are not in fact responses to a dark, abiding, signing Africanist presence" (Morrison 1992, 5). Just as the founding the American nation required a coded language to mark the problems and moral questions of racism, so its national literature required its restrictions and codes that are still present in the 20th century.

The argument is built on the key terms "Africanism" and "African-American presence." Morrison's notion 'Africanism' covers all the presuppositions, readings and misreadings that constitute the Eurocentric body of knowledge about African peoples. These include "both a way of talking about and a way of policing matters of class, sexual license, and repression, formations and exercises of power, and meditations on ethics and accountability" (7). In America, a special type of this knowledge is

called American Africanism, but also South-African and European variations exist. The concept resembles Edward Said's term, "orientalism" that refers to the construction of a fictive Europeanized image of the Orient by colonizers. The companion piece of the concept 'Africanism' is the notion of 'African-American presence.' It refers to a special history of the effect Africans had on American literature. For Morrison, African-American presence becomes problematic in the context of American literature. How does an African presence function in this context? The issue is at least twofold: on the one hand, how a coded literary language turns from oppressive to seemingly subversive, and, on the other, how it limits or influences the perspective of literary critics when they think about American literature.

No scholar before Morrison has asked this question about American literature for two reasons. First, the coded literary discourse did not allow for the discussion of the topic but required a poetics of silence. It was considered a graceful, well-bred, liberal gesture to ignore racism, to enforce its invisibility through silence (10). For another, the literary discourse about African-Americans traditionally studies racism from the perspective of the sufferer, in terms of its consequences on the victim. As opposed to this, Morrison investigates the effect of racism on those who practice it: "the impact of racism on those who perpetuate it [...] what racial ideology does to the mind, imagination, and behavior of masters" (11, 12). So the new objective of literary studies is to retrace the ways canonized writers and critics practice racism in American literary discourse.

At this point it might be useful to comment on the personal background of Morrison's new objective. The new perspective she offers is a result of her personal conviction that concerns her role as a writer. As a student, as a reader, she was reading as she had been taught to read; in other words she had no expectations whatsoever about the representation of the Africanist presence in American literature. She did not even think such a link was possible. Later on, already as a writer, she articulated for herself the task of a writer as a personal responsibility for language. For her, this is the question of how one handles the discourses one applies in writing and how one makes use of the social contexts these discourses are tied to. Her view is that the writer's role lies in thematizing the ideological presuppositions of social discourses. A writer is able to imagine what he or she is not, to bring the unknown close by and distance the familiar, dust off the myth and look behind it (Laclair 1993, 372 and Surányi 2007,

16). In other words, the writer has the ability to imagine others and the threat that others pose for him/her (Morrison 1992, 4). Thinking along these lines made her realize absences within criticism, the actual blindness of criticism towards the treatment of African-American characters. Where she as a writer found an African-American character central to the text, in critical accounts she could only locate a white spot or refusal to notice. This, eventually, led to the careful formulation of her views.

Her textual analyses focus on rereadings of nineteenth century and early twentieth century works in which African characters seem of minor importance. Her examples include Poe's *Arthur Gordon Pym*, Willa Cather's *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, and Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not*. In Poe's text Morrison places the role of the mysterious whiteness of the Pole and the white giant into context. Whiteness is the reason of the death of the black servant, Nu-Nu, and the giant figures the blinding, unpiercable whiteness. Both figures are typical of literary representations of the Africanist presence (33). In *Huck Finn*, again, the main problem is not Huck's coming of age but rather the Africanist presence, as Huck is rafting down the Mississippi in the company of a black slave, Jim. It is certainly true that Twain is criticizing the institution of slavery and middle-class features in Huck's character. Yet the adventures could not be realized without Jim's active assistance. Huck's own coming of age and freedom is partly a result of a slave's help. So Jim cannot just be allowed to go free or escape at the end of the story: the catalyst would then be lost. In accord with that, Tom Sawyer's appearance at the end, the reinforcement of Jim's slave status is to provide the story with a relieving (abiding) closure (55). Thirdly, Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not* tells the story of the classical American hero: the isolated individual struggling with the state that limits his freedom. The hero has a black helper whose aid is indispensable for the hero at first. Hemingway applies racial stereotypes for the main African-American character: he has no name, no sex, no individuality. It is only later on in the story that he is given a name and it dawns upon us that he can steer and also think—as far as one can make this out on the basis of his unfinished sentences and complaints. The relationship between hero and wife is also built on the exclusion of the black (dark) presence (69–80). Finally, from the perspective of an Africanist presence, Cather's *Sapphira* has failed to become part of the Cather canon not because it is less imaginative than her other works (as critics like to claim) but because it treats a topic that has traditionally been a taboo for

literature. The problem is trying to come to terms artistically and critically with the novel's concerns: "the power and license of a white slave mistress over her female slaves" (18).

Morrison distinguishes three stages within the history of literary representations of the Africanist presence in American literature, in the literary construction of racism (63–64, Klein 1994, 660). The first phase is that of hierarchical differences, the stage when a European sense of superiority over blacks came into existence. At the same time, the perceived intellectual and moral inferiority of African-Americans legitimated the institution of slavery. In this phase the African characters represented are ignorant, wild, and different. In the second phase the Africanist presence was used as a subterfuge for thinking about the nature of white identity. The representation of an African-American character was not to be interpreted on the basis of African-American history or lack of rights but rather as a representation of the insecurities of creating a new world. So the African character always had a reflexive role. The romance, as a genre, represents the themes and problems of the new world, in which questions and anxieties are inscribed into the African characters who signified the dark side of the American Dream (36–37). The question of the rights of man in America, for instance, was yoked by Africanism (38), as slavery highlighted freedom for Enlightened contemporaries. In the third phase blackness becomes the rhetoric of fear and desire. The black characters or other representations of blackness articulate a double extreme experience. Images of blackness can be both good and evil, moral and immoral, chaste and guilty at the same time.

The representation of the Africanist presence in the American literary discourse is becoming more and more metaphorical throughout the three stages enlisted above. Through this process, the concept of race loses any biological origin and becomes a culturally constructed notion. A Morrison puts it: "Race has become metaphorical—a way of referring to and disguising forces, events, classes, and expressions of social decay and economic division far more threatening to the body politic than biological 'race' ever was. [...] [R]acism is as healthy today as it was during the Enlightenment. [...] [It] has assumed a metaphorical life so completely embedded in daily discourse that it is perhaps more necessary and more on display than ever before." (63) This is the urgent reason why Morrison the writer considers it our most immediate task to study the mechanisms of racial language use in the American literary discourse.

II. Context: Morrison's relation to James's legacy

Morrison's project of redrawing the map of American literature is an ambitious project that, as we have seen, contains several powerful claims. These are, naturally, derived from a specific theoretical position (Wallringer 2007, 117). Despite the existing background, we have seen that the keynote essay in *Playing* titled "Black Matters" contains only two references to two interpretations, one pertaining to a primary text, the other to a critical misreading: two examples. There is no reference to any theoretical text, so the representatives of a traditional notion/map of American literature are not criticized directly. This is the more challenging when you realize that contemporary theoreticians are not pointed out, either, although references to them would indicate that Morrison is actually not drawing the map of an altogether 'white' or unknown intellectual landscape. I argue that her text aims at reforming Lionel Trilling's liberal notion of literature and at taking issue with Richard Chase's romance thesis from the fifties. Relying on contextual rewritings of the liberal tradition in the 1980s and retaining some of the traditional ones, Morrison locates the place of the Africanist presence as a decisive contextual factor in the discourse of American literature, but at the same time remains entangled with the terminology contested.

Despite her intention to make it new, Morrison's text is saturated by Henry Jamesian critical terms that became cornerstones of 'liberal' American literary theory in 1940–50s. As a James scholar, I was mightily surprised to notice that some of Morrison's key terms are linked to Jamesian theory. The most spectacular one of these, for me, is the term 'the literary imagination' in the title of Morrison's book. In Jamesian parlance the literary imagination is the motor or basic principle of literary creation (James 1963, 56). In James's postromantic model understanding is an endless process that is triggered by empirical stimuli in the perceiver's mind. This fluid understanding is always idiosyncratic, characteristic of the mind of the perceiver rather than of the stimuli on the basis of which it came into being initially. Understanding in process creates experience, and this experience we normally call knowledge. An author creates literature by describing experience that comes into being in his/her mind. In his well-known essay, "The Art of Fiction," James lectures on the play of the literary imagination, his model of experience points out the significance of personal experience in literary creation (Kovács 2006b, 34). Morrison shares the interest in the authorial imagina-

tion, yet for her it is the linguistic aspect of writing that functions as the motor of the creative process. The activity of authorial imagination makes it possible for a writer to problematize the social role of stereotypical, oppressive, exclusive discourses, for instance that of metaphorical racism.

The second surprise comes when we consider the elements of Morrison's objective explicated above. Let us quickly recall how she motions us to perform the intellectual work needed for the study of racist discourse and its practitioners: "what racial ideology does to the *mind*, *imagination*, and *behavior* of *masters*" (emphases mine) (12). These elements can again be linked to Henry James. First of all, the terms *mind* and *imagination* are key concepts of the Jamesian model of understanding. Secondly, investigating manners or *behavior* is again a Jamesian earmark as he is known to be author of novels of manners, and displayed the movement of the human mind in the context of social interactions in his novels. Moreover, the term *master* relates very strongly to James as well: not only did he write a metafictional short story titled "The Lesson of the Master," but James *the master* is the critical code name referring to James in the early 1900s when he wrote his major novels, as is indicated by the title of the fourth volume of Leon Edel's James biography. No wonder that the title of Colm Tóibín's biographical metafiction, *The Master*, refers to James, too. Using these four terms together not only implies but points towards a Jamesian model of (literary) understanding.

Morrison's first example of absences in criticism brings up James's critical reception, too. Referring to effects of racist discourse in criticism, the black princess in his *What Maisie Knew* is singled out as a case in point. Her presence is silenced and made insignificant in critical accounts. An example referring to James criticism again, after all the hints enumerated so far, sounds as if Morrison said: had you by any chance missed the references to James so far, here is one more for you to stumble into.—Have we met a contradiction in Morrison's argument? On the one hand, she relies heavily on Jamesian terms in her title and the articulation of her objectives. On the other hand, she refers to James-related criticism as a critical landscape that needs a new map. The answer is no; relying on Jamesian terms need not imply an identification with the Jamesian project. Rather, the intertextual connection points towards the latent critical legacy of James in Morrison's argument, the very tradition Morrison is intentionally criticizing, an ambiguity at most.

Looking into the literary debates on canon formation in American criticism during the 80s helps us place this ambivalent James-related

tradition. Amy Kaplan's *The Social Construction of American Criticism* provides us with a Foucauldian genealogy of the realist novel in America and together with this a historical survey of the changing interests of American critics in the novel as such. This theme, in itself worthy of lengthy discussions (Kovács 2006a, 83), proves relevant for Morrison to the extent of a parallel: placing Kaplan's narrative beside Morrison's proposal, Morrison's theoretical preferences become much more focused.

According to Kaplan's introduction, the reception of the realist novel in America is built on a rhetoric of absence condemning American society. This rhetoric originates from Henry James's *Hawthorne*. As far as James is concerned, in American society one can find a significant lack of social institutions:

The negative side of the spectacle on which Hawthorne looked out, in his contemplative saunterings and reveries, might, indeed, with a little ingenuity, be made almost ludicrous; one might enumerate the items of high civilization, as it exists in other countries, which are absent from the texture of American life, until it should become a wonder to know what was left. No State, in the European sense of the word, and indeed barely a specific national name. No sovereign, no court, no personal loyalty, no aristocracy, no church, no clergy, no army, no diplomatic service, no country gentlemen, no palaces, no castles, nor manors, nor old country-houses, nor parsonages, nor thatched cottages nor ivied ruins; no cathedrals, nor abbeys, nor little Norman churches; no great Universities nor public schools—no Oxford, nor Eton, nor Harrow; no literature, no novels, no museums, no pictures, no political society, no sporting class—no Epsom nor Ascot! Some such list as that [44] might be drawn up of the absent things in American life—especially in the American life of forty years ago, the effect of which, upon an English or a French imagination, would probably as a general thing be appalling. The natural remark, in the almost lurid light of such an indictment, would be that if these things are left out, everything is left out. The American knows that a good deal remains; what it is that remains—that is his secret, his joke, as one may say (James 1879, 44–45).

James contends that Hawthorne's romances testify to what extent a talented writer can be limited by an underdeveloped social context.

Referring to James, several later critics adopted the argument that because of the underdevelopment and short history of American society it is impossible to write a European style realist novel in the US. Based on the example of F. R. Leavis's *The Great Tradition* about the masters of the English novel, Richard Chase wrote his groundbreaking study, *The American Novel and Its Tradition*, in which he expounded his romance-

thesis with reference to James. Chase constructed an academic argumentation to support the claim that no good novel can be written in America because of historical reasons. Instead, the real American genre is the romance. In a romance the socially isolated hero starts out on a melodramatic quest in a symbolic universe where social limitations do not hold (Chase 1957). Kaplan comments that the romance-thesis is built on the presupposition about an opposition between the workings of the human mind and of social reality (Kaplan 1988, 2). In other words, in a romance the individual mind can operate without limitations even amidst a thin social context. Chase's romance-thesis and its presuppositions remained to be axioms of American literary criticism until the 1980s.

Although Chase himself refers to James when making the romance-thesis, Kaplan maintains that the real horizon of his work is comprised of Lionel Trilling's liberal literary criticism and the strategies of reading devised by American New Critics. Trilling adopts the rhetoric of absence James initiated and also the presupposed opposition between the workings of the human mind and the social context. He extends James's list of absent things with a new item, "manners," and endorses the view that the function of literature is to study the workings of the liberal imagination in the individual mind, rather than to reflect social relations in the real. Instead of a realistic representation of the real, the aim of literature is to represent the workings of the human mind, of the moral imagination (Trilling 1951, 206). Trilling's model survived other contemporary critical schools and determined American critical thinking for decades to come.

Returning to Morrison's text, on the basis of Kaplan's argument the James-related terminology in Morrison connotes the liberal America tradition *à la* Trilling, the tradition that elevated James to the position of 'the master.' Indirectly, this also explains the theme of the second essay in Morrison's book that explicated problems with the romance tradition in American literature. As we have seen already, Morrison holds that the romance genre had a significant role in the metaphorization of race in literary discourse. In the second phase of metaphorization romance was one of the major areas for the substitution process about the nature of white identity, rather than the space for the melodramatic quest of the socially isolated hero.

After all these theoretical meanderings, we can again wonder why Morrison remains silent about both the representatives of the old literary tradition and the proponents of the new ones she sympathises with.

Kaplan's account again gives us a hand here, as it helps us to situate the conceptual background Morrison is actually applying. As Kaplan recounts, there was a renewed interest in realism in the 1960s, yet this return to the social was still characterized by preserving the mind/real opposition. Only in the 1980s can she witness the elimination of the binary opposition between social context and literary form (Kaplan 1988, 6). Yet she is content with neither poststructuralism nor literary history, the main approaches used in the 1980s. She thinks poststructuralists focus on fictionality and are always pointing out how a realist text deconstructs its claims for referentiality, while literary historians treat realism as an answer to the threatening features of capitalism. Kaplan maintains it is not enough to eliminate the opposition between the mind and the real, because the relation of the two spheres is to be thought of as a dynamic process. Therefore we can neither claim that literature deconstructs referentially (focus on the mind), nor that it reproduces the real (focus on the real) but need to consider both sides. A dynamic relation of the two sides means that the construction of the real happens in language, in a language that is far from being innocent, a language that is influenced politically, ideologically, in other words socially. So a literary text can be thought of as a discursive practice, as a language use that has a formative role in the *construction* of our knowledge about the real. The realist texts Kaplan investigates bear the traces of this struggle to construct a knowledge about the social realm.

Kaplan's account of the reception of the realist novel provides a survey of critical approaches in the US and indirectly helps us place Morrison's project and its ambivalent relation to traditional American literary scholarship. On the one hand, Morrison's objective about representing and subverting the effects of the metaphorization of race in literary discourse is parallel to Kaplan's project to map conflicting discursive practices. Similarly to Kaplan, Morrison thinks of writing as becoming (Morrison 1992, 4), and finds herself face to face with social influences that have been encoded linguistically through history. Naturally, one cannot simplistically claim that Morrison is an intellectual apprentice of Kaplan, or for that matter, of Foucault, yet Kaplan's work represents an excellent example for the kind of critical thinking Morrison's texts in 1990 and 1992 could actually rely on. Morrison's approach is avowedly more of a compound – it has a quiltlike structure, as she likes to put it— than that of Kaplan, as Morrison often refers to feminist arguments and also the poststructuralist supplementational rhetoric of blindness and

insight explicitly. Moreover, while Kaplan discusses discourses of consumer capitalism and surveillance because she is interested in how novels actively construct a sense of reality, for Morrison the same discussions come replete with a specifically Americanized political mission when they become methods for studying how racist discourses construct our sense of reality through American literature. On the other hand, Morrison's discourse itself is interwoven by the terminology of traditional American criticism (the Jamesian legacy), her periodization of the metaphorization of race in American literary discourse reflects classic divisions of American literary history. One might conclude that challenging as the language aspect of Morrison's theory might be, her reliance on traditional categories of scholarship might be less useful and also makes one wonder to what extent her excellent stylistic practice has been wrought out theoretically.

III. Reappearances of Morrison's framework

Morrison's manifesto has been out for more than fifteen years, so one has the chance to look at what has become of her project of redrawing the map of American literature from the perspective of the African American studies (Wallringer 121–122). Yet Morrison's contribution has elicited a wider response. From among the various possibilities, let me focus on two arbitrary examples in order to indicate possible directions of extending the project.

The most up to date and widely known reaction to Morrison's appeal came from Eric J. Sundquist in his 500 page literary history *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (1993). The main objective of Sundquist's study echoes that of Morrison: to awaken readers to the significant role African-American presence plays in traditional American literature. This objective is pursued in the era 1830–1930. The very first footnote of the Introduction refers to Morrison's two programmatic articles (and Ellison), and the project is declared to form a part of Morrison's agenda. In spite of this, most of the discussions cover works by African-American authors from the era, not rereadings of traditional works by white authors. The book analyzes "black" and "white" texts in turn, since Sundquist contends that a focus on neither corpus is sufficient in itself to portray the continual race related crisis in American cultural and political life (Sundquist, 1993, 7). There is a lot at stake as

Sundquist's ultimate aim is to document how black and white texts form an intertwined American literary tradition.

The second example shows how Morrison's argument can be used as the frame of reference for the reauthorization of a white 19th–20th century American author, Edith Wharton. In 1995 Elizabeth Ammons devotes a whole article to expounding Morrison's project in the context of Wharton studies. Wharton, an upper class American dame from New York City's gentile elite of the turn of the century was active as a creative writer from 1890s till 1930s. Ammons follows Morrison's lead in approaching Wharton's texts: Ammons' starting point, her chosen texts, her treatment of racist discourse in Wharton all echo the tenets of *Playing in the Dark*. Ammons opens her narrative with the problem of blatant censure in Wharton editions and criticism so far. As a prime example, she names R. W. B. Lewis, the author of the first reliable and academic biography of Wharton, the prominent Wharton scholar to date, who in his edition of Wharton's correspondence omitted all the letters that had any anti-semitic references, actually quite a significant number of them. Thereby Lewis and his co-editor, Nancy Lewis, modified the image of the author represented by the collection. In turn, Ammons investigates the workings of anti-semitic discourse in Wharton's memoirs, letters, and three novels. She comes to the conclusion that Wharton's anti-semitism plays a basic role in all these texts, it even enables one to articulate radical rereadings of the novels.

In her analysis of *The House of Mirth*, for instance, Ammons rewrites her own former account of the novel along the lines of the race agenda. Formerly writing about the changing of social values, now she explains Lily Bart's suicide with anti-semitic sentiments towards her Jewish suitor, Rosedale, as it is encoded in the racist discourse that constructs her sense of reality. Formerly she argued that Lily's suicide becomes inevitable because she is unwilling to defend her social reputation with new and revolting means, by blackmailing someone from her own set (Ammons 1980, 42). In her rereading of the text and of her own former interpretation, Ammons claims that Lily commits suicide not because she is unwilling to change her manners but because she shares the assumption that to her set even "death is preferable to interracial sex" (Ammons 1995, 81).

Although both examples alter the initial project to some degree, even Morrison would approve of these critics' thematization of racist discourse. Sundquist and Ammons display how culturally encoded strategies

of racist discourse silence the Africanist or the ‘Semitist’ presence in 19th century texts and in Wharton, respectively.

Conclusion

Morrison’s text formulates a methodology for studying the cultural construction of race. In particular, it opens up new spaces in researching and thinking about American literature. In general, Morrison’s argument can be understood as one of the metanarratives of the cultural turn in literary studies in the 1990s.

WORKS CITED

- Ammons, Elizabeth. “Edith Wharton and the Issue of Race” In Millicent Bell, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. 66–86.
- . *Edith Wharton’s Argument with America*. Athens: Georgia Univesity Press, 1980.
- Chase, Richard. *The American Novel and its Tradition*. Garden City, NY.: Doubleday, 1957.
- James, Henry. “The Art of Fiction” In Morris Shapira, ed. R. R. Leavis, Pref. *Henry James: Selected Literary Criticism*. London: Heinemann, 1963 (1884). 49–67.
- . 1879. *Hawthorne*. Available: <http://www.ibiblio.org/eldritch/hjj/nhhj2.html>, access: April 23, 2008.
- Kaplan, Amy. *The Social Construction of American Realism*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988.
- Klein, Donald and Hisham H. Amin. “Playing in the Dark” *African American Review* 28 (1994): 659–663.
- Kovács, Ágnes Zsófia. “Szempontok a kortárs amerikai irodalom olvasásához” *Híd* 70. 6–7 (2006a) 82–95.
- . 2006b. *The Function of the Imagination in the Works of Henry James*. Lewiston–Queenston–Lampeter: The Mellen Press, 2006b.
- Leclair, Thomas. “‘Language Must not Sweat’: A Conversation with Toni Morrison” In Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ed. *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. New York: Amistad, 1993. 369–377.

- Morrison, Toni. 2003. *Nobel Lecture*. Available:
<http://nobelprize.org/nobel-prizes/literature/laureates/1993/morrison-lecture.html>,
Access: April 15, 2008
- . *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the literary imagination*. Camb., Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- . “From Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature” In Harold Bloom, ed. *Modern Critical Views: Toni Morrison*. New York: Chelsea, 1990. 201–30.
- Sundquist, Eric J. *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature*. Cambr. Mass.: The Belknap Press of The Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Surányi, Ágnes. “*The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*: black female experience from childhood to womanhood” In Tally, Justine, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 11–25.
- Trilling, Lionel. “Manners, Morals, and the Novel” In *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society*. New York: The Viking Press, 1951. 205–222.
- Wallringer, Hanna. “Toni Morrison’s Literary Criticism” In Tally, Justine, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 115–124.