

CRRES SPEAKER SERIES, Spring 2016

Challenging Her Own Master Narrative: The Dual Voices in Toni Morrison's Home

Much of Toni Morrison's writing, both non-fiction and fiction, has been dedicated to exploring the pernicious consequences of what she has termed the master narrative. She describes this key concept as "whatever ideological script that is being imposed by the people in authority on everybody else." As arguably the most celebrated American author of her time, has she not become one of the "people in authority," able to impose ideological scripts upon others? We must thus consider how master narratives derived from fiction or art may become totalizing social scripts that limit human individuality and possibility. Ever attentive to her own place in American letters as well as to the importance of welcoming new voices into critical and artistic discourses, Morrison, in her three most recent novels, seeks to undermine her prodigious narrative authority, and thereby the very master narrative associated with authorial omniscience. In particular, Morrison's 2012 novel *Home* demonstrates how every story reflects its teller; narrative is inevitably composed of the biases and limitations produced by individual experiences, including her own. Moreover, if Morrison is the premier beneficiary of what Mark Anthony Neal terms the "one black woman public intellectual at a time" rule, her most recent fiction would seem to affirm the importance of engaging multiple voices that recognize the depth and diversity within black female subjectivity. While there is a master behind these works, there is no master narrative, but instead a commitment to questioning any voice that proclaims a singular version of the truth.

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Thursday, February 18, 2016
Maple Room, IMU
4:00-5:30pm



Stephanie Li is the Susan D. Gubar Chair in Literature at Indiana University. She is the author of four books including *Playing in the White: Black Writers, White Subjects* (Oxford, 2015), *Signifying Without Specifying: Racial Discourse in the Age of Obama* (Rutgers UP, 2011), and *Something Akin to Freedom: The Choice of Bondage in Narratives by African American Women* (SUNY Press, 2010).