

A NEW ARENA OF DIALOGUES AND DEBATES. Bárbara Arizti and Silvia Martínez Falquina, eds. *On the Turn: The Ethics of Fiction in Contemporary Narrative in English*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2007.

The last two decades of the 20th century witnessed a particular concern about ethics in literary studies, the so-called “turn to ethics.” This is how editors Bárbara Arizti and Silvia Martínez Falquina begin to explain the genesis of *On the Turn* in its introduction. Interestingly, they introduce us from the start to a set of essays which come to prove that this ethical (re)turn entails dialogues and debates between two main trends. On the one hand, a more conservative group, continuers of Leavis’s moral criticism, in which names such as Wayne Booth, David Parker, Martha Nussbaum, Alasdair MacIntyre and Richard Rorty are included. On the other hand, there are some seconders of Emmanuel Levinas and his primary interest in the Other, for whom an approach to ethics and literature bearing in mind certain principles of deconstruction and poststructuralism is more appropriate. Amongst the latter group, Geoffrey Harpham, Drucilla Cornell, Christopher Falzon, J. Hillis Miller and Andrew Gibson are mentioned, the last two being very often alluded to in *On the Turn*.

Actually, its first part, “Framing Ethics,” presents us initially with an essay by the very Andrew Gibson in which he develops his concept of intermittency by emphasizing four particular characteristics of it. He explains each of those features by referring to key theoretical works and also to certain literary ones, before examining them in particular in J.M. Coetzee’s *Age of Iron*, *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man*. Secondly, Patricia Waugh approaches the turn to ethics by paying particular attention to the impact of recent biological disciplines on the Humanities. In this context, she analyses closely and clearly the works of theorists such as Iris Murdoch, and novelists as widely-known as Ian McEwan and Kazuo Ishiguro. Waugh concludes that the main implication of the turn to ethics under the light of recent scientific viewpoints is the recognition of the primary importance of

emotions and the body. Curiously, the following essay also proposes one of Ian McEwan’s fictions as a case study. Thus, Heinz Antor explores the former’s *Black Dogs* to illustrate how the turn to ethics is possible despite the current worldwide decentredness and fragmentation.

“Studies in Mode,” Part II of *On the Turn*, starts with Susana Onega’s exhaustively documented analysis of A.S. Byatt’s *Babel Tower*, exposing how, in several ways, it participates in the current ethical turn, by examining thoroughly the novel’s possibilities in this context, producing an appropriately argued and thought-provoking essay. Next, we encounter Jean-Michel Ganteau’s views on the implications of ethics on the study of romance, studying the perspectives that the latter offers in the turn, alluding to Peter Ackroyd as the contemporary author who best exemplifies his opinions. Then, María Jesús Martínez Alfaro evidences and justifies how Charles Palliser’s short story “The Medicine Man” participates in the ethical turn, exploring the connections of satire with this field. Finally, Gabrielle Moyer reflects on the important role of recovering the practice of hermeneutic, “attentive reading” at the prospect of the ethical turn. She carries out in her paper several such readings, theoretical and literary, of the process of falling in love, in order to prove the validity of her particular focus.

*On the Turn* offers a third section, “Visions of Multiplicity,” which opens with Gordon Henry’s close analysis of the relationships between ethics and both theoretical and literary treatments of American Indians, not only revising how this has taken place so far, but also proposing several angles for the future development of such a topic. Then, M. Dolores Herrero chooses David Malouf’s *An Imaginary Life* in order to show how it illustrates the connections between ethics and narrative territorial representations, as she also exposes tenets of both Levinas and Heidegger which she believes most appropriate for this ethical dimension. In the paper that follows by Isabel Fraile Murlanch, some of Levinas’s principles, namely that of Facing and its implications in responsibility and identity, are also chosen as a theoretical framework to study both *The Last Magician* and *Oyster* by Janette Turner



Hospital. Next, Chris Weedon describes different contemporary images of Islam by accounting their representation in the visual arts, particularly in the film version of Hanif Hureishi's *My Son the Fanatic*, and pointing out some ethical implications of Islamophobia. In the final essay of this part, Rüdiger Ahrens centres the ethical turn on an interdisciplinary debate between equity, law and literature, which he studies both in colonial and postcolonial writers such as Joseph Conrad, E.M. Forster, Salman Rushdie and Caryl Phillips.

Stephen Ingle's comparative study between Orwellian ethics, particularly his treatment of truth and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and their role in certain current affairs such as the Iraq war, opens "Political Positionings," *On the Turn's* Part IV. In the next paper, Chantal Cornut-Gentille D'arcy scrutinizes the British TV series *The Vicar of Dibley* from a feminist viewpoint, aiming at revealing alternative ethical readings of this seemingly unoffending sitcom. This essay is followed by Monica Calvo Pascual's interesting approach to the so far somehow neglected Stephen Marlowe's *Colossus*, in order to evidence the novel's possibilities to offer an appealing ethical reading. Next, Francisco Collado Rodríguez examines E.L. Doctorow's *The March*, focusing on the treatment of the sense of sight, the visual and perspective in the narrative as a means to arrive at several ethical considerations.

The final part of *On the Turn*, "The Ethics of Writing/Reading," includes six papers. Firstly, Marita Nadal deals with ethical criticism paying special attention, following Hillis Miller, to the relationships between author, reader, narrator and characters, particularly in some works by Flannery O'Connor, both as an essayist reading her own work and as a writer. Secondly, Vera Nünning also considers the role of narrators in the ethical turn. However, she deals with unre-

liable ones, distrusted or disapproved of by readers, however demonstrating that they might turn out to be fruitful in the current ethical debate, such as the ones appearing in Ian McEwan's *Enduring Love* and Nick Hornby's *A Long Way Down*. From this proposal to credit (un)reliable narrators, we move to C. Namwali Sepell's emphasis on uncertainty as a means to accomplish a new ethical reading of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Next, Adia Mendelson-Maoz proposes to explore literature's particular essence by examining certain units and linking them to morality and aesthetics, illustrating her viewpoints with William Styron's *Sophie's Choice*. The following essayist, Sonia Baelo Allué, revises various critical responses to the controversial *American Psycho* by Bret Easton Ellis in order to prove that the ethical turn entails both assets and liabilities. The author argues that, in order to avoid the latter, ethics and aesthetics must converge by paying attention, as it should have been the case in *American Psycho*, to aspects such as the implied author. Finally, Eamonn Dunne examines J. Hillis Miller's views on reading and how they are linked to ethics, showing how they are exemplified in Paul Auster's *City of Glass*.

The pertinence of all the papers included is undeniable, although the finest insights are mostly present in those by members of the Universidad de Zaragoza's research team currently studying the ethics of fiction, as acknowledged by the editors. On the contrary, some of the less extensive papers of the book should be continued elsewhere as unfortunately their interest is diminished by their brevity. All in all, the plurality, depth and comprehensive research of all the aforementioned essayists accomplishes an enriching work which is a must for any scholar interested in the ethical turn.

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