ETHICAL CRITICISM AND LITERARY THEORY

SIOBHAN CRAFT BROWNSON

In 'Ethical Criticism and Liberal Education: The Pedagogical Connection', Marshall Gregory observes, 'In the absence of any powerful social or vivid moral imagination and in the vacuum created by the disappearance of the tradition of moral discussion that used to help train both conscience and imagination, students are mainly left, through no fault of their own, with what they call "personal objectives" or "self-realization"', that is, a self-reflexive attitude toward making ethical decisions based on the idea that, as many of them say, 'everyone is entitled to their own opinion'. Indeed, many students, especially less experienced undergraduates, away from home for the first time and experimenting with voicing their opinions among professors and other students from diverse and unfamiliar backgrounds, are prone to such statements as they navigate through discussions of challenging ethical questions without offending their classmates' sensibilities. While the development of students' cultural sensitivity is a desirable result of such classroom interaction, I believe that the English faculty in particular is doubly positioned to encourage students to evolve their moral standards. Firstly, English teachers can continue, as they have for decades, to use the study of literature to examine closely the motives and decisions of literary characters who confront moral dilemmas. Gregory agrees, pointing to 'the old but still vital arguments about literature's ethical effects: its capacity to fortify character, to teach the recognition of moral situations, to stimulate moral reasoning, to provide models for imitation, to introduce ideas, to cultivate the feelings, to familiarize us with worlds larger than our own, and to teach us how to deal with experience' ('Liberal Education').

However, we can also take the opportunity to welcome 'ethical criticism' as a *type* of criticism by being more prepared to respond to our students' needs for instruction in it within the *literary theory* classroom. Students have evidenced such a need in my literary theory courses more and more frequently over the last several years, asking, 'Is there such a thing as "ethical criticism?"' The question leaves me somewhat at a loss, choosing among fundamentally inadequate answers—'Yes, but we'll have to wait until later to discuss it', or 'Yes, but few scholars approach texts that way any more', or the old standby, 'What do you think?' In other words, I forestall, equivocate, or shift the burden elsewhere. The following discussion contains the results of my efforts to create not only more fitting responses but also some concrete practices that will help my students to develop an understanding of the current standing of ethical criticism in the academy.

A major problem in trying to answer my students' query is that so much poststructuralist literary criticism suggests discomfort with the ethical approach that a critic such as Matthew Arnold accepted as his highest responsibility and even vocation. Scholars recently, however, have embraced ethical and religious criticism and begun to explore what such criticism can bring to the field of literary studies. For example, in 1998, the journal *Style* published a special issue on the topic of ethical criticism. Citing John Gardner's 1978 *On Moral Fiction* as 'an important precursor to the revival of contemporary interest in ethical criticism', authors Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack, in their introductory essay to the issue, made an eloquent plea for not only the usefulness of ethical criticism but also perhaps for its necessity in 'articulating the value of literary study to a Western populace in significant need of a critical methodology that elevates cultural pluralism and communal responsibility over cynical and monoculturalist theoretical agendas' (189). This burgeoning interest in ethical criticism also can be found in recent works such as Robert Eaglestone's *Ethical Criticism* (2001), Rainsford and Woods's *Critical Ethics: Text, Theory and Responsibility* (1999), and David Parker's *Ethics, Theory, and the Novel* (1994). Furthermore, some scholars have begun to call for religious criticism as evidenced in 'The Need for a Religious Literary Criticism' (1997), in which Dennis Taylor argues that this need reflects a 'present scholarly void . . . felt by many teachers and students' (3), and in *Beyond Ontological Blackness* (1995), in which Victor Anderson foregrounds religious criticism as a vehicle for understanding African-American literature.

Scholars interested in revisiting and reviving ethical criticism approach their definitions of the practice from a number of perspectives, with many tracing the history of Western ethical criticism since Plato, others answering objections to its very existence, and still others assessing its current state in higher education in general and within literary studies in particular. Some arrive from the point of view of revitalising the former objectives of a liberal education whose aims, as Marshal Gregory posits in 'Ethical Criticism and Liberal Education', are ethical. Gregory writes, '[The] primary objective [of liberal education] is to work toward the perfection of both individuals and society'. Others are careful to distinguish between ethical criticism and preaching or the forcing of certain religious viewpoints on students, leading to a kind of censorship, objections many in the academy have to raising in the classroom questions of moral and immoral practices in any discipline. Gregory articulates this concern by noting: 'Historically, and unfortunately, many of the conspicuous examples of ethical criticism in action present images of dogmatic moralists, zealous religionists, or belligerent burghers trampling art, tolerance, and free speech in the dust with a nasty kind of self-satisfaction'. Christopher Claussen also summarises this view, noting in *The Moral Imagination: Essays on Literature and Ethics* that these fearful critics believe that '[s]ince *moral* can easily mean narrow, bigoted, intolerant, let us see that the word and concept remain banished from the

vocabulary of reputable criticism' (1, italics in original). In acknowledging some of ethical criticism's most ardent detractors, Wayne Booth, in 'Why Ethical Criticism Can Never Be Simple', states, 'More challenging efforts to rule out ethical criticism come from those who fear that it will destroy our most precious narrative possession: the "aesthetic" domain, the world of true art, a world that is not just different from the quotidian world of moral conflict but in effect far superior to it' (352). Booth might have been responding to views typified by an essay that preceded his own, 'Against Ethical Criticism', in which Richard Posner, citing Oscar Wilde, not only aligns himself with 'the creed of aestheticism, of art for art's sake' (1), but also states that the 'moral properties' of literature 'are almost sheer distraction' (24) as well as that '[e]thical readings of works of literature tend to be reductive—and digressive' (12).

More to the point for my discussion of how to respond to students' requests for information on ethical criticism are those scholar/teachers who focus specifically on the power of literature to transform lives by serving as a ground on which, as readers, we might work out our moral questions and quandaries, by offering characters who can serve as both positive and negative role models, and by expanding our experience and knowledge of the world. The following commentators clearly find ethical criticism to be an important component of readers' responses to literature, a point to which I shall return later, and each defines ethical criticism's purpose. Wayne Booth, one of the most respected scholars in the field of ethical criticism, and a touchstone to whom most of the writers cited in this essay refer, not only details the complex responsibilities of author, reader and text to self, other and society, but also writes pointedly and plainly in *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* that '[e]thical criticism attempts to describe the encounters of a story-teller's ethos with that of the reader or listener' (8). Gregory offers a similar definition in 'Ethical Criticism: What It Is and Why It Matters', saying,

> Transpositions between readers and fictional characters carry obvious ethical significance. Despite current theories in philosophy and criticism about the inescapability of relativism, most of us cannot evade the deep intuition that identifying with characters in stories can exert a powerful influence on the quality and content of our own live. It is this perspective—stories as an influence on ethos, or who we become—that makes ethical criticism necessary. To analyze how fictions exert this influence and to assess its effects is ethical criticism's job. (194)

Davis and Womack concur when they propose, in 'Reading Literature and the Ethics of Criticism',

> If we are to accept the proposition that literature reflects human experience while at the same time it affects it, that literature is both a product of the social order and helps establish and maintain it, ethical criticism, in its desire to examine the moral and ethical nature of a work of art, clearly establishes an important bond between the life of the text and the life of the reader. (185)

Such eloquence can only move us to re-examine the place of ethical criticism in our own reading of literature. However, my immediate purpose is a bit more practical and pedagogical than theoretical—I wish to examine ways in which we can bring ethical criticism into our undergraduate and graduate literary theory classrooms, to familiarise students with the history, the waxing and waning, of these approaches to literature that they might recognise them in their own research as well as develop essays in which they take such approaches if they choose. For, while many contemporary critics write forcefully of the need to bring ethical criticism back into the literature classroom, few of them address methodology and those who do offer general rather than specific advice for teachers who agree with their points. Furthermore, almost none examine how to situate ethical criticism within the critical theory class. I therefore wish to explore methods by which we can attempt to fill in this gap left by conventional survey courses in literary criticism with special attention to what is currently missing in available textbooks. The major problem for students is that little codification of the theory or details on its methodology are centrally located for their easy reference. And students who are new to critical theory require background materials to which they can continuously refer.

A brief description of the course texts I use may help ground my discussion in what is missing. In the undergraduate and one of the graduate classes, both of which are surveys of literary approaches, I require a text from the Bedford Series in Contemporary Criticism; selections I have used include Joyce's 'The Dead' (1993) and Conrad's *The Secret Sharer* (1997). These works include the text of the literary piece, five introductions to a specific literary theory, and an accompanying essay that exemplifies an application of each theory, the last having been written expressly for inclusion in the casebook. Each book attempts broad coverage of the most practised contemporary approaches, such as psychoanalytical, feminist, gender studies, reader response, new historicist, and deconstructionist theory. In addition, I use a text that introduces the theories, such as Charles Bressler's *Introduction to Literary Theory* (2007). For my institution's second graduate course in theory, the content of which derives from detailed readings and discussions of the primary works from ancient to modern times, the typical text is David Richter's *The Critical Tradition* (2007), which combines classical with contemporary primary texts in theory, ranging from Plato through to Edward Said.

These texts leave surveys of ethical criticism in the somewhat distant humanist past making it difficult for me to provide background for my students. The Bressler and Bedford books do not take up the issue of ethical criticism at all, nor do other recent surveys of critical theory such as those published by Blackwell, Norton, and Oxford. This absence suggests to students, especially those new to literary criticism, that this type of approach is not available, acceptable, or possible. This perspective is confirmed by the teacher of a survey course, who, with little time to acquaint her students with the complexities of poststructuralist criticism, must depend rather heavily on her chosen textbooks, usually to the exclusion of ethical criticism. Compounding the problem is the necessity of providing instruction to students in the actual practice of the approaches in their own writing. Furthermore, the Richter text, in the very layout of its table of contents which divides 'classical' from 'contemporary' primary texts and in the number of pages devoted to each section, seems to privilege the latter, thus also implying that while it is all very nice to know what Plato, Aristotle, Sidney, Pope, Behn, and Arnold had to say about literature, the real cutting-edge material is from the last hundred years, particularly the last four decades. Thus the canon for literary criticism can be seen to be established by textbooks, scholars, professors, and course syllabi in the same ways that the canon for literature itself is established.

So how can teachers plan a course in a survey of critical theory that addresses and incorporates ethical criticism? What pedagogical strategies can they use in their classrooms to acquaint students with what it is and how it is practised? How might teachers structure a semester-long course devoted to ethical theory? Though the readings, writing assignments, and learning outcomes would vary depending on how much time teachers can devote to ethical criticism, I believe carefully planned syllabi and reading lists can move teachers and students in the direction of a richer sense of its possibilities. The following approaches and topics can be taken and addressed in any combination or order befitting the other goals of the course. It is especially important in survey courses at either the undergraduate or graduate levels to create opportunities for conversations about ethical criticism since the content coverage is already so broad. Therefore, it will be helpful at times, as outlined below, to bring the subject of ethical criticism into a pre-existing survey syllabus while a full-scale discussion of ethical criticism could be placed at the end of the semester. This book-ending approach, of the classical and the revived, will reveal the continuity of ethical criticism throughout the Western critical tradition.

One issue that instructors and students can discuss is the relationship between ethics and ethical criticism. Most writers on the issue of ethical literary criticism seem to situate their ethics in the Platonic ideal of right behaviour that supports a community. Many ethical critics' judgments, therefore, of authors, plots, characters, and character choices, arise from this fundamental concept.

Asking for students' reactions to such a foundation would be one way to start the conversation. Another helpful entry into this discussion will be the students' experience with approaches such as psychoanalytical, feminist, and Marxist, for literary approaches and corresponding critical language arose from these psychological and political movements, though some shifts in the focal points between the movements and the criticism took place. Similarly, readers bring their background in ethics and morals, from areas such as their families, churches, and philosophy courses, and the language they have acquired in the topic, to their analyses of literature. Calling their attention to this influence and reminding them of reader response theory, which delineates what affects a reader's interaction with a text, might reveal ways in which they already, albeit unknowingly perhaps, engage in ethical criticism. Furthermore, it would be useful to ask students to define such terms as ethics/morals and ethical/moral behaviour. Do they agree with the very general and classical notion that ethics entails concepts of right and wrong behaviour? Do virtue, utility, relativity, or consequences, more recent developments in the field, enter into their conception at all? Many students will likely agree that they abide by some sort of moral code in their own behaviour and that they judge others' behaviours according to that code. The goal in this discussion is not to prescribe specific types of ethics, moral behaviours, or ways to approach texts, but rather to raise questions that will alert students to possibilities for ethical critical readings.

Instructors can also moderate a discussion on the value of literature. Such a discussion might begin with questions such as, why do we read? Why do we enjoy reading? What are some of our favourite novels, short stories, plays, and poems? Why are these are favourites? If we learn anything from these works, what is it we learn? Opening with a point Gregory makes in 'Ethical Criticism: What it is and Why it Matters' might help facilitate this discussion. His aims in this essay, as previewed in his title, are to define and defend ethical criticism, but he also articulates, as does Booth, how we as readers can interact with literature as moral agents. He says, for example,

> Ethical criticism will attempt to help readers understand that there is no such thing as being 'merely' entertained, that even at the lowest possible level of engagement, the intellectual and affective exertions that are required just to understand the content, shape, and direction of a story in fact involve a complicitous agreement to let the story have its own way with their beliefs and feelings. (203)

In other words, storytelling, by its very nature, becomes a morally engaging artifact that challenges us to agree, disagree, affirm, disavow—to judge. It asks us to engage with it, to respond to it, or as reader response critic Louise Rosenblatt, says, to transact with it. Interestingly, in their use of the words

'encounters', 'transpositions' and 'bond', Booth, Gregory, Davis and Womack, respectively, and quoted earlier in this paper, rather definitively echo Ronsenblatt's 'transactions', suggesting that ethical criticism is simply one more mode of reading, of responding to texts. A further advantage of this discussion is that it can confirm any experience the students may already have with reader response theory and the teacher can refer to this prior knowledge to suggest that an ethical response to a work is merely one among many, such as those determined by gender, race, religious background, ethnicity, regional placement, and previous readings, that influence our perception of a text. In other words, a reader's definition of ethics can affect his or her reading in important ways.

A further question we might raise with our students is what, if anything, *should* we read? Are there indeed works that are 'good' for us and works that are 'bad' for us? How do we define these terms? What are the potential elevating and harmful effects of literature? Other writers on the topic of ethical criticism raise similar questions. For example, J. Hillis Miller in *The Ethics of Reading* argues that 'moral law gives rise to an intrinsic necessity to storytelling, even if that storytelling in one way or another puts in question or subverts the moral law. Ethics and narration cannot be kept separate' (2). Along similar lines Wayne Booth states that 'we must both open ourselves to "others" that look initially dangerous or worthless, yet prepare to cast them off, whenever, after keeping company with them, we must conclude that they are potentially harmful' (*Company* 488). A complementary question might be, what, if any, are the responsibilities of authors? Do authors have a duty to the culture in which they, their readers, and their works interact? Should authors actively, consciously, and conscientiously try to teach their readers about the right and wrong way to live? Or are their only obligations aesthetic ones? Booth asks similar questions of writers as well as many others in *The Company We Keep* to illustrate the complexities of ethical criticism as well as to discourage reductive readings (126–34). Raising these issues with our students will alert them to how our expectations of what authors and texts are supposed to deliver impact our ethical criticism of them.

Secondly, in the historical survey of criticism which begins most literary theory courses, we can emphasise the ethical dimension of writers such as Plato, Aristotle, Horace, Longinus, Sidney, Pope, Wordsworth, Shelley, Arnold, James, and T. S. Eliot. Some of these writers address the issue of what writers should do in their works, while others address the effects of literature upon readers. Instead of simply noting that these figures are historically important for being our first Western literary critics we can highlight the ethical imperatives that inform much of their discussion. All of them, for example, make judgments about either what makes literature good or what an author's responsibility is *vis á vis* the reader. As instructors, we can take the time to point out that, in part, these writers were, as Gregory says of liberal education, trying to 'create a

particular kind of citizen: the citizen who will know how to define and discuss the values that society wishes to cherish and about which society must remain clear if it is to preserve its identity, solve its problems, evaluate its practices, and civilize its spirit'. The classical tradition of literary criticism, as Richter calls it, did not separate moral truths from literary truths but saw them as part of a seamless cloth of learning, education, reading, and practice. If authors have responsibilities toward their readers, then readers might do well to understand what those responsibilities were and how in turn that understanding could help them realise a concomitant moral action in their daily living or, as Plato said, 'Education then is the art of doing this very thing . . . the knowledge of how the soul can most easily and most effectively be turned around [from darkness toward the light]' (qtd. in Gregory, 'Liberal Education').

As the class moves into contemporary strands of criticism, particularly the feminist, Marxist, race, gender studies, and postcolonialist theories, we can remind students that though these approaches arose out of political concerns for the marginalised and oppressed members of society, those political concerns cannot be separated from moral and ethical ones. As Gregory states, all forms of 'political criticism may be more truthfully seen as subcategories of ethical and moral criticism' (Liberal Education'), and 'Making political arguments about the reconfiguration of power cannot be made without the arguer assuming at least some moral judgments and moral arguments are intrinsically and not just contingently compelling' (What It Is'). Instead of simply defining and offering examples of these approaches, we can situate them within the realm of ethical criticism by discussing with our students the ultimate objective of many of these practitioners, which was not only to foreground the power structure responsible for silencing the voices of female, working class, African American, gay and lesbian, and colonised peoples, but also to assess the hierarchies from within an ethical and moral framework and to effect change.

A final step toward codifying ethical criticism in the survey courses, and the most challenging because such codifying does not now exist in critical anthologies, might be to move from the abstract to the practical by asking students to be aware of its practice in essays, articles, and book chapters in which the authors clearly reveal their intentions to approach one work of literature from the ethical critical perspective. It is especially important for students new to contemporary literary criticism to read examples of its practice which is why at my institution we use the Bedford Series I spoke of earlier. The essays all concern the primary work contained in the text. Because Miller has contributed deconstructionist essays to several of the texts and because his critical program has recently been informed by his interest in the ethics of reading, his essays serve as good examples of a type of ethical criticism. Furthermore, because all students in the class are familiar with the same primary work, they can follow Miller's arguments with relative ease and class discussion is enhanced as a result of that familiarity.

However, I have found that it can also be helpful to ask students to offer examples of critical essays about primary works with which only one or two of the students are familiar. All students choose a primary text with which to work and about which to write (an annotated bibliography, a review of literature, a casebook, and a critical essay) for the entire semester. Therefore, when we discuss particularly challenging approaches such as New Historicism or deconstruction, I ask students to bring in essays in which authors take one of these challenging approaches that they have discovered in their research on their chosen primary semester text to share with the class. The goal is to familiarise students with scholarship by writers who have not composed their essays as teaching instruments, as the writers of the essays for the casebooks have done. The students read passages aloud and then present an argument for what attributes in the excerpts echo a particular critical stance. The students must interact quite attentively with not only their primary text but with the secondary work they choose to present. In terms of reader response criticism, an approach with which by this time they are already familiar, this dual interaction adds another layer to their response to their primary text as it forces them to read the text through the eyes of another reader, the critic. Further expanding the boundaries of their reader response, they are given the opportunity to hear their classmates' response to the critical work, for as a class, we then discuss whether or not we agree with the student's suggestion, supporting our position with reasons based on our understanding of what characteristics constitute New Historicism or deconstruction. If we believe the author of the essay has taken a different approach, psychoanalytical or postcolonial perhaps, we too support our reasoning by connecting the way in which the author approaches the text with the features that mark that particular approach. Throughout the discussion, we have the Bressler text as well as the casebook to refer to for support and clarification. Our responses usually lack uniformity—however, it is often on the dialogue that ensues concerning what exactly constitutes a particular approach in an article, outside of the confines of the casebook, that students found their ability to articulate definitions of individual theories as well as become aware of how difficult it can be at times, in articles not written expressly to 'illustrate' a particular approach, to separate one theory from another, as scholars so often combine two or even more ways to engage a literary work. I believe we could adapt this exercise by following a similar strategy with an essay in which the author approaches a literary work from the ethical critical vantage point. Students could be asked to explain why and in what specific ways the authors of articles, essays, and book chapters have viewed a literary work from an ethical perspective, either as a subtext to a political approach such as feminist, Marxist, postcolonialist, or race theory, or as the primary method with which to apprehend the work, the latter exemplified in Parker's chapter on *Middlemarch*, of which he says, 'One of the great insights at the heart of *Middlemarch* is that until I understand that my dominant impulses are not entirely separable from the

world as I construe it, I will continue to misconstrue it. . . . The novel is at pains to show that this is a mistaken way to regard [the world]' (81). Students could bring to class essays using language similar to Parker's and could explain what, for them, makes the writer's approach an example of ethical criticism. Asking students to be alert to the language of ethical criticism in the critical writings of others would I hope begin to make them more confident about their abilities not only to recognise it but to try to accomplish it on their own.

In undergraduate and graduate surveys of critical theory, the goals of discussing the value of literature; of determining what, if anything, should be read; of emphasising the foundations of Western ethical criticism in our earliest philosophers and writers; of underscoring the interweaving of the ethical/moral and the political in much contemporary critical theory; and of making assignments that encourage students to become familiar with the manner in which literary critics today articulate ethical criticism in their scholarship, are not only to give students the tools to define and recognise ethical criticism but also to practise it in their own critical work. Despite the current absence of any regularised attention to ethical criticism in textbooks, I believe we can fill the gap by measures such as those I have outlined. However, the more ideal solution to the lack of rigorous attention to ethical criticism in literary theory textbooks would be semester-long courses devoted to the study of ethical criticism alone. Unconfined by the necessary time limits of a survey, a course focused on ethical criticism would allow coverage of some of the field's leading practitioners and thus a more in-depth knowledge of its possibilities. During the first few meetings, the class could cover some of the topics laid out for the survey courses. However, the students could then begin to examine in detail examples of ethical criticism as well as literary works that demand some type of moral response.

A very good possibility for a textbook in an undergraduate course is Davis and Womack's *Mapping the Ethical Turn*, a collection of essays that not only reprints several of the more general articles on the topic of ethical criticism from the special issue of *Style* but also offers a number of new perspectives on the direction, or 'turn' as Davis and Womack call it, ethical criticism is taking concurrent with the turn of the twenty-first century. The essays are appropriately challenging for experienced undergraduates yet accessible and remarkably free of jargon. The book is divided into sections on the ethics of literary study, of race and power, and of narrative as witness as well as on the diversity of applied ethical criticism. A singular advantage of the book is the literature the writers examine including Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, Thomas Kenneally's *Schindler's List* (both the novel and the Spielberg film), and Henry James's *The Golden Bowl*. An instructor might develop a syllabus around this list, assigning students the literary work first, followed by discussion in which students offer their ethical perspectives on the work, then the essay on the work from the textbook, followed by another

discussion in which students would compare their ethical criticism with the textbook's. The novelists' examination of ethical questions surrounding slavery, apartheid, and the Holocaust, some of human beings' most grievous injuries against one another, should prompt students to scrutinise their own responses to such horrors as well perhaps as to finding solutions for avoiding their future occurrence. Writing assignments might include grappling with just such questions in personal journals as well as in critical essays in which the students take an ethical critical approach to one of the novels that differs from the perspective in the textbook. Students might also compile an annotated bibliography or a review of the literature of literary ethical criticism, covering perhaps ten to twenty items. Such an assignment would allow them to analyse and evaluate other works in the field, thus giving them a larger sense of the state of ethical criticism outside of the classroom. Other assignments might be definitions of ethical criticism as well as a position paper analysing reasons against practising ethical criticism. This written work should give students a sense of the scope of ethical criticism as well as some of the questions it provokes in the academy.

A graduate course in ethical criticism, on the other hand, would allow students and instructors the opportunity for a bit more depth and breadth. A reading list might include a brief review of ethics as a branch of philosophy, such as *A History of Western Ethics*, edited by Lawrence Becker and Charlotte Becker, a text that covers various Western approaches to ethics from the classical Greeks to the twentieth century. Having this information available would give the class some foundation for discussions of literature when our responses to, for example, a character's actions vary, and we can refer to virtue or utilitarian ethics as well as use the appropriate terminology to articulate our points of view as well as engage in discussion. Another text that might be useful is Stephen K. George's *Ethics, Literature, Theory: An Introductory Reader*. Containing over thirty essays arranged in sections on ethical criticism and literary theory, on philosophy, religion and literature, on writers' responsibilities, and on readers and ethical criticism, with the last section containing three essays on *Huck Finn*, the collection offers a wealth of perspectives and one of its advantages is the sense of dialogue. One assignment could ask each student to be responsible for reading, analysing, and evaluating one of the essays, compiling his/her response in a brief essay, and then presenting his/her findings to the class. Another assignment might ask students to locate another text on the subject of ethical criticism or ethics in literature and to write a book review. In terms of other readings, because one of my teaching specialties is the contemporary novel, I would consider choosing from such novels because writers take up issues of gender, postcolonialism, race, sexual orientation, power, and class, some of the most morally knotty problems in human history. Works such as Barry Unsworth's *Hunger*, Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin*, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Ian McEwan's

Saturday, and Anne Enright's *The Gathering* could be considered along with those mentioned for the undergraduate course. A final written assignment might be a critical analysis in which students take an ethical critical approach to one of the novels on the reading list, giving them the opportunity to practise the techniques on their own.

Ultimately, I believe that we have an obligation to our students to make available to them the tools for developing their skills in all critical approaches by codifying and quantifying ethical criticism as best we can until it becomes a more accepted form of critical discourse. The point is not to make them accept any particular theory as the 'correct' one but to offer them as much information as possible about all approaches to literature so that they can make informed choices about the style of criticism which best suits their purposes as they continue their study of the discipline of literary studies. An added benefit to alerting students to the current reawakened interest in ethical criticism is that we can hope that this knowledge will transfer from the critical theory class to the literature class and finally to all their undergraduate studies. The goal of most teachers is to help students become good citizens. We should not be shy or apologetic about letting them know that this is our objective. Discussing morals and ethics in the classroom is a good way to make them aware of our goals and to begin this important dialogue.

WORKS CITED

Anderson, Victor. *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An Essay on African American Religious and Cultural Criticism*. New York: Continuum, 1995.

Becker, Lawrence C. and Charlotte B. Becker, eds. *A History of Western Ethics*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2003.

Booth, Wayne C. *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

———. 'Why Ethical Criticism Can Never Be Simple'. *Style* 32.2 (Summer 1998): 351–64.

Bressler, Charles. *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*. 4th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007.

Claussen, Christopher. *The Moral Imagination: Essays on Literature and Ethics*. Iowa City, IA: Iowa University Press, 1986.

Conrad, Joseph. *The Secret Sharer*. Ed. Daniel Schwarz. Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism. Boston: Bedford St. Martin's, 1997.

Davis, Todd and Kenneth Womack. 'Introduction: Reading Literature and the Ethics of Criticism'. *Style*. 32.2 (Summer 1998): 184–93.

Davis, Todd F. and Kenneth Womack**. *Mapping the Ethical Turn: A Reader in Ethics, Culture, and Literary Theory*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001.

Eaglestone, Robert. *Ethical Criticism: Reading after Levinas*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997.

George, Stephen K., ed. *Ethics, Literature, Theory: An Introductory Reader*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005.

Gregory, Marshall. 'Ethical Criticism and Liberal Education: The Pedagogical Connection'. *ADE Bulletin*. Fall 1988: 34–45. 21 March 2006. <http://web2.ade.org/ade/bulletin/n090/090034.htm>

———. 'Ethical Criticism: What It Is and Why It Matters'. *Style* 32.2 (Summer 1998): 194–220.

Joyce, James. *The Dead*. Ed. Daniel Schwarz. Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism. Boston: Bedford St. Martin's, 1993.

Miller, J. Hillis. *The Ethics of Reading*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.

Parker, David. *Ethics, Theory and the Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Posner, Richard. 'Against Ethical Criticism'. *Philosophy and Literature* 21 (1997): 1–27.

Richter, David H. *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*. Boston: Bedford St. Martin's, 2006.

Taylor, Dennis. 'The Need for a Religious Literary Criticism'. *Seeing Into the Life of Things*. Ed. John L. Mahoney. New York: Fordham University Press, 1998. 3–30.