The Parish Review
Journal of Flann O'Brien Studies

Hadas Wagner, 'Review of *Ethical Crossroads in Literary Modernism* (2023), edited by Katherine Ebury, Bridget English, and Matthew Fogarty,' *The Parish Review: Journal of Flann O'Brien Studies* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2024): 1–5. DOI: https://doi.org/10.16995/pr.17266

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Review of *Ethical Crossroads in Literary Modernism* (2023), edited by Katherine Ebury, Bridget English, and Matthew Fogarty

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Ethical Crossroads in Literary Modernism, edited byKatherine Ebury, Bridget English, and Matthew Fogarty, builds on newmodernist studies and recent criticism to interrogate the term 'modernistethics.' The collection stands out in the breadth of its scope, seeking to actas a definitive guide to those seeking to familiarize themselves with themultifaceted conjunction of modernism and ethics. While other book-lengthstudies in the field tend to focus either on a specific canonical writer,or on narrower aspects of ethics, *Ethical Crossroads* isbroadly divided into four methodological sections: 'The Ethics of Mind andBody,' 'Planetary Ethics,' 'Legal Ethics,' and 'Intersectional Ethics.' Each of these sections includes a wide range of theories and approaches,which are discussed in relation to both canonical and non-canonical texts. Incombining such an expansive approach together with attention tothe different localities, specificities and nuances making up literarymodernism, *Ethical Crossroads* emerges as a rich andthought-provoking collection, and a welcome contribution to scholarship.

Ethical Crossroads in Literary Modernism, edited by Katherine Ebury, Bridget English, and Matthew Fogarty, seeks to interrogate the term "modernist ethics," exploring the ambiguities and uncertainties surrounding the very notion of ethics in a period famously characterized by political, ideological, and philosophical upheaval, as well as rapid scientific and technological change. The collection re-examines these issues in light of "recent scholarship and the extended canon of the new modernist studies" (1), while also bearing in mind that modernist ethics are deeply entangled in the aesthetics of the period (3). There is an implicit challenge in applying a term as wide as "modernist ethics" to a historical moment that includes a range of artistic forms, ideologies, cultural contexts, and geographical locations. Aware of the difficulty of defining a modernist ethics, the collection's editors cite Virginia Woolf's rejection of a single, over-bearing, egotistical "I," associated not only with patriarchy, but with an outdated form of writing and an anti-modernist worldview that assumes clear boundaries between the sexes, between self and other, and between world and consciousness. Woolf opposes such clear-cut distinctions and advocates for a more diffused, messy approach, imagined as a "semitransparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end" (189). This "messier" approach to life and to ethical dilemmas holds the potential to accommodate the inherent multiplicity of the term "modernist ethics."

The collection stands out in the breadth of its scope. As the editors themselves state in the Introduction, other book-length studies in the field tend to either focus on a specific canonical writer, or on narrower aspects of ethics, such as the political imagination, postcolonialism, or animal ethics. In adopting such an expansive approach, *Ethical Crossroads* seeks to act as the "definitive introduction to the topic of ethics in modernism" (5–6). In addition to its broad perspective, the collection also examines modernist ethics through the prisms of several cutting-edge theories, as reflected by the book's structure, which is divided into four sections: "The Ethics of Mind and Body," "Planetary Ethics," "Legal Ethics," and "Intersectional Ethics." Such a structure proves useful in "expanding the scope of discussion beyond the realm of interpersonal and intercultural relationships" (2).

Opening the first section is Paul Fagan's evocative "*An Béal Bocht* and the Ethics of the Modernist Laughing Apocalypse." Distinguishing between two kinds of apocalypse, Fagan proposes that "a changed relation to the material body—as a locus not only of suffering but also of a transformed relationship to the limit" is a "necessary coordinate for understanding the ethics and evaluating the ethicality of the modernist literary apocalypse" (32). Utilizing Frank Kermode's notion of a sense of an ending alongside Kristeva's idea of apocalyptic laughter to read Brian O'Nolan's *An Béal Bocht*, Fagan discusses abject bodies, finitude, and a kind of laughter that is "amoral, yet ethically oriented" (33).

In the following chapter, Jade French explores the ethics of representing old age in Djuna Barnes's nonfiction. The chapter "grapples with what it means to be represented as an autonomous, older person in Barnes's work and life [...] as she engages in a tricky balance between representing agency and passivity to varying degrees" (52). The third chapter sees Carrie Rohman exploring D. H. Lawrence's and Isadora Duncan's preoccupation with the solar plexus in relation to artistic creation. Rohman's concern with a "solar imagination" as reflecting an "ecological situating of the human within its cosmic and earthly webs" (67) bridges between "The Ethics of Mind and Body" and the next section, "Planetary Ethics."

Opening the second section is Marian Eide's essay, which proposes a striking methodology called "reparative ethics." Building on Levinasian philosophy, Eide states that "in reading, one is oriented through the work of art toward the Other" (90). A central question underlying Eide's discussion is what to do with texts that have caused us and others harm. According to the methodology she lays out, the first step toward reparative ethics is to "acknowledge and then pay [a] debt to the text's responsibility for its harms" (98). A second stage then draws from Levinas's Talmudic notion of the paratext to advocate for "communities of interpretation" that seek to mitigate a text's harms through commentary (103). Within the framework of Eide's methodology, a text's interpretive legacies are inseparable from the original work of art, and hermeneutics itself becomes an ethical practice.

In the next chapter, Shinjini Chattopadhyay connects planetary ethics and "modernist cosmopolitanism," by interrogating how Stella Benson's travel writing "enables middlebrow travel writing to develop an ethic of transnational solidarity and also a critique of imperialism" (108). A particularly arresting contribution to this volume is the final chapter of the "Planetary Ethics" section, in which Ben Ware discusses ethics and apocalypse in the late work of Ludwig Wittgenstein. Considering several of Wittgenstein's remarks on the Atomic Bomb, Ware views him as an exponent of what he calls "philosophical modernism" (126). Contrary to standard thinking, Ware locates Wittgenstein's modernism not only in the literary and aesthetic dimensions of his work, but in his concept of philosophy itself (132). Ware claims that Wittgenstein's late work "carries out a kind of apocalyptic–anti-apocalyptic move: he strives to bring to an end not philosophy as such, but rather philosophy as a discourse of the end—that is, philosophy which takes as its goal 'crystalline purity'" (140). This chapter is illuminating because it locates Wittgenstein's modernism in his conceptualization of philosophy and highlights the ethical dimensions of his comments on apocalypse.

The third section, "Legal Ethics," considers ethics "within the framework of law and literature methodology" (19). As the editors explain, the legal humanities

share with planetary approaches an in-built concern with ethics. In the first essay, Kieran Dolin discusses Charles Reznikoff's *Testimony*, a poetic sequence that "distills hundreds of legal cases into an Objectivist form" (145). Dolin argues that despite the poems' supposed emotional reticence, they possess "an implicitly ethical and political orientation that parallels the legal and policy shifts towards workers' rights, racial equality, and social welfare that emerged in these decades" (159). The rest of the section comprises Katherine Isobel Baxter's analysis of Margery Perham's *Major Dane's Garden*, a novel which develops "an ethics of paternalist care for the colonies" that "oscillates between eroticism and restraint" (161–62), and Mimi Lu's essay on Anthony Powell's *A Dance to the Music of Time* in relation to modern tort law.

The final section, "Intersectional Ethics," explores "how intersectional approaches can reveal aesthetic and ethical challenges in modernist representation" (23). In the first essay, Laura Ryan interrogates "some of the ethical quandaries and pressures faced by Harlem Renaissance writers," examining "the ethics of responsibility to one's race, and particularly the ethical implications of racial passing, the involvement of white patrons, and individualism" (198). Following this is Zsuzsanna Balázs's discussion on the collaboration between Eleonora Duse and Italian playwright Gabriele D'Annunzio, exploring the previously overlooked ways in which Duse opened D'Annunzio's work to a "wide range of gender and sexual possibilities" (218). The collection ends with Julie McCormick Weng's reading of James Joyce in light of the #MeToo Movement. Weng shows how "Joyce exposes a devastating normalization of sexual predation across strata of Irish society," while also offering "an ethic of sexual intimacy that is bound up with an ethic of empathy [...] first presented during Stephen's adolescent sexual development and later illustrated more maturely through Bloom and Molly's courtship and marriage" (237). Weng thus proposes that Joyce's works can serve as a lens through which to reflect on our contemporary debates regarding the ethics of consent.

Ethical Crossroads is at its strongest in those chapters that manage to bring together a contextual awareness of a specific modernist moment and an attunement to its aesthetic forms, in ways that shed light on ethical concerns arising from the text itself. Ware's and Fagan's respective chapters exemplify such attentive readings, yielding illuminating insights on modernist ethics from new perspectives. Similarly, Eide's essay on "reparative ethics" is a strong contribution to the collection, and the methodology it proposes willbe of significant value to scholars, as we approach texts that trouble us and yet still engage us. However, Eide's model of "reparative ethics" could benefit from further clarifying its views on the relations between the ethical and the aesthetic. Eide states that in addition to the initial ethical act of acknowledging a text's harms, a literary work's aesthetic properties can "be an instrument for repair" (88). Indeed,

she refers to her own reading of New Zealand modernist Anna D. Whyte's work as an example of how a text is "both enjoyed for its beauty and recognized as a part of the racist legacy" (98). While this idea is intriguing, it remains unclear from Eide's analysis exactly *how* enjoying a text's beauty can be reparative. It would be interesting to see more research on the ways in which the aesthetic force found in literary works might fuel the act of reparative interpretation.

Despite these questions, *Ethical Crossroads* is a rich and thought-provoking collection, and a welcome contribution to scholarship. It will doubtlessly be of help to scholars seeking to explore the varied meanings, implications, and contexts ingrained in the term "modernist ethics." By attending to specificities and differences while still delineating some overarching concerns, *Ethical Crossroads* paints a wide-reaching, nuanced picture of literary modernism. The essays comprising *Ethical Crossroads* also make the book valuable to critics studying more specific aspects of modernist ethics, such as race, feminism, ageism, and queer studies. Finally, the collection is relevant to younger students wishing to familiarize themselves with literary modernism both through historically contextualized readings, and in relation to newer theoretical perspectives.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.