

ETHICS AND LITERATURE. GUEST EDITORS' PREFACE

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary problems such as post-politics, post-capitalism, digitization, among others, have entered the themes of literature, sparking debates around the current state of affairs, investigating its causes, anticipating its possible consequences. This trend resonates in the suggestive "Ethical Turn" (Baker, 1995), according to which reflection on experience, both individual and collective, would be inherent in literature, through what Levinas (Levinas, 1961) called, an ethics of language. This issue of *Ethics and Politics*, dedicated to the relationship between ethics and literature, proposes some paths in this field of research and creation.

KEYWORDS

Ethics, literature, politics, language, fiction

The ethical-poetic relationship and, by extension, the relationship of literature with the field of ethics is in a certain way expressed from the beginning of the reflection on artistic creation in Aristotle under the title *Katharsis*. We know that Jauss (Jauss, 1982) recovers this central motif of poetics in the foundational works of reception aesthetics, rereading the Aristotelian motif and placing it in the field of literary hermeneutics. This antecedent is not, however, the only one regarding the ethics-literature relationship. For example, in the order of literary production, the genre of confessions, from Saint Agustin to Sándor Márai (Márai, 2004) explore the self and its ethical consistency through the narrative configuration of its experience. We start from these basic coordinates to propose a special edition of *ETHICS & POLITICS* dedicated to scrutinizing the current field of relations between literature or literary experience in a broad sense (production, mediation, edition, reception, interpretation) and what we can consider as a relatively broad dimension, and

probably increasingly differentiated in the current era, of ethical configurations of that experience.

Since the middle of the last century, the field of literary hermeneutics, for example, has received a healthy influence from philosophy and particularly from a set of problems that we could place in the field of ethics. The already classic controversy, opened by the intentional fallacy and its questioning (Wimsatt, 1946), (Hirsch, 1967), (Hoy, 1978), reviews the opinions of Barthes and Foucault on the death of the author, reactivating the authorial dimension, and with it, the role of intentionality in the production and reception of literary works, giving rise to specifically ethical problems of interpretation. On the other hand, works such as those by Jean Bollack (Bollack, 2006) who questioned Gadamer's (Gadamer, 1986) conservative reading of Paul Celan or the works by Jonathan Culler on deconstruction and feminism (Culler, 1983) investigate, from philology, hermeneutics and deconstruction, non-hegemonic modes of production of meaning. To this explosion of orientations of literary criticism, we should add works such as that of Wayne C. Booth (Booth, 1988) on the ethics of fiction, as well as that of Greg Garrad on eco-criticism (Garrad, 2012) where an ethics oriented to the relationship of man with his natural environment occupies a central place.

To these references should be added those that link literary work with social commitment. In this regard, it is significant, despite the various criticisms, the demand that Jean Paul Sartre (Sartre, 1969, 1972), makes to the intellectuals of his time and, in particular, to the writers, to assume a social commitment, denunciation, elucidation. Also notable in this sense are the contributions of the Frankfurt school, framed in the concept of cultural industry (Adorno 2008). This concept, which in the opinion of its critics constitutes a demonizing or at least nostalgic view of art, and in this case of literature, nevertheless enjoys great relevance, since it places literary works of art in the circuit of merchandise, allowing us to think about contemporary phenomena such as the possible subjection of authors to the dynamics of supply and demand and the risk that said subjection could translate into a loss of autonomy, of critical character, of the coefficient of friction and of the controversial vocation, of rational clarification, even subversive, that this conceptual elaboration subscribes to literature (Adorno, 2003, 2004).

Richard Rorty, for his part (Rorty, 1991, speaking of the "ultimate lexicon", highlights the close links between the logic of exchange and the logic of communication, and places literature among the ways of resisting the lexicons that prevent criticism, thus contributing to an ethical and aesthetic characterization of barbarism.

Contemporary problems such as post-politics, post-capitalism, digitization, among others, have entered the themes of literature, sparking debates around the current state of affairs, investigating its causes, anticipating its possible consequences. This trend resonates in the suggestive "Ethical Turn" (Baker, 1995), according to

which reflection on experience, both individual and collective, would be inherent in literature, through what Levinas (Levinas, 1961) called, an ethics of language.

Lastly, the autobiographical or autofictional genre, widely extended in contemporary literature, has in itself an ethical nuance, that of self-care and self-criticism. Being situated in the quicksand that lies between fiction and reality, and from that terrain reiterating the fundamental questions for the here and now, the first causes, the uncertain and at the same time inescapable destiny, links him with urgent problems such as memory and the elaboration of the traumatic past, through a fictional exploration of the experience (Alberca, 2007; Gennet, 1993; Musitano, 2016).

This presentation does not intend to exhaust the field of the enormous reflexive possibilities that the relationship between ethics and literature unfolds. Rather, it aims to draw a horizon of possibilities, neither complete nor exclusive of the summaries that will be part of this issue.

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