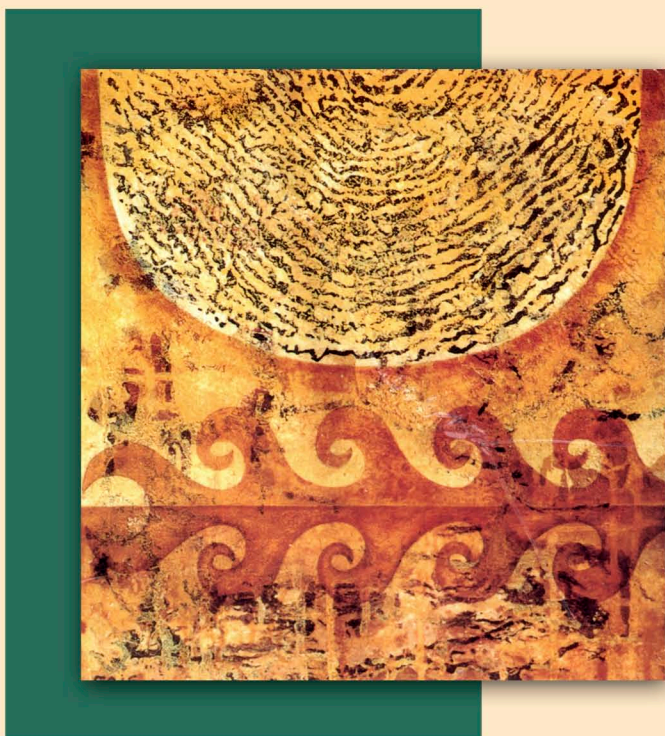


BIBLIOTECA JAVIER COY D'ESTUDIS NORD-AMERICANS

ETHICS AND ETHNICITY IN THE LITERATURE OF THE UNITED STATES

MARÍA FRÍAS, JOSÉ LISTE AND BEGOÑA SIMAL, EDS.



PUV

ETHICS AND ETHNICITY
IN THE LITERATURE OF THE UNITED STATES

Biblioteca Javier Coy d'estudis nord-americans

Directora
Carme Manuel

ETHICS AND ETHNICITY
IN THE LITERATURE OF THE UNITED STATES

María Frías, José Liste and Begoña Simal, eds.

Biblioteca Javier Coy d'estudis nord-americans

Universitat de València

© María Frías, José Liste and Begoña Simal, eds., 2006

Ethics and Ethnicity in the Literature of the United States

1ª edición de 2006

Reservados todos los derechos de autor

Prohibida su reproducción total o parcial sin consentimiento escrito del editor

ISBN: 978-84-370-8349-0

Imagen de la portada: Gema Goig

Diseño de la cubierta: Celso Hernández de la Figuera

Publicacions de la Universitat de València

<http://puv.uv.es>

publicacions@uv.es

Table of Contents

Introduction	9
Writing Honestly: On New Knowledge and Chicana/o Narrative Ethics, <i>Juan D. Mah y Busch</i>	25
Translating the Incommensurable: African-American Cultural Tradition and Beyond in Ralph W. Ellison's <i>Invisible Man</i> , <i>Aitor Ibarrola-Armendariz</i>	47
Alternative Historiography and Feminist Ethics of Care in Toni Morrison's <i>Paradise</i> , <i>Mar Gallego</i>	71
"Yet These Were Strangers To Me That I Never Saw Before": The Puritan "Ethic" and Hierarchies of Otherness in Mary Rowlandson's Captivity Narrative, <i>José Liste Noya</i>	91
The Dialogical Test: Ethics and Ethnicity in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Work, <i>Carolina Núñez Puente</i>	117
"Trippers and (M)askers": Trickster Ethics/Trickster Aesthetics in Gerald Vizenor's <i>Griever</i> and Maxine Hong Kingston's <i>Tripmaster Monkey</i> , <i>Begoña Simal</i>	141
<i>It Just Ain't Fair</i> : The Ethics of Black Health Care in the South and "Dental Charity," <i>María Frías</i>	169
Ethnicity and Nature: Ethnic Literature and Environmental Ethics, <i>Carmen Flys Junquera</i>	203

Introduction

To bring together ethical concerns and an ethnic focus in literary studies may seem, in our current critical climate, a courting of the tautological. Isn't the taking up of an ethnic perspective in literary studies, however we may want to contextualize it, an implicitly, if not explicitly, ethical and even political gesture? Isn't the perhaps more generalizing purview of the ethical turn given an individualizing cast in its own necessary turn towards specific others such as the ethnically-defined subject? Tautologies, however, if this is one, have an unnerving habit of deconstructing themselves, questioning themselves in and through their very repetitiveness. Ethics and ethnicity. Ethics or ethnicity. What is in question here isn't the bracketing of the relation, whether they are seen as inextricable partners or as self-cancelling options. Rather, the making explicit of this coupling, the foregrounding of its very taken-for-grantedness in some critical contexts, should be seen as an attempt to explore the often undetected conceptual slipperiness of the two terms and, especially, of their supposed mutual imbrication. The pairing of the ethical and the ethnic, a pairing which imposes a reciprocal focus on the partner term, is a gesture meant to resist the inevitable conceptual hardening undergone by terms of such generalizing critical scope.

To do so, furthermore, is to strive to remain true to the singularities of difference and otherness that both terms seek to safeguard. Ethics and ethnicity, ethics or ethnicity? In the slipperiness of that and/or one perceives the unguarded methodological shifts that may underlie critical practice, even when one seems to at least pay lip service to the "other" guiding notion—the ethical, the ethnic—left behind or in the background of one's critical pronouncements. Both terms, though

in different ways and from different conceptual planes, approach the knotted question of the relation with others. Both terms, again to different degrees given their conceptual provenance, run the opposed but ultimately complementary risks of falling into either unmoored abstraction or constricted individualization, modes of stereotyped sameness that betray the alterity they are supposed to respect. Both terms, when employed as guiding notions in critical analysis, may be evidence of that analysis's temptation to avoid the mutual questioning enforced by the monitory presence of the other term by shifting its emphasis to one pole or the other, often the apparently safer, because more identifiable, more identity-based, waters of ethnicity. Rey Chow, for example, has warned against this sort of critical stereotyping, pitting theoretical self-consciousness against cultural and ethnic reifications but also dealing with theoretical developments in a culturally and ethnically informed way.

Ethics, of course, in the realm of moral philosophy, is that branch that deals with human conduct and its moral evaluation, specifically in its relation to other human beings. Whether conceived as the general science of morals, of the underlying principles of human duty or as a specific, action-oriented codification of moral principles, ethics begins and ends with the relation to the other. Indeed, from the perspective of a continental philosophical tradition, such as that of Emmanuel Levinas, ethics has been seen *as* that relation with the other, an obligatory response to *an-other* preceding any specific moral rules of conduct, a primordial ethical relation that is the basis for *a* particular ethics or moral code. When that other is particularized as an ethnic other, then, how is this conception of ethics as a primordial relationship with the other affected in its articulation? This leads us inevitably to a series of questions that upset the apparently self-evident. Is ethnicity itself a concept of an ethical tenor? Is there an ethics of ethnicity? On the contrary, is ethics ethnic? Or does the ethnic coloration of ethics narrow in some way the scope of the ethical? In a culture such as that of the United States predicated upon a paradoxically universalizing ethic of individualism that confronts recurrently the

constraints placed upon the ethnic singularities of its many others, such questions seem especially pertinent. At the same time, perhaps, from the perspective of the vested interests in essentializing alterity in certain ways, they may also seem especially impertinent.

As the essays that follow implicitly demonstrate, there are no set, unchanging answers to these questions, for we are dealing with terms whose domain is that of the singular and different, the stubbornly non-generalizable particularities of distinct others. One may wish to oppose the often implicit identity politics of the ethnic approach to the overarching, even dis-identifying momentum of the ethical. To do so, however, would be to establish a dichotomy that turns out to be the contemporaneously predominant paradigm of a recurring methodological oscillation within literary-critical research between the universal and the particular, the stereotypical and the singular, the synchronic and the diachronic, the same and the other. It would also be to do away with the oscillation between the same and the other that characterizes the internal functioning of each term within its own context. The bringing out into the open of this oscillation, the slippage from one pole to the other within each term itself, is one of the results of bringing the two terms explicitly face to face in this way. One is forced to explore the ethics of ethnicity and, vice versa, posit the ethnicity of ethics as revelatory, complexly contextualized critical hypotheses. To adopt the perspective of an ethics of ethnicity, for example, while tending perhaps to impose a one-way movement that constitutes ethnicity as the centre of debate and takes for granted the status and nature of the ethical, may also lead one to make explicit the often unquestioned ethical nature of the identification, defence and study of the ethnic in all its varieties. The necessary corollary to this perspective would reside in bringing out into the open the suspicion of the implicitly ethnic conception of an ethics that presents itself as a universalizing, even totalizing discourse. That is the case, for example, of approaches that uncritically employ ethical perspectives drawn from

the humanist Enlightenment tradition, seen from some postmodern and/or postcolonial perspectives as harbouring an unacknowledged ethnocentric bias.

This mutual questioning, both between the two terms and within each term in itself, is of course echoed in the question of representation, literary and otherwise. Literature's privileged access to and harnessing of this representational ambivalence between the universal and the particular, the self and the other, provides the ideal textual focus for the current conjunction of the ethnic and the ethical in contemporary literary-cultural studies. Yet literature partakes of this ambivalence in its own discursive makeup, it is not a neutral vehicle for it. In other words, literary representations foreground otherness and, often at the same time, participate in its repressive domestications. The essays on Richard Rodriguez and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, for example, deal in part with this starkly unresolved duality. Perhaps the often unwonted "ethical" nature of literature lies here in this inescapability of irresolution beside totalizing pronouncements of an idealizing or dogmatic kind. Literature, the literature of the United States, in this case, with its own historically-determined injunctions towards discursive plurality and transcendent totalizations, becomes the privileged sphere for the articulation in a non-closural form of this double movement. In this light, one can understand the historical resistance to those works that self-consciously enact this double movement, both "ethnic" works that question and refashion entrenched notions of ethnic identity and "mainstream" works whose universalizing humanist assumptions may be only skin-deep. In this light, also, one could say that literature *is* ethics or, perhaps less self-righteously, an ethically-oriented discourse that maintains its open-endedness through its untotizable openness to the other(s). Through this lack of discursive enclosure, literature, especially such generic modulations as narrative, fashions itself as a discourse of discourses, a sort of meta-discourse akin to that meta-discourse envisioned by Geoffrey G. Harpham as ethics: "Ethics is the arena in which the claims of otherness—the moral, law, the human other, cultural norms, the good-in-itself, etc.—are articulated and

negotiated. [...]. Articulating perplexity, rather than guiding, is what ethics is all about” (26, 27). And so, we should say, is literature.

To return, then, to the focus of this collection, if “ethics” is a sort of metadiscourse enabling the articulation of a moral problematic, rather than offering a prescriptive solution or alternative, what occurs when the “problem” it addresses is the ethnic other? One generalizing response that lies at the core of virtually all the essays gathered here is that an ethnic approach favours the concretization of the danger of ethics’ tendency towards abstractness, while the ethical impulse provides a guard against the stereotyped and paradoxically universalizing positing of ethnic identities. It is interesting to note that this awareness is present in both the more generalizing interventions, such as Carmen Flys Junquera’s charting of the interactions between ecocriticism and ethnicity, and Begoña Simal’s more formalist tracing of trickster strategies in recent ethnic literature. Indeed, all these essays try to strike a balance between these convergent perspectives, they all try more or less explicitly to attend to the asymmetry of the relationship between the same and the other. Notions of selfhood and otherness predictably prevail, for, after all, the ethical relation is one between selves who encounter each other *as* others. Depending on the nature of that encounter, the status of the response and responsibility it entails, one may speak waveringly, never definitively, of the opening to the ethical. All of the essays stress ethnicity as a crucial factor in enforcing the awareness of this opening.

If totalization is not of the order within the discourse of ethics, neither is it possible in seeking a shared line of argument among these essays. The relation between self and other, whether seen in communitarian or personal terms, marks the path but it is more an as yet uncharted itinerary, making and remaking itself along the way, than a well-signposted highway to a preconceived destination, that of an ethico-ethnic resolution. The volume begins with a series of essays pinpointing in their own ways the identity politics always unstably present at the ethnicity / ethics nexus (Mah y Busch, Ibarrola-Armendariz, Gallego), passing

through interventions that rely to different degrees on what we could call a dialogical ethics in questioning ethnic preconceptions (Liste Noya, Núñez Puente, Simal) to work that focuses on the “practical” ethics fuelling ethnic grievance and revindication (Frías, Flys Junquera). In the process, one becomes increasingly aware of the necessary interaction between the ethnic and the ethical, necessary in its demand that both terms come to grips with its usually unacknowledged terminological other.

From an identitarian stance, the autobiographical experience of the processes of racial and cultural othering would seem a privileged domain. Juan D. Mah y Busch, in his reading of Richard Rodriguez’s autobiographical “honesty,” explores the traditional ambivalence of autobiography as a narrative construct in ways that illuminate its prevalence within ethnic literatures. He shows how that autobiographical impulse presents itself as a narrativization of otherness that may domesticate it, thus enshrining stereotyped, unquestioned modes of agency and subjectivity supposedly untainted by alterity; but it can also be a means of counteracting and resisting assimilative modes of otherness that deny difference. Analyzing the often simultaneous valuation / devaluation of difference as both a cultural and personal strategy, he counters the “sincerity” of Rodriguez’s account with his own critical notion of “honesty.” Honesty, in his analysis, is not a difference-denying adhesion to absolutist positions of truth / falsity but a mode of “ethical vigilance,” a performative negotiation of changing contexts and incommensurable, overlapping, contradictory levels of social and personal existence. Hence, one needs to counter an essentialist dishonesty with an active notion of “integrity,” an integrity constructed through a performative “integration” within the everchanging network of discourses constituting our socio-cultural reality.

Like Charles Taylor, Mah y Busch associates identity with ethical orientation but, rather than being founded upon what Taylor calls a framework of a usually inarticulate sense of the good, this is seen as a performative construction

narratively guided by what Mah y Busch calls “spontaneous creativity.” Such creativity (perhaps an Emersonian inheritance that reappears in Ellison, for example?) produces new “truths” that test inherited beliefs. Ethics becomes a form of epistemology: “honesty is epistemic vigilance.” Such an epistemology-ethics is also a response to the unavoidable imbrication of the ethical stance and its interpellation by power, the distinctive status of “honesty” being established in accord with one’s positioning within the discursive network. From this vantage, ethnicity and ethics mutually challenge each other to negotiate their interrelations performatively, veering away from absolutist or essentialist positions that end up levelling differences and denying the force of subordination, subalternity or hierarchicization within social and cultural relations. That is, “honesty” must face up to its own intrinsic alterity, its own occluded dishonesty in some cases, such as that of Richard Rodriguez. In other words, it must become a narrative, one which traces inevitably the “ethical orientation of an identity.” Honesty thus becomes a narrativization of otherness and difference that vigilantly refrains from annulling that very alterity within its narrative constructions. Only in this way can ethical value coincide with epistemological value.

Honesty for an ethnic writer—for any writer, we might want to emphasize—is also a question of translation, the cultural translation implicit in the act of writing and reading literature. An ethics of the transcultural within the literary realm is perhaps necessary precisely in order to respect the shifting, interconnected singularity of cultural identities. This is the point made by Aitor Ibarrola-Armendáriz in his focus on the cultural “materials” of ethnic identity in Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, those culturally material markers such as folklore, with its class as well as racial/cultural inflections. Ibarrola-Armendáriz stresses the ethical responsibility of writer and reader to such materials given their very ambivalence and changed status within a literary artefact. Their employment and interpretation requires an ethics of cultural “translation” so as to recognize the plural, dialogical

constitution of alterity. But this is also the recognition of the ceaseless translatability within and without its cultural parameters of the culturally “other.”

For the writer and, later, for the reader, this begins in a close, unconditioned attention to the actually existing complexity of those determinations, discourses and differences that make up identity, especially as embodied in received experiences and the symbolic stereotypes predicated upon them. This is an exploration of the very internal otherness to which such cultural labelling is a response: “Without a profound knowledge of his own ‘cultural baggage,’ the writer would be unable to find those points of internal otherness that allow him to open it to translation.” Thus, “cultural translation” begins in / as (the response to) alterity; what is “translated,” necessarily and always imperfectly—a saving and “ethical” imperfection—is otherness, the (only) thing that both requires and resists translation. Furthermore, as in Ellison’s case, the painful encounter with one’s own otherness is a mode of self-translation, an ethics of self-response / self-responsibility that opens up the self to others, both the others that entrap and the otherness that liberates constricting notions of (the lack of) selfhood. In concert with Kwame Anthony Appiah’s recent reflection on the dialogical ethics of cultural identity, “[Ellison’s] ethics, as a literary artist, derived directly from his conviction that his ‘cultural baggage’ would only be serviceable if he succeeded in opening it up to other types of knowledge and traditions that would inevitably interact with it and transform it.” Ultimately it is the reader who is enjoined to assume this responsibility, the responsibility which is reading itself. The stylistic translation that constitutes the novel, Ibarrola-Armendáriz asserts, imposes upon the reader a hermeneutic “translation,” the ethical need to “hit a balance between being able to trans-late its ‘difference’ to make it relevant to [the reader’s] experience, and preserving that part of its humanity and incommensurability without which its particular nature would be severely distorted.”

The reader is enjoined to strike such balances in all of these essays, though again to differing degrees and in different ways. Mar Gallego, for example, like

Carolina Núñez Puente and María Frías, adopts a feminist slant, though one mediated through a postcolonial, diasporic perspective. In her reading of the work of Toni Morrison, the feminist exploration of a hybrid, diasporic notion of ethnic identity reveals a convergence of differently contextualized identities and alterities that implies and demands a fictional and historiographic rewriting. The question of representation explicitly comes to the fore in its ambivalent depiction of selves and others, racial and sexual identities and their crossings. Gallego suggests that Morrison's textual articulation of hybridity offers a liminal, utopian space for ethical revaluation of "altered" identities, specifically that of the other's other as personified in the role of women within ethnically and culturally marginalized communities. She draws on Morrison's focus on a transnational, transcultural space of enforced cultural exchange and negotiation among othered identities. Specifically what is proposed, in Gallego's reading of Morrison, is a sort of transnational feminism, resistant to both hegemonic subordination and racial appropriation within its own cultural group by insisting on the differentiating role of gender in conjunction with ethnicity.

The defence of the hybrid identity goes hand in hand with Gallego's critical appropriation of the notion of the feminist "ethics of care," a notion that crops up in other essays in this collection (Frías, Núñez Puente). The feminist "ethics of care" is seen as a communal response to and an acceptance of hybrid alterities that make up a hopefully viable, evolving community, one not predicated upon exclusionary hierarchies and the suppression of others. This utopian bent, the subject of Morrison's novel *Paradise*, is reflected in what Gallego labels Morrison's "diasporic depiction," a mode of representation that provides an ethical response to and a contestation of an other-annulling, hierarchicizing and totalizing historiography, a history of the "one" and the "same."

Perhaps the earliest, certainly one of the most culturally influential histories of the one and the same in American letters has been the Puritan interpretation of the New World and its later incorporation in a less sectarian mode within the

mythology of the United States. Nevertheless, despite Puritanism's dogmatic insistence on its overweening totalization of human existence and purpose in the "new Jerusalem" America was supposed to become, Puritanism was and has always been a discourse of otherness, a discourse riddled with the unrepresentable presence of an alterity that paradoxically spawned its own unadmitted—because inadmissible—others as necessary mainstays for an absolute otherness always on the verge, in the Puritan scheme, of wiping out the differences that brought it into conceptual existence. This is the guiding thread of José Liste's analysis of Mary Rowlandson's classic captivity narrative, one of the earliest accounts in American letters to deal with the disruptive convergence of the external otherness of the New World and the internal otherness of its Old World colonizers. Puritanism may be a discourse of otherness but it is one whose vision of a privileged relation with an absolute alterity "ab-solves," to use Levinassian wording, the Puritan of responding to the more mundane others that buttress but also counter his or her own identity-conferring sense of election. The captivity narrative, a popular variant of the conversion narratives that dominate Puritan textuality, articulates the use of Otherness to annul others, the attempted domestication and cultural annihilation of human others through recourse to a divine Other whose demands centripetally assail the ravaged Puritan self through the centrifugal dispersal of its cultural and racial others.

The encounter of others and modes of otherness, human and divine, that the Puritan captivity narrative stages, then, also unsettlingly reveals their "proximity," to use another Levinasian term, a shared yet incommensurable alterity that frustrates the assimilative subordination of one to the other.¹ Ideological domination and imposition take place, cemented by the brute realities of physical annihilation. At the same time, however, what this symbolically implies is that the

¹ For an introduction to Emmanuel Levinas's crucial work on alterity see, for example, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, eds. Adriaan Peperzak, Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (1996). More advanced reading is provided by his classic works *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (1969), originally published in French in 1961, and *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (1998), originally published in 1974.

ethnic other is absolutely indispensable, hence ethically destabilizing, in order to forward the imperious demands of the absolute alterity which is the Puritan god. The captivity narrative's projection of otherness thus becomes a discursive casting out of the otherness within and without, a gesture meant to ward off the ethical complexities of the encounter with alterity. Mary Rowlandson's "honesty," recovering Mah y Busch's reflections, lies in her Puritanically "dishonest" lingering on her experience among her ethnic others, a narrative performance of the trauma that persists; her dishonesty lies in her adherence to the Puritan schema of redemptive martyrdom, her unceasingly wavering disavowal of the radical heterogeneity and asymmetry of the relation to the other(s), human and sacred.

The potentially murderous dogmatism of the Puritan vision is rehearsed in another vein in the fin-de-siecle writings of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, the feminist sociologist and militant writer of first-wave feminism whose positions exemplify well the divisive and contradictory developments associated with the birth of modernity. Adopting the perspective of a feminism that draws upon Bakhtin's dialogism, Carolina Núñez Puente stresses the dialogical nature of ethics, conceiving it as a discursive relation between speakers considered as mutually *other* to each other. While the relation between dialogism and ethics remains a main pathway to the exploration of a work's ethical scope, such a relation cannot be reduced to a simplifying equation, especially if one accepts unquestioningly a certain notion of the "dialogical" as a supposedly open-ended relation with unrestricted access to all comers. From this nuanced perspective, Núñez Puente shows how Gilman's work, with its often stilted "dialogical" scenarios, fluctuates between a militant espousal of feminist identities rendered other in her own cultural context—though identities heavily marked by classist and racist exclusions—and an alienating focus on racial and ethnic minorities, whose very strategies of othering nevertheless permit representational access to those derided others within Gilman's governing discourse of white supremacy. Gilman's writing, then, like

many fin-de-siecle authors, is disrupted by the return of the repressed others, the (white Anglo-Saxon feminist) other's others in this case.

Núñez Puente's analysis interestingly turns to the generic constraints that both serve as vehicle and as obstacle to Gilman's gender politics. Thus, the racist ecology of her radically non-dialogical utopian scenarios constitutes a projective fantasy attempting to render symbolically void the cultural and social transformations characteristic of the turn-of-the-century United States with its proliferating ethnic enclaves. Such a generically-mixed discourse as that of Perkins Gilman becomes a test-case for a dialogical approach that reveals the ethical curtailment present in apparently progressive texts and theories (such as first-wave feminism). Specifically, Núñez Puente's employment of a "chronotopical" analysis contextualizing essentialist racial, cultural, gender and sexual categorizations allows a critical revision of both feminist perspectives and of Gilman's blatantly self-contradictory positions.

What is perhaps lacking in writing such as Gilman's is the sort of ethically-oriented irony and play that one encounters in much ethnic literature such as the trickster narratives reviewed by Begoña Simal. In these texts, specifically the writings of Gerald Vizenor and Maxine Hong Kingston, "tricksterism" as a transgression of ethnic and ethical boundaries is envisaged as elaborating an ethics of intertextuality and interculturality. In "essence," it presents itself as a "de-essentializing" narrative and ethical strategy. "Essentially" speaking, then, such narratives seem to paradoxically suggest that the quintessentially "ethnic" nature of the trickster lies in his/her/its? strategies of decentring and disarticulating fixed identities. Such playfully deconstructive textual experiments set out to destabilize the grounding monologism of dominant cultural discourse, even the surreptitious monologism of minority discourses. As Simal points out, this implies forcefully opening out the text to the necessary other which is the reader, always the explicit point of convergence for the self-reflexive text. At the same time, a critical self-

reflexivity is the task that such texts pass on to the reader, an ethical task residing in a self-conscious, self-questioning reading strategy.

The ethics of liminality, of occupying the textual and cultural borderlands, is both a thematics, a stylistic option and an enforced mode of reading in such texts. As a transgressive gesture it foregrounds defining limits, thus highlighting essentialist conceptions of identity, but it also renders them suddenly evanescent, textually dismantling those supposedly core selves. In the process it brings into the light, sometimes only fitfully, the otherness that (de)constitutes core selfhood. Othering their own “self” in a parodic Proteanism, such texts question the very agency of essentialist notions of ethnic identity through their own agential excess. Their textual “practice,” in effect, becomes a self-reflexive undermining of the sort of dichotomizing gestures that consign self-reflexivity in literature to a self-involved tour-de-force at odds with real-world practice.

This, of course, is a crucial question in the ethical questioning *of* literature and in the ethical questioning which *is* literature. One should perhaps be wary of severing the two vantage points from which we can approach this question, the question *of* ethics. Latent in all the essays in this collection, the “practical” nature of ethics *in* texts and *as* a text guides the analyses of María Frías and Carmen Flys Junquera. Both demonstrate the specifically textual contours that ethnic agency and ethical practice take in a wide variety of styles and genres. Frías returns to the autobiographical mode in her reading of Trudier Harris’s writing. Exploring the “practice” of “ethics” in the Civil Rights era in the American South, Frías Rudolphi vindicates the notion of ethical practice both as a contestation of universalizing abstractions that reinforce discriminatory ideologies and also as a demonstration of the very untheorizable and untotizable nature of the ethical. Its very untotizability, rather than consigning ethics to the fuzzy realms of philosophical abstraction, serves to return it to the always singular contexts and subjects in which the demands of the ethical are played out. Ethics is always practice, always

response, always responsibility. That practice and response, furthermore, is pre-eminently textual and discursive in its interrelating of others.

Frías's analysis of the "ethics of care" and the "ethics of justice" as practiced in the ethnically and racially divided South reveals their contextualization as irresponsible, un-ethical practices, preconceived theoretical and ideological templates that do not respond to the ethical injunction of the other. They are characterized as ideologically-charged discourses articulated in a monological context or, at least, within a stunted dialogical framework, that blunts their response to the sometimes mute, often outspoken demands of others. This is so despite the fact that, from a less socially-committed and historically-defined perspective, the "connective" ethics of care concerned with non-violence towards others and the individualizing ethics of justice concerned with equality could be seen as necessary partners in ethical engagement. We find here a situation where the totalizing abstractions of a certain "ethical" practice, with their patent social effects, are critically undermined by the perspective of the ethnic other. Ethical ideals are brought down to earth by ethnic grievance. Frías raises in this way the complex issue of the danger of the ethnic compartmentalization of the ethical impulse. Is this a reductive stereotyping of ethics in allegiance to distinct ethnic cultures and identities that ends up curtailing the very openness to undelimitable otherness intrinsic to ethics? Or is it a truly ethical realism in situating it as a practice within specific contexts, definable locations of otherness? As Frías poignantly notes, the plaintive ethnic lament that "It just ain't fair" is often deprived of its soft-spoken exigency by its conversion into the resigned, ethically-alooof smugness of "It's just even if it ain't fair."

Carmen Flys Junquera proposes a counter-totalizing perspective, that of ecological criticism, to arrest the levelling, deadening totalizations of official cultural and political discourse, with their empty gesturing towards legal and ethical redress of ethnic communities' disharmonies and dysfunctions. The defence of ethnicity, of the ethnic other's specific condition and circumstances, finds a new

source of militancy in the demand for an environmentally-conscious ethical practice, a fully-fledged awareness of the often hidden presence of class and race-based environmental discrimination. The counter-totalization proposed here presents its ethical credentials, in Flys Junquera's view, precisely because its pretension is not the closed, sealed totality of exclusionary discourses. Its non-closural impulse is a product both of ecological criticism's vision of the interconnective, self-perpetuating, plurally proliferating nature of the environmental systems that we inhabit, and of its attention to the human and cultural singularities inhabiting, conditioning and being conditioned by those systems. The non-totalizing yet holistic ethical stance of ecological criticism and environmental awareness is seen to be guaranteed and only fully realized through approaches, such as the focus on the ethnic, that contextualize such concerns and monitor critically their socio-cultural consequences. At the same time, again exemplifying the double-movement we attributed to the conceptual encounter between the ethnic and the ethical, the divergences and contradictions in the social constitution of ethnic identity are made patent through their overlapping with such discourses as that of ecology. Again we find the need to bring into contact—a self-questioning, sometimes even agonistic contact—our two guiding terms for only in their proximity can the critical value of both contribute relevantly and insightfully to literary-cultural “practice.”

Works Cited

- Appiah, Kwame Anthony. *The Ethics of Identity*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Chow, Rey. *Ethics after Idealism: Theory, Culture, Ethnicity, Reading*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998.
- Harpham, Geoffrey Galt. *Shadows of Ethics: Criticism and the Just Society*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. 1961. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969.
- . *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*. 1974. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998.

Peperzak, Adriaan, Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi, eds. *Basic Philosophical Writings*.
Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996.
Taylor, Taylor. *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard
University Press, 1989.