

Editorial

THE ETHICAL IN LITERATURE

Oscar Wilde claimed that “[t]he sphere of art and the sphere of ethics are absolutely distinct and separate,” while Wittgenstein categorically affirmed that “ethics and aesthetics are one and the same.” Literature and ethics have exhibited strong ties throughout human history and literature is regularly used for moral instruction. Although literature and ethics have different methods, strategies, and goals, they both are part of human lives and the history of literature is also a history of ethical codes as they are inscribed within the wider cultural context.

Functionality is the paradigm of Homeric ethics as it investigates what makes a good farmer, king or sailor; the ethics of the city-state, on the other hand, is concerned with what makes one a good person, good citizen, and ultimately what makes a good society. The Aristotelian dogmatic-didactic school used literary texts as an educational instrument while Platonic formalist-aesthetic school went against the inclusion of external interests, including ethics, in the domain of literature. The contemporary society though refuses to be told how to live its life, in fact, is told how to live its life much more than any previous generation by advertisements, media, markets, and social networking sites. Ethical considerations of texts are informed by the society and history in which they were produced and they, in turn, influence forms of life in the society. Often as the society changes so does its ethical practices. Hence, a critical and creative engagement between literature and ethics is a necessary and meaningful venture.

The Centre for the Study of World Religions (CSWR), Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore and Globethics.net India jointly organized a workshop in collaboration with Christ University, Jyothi Nivas College, St Joseph’s College, Bangalore, to examine critically and creatively the interfaces of “Literature and Ethics,” on Saturday, 2 March 2013. *Journal of Dharma* is publishing some of the fruits of the workshop in this issue dedicated to the theme Literature and Ethics. The papers presented in the workshop and the articles included in this issue look at the interface of literature and ethics critically and creatively. They offer a re-reading of significant texts and authors to bring out the ethical dimensions of those literary texts. The texts examined are truly universal and global both geographically and conceptually.

Rica de los Reyes Ancheta presents a re-reading of Maria Rosa Henson's experience at the military brothel in the Philippines during the World War II, in her article "The Comfort Woman Story and the Pacific War Narrative." Maria Rosa Henson's autographical description of her experience of war and violence provides an alternative reading of the mainstream War stories which considered comfort women as inevitable collateral damage. The author successfully shows how the corrective use of the literature of a victim would serve to illustrate how a powerful narrative of negative experiences disturbs and challenges the sweeping claims of the dominant narrative. The conscription of comfort women is neither a minor evil nor a necessary collateral damage, but a major and fundamental damage when viewed from a more inclusive way of thinking that considers small stories as integral to the War's grand story. Henson, who braved exposure as a comfort woman, affirmed the inviolable dignity of a woman as a human person.

"The Dharma of *Kama: Kāmasūtra's* Morality of Integrated *Puruṣārtha*," by Vikas Prabhu, persuasively argues that *Kāmasūtra* is not merely a *sūtra* on *kāma* – a text that would solely focus on enhancing sexual pleasure – rather it is *kāma-dharma-śāstra*, a treatise that aims to achieve a subtle balance between enjoyment of sensual and material pleasure along moral lines. Vātsyāyana lived in a society the boundaries of whose sexual traditions were constantly were at risk of being pushed by virtue of its diverse practices. Vātsyāyana's treatise, in effect, according to Vikas Prabhu, stands at the confluence of pleasure and morality, with a meticulous eye towards traditional compliance and scientific systematization. For Vātsyāyana, the value of *kāma* is not one of subservience to other components in the *trivarga* but an interdependent relationship intertwined essentially with the values of dharma and *artha*. Through his directive of a conscious and cautious approach towards passion and pleasure, Vātsyāyana weaves the thread of dharma through the integrated emphasis on *kāma* and *artha*, thus, providing a cloak of righteous mentality that societal beings, like the *nāgaraka*, can don, and eventually, in their effort towards righteous living, imbibe.

Etienne Rassendren, in "The Secular Ethic and the Pitfalls of V. S. Naipaul's Non-Fiction," provides a re-reading Naipaul in and through the matrix of the secular ethic as a cultural practice. Rassendren discusses first the varied conceptions of the literary and its tensions with the secular and the ethical; secondly he demonstrates by exposition as evidence the pitfalls of Naipaul's writings with regard to the secular ethic; and, thirdly, he

argues by way of conclusion that Naipaul’s writing is ideologically islamophobic bearing distortions of history, based on an overwhelming anti-Islamic discourse, which then makes his writing unjust and anti-secular. The author combines Michel Foucault’s exposition of discursive power and Antonio Gramsci’s explanation of hegemonic violence. His reading of Naipaul is “contrapuntal” in nature exposing Naipaul’s ideological pitfalls and biases as an explanation of his Islamophobia.

It is the contention of Maheshvari Naidu, in her paper “Attending to the Patient: Bioethics and Medical Literature” that while there is always the need for clinical studies, written in a grammar of statistics and percentages and with an analytical vocabulary, there is equally an urgent need for medical texts and literature that describe the lived experiences of the patients woven into the discourse and description of the illness. Her concern is the ‘ethics’ in medical literature, or the embedded values and sense of ‘right’ within the texts, in terms of the (wholly clinical) descriptions of illness and health. Bioethics in medicine is not merely about ethical rules that govern how medical professionals ought to behave and enact their medical selves with the patient, but that it also extends to how the medical literature ought to be written for the interconnected community of medical students, practitioners and the patients. If the medical literature is barren and bereft of the personal and social face of the illness (like cancer) and of the actual vulnerabilities of the patients, there is very little that the practitioners are learning of the ill person, beyond merely the medical. She concludes by referring to the Hippocratic Oath as the quintessential piece of medical literature as it refers to medicine as both an art and a science. Narrative medicine which privileges the patients’ experience of illness has also been put forward as a solution to an increasingly impersonal medical environment, where educators in the medical humanities, turn to narratives and narrative studies to teach medical students ‘an emotionally fulfilling and interpersonally related professional practice.’

Ferdinand D. Dagmang in his “Ethic of Romance in the *Twilight* Series” examines creatively the *Twilight* Series by Stephenie Meyer. He comments on the following interrelated topics: 1) Meyer’s dream and longings as the source of the novels’ drive; 2) the novels’ ethical approach to girl-boy romance as constituting the narrative’s appeal and 3) the thirst for the old-fashioned moral values as the “chord in every reader’s heart.” He argues that *Twilight* is a timely offer to young adult readers who consume it with enthusiasm because of their search and mood for what is right in romantic contexts. Meyer has successfully transformed *her dream*

(dream^a) and *longings* (dream^b) into a creative and ethical act through literary composition. It is his contention that the convergence of the readers' response to *Twilight* as a dovetailing between the authorial ethical position and the readers' longing (dream^c) for what is ethical.

My article, "Language and Truth of Aesthetical and Ethical Practices: Philosophical Explorations after Wittgenstein" examines creatively the family resemblance between Aesthetics and Ethics through a study of Wittgenstein's remarks on aesthetical and ethical discourses, judgements and practices which are interwoven with his philosophical investigations and his life. Instead of seeking analytic or ostensive definitions of aesthetic and ethical terms such as 'beautiful,' 'art,' 'good,' and 'just,' philosophical explorations after Wittgenstein should examine their inter-related and variety of uses. There are linguistic, conceptual and ontological family resemblances between Aesthetics and Ethics and with other practices in the stream of our lives. Life remains, as in the case of other practices, the bedrock of explanations and justifications for aesthetical and ethical practices and discourses.

The current issue of the *Journal of Dharma*, thus, presents a collection of articles that looks into the interface of Literature and Ethics in a variety of literary works. Have an enjoyable and fruitful reading!

Jose Nandhikkara, *Chief Editor*