



An Aesthetics of Morality: Pedagogic Voice and Moral Dialogue in Mann, Camus, Conrad, and Dostoevsky

John Krapp

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Reclaiming a valuable space for ethical criticism while avoiding the reductive voice of moral authority; In *An Aesthetics of Morality*, John Krapp reappraises the value of ethical criticism in our time. Allying himself with those who, like Wayne Booth and Martha Nussbaum, believe that there is room for attention to moral considerations in literary criticism, Krapp argues for the possibility of speaking about the ethical dimensions of reading without reducing the discussion to dogmatic declaratives. Focusing on instances of moral pedagogy in novels by Thomas Mann, Albert Camus, Joseph Conrad, and Fyodor Dostoevsky, he suggests that literature uses an aesthetic portrayal of personal relations to introduce scenes of moral tension that illustrate the way ethical claims are made and validated. Krapp describes current theoretical attitudes about ethical criticism, distinguishes ethical criticism from the more prevalent political criticism, and locates his own less widely attributed views within the landscape of literary studies. Diverting attention from moral themes and toward aesthetic structures, he provides refreshing discussions of *The Magic Mountain*, *The Plague*, *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim*, and *The Idiot* that include his assessment of recent rhetorical and critical positions on these texts. Citing specific examples of how literature can be morally momentous without promoting a particular moral outlook, Krapp pays special heed to each of the four writers' second-order remarks on the linkages between art and morality. He supplements those comments with an appreciation of the dialogue among "ethically invested voices" presented by their characters and narratorial positions. As he considers why some ethical voices are more pedagogically effective than others, Krapp argues that moral dialogue in literature may be studied as a paradigm for ethical literary criticism.

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