

Politeja

No. 3(60), 2019, pp. 37-50

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## APPROACHING ETHICS VIA LITERATURE: A CASE STUDY FROM SPAIN

**ABSTRACT**

This article proposes that undergraduate study of a spy novel can function to help learners to query what constitutes ethical human conduct. It overviews current and recent scholarly literature on the usefulness of fiction in the teaching of ethical considerations; proposes a broad-based notion of 'ethics' relevant in the context of the literary studies classroom; and then suggests sample approaches to a novel that is proposed as a case study (María Dueñas' *El tiempo entre costuras* [2009]).

**Key words:** spy novel, ethics, pedagogy, Spain

## INTRODUCTION

As a university tutor I often spend some significant time reflecting on what motivates me to design a curriculum in a certain way, and what I want to offer learners via a particular course. In the first instance, as a Hispanist specialising in twentieth- and twenty-first-century narrative fiction and other cultural production, I am prompted by a keen desire to share with students my passion for the Spanish-speaking world and its languages, particularly Castilian. A BA programme should entail some considerable element of pleasure (for both teacher and the taught!), and thus enjoyment of both the learning process and of content is also a key consideration. Beyond the quest to make higher education as agreeable and engaging as possible, I must also ponder *what* students in my modules need to learn and *why*. The *what* relates to acquisition of knowledge and capabilities, and the *why* would contemplate the reasons for young scholars to know certain things or to be able to deploy a related skill-set. In the case of literary studies, the broad aim of any course at undergraduate level is for students to gain know-how about literary and other cultural artefacts (usually produced in Spanish); to develop an understanding of the key socio-historical factors that gave rise to these cultural outputs (and understand how a text or movie, for example, interrogates a particular socio-historical reality); and to cultivate and perfect the ability to analyse a cultural product – with reference to the aforementioned context, and in conjunction with an appropriate body of critical and theoretical material. In this we might follow Patricia A. Ward who observes: *I assume that a fundamental aim of teaching literature is always to assist students in becoming competent readers who understand the nature of literature, its conventions, its canons, and the process of reading.*<sup>1</sup> Further to proficiency in comprehending a text and being able to operate on it theoretically and critically, I often point out to undergraduates how certain tasks assist them in developing particular aptitudes that will be valuable beyond university, not least in the workplace – abilities widely called ‘transferable skills’. Generally speaking, then, our ultimate goal as lecturers and professors is to produce informed young people who are culturally (and linguistically) competent to operate in a pan-European and global arena, and who are equipped not only to perform professionally, but also to be what I call useful citizens who question and query established socio-political discourses when these need to be challenged. Indeed, Ward goes on to say: *But the ethical [...] perspective may also foster the formation of character, of readers who also are on their way to developing a consistent basis for their choices and actions.*<sup>2</sup> Her suggestion thus brings to the fore another valuable function of the study of literature: that it can operate as a springboard for discussion of what are essentially ethical considerations, and actually inform learners’ decisions and behaviour – notions that reflect and tie in with my own idea of producing ‘useful citizens’ that

<sup>1</sup> P.A. Ward, “‘An Affair of the Heart’: Ethics, Criticism and the Teaching of Literature”, *Christianity and Literature*, vol. 39, no. 2 (1990), p. 185.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

I mentioned above, or, to use another of Ward's proposals: that as educators we seek to *equip [...] students to be contributing citizens after graduating*.<sup>3</sup>

What I want to do first of all is to survey and comment on some extant academic publications that consider the teaching of ethical issues via the analysis of literature. My aim here is to use these articles to try to elucidate on what we might understand to constitute ethical behaviour, and also to interrogate the possible usefulness and relevance to learners of questioning ethical issues through fiction. I shall then move on to present a sample case study in which I will propose a series of possible approaches to a spy novel as the literary artefact via which undergraduates might assess a certain set of ethical questions. The espionage thriller provides a particularly interesting example of a genre valuable for fomenting undergraduate thinking about ethical conduct because it is pre-eminently founded in what we might term 'ethical' premises such as loyalty to nation, State, groups and individuals; 'treason' and its justification; the use of violence – including ending the life of another – and its potential rationalisation; manipulation of 'truth' and knowledge; and pretence, deceit, disguise and fakery. Fundamentally, of course, spy fiction is structured around a primaeval dichotomy of good vs. evil, a concept that underpins many considerations of ethical issues. Given my research expertise in late-twentieth- and twenty-first-century Hispanic literature, with particular focuses on women's writing and the *noir* genres, the work I want to discuss in my case study is María Dueñas' 2009 worldwide bestseller, *El tiempo entre costuras* (translated into English as *The Seamstress* and *The Time Between*). The novel, Dueñas' first, is also one of a tiny number of spy stories by Spanish authors, and is therefore generically innovative, as well as being of particular interest to the project to hand because of the gendering of its protagonist (who is a woman) and the historical context it portrays (the immediate Civil War period in Spain) – issues to which I will return in that section of this study in which I consider the work.

## LITERATURE AND ETHICS IN THE CLASSROOM

Begoña Román Mestre reminds us that *La literatura... no supleix ni la conceptualització ni la fonamentació estrictament ètica... la literatura no substitueix l'ètica*,<sup>4</sup> a useful observation that serves to underscore the fact that in our literature and culture classrooms we do not teach ethics, per se – neither the theory nor the philosophy of ethics. Should we do so? Undergraduates at the Universiteit van Amsterdam are obliged to take (and pass) a general module about currents in historical and contemporary thought, and implicit – although not explicit – to some of the philosophy studied are what we might identify as broad-based ethical issues. But neither this nor any other module focuses on ethics, and nor do we teach Ethics on the Spanish Programme. In fact, the philosophy

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>4</sup> B. Román Mestre, "La literatura en l'ensenyament de l'ètica: de la comprensió estètica a la fonamentació filosòfica", *Temps d'Educació*, vol. 36 (2009), p. 131.

and theory of ethics may prove too challenging a subject for some learners outside a philosophy course; it may not fit with the profile of the student who signs up for a degree in Modern Languages; and I would also query whether teaching 'pure' Ethics might not perhaps be prescriptive and thus go against the grain of courses in literature where participants should learn to evaluate, analyse and reflect. What we do do, though, is tutor in such a way that ethical considerations form an implicit ingredient of our pedagogy. One element of our literature programmes aims to help students to acquire knowledge and skills, but we also use texts and other cultural products (mostly works of fiction, but sometimes documentaries or autobiographies, for example) from Spain and Latin America to foment discussion about the sorts of social issues and human actions through which we can frame and ponder what are in fact broadly ethical questions – with the wider aim of developing thinking, critical citizens. We might identify this practice and process as a sort of 'implied ethics,' and our own conduct as educators also feeds this idea of 'implied ethics' if we demonstrate in the lecture room – both as individuals and via our teaching – fairness, democracy, inclusivity, etc.<sup>5</sup> Earlier on I mentioned that our wide-ranging aim as professors is not only to furnish our students with knowledge and information and help them develop the confidence needed to engage with the status quo, but, in general terms, to encourage them to become what I call 'useful citizens.' Implicit within this project – although hitherto never explicit – is the understanding that this 'useful citizen' is in fact an ethical one. The whole notion of a potential useful or 'good' citizen can be fraught with conceptual and ideological dangers, though. Wayne C. Booth says that in conservative quarters 'moral' or 'ethical' students are posited as those *who don't cheat or steal or kill, students who honor their fathers and mothers, who stay off drugs and handle their sexual desires responsibly*.<sup>6</sup> However, Booth expresses grave concern that learners who fit (or are fitted into) this profile later become '*good citizens, which too often means those who will stay off welfare and passively accept low-paying jobs*'.<sup>7</sup> Booth's position is an insightful one that we need to bear in mind, for a *good citizen* is not necessarily an ethical one – or, at least, an ethically aware one – in his paradigm. Following Booth, then, an ethical being seems to be one who does not subscribe unquestioningly to either a) a set of norms and 'values' imposed from outside his or her own intellect and conscience, nor b) conforming to a socially- or politically-imposed norm. Both of these would merely signal submissiveness, where surely what we seek in the university is to assist in the formation of individuals who

<sup>5</sup> It perhaps goes without saying that our own broadly ethical conduct as tutors and academics should be mirrored by that of the institution itself. For example, the University should not permit fraud, exclusion of certain groups or individuals, or bullying or other sorts of violence to characterise it. See, for example, W.C. Booth, "The Ethics of Teaching Literature", *College English*, vol. 61, no. 1 (1998), p. 47; B. Cherne, "Empathy as a Diversity Teaching Tool: A Performance-based Class in Multicultural Dramatic Literature", *Theatre Topics*, vol. 23, no. 1 (2013), p. 72; P.A. Ward, "An Affair of the Heart...", p. 187.

<sup>6</sup> W.C. Booth, "The Ethics...", p. 47.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Booth's clear inference that "good" folks don't "cheat or steal or kill" is one with which we might instinctively agree (although as these actions form the cornerstone of many spy thrillers, their discussion with learners.

query and interrogate dominant discourses and possibly propose new ways of thinking and acting. This is an active and creative intellectual process to which a consideration of ethics is fundamental.

In their article that explores deploying fiction to develop learners' appreciation of ethical issues, Merna McMillan and Lance Gentile offer up an interesting exposition of the reasons why it is necessary to introduce a consideration of ethics into the classroom context: *The widespread and growing concern about the importance of teaching ethics is prompted in part by the revelation of unethical and sometimes illegal behavior of many influential people in responsible roles in American finance, business, politics, entertainment, sports, religion, and government as well as in the professional fields of medicine, law, and education.*<sup>8</sup> McMillan and Gentile's paper focuses on schools rather than higher education, and references the United States specifically, but the motivator they identify for including learner analysis of ethical puzzles and challenges within a curriculum is just as valid for the university, too – and in multiple national spaces. What is more, although their article is now 30 years old, McMillan and Gentile's rationale for including consideration of wider ethical issues in the classroom remains particularly pertinent because we are currently living in a 2019 characterised by war and fighting; corruption; mass abuse of human rights; and multiple forms of violence and aggression across the globe. As tutors we might thus hope to assist students to pose questions about what McMillan and Gentile identify as *unethical and [...] illegal behaviour* – a key factor in encouraging the development of that critically-competent citizen whom we aim to send out into the world at the end of a degree programme.

Educator Alizabeth Leonard poses a question about her pedagogical practice, and asks both herself and her reader how, via an appraisal of ethical conundrums, she can change her students *in ways [...] that are most useful to them.*<sup>9</sup> While we might query Leonard's notion of 'changing' learners – because altering them might be seen as a form of subjugation or indoctrination of the sort alluded to by Booth in his notion of the *good citizen* – here I think that we should not lose sight of the fact that our pupils can themselves achieve change – in the University context often with only minor guidance from a tutor, since undergraduates are often very autonomous in their quest for knowledge and their posing and answering of intellectual queries. Another professor from the U.S., the aforementioned Booth, talks of the *traditional ethical goal of building character... persons with a genuinely admirable, or 'useful', or ethical center,*<sup>10</sup> an aspiration that in its reference to 'building' character implies to some significant degree the need for change of some sort to be wrought in the learner, much as Leonard notes. We might also assert that the ethical individual we hope will emerge from the university having successfully completed a course of study will also be a caring one, where such a being exists

<sup>8</sup> M. McMillan, L. Gentile, "Children's Literature: Teaching Critical Thinking and Ethics", *The Reading Teacher*, vol. 41, no. 9 (1988), p. 876.

<sup>9</sup> A.A. Leonard, "Assignment #9. A Text Which Engages the Socially Constructed Identity of Its Writer", *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 48, no. 2 (1997), p. 42.

<sup>10</sup> W.C. Booth, "The Ethics...", p. 43.

in function not of *dominating, or explaining, or appreciating, but through caring and being cared for*, to quote Milton Mayeroff's seminal work on caring.<sup>11</sup> Here, too, though, a caveat is required, for we need to understand that a caring person is not necessarily one who is submissive and/or who fails to demonstrate consideration and compassion for him or herself while also doing so towards others. Again according to Mayeroff, caring is *a process, a way of relating to someone that involves development*.<sup>12</sup> Mayeroff's idea of *development* (of the caring, ethical individual) resonates with Booth's proposition about *building* of character, and Leonard's thinking about ways of 'changing' students, and all recall our project of working with learners to potentialise their growth or maturation into a subject characterised by ethical awareness and deeds or actions.

Mayeroff's work on caring – a concept and conduct that necessarily involves a relation with the other who cares for one and for whom one cares – reminds us that behaving ethically is not merely a private, personal matter, but one which must also have repercussions for and effects on the other humans who inhabit our environment and social context, an idea that I introduced earlier. In this regard Román Mestre's proposition is useful to teasing out and further comprehending the various facets of ethical doing and being:

*L'ètica és una disciplina teòrica que reflexiona sobre com viure bé, en concret, versa sobre els següents àmbits:*

a) *Una ètica personal, de forja de caràcter, de la bona voluntat i de la recerca de la felicitat.*

b) *Una ètica comunitària on troven sentit la pertinença i les seves senyes d'identitat els individus ...*

c) *Una ètica cívica que reflexiona sobre la ciutadania cosmopolita i una teoria de la justícia vàlida mundialment.*<sup>13</sup>

Beyond a sense of personal ethics, then, Román Mestre signals group or collective concepts. Her points b) and c) remit to and are underpinned by ideas such as inclusivity and impartiality – the latter is a concept I want to discuss in more detail a little later on. But what conduct and deeds make up these various forms of ethics highlighted by the Catalan scholar? In order to try to draft a response to my own question here I want to have recourse to a study which, like Román Mestre's, attempts to untangle the relationship between pedagogy, fiction, and ethics – the article by McMillan and Gentile that I cited earlier. These two scholars posit that literature is particularly valuable for teaching *critical thinking and ethics*<sup>14</sup> – and it is interesting to note that they conflate the ability for *critical thinking* with *ethics*, presumably since they perceive that one leads to the other (an assumption that I think implicitly underlies a great deal of the analysis of literature that we as university educators encourage our own students to undertake).

<sup>11</sup> M. Mayeroff, *On Caring*, New York 1972, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> B. Román Mestre, "La literatura...", p. 130.

<sup>14</sup> M. McMillan, L.M. Gentile, "Children's Literature...", p. 877.



McMillan and Gentile posit a series of themes that pervade the sorts of stories and tales with which they work in the literature classroom in order to engage their pupils in debate about acting ethically. I want to reproduce that list here because these *themes* resonate very closely with what we might identify generally as ‘ethical’ actions: *honesty, kindness and compassion, faithfulness, discipline, respect for the law, perseverance, sharing and unselfishness, humility, proper ambition, forgiveness, courage, integrity, public service and democracy*.<sup>15</sup> The scholars’ use of the term “*themes*” here of course references topics that feature in the works they study with their pupils, but it is a usefully neutral word that moves away from expressions such as ‘values’ or ‘morals’ that certain groups or individuals might associate with the idea of ethical behaviour, and which can become problematic because they are semantically and conceptually laden with overtones of particular sets of religious beliefs, for example, or other ideologies. It is also significant that many of the sorts of conduct that McMillan and Gentile identify as being ethical clearly imply behaving ethically towards another person or persons, an assumption that echoes Román Mestre’s assertions cited earlier, particularly her points b) and c) which clearly reference collective, collaborative and community conceptualisations of ethical deeds.

To McMillan and Gentile’s helpful inventory of *themes* (or behaviours) that underpin or constitute ethical acts, we might also add empathy, a trait identified by pedagogues and scholars as a wilful or knowing conflation of the affective and the rational or cognitive<sup>16</sup> in a response to the other, where one is capable of *considering another’s perspective or imagining oneself in the situation of the person and/or character*.<sup>17</sup> Evincing true empathy, then, not only demonstrates someone’s understanding of the status or predicament of another person, but can be evidence of an ethical being if we read it as revealing an individual who does not dogmatically adhere to their own point of view and set of beliefs and principles but values and evaluates those of others, too. In this regard, an analogous stance might be impartiality, since once again it points to a character accepting of the other in his or her self, ideas and convictions. As María Teresa López de la Vieja reminds us, *El punto de vista moral ha estado y está casi siempre asociado a un punto de vista imparcial*.<sup>18</sup> López de la Vieja’s observation is useful in reminding us that what she calls the ‘moral’ being (for us, the learner whom we are assisting towards an understanding of ethical choices and conduct) is an impartial one.<sup>19</sup> When we talk of getting our undergraduates to think through ethical posers arising from their reading

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 877.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, B. Cherne, “Empathy...”, p. 69; L. Jamison, *The Empathy Exams*, London 2014.

<sup>17</sup> C.R. Junker, S.J. Jacquemin, “How Does Literature Affect Empathy in Students?”, *College Teaching* vol. 65, no. 2 (2017), p. 79.

<sup>18</sup> M.T. López de la Vieja, *Ética y literatura*, Madrid 2003, p. 19 (my emphasis).

<sup>19</sup> We should note, however, that the term “moral” is problematic in that it – and other notions such as ‘virtue’ and even ‘ethics’ itself – have been appropriated by certain religious and right-wing groups, and that within their pronouncements such terminology does not equate with the sort of impartiality and empathy of which we seek to induce awareness in our students. Indeed, far from it. Often the deployment of such terminology implies that its enunciator wields it from a position that he or she perceives as superior to that of those who receive the message.

of literature, and to analyse what constitutes ethical conduct via a study of characters' behaviour in a book (or film, or other cultural output), our concept of 'ethical' actions is founded in the impartiality identified by López de la Vieja, the empathy researched by the scholars I cite earlier, as well as those attitudes and deeds listed by McMillan and Gentile. For us as pedagogues, then, being ethical necessarily involves a multi-faceted consideration of the other – as individual, group, society or even mankind in its entirety – and this is the broad-based premise that we seek to have our students explore.

## ETHICAL ISSUES IN THE SPY NOVEL: PROPOSAL FOR A CASE STUDY

In his examination of ethics in the espionage novel J.J. Macintosh ponders how authors textualise intelligence agents' justification of their professional endeavour and associated deeds, and explains his thesis that writers within the genre need to start from the notion of *real, not conventional, morality*,<sup>20</sup> and he goes on to provide examples of each. While Macintosh's proposition mirrors the distinction between ethical conduct and the notion of the 'moral' being hijacked by certain religious and political groups that I discussed previously, in his own reflection on this issue the novelist Kingsley Amis theorises *good* (ethical) and *bad* (not ethical) acts and deeds in spy fiction in a way that echoes the list put forward by McMillan and Gentile that I included earlier. Amis contends that in the spy story *[s]ome things are regarded as good: loyalty, fortitude, a sense of responsibility, a readiness to regard one's safety, even one's life, as less important than the major interests of one's organization and one's country. Other things are regarded as bad: tyranny, readiness to inflict pain on the weak or helpless, the unscrupulous pursuit of money or power. These distinctions [...] constitute quite enough in the way of an ethical frame of reference [in spy fiction]*.<sup>21</sup> In essence, then, the espionage thriller is structured around ethical complexity: it is premised on potentially opposing notions of good vs. evil, right vs. wrong (particularly in the genre's earlier, traditional guise, although in later manifestations of this sort of literature, as produced by le Carré, for example, such concepts become muddled as absolutes get blurred in a mid- to late-twentieth-century context). Analysis of this sort of text in the university thus furnishes a space in which undergraduates can interrogate the behaviour of fictional characters and authorial ideologies in order to address the sort of broadly ethical issues involving self and others discussed in the previous section of this article. (Ethical conduct involving the other, when this manifests itself as patriotism – what Amis calls *a readiness to regard one's safety, even one's life, as less important than the major interests of... one's country* is an issue to which I will return a little later.) For example, learners and their tutor might query whether deceiving another person can ever be ethically justifiable – in the event that so doing preserve the lives or wellbeing of

<sup>20</sup> J.J. Macintosh, "Ethics and Spy Fiction", *Intelligence and National Security*, vol. 5, no. 4 (1990), p. 162.

<sup>21</sup> K. Amis, *The James Bond Dossier*, New York–London 1965, p. 74. Amis' work focuses on Fleming's James Bond series, but this particular postulation, as well as many others that he makes in his study, can be extrapolated to aspects of other sorts of spy fiction and other novelists.



the many, for example. Together we might deliberate on the ethical implications of a spy protagonist taking on an assumed identity. But perhaps any such inferences might alter depending on the reasons why the disguise is taken up. Is fakery permitted in order to allow justice to prevail, to protect the lives of others, or to further the interests of one's nation? Indeed, ethical riddles and puzzles of this sort that arise from the study of espionage narratives can be of considerable complexity, and thus suited to consideration at university level in the context of Literary Studies modules.

María Dueñas' 2009 bestseller *El tiempo entre costuras* (translated into English both as *The Seamstress* and *The Time in Between*) is a useful text for deployment in the classroom to foment the kind of consideration of ethical issues that I mention.<sup>22</sup> It recounts the trials and adventures of Sira, a young seamstress from a humble single-parent family in pre-war Madrid who decides to ditch mundanity and mediocrity and run away to North Africa with her lover, Ramón. After he abandons her, leaving her penniless, heavily in debt and pregnant, she spends several years establishing herself as a fashionable dressmaker in the Spanish protectorate of Tetuán (Tetouan). The second part of *El tiempo entre costuras* narrates her return to the national capital shortly after the end of the Civil War. Now going under the alias of Arish, she spies for the British by collecting information on the large resident German population that inhabited the city. As she takes measurements from and fits clothes for the wives of Nazi officers and regime members, Arish gathers data on their social activities and contacts with the Franco elite. While the first section of the work contains features of the romance novel and is a veritable rags-to-riches-to-rags-to-riches tale in which, through hard work and honest living, the hapless protagonist achieves stability and renown and overcomes her past 'lapses' (mostly in judgement), it is on the second segment that I want to centre my attention here because this is where the book becomes a true spy thriller (albeit with continued overtones of the romance).

Earlier on I observed that themes such as deceit, false identities and violence, for example, underpin the textual action and the narrative ideology of espionage fiction, and in this *El tiempo entre costuras* (its second portion, at least) is no exception. I thus want to reference a small number of examples taken from the novel in order to consider how these might serve to function as prompts for learners to evaluate ethical issues.

<sup>22</sup> The original Castilian title translates directly as 'The Time Between Seams', which could be read as a reference to the protagonist's profession as a seamstress, but can also be interpreted as an allusion to the dressmaking patterns she devises while working as a spy and via which she passes information to her handler. The mention of seams in the novel's title might also be understood as a reference to the metaphorical 'straightjacketing' of the Spanish population in ideological and physical terms once the Civil War had ended and Franco took power. In this regard, then, the English title *The Time in Between* does not convey the meaning of the original Spanish, while *The Seamstress* – much like the Polish translation, *Krawcowa z Madrytu* – reduces Dueñas' character to the hyper-female role of dressmaker and ignores entirely her espionage function. Interestingly, the French translation takes another tack altogether, and opts for the title *L'espionne de Tanger*, thus giving primacy to the spying undertaken by the young female lead character, while also 'exoticising' it by focusing on the time she spends in Tangiers (rather than the initially mundane, and later destroyed Madrid referenced in the title of the Polish version of the work).

It is generally the case that in a spy story several characters dissemble and deceive and that the fiction is erected around multiple layers of fakery and pretence. Here I want to focus on the actions of Sira/Arish – for reasons of expediency and also because she is the central character within the work. Sira's initial incursion into counterfeiting her self in fact comes in the first part of *El tiempo entre costuras* when she dresses in a *jel-laba* in order to seem to be an Arab girl and thus creep unnoticed through Tetuán in the dead of night to sell on to a contact a cache of arms which had been left in the boarding house in which she lives. Notions of bogus identity therefore conflate with illegality – for purveying the pistols to an anti-Franco group would surely have merited a frightful punishment. Multiple queries about the ethical nature – or otherwise – of the activities related in this exciting sequence in Dueñas' novel are thus suggested to students. These might include consideration of the legality of trading goods which did not rightfully belong to either Sira or her landlady; analysis of the very fact of dealing in weapons – arms are used to kill others, or perhaps learners might see possession of a gun as a means of self-defence, and thus reasonable rather than anti-ethical?;<sup>23</sup> thinking about the justification of the sale of the revolvers – the imperative to raise funds to set up Sira in business so that she be able to pay off the debts incurred by the lover who abandoned her; examination of Sira's need to disguise herself, not only to avoid being recognised, but also in order to protect herself, for example, against the drunk Spanish soldiers she encounters outside a bar as she hurries along on her dangerous errand. Conundrums such as these – here relating to a single narrative sequence – can foment student discussion and deliberation about the ethical implications of a raft of behaviours and situations which are complex, sophisticated and multi-faceted.

Once she has returned to Madrid, Sira/Arish engages in any amount of falsehoods and deceits – starting with her very name, which has been altered to sound more 'exotic'. She pretends to be a wealthy Moroccan; she spends her Saturdays feigning interest in the paintings in the Prado in order to use the museum to drop off secret messages; in the tearoom where she is to meet her handler she simulates dropping her handbag – a pre-arranged secret signal; she fakes visits to the beauty salon and to a doctor's surgery, in both cases to meet with contacts from the world of espionage; she forges a faint in the Hippodrome in a desperate bid to escape the attention of the Germans in the next box; and she travels to Lisbon on the pretext of buying fabrics and trimmings although the real aim of her trip is to spy on a Portuguese national suspected of collaboration with the Nazis. Importantly, given both her profession as a seamstress and the inter-textual allusions to the romance novel that seam through *El tiempo entre costuras*, much of Sira/Arish's deception is played out via wearing particular sorts of clothing that bestow upon her an identity that is far from that of a hard-up dressmaker (while the endless narrative description of garments and outfits might perhaps be interpreted as a 'feminisation' of

<sup>23</sup> Student views of this particular sequence in the novel and its motivation and possible outcomes may vary depending on the national context in which classroom analysis and discussion take place. For example, learners from the United States, where gun ownership is routine, may argue differently about this matter than students from the European Union where firearms are strictly controlled and very few citizens own one.

the spy novel). The sub-genre of the espionage thriller provides the literary context in which dissembling, false identities and downright deceit are worked through textually and played out by the protagonist, again providing ample opportunity for learners to use these actions and character from *El tiempo entre costuras* as a springboard to enquiry about what they perceive to be ethical conduct. A little earlier on I posited a possible student discussion of the motivation for Sira's participation in the sale of the cache of guns as a pedagogical strategy for introducing to learners the idea of stimulus for characters' actions. Similarly, an analysis of Sira/Arish's ongoing wholesale deception of her clients and social contacts once she returns to Madrid might also usefully be scrutinised by undergraduates in conjunction with the spur or motor for her fake identity and two-faced actions. From a discussion of cause and consequence, course participants can examine in some detail whether Dueñas' protagonist acts in ways that they consider to be ethical – an exercise that can also assist them to consider if they are *developing a consistent basis for their choices and actions*, as per Ward's ideas cited earlier.

So why does Sira/Arish engage in espionage? Why does she carry out actions that might be classified as illegal and deceitful? I cited at the beginning of this section Macintosh's preliminary comments on the justification or explanation for spying, and the scholar goes on to observe that *Throughout the history of the 'great game' genre there has been an awareness that the activities chronicled – not only the incidentals such as torture and murder, but also the central activity of spying itself – stand in need of moral justification.*<sup>24</sup> Addressing this issue, one that entails a discussion of motivation and motive, and the justifiability of a character's behaviour, is central to students' examination of ethical conduct. I mentioned a little earlier the example of the sale of the guns – Dueñas' protagonist becomes an impromptu arms runner in order to raise cash to set herself up as a seamstress and thus get out of the existential and financial hole in which she finds herself. (She is prompted into this incursion into illegality by her landlady who is keen to recoup her expenses in harbouring Sira, while also possibly making a profit via the younger woman's skill as a dress-maker.) But beyond this example, *El tiempo entre costuras* posits two primary motives for the actual spying undertaken by its central character. Dueñas' protagonist first starts to gather details about her clients and others encouraged by her (male) neighbour who evinces an incorrigible interest in gossip. Later on she engages socially with Nazi officials at a party in an attempt to gain information, in this case persuaded by the dashing British 'journalist' who becomes a recurrent love interest throughout the novel. In these examples, then, students might query not only the ethics of surreptitiously gleaning facts about others to pass on to third parties, but also the gendering of the dynamics of situations in which a female is urged by men to sneak around. Learners might pose questions about the ethics of the behaviour of the primary motivators here – all male – and of the female character whom they might consider to have been pushed into snooping.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> J.J. Macintosh, "Ethics...", p. 169.

<sup>25</sup> In a broader sense, a study of *El tiempo entre costuras* (as well as of one of any number of other novels) can serve as a springboard to examine and query how the gender of a fictional character impacts and impinges on students' perception of what is deemed 'ethical' conduct for each sex. In the case of Dueñas' novel, beyond the spying activity, learners might pick up on the view expressed by Sira's former fiancé

The primary stimulation for Sira/Arish's intelligence-gathering about the Nazis for the British, however, is her desire to prevent Spain from being caught up in yet another conflict immediately the Civil War has ended. Sira's mother explains to her, *España entera está arrasada, nadie tiene ya fuerzas para soportar de nuevo la misma pesadilla. Lo único que este país puede hacer ahora es llorar a sus muertos y tirar hacia delante con lo poco que le queda*.<sup>26</sup> A form of patriotism, then, is the key reason why Dueñas' character agrees to leave Tetuán and return to Madrid as a spy. In his study of the *moral justification* of espionage articulated in genre thrillers, Macintosh notes that *Initially this [the moral justification] was thought to be provided by the fact that (a) the spy was working for his or her own country, and (b) patriotism was a virtue*.<sup>27</sup> The scholar goes on to clarify, however, that *Sometimes [...] it was realized that (b) was not in general adequate but, luckily, it was adequate when the patriotism was for the right country, namely England or the US, because they were by definition moral and just*.<sup>28</sup> In some spy stories, then, love of one's country might be proposed as a rationalisation and excuse for intelligence work and certain of the behaviours that are part and parcel of it, a tenet of the genre that is useful for student evaluation of the ethics of espionage and its motivations. *El tiempo entre costuras* is written by a Spanish author and its backdrop is Spain – not the *England or the US* referenced by Macintosh. Dueñas depicts the early years of the dictatorship and shows how her protagonist strives to halt Franco's potential support of the Germans in WWII, an authorial stance which, combined with Sira/Arish's concern for the poverty-stricken 'losers' of the Civil War, I propose we can read as evidence of the novelist's support for the ousted Republicans. In this ideological economy, then, the lost Spain of Sira/Arish's childhood is *the right country*, to use Macintosh's term, and it is this memory and past reality of the nation that Dueñas' protagonist seeks to protect. Students who analyse the novel must also add to any consideration of the ethics of spying an examination of the ethical implications of working against one's own government, for this is what Sira/Arish does – a conundrum that might also lead learners to evaluate the very legitimacy of the regime and its quest to support Nazi Germany, a move that would involve its own citizens in yet another war. Despite Macintosh's observations at the time of his writing to the effect that *it is now fashionable not to offer patriotism as an explanation for spying in espionage fiction*,<sup>29</sup> the many queries that this paradigm brings to the fore in *El tiempo entre costuras* serve as a valuable springboard

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who reads an overnight visit by a male friend to Sira's apartment in Madrid as evidence that she is running a brothel. As an emblematic representative of the Franco regime, this male character's view of the 'ethics' of Sira's conduct is illustrative of the rigid sex-based roles imposed by the dictatorship and its peddling of a Catholic 'morality' that policed women's social and sexual conduct in particular. While on the topic of gender issues within *El tiempo entre costuras*, however, it should also be noted that the fiction gives a voice to a group which, because of its sex and social class, was largely silenced in the actual historical period portrayed in the work, and has rarely been the subject of Spanish cultural creation.

<sup>26</sup> M. Dueñas, *El tiempo entre costuras*, Barcelona 2015, p. 385.

<sup>27</sup> J.J. Macintosh, "Ethics...", p. 169.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. (emphasis in original).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. (emphasis in original).

that allows undergraduates to debate important questions about the ethics (and ethical justifiability) of spying, patriotism, dictatorship and the legitimacy of the state.

Students of the novel might also observe that Sira/Arish's patriotism is in fact very carefully nuanced. Despite the privilege and wealth in which she ends up living in Madrid, Dueñas' character articulates concern for the multitudinous hungry dispossessed who throng the city's streets away from the small circle of opulence that she inhabits. In light of her compassion for the have-nots, further consideration of the ethics of her intelligence work might prompt students to justify what she does – above and beyond the mere notion of patriotism. Indeed, by portraying those who were deemed to be the 'losers' in the Civil War (a collective that included not only those politically opposed to the fascists, but also the poor, and women, amongst others), and articulating the polyphony of their (albeit muted) voices, Dueñas induces her reader to consider the ethical implications of a regime characterised by mass hunger and poverty; violence and brutality; totalitarianism; instability; and absence of peace. The novelist tints the motivation for Sira/Arish's spying in a further way: by significantly personalising it. For not only does her young protagonist seek to protect her nation – and perhaps particularly its poverty-stricken underdogs – but she is prompted to do so because many of these 'losers' are her former neighbours from her girlhood days in a working-class district, as her former fiancé tells her: *Tu vecino Norberto cayó en Brunete, a su hijo mayor lo fusilaron... el mediano está picando piedra en Cuelgamuros y el pequeño en el penal de El Due-so... la señora Engracia... se ha quedado media ciega y anda por las calles como trastornada... En tu barrio ya no quedan palomas ni gatos, se los han comido todos... a la Andreíta la reventó un obús... [De] la Sole... [d]icen que... anda ahora ofreciéndose a los descargadores del mercado...pidiendo una peseta por cada servicio que hace allí mismo, contra los ladrillos de la pared... La Agustina y la Nati... están en la cárcel de las Ventas...*<sup>30</sup>

The central character's very close link to these named individuals who are citizens of the devastated nation she hopes to protect from participation in more fighting raises yet another question about the justification for spying and to what extent it can be seen as ethical. For although Sira/Arish never commits murder nor orders that anybody be killed (and both murder and instructing that somebody be killed are both frequent motifs in the espionage thriller), as I discussed earlier, she does engage in deceit, falsehood, trickery, disguise and fakery, all essential elements of the spy story. However, Dueñas' articulation of the personal prompt to her protagonist's actions necessarily stimulates the reader, and the student, of *El tiempo entre costuras* to question whether Sira/Arish's intelligence work can in fact be ethically justified. This, then, is a central query we can ask our undergraduates to explore and discuss when we seek to introduce into our pedagogy a consideration of what constitutes ethical behaviour. Although the novel is innovative in that it is multi-generic and protagonises a female spy, it otherwise observes many of the fundamental tenets of the espionage novel and therefore textualises the ethical conundrums that the spy must attempt to unravel when positioned between the need or imperative to engage in intelligence gathering and the fakery and deceit

<sup>30</sup> M. Dueñas, *El tiempo...*, pp. 462-463.



that their profession necessarily entails. In analysing queries of this sort arising from a careful close-reading of a fictional text, learners ponder in depth the ethics of misrepresentation and dissembling when these are counterbalanced with a need to protect the many (embodied in the notion of 'the nation' or as specific collectives such as the poor and dispossessed), a consideration that necessarily brings to the fore the very fundament of what I have proposed here to constitute ethical behaviour: a set of deeds and beliefs that promote the wellbeing of the collective, community or group.

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