John Gardner: A Tiny Eulogy

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John Gardner: A Tiny Eulogy
by Phil Jourdan

John Gardner’s career was permanently changed by his publication of *On Moral Fiction* (1978), a controversial and derided assessment of the state of literature as Gardner saw it. By arguing for a return to greater seriousness and moral commitments in literature, Gardner found himself attacked on all sides by critics and writers who found his conservatism suspicious or simply irrelevant. In this short tribute to Gardner’s late intellectual concerns, Phil Jourdan looks at some of the difficulties in *On Moral Fiction*, and asks whether Gardner was rigorous enough in his deployment of various philosophical concepts through his book. Convinced that, despite any problems of argumentative method or intellectual honesty, *On Moral Fiction*’s basic message should not be dismissed outright, Jourdan tries to determine what is superfluous to the book, so that we may focus on its core: a call for writers not to forget their moral influence on readers.

Phil Jourdan is the author of *Praise of Motherhood* (Zero Books, 2012) and co-founder of the popular online writing workshop LitReactor.

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