In the late 1980s Wayne C. Booth and Martha Nussbaum pioneered the so-called ‘ethical turn’ in literary criticism, arguing for the need to attend to the kinds of social and personal good that literature – especially the novel – could serve (or destroy). For Nussbaum especially, the ‘good’ of fiction was located in its ability to render its readers more ‘finely aware and richly responsible’: she advanced a neo-Aristotelian account of fiction’s ability to call out, by means in part of its hypothetical realism, lucid self-perception and self-correction. More recently, however, a ‘new ethics’ – as Dorothy Hale names it – has emerged, drawing Foucault, Agamben, Adorno and Levinas instead of Aristotle, which disputes Booth and Nussbaum’s humanist accounts. Uncertainty, alterity and instability are the sources and causes of ethical outcome, rather than empathy, identification and amelioration: ‘the ethics of alterity is produced through the experience of self-limit’ (Hale). This week, we consider these ‘new ethics’ as they are explored in and by recent novels and theorists, testing Tom McCarthy’s Remainder and Zadie Smith’s On Beauty against essays on these texts by Dorothy J. Hale and C. Namwali Serpell, and vice-versa. Please read as much of McCarthy and Smith as possible (it will be worth acquiring both books well in advance of the seminar), and all three of the set essays/chapters, though I recognise that this represents substantial core reading. Do the best you can, and at least read the first two chapters of both novels.

**Core Texts**


C. Namwali Serpell, ‘Metareading Tom McCarthy’s *Remainder* (2005)’, in *Seven Modes of Uncertainty* (Harvard University Press, 2014), pp. 230–68. (PDF to be provided)

**Contexts**


David James, “‘Style is Morality?’ Aesthetics and Politics in the Amis Era’, *Textual Practice*, 26:1 (2012), 11-25