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Writing Peace out of Conflict: Nancy Cunard, Carole Satyamurti, Frank McGuinness

Abstract I: La concezione di guerra intesa come fenomeno naturale e inevitabile è antichissima, e serve a giustificare la presenza costante di conflitti nella storia dell'umanità. Recentemente, tuttavia, e in particolar modo dopo gli avvenimenti dell'11 settembre 2001, il modo di condurre, descrivere e raccontare i conflitti è cambiato, e necessariamente è cambiata anche la retorica della guerra, che in passato ha legittimato il concetto di 'guerra giusta', e negli ultimi anni ha introdotto l'espressione 'War of Words', a sottolineare il ruolo fondamentale della lingua nelle dinamiche di conflitto. Per contro, si parla poco di 'peace talks' e di come la lingua sia fondamentale anche nei processi di costruzione della pace. In tal senso la letteratura costituisce una risorsa di grande valore per la realizzazione di una nuova cultura di pace. Ne sono un esempio le opere di tre autori presi in considerazione nel presente lavoro: seppur storicamente e culturalmente lontani, Nancy Cunard, Carole Satyamurti e Frank McGuinness condividono la visione di chi 'out of conflict' scrive di pace, e interrogando le logiche di guerra va alla ricerca del dialogo e dell'incontro interculturale.

Abstract II: In recent years, and more especially since 9/11, the way in which wars are carried out, spoken of, justified and (re)presented has changed significantly. Language plays a crucial role in the construction and consolidation of the rhetoric of war as exemplified by the concept of a 'just war' and the phrase 'War of Words'. Yet, the implications of language use in peace-making processes remain somehow largely underestimated or undervalued, when recognised. Faced with political and cultural intransigence, literature can create models for a co-operative culture enabling both writers and readers to contribute to the development of alternative peace discourses. Accordingly, this paper proposes a reading of pacifist works by Nancy Cunard, Carole Satyamurti and Frank McGuinness. Written out of conflict, and despite their different historical and cultural *milieux*, these texts demonstrate the power of the creative word to promote a new culture of peace based on intercultural dialogue and encounters.

The rhetoric of war is largely built upon discursive practices that seek to legitimise violence: the necessity of conflict, for instance, is one of History's most enduring and resonating myths, as is the notion of war as a natural process, notwithstanding the fact that what one calls cruelty, another calls justice[1]. Men have engaged in 'holy' and 'preventive' wars; they have introduced the concept of 'a just war', which is fought to resist armed aggression (Walzer 1977: ix), and more recently have adopted the expression 'War of Words' to define a novel way of carrying out, recounting and speaking of wars. Undoubtedly, language plays a crucial role in popular constructions of (armed) conflict, whereas the implications of language use in peace-making processes remain largely underestimated[2]. Faced with the culture of war and with political and ethnic intransigence, literature and the creative word can construct a rhetoric of peace which engages both writers and readers in a moral and intellectual interrogation of conflict and war and their consequences. What follows focuses on a selection of texts by Anglophone 'active pacifist'[3] writers that do not simply explain or interpret conflict but rather pose questions as to its emergence and manifestations in language, while also interpreting the way violence should or should not have occurred at a particular point in time. Although from different historical and cultural contexts, this paper contends that Nancy Cunard, Carole Satyamurti and Frank McGuinness write of peace out of conflict; they use language to promote a new, alternative culture of peace that is based on intercultural encounters and dialogue. Cunard exposes the brutality and deceit of war which she experienced in the late 1930s. Satyamurti looks at the Bosnian conflict and reflects on the ways in which war is a social construct that legitimises discriminatory attitudes as well as creating often irreparable cultural fractures. McGuinness uses myth to expose the limits and faults of war discourses as he reflects on how language shapes reality and makes (armed) aggression sound almost just.

Born in 1896, Nancy Cunard was a key figure in the Western cultural scene of the first half of the twentieth century. She became the elegant muse of Man Ray, a fashion icon who was involved in several controversial love affairs. More important, for the present purposes is her work as an activist, a journalist, a translator and a poet. Cunard dedicated

[1] For the demythologisation of the necessity of conflict see Norberto Bobbio (1984: 29-98); the second part of the sentence recalls Hobbes's view that 'One calls cruelty what another justice', cited in Walzer (1977: 11).

[2] Peace is often defined generically in relation to and as opposed to war and conflict, but it clearly does not represent simply the absence or the negation of war. Peace rather coincides with a condition of political and social stability, and a lasting culture of peace begins with language and with a re-definition of peace in terms of a shared value and a good. Cfr. Norberto Bobbio's reflections on these aspects in *Il problema della guerra e le vie della pace* (1984: 121; 125-127); essays by Giuseppe Prestipino, Bernard Bourgeois, and Domenico Jervolino in *Guerra e Pace*, edited by G. Prestipino (respectively, pp. 9-28; 67-82; 283-292).

[3] The notion of active pacifism, as opposed to passive pacifism, is owing to Bobbio's definition (1984: 56, 138-139) and to the work of the Italian philosopher Giulio Girardi on peace and revolutionary culture (cfr. Jervolino, in Prestipino 2004: 289, 291).

her life and wealth to numerous radical causes in the hope of establishing a just world free of racial discrimination and without totalitarian forms of power. Today she is known primarily for the vast *Negro Anthology* (1934) and for the pamphlet "Authors take sides on the Spanish War"[4], but she also wrote poetry, published in four volumes between 1921 and 1925. In 1943 she began organising her poetic *oeuvre* into a collection, a task completed in 2005 by John Lucas under the auspices of the Bodleian Library, where the typescripts are currently housed. The thirty-five poems in the volume look at war or scenarios in-between wars[5], providing accounts of different (armed) conflicts observed from within. The poetic 'I' is always a witness to violence and speaks from the frontline, from the trenches, from the street; what readers hear is the voice of despair and rage, raised from amidst the mayhem. War shatters people's confidence and trust, Cunard observes in a poem entitled "Tell it Glen" (1934), in which she denounces those who say that "The world is beautiful" because "they lie", and "life is a swathe of pain" (Cunard 2005: 41). A deep sense of betrayal haunts these lines, turning the poem into a call to understand "the cruel march of history" (Cunard 2005: 41). Cunard crafts a grammar that is designed to make sense of violence while also facilitating dialogue between opponents. To such purpose she often relies on the use of interrogative clauses, as is the case with a poem entitled "Yes, it is Spain", whose opening stanza is worth considering:

> What is a bomb?
> Something I can't yet believe.
> What is a tomb?
> Something I can't yet see.
> And what is a wound in its wounding
> and the shot cutting a vein and the blood coming
> Out of an eye, say, stabbed – are these things too for me? (Cunard 2005: 45).

"Yes, it is Spain" was written in 1937 – the same year as "Authors take sides" – in response to W. H. Auden's "Spain", based on his personal experience of the Spanish Civil War (Qwipp 2013: 171-187). In the poem, Cunard questions the reality of war and exposes its brutality: war is a bloody affair that 'wounds', 'shoots', 'stabs' and spares no one, not the innocent (who can't yet believe) nor the young (who can't see their tomb). "These things" (line 7) evoke images of an armed conflict that Cunard witnessed as a journalist and which

[4] Published in the *Left Review* in 1937, the pamphlet was prompted by the threat of absolutist powers and a deep-felt preoccupation with the atmosphere of terror across the Continent on the part of a group of intellectuals who addressed "writers and poets from England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales" and posed the following questions: "Are you for or against the legal government and the people of Republican Spain? Are you for, or against, Franco and Fascism?". The *Left Review* was a socialist, anti-fascist, and anti-imperialist British journal closely allied with the Pro-Soviet Writers' International.

[5] "Tell it Glen", for instance, refers to the fifth National Hunger March of 1934, from Glasgow to London.

became one of her most engaging causes, probably because she regarded it as a prelude to another wider war [6] and felt that "the time for weeping was not over"[7]. She believed that artists had a moral responsibility to their current time – "Every man to his battle, child; this is yours, understand it" (Cunard 2005: 45-46). On a number of occasions, in both prose and poetry, she launches a poetic wake-up call for "artists in hesitations", that they might "become the act" and speak up against Franco's regime. Relying on a collective authoritative voice from the past, in "Yes, it is Spain" Cunard summons her favourite writers and painters – Bosch, Zola, Villon, Blake, Hogarth, Shakespeare, Chaucer, Marlowe, Goya, Heine, Daumier, Hugo and Dante – in an attempt to exhort her contemporaries to "learn from the day's ruins and tombs" and act against the ongoing war (Cunard 2005: 46). The question of agency, which is crucial to Cunard's activism and especially her pacifism, reflects a view of literature that is largely consonant with Raimon Panikkar's own depiction of it in terms of an *agora*, that is to say a field of equal opportunities, where difference is discussed in a constructive and creative way (Panikkar 2002: 44). Unlike the *arena*, a place where enemies fight with no particular aspiration for peace, the *agora* is a site of resistance in the active pacifist sense of the term. And similarly, Cunard's poem, which exposes "the 'foolery' and 'lying' of war, is the writer's place to say 'no' to the living-dead" (Cunard 2005: 46).

An analogous atmosphere dominates another poem, entitled "To Eat Today" (Cunard 2005: 47-48), which reiterates Cunard's ideological and aesthetic priorities, although, in this case, the language is not simply mimetic. It does not aim to represent an experience, but rather turns into the expression of that experience itself. "To Eat Today" was written on September 13th, 1938 during a Nazi air-raid in Barcelona; the rhythm reflects the immediacy of the events, and the verse is orally and visually pungent. An eye witness to that raid, the poetic 'I' reads in a newspaper (first stanza), the "codicils and the dashes along the great maniac speech" pronounced by Hitler in Nüremberg. The speaker then poses an evidently rhetorical question: "Is the mark worth the bomb?"

She is "sitting down to lunch" in a hotel when the air-raid strikes, unexpectedly, and kills "a woman … four children outside, with the house, and the pregnant cat … five mouths less to feed today" (47). The reaction is a surreal address to the pilot who has just dropped the bomb:

> I wonder – do you eat before you do these things?
> …
> Are you sitting at mess now saying "Visibility, medium"
> … I wonder –

[6] "You think this is something new? No, *this too* becomes Spain" (emphasis added, Cunard 2005: 45). See also the line, "Another country arming, another and another behind it", in "To Eat Today" (Cunard 2005: 47).
[7] Cunard, cited in Gordon 2007: 223, 224.

> Or highing it yet on the home-run to Mallorca,
> Cold at 10,000 up, cursing a jammed release… (Cunard 2005: 47).

The attack disrupts "the usual street of man's middle day", its contingency affects all, however differently. In an atmosphere of strange intimacy with the protagonists, the reader hears the voice of the pilot from above: "Give it 'em, *puta Madonna*, here over Arenys – / Per Bacco, it's nearly two - bloody sandwich it's made down there - / Aren't we going to eat today, *teniente*? Te-niente?" (Cunard 2005: 48).

War deprives everyone of food and its lack leads to death. In the poem's present, the basic need to eat[8] brings together two worlds, and on that day nobody eats: the people in the street die, the poet stops having lunch, while the "driver in the clouds" does not know whether *he* is going to *get anything to eat* – *te-*niente – or risk his life in this war. The inclusion of Spanish-sounding phrases adds to the chaos: it is a rather efficacious poetic device that is deliberately disorienting for the English-speaking reader, who, in Jane Dowson's words, "might otherwise have some psychological immunity to the images of the suffering" (Dowson: 53). Both the pace and tone of the poem contribute to a disturbing depiction of the conflict, and chaos is echoed in the man's curses and in the 'jammed release' of words. On the page, the pilot's speech is marked with codicils and dashes as is Hitler's manic speech (first stanza), his words are as heavy and devastating as his bombs. This analogy can hardly be ignored by the reader, and it is precisely this type of response that Cunard pursues and which is crucial to her pacifism. Indeed, a major preoccupation of pacifist writings lies with the risk of people becoming "comfortably numb" when immune to violence, somehow entranced by the alluring rhetoric of war. Alert to the danger of a sanitised war, Cunard seeks to draw her readers into the world of her poems and turns them into bystanders; no longer innocent nor placed outside the logic of conflict, the recipients of her message are expected to take sides – like the authors in her pamphlet – and face yet another taxing question: "Are you for or against this?"

Participation is fundamental to peace building, and dialogue plays a primary role in the process because it enables contact with the Other, even if only imaginatively. In this respect a poem entitled "Striking Distance" by Carole Satyamurti (born 1939) is a good example of the workings of contemporary war rhetoric. Written in 1991 and published three years later in the eponymous collection, "Striking Distance" is chiefly concerned with the, then current, Bosnian conflict. A poet, a sociologist and a translator based in London, Satyamurti observes the effects of that war and its consequences for ordinary people in their everyday lives, reflecting on the need for mutual and equal recognition to attain peace. The striking distance of the title is a relatively small gap of just nine inches

[8] The emphasis on food is not accidental: the conflict caused an appalling lack of provisions, and Cunard committed herself to a food campaign in war-stricken areas at the time. In the poem, food signifies both the pleasure**s** of sharing (gathering at the table) and the need to eat as a matter of survival.

between neighbours and friends, which grows inexorably wide as people are separated by the conflict. War is evidently "a social creation" (Walzer 1977: 24) that breeds hatred, intolerance, and more dangerously in-difference, a lack of concern and respect for ethnic difference. As with Cunard, Satyamurti's poem deploys interrogative clauses to denounce intolerant attitudes and feelings, and to elicit the intercultural encounter through dialogue. As a result, the reader becomes a witness to violence, engaged in a process that equally aims at creating peace out of conflict.

"Striking Distance" begins with a question, and similarly ends with a question. A long sequence of interrogative clauses runs across the page and through the four stanzas of the poem, all of them demanding answers:

> Was there one moment when the woman
> Who's always lived next door turned stranger
> To you? In a time of fearful weather
> Did the way she laughed, or shook out her mats
> Make you suddenly feel as though
> She had been nursing a dark side to her difference,
> And bring that word, in a bitter rush
> To the back of the throat – *Croat*/*Muslim*/
> *Serb* – the name, barbed, ripping
> Its neat solution through common ground?
>
> Or has she acquired an alien patina
> Day by uneasy day, unnoticed
> As fall-out from a remote explosion?
> …
>
> Do you sometimes think, she could be you,
> The woman who's trying to be invisible?
> Do you have to betray those old complicities
> Money, worries, sick children, men?
> …
> One morning will you ignore her greeting
> And think you see a strange twist to her smile
> For how could she not, then, be strange to herself
> (this woman who lives nine inches away)
> In the inner place where she'd felt she belonged,
> Which, now, she'll return to obsessively
> As a tongue tries to limit a secret sore?
> And as they drive her away, will her face
> Be unfamiliar, her voice, bearable:
> A woman crying from a long way off? (Satyamurti 1991: 477-478).

The need for responses and for a dialectical exchange requires "bravery" (line 6, third stanza) on the part of the protagonist and it will work only when it is borne out of reciprocal trust. References to trust and the lack of it are pertinent and eloquent: in line 6, in the first stanza, a neighbour sees that there is "a dark side" to the Other and fears her "betrayal" (line 3, third stanza). The poem presents strong images of hostility and cultural fracture that are striking in their dynamics and relentless in their outcome. Difference turns into in-difference when the woman "next door" becomes a stranger (first stanza), "acquires an alien patina" and her words are an "irritant" (second stanza); she tries to be "invisible" (third stanza), and finally turns "unfamiliar" (fourth stanza). Here too, visual and especially aural elements combine to articulate the tension, alliteration, repetition and accents ultimately shaping the poem's distinctive sectarian idiom. In the second stanza,

> She uses their word for water-melon
> as usual, but now it's an irritant
> You mimic to ugliness in your head,
> Surprising yourself in a savage pleasure (Satyamurti 1991: 478).

The sequences *Croat*/*Muslim*/*Serb* (first stanza) and *Muslim*/*Serb*/*Croat* (second stanza) are spelt as one single word on the page, morphologically reflecting the effacement of differences between three ethnic groups seen essentially as one, and at the same time 'alien', 'strange' and 'sinister' Other. In the stanza that follows, they turn into generic "people/Serbs/Muslims/Croats", and in the end "*This'* woman … is strange to herself", an exile whose voice is heard as "they drive her away" and she "cries a long way off" (fourth stanza). On the other side of the political divide, nine inches away, that woman is kept and watched at a distance while driven away. Her voice ("she cries") contrasts with the silence of her onlooker, a condition shared by readers too as they witness the brutal eviction and become involved in the experience, finally partaking in a process that aims to overcome the boundaries of one's culture in order to renegotiate distances. Dialogue – the breaking up of passive silence – is a viable way to a real intercultural encounter (Panikkar 2002: 49), and it is in these terms that Satyamurti's poem exposes and weakens dominant war discourse.

In a similarly sympathetic and engaged manner, Frank McGuinness's play *Hecuba* (2004) can be read as an exploration of the way language, especially verbal language, is used to consolidate conflict. Moreover, it also considers how disparate groups can construct a shared sensibility and a shared place of peace[9]. Born in 1953, McGuinness adds

[9] This is Frank McGuinness' second 'Greek play'. It follows *Sophocles' Electra* (1998), and is followed by *Sophocles' Oedipus* (2008), and *Euripides' Helen* (2009). For a comparative study of these adaptations see Salis 2014: 145-160.

to a long list of Irish writers who have turned to classical myth in order to deal not only with their homeland's history of violence, but also with the challenges of the contemporary, globalised post-national world. Myth has long provided artists with a special grammar to understand the unknown in cultures across the world, and it has proved remarkable in the Irish case. In McGuinness' reworking of Euripides' *Hecuba*, myth becomes a powerful means of posing the moral question of a 'just war' and the notion of "restraint of conflict as the beginning of peace" (Walzer 1977: 11).

The play is set in the aftermath of the Trojan war, and Hecuba, the Queen of Troy, is faced with the consequences of defeat – she has lost her sons and husband, her country, her home, her freedom and royal status. War spares her no pain, not even now that the aggression is over because the ghost of Achilles demands sacrifice: Polyxena, Hecuba's daughter, is to be immolated at his behest. Her youngest son, whom she believes to be safe in Thrace, has been killed by his host, her friend, the Thracian, Polymestor. The violence that she has suffered is morally indefensible to the point that in the play her revenge is legitimised. Indeed, Hecuba's emotional response and resolve to return evil for evil are both justified: "If you pay no penalty nor punishment", she says, "there is no justice among men – no justice" (39). Faced with the horror of Polymestor's blinding and the slaughter of his children, the audience somehow sympathise with the Trojan Queen and come to think that her war must be a just war. The question can be posed as to playwright's take on violence. In other words, if McGuinness does not condemn Hecuba's act of violence, does that mean that, for him, a war can be just, justified, justifiable? And as an audience, what are we to make of it?

McGuinness remains faithful to Euripides' plot but alters the language so as to modernise it and make it essential, simple in its syntax and vocabulary, with few descriptions and short dialogues. Characters speak a very basic idiom, an all-too-familiar war talk which is exemplified in Polymestor's words:

> Polymestor: I will wreck this place
> You will feel the power of my fists
> …
> Accursed dirt
> Filth of Troy
> Where do you snout,
> Pigs in your pen
> Fearing my fierce anger? (McGuinness 2004: 49-51).

These barbarous words echo the kind of sectarian language spoken by paramilitaries and politicians in Ireland (local expressions and accents are used strategically in performance), but it is a language that would strike a chord also with non-Irish audiences who watched the news of the war in Iraq and heard analogous talks in the media in September 2004,

when the play opened in London (produced by the Donmar Warehouse Theatre Company, it featured a memorial wall on the stage with names of the 9/11 victims and the victims of the Iraqi war)[10]. Thus, an overwhelming sense of hopelessness haunts the play: the war has ended but there is no peace. Neither the end of a war nor victory over an enemy can bring peace "automatically" (Panikkar 2002: 130, 108) for peace is built when and if there is a will to it and, especially, when and if there is no will to war. In the play, words are used to perpetrate violence and create divides, as with Satyamurti's poem above, but McGuinness' primary focus is on the legitimacy of aggression as reflected in the language, that is to say which dynamics lead to and ultimately justify the use of violence. A look at two sections will help explore both aspects in detail. At the start of the play Hecuba asks Odysseus to return her a favour and begs him to spare her daughter's life (McGuinness 2004: 11-20). The Greek responds that *he will save her life*, as she once saved his, *but*…

O: But I have said this all along…
Troy is now ours –
And all in it.
Achilles died for Greece –
Died bravely, died nobly.
Lady, he must be honoured

It is the curse of most states
They make no distinction
Between the strong and the spineless.
…
Say there's another war,
Another gathering of the men –
Will we fight?
Would we prefer to live?
What point dying to be dishonoured?
…
Endure what is yours to endure.
…

[10] According to Jonathan Kent, who directed the play in London, it would be a mistake "to set the action explicitly outside Basra or Baghdad [but] it would also be a sign of failure if the play didn't bring Iraq to mind" (Kent 2004). When *Hecuba* was performed in Dundee, the audience were "invited onto the stage-set seating as radio recordings of the 2003 Iraq war and the imitated tone of George W. Bush crackle overhead" (Donaldson 2013). During rehearsal, another episode of violence occurred which influenced both the performance and its reception. This was the massacre of innocent children and teachers in an elementary school in Beslan. Again, the question of the necessity of war was inevitable, and the play denounced also the madness of that seemingly unnecessary aggression.

You are barbarians.
You don't respect your own dead.
You forget who your friends were.
Is it a wonder Greece thrives,
While *you get what you deserve*? (McGuinness 2004: 16-17, emphasis added).

Odysseus' remorseless logic requires nothing less than Polyxena's death and there is no arguing against this. And since Troy "is now ours", the exchange does not take place on equal grounds – that final question is evidently rhetorical because it does not open but rather it shuts dialogue. For Odysseus, Achilles' death and the Greek victory demand sacrifice, literally legitimising aggression even though the war has ended. The man fails to distinguish between the *jus ad bellum* (justice of war) and the *jus in bello* (justice in war) in that he fails to acknowledge the ideological and moral confines of a just war[11]. Therefore, he denies Hecuba something that she is entitled to because, in his view, she deserves what she gets.

The Queen then seeks Agamemnon's help and asks him to delay Polyxena's funeral, so that brother and sister can be buried together. This time an encounter of some sort occurs between the Trojan woman and the Greek warrior:

A: How can women win against men?
H: Who can stand against a tribe
wild tribe of wise women?
A: Wild, yes, but women cannot kill –
I believe that.
H: Why believe that?
Women have slaughtered
Their own sons.
They have taught men
A murderous lesson… (McGuinness 2004: 41-42).

In the end, as it were, the two agree to disagree. Agamemnon, who is not fully persuaded by Hecuba's argument, acknowledges the woman's misfortunes and acts as a judge in her confrontation against Polymestor. Unlike the previous exchange with Odysseus, this one occurs in an *agora* type of context because Agamemnon listens to Hecuba's plea and finally

[11] "*Jus ad bellum* requires us to make judgements about aggression and self-defence; *jus in bello* about the observance and violation of the customary and positive rules of engagement. The two … are logically independent. It is perfectly possible for a just war to be fought in strict accordance with the rules … It is a crime to commit aggression, but aggressive war is a rule-governed activity. It is right to resist aggression, but the resistance is subject to moral (and legal) restraint" (Walzer 1977: 21).

grants that the traitor be punished (63)[12]. Polymestor pays for an act, his betrayal, that is beyond the necessities of war, but at the same time he is made to pay for endorsing a distorted view of war that admits reprisal[13]. Reprisal is different from revenge because it does not *return* evil but rather repeats it. Reprisal, in other words, affects essentially innocent people, and blood that is thus spilt calls for more blood. In this way peace is given no chance, and indeed the play ends *not* in peace; despite Agamemnon's wish that "May we have peace there in our homes, / now that the war is over" (63), *Hecuba* ends in the tragic realisation of what lies ahead for the women of Troy: "Begin our lives as slaves. / Fate is fate" (63). These women survive the massacre but their future is tainted; those who dissent die as free women, and like Polyxena show that their "worth is in their words" (Chorus). There is no winning a war, and everyone is a loser for everyone suffers in a conflict. The rhetoric of war is a "heap of empty words" and Good (capital letter) "speaks for itself", writes McGuinness, who knows all too well that conflict is often inevitable and for some also desirable.

To conclude, the authors considered in this study write about peace out of conflict situations in that they share an analogous view of literature as a site in which the logic and the rhetoric of war can be interrogated, exposed and eventually defied. In such terms, Nancy Cunard, Carole Satyamurti and Frank McGuinness act as pacifist writers who rely on the power of words to be creative, demanding, revolutionary, responsible, co-operative, and ultimately dialogic. Cunard pursues resistance to the foolery of a war she actually witnessed, and whose reality and brutality she spelt out in her poems. Satyamurti shows how (armed) conflicts are social constructs that legitimise discriminatory attitudes, and everyone, including those who remain silent and observe from afar, play their part in creating and widening cultural fractures. Similarly, McGuinness reflects on ways in which language shapes the contours of reality to the point of legitimising violence. His rewriting of the Hecuba myth exposes the limits and faults of current war discourse, ending in a tragic realisation that conflict is necessary often because it is thus willed. The primary obstacle to a culture of peace is the will to war, and in the face of it the texts presented here show how the politics of confrontation may also give way to the politics of encounter. This process eventually dismantles the myth of war as a necessity of life. Linguistically, the use

[12] Agamemnon's reasons are questionable, of course, and indeed he seems to cooperate more for his own sake than for Hecuba's ("I don't wish to be so accused", he says). His words to the Trojan queen reveal a moral dilemma – is Hecuba innocent, or is she not? – that is promptly dismissed only because Polymestor is considered to be more guilty:

> A: I dislike passing judgement /On the errors of others,
> But … I can't walk away from it. /That would not be correct.
> … If I pronounce you [Polymestor] innocent, / I would be of the guilty party.
> *I don't wish to be so accused*. (59, emphasis added)

[13] Cursing Agamemnon and foreseeing his bloody end, the Thracian king reveals that "That man's wife (Clytemnestra) will raise an axe, she will kill Agamemnon" (McGuinness 2004: 62).

of interrogative clauses, common to the poems and the play referred to, is functional to eliciting dialogue across enemy lines as well as engaging readers, both morally and intellectually: their participation is indispensable to the consolatory role of literature and to its power to create a new culture of peace.

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