What Does Peace Literature Do? An Introduction to the Genre and its Criticism

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The concepts of the genre of peace literature and its criticism are not static. Rather than try to define peace literature, it is more productive to ask what peace literature does and can do, as this leads to opportunities for thought and action. Writers seldom set out deliberately to write peace literature; it is the critics who apply this label, albeit infrequently. Self-aware "peace writers," "peace literature scholars," or "peace literature critics" are rare. The critical strategies most effective for peace literature differ from those for other genres (such as short stories, tragedies, or sonnets) that are deliberately chosen by their writers, and whose critics can thus draw upon an established corpus and frame of reference. The critical strategies for peace literature consider readers to be active agents in the production of meaning, and so they fall within the tradition of reader response criticism in a broader and more holistic sense than is commonly understood; this includes not only semantics, cognition, and affect but, above all, behaviour.¹

Peace literature is not defined by the writer's identity in the sense of women's, ethnic, or gay literature as is prevalent in literary studies today, even though the writers of peace literature inevitably fall into one or more of these identity categories. No single identity, whether hegemonic or subversive, can monopolise the genre or criticism of peace literature as it is proposed here, as this would negate an important aspect of what peace literature does and can do, namely, *create unity in diversity*. This is not to say that any text or group of texts can be reframed as "peace literature," as there are certain characteristics of this genus that preclude overinclusion. Peace literature texts differ from those that negate or suppress identity traits, such as "national" literatures suppressing "national languages." Imagine trying to name and understand a dynamically evolving genus through new techniques of observation, analysis, and interpretation; in the same way, it

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is more productive to ask what peace literature does and can do rather than what it is.

The difficulties and possibilities inherent in understanding peace, while considering its wide range of historical contexts and actors, are addressed in various places, including this author's Peace: A World History.² The criticism of peace literature, whether as a genre or an individual text, requires a heightened historical awareness. This excludes a purely formalist approach, as much of what peace literature does and can do is based in contextual and re-contextual play; ignoring history would render this invisible and thus impotent. For example, we cannot understand the biting satire of Aristophanes' play Peace, arguably the first known peace literature text in the Western canon, without understanding Ancient Athenian foreign policy. Likewise, the radical reinterpretation of Homer's epics as anti-war literature (akin but not identical to peace literature proper) requires new critical strategies that focus simultaneously on the text, the contexts of its production, and the contexts of its consumption, particularly given the millennia of critical traditions that emphasize features antithetical to this reinterpretation. This is not to say that a text's formal qualities are irrelevant; on the contrary, these are what often invoke, evoke, and revoke the contexts in question, and so they must also be (re)examined in the light of what peace literature does and can do.

This (re)examination of the traits of both canonical and marginal literary works as they constitute "peace literature" as a genre is a great challenge. However, we believe this collection of articles exploring peace literature shows that this work is worthwhile. Making more dedicated resources available to practitioners in the field is, literally, a way to save and institute peace in its diversity by integrating cultural studies and critical theory into already erudite, practical conflict resolution and peace studies.³ The study of peace literature includes research from political and social sciences, biology, psychology, economics, law, cultural and peace studies, and literary studies, to name a few. This study and pedagogy of peace literature offer not only interdisciplinarity; they also offer advances in each discipline with which they engage. The problems with and possibilities for exploring peace literature are addressed here through points of connection in the genre and its criticism, using three dynamic paradigms through which encounters with peace literature can be made pragmatically didactic in an empowering sense.4 These three paradigms are individual peace (how peace is made and maintained within persons), social peace (how peace is made and maintained within groups), and collective peace (how peace is made and maintained between groups). Comparative literature approaches are thus integral to the criticism of peace literature. Each of these three paradigms serves as a lens through which texts can be examined; signs and the systems in which they signify (including living contexts) are the primary concern of the genre of peace literature and its criticism. In contrast, life outside these signs and their systems is the domain of the wider fields of peace research such as nonviolence, conflict resolution, and geopolitical and security studies. Behaviour based on the understanding of texts as peace literature can serve as a bridge between these disciplines, while also transforming them into areas of expertise inseparable from the advancement of peace in its diversity.

There is some overlap between these areas, and we need not make strict distinctions between them. Peace literature, even in its current infant state. cannot exist independently of other fields of research, from local and global environments to local and global policies. We must move away from critical attention to yet another constructed genus whose relationships and characteristics are externally defined. We are aspiring to a newly reconstructed genius whose goals are established through relationships and singularities aimed at in-forming the present and the future. There is much to gain and to learn, and this collection is a step in that direction. Effective critical strategies can take us from the *genus of* to the *genius in* peace literature, not in the exceptional sense, but in the etymological one: that which exemplifies a time and place in its particulars, to the point of converging with the universal.⁵ Postmodern criticism tends to focus on the particulars at the expense of the universal. This is invaluable analytically but ineffective on the ground without synthesis. Universality—in actualities or aspirations—is the quality shared by what used to be called "great literature," "world literature," or "canonical literature," and is what peace literature, its study, and its pedagogy seek to reclaim, with the addition of diversity. Universality integrated with diversity engenders unity.

"THE" GENRE OF PEACE LITERATURE

Criticism of peace literature as a genre requires a clear understanding of the meaning of genre, as well as how this meaning can be applied to texts that *become* "peace literature" through the process of this genre criticism and beyond. Competing or complementary meanings of genre have been

constructed through centuries of inquiry, and are not always self-evident. A clear understanding of genre leads us to a question often asked by critics of their analyses (thus turning them into interpretations), but only rarely asked of critics' activities as a whole themselves: *So what*? That is, what relevance do these activities have for people outside "communities of interest" or "interpretive communities," regardless of their legitimacy? Three important genre theorists have advanced premises that can help us address this question: Aristotle in Ancient Greece, Mikhail Bahktin in Soviet Russia, and Carolyn Miller in the Cold War era United States. When considered together, their calls for reconceptualizations of genre *for* peace literature are more promising than when considered separately. This discussion of what constitutes a genre of peace literature underlies our following discussion of the criticism of peace literature.

Aristotle's understanding of genre includes two defining elements: identifiable, distinguishing formal traits (such as poetic meter) and structural traits (such as tragedic or comedic theatrical progressions).⁶ In this sense, Aristotle would not recognise peace literature as a genre. The presence of several formal genre criticisms in this collection, like Constanza López-Baquero's article on South American women's nonfiction testimonial writing, "Razones de vida by Vera Grabe: Pro-Peace Narrative or the Search for Memory," demonstrates the impossibility of relying solely on formal and structural traits when identifying and discussing peace literature as a genre, as the genre's characteristics work both within and beyond these traits. In peace literature, content and process are paramount, and thus take precedence over formal and structural traits. The discussion of collocation below elaborates on this point. López-Baquero notes that "Razones de vida, together with other recent testimonial narratives that have emerged in the country, forms a new literature that dialogues, transforms, and searches for memory, but most importantly gives women a place in the reconfiguration of Colombia". Only in conjunction with this collection's other articles, however, can Lopez's piece make this concerted point about peace literature being strictly non-formalist, placing function above form.

In another sense, however, peace literature is undoubtedly an Aristotelian genre because it makes full use of mimesis ("representation"), a ubiquitous and multifaceted literary device which, given established sets of cultural norms, elicits more or less predictable ethical and affective reader responses. Tragedy, for Aristotle, represents humans as "better" than we are,

so that their trials and tribulations evoke pity and fear. Comedy, in contrast, represents humans as "worse" than we are, so that their adventures evoke ridicule and laughter. With this in mind, peace literature often takes on the complexities of tragicomedy à la Samuel Beckett, in which humans are represented "as" we are, so that our actualities evoke *empathy*. There are two ways in which this empathy is aroused. First, as an Aristotelian genre, peace literature elicits an *empathic identification* between readers, writers, contents, and contexts beyond identitarianism, because it can and does happen across identities (that is, in diversities). Second, peace literature can facilitate empathic ascription, by which writers and readers become able to examine their intellectual and affective preconceptions with regard to content, contexts, and correlates. In the words of Hans-Georg Gadamer in Truth and Method, describing what Aristotle means by the enigmatic term *catharsis*: "To see that 'this is how it is' is a kind of self-knowledge for the spectator, who emerges with new insight from the illusions in which he [or she], like everyone else, lives."9 It is this cathartic effect that makes peace literature an Aristotelian genre.

For Bakhtin, representation is at the core of genre recognition and analysis, but he has in mind less the representation of humans themselves than of their speech patterns, which themselves represent social statuses and relations. 10 Peace literature is thus determined by speech patterns as genres, as they are extensions of wider sociological trends. The formal characteristics of a text, such as the use of slang or technical jargon, allow critics and audiences to recognize the speech patterns through which the meanings of messages can be understood. These speech patterns, in turn, reflect the wider social realities through we can interpret characters, scenes, objects, etc., and their treatment by authors. In Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination*, epics and novels represent antithetical social conditions. Epics represent the conditions of the hallowed past where authoritative, authentic, and aesthetic values are centrally and hierarchically determined, and disseminated downwards and outwards. In contrast, novels represent the conditions of the harrowed present where everything, even representation itself, is contestable, and where these contestations seep from periphery to centre and from the grassroots upwards, rejuvenatingly, reinforcing establishments, or subversively. In Bakhtinian terms, the genre of peace literature paradoxically belongs to what has elsewhere been called epic novels, which explore representational tensions between epics and novels to create syntheses and synergies that would not be achievable otherwise.11

For Miller, a "rhetorically sound definition of genre must be centered not on the substance or the form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish."12 This notion opens up the genre of peace literature to a pragmatic approach, both philosophically and linguistically. Philosophically, Miller calls genres "a form of social knowledge—a mutual construing of objects, events, interests and purposes that not only links them but makes them what they are: an objectified social need." In our case, this social need is peace. Linguistically, genre as social action evokes the field of pragmatics, which focuses on how contextual conditions influence the interpretation of language. In this collection, Patrick Henry and Richard Middleton-Kaplan, in "Teaching Peace," are motivated by a firm and demonstrable belief in the value of teaching peace. They seek to reverse that decline in peace education by teaching these classes and showing students models of nonviolent activists for peace and social justice. They do this by focusing "almost exclusively on non-fiction writing, and . . . therefore employ an expanded definition of literature that includes essays, speeches, letters, and life writing."13 Their compelling pedagogy of peace literature is based on understanding the context as much as the content of the works they examine with students. Henry and Middleton-Kaplan's conception of social action should not be confused with the kind of "committed" social action in existential or socialist senses that Iean Paul Sartre had in mind in What is Literature? (discussed below). Evoking feelings of disgust at violence and warfare, and creating more empathy with nonviolent victims than with hero aggressors, are both teacher and writer skills—but they should not be confused with the full potential of what peace literature does and can do.

The term "peace literature" is also used to refer to the general body of written work of peace research and propaganda. This does not detract from its use in reference to literary works specifically, but the ambiguity thus created does constructively call each into question. Peace literature as tragicomedic, doubly empathic and cathartic; as active in the limbic discursive spaces between epics and novels; as social acts that are pragmatic both philosophically and linguistically—these in no way disregard or discount the extensive and growing body of "peace literature" embodied more broadly in scholarly articles, journalistic articles, books, blog posts, Tweets, interviews, videocasts, and so on. Peace literature as a genre does not rest upon formal or structural traits; it does, however, rest upon the consistent agreement and

recognition of the *people* who produce, consume, discuss, and act upon that corpus.

So what? To affirm that a genre depends less on texts than on the people who engage with them is to begin to understand what it means to ask what peace literature does and can do. This formulation intends to take into account Jacques Derrida's proposition that individual works of literature do not belong to, but rather participate in, a given genre. ¹⁴ To ask what peace literature, as a genre, does and can do is to acknowledge that it is primarily determined not by its formal, structural, or discursive marks, but by substantive ones that can be explored and explained by criticism of the genre. We cannot thus speak definitively of "the" genre of peace literature, despite the fact that it is as old as literature itself, because peace literature as a genre is determined not by a formal structure but by the ways in which readers do and do not interact with it.

CRITICIZING PEACE LITERATURE: THE POWERS OF COLLOCATION

"Committed literature," as proposed by Sartre, arose in France in the wake of World War Two. 15 Of relevance here is that Sartre saw literature as acting upon the world, not only in the strict sense of Miller's social act, but in a much wider sense as having actual consequences in the "real" (that is, non-representational) world. Sartre thus believed that authors must assume what we today would call social responsibility, not only for their words, but also for these extended repercussions. Noting that the war did almost nothing to alleviate oppression and poverty worldwide, Sartre asserted that because we live in "a society based on violence," authors (and, by implication, readers and critics) have two choices. One is to be complicit in that violence by remaining silent about it; the other, more problematic if properly understood, is to offer what he calls "counter-violence": verbal (pseudo?) violence opposing "real" violence to undo it by exposure, dissent, or other means. Counter-violent writing is not nonviolent but, paradoxically, a particular kind of violence directed at the violence of our society.

In a Sartrean frame, peace literature and especially its criticism become counter-counter-violence; that is, they are wholly nonviolent when considered through the paradigmatic prisms of individual, social, and collective peace. Fetishizing the "subvert for subversion's sake" has no place in peace literature. Genre criticism is only one approach to peace literature, and has

limited usefulness in isolation from other forms of criticism. Like Bakhtin, Sartre sees an elemental difference between the discourses of prose and poetry, if also a different difference. Prose, being essentially representational for Sartre, can be counter-violent in ways poetry, being nonrepresentational for him, cannot. In the kind of criticism we are proposing for peace literature, collocation (rather than representation) becomes the strongest linguistic force available to peace literati. As we earlier moved from genus to genius, we are now on a trajectory from mimesis to "memesis." In this collection, Marilène Haroux's "Attempting the Impossible: Romain Rolland's Pacifism and Crisis in his Personal Diary and the Novel *Clerambault*" makes this trajectory clear through discussing the tensions between self-representation in the novel and self-expression in the diary of this pacifist French leader in World War One: the mimesis of the former resonates only partially with the memesis (as defined below) of the latter.

Effective peace literature critics, as in any field, are able not only to provide new readings of textual contents, but also to provide new contexts in which even old readings can become new. For example, when Jesus contextually not yet Christ—gives the Sermon on the Mount and proclaims "blessed are the peacemakers," he is speaking directly to the reader in that crowd, although that awareness may only come later. Reading the passage to one's self, reading it out loud in congregation, disassembling and reassembling it in a seminar, heatedly debating it in a bar or café, or explaining it to someone of a different religious tradition—each engagement provides, in Gadamer's terms, new insights. This can apply to key passages from all belief systems, including secular ones like sciences. There is, insists Gadamer, an often unacknowledged hallmark of the cathartic dimension of peace literature that its criticism seeks to draw out: new insights are not only about texts in different contexts, but about the persons and the texts in different contexts, then about the persons without the texts in different contexts in which the texts manifest themselves through the persons. These ripple effects are perhaps most obvious in religious, legal, and other prescriptive texts, but are also present to varying extents in declarations, manifestos, constitutions, laws, poems, novels, and theatre. A prime example of this, drawn from American literature, is Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin. Individual, social, and collective critical categories are used in an attempt to understand and inform as much experience as possible without sacrificing precision.

Religious texts offer a unique lens onto specific criticism of peace literature, starting with the fact that so many diverse texts are widely recognized as belonging to a particular corpus. Unlike the Sermon on the Mount, the five daily prayers of Islam are not a "performance," as is currently fashionable to claim, but an actual enactment of a text that becomes one's body and even one's soul if the reader or reciter believes it is so (Our'an, after all, translates as "recitation"), and vice versa to the point of rational irrationality. In such situations, if one can speak of criticism, it may begin with how to breathe, how to position one's body, or what to wear, as much as it may begin with how to pronounce the letter "a" or de-emphasize a rhyme. Individual criticism, then, is about understanding ourselves in a holistic sense in relations to texts, specifically and generally. The cognitive criticism that is gaining ground is only one piece of a large puzzle in which reading is a behaviour, and individual criticism is a behavioural science. 16 The goal of the individual criticism of peace literature is thus to be at, stay in, and reinstate peace with ourselves when it is breached; this sounds likes textual psychology or cognitive science because it is.

It is the peace literature critic's function to provide new insights into peace literature and those parts of world literature that may constitute peace literature. These critics, however, are not limited to providing new insights about the texts alone, but can explore insights that readers experience about themselves during and after the process of reading; this, of course, starts with how to read texts critically but in no way needs to stop there. Ezra Pound, an astute student and practitioner of literature, proposed that readings could be prescribed, in the pharmaceutical sense, to cure the ills of societies. Of course, this is done on a regular basis—"Did you read the latest research on solving problem X?"—but what Pound had in mind was for literary critics to act as prescribers, a socially conscious Oprah's book club if you will. Our purpose here is to extend this proposition to include curing the ills of individuals, groups, and collectives, to keeping them healthy, and to the hosts of other effects that reading (and only reading?) can achieve; the effect we are concerned with here is peace and all its contributing parts as achievable through and in literature. As Edward Dauterich writes in "Johnny Got His Gun and Working Class Students: Using Rhetorical Analysis to Intellectualise Pacifism" in this collection.

At the beginning of these classes, the greatest challenges are getting students to define violence, to see the motives for

violence, to examine and begin to construct theories of violence, and to recognise the rhetoric of violence and war that surrounds them in contemporary popular culture. By the conclusion of the course, I hope that their knowledge of violence can lead them to a critically constructive way of addressing both violent acts and violent rhetoric.¹⁷

All the articles in this collection make pragmatically clear the importance of using close textual analysis inside and outside classroom settings not only to better understand peace-related subject matter, but also how it relates to our own subjectivities and their objective causes.

Sociality is a precondition of collectivity, just as individuality is a precondition for sociality; these categories do not exist independently of each other, even if one may be emphasised for a given analysis or proposition. Socially, the criticism of religious texts (for example) can be done within a group of people who believe in those texts, within a group of people who believe in a different body of texts, or within a group of non-believers. The fact that we approach them as religious texts in-forms how we read before we even read the first word, whether or not we believe in them. This example of examining religious texts can be replaced with debating a piece of legislation, negotiating a contract, or debating how to interpret data, if these occur between two or more people. Some kinds of texts are less demanding, such as the spam and junk mail that clutters our minds and robs us of precious time. Other texts call upon us to make, break, maintain, create, reconsider, and otherwise relate to peace socially. Thomas Lynn, in "Catastrophe, Aftermath, Amnesia: Chinua Achebe's 'Civil Peace'" in this collection, shows that "Achebe rejects a partisan vision in the stories in favour of understanding" 18 the transformative effects of war and the human traits that emerge, but that partisanship was in effect collectivity construed as a society, which Lynn, as the critic, discusses perceptively.

Imagine (not hard to do) that a country is in crisis because its linguistic, ethnic, or cultural mix is shifting significantly, or because power- or resource-hungry leaders have exploited such differences to rationalize violence. Manipulating differences such as nationalism, racism, religionism, and other "isms" works because it reduces collectives to societies. It is thus no surprise that writers of peace literature and their critics seek to correct such misconstruals. The purpose of collective criticism, as distinct from individual criticism through which we learn about ourselves and social

criticism through which we learn about our groups in relation to given texts, is to learn about how two or more groups interact in relation to a given text, such as a trade treaty, a conflict-ending agreement, or a prenuptial agreement. Concomitantly, the collective criticism of peace literature seeks to understand a triad: the text, the groups, and peace in relation to each other. Kathleen Madigan in "Keeping the Peace in Senegal: Abdoulaye (Pape) Tall's 'Adélia' and Anne Piette's 'Commandos Insolites'" in this collection seeks to place Senegal in historical and political context, and then compare two short stories devoted to the theme of peace. Here, lines of demarcation in ethnic conflict or between villages become blurred as greater consciousness of the interconnectedness of the human family comes into focus. Pride of power becomes replaced by lyric humility and the art of creating stories of peacemaking.

In the same vein, Eckhard Kuhn-Osius's "Two German Voices on World War I: Andreas Latzko and Walter Flex" in this collection opens with "Pacifism as a movement suffers from the deplorable fact that the eagerness for war-making hardly ever stops in spite of all good arguments against it," and it ends with "The difference between the two books is hope and consolation. Flex offers plenty of both to the survivors while assimilating the war to traditional patterns of thinking. Latzko demands thinking, Flex offers consolation." Elex offers

So why is collocation so important to individual, social, collective, and other forms of peace literature criticism? Collocation is a sequence of words which co-occur more often than would be expected by chance; in other words, they are strongly associated with one another. For example, when we think of the word "kitchen," it is collocative to think of the words sink, cooking, and stove, but not meteor shower or automobile; if we add the word "women" to this collocation, we can begin to appreciate why collocation is a powerful critical tool in interpreting peace literature. Linguistically, the technical term for this is that one word "governs" the use of another; for example, the word "tea" governs the use of the adjective "strong" but not "powerful" for reasons that neither grammar nor grammatology can explain. When we think of peace, the most common collocations (determinable statistically in computational linguistics) include its opposites (such as war, conflict, and violence), its composites (such as security, plenty, prosperity, and wealth), and its processes (such as diplomacy, conflict resolution, and social development). A strong footing in collocation provides the widest pivot point to both writers and critics of peace literature. Memetics, an evolutionary approach to collocative meaning based on the unit of the "meme" as a replicable set of propositions or assumptions, may turn out to be the new saving-grace frontier for literary studies as a whole and is a fruitful starting point for the criticism of peace literature, as this collection makes clear.²¹

While postmodern critics often fetishize the pseudo-discovery of the unending "openness" of textual interpretation, they forget that openness is not in itself a quality with any pragmatic value. In fact, in many life-or-death situations, such as post-war treaty negotiations, it is precisely the ambiguity and openness postmodernists idealize that is most dangerous, as Immanuel Kant pointed out in his first articles of *Perpetual Peace*. It is in the specificity of interpretation, enabled but not limited by this openness, that the possibilities and pragmatisms of interpretive openness come one step closer to being actualities in their own right. The great postmodern insight into interpretation is to ask who is interpreting for whom; our insight here is, who is interpreting for whom *for what purpose*: peace.

ENDNOTES

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