

Aránzazu Usandizaga and Andrew Monnickendam, eds. 2007: *Back to Peace. Reconciliation and Retribution in the Postwar Period*. Notre Dame, Indiana: U of Notre Dame P. i-viii+ 312 pp. ISBN 978-0-268-04452-7.

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The interest in English speaking countries, in particular Great Britain and the United States, in issues related to the two world wars is made manifest in the profusion of novels, as well as historical and cultural studies, that are published week after week and granted the best-selling aisles in bookshops across both countries. Not only is the post-WW2 period taken as a watershed supposed to open a new historical and literary era, but also the two World Wars are being studied increasingly as the thematic source for fiction inspired on them. Novels based on the 1914-1945 period that have met with both critical and public accolades in the last couple of decades include Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow* (1991), Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy (1991–1995), Robert Harris's *Enigma* (1995), Anthony Beevor's *Stalingrad* (1998), Sebastian Faulks's *Birdsong* (1994) and *Charlotte Gray* (2000), Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989) and *When We Were Orphans* (2000), Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001), or William Boyd's *Restless* (2006). The selection, while obviously limited, does indicate the varied literary techniques, genres and themes that authors explore, from magical realism to historicism, spy-novel to biography. For the literary researcher, however, it is the different narrative techniques that attract the highest interest, since we encounter violent disruptions not only of characterisation and time-line but also of the narrative voice and even the very frame that separates fiction from reality.

Such narrative innovations and the sheer proliferation of novels whose background is mainly WW2 has led, in turn, to a profusion of literary studies specialising in the topic. To name but a few, DeCoste studies the "literary response" (2005: 3) to WW2 in the period between the closure of the conflict and the turn of the century, as do Taylor (1993), whose analysis is literary and social, and Salwak, who focuses on "the angry decade" (2005: 21) and after; and Munton (1989) concentrates on fiction produced in the direct aftermath of the conflict, in which the main focus of interest are stories by and about combatants or other direct participants (nurses, civil servants, etc.), an approach consonant with its earlier date of publication. To mention a few titles whose scope is closer to that of *Back to Peace*, Norris (2000) presents an overview of 20th century wars in literature that covers British and American authors of mainly novels, but also covering films and press censorship in the last decade. Acton (2007) has compared the private expressions of grief during war in letters, diaries and poetry among others, with the public discourse of armed conflict. Recently, White (2008) has studied pacifism in literature, mainly poetry, from the fourteenth century onwards. These three latter volumes insist that the concept of war is in need of revision, and that art must find an alternative to the legitimised discourse of warfare.

The object of this review, Aránzazu Usandizaga's and Andrew Monnickendam's *Back to Peace. Reconciliation and Retribution in the Postwar Period*, inscribes itself in this current trend. It attempts an "understanding of war" (3) not as an absolute, but as the manifestation of contradictory human tendencies: to self-destruction and philanthropy; and it analyses the various literary responses to the processes that individuals, communities and nations undertake in order to return to the 'prelapsarian' *status quo*, if indeed such a shift may be accomplished. The result of that analysis is given in three Parts, Return of the Combatant, Reconciliation, and Wars within Peace, in which the different contributors offer an overview of the literary approaches that authors – geographically, temporally and aesthetically divergent – have adopted in their traumatic rendition of peace after war.

The main feature that recommends *Back to Peace* is its innovative interdisciplinary approach to a category, that of peace, that has been insufficiently considered so far in academic circles, and which deserves the kind of revision that is associated not only with Lyotard's rejection of master narratives to favour individual *petits récits*, but also with Hayden White's concept of *metahistory*, and even Habermas's public sphere (Barry 2002: 86; Habermas 1994; Newton 2006: 480). The volume edited by Aránzazu Usandizaga and Andrew Monnickendam addresses these issues directly. In first place, the role of the individual, as he or (less often) she returns to civilian mode, whether in mourning and shock, as in Brian Dillon's analysis of Great War poets; in shame, as in Beatrice Trefalt's study of autobiographical accounts of defeated Japanese fighters; or in impotence, as in Aránzazu Usandizaga's research on collaborators who witnessed the general international indifference towards the Spanish Civil War as WW2 approached.

Secondly, the volume considers the extent to which the disintegration of the Humanities' formerly closed categories and the encroachment of cultural studies in academia continue to provide scholars with documents (diaries, letters, pamphlets, etc.) which challenge the assumed concept of history. For, if history is discourse, it includes elements of the fictional, as White affirms, and fiction includes elements of the historical; or, as the volume editors put it, "literature and history must work together" (4). This is the approach we find in Claire Tylee's study of the play *The Lucky Ones*, and Renny Christopher's essay on Vietnamese exile writers. In both chapters, the issue of identity is seen as the result of challenging one's personal, family's, community's and country's perceptions of nationality, in particular since all the characters try to adapt in their new environment. Tylee's piece, in particular, is rich in British historical and social contextualisation, which can only enhance a literary study. Likewise, Kathy J. Phillips's chapter on works by H. D. (Hilda Doolittle) and Gertrude Stein is a perceptive analysis that debunks the traditional pigeonholing of Modernist authors as escapist non-combatants. She shows, by contrast, that their aesthetic radicalism expressed a criticism of inter-war power systems in a much more acute way that demands new lines of interpretation.

The only shortcoming of *Back to Peace* is its not totally coherent selection of articles, or to put it more precisely, the impression one gets that there is no unifying thematic principle for all articles, although there is one for most, as I explain next. The title and subtitle point to no specific after-war era, but *Reconciliation and Retribution in the Postwar Period*, through the use of the definite article, offers specification. This

impression is reinforced through the volume's cover photograph, of soldiers waving their hats from a train's windows. To judge from their appearance, they could be troops taking part in any conflict in the 20th century, which is the period that most of the articles cover (for accuracy's sake, a stop at www.clipart.com confirms they are American Signal Corps during the First World War). Indeed, twelve out of fourteen chapters in the book deal with contemporary conflicts, from the Great War to the Viet Nam War. Of those twelve, three chapters deal with World War 1 exclusively, and two more in association with some other conflict; and five deal with WW2 in isolation plus three in combination with other conflicts. These statistics of sorts reinforce the ideas that 1) there is a strong presence of WW2, the greatest catastrophe that has affected mankind in its history; this is what the reader, I defend, would expect from the title and cover photograph; and 2) that, as a result, the remaining two articles seem oddly out of place in the selection offered in *Back to Peace*. I feel that the volume would have gained consistency, both thematic and chronological, in limiting the selection of contributions to 20th century conflicts. This idea is reinforced by current historical research which considers the two World Wars as falling within one thirty-year global-war period (Purdue 1999: 11-12). In addition, the Spanish Civil War and the Vietnam War can be considered a prequel and a consequence, respectively, of WW2.

Indeed, when the reader reaches chapters 6, 'Searching for Peace: John Dryden's *Troilus and Cressida* or *Truth Found Too Late*', and 7, 'Romances of Reconstruction: The Postwar Marriage Plot in Rebecca Harding Davis and John William De Forest', the impression is one of lack of continuity, notwithstanding the civil war element common to both adjoining chapters. This is not to detract from their value. Janet Dawson's study of Dryden's tragedy is perhaps one of the most perceptive ones in the volume, with its historicist analysis of the parallelisms not only between Hobbes's philosophy in *Leviathan* and the theme of the Trojan war but also England's convulsed political climate after the Restoration, which London theatre audiences would have been able to read in the play. Equally perceptive is Jennifer Terry's historically contextualised study of Toni Morrison's fiction in terms of American-ness as defined by race and class, a definition which nevertheless made an exception of coloured ex-combatants.

One more query has to do with the titles of sections II and III. Part I, Return of the Combatant, is self-explanatory, with accounts of the problems of readjustment that former soldiers of the Great War, WW2 and the Vietnam War encountered upon their return to their homes. These home lives were either shattered by tragic reminiscences (Brian Dillon's study of World War 1 poets) or implied an uncomfortable re-domestication of both wives and ex-combatants (Mary Anne Schofield's study of soldiers' return to everyday civilian life); in other cases, their homes and families were ashamed of their return (Beatrice Trefalt on the defeated Japanese troops), rent by unresolved race divides (Jennifer Terry on Morrison's fiction), or ill-adjusted in their indolence (William Blazek on *Tender Is the Night*). Part I is the most consistent in its selection of themes, and also the most varied in its genre representativeness.

The titles of Parts II and III, however, depart from conciseness and specificity. Part II uses an abstract term, *Reconciliation*, whose meaning changes: first, appeasement between the contending factions, in Don Dingedine's study of Southerners marrying Northerners after the American civil war; then, the very opposite of conciliation, in

Laurie Kaplan's study of the English clubs which denied access to WW2 Indian brothers-in-arms who had served in their "King uniforms" (161). Most problematic of all is the naming of Part III, Wars within Peace, since such vagueness in the title's metaphorical meaning allows for the inclusion of any conflict, not necessarily armed ones. And this is what the reader finds, incidentally. For example, there is no war (or war within peace, even metaphorically speaking), no reconciliation and no retribution in Donna Coates's study of Canadian female authors of fiction and drama. The chapter is undoubtedly very vividly written, thoroughly researched and enlightening, but it can claim very tenuous kinship to the rest of the volume; and it is somewhat exaggerated in its claim that those War Brides – whose lives the chapter describes – who arrived in physically or socially desolate Canadian landscapes suffered as much through displacement as the soldiers did at the front (264).

The choice of section titles is not an issue in itself, but it does reflect what may potentially constitute a fault in the volume's cohesion. In Part III, the editors have stretched too far a conjunction like "gender issues" (15) plus the back-to-peace motif. The choice of one critical frame is of course not censurable, but one wonders why gender studies have been given such prevalence in Part III, when Parts I and II cannot be characterised by any school of literary criticism in particular. Quite the opposite, it is never made very clear whether the critical approach is literary, cultural, historicist or a mixture of all. A consistent historicist approach would, in my view, have yielded excellent results, although this may be disputed as a matter of personal choice. Certain chapters do adopt a cultural or historicist approach, as has already been mentioned, and the broad, post-modern sense of the term *literature* ensures that many different genres are given scope, from diaries to plays, novels to memoirs, or poetry to conduct books. This evidently enriches the volume.

The inclusion of Camila Loew's 'Ta(1)king War into Peace' is a fitting closure to the section and the whole volume. It analyses *La Douleur* as Marguerite Duras's means of going back to peace, as a witness to and teller of her lover's experience at a French concentration camp. The war-within-peace here is humanity's fallen condition resulting from the Nazi order, a disappointment for the author whose best expression is the very impossibility of lexical representation. It is a suitable, albeit disheartening, ending for a volume which concentrates not only on reconciliation but also on retribution, for, as Loew suggests, such a return to peace implies inevitably returning to war (289).

One final and, I concede, very personal doubt arises with regard to the selection of chapters, or rather, the exclusion of potential ones. Several salient 20th century conflicts seem to be inexplicably missing in the volume. For example, a study on the Balkans War, the wars in Afghanistan (both USA vs. Russia and USA vs. the Taliban regime), the Arab-Israeli conflict or the Cold War. And this only to mention those conflicts which have provoked the bitterest response from media and society alike, the most widespread degree of civilian suffering, or, as in the case of the Cold War, the widest-ranging tension across the globe. After all, the media attention that characterised those conflicts and, in most cases, their cruelty and pointlessness would make them consonant with many of the points made in the volume. Most interesting, in particular, would have been to see a study of reconciliation and retribution in Germany, as proved

by the success of films such as *Downfall (Der Untergang)*, *Goodbye Lenin* or *The Lives of Others (Das Leben der Anderen)*, which address the issue of how the German nation is coming to terms with its own recent past.

I would not like, however, this criticism to appear more severe than it is. For I would like to argue, too, that the somewhat arbitrary inclusion of literary periods, historical periods and genres does serve the purpose of making the volume wide-ranging, entertaining and highly educative. Another attractive feature of this volume is precisely its postmodern stress on the debatable nature of the definitions of the terms *peace* and *war*. Unarguably, the contributors' degree of knowledge and specialisation is commendable. The editors have clearly chosen experts in their respective fields, and the reader receives an impression of well-argued ideas, deeply-researched topics and well-structured articles. The editors themselves are well versed in the topic of war literature and discourse, as evidenced in their joint edition of *Dressing Up for War* (2001). Their Introduction is actually one of the most interesting pieces of the volume, since it gives a concise overview of its contents which stresses their thematic and critical links.

Perhaps the highest praise that can be given to a literary study is that the reader has found its perusal educational while entertaining, academically satisfying and thought-provoking. Such was precisely my reaction to this volume. Although missing certain inclusions and personally favouring certain literary periods over others, which is all but inevitable, I enjoyed the diversity of outlooks and genres, of tone and style, that this selection of studies offers, and will be returning to it for inspiration for my own field of research. Most relevantly of all, the editors and contributors must be congratulated for their daring approach to a theme and label, *peace*, that should be debated and reviewed from the points of view of history, sociology, philosophy, politics and even anthropology. It is to the credit of Usandizaga and Monnickendam that they have conducted such a pioneering study in the field of literature.

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