

Utopian Realism

The Struggle for Positive Peace in Frida Stéenhoff's *Stridbar ungdom* (1907)

MARIA MÅRSELL

ABSTRACT

Around the turn of the nineteenth century writer, and opinion leader, Frida Stéenhoff (1865–1945), developed a theory of the future and the present of society, and argued that contemporary ideas of the social, ethical, and aesthetical were provisional, not comparable to the coming. An affinity between drama and theory, as well as investigations of peace as an idea, are distinctive features of her writing. Her play, *Stridbar ungdom / Pugnacious Youth* (1907), can be positioned in a tradition of peace dramas spanning from Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* to Sarah Kane's *Blasted*. This article studies the utopian potential of peace in *Pugnacious Youth*. By reading the play with Ruth Levitas' method the Imaginary Reconstitution of Society (IROS) – suggesting that utopia is a method rather than a goal in itself – peace does not emerge negatively, as non-war, but as concrete development and possible presence. Furthermore, the division between realism and idealism when it comes to militarism and peace, as well as the realist and idealist branches of the peace movement, are problematized. In conclusion, it appears that studying ideas of peace in fiction enables an alternative entry into the actualization of its not-yet-here quality.

KEYWORDS

Frida Stéenhoff, militarism, peace drama, positive peace, *Stridbar ungdom*, utopian realism

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In¹ ancient Greece, Eirēnē, the goddess of peace, had a celebrated position comparable to Dionysus. Today, she's missing. In the reproduction of Greek mythology Eirēnē has been ejected to the periphery. Instead, Ares, the god of war, and especially his roman equivalent Mars, holds a prominent position.² A similar tendency is noticeable in history books where peace comes across as the uninteresting gaps in-between wars. This temporal narrative structure gives the impression that war, rather than peace, moves development forward. Furthermore, in comparison to war, ideas of peace are seldom the subject of interest.³ Humans seem to have estranged themselves from peace. War is omnipresent, and perhaps the goddess of peace is absent because humans do not know a world without war, n/or have made a collective effort to reach such a world. How, then, can a peaceful existence be imagined?

In *Visions of Peace*, Shogimen and Spencer call for a diversity of historical and cultural perspectives on peace, to meet the need of a visionary and creative thinking in the field of peace studies.⁴ To study the topic of peace in theatre – where ideas are tested and embodied – enables such an alternative perspective. Frida Stéenhoff (1865–1945) can be counted among the Nordic countries most seminal writers, opinion leaders, and peace activists during the first half of the twentieth century. Her play, *Stridbar ungdom / Pugnacious Youth* (1907), can be positioned in a tradition of peace dramas spanning from Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* to Sarah Kane's *Blasted*.⁵ In Stéenhoff's writing theatre and politics are intertwined. She reflected on the relation between the fictional and actual and was convinced of art's aesthetic ability of representing and thereby possibly changing the future.⁶ Against this background, I read *Pugnacious Youth* as a carrier of utopian implications, and the aim of this article is to

1 Thanks to the anonymous reviewers for well-directed criticism and comments.

2 Hannah 2014, 15.

3 Wilson 2017, 33-62, Cockburn 2012, 1-18, Lettevall 2009, 49-64, Gittings 2012, Young 2010, 1-14.

4 Shögimen & Spencer 2014, 1-2.

5 All translations of and from the play are mine.

6 Today, Stéenhoff is perhaps most famous for popularizing the term feminism in Sweden with the lecture *Feminismens moral (The Morality of Feminism)* 1903. She made her debut in 1896 as a second-generation Nordic modern breakthrough writer with the play *Lejonets unge / The Lion's Kid*. Throughout her life she worked as a writer and opinion leader focusing on social policy issues. There are no academic works fully devoted to her writings but due to her authorship and broad social commitment she's often mentioned and sometimes introduced in a section or chapter in research within disciplines such as literary studies, gender studies, social work, and history of ideas. Literary scholar Claes Ahlund (f. 1957) is the one who has studied Stéenhoff's authorship most thoroughly. In two articles from 2004 and 2005 he presents her as a comparatively optimistic pacifist before and during World War I. There are also two biographies about her: Christina Carlsson Wetterberg's *–bara ett öfverskott af lif: en biografi om Frida Stéenhoff (1865-1945) (just a surplus of life-: Frida Stéenhoff a Biography (1865-1945))* published in 2010 and Beatrice Zades *Frida Steenhoff: människan, kämpen, verket (Frida Steenhoff: Human, Fighter, Deed)*, which resembles a Festschrift and was published to honor her on her seventieth birthday 1935. Ahlund 2004, Ahlund 2005, Carlsson Wetterberg 2010, Zade 1935.

study this utopian potential of peace in the play's manuscript.

Reaching for Utopia

Like the common understanding of utopia as no place, peace is often defined negatively as non-war. The prefix no/non has prompted the understanding of utopia, as well as peace, as something impracticable. Utopia has connotations of dreamy escapism, and the branch of the peace movement that advocates disarmament is known as idealistic. Yet, utopia and peace do not cease to fascinate, both are common – but in the case of peace scarcely researched – literary themes. However, it is important to keep in mind that utopia as a genre, as well as our understanding of the word, emanates from Thomas More's etymological and phonetical play with the Greek terms: *eu*, good; *ou*, non or not; and *topos*, place.⁷ Utopia can thus be interpreted both as a good place that is no place *or* a good place that is not – yet.

Ernst Bloch claims that hope is a part of the human ontology.⁸ Developing his thinking Ruth Levitas seeks to understand utopia as an expression of our desire "(...) for being otherwise, individually and collectively, subjectively and objectively."⁹ In that sense Utopia is forever coming. It is on the horizon, and reaching the good place does not equal reaching Utopia. The oxymoronic title of this article – *Utopian Realism* – alludes to this contradictory way of viewing utopia as inaccessible even though we're inevitably on our way there. Whatever we achieve, we will always long for something else or something better, but that does not mean we cannot strive to improve our current condition. In fact, we cannot help but doing just that. In one way or another we always reach for the visionary, and occasionally it gets us somewhere.

Levitas claims that utopia is as necessary for our imagination as our conception of reality and should be approached as a method rather than a goal in itself. She calls attention to utopia as a critical tool with the ability to both expose the limitations of the present and to embrace a holistic approach to possible futures.¹⁰ In accordance with this my close reading of *Pugnacious Youth* will concentrate on what the plays proponents of peace react *against*, and what they strive *for*. Peace is here to be understood as Johan Galtung's concept of positive peace introduced in 1969, where peace is defined as the absence of violence *and* structural violence.¹¹

What the peace friendly characters oppose and envision will be analysed with Levitas method, the Imaginary Reconstitution of Society (IROS). It is a method that, according to Levitas, can identify "(...) how the utopian mode works as a speculative sociology", an understanding that goes well with Stéenhoff's play where social policy issues are always close at hand. IROS consists of three modes: the archaeological, the ontological, and the architectural mode.¹² Levitas herself applies the archaeological and ontological mode on contemporary society and the third mode on representations of utopia in art, music, and literature. But since Stéenhoff's play gives voice to perspectives on peace that are marginalized in the militaristic public and political discourse, I will analyse it as a world in itself to enable its utopian potential to flourish.

Pugnacious Youth

In her biography of Stéenhoff, Beatrice Zade writes that *Pugnacious Youth* was noted as Sweden's first pacifist drama.¹³ The first two performances took place in Gävle in 1906. In the Liberal newspaper *Gefle Dagblad*, the signature –dh writes that the premier was attended by a fairly large audience. The theme is described as antimilitaristic as well as controversial and sensitive but –dh is not impressed by the performance and considers the play tendentious with a thin storyline and superficial characters. Still, –dh notes that some in the audience received the play with demonstrative approval and that Stéenhoff was called onto the stage

7 Sargisson 2007, 25.

8 Bloch 1977, 1.

9 Levitas 2013, xi.

10 Levitas 2013, xi.

11 Galtung 1969, 167-91.

12 Levitas 2013, xvii.

13 Zade 1935, 140.

no less than three times after the performance.¹⁴ The review in the competing newspaper, Social Democratic *Arbetarbladet*, is headlined: “Pugnacious Youth, A remarkable premier and a remarkable success”. The signature I– n– praises the dialogue as classic in its biting and precise realism, and describes the reception as warm and solid, except for the interested, although reserved audience in the front row. All in all, I– n– considers the play a great success for Stéenhoff as well as the theatre company.¹⁵

After the premier, the play toured around Sweden for sold out auditoriums. The Social Democratic Youth Party, with the then chair Per Albin Hansson (later Prime Minister of Sweden and the one who launched the term *Folkhemmet*), acquired the rights and printed the drama in no less than 5000 copies.¹⁶ The play was written at the time of the dissolution of the union between Norway and Sweden, but it also has a European applicability. It reflects the growing influence and war resistance of the labour movement, and it takes place in an unnamed European city where the peace movement has managed to loosen up the militaristic order. The plot revolves around the ideological rifts between peace activists, reactionaries, and militarists. The former is represented by the young antimilitarists, Flor Melato and Vjera Sakki who both sympathizes with the working-class leader and peace agitator Veber. Flor is a rebellious upper middle-class boy in his late teens. Vjera works for his father, a prominent Professor in History who lives for the past. As Veber is suddenly murdered – shot by militarists in the street – a military strike breaks out, and eventually the play ends with the government’s resignation in favour of disarmament and international fraternization.

A Militarized Society

Applying the method of IROS on *Pugnacious Youth* means asking questions about the text to identify its archaeological, ontological, and architectural mode. The archaeological mode is a social critique and focuses on the utopian aspect of ideology, asking questions such as what is considered a good society in political programmes, social, and economic policies? In *Pugnacious Youth*, contemporary societal issues are already raised in the opening scene where the relationship between war, nationalism, subordination, emigration, upbringing, education, and art is addressed in an argument between the Generaless and Vjera.¹⁷ The Generaless is the Professor’s sister and, moreover, the play’s foremost exponent of militarism. The presence of foreign literature at the Melato residence as well as Flor’s mothers lack of commitment to nationalism has, according to the Generaless, had a disastrous influence on Flor:

THE GENERALESS

(...) He despises his motherland – although stays in the country enjoying all its benefits.

VJERA (interested)

Would it be better if he emigrated?

THE GENERALESS

In a way it would probably be good for the country to get rid of all dissatisfied elements. But emigration is a foul betrayal, a crime.¹⁸

Between 1851 and 1910, more than a million people emigrated from Sweden to North America, and at the time of the play’s conception the system of a professional army had recently been replaced by conscription.¹⁹ In relation to the defence reform, a demand was raised for universal suffrage for men under the slogan “One man, one vote, one rifle”.²⁰ Behind the Generaless’ words of betrayal and crime lies an awareness of how this widespread emigration threatens

14 –dh 1906.

15 I–n– 1906.

16 Carlsson Wetterberg 2010, 194.

17 The character’s name is Kristina von Burg, but Stéenhoff calls her “Generalskan”, which means the General’s wife in Swedish, throughout the play and I have translated it as “the Generaless”.

18 Stéenhoff 1907, 8.

19 “Så påverkade utvandringen till Amerika Sveriges befolkning” 2013.

20 Ahlbäck & Sundevall 2019, 30.

the idea of the superior nation and the ability to defend it, as well as the system of hierarchical subordination required to maintain militarism. A shortage of young, poor, and vulnerable men undermines the army.

Vjera seizes the opportunity of emphasizing subordination as a prerequisite for militarism:

VJERA

It sometimes seems to me that emigration is most disliked, when it comes to the poor youth?

THE GENERALESS

How can Vjera say so? In that respect there is no class difference.²¹

On the contrary, says Vjera, a difference is made between a poor peasant who seeks happiness in America and an engineer who accepts a favourable preferment abroad. The former is called dissatisfied while the latter is praised. Not to mention those who most represent a nation, such as the royal family. A princess for example, says Vjera, is a representative of the national and the nation. Nevertheless, she can marry in a trice, change her language, religion, and people without anyone batting an eye.²² The Generaless, on the other hand, holds no brief for the young who consider leaving or leave their homeland in an attempt to get out of poverty. They are nothing but materialists, a war and a nationalist revelation is what is needed:

THE GENERALESS

The soul needs a national revival as well as a religious one. A renaissance. It happened to me once in a foreign country, in Paris. I saw a panoramic painting depicting the Battle of Gravelotte.²³

She records her profound (art) experience: "It (the painting) made an indelible impression on me. It was the most edifying spectacle I have ever seen. (...)" She is not the only one contemplating the painting. Next to her stands a young officer, so absorbed by the painting that he does not notice her. She, in turn, becomes absorbed by him and starts fantasizing: "(...) He might have lost his father, his uncles, his entire family right there, or in another bloody battle. And perhaps he would meet the same fate without hesitation. (...)"²⁴

The Battle of Gravelotte was fought in 1870 between German and French forces. Prussia "won" the battle, but 20 163 soldiers lost their lives, almost twice as many as the opposing side. The outcome has been described as a strategic victory for the Germans, and a tactical victory for the French.²⁵ The Generaless refers to the experience of the panoramic painting as her patriotic revival, but it is rather a militaristic revival. The event takes place abroad, it is triggered by an officer of unknown nationality, and a painting with a motif that can be interpreted as an allegory of war as loss. Her experience also makes the bond between militarism, education, and art visible. Battle paintings were primarily used as a pedagogical and strategical tool. Their motives were created with the guidance of detailed investigations of the battle in question and used as teaching aids.²⁶ The battle paintings were also intended as war propaganda and it is as such it works on the Generaless, as emotions, myths, and notions of fate, sacrifice, masculinity, and subordination are evoked. These, primarily militaristic, ideals move her to tears and arouse her gratitude. The event even gives her a new view of life and death, although she concludes, in a lowered voice:

THE GENERALESS

21 Stéenhoff 1907, 8.

22 Stéenhoff 1907, 9.

23 Stéenhoff 1907, 10.

24 Stéenhoff 1907, 11.

25 Howard 1961, 180-1.

26 Palme 1975, 19-25.

(...) However, there are men who can die.

VJERA
Women too. (...) ²⁷

Women's hardships in war have been in the margins for centuries.²⁸ Vjera's notice of death, not only of soldiers, as the ultimate consequence of war, and all places where war reaps victims as battlefields, puncture the Generaless' enchantment.

A Realizable Ideal

Distinguishing features, such as a plot revolving around current topics and characters embodying social types rather than individuals, demonstrate *Pugnacious Youth's* affiliation with the conversation piece and places it on the map of the history of drama. At the same time this play focuses on the relation between the characters and society. It shows how dialogue contains a potential for change and can lead to action which, according to Peter Szondi's definition, is not compatible with the conversation piece.²⁹

The significance of dialogue and a confidence in the ability of arguments to arouse reason and illuminate truth has been stated as essential novelties in the literature of the female Scandinavian modern breakthrough writers.³⁰ *Pugnacious Youth* falls within this tradition, but also expands it to issues of class and peace. The argument between the Generaless and Vjera is a prelude to the drama and can be interpreted as a prologue where militarism is initially highlighted as a central force of human beings. The plot is brought forward through dialogue rather than action, and Stéenhoff avails herself of humour as a dramatic strategy and a rhetorical tool to evoke emotions in the audience. This is most prominent in the character of the Generaless who appears as a type: a comic caricature of a warmonger. In the play's very first stage direction she "opens a sewing box and starts sewing on a flag of indefinite nationality". Throughout the play she emphasizes nationalism and militarism as the highest of ideals, she shouts like she's giving orders when addressing her brother, and cannot tolerate anything but domestic literature – all this while sewing yet another ten flags. When contrasted with the Generaless' double standards concerning patriotism, Vjera's use of rational arguments grounded in reality cements her credibility. She substantiates her line of reasoning with a lived experience as well as examples of how one's conditions, decisions, and intentions are perceived and treated differently depending on one's position.

The prevailing militaristic ideology in the play comes forth fully as Regina, the Generaless' daughter, enters and indignantly tells Flor's parents and an old friend of theirs that there has been a demonstration for striking conscripts where the police intervened. The protesters were carrying a banner reading: "Down with militarism. War is fratricide". Regina is especially upset with Flor seemingly sympathizing with them. As a companion piece to the opening scene with Vjera and the Generaless, Regina and Flor dispute militarism contra peace. What was initially discussed on an abstract level is now established on a personal level and strengthens the credence of the antimilitarists.

Regina and Flor are cousins and childhood friends. They are expected to get married, but their disagreement on the issue of defence intervenes. Flor explains that he plans to emigrate to escape conscription and the requirement to kill fellow humans. Regina, who has been raised by the Generaless to become the wife of an officer (the Generaless' future plan for Flor), is upset with his antimilitarist opinions on patriotism, defence, and national service. Contrary to him she does not believe that a world beyond the motherland would be better:

REGINA
(...) The peace movement is just a pretext. They want to get rid of the soldiers, so that the poor can then share everything equally with the rich.
FLOR:

27 Stéenhoff 1907, 11.

28 Lamb 2021, 9.

29 Szondi 1972, 70-1.

30 Hjordt-Vetlesen 1993, 343-5.

Thus, it is not the motherland you care for, but the wealth.

REGINA:

Both parts because one is connected to the other (...) ³¹

The first act in *Pugnacious Youth* depicts the play's archaeological mode as a society dominated by militarism. The ontological mode is about the historical and social determination of human nature and asks questions such as: what kind of people do these ideas about the good society create? In *Pugnacious Youth* the militarized society creates and rewards militarized humans, or rather militarized bodies as the mind of the individual is discouraged and the individual punished unless it supports the nationalist, capitalist, and militarist ideology. This means that the archaeological mode is close to fascism in terms of its extreme nationalism and pro-violence. The purpose of the militarized bodies is to act as a body of the nation, defending it from internal and external enemies, and possibly expanding the body of society, the motherland and, as Vjera's and the Generaless' as well as Flor's and Regina's argument shows, who must ultimately sacrifice themselves depends on subordination based on class and gender. ³²

What then is the alternative? The architectural mode analyses the way in which utopias represent an alternative future. In the case of *Pugnacious Youth*, the idea of a militarized society with militarized bodies – built upon patriotism, hierarchies, class distinctions, and gender inequality – is opposed to a peaceful society and a collective love:

FLOR:

(...) the idea of nationality is a corpse, which is to be buried. – We who want the whole earth as a motherland, humanity as a chain of siblings, we have sworn off the banners. ³³

Flor's line presupposes the radical idea that humans could act on the basis of their community as a species, as a collective body, instead of a national or international community. In the play it is suggested that the precondition for making use of this possible future world-wide human community is that the struggle for peace must go hand in hand with the struggle for class- and gender equality. It thus anticipates Galtung's concept of positive peace. Galtung, founder of the Peace Research Institute (1959) and *Journal of Peace Research* (1964), claimed it insufficient to define peace negatively as non-war because it meant that peace could coexist with unacceptable social conditions. Instead, he suggested the terms negative peace (absence of personal/direct violence) and positive peace (absence of personal *and* structural/indirect violence) which are substantial in peace and conflict research, the peace movement, and civil work for peace. ³⁴

In Europe, the modern idea of peace – the question of how a global and permanent peace can be achieved – stems from two different traditions, realist and an idealist ones. The realist tradition looks at the historical experience and states that war will always exist – the focus must therefore be on preventing war. The idealists instead believe in development and change. War is socially, not ontologically, conditioned and can therefore be contested. ³⁵ Galtung's term positive peace is a development of the idealistic peace tradition, but the problem with his term is that it, once again, defines peace negatively and thus makes the creative potential of peace invisible. In *Pugnacious Youth*, this issue is tackled from another angle. Instead of trying to broaden the meaning of peace according to the established realist and idealist peace tradition, the play questions the premise for the very designation of the idea of peace as realistic or idealistic. This is done by reversing the concepts. Firstly, Vjera points out the contradictoriness in the possibility of a princess, not a poor person, emigrating without enduring criticism and notes that: "All that *ideality* others have to defend with life and blood are passed over." (my emphasis). Secondly, the Generaless describes the panoramic painting of the Battle of Gravelotte as an

31 Stéenhoff 1907, 30.

32 Mårsell 2021, 129-37.

33 Stéenhoff 1907, 31-2.

34 Galtung 1969, 183.

35 Johansson 2018, 11-12.

expression of “grand *ideality*” (my emphasis).³⁶ Thirdly, Flor’s mother, Doria, comments on the Generaless notorious sewing of flags. It is suggested that she should consider sewing them on a machine, or place an order from a factory:

THE GENERALESS (satisfied)

I flatter myself with not being practical. – It is a work of love, you see, that should bring a blessing with it.

DORIA

You are such an *idealist*. (my emphasis)³⁷

In all these cases idealism is linked to militarism, not to the peace movement, and even though a friend of the family declares Flor’s “idealism” a transient malady, the end of the play suggests the opposite. The struggle for peace is just as idealistic as realistic.³⁸

Springtime for Peace

The peripetia plays out as the antimilitarist leader Veber is murdered. Public opinion against militarism increases and even a convinced proponent like Regina falters. She blames hers and Flor’s failed marriage plans on the Generaless:

REGINA

If I had not been brought up to be the one I have become.

GENERALESS (hurt)

Feel free to blame me, if it relieves. I have brought you up as my duty and sense of responsibility required. I wish the same thing would happen to all children. Then things in this country would be different. – I am convinced that you can influence people’s brains in a certain direction, especially the children, as long as you have the right method. (...)

REGINA

Then there would never be any change through the youth. Everything would stay the same.³⁹

The Generaless’ thoughts on sacrifices and the indoctrination of children for the sake of the nation further connects militarism with what we today label fascism, and points towards a possible next step in the militarization of bodies. But with the assassination of Veber the issue of militarism comes to a head. It has an opposite effect to the one intended. It brings the like-minded youth who believe in change, like Flor and Vjera, together. Vjera is a Russian name meaning faith, and Flor is masculinum of Flora formed from the Latin word *flōs* meaning flower. Flora is also a Roman Goddess of youth and the season of Spring, and as Flor and Vjera decide to attend Veber’s funeral despite the risk of being shot by the army, it is springtime for peace:

FLOR:

Maybe they will refuse to shoot. It is not impossible. We have come a long way with them. – But otherwise – are you ready to die, Vjera?

VJERA:

Ready? What does that mean? (Lively.) May I stand next to you?

FLOR (clasps her hand):

Of course. We shall stand next to each other.⁴⁰

In fin de siècle-fiction the New Woman – a middle class woman that frees herself from the

36 Stéenhoff 1907, 9, 11.

37 Stéenhoff 1907, 14.

38 Stéenhoff 1907, 27.

39 Stéenhoff 1907, 65.

40 Stéenhoff 1907, 62.

narrow conventions of the bourgeois – emerged. In the periodical press around the turn of the nineteenth century she was seen as connected to socialism and the working man.⁴¹ In *Pugnacious Youth* this relationship is inverted as Flor is shaped like the working woman Vjera's companion – the New Man. He's born into the upper middle class but joins the labour movement and falls in love with a woman from the working class whom he regards an equal, someone to stand by. He would rather be in prison or emigrate than do military service, and he sacrifices his social position, access to education as well as a conventional marriage. Vjera does not have bright prospects of that sort, but she risks her reputation as she initiates an extramarital affair with Flor and like him, she is prepared to die for her convictions. In the end they go, like soldiers, towards an uncertain destiny, but unlike soldiers they do so out of free will.

The Utopian Potential of Peace

Pugnacious Youth has been categorized as a pacifist as well as an anti-war drama.⁴² The play's message is equally radical-pacifist and antimilitaristic. Flor's and Vjera's socialist sympathies express antimilitarist motives, while the peace movement they join uses methods that are decidedly non-violent as they resist without using force. I prefer the term peace drama. It ensures a curiosity about what peace is and how it is expressed beyond an understanding of it as the antithesis of war. In *Pugnacious Youth*, peace does not appear negatively, as absence, but as possible presence. The characters struggling for peace drive the plot and the world of the play forward because they refuse to accept the present as static. They shed light upon the world as it appears *and* as it could appear, thereby threatening the social order. They react against militarism as a repetitive governance of violence and structural violence. As an alternative, they suggest a future of disarmament, social justice, and, eventually, a world state of humans acting on the basis of their community as a species. They value critical thinking and an ongoing exchange of opinions.

This emphasis on argumentation and reasoning as a vehicle for development and change is characteristic of the play. Stéenhoff's choice of genre – the dramatic form – thereby fills a logos-creating function in general, and the emphasis on the dialogue as a forum for a debate of ideas does so in particular. Both protagonists and antagonists are fairly one-dimensional types. Emotional arguments are linked to violence and war, and rational arguments to peace. The rational arguments come forth as the more attractive ones. They are rendered by the young whose credibility and appeal are closely linked to their determined striving, from an inferior position, to realize their convictions. In addition, humour is used as a strategy to reach out and sell an idea of peace. The militaristic antagonists, on the other hand, are caricatures. They are exaggerated stereotypes intended to be laughed at. This makes an anti-heroic character like Regina particularly interesting as she starts off as a type but, despite her seemingly predestined fate, can change.

The utopian potential of peace in *Pugnacious Youth* also works on a structural level. Like Levitas claim that utopia should be approached as a method rather than a goal in itself, peace can here be understood both as a literary theme and a strategy to communicate the possibilities of actualizing the not-yet-here. In *Pugnacious Youth*, sympathy is created towards Flor and Vjera who both primarily make use of rational arguments which makes them appear as realists while their antagonists make use of emotional arguments and are portrayed as idealists. The play thereby problematizes and reverses both the traditional understanding of war as a creative force that gives birth to something new, and the utopian connotation that lies in the naming of the non-violence branch of the peace movement as idealist. *Pugnacious Youth* depicts a counter-image of this by switching the perspectives around and connecting militarism with idealism and repetition, whereas peace is described as realist and representing development. This thought is further explored in Stéenhoff's drama *Fraud – Three Disrespectful Acts on Certain Policies* (1933).⁴³ The relation between militarism and fascism that are touched upon in

41 Ledger 1997, 35.

42 Zade 1935, 140, Ahlund 2004, 97, Carlsson Wetterberg 2010, 194.

43 Stéenhoff 1933. "Deceit" would probably be a better translation of the title, but I have chosen to keep *Fraud* since it appears in an English translation of the play found among Stéenhoff's papers. Carlsson Wetterberg 2010, 295.

Pugnacious Youth is deepened in this understudied play about a dictator, set in Italy, published during the Mussolini regime. *Fraud* explores how an immoral state creates immoral people. Like the militaristic society, such a state can only repeat violence and structural violence in various forms like war, class differences, gender inequality, and fascism.

Although this relationship between realism and idealism is inverted, Stéenhoff does not leave us with a dualism: either this *or* that. Instead, she points at idealism *and* realism as immanent in ideas of militarism as well as peace. An entangled relationship like the kinship between utopia and dystopia, requiring caution. Peace in Stéenhoff's writing is above all an ongoing struggle and a never-ending conversation on how to create and develop a peaceful way of living together. This is mirrored in the opening scene of *Pugnacious Youth* as the Generaless dismisses all Vjera's reading suggestions in favour of the "edifying" message of the panoramic painting. The play begins with a discussion of the impact of literature and art because the ability of the arts to point at the not-yet-here has a decisive role to play in the peace issue. This in turn makes peace an attractive aesthetical theme since everything is to be gained in representing, and thereby possibly influencing, the becoming of it's coming.

AUTHOR

Maria Mårzell is a PhD Student in comparative literature at Södertörn University. Her PhD project, with the working title *The Critical Potential of the Literary Peace Movement*, explores peace as a literary theme in the writings of Frida Stéenhoff, Elin Wägner, and Hagar Olsson. Mårzell previously published "Militarismens ontologi. Krig och fred som mänskliga existensvillkor i Frida Stéenhoffs *Stridbar ungdom* och Elin Wägners *Släkten Jernploogs framgång*" in *Tidskrift för Litteraturvetenskap* (No. 1-2 2021).

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