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**Make Words, Not War:
Notes Towards a Literary Ethics Between Fundamentalism and Arbitrariness**

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Abstract: We live in an age of proliferating conflicts, an age that is characterized by the falling apart of old explanatory patterns on the one hand and the often fundamentalist and even violent re-assertion of particular positionalities on the other. Concepts such as the notion of truth have become problematic and have been relativized by postmodern thinkers, and so have the norms and structures based upon essentialist truth claims. Conversely, where to position oneself and how to construct cultural patterns of orientation has become one of the most urgent and difficult tasks of the individual as well as of whole societies since we are placed between the Scylla of an old-fashioned essentialism and the Charybdis of a new-fangled arbitrary valuelessness in which anything goes. These issues often give rise to violent conflict and they raise important ethical questions. This article discusses the function of literature as one of the prime tools used by humans in order to turn the contingent chaos of experience into structured orientational patterns. It presents a conversational ethics of dialogic exchange and negotiation which accepts the conversational gambit posed by otherness. This approach advocates openness and tolerance towards difference while insisting on the necessity of particularity and positionality. The article in this context discusses the uses and pitfalls of universalism as well as of particularity, and it probes the possibility of establishing consensus in the midst of conflict and incommensurability.