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1. Introduction

[T]he Great War took place in what was, compared with ours, a static world, where the values appeared stable and where the meanings of abstractions seemed permanent and reliable. Everyone knew what Glory was, and what Honor meant. It was not until eleven years after the war that Hemingway could declare in *A Farewell to Arms* that “abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates.” In the summer of 1914 no one would have understood what on earth he was talking about. (Fussell 21)

At a remove of one hundred years, it seems only natural not to attribute the labels ‘honourable’ and ‘glorious’ to what happened on the battlefields of Europe during the First World War. Today, the Great War is commonly considered a major historic catastrophe and all the bloodshed and mass killing that were part of it are regarded as futile and utterly unheroic, not only by historians, but also by the general public. The Great War changed the face of the world and especially that of Europe forever. It brought misery upon millions of people and left behind a fragile continent of crumbling empires that soon engaged in an even more outrageous war. The utter ferocity of these two wars exposes the tragic irony and the cynicism that are expressed in the use of words such as ‘glory’ and ‘honour’ in connection with warfare.

But – as Fussell rightly remarks – that is only today’s perspective. These ideas about war were not commonly shared at the beginning of the 20th century. For many politicians and statesmen in the 1910s, war in Europe was a necessity, as it was for many of the common people; but also artists and intellectuals shared this conviction. It was the age of nationalism and hegemonic ambitions were not deemed reprehensible. Belligerence was widespread and war was thought of positively by many people. The public simply did not know about the new technical means of mass killing. The typical images of warfare were not the trenches and tanks that we might think of nowadays, but the parading troopers and cannonades of the 19th century. Soon, a new reality would be established, which tragically paved the way for modernity, not only with regard to the

technical aspects of warfare, but also in respect of how artists tried to come to terms with the experience of war in their works.

Before 1914, Fussell argues, there was a set of established values. The instability of values that we have experienced in recent decades was not commonly felt before the Great War. However, the reality of industrialised murder gradually changed these dominant conceptions. After more than four years of fighting and millions of dead, some people began pointing at the cruelties and the foolishness of war. Among these were some of the artists who had welcomed or even hailed it in the first place, but who were soon disillusioned over its reality. Throughout the 1920s, they were the first to voice concerns that civilization as it was known was nothing but a tissue of lies. Artists from many different countries highlighted the obscenity and cynicism of what appeared to be stable values: glory, honor and courage. What they had seen on the battlefields of Europe was the exact opposite and by means of their respective arts, they tried to overcome the self-deception of many of their contemporaries. This new awareness was also reflected in the United States, where young writers responded to the Great War in different ways. Some of their novels will be of central interest in the paper at hand.

1.1. Great War Literature: The American Dimension

1. 1. 1. The 'Older' Generation

Postwar fictional response was huge in the United States. Although the country entered the First World War at a rather late stage and had a small number of casualties compared to that of many European countries, the experience of war left a strong imprint on many North Americans. From a literary perspective, it appears to be a genuine US-American war, even though no battles were fought on American soil.

But the ways of dealing fictionally with the war differed between the generations. There were established authors such as Edith Wharton and Willa Cather who were in their forties and fifties at the time of the war. They were part

of the parental generation of soldiers and they did not experience war in Europe themselves. In Wharton's *A Son at the Front* (1923), a French-born American youth is called to duty in the French army. His parents desperately try to secure him a desk job in order to keep him away from the heat of the battle, but the boy secretly strives after a front-line engagement. In Cather's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *One of Ours* (1922), a young man from Nebraska escapes his troubled situation in America by enlisting in the army. On the battlefields of Europe he finds a new purpose in life. Novels like these two portray young men who devote themselves to a cause that they believe to be worthy.

1. 1. 2. The 'Lost' Generation

By way of contrast, there were a large number of young American writers who could draw on first-hand experiences in the composition of their novels of the 1920s. Many of them had volunteered for ambulance service in Europe and had joined units such as the Norton-Harjes Ambulance Corps in France. The reasons for their engagement were diverse. Some wanted to be part of the action but had physical handicaps that made them unfit for service. Others simply sought adventure away from home or tried to evade a draft. In any case, the ambulance units turned out to be a breeding ground for many later writers. Among them were Louis Bromfield, William Slater Brown, Malcolm Cowley, Robert Hillyer and also three others whose novels will be discussed in this paper.

First, there is Ernest Hemingway, who briefly worked as ambulance driver at the Italian front in 1918 and wrote the novel *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). Second, there is John Dos Passos, who went into service with the Norton-Harjes Ambulance Corps and was stationed in Paris and north-central Italy. He came to terms with his experiences in the novel *Three Soldiers* (1921). Third, there is E. E. Cummings, who also volunteered for the Norton-Harjes Corps in France, but was soon arrested and detained for three months in a French concentration camp on account of allegedly suspicious letters his friend William Slater Brown had sent home. Cummings wrote about the period of incarceration in his novel *The Enormous Room* (1922).

Many of these authors went to Europe with great expectations of adventurism and bravery. They did not know about the grim reality that awaited them. Soon, they were strangely disillusioned and found themselves in an ambivalent position: They did not engage in actual warfare, but they nevertheless experienced the horror of war. Although as ambulance drivers they – often inadvertently – assumed a “spectatorial attitude” (Cowley, *Return* 43), many of them sustained injuries and thus did not stand outside of the war, as they often persuaded themselves.

Hemingway, Dos Passos, Cummings and others were united by a strange feeling that it was not ‘their’ war that they were experiencing and that they could not answer the hopes articulated by their parental generation. Their experiences made them aware of the fact that writers such as Edith Wharton had lost touch with the reality of young men. They went to Europe full of expectation, but soon felt only “uneasiness and isolation” (Cowley, *Return* 214). This experience was reflected in their novels, whose ‘heroes’ are not the war-crazed young soldiers of *A Son at the Front*, but people seeking a direction for their lives to take. Hoffman (*Twenties* 57) uses the term “violation” to describe the experiences of these future authors. It “indicates what happened to their sense of dignity and security as the result of events that had little or nothing to do with them.” Later, Gertrude Stein would call them the lost generation of writers. Her label turned out to be long-lasting.

1.2. New Horizons

Writers such as Hemingway, Dos Passos and Cummings felt that (war) literature needed to change. These authors wanted their novels to reflect reality as they experienced it. They wanted to show the effect of war on the individual spirit and by doing so, they managed to unmask the “inflated rhetoric of patriotism and sacrifice” (Kershner 37) that surrounded them. The collective effort of war becomes an individual experience in their works. As readers, we do not sympathise with the protagonists of novels such as *A Farewell to Arms* or *Three Soldiers* because of their heroic deeds, but because we can comprehend

(or at least are made to try to comprehend) the inner feelings of these physically and mentally damaged young men, who are overwhelmed by the “organized indifference to human life” (Cotsell 49).

These authors found many different ways to go about depicting their protagonists’ interiority and the novelty of their experiences. Whereas Hemingway tried to show the bleakness and absurdity of this “distinctly unromantic” (Matsen 3) war by using a very sparse style, Cummings experimented in form and subverted narrative rules in order to illustrate the topsyturvydom of his experiences. In a way, all of these works are trauma narratives, insofar as they register “the shocking and unassimilable nature of [their] subject matter in formal terms” (Whitehead 83).

The literary scholar David Lodge (49-50) notes in his study *Consciousness & the Novel* that in modernist literature “the emphasis falls on the construction of the real within the individual’s consciousness, the difficulty of communication between these separate mental worlds, the distorting effects of the unconscious on consciousness, and the limits of human understanding.” This also holds true for the novels discussed in this paper, whose protagonists often face incomprehensible challenges. In a world of inhumanity and death, they want to find out what makes them human and alive. They don’t fight against soldiers in the trenches, but against a superimposed force that robs them of their individuality. These young men are “unwilling to submit themselves to any authority but of their own creation” (Beach 83).

I chose these novels for my thesis not only because I am generally interested in literature of the early 20th century, but also because they show up more than others how the shared experience of war found literary expression in completely different ways. Ernest Hemingway, John Dos Passos and Edward Cummings were friends and they exchanged opinions extensively. As ambulance drivers, they must have had similar experiences and their views on war were very similar indeed. However, their efforts to record the reality of war differed in many respects. Their novels’ protagonists face different obstacles and choose different paths to overcome them. But however diverse these individual crises are, they all can be traced back to war-related events. The three novels

highlight the fact that in times of war, life itself changes. Although there is hardly any actual fighting going on, each man's fate seems to be decided upon by the overwhelming circumstances of war. This is what makes these books so interesting to me.

On the following pages, I will discuss the three novels mentioned above in more detail. I want to find out which literary strategies the authors employ in order to convey and filter experiences and how they portray the protagonists' inner feelings. I will point at similarities, but also at differences between the novels and I will try to identify general trends. Each chapter will be introduced by a short biographical sketch of the individual author, which will pay special attention to his role during the war. Besides focusing on certain dominant themes and on character analyses, I will put my main emphasis on the narratological structure of each novel. A comparison will show that the authors use different narrative modes and techniques in order to achieve certain effects in their depiction of the figural consciousnesses.

2. Portraying Consciousness: Dorrit Cohn and *Transparent Minds*

I noted in the introduction that the main analytical focus of my thesis will lie on the rendition of experiences and on how interiority and consciousness are represented in the novels. For these purposes, narratological analysis will play an important part. Narratology can be defined as the “set of general statements on narrative genres, on the systematics of narrating (telling a story) and on the structure of plot” (*Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory* 110). This paper will focus on the second of these aspects, namely the “systematics of narrating”.

My analysis of interiority and the portrayal of consciousness and rendition of experiences will chiefly be based on the terminology established by the literary scholar Dorrit Cohn in her book *Transparent Minds*. Initially released in 1978, it is still one of the most significant works on consciousness and interiority in fiction and it helped me a lot in my analysis of the novels that are the object of study here. Cohn’s chief analytical distinction is that between third- and first-person narratives, each of which is treated in individual chapters in the book.

2.1. Third-person Narration

Of the three novels surveyed in this paper, only John Dos Passos’ *Three Soldiers* is written in third-person form. Cohn identifies three different narrative techniques in such text forms. These are psycho-narration, quoted monologue and narrated monologue, which will be dealt with in the following subchapters. I want to add that the boundaries between these narrative techniques are often fluid and not all cases are as clear-cut as the examples that will follow. The same holds true for the discussion of first-person narration below.

2. 1. 1. Psycho-Narration

In psycho-narration, the narrative act is explicit. The reader is aware of the narrator's presence. A typical sentence could be: "He wondered what was behind the door." The mental verb "wonder" highlights the narrative act. The chief advantage of psycho-narration is that it is verbally independent from self-articulation (see Cohn, *Minds* 46). What the protagonist feels, but may not be able to articulate him- or herself is revealed by a superimposed narrator. This narrative style is typically "associated with traditional narratives such as epics" (Keen 97) and is therefore sometimes considered old-fashioned. If we follow Cohn's argumentation, however, psycho-narration is the best form to touch upon sub- or unconscious psychic levels. "[T]he novelist who wishes to portray the least conscious strata of psychic life is forced to do so by way of the most indirect and the most traditional of the available modes" (Cohn, *Minds* 56).

According to Cohn, psycho-narration can either be dissonant or consonant. The dissonant type, she explains with reference to Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, is characterised by "ex cathedra statements, unmistakably set apart from the narration proper by their gnomic present tense. Beyond this, a highly abstract analytical vocabulary is used to describe the inner world, or to elucidate the obscurer side of the psyche" (Cohn, *Minds* 28). In dissonant psycho-narration, the narrator has "superior knowledge of the character's inner life and [...] superior ability to present it and assess it" (Cohn, *Minds* 29).

Consonant psycho-narration, on the other hand, is characterised by a "striking absence [...] of the more obvious signs of disparity between the narrating and the figural consciousness: no gnomic present statements, no speculative or explanatory commentary, no distancing appellations" (Cohn, *Minds* 31). Cohn (*Minds* 31) illustrates this by a passage taken from James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, where the narrating voice "yields to the figural thoughts and feelings even as it reports them." Consonant psycho-narration is often prominently featured in stream-of-consciousness fiction (see Cohn, *Minds* 33), but it also plays a role in more traditionally narrated novels, such as *Three Soldiers*, where it underlines the narrator's identification with certain characters.

2. 1. 2. Quoted Monologue

The second third-person narrative technique identified in *Transparent Minds* is the quoted monologue. It is basically very simple and consists of the quoted reproduction of self-addressed utterances and thoughts of protagonists (see Cohn, *Minds* 15). The example above would look something like this in quoted monologic form: “He wondered: ‘What is behind the door?’”. In third-person fiction “the direct expression of a character’s thought (in first-person form) will always be a quotation, a quoted monologue” (Cohn, *Minds* 15). I will show in the analytical part how John Dos Passos uses quoted monologue to highlight the distress of the protagonists.

2. 1. 3. Narrated Monologue

The third technique for representing consciousness in third-person contexts put forward by Cohn is the narrated monologue, which she defines as the “transformation of figural thought-language into the narrative language of third-person fiction” (Cohn, *Minds* 100). In other words, narrated monologue is used for “rendering a character’s thought in his own idiom while maintaining the third-person reference and the basic tense of narration” (Cohn, *Minds* 100). Accordingly, the example sentence would look something like this: “What could be behind the door?” The narrator fades from the spotlight and highlights what the protagonist feels or perceives at the moment of narration.

This narrative technique is typically associated with modern works of fiction that focus on the immediate sensations and bewilderments of the figural consciousness. Ideally, narrated monologue adds to the immediacy and intensity of a novel. What is said and what is thought is not always clear in narrated monologue. This narrative technique suspends the “[figural consciousness] on the threshold of verbalization in a manner that cannot be achieved by direct quotation” (Cohn, *Minds* 103). Narrated monologue must not, however, be confused with psycho-narration, for it is separated from it by “the absence of mental verbs (and the resulting grammatical independence)” (Cohn, *Minds* 104). Thus, narrated monologue can sometimes be mistaken for simple

fact-rendering report, which is why “an author who wants his reader to recognize a narrated monologue for what it is will have to plant sufficient clues for its recognition” (Cohn, *Minds* 106).

2.2. First-Person Narration

Two of the three novels discussed in my thesis are written in first-person form (Ernest Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms* and E. E. Cummings’ *The Enormous Room*). Basically, the three third-person narrative techniques identified by Cohn can be applied to first-person fiction as well, albeit with a different terminology. In first-person retrospective fiction, she differentiates between self-narration, self-quoted monologue, and self-narrated monologue. Each of these will be discussed individually in the following subchapters.

2. 2. 1. Self-Narration

As mentioned above, self-narration is roughly analogous with psycho-narration in third-person novels. It “can articulate inarticulate states of consciousness, or summarize long-range psychological situations and their slow mutations” (Cohn, *Minds* 143-144). Just like psycho-narration, self-narration can either be dissonant or consonant.

Ideally, dissonant self-narration is characterised by “[a] lucid narrator turning back on a past self steeped in ignorance, confusion, and delusion” (Cohn, *Minds* 145). The narrator tells a story of his past and can no longer, or only partly, relate to the actions of his old self. There is an experiential gap between the narrating and the experiencing I. With reference to Marcel Proust’s *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, Cohn (*Minds* 148) points out that in dissonant self-narration “the cognitive deficiency of the past self is stressed, especially its incapacity to analyze.”

By contrast, consonant self-narration is characterised by the presence of an “unobtrusive narrator who identifies with his earlier incarnation, renouncing all

manner of cognitive privilege” (Cohn, *Minds* 155). With reference to Knut Hamsun’s *Hunger*, Cohn (*Minds* 156) adds that the consonant narrator “simply records the inner happenings, juxtaposing them in incongruous succession, without searching for causal links.” Ideally, a consonant narrator completely suspends narrative distance and “present[s] [psychological incongruities] without corrective hindsight” (Cohn, *Minds* 157).

This implies that dissonant and consonant self-narration have different focalisers. Whereas the former is focalised through the narrating self, the latter is focalised through the experiencing self (see Cohn, *Encirclement* 180). This distinction is crucial and it will play an important role in the analytical part.

2. 2. 2. Self-Quoted Monologue

The self-quoted monologue in first-person retrospective fiction is very similar to its third-person counterpart described above. The example sentence would then be: “I wondered (or “I said to myself”): ‘What is behind the door?’” Since people normally don’t remember the exact wording of their past utterances, a “long quotation of [the narrator’s] past thoughts can quickly appear as a kind of mnemonic overkill” (Cohn, *Minds* 162) and might thus appear contrived very easily. Still, the self-quoted monologue can be a very effective means of representing consciousness and „[s]ome novelists [...] deliberately exploit the ambiguity created by self-quotation in first-person context: by omitting clear signals of quotation, they run together their narrator’s past and present thoughts, thereby suggesting that their ideas on certain subjects have remained the same” (Cohn, *Minds* 164). This sometimes leads to “true indeterminacy” (Cohn, *Minds* 165) as to what is quoted monologue and what is present thought.

2. 2. 3. Self-Narrated Monologue

Self-narrated monologue is the equivalent of narrated monologue in third-person fiction. In fact, it could sometimes have the same form, as the following

example will show. In its self-narrated monologic form, the door-question would look like this: “What could be behind the door?” The reader will recognise that this is exactly the same question as the one in the subchapter about narrated monologue in third-person fiction. The only difference between the two examples would be the third- or first-person language that precedes the sentence (like in: “I approached the locked door.”) Cohn points out that “the narrated monologue [...] defines the generic zone where first-person and third-person texts move into closest proximity to each other,” (Cohn, *Minds* 169) insofar as both self-narrated monologue and narrated monologue appear to “tell themselves”.

Self-narrated monologue is often used by narrators who experience “an existential crisis that has remained unresolved” (Cohn, *Minds* 168). The distance between the experiencing and the narrating self is then reduced or suspended altogether. Cohn illustrates this with reference to a passage in Hermann Hesse’s *Steppenwolf*, which abandons “all elements that draw attention to the verbal gesture of narration” (Cohn, *Minds* 169). The narrative act itself fades from the spotlight and an impression of immediacy and directness is created. The “narrator momentarily identifies with his past self, giving up his temporally distanced vantage point and cognitive privilege for his past time-bound bewilderments and vacillations” (Cohn, *Minds* 167).

Cohn dedicates the rest of *Transparent Minds* to other narrative techniques such as the autonomous monologue. These will be of minor importance in my thesis and shall be discussed in the analytical part itself, if need be. Apart from the terminology established by Dorrit Cohn, I will also draw on the taxonomy of the literary theorist Gérard Genette, who offered a terminological framework for narratological analysis in his book *Narrative Discourse*.

The following chapters will show how all of the above-mentioned narrative techniques are used in the three novels and which effect they have on the rendition of experiences. I want to start with John Dos Passos’ novel *Three Soldiers*.

3. John Dos Passos and Three Soldiers

3. 1. Dos Passos' Life and Work

3. 1. 1. Biographical Sketch

John Roderigo Madison was born in Chicago, Illinois, on January 14, 1896. He was the illegitimate son of John Randolph Dos Passos and Lucy Addison Sprigg Madison and was brought up largely by his mother in Europe. Only after his parents married in 1910 could he change his name from Madison to Dos Passos and return to the United States. His father was a prominent New York lawyer of Portuguese descent and played an important role in John Dos Passos' life. Especially in his early fiction, the novelist opposed the capitalist values that John Randolph personified.

After John Dos Passos received schooling in England, he attended the Choate School (now Choate Rosemary Hall) in Wallingford, Connecticut, where he began writing articles for the school paper. Before enrolling in Harvard College at the age of 16, Dos Passos spent a "grand tour" in Europe and the Near East, visiting countries like England, Italy, and Turkey in order to study the arts of antiquity. At Harvard College, John Dos Passos not only continued his newspaper work, writing for *The Advocate* and the *Harvard Monthly*, but he also got started with fiction writing. After having graduated *cum laude* in 1916, Dos Passos moved to Spain at his father's desire in order to study architecture. The sudden death of the elder Dos Passos in early 1917, however, presented the young man with the possibility to satisfy his longing for adventure on the battlefields of the Great War. In July 1917, he joined the Norton-Harjes Ambulance Corps in Europe together with his friends E. E. Cummings and Robert Hillyer. Dos Passos served as a Red Cross driver in France and Italy, but what he imagined adventurous turned out to be shocking and disillusioning. He would later try to come to terms with his war-related experiences in his fiction, especially in the two novels *One Man's Initiation: 1917* (also known as *First Encounter*) (1920) and *Three Soldiers*.

After the Great War, Dos Passos spent much time in Europe and befriended other writers of the lost generation such as Ernest Hemingway, Edmund Wilson, and F. Scott Fitzgerald. In the following years, he travelled freely between Europe and America. In the early 1920s, the debutant novelist toured Eastern Europe and Asia and joined the Near-East Relief in the Caucasus (some of his experiences are collected in his 1927 travelogue *Orient Express*) and in 1928, he took a six-month-tour through Russia in order to study socialism, having become an ardent leftist at the time. Not only did he attack war, industrial capitalism and social inequality in his fiction, he also took action in real life, writing a pamphlet for the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee and joining a committee for the defense of Leon Trotsky. He was also a staunch supporter of workers' rights. In 1937, he visited Spain, which at the time was stricken with the terror of the Civil War. When his Spanish friend José Robles was assassinated, presumably by the Soviet intelligence, John Dos Passos became increasingly estranged from communism and later even turned into a zealous supporter of conservative politics. Dos Passos, who was twice married and the father of a daughter, died on September 28, 1970, aged 74.

During his lifetime, John Dos Passos wrote more than 40 books and is thus by far the most prolific of the writers treated in this paper. Besides the already mentioned novels, Dos Passos literary fame is chiefly based on a few other select works. One of his most important novels is *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), which was not only a commercial success, but also introduced experimental techniques of collage and stream-of-consciousness into his work. Perhaps his most unique literary achievement is the *U.S.A.* Trilogy, comprising the novels *The 42nd Parallel* (1930), *Nineteen Nineteen* (1932), and *The Big Money* (1936). In *U.S.A.*, Dos Passos employs different narrative modes, ranging from straightforward prose to autobiographical stream-of-consciousness passages and biographical accounts of famous Americans. With this trilogy, he was able to epitomise the development of a whole nation in a crucial period of its existence.

Later, Dos Passos mostly abandoned the experimental style in his fiction and also wrote non-fictional works, including historiographic and biographical books such as *The Head and Heart of Thomas Jefferson* (1954) and *The Men Who Made the Nation* (1957) about the American founding fathers, war reports such as *State of the Nation* (1944) or *Tour Of Duty* (1946) and political essays such as those in *The Prospect Before Us* (1950). Other works worth mentioning are the *District of Columbia-Trilogy* (1952) and his memoir *The Best Times* (1966). In a 1936 essay, the French existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre (69) called Dos Passos “the greatest writer of our time.”

3. 1. 2. Dos Passos' Work

In novels like *Manhattan Transfer* and *U.S.A.*, Dos Passos revealed the destructive force of capitalism and portrayed the multitude of experiences in rapidly growing cities such as New York, which were teeming with people of different backgrounds and different social standing. Dos Passos took account of the multifacetedness of urban life by employing different narrative techniques and literary devices such as collage and stream-of-consciousness. “Thus technique [became] the vehicle of social commentary” (Gelfant, *Synoptic* 43).

In *Three Soldiers*, Dos Passos' second novel, the sensibility for injustice is also present, though not yet brought into such intricate narrative shape as in the novels that would follow. From a narratological viewpoint, *Three Soldiers* is much more conventional than *U.S.A.* or *Manhattan Transfer*. Like Dos Passos' debut, *One Man's Initiation: 1917*, it deals with the Great War in Europe and its devastating effect on the soldiers. The novel shows “how the individual sensibility is inevitably crushed by an impersonal reality,” (Hook 10) which holds true for all of its three protagonists.

But this impersonal reality is only to a slight extent dominated by actual warfare. In *Three Soldiers*, “die Unterdrückung und Zerstörung der Individualität des Menschen [wird] nicht in apokalyptischen Visionen kriegischer Auseinandersetzung sichtbar” (Fingerhuth 117). The horror of the trenches plays only a very subordinate role in this novel. In fact, more than half of *Three*

Soldiers is set in postwar France. But the fact that the war is over does not lessen the tribulations of the protagonists. Dos Passos portrays the “tyranny, exploitation, and purposelessness” (Hicks 108) that the military machinery inflicts on individuals caught in it. The tripartite division of focalisers in the novel must be credited to Dos Passos’ interest in the fate of individuals facing an insurmountable obstacle and their respective reactions to it. Thus, *Three Soldiers* is not only a war novel, but also and maybe foremost “a psychological study of three men, men brought to some kind of essential portrait through the extremities of war” (Wagner, *Dos Passos* 15).

In *Three Soldiers*, men are depicted as mere cogs in a vast and destructive wheel, who not only suffer through war, but also perceive “[f]amily, society, politics, [and] literature” (Pizer 5) as oppressive forces. In 1921, this was quite a bold articulation of war experiences and upon the novel’s initial release, “[m]any readers were shocked by the spade-calling realism of *Three Soldiers*” (Davis 12). Its literary impact, however, was huge. According to Beach (34), *Three Soldiers* was “the first important American novel, and one of the first in any language, to treat the War in the tone of realism and disillusion”.

3. 1. 3. Influence of Dos Passos’ Experiences on his Work

John Dos Passos wrote *Three Soldiers* chiefly out of personal memory, at least those chapters that deal with John Andrews, who bears many characteristics of Dos Passos himself. McLuhan (152) even calls the novel “a portrait of the ‘artist’ as G.I.”

His experiences have fed him with the belief that war is futile and devastating. Dos Passos was one of the first authors to treat the Great War in anti-heroic tones in his fiction. In *Three Soldiers*, he attempts to “evaluate fictively the suffering of men of different cultural backgrounds,” (Walsh, *Literature* 74) a theme which he would continue in his later fiction. “Dos Passos uses the military situation provided by the Great Crusade as a metaphor for twentieth-century civilisation, and in this respect the book is cultural diagnosis rather than realism” (Cooperman, *Aesthetics* 23). As mentioned above, not only war is a

threat to the individual, but also a world that is consumed by war. In such a world, the individual loses its place. Feeble gestures of protest can however be made, even if only a select few manage to do so. *Three Soldiers* focuses on the individual's claim to freedom and self-realization and the lack thereof. The following chapters will deal with the novel's protagonists in more detail.

3. 2. Portrayal of Characters in Three Soldiers

Three Soldiers is the only one among the three novels discussed in this paper that is written in third-person form. According to Cohn (*Minds* 25), "the audible narrator disappears from the fictional world" when the psychological problems of the individual characters take centre stage in a novel. This is mostly also the case in *Three Soldiers*, which seeks to portray the interiority of three different characters without much interference on the part of the narrator. There are, however, certain passages in which the narrator's control finds clear expression. Dos Passos takes three very different paths in portraying the individual crises of the focalising characters and their struggle to overcome them or their failure to do so. This will be shown in the following subchapters, which are dedicated to the three protagonists: Dan Fuselli, Chrisfield, and John Andrews.

3. 2. 1. Daniel Fuselli – The Obedient "Hero"

For Daniel Fuselli, store clerk from San Francisco craving for validation, the war is very unlike what he pictured it. Instead of being able to do heroic deeds like he had seen them in the movies, he is caught up in the dull routine of camp life, working for the medical supply unit far off the trenches. He hopes for a promotion in order to escape this dismal situation, but instead, his obedience to authority only leads to self-denial and aggravates his distress. Although outwardly cool and collected, Fuselli has nightmares and haunting visions, for example during the passage across the Atlantic. After having taken part in a discussion about meningitis, he is suddenly overcome by fear: "As he opened the door he thought of himself crawling back to his bunk and feeling his neck

swell and his hands burn with fever and his arms and legs stiffen until everything would be effaced in the blackness of death" (*Soldiers* 49).

Later, while he is based at a camp in France, Fuselli feels increasingly isolated: "Despair seized hold of him. He was so far from anyone who cared about him, so lost in the vast machine" (*Soldiers* 64). His troubles culminate when Yvonne, the French girl he has fallen in love with, refuses his marriage proposal and devotes her attention to the sergeant of Fuselli's outfit instead. On top of that, the young soldier suffers a major setback at the return of the corporal, whose position he was promised to take.

And all the flood of bitterness that had been collecting in his spirit seethed to the surface. They had not treated him right. He felt full of hopeless anger against this vast treadmill to which he was bound. The endless succession of the days all alike, all subject to orders, to the interminable monotony of drills and line-ups, passed before his mind. He felt he couldn't go on, yet he knew that he must and would go on, that there was no stopping, that his feet would go on beating in time to the steps of the treadmill. (*Soldiers* 118-119)

All of the passages quoted above employ a language that is far removed from that which Fuselli would actually use himself. The novel presents the 19-year old as an obedient soldier, willing to fulfill the wishes of his superiors and eager to prove his ability. It is very unlikely that he would actively use the words "blackness of death" and "vast machine" in connection with life in the army. The discrepancy between Fuselli's unvoiced trepidation and his cool outward appearance underlines the importance of narrative perspective in these passages. Although there is no overt interference on the part of the narrator, it is clear that these are cases of dissonant psycho-narration, insofar as the narrator has "superior knowledge of the character's inner life and [...] superior ability to present it and assess it" (Cohn, *Minds* 29).

Fuselli is a broken character, unable to articulate his distress, let alone relieve it. Instead of trying to come to terms with his disheartening experiences, he consoles himself with "a comfortable feeling of possession" (*Soldiers* 112) towards Yvonne, not realising that she is hardly interested in starting a relationship with Fuselli, much less in marrying him. Similarly, the young soldier

enjoys “a delicious feeling of leadership” (*Soldiers* 69) at the simple task of distributing food rations among his fellow soldiers, thus compensating for the lack of significance he otherwise has in the army. He “limits his own protest to mere nightmares of proud insubordination” (Cooperman, *Novel* 154). Fuselli either denies his fears or he attributes them to his insignificant position in the army, trusting that a promotion will alleviate his problems. However, even when this hope is dashed, Fuselli remains unable to assert his individuality. Instead, he goes with the flow and becomes part of the vast machine again. He ends up with a venereal disease and is transferred to a labour battalion, where he does menial work. The young soldier who desperately tries not to “get in wrong” does so in the end (see *Soldiers* 327).

With the character of Fuselli, Dos Passos calls into question the romantic ideal of war that I have discussed in the introduction. Fuselli derives most of his knowledge about war from movies (see *Soldiers* 32) and is unable to adapt to the reality of war. He still believes in heroism and admires his superiors, which finds expression in his careful study of their demeanour, for example when he notices the “brilliantly-polished puttees” of the lieutenant (*Soldiers* 73). “In der Figur Fusellis komprimiert Dos Passos all jene Züge, die den Menschen als gedankenloses Herdentier erscheinen lassen. Fuselli verkörpert den plumpen Opportunisten, dessen naive Illusionen und Mangel an persönlicher Integrität die Ursachen seines Scheiterns sind“ (Fingerhuth 125).

Dos Passos’ disdain towards Fuselli is also expressed in the passages that deal with Eisenstein, a Jewish intellectual sympathising with the Russian revolution. When Fuselli first meets Eisenstein, not knowing about his leftist leanings, the young soldier observes that “[k]ikes ain’t so bad,” (*Soldiers* 9) simply because he has got “a good friend who’s a kike.” However, once he discovers that Eisenstein is a supporter of pacifism and revolution, he starts to condemn his “pro-German” (*Soldiers* 120) thinking. Thereafter, he seems to disdain Jews in general. When Eisenstein discusses revolution with a Frenchman in a pub, Fuselli concludes: “A kike and a frog, that’s a good combination,” (*Soldiers* 95) thereby insulting Jews and the French equally.

3. 2. 2. Chrisfield – The Irascible Cog in the Machinery

In contrast to Fuselli, Chrisfield holds the military machinery in high contempt, but like the former, he is stuck in a dilemma and overcome by feelings of loneliness, fear, and a sense of insignificance. Like Fuselli, he seeks refuge in dreams, but instead of promotion, he yearns for his native land in Indiana, which he calls “God’s country” (*Soldiers* 151). By reminiscing about his home, Chrisfield compensates for the feeling of being uprooted and powerless, which is strongest in the confrontations with his arch enemy, Sergeant Anderson, as the following passage shows: “Chrisfield felt powerless as an ox under the yoke. All he could do was work and strain and stand at attention, while that white-faced Anderson could lounge about as if he owned the earth and laugh importantly like that” (*Soldiers* 166).

Chrisfield directs all his anger against Anderson, whom he had already tried to kill back at the training camp. His pent-up wrath finds expression in his willingness to resort to violence, for example when he impetuously punches his companion Judkins after an encounter with Anderson (see *Soldiers* 161). When Chrisfield is unable to set loose his violence, he compensates for his unfulfilled desires with crude imaginings: “Chrisfield marched with his fists clenched; he wanted to fight somebody, to run his bayonet into a man as he ran it into the dummy in that everlasting bayonet drill, he wanted to strip himself naked, to squeeze the wrists of a girl until she screamed” (*Soldiers* 160). Fingerhuth (127) connects Chrisfield’s irascibility with the influence of the military machinery:

Chrisfields blinder Haß offenbart den Irrweg einer Generation, der mit bössartiger Propaganda ein Feindbild anerzogen worden ist, das den Mechanismen des Krieges, der Freund und Feind gleichermaßen zerstört, Hohn spricht. Dieser Haß muß verstanden werden als Ausdruck absoluter Frustration und Ohnmacht angesichts der Unterdrückungsmechanismen der Militärmaschinerie.

All his unsatisfied desires exacerbate Chrisfield’s troubled situation. He reaches rock bottom after an encounter with Sergeant Anderson in the barracks, where Chrisfield is appointed guard and thus all by himself. When Anderson suddenly turns up and inquires after the condition of the barracks, Chrisfield loses his self-control. Instead of trying to avoid “getting in wrong”, as Fuselli would have

done, he provokes Anderson with daring remarks and even threatens to kill him. As a result of this encounter, Chrisfield is put under arrest and a court-martial is being initiated.

Chrisfield's decline is mirrored in the gap that opens up between himself and John Andrews. Initially, he admires the "damn good kid" (*Soldiers* 136) for his intellect and thinks of him as a friend. In a conversation between the two, Chrisfield even admits that he would love to be like Andrews (see *Soldiers* 177). After his insubordination towards Anderson, Chrisfield is stricken with fear at the prospect of the court-martial and wishes that Andrews could go with him and defend him (see *Soldiers* 172). However, Chrisfield later begins to turn his back on Andrews, increasingly adopting the opinion of his companions, who think that the latter is a "yeller dawg" (*Soldiers* 183), i.e. a "cowardly person". While Chrisfield first defends his friend, he later refrains from arguing with Small and Judkins, who continue to speak ill of Andrews. Ultimately, Chrisfield forms the opinion that Andrews is "crazy", which he connects with the latter being a "yeller dawg" (*Soldiers* 193).

Highlighting Chrisfield's increasing alienation from Andrews is a means for the author to level criticism at the former. Instead of teaming up with his companion, who obviously finds life in the army intolerable as well, Chrisfield distances himself from Andrews and goes with the flow in the end. His portrayal suggests that he is unable to assert his individuality and to live by his values, very much like Fuselli. Chrisfield often acts "big" and asserts that he does not "give a hoot in hell" (*Soldiers* 170 and 185), for example when he is arrested or when he hears gunfire in the distance. But in reality, he is very much afraid of life in the army and the loss of individuality. This is best illustrated by a passage that deals with his temporary arrest: "Chrisfield listened to the talk about him as if from another world. Already he was cut off from his outfit. He'd disappear and they'd never know or care what became of him" (*Soldiers* 172). After this event, he no longer enjoys being alone (like he did when he was barracks guard, where there was "no chance of anyone shouting orders at him" (*Soldiers* 168)).

Chrisfield's desperate situation peaks in his assassination of Sergeant Anderson. Having committed this hideous crime and having thus "redeem[ed] his manhood," (Cooperman, *Novel* 154) he feels most comfortable as a cog in the machinery, after all: "Chrisfield looked straight ahead of him. He did not feel lonely any more now that he was marching in ranks again. His feet beat the ground in time with the other feet. He would not have to think whether to go to the right or to the left. He would do as the others did" (*Soldiers* 201). Chrisfield becomes one of many nameless fighters; "a man without any accessible interior life" (Lee 204).

In the passages that deal with Chrisfield's fears, Dos Passos allows insights into the character's state of mind that the unreflective soldier would hardly ever articulate himself, very much like Fuselli. There is a stark contrast between Chrisfield's bold demeanour and his fears of falling into oblivion and being left all by himself. However, the narrator does not so much exert his control over the character by using a different tone, like he did with Fuselli. The style that is used in these passages is close to Chrisfield's own idiom. This could indicate that the author ultimately has more sympathy for Chrisfield's temporary protest than for Fuselli's cowardly subordination.

The end of the novel offers yet another perspective on Chrisfield, showing him to have an accessible interior life indeed! We come across him again in the very last chapters of the book, when he and Andrews meet in Paris after having both deserted, even though Chrisfield had been appointed corporal in the meantime. The relationship between the two seems to be budding again, and Chrisfield obviously even trusts Andrews that he has not told anybody about the assassination of Sergeant Anderson (see *Soldiers* 424). This is remarkable insofar, as Chrisfield had shared the secret with Andrews only and is then confronted with a certain sergeant who knows about the murder.

He differs from Andrews, however, in that he does not believe in the feasibility of a revolution, which is something the soldiers discuss extensively, after having heard about the political upheaval in Russia. Andrews believes in the potential of a leftist uprising. Bearing in mind what has been said about John Dos

Passos' political leanings at the time of writing, it is obvious how the author uses Andrews as a mouthpiece for his own beliefs.

3. 2. 3. John Andrews – The Sensitive Artist

All of the three protagonists in Dos Passos' novel are victims of circumstances and are unable to overcome their individual predicaments. It is John Andrews, though, who we as readers are most tempted to sympathise with, for not only is his distressed situation given major prominence (more than half of the book focuses on his experiences), but it is also depicted in very sympathetic terms. He is altogether the most tragic figure in *Three Soldiers*. The military machinery is an unbearable burden for Andrews, who, after some vain attempts, is ultimately unable to escape its clutches. He keeps on making wrong decisions (or none at all) and even his desertion turns out to be without avail. Like Chrisfield and Fuselli, he is unable to avert the pending calamities. However, there is one big difference between Andrews and the other two: Although the three of them are „broken, hidden, and then discarded” (Ludington 180) by the military machinery, the fact remains that Andrews is the only one of the three who seeks to find a (nonviolent) way of self-expression and positive self-assertion in the gruelling army life. The sensitive young man's attempts at asserting his individuality turn out to be futile, but even his longing for agency and his desire to oppose the military machinery with a work of art give him a somehow heroic position and make him stand out among his companions.

3. 2. 3. 1. Andrews' Conversion: Desire for Individuality

Andrews' craving for freedom is initially not as strong, though. Quite on the contrary, the young soldier seeks to find “victory of conformity over individuality” (Gelfant, *Search* 178) by enlisting in the army. When he is at the training camp in the third chapter of *Three Soldiers*, Andrews is confident about his decision: “This was what he had sought when he had enlisted, he said to himself. It was in this that he would take refuge from the horror of the world that had fallen upon him. He was sick of revolt, of thought, of carrying his individuality like a

banner above the turmoil" (*Soldiers* 22). It remains unclear why he wants to 'get lost in the shuffle', but Andrews seems determined to break with his past and deems his submission to the machinery of the army the appropriate means for this: "At least at the bottom, in the utterest degradation of slavery, he could find forgetfulness and start rebuilding the fabric of his life, out of real things this time, out of work and comradeship and scorn" (*Soldiers* 28). There is reason to believe that Dos Passos uses Andrews' early attitude about warfare and life as a soldier to represent the war craze that marked the beginning of the Great War (see also chapter 1) and that not only cast a spell over the uncritical masses, but also affected intellectuals of all sorts, including John Dos Passos himself. However, disillusionment followed soon after, which also found expression in *Three Soldiers*.

Andrews is at odds with himself. On the one hand, he wants to get lost in the masses of anonymous soldiers, on the other hand, he is beginning to fear the loss of his own identity: "But some day he would want to play the piano again, to write music. He must not let himself sink too deeply into the helpless mentality of the soldier. He must keep his will power" (*Soldiers*: 27-28). The incompatibility of the dull army life and individual creativity that is a major theme in later parts of *Three Soldiers* is already hinted at here.

The spark of desire for freedom becomes stronger in the course of the novel. The young soldier increasingly feels that the "circumstances of Army life impose an intolerable restriction on the rights of the individual human being" (Allen 143). His growing desire to assert his individuality goes hand in hand with a sense of alienation from his unit: "He felt triumphantly separated from them, as if he were in a window somewhere watching soldiers pass, or in a box of a theater watching some dreary monotonous play" (*Soldiers* 206).

However, Andrews does not make up his mind to claim his individuality until he gets wounded by a shell while he is cleaning barracks windows. Through this incident, the young soldier becomes aware of the preciousness and singularity of his own life. He is transferred to a hospital, where he seems to have some sort of spiritual awakening: "He felt suddenly as if his spirit had awakened from

a long torpor. The spell of dejection that had deadened him for months had slipped off. He was free” (*Soldiers* 211). Andrews reasons that as long as he stays at the hospital, he will be free from the constraints of army life. This stirs up hopes inside him:

Perhaps he was badly enough wounded to be discharged from the army. The thought set his heart beating like mad. That meant that he, who had given himself up for lost, who had let himself be trampled down unresistingly into the mud of slavery, who had looked for no escape from the treadmill but death, would live. He, John Andrews, would live. (*Soldiers* 212)

From then on, the young soldier, who had enlisted in the army because he was “sick [...] of carrying his individuality like a banner above the turmoil,” seeks to assert his right to exactly this individuality and to stop his “aimless drifting” (*Soldiers* 226). John Andrews makes up his mind to desert after his release from the hospital. And even though circumstances seem to be propitious – the armistice follows soon after he leaves the infirmary – the young soldier is not able to turn the tide in his favour. Quite the contrary, he soon falls even deeper into the clutches of the military machinery. The various reasons for his misery will be looked at in more detail in the following subchapters.

3. 2. 3. 2. The Downward Spiral

John Andrews’ major problem is his constant indecision and his failure to act rationally. His army experiences have convinced him of the necessity of making a sign of protest. However, after his release from the hospital he feels “the stagnation of the life about him [...] sinking into every crevice of his spirit” (*Soldiers* 231) and deadening his wish for revolt. He tries to “discover a means of personal self-realisation that will redeem the impersonal and inhuman mechanism of army existence” (Colley 33). But Fuselli’s self-denial or Chrisfield’s propensity towards violence are no practicable solutions for the sensitive soldier. Contrary to his resolution, he does not even desert after his release from the hospital. Having won an army scholarship assignment to the Sorbonne, he focuses on his music as a token of insurrection instead. When

John Andrews finally follows through with his desertion, it is hardly an act of revolt.

3. 2. 3. 3. The Desertion: Andrews as a Tag-along

In fact, Andrews merely follows someone else's example, hardly knowing what he is doing. This takes place when he is unloading cement at the wharf of Passy after having been caught without his school pass and subsequently transferred to a labour battalion. There, he makes friends with a 17-year-old car thief called the Kid. While Andrews claims that the labour battalion is "not really as bad as I thought it would be," (*Soldiers* 394) the Kid makes up his mind to put an end to their miserable situation and suggests desertion. But all of a sudden, this seems "too risky" (*Soldiers* 397) to Andrews. He seems unable to go through with what he was convinced of only weeks ago. Instead of acting from conviction, he just does what the Kid tells him to do. When the teenager slips into the current from the planks, Andrews follows him without really knowing what he is doing. The accidental nature of his desertion is also expressed in sentences like the following: "He dove again, without thinking, as if his body were working independently of his mind" (*Soldiers* 404). Someone else seems to be the agent of his own desertion, which is thus "barely a matter of volition" (Brantley 32) and definitely not a gesture of self-assertion. On this reading, the desertion is just one of many haphazard attempts at escaping the clutches of the army. Instead of setting a self-confident example and a real sign of revolt, Andrews' plunge into the water is just as timid as all his other feeble gestures.

Therefore, I disagree with Fingerhuth (136), who argues that, starting with his desertion, Andrews is finally able to overcome his lack of agency: "Es wäre falsch, Andrews' Desertion als bloße abenteuerliche Episode in den Ablauf der Romanhandlung einzustufen. Vielmehr ist sie der Auftakt zu Andrews' bewußter Loslösung von dem System, das ihn unterdrückt."

Fingerhuth overlooks the fact that Andrews' "aimless drifting" and irrational conduct do not change after his plunge into the river. He has haunting

memories of his arrest and becomes increasingly estranged from his friends, who advise him to apply for a discharge (see *Soldiers* 426). Andrews refuses all their offers of assistance, because he is too proud to “crawl on [his] belly and lick people’s boots” (*Soldiers* 301) any longer. His search for understanding leads to another problematic decision, namely that to go and talk to Geneviève Rod. Instead of being able to get him out of his predicament, she actually causes even more troubles, which the young soldier realises too late.

3. 2. 3. 4. Geneviève Rod

Geneviève Rod is the daughter of a wealthy Parisian family. The young soldier becomes infatuated with her, although he is initially reluctant to meet her at all. When his friend Henslowe, an ambulance driver for the French army, tells him about Geneviève and about her being distinguished and intellectual, Andrews declares that an intellectual is “the last thing I want to meet” (*Soldiers* 337).

He meets her very soon, though, and already her outward appearance is an image of pending doom: Geneviève is holding a cigarette, she is wearing a black dress and her eyes are “very large, a pale brown, as large as the eyes of women in those paintings of Artemisias and Berenikes found in tombs in the Fayum” (*Soldiers* 343). By using these images of blackness and death, Dos Passos conveys a sense of foreboding. Andrews’ infatuation with Geneviève Rod soon brings the young soldier into trouble. It might not be a mere coincidence that Andrews gets caught without his papers and is subsequently sent to a labour battalion while he is visiting Chartres with Rod.

Later, after his desertion and his escape from the labour camp, Andrews longs to go back to her place, although his friends advise him to either leave Paris or to apply for a discharge. He is, nonetheless, bent on seeing her, thinking of nothing else and willingly taking the chance of getting caught. “[I]nstead of using the money given to him by his friends to get across the border into a neutral or unoccupied country, Andrews goes to see Genevieve Rod for whom he has never demonstrated a consuming passion” (Brantley 32). His last encounters with her are disillusioning. She is reluctant to speak to him alone, which

Andrews so desperately wishes. The young soldier begins to put the blame for his troubled situation on families like the Rods, who, he thinks, personify the system that wants to bring him down. This culminates during a lunch at their mansion: “[H]e had a crazy desire to jump to his feet and shout: ‘Look at me; I’m a deserter. I’m under the wheels of your system. If your system doesn’t succeed in killing me, it will be that much weaker, it will have less strength to kill others.’” (*Soldiers* 455)

When Andrews and Rod are alone at last, she shows no understanding for his actions. Upon hearing that the young soldier has deserted, she merely comments about his seeming lack of patriotism. Geneviève Rod is incapable of understanding that Andrews craves for freedom. Their differing worldviews are unbridgeable. During their penultimate encounter, Andrews tells her about what he has become convinced of in the course of the war:

‘It seems to me,’ he said very softly, ‘that human society has been always that, and perhaps will be always that: organizations growing and stifling individuals, and individuals revolting hopelessly against them, and at last forming new societies to crush the old societies and becoming slaves again in their turn....’ (*Soldiers* 458)

For such a mode of thinking, Geneviève Rod has no understanding. “Emancipated yet thoroughly imbued with outdated beliefs in middle-class respectability and bourgeois pragmatism, she is unable to share Andrews’ hard-won ‘notions of individual liberty’” (Piep 80). On top of that the incompatibility of their respective ways of life is also symbolised in Geneviève’s lack of sensitivity to music, which, she professes, does not extend beyond that of chairs or tables (see *Soldiers* 345).

The major tragedy in connection with Geneviève Rod is that it takes Andrews too long to realise that he has actually never stopped the “aimless drifting” and has ignored the many differences between himself and her. Only at a very late point in the novel does he begin to see that she might not be able to give him the devotion he desires. “Would he and Geneviève ever find a moment of real contact? All at once a bitter thought came to him. ‘Or is it that she wants a tame pianist as an ornament to a clever young woman’s drawing room?’” (*Soldiers*

452). In the end, Andrews realises that “Geneviève is too caught up in her shallow social life to shower [him] with the considerate attention he craves” (Piep 80).

John Dos Passos uses Geneviève Rod as a symbol for “the exploitive [sic] nature of a capitalistic system that thrives on war for profit” (Piep 81). Her professed belief, namely that “[e]veryone has to give up a great deal of life to live anything deeply” (*Soldiers* 382) turns out to be phony. After all, Rod does not give up anything, which contributes to the estrangement between her and John Andrews.

3. 2. 3. 5. The Queen of Sheba: Art and Life

It has been briefly mentioned above, that John Andrews writes music in order to oppose the military system. The idea for a symphony about the Queen of Sheba comes to him while he is still at the hospital. In the initial stages of his growing isolation, he seeks refuge in wild imaginings:

[H]e began to think of the music he had intended to write about the Queen of Sheba before *he had stripped his life off* in the bare room where they had measured him and *made a soldier of him*. Standing in the dark in the desert of his despair, he would hear the sound of a caravan in the distance, tinkle of bridles, rasping of horns, braying of donkeys, and the throaty voices of men singing the songs of desolate roads. He would look up, and before him he would see, astride their foaming wild asses, the three green horsemen motionless, pointing at him with their long forefingers. Then the music would burst in a sudden hot whirlwind about him, full of flutes and kettledrums and braying horns and whining bagpipes, and torches would flare red and yellow, making a tent of light about him, on the edges of which would crowd the sumpter mules and the brown mule drivers, and the gaudily caparisoned camels, and the elephants glistening with jeweled harness. Naked slaves would bend their gleaming backs before him as they laid out a carpet at his feet; and, through the flare of torchlight, the Queen of Sheba would advance towards him, covered with emeralds and dull-gold ornaments, with a monkey hopping behind holding up the end of her long train. She would put her hand with its slim fantastic nails on his shoulder; and, looking into her eyes, *he would suddenly feel within reach all the fiery imaginings of his desire*. (*Soldiers* 217-218, emphasis added)

With reveries like this one, John Andrews passes the time at the infirmary. In his mind, a multi-coloured dream world spreads out, which makes him forget the dull grey of life in the army. Writing music seems to be the only consolation for the lonely young soldier. The passage underlines an idea that runs through large parts of *Three Soldiers*, namely that creativity and the machine-like existence in the army are contradictory concepts. Art is something that only human beings can create, but by becoming a soldier, John Andrews has ceased to be such. By creating a piece of art, he wants to reclaim and assert his humanity. Seen from this light, his arrest at the very end of the book and the remaining behind of his sheet music, blown away by the breeze, are a certain form of death. His final obedience to the military police and his indifference to take along his writing show that the army has crushed the individual spirit at last. The music remains unfinished and its author will never be known. The “fiery imaginings of his desire” are benumbed and Andrews’ ardent wish, namely to create a piece of art that will last, is shattered by the omnipotence of the army. As readers, “we are made to feel that the destruction of this symphony, this ecstatic song choked off and dispersed on the wind, is the real tragedy of the War” (Cowley, *Dos Passos* 487).

3. 2. 3. 6. Andrews’ Lone Struggle for Freedom

When John Andrews is finally broken, he is a lonely man. His protest against the military machinery has driven him into increasing isolation. He has ignored the fact that his shattering experiences, his desperation and his disillusion are collective phenomena and are shared by the people around him. Although Andrews theoretically devotes himself to socialist ideas, he remains isolated and does not team up with other soldiers. Only at the very end of the novel does he understand that his anti-social behaviour has not been conducive to his aims. Having refused to be helped for too long, but also having failed to help others, he ends up totally alone. This is when Andrews rechristens his musical composition *The Soul and Body of John Brown*. At the same time, he also realises that he “had not lived up to [that] name” (*Soldiers* 469). “[E]r versäumt es, seinen individuellen Protest dem einer ganzen Generation unterzuordnen,

die sich gegen die bestehenden gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse auflehnt“ (Fingerhuth 133-134).

3. 2. 3. 7. Increasing Desperateness: Different Narrative Modes

As noted above, the character of John Andrews widely reflects the author's own experiences. John Dos Passos tried to comprehend the historical shift that took place on the battlefields of Europe at the time and he used the sensitive soldier to voice many of his own beliefs in his novel. Thus, it is hardly surprising that when psycho-narration is used in connection with John Andrews, it is almost always of the consonant type. Dos Passos leaves out no chance to highlight the distress of the young soldier. Cohn (*Minds* 38) notes that psycho-narration “is [...] rarely used simply to follow consciousness through its paces, since it can do so only in the form of unadorned indirect quotations.” According to Cohn, this becomes monotonous very quickly, which is also the case in *Three Soldiers*. As readers, we are informed in no uncertain terms that John Andrews feels like “the only living thing in a world of dead machines; the toad hopping across the road in front of a steam roller” (*Soldiers* 462). Images of that sort, which underline Andrews' perception of the army as a machine-like juggernaut, appear over and over again in the novel.

In contrast to the portrayal of Fuselli's experiences, there is no “disparity between the narrating and the figural consciousness” (Cohn, *Minds* 31) in the passages that focus on Andrews. One of the biggest differences between John Andrews, on the one hand, and Daniel Fuselli and Chrisfield, on the other hand, is that the former reflects on his actions and acknowledges his feelings of hopelessness and despair – feelings (and thoughts) that are very often coincident with what is revealed about the character on the part of the narrator. In most of these passages, the narrator “remains effaced and [...] readily fuses with the consciousness he narrates” (Cohn, *Minds* 26). However, the countless efforts to bring across Andrews' predicament and his state of irresoluteness soon become superfluous. John Dos Passos' skills as a writer were simply too limited at that stage of his career and many of the later chapters of *Three*

Soldiers drag on with countless and monotonous images of doom and oppression.

As John Andrews' isolation increases, Dos Passos blends psycho-narration and narrated monologue or relies solely on the latter. This often takes the shape of philosophical remarks and questions about the troubled state of the world: "So was civilization nothing but a vast edifice of sham, and the war, instead of its crumbling, was its fullest and most ultimate expression. Oh, but there must be something more in the world than greed and hatred and cruelty" (*Soldiers* 225). Narrated monologue is also used to express Andrews' increasing hopelessness: "And now he was a deserter. Was there any sense to it all? Had his life led in any particular direction, since he had been caught haphazard in the treadmill, or was it all chance?" (*Soldiers* 451). No matter what the young soldier does, everything seems to bring him more deeply into the maelstrom of trouble.

As Andrews' desperateness increases, Dos Passos frequently makes use of quoted monologue. This further highlights the young soldier's distress and indecision. Since he has no real attachment figures that could give him reassurance, Andrews resorts to soliloquies, for example when he walks around in civilian clothes after his desertion and is afraid of being followed: "Where's your nerve. Where's your nerve?' He was saying to himself" (*Soldiers* 422). By that time, Andrews is already a nervous wreck and driven into complete isolation.

His irresoluteness reaches its peak towards the end of the novel, shortly before his arrest. Again, the use of quoted monologue stresses Andrews' uncertainty: "'I must fly the coop tonight,' he said to himself. But suppose then letters came with money the next day. He writhed in indecision all the afternoon" (*Soldiers*: 469). This is just one of many passages in *Three Soldiers* that underline the fact that Andrews' inability to act is a contributory cause of his downfall. Strangely enough, Isernhagen (112) claims the exact opposite by arguing "daß Andrews als einziger der drei Soldaten aufgrund einer Entscheidung unterzugehen scheint." Indeed, Andrews makes up his mind to no longer serve the military

machinery (which is what Isernhagen refers to), but his resolution remains vague and desultory. He suffers from a lack of self-confidence which impedes most of his plans. Ironically, he overcomes this problem at the end of the book. Upon his arrest, Andrews' behaviour has suddenly changed: he calmly tells the military police that he is a deserter and he recklessly leaves behind his sheet music, which used to be so important to him. It seems that he is finally able to live with the consequences of his actions.

3. 3. Concluding Remarks

John Dos Passos uses the character of John Andrews in order to epitomise the distress and misery of a whole generation. The book's three soldiers – Daniel Fuselli, Chrisfield and John Andrews – are all victims of circumstances, but as readers, we only perceive the latter to be “full of possibilities and hopes and desires” (*Soldiers* 378). What's so tragic about Andrews is that, whatever he does to throw off the shackles that weigh him down, his situation always gets worse. Every step that he takes gets him into even more trouble. Andrews represents the idea that the omnipotence of the military machinery crushes everyone, but particularly those who are not willing to toe the line. Of course, it is not just bad luck that brings the young soldier down. In a way, he is also the agent of his own misery, because he cannot act rationally and is unable to accept help. He seeks isolation and overlooks the many extended hands that offer him assistance or he hangs on to those that show no real interest in him as a sensitive and creative human being, namely that of Geneviève Rod.

Although *Three Soldiers* touches upon many important societal, philosophical and political issues of its time, it is a weak novel from a structural viewpoint. The tripartite division does not really work, especially as Andrews is given too much prominence. If Dos Passos had balanced the lengths of the three parts, Fuselli might not have been the flat character that he is and the portrayal of Andrews could also have profited from shortenings here and there. The three parts are not really interconnected and the roles of Fuselli and Chrisfield seem to amount

to little more than that of wildcards. Their simplicity makes Andrews stand out even more.

John Dos Passos was clearly only learning his trade when he wrote *Three Soldiers*. Of the three novels discussed in this paper, I personally find it the least interesting. But seen from a thematic perspective, it is a bold and important novel indeed. Almost one hundred years ago, its author voiced his beliefs about war and what it does to innocent people in a way that was unheard of at the time. The world that many young soldiers entered when they came to the battlefields of Europe in the early 20th century was a different world than the one they had left behind. Andrews articulates what they might have felt right at the beginning of *Three Soldiers*:

“His life before this week seemed a dream read in a novel, a picture he had seen in a shop window—it was so different. Could it have been in the same world at all? He must have died without knowing it and been born again into a new, futile hell.” (*Soldiers*: 28)

4. Ernest Hemingway and A Farewell to Arms

4. 1. Hemingway's Life and Work

4. 1. 1. Biographical Sketch

Ernest Miller Hemingway was born on July 21, 1899 in Oak Park, Illinois. He was the son of Clarence Edmonds Hemingway, a physician, and Grace Hall-Hemingway, a singer and musician. He attended Oak Park and River Forest High School, where he contributed to the school newspaper and thus laid the foundation for his later literary achievements. But before he began his career as a writer of short stories and novels, Hemingway learned his trade in the newspaper business, working for the *Kansas City Star* as a cub reporter after having graduated from high school.

His experiences during the Great War provided him with material for what was later to become his second novel, *A Farewell to Arms*. After the American entry into the war, he volunteered for Red Cross ambulance service and crossed the Atlantic in May 1918 to serve as ambulance driver at the Austro-Italian front. Although he was not a combatant soldier, he was nonetheless exposed to the danger of being hit by shells or machine-gun fire and eventually did sustain a serious injury near Fossalta di Piave. After having been attended at an Italian field hospital, he was conveyed to a Red Cross infirmary at Milan, where he fell in love with the American nurse Agnes von Kurowsky. Their marriage plans were never carried out, however, and the couple eventually broke up. Catherine Barkley, the female protagonist in *A Farewell to Arms*, is commonly understood to be largely based on the example of Agnes von Kurowsky (although this view has been contested by writers such as Reynolds (*War* 219)). After a temporary return to ambulance service, Hemingway reentered the hospital with jaundice. By January 1919, however, he had fully recovered and was back in the United States, "thus ending a nine-month tour of duty abroad," (Oldsey 45) during which he had twice been decorated for his services.

Again, his stay in the United States turned out to be temporary, and in 1921, Hemingway moved to Paris with his newly married wife Hadley Richardson. Back in Europe, he worked as a correspondent for the *Toronto Star*, reporting

among other things on the Greco-Turkish War, which presumably provided him with further material for the writing of *A Farewell to Arms* (see Baker 10, an assertion contested by Reynolds, *War* 128). In 1924, he resigned from journalism in order to pursue his career as a fiction writer. To that end, Hemingway's stay at Paris turned out very fruitful. He met and befriended other writers such as Ezra Pound, F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Dos Passos and his early mentor Gertrude Stein. Very soon, he established himself as a writer of novels and short stories, exhibiting great talent with his short story collection *In Our Time* (1925) and his first two proper novels, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) and *A Farewell to Arms*.

In his later years, he was married thrice more and continued writing fiction as well as non-fiction. Besides the above mentioned, his most renowned works are the short story collections *Men Without Women* (1927), *Winner Take Nothing* (1933), *The Fifth Column and the First Forty-Nine Stories* (1938) and *The Snows of Kilimanjaro and Other Stories* (1961) as well as the novels *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) and *The Old Man and the Sea*, which won him the 1954-Nobel Prize in Literature. He died by suicide on July 2, 1961.

4. 1. 2. Hemingway's Work

With his fiction, Hemingway became "a charter member of modern times" (Reynolds, *Young* 31), exhibiting a sharp eye for dialogue – Hamburger (193) called it the "basic narrational substance" of his fiction – and evincing great talent in his engagement in interpersonal and social issues as well as for scenic description. Especially in his early writing, Hemingway's style was very sparse and reportorial in nature, often "keep[ing] out of sight the intelligence behind it" (Young 204). By leaving out adjectival adornment (see Levin 157) and by relying chiefly on declarative sentences and simple diction (see McCormick, *Literature* 48), he offered his readership a very plain language, whose underlying meaningfulness had to be detected. Hemingway likened his writing to the gestalt of an iceberg, whose visible tip constitutes only a fraction of its total size. Similarly, however superficially sparse and economical in shape his fiction may be, the subtexts of his stories carry a lot of underlying meaning

which only the attentive reader can gather. Hemingway believed that “[a]nything you know you can eliminate and it only strengthens your iceberg” (Plimpton 35). This concept also has a bearing on *A Farewell to Arms*, as will be illustrated and shown in the following chapters.

4. 1. 3. Implications of Hemingway’s Biography on his Work

For the following discussion of *A Farewell to Arms*, Ernest Hemingway’s service as an ambulance driver during the Great War is clearly the most important aspect of his biography. However wary we should be of projecting one-on-one Hemingway’s experiences at the front to his fiction, it is still necessary to acknowledge their impact on the novel’s organisation and on Frederic Henry’s narrative stance. “Hemingway reproduced on paper the life he had seen through the eyes which his experiences made distinctive. What was muddy and messy became ordered and clear. The large part of it that was unpleasant was repeated, mastered, exorcised” (Young 210).

In other words, had Hemingway not experienced life at the front lines himself, it is more than doubtful whether *A Farewell to Arms* would have been the powerful novel that it is. Reynolds’ assertion (*War* 15-16) that “[t]o read any of Hemingway’s fiction as biography is always dangerous, but to read *A Farewell to Arms* in this manner is to misread the book,” is, therefore, somewhat overblown. However contrasting the lives of Frederic Henry – portrayed in the novel as an expert who “understands military tactics well enough to criticise blunders with the accuracy of a military historian” (Reynolds, *War* 230) – and of Ernest Hemingway – who had spent “only six days (...) under what might properly be called combat conditions” (Matsen 62) and who had not even seen most of the places the novel is set in – might be, it is somewhat misleading to emphasise the fact that *A Farewell to Arms* is Hemingway’s “only novel set on terrain with which he did not have personal experience” (Reynolds, *War* 15, see also Meyers 216). The crucial point is that for Hemingway, Frederic Henry serves as a means for coming to terms with the incisive experience of ambulance service at the front lines and with his dashed hopes connected to his relationship with Agnes von Kurowsky. Bearing in mind what has been said

about the new experience of a whole generation of writers, it is important to comprehend the cathartic function of *A Farewell to Arms*. Like his contemporaries, Hemingway used “literature as a way of resolving, or attempting to resolve, war experiences whose recurring trauma [had to] be relived, reexamined, and, through an apparent catharsis, accepted” (Savage Brosman 90). Matsen (62) puts it in a nutshell by concluding that Hemingway, during his time in Italy, “experienced two shattering woundings, one physical and one emotional. At least to some extent, they would reappear in his fiction in different guises.” The anguish and the tribulations of Hemingway and Henry are, therefore, to some extent comparable.

It is perhaps most appropriate to regard *A Farewell to Arms* as a semi-autobiographical novel, whose author takes the liberty of making judicious use of made-up elements in order to create a coherent narrative and obtain a symbolic level. Hemingway blended “fact into symbol”, and brought together “style and experience” (Kazin, *Grounds* 333). Ironically enough, Reynolds himself gives the clue to this interpretation, by arguing that “[w]here [Hemingway’s] experience is usable in its original form, he brings it whole into the novel. (...) However, Hemingway would always sacrifice his own experience to the needs of his fiction when it was demanded of him” (Reynolds, *War* 171). By careful study of military histories, he was able to “recreate[...] the Austro-Italian front of 1915-1917 more vividly than any other writer” (Reynolds, *War* 15). Similarly, Oldsey (39) calls *A Farewell to Arms* an “achieved fiction which emerges from an autobiographical past.”

The result of this operational mode is often regarded as Hemingway’s best novel (see among others Young 91). Upon reading and re-reading it with regard to my research topic – the rendition of experiences – I repeatedly marveled at its richness in this respect. It is no wonder that *Farewell* has been so thoroughly researched and that it still appeals to scholars and readers equally. I want to begin the following analysis of the novel with a discussion of self-narration and its function in the text.

4. 2. Self-Narration in *A Farewell to Arms*

4. 2. 1. The Experiential Gap

An important narratological aspect of Hemingway's novel is the experiential gap between Frederic Henry at the time of action and at the time when he narrates his story. Nagel (172) points out that "many of the judgments expressed in the novel must be perceived as having derived not from insight contemporaneous with the action but from the older and painfully wiser perspective of Frederic Henry as narrator." Thus, one could argue that *A Farewell to Arms* presents "a consciousness in the process of becoming aware of what it has learned," (Prescott 49) which is why the novel is sometimes classified as a *bildungsroman* (see for example Matsen 126). However, there are good reasons not to follow this interpretative drift unquestioningly, as will be shown later. For the time being, this viewpoint shall be examined in the following subchapter nonetheless.

At the time of narration, Frederic Henry looks back on and re-experiences a process of disillusion. Having become unable to identify with his former beliefs and ideals and disenchanted with the war, he sought shelter in isolated togetherness. He learned to cherish the idea of full dedication to love and devoted all his (will) power to it. His ideal of love, however, is doomed to be evanescent and, ultimately, ends in death and misery. In the end, "Frederic is left to live out his life with the knowledge of what he has lost and the certainty that there is no escape from the destruction he has just experienced" (Phelan, *Reading* 173). How this idea takes shape in the novel will be discussed in the following chapters.

4. 2. 2. Dissonant Self-Narration

It is important to bear in mind that Henry's development as a character and his changed emotional state at the time of narration are hardly ever explicitly pointed out. "Although the events of the novel are filtered through Frederic's retrospective subjectivity, his narration includes remarkably little commentary on

these events,” Owens-Murphy (91) rightly observes. Only very few passages in the novel make explicit reference to the change that Henry undergoes in the course of the events depicted in his narrative. In chapter 3, he talks to the priest about his leave of absence and tells him that he did not visit the priest’s family in the Abruzzi, which he had invited him to do (see *Farewell* 8). Frederic admits that he initially had wanted to go there, but instead he had let himself go and had given in to self-indulgence:

I had wanted to go to Abruzzi. I had gone to no place where the roads were frozen and hard as iron, where it was clear cold and dry and the snow was dry and powdery and hare-tracks in the snow and the peasants took off their hats and called you Lord and there was good hunting. I had gone to no such place but to the smoke of cafés and nights when the room whirled and you needed to look at the wall to make it stop, nights in bed, drunk, when you knew that that was all there was, and the strange excitement of waking and not knowing who it was with you, and the world all unreal in the dark and so exciting that you must resume again unknowing and not caring in the night, sure that this was all and all and all and not caring. Suddenly to care very much and to sleep to wake with it sometimes morning and all that had been there gone and everything sharp and hard and clear and sometimes a dispute about the cost. Sometimes still pleasant and fond and warm and breakfast and lunch. Sometimes all niceness gone and glad to get out on the street but always another day starting and then another night. (*Farewell* 12-13)

The lengthy description of what he has *not* done indicates that Frederic is retrospectively sorry for what he had missed then. Instead of having sought the shelter of places and things whose value he later realised (places like the mountains, or things like quietude, see Baker 101-102), he got drunk in bars and lived a licentious life, trying to flee reality by consuming alcohol and having sex with prostitutes. The reader can already sense that Henry, at the time of narration, would not act the same over again, although this is not explicitly pointed out. The passage then continues in a complicated manner:

I tried to tell about the night and the difference between the night and the day and how the night was better unless the day was very clean and cold and I could not tell it; as I cannot tell it *now*. But if you have had it you know. He [i.e. the priest] had not had it but he understood that I had really wanted to go to the Abruzzi but had not gone and we were still friends, with many tastes alike, but with the difference between us. He had always known *what I did not know* and what, when

I learned it, I was always able to forget. But I did not know that then, although I learned it later. (Farewell 13, emphasis added)

What is striking here are the frequent movements on the time axis and the singular shift to the present tense, being expressed in the use of the word “now”. The passage explicitly mentions the empirical gap between the narrating and the experiencing I. Its incoherence seems to be evidence for the intrusion of past experiences into the narration. Dodman (259) argues that the passage illustrates Henry’s “struggle to articulate a set of wartime experiences that remain resistant to the meaning-making structures of language.”

As readers, we are left in the dark as to what it is that the priest had always known and what Henry himself learned and learned to forget and what he refers to simply as “it”. Beversluis (21) interprets “Frederic’s remarks (...) as a reference to his discovery of himself in relation to Catherine.” During his leave, Frederic gave in to self-indulgence and spent his time in bars and cafés in the city, although, by all appearances, this is not what he had really wanted to do. It seems, then, that what the priest had always known and what Frederic himself learned later and learned to forget was “that spending his leave in the city instead of the Abruzzi was symptomatic of his whole way of life” (Beversluis 24). Having “truly experienced love and war” (Prescott 49), Frederic is able to cast off the hollow urges that triggered his reckless behaviour of old and he learns to embrace his love and life with Catherine. He then also begins to take his fate into his own hands and exhibits a new sense of agency. Frederic’s former “uninitiated character contrasts dramatically with the man who later rows to Switzerland, travelling perilously in a small boat over thirty kilometers in a storm” (Prescott 49).

However, this ‘conversion’ does not change the situation for the better, for Frederic’s discovery of his capacity to act and his belief in true love eventually turn out to be vain. This also explains Frederic’s remark that he was able to forget what the priest had always known. Considering the anguish Frederic must have felt after he lost his wife, the value of what he has learned is difficult to assess, which makes an interpretation of this passage and the novel in general so difficult. Maybe this is also why Frederic’s opinion of the priest is

somehow ambiguous. Although he likes to have long talks with him and obviously derives some sense from them (especially in chapter 11, when the priest visits Frederic at the field hospital and they have a very long conversation), he also finds him dull (see *Farewell* 37). It can't be ruled out that Frederic subconsciously bears a grudge against the priest, who told him that he would love and that he would be happy (see *Farewell* 66), thus finding "it". But when Henry learns to love, his doom is predestined. The priest, in contrast, loves only God and cannot share Henry's shattering experiences.

4. 2. 3. Implicit Dissonance

The above-mentioned explicit hint at the experiential gap between the young and the "painfully wiser" (Nagel 172) Frederic Henry is a very rare exception to the prevailing pattern in *A Farewell to Arms*. Cohn's (*Minds* 162) assertion that "[a] wise old narrator is [...] especially careful to separate the half-baked mental essays of his youth from his present wisdom by explicit, sometimes ironic, comments" does not really hold true for Hemingway's protagonist. Very often, the narrator does not discuss his emotional and mental state at all. "Hemingway does not let the reader see Frederic's pain, which is consistent with his theory of leaving out as much as possible while letting incident and dialogue carry the story" (Reynolds, *War* 37). Thus, the experiential gap between the experiencing and the narrating I mostly remains unvoiced, although there are clues that indirectly suggest a difference between the two (these will be discussed in the following chapters). This insight brings us back to Hemingway's iceberg theory: His fiction might appear pretty straightforward, but it turns out to be quite complex upon closer examination. Very often, the smooth surface of Frederic Henry's account belies the fact that there is a mingling of different voices in *A Farewell to Arms*.

Chapter 34 in book IV provides one example of implicitly dissonant self-narration. When Frederic Henry spends his first night after the desertion together with Catherine Barkley at the hotel in Stresa, the narrating I suddenly comes to the fore, which might pass unnoticed at first:

I know that the night is not the same as the day: that all things are different, that the things of the night cannot be explained in the day, because they do not then exist, and the night can be a dreadful time for lonely people once their loneliness has started. But with Catherine there was almost no difference in the night except that it was an even better time. If people bring so much courage to this world the world has to kill them to break them, so of course it kills them. The world breaks every one and afterward many are strong at the broken places. But those that will not break it kills. It kills the very good and very gentle and the very brave impartially. If you are none of these you can be sure it will kill you too but there will be no special hurry. (*Farewell* 222)

Before going on with the discussion of the intrusion of the narrating I, it is necessary at this point to quote again what Henry had said about the night in chapter 3: „I tried to tell about the night and the difference between the night and the day and how the night was better unless the day was very clean and cold and I could not tell it; as I cannot tell it now” (*Farewell* 13).

Already before he fell in love with Catherine, Frederic knew that the night was preferable over the day, but he could not grasp what it was exactly that made it so, as he had not known real love up to that point. The night can be “a dreadful time for lonely people”, but even then there is something to be desired in it, which also the younger Frederic Henry is aware of. With Catherine, the difference between night and day is narrowed, as they both are emotionally fulfilling in their particular ways. Thus, one could argue that by professing himself unable to tell about the difference between night and day at the time of narration, Henry tricks the readers, for it is exactly what he has gone through and what he was able to learn (by a painful lesson) that should enable him to explain that he refers to nights spent together, nights of loving and caring instead of nights chasing and drinking. But after Catherine’s nightly death and the anguish he must have felt in its wake, it seems only fair to allow Henry his state of irresoluteness. He has experienced the bliss of nights spent in intimate togetherness, but he also went through his most gruesome ordeal during the night. Henry struggles to come to terms with the duality of his experiences, which render him unable to articulate the nightly blessings without qualification.

4. 2. 4. Henry's Second Voice

But there is even more to this passage. It is in the light of this analysis, that the second part of the quote above, beginning with “If people bring so much courage to this world” constitutes one of the most interesting passages of the novel. The fact that *A Farewell to Arms* is narrated in retrospect bears all the importance here. The meaning of this passage actually cannot be grasped by first time readers, as it is the experience of Catherine's death that prompts Henry to think about life and death in such a manner (see also Nagel 180). Catherine's later words echo in this passage, uttered shortly before she dies: “I'm not brave anymore, darling. I'm all broken. They've broken me. I know it now” (*Farewell* 285). She also tells Frederic that “[t]hey just keep it up till they break you” (*Farewell* 285). This quasi-prolepsis (see Genette, *Discourse* 40) – which only later can be identified as such – not only seems to be a “traumatic intrusion” (Dodman 264) of an event from the past on Henry's narration. What makes the passage so conspicuous is the above-mentioned implicit dissonance in Henry's self-narration, manifested in the sudden introduction of a totally different narrative voice. Frederic's reflections about death and the world's destructive power stand in stark contrast to the stoic coolness he exhibited at the deaths of Passini and Aymo. According to Phelan (*Narrative* 73), this intrusion of a different voice constitutes one of the rare structural weaknesses of the novel: “The effectiveness of this famous passage is partially hindered because Hemingway's voice overrides Frederic's to some extent. The passage gives us a voice that is too great a departure from any of the voices that we have heard Frederic use to this point.” From a structural viewpoint, this critique seems justified, as the passage constitutes a sudden breach in the narrative linearity and cohesion of *A Farewell to Arms*. But this does not mean that its credibility is thereby reduced. On the contrary, the sudden dominance of the narrating over the experiencing I (which is what Phelan calls Hemingway's overriding voice) increases the narrative immediacy and adds force to Henry's seemingly generic reflection about life and death by the dispensation with introductory remarks.

In passages such as these, the dissonance in Henry's self-narration is manifested in the "narrative collision with the violence of trauma," (Dodman 249) taking shape as sudden alterations of Henry's voice. The reason for the emergence of this second voice lies in the change of Frederic as character. This change will be discussed in the following chapter.

4. 3. Portrayal of Character in *A Farewell to Arms*

4. 3. 1. The Restrained Narrator

It has been argued in the theoretical part that different narrative techniques are used in order to filter and convey experiences differently. The rendition of experiential processes usually contributes to the authenticity of fictional characters. The more thoroughly this is achieved, the more likely we as readers are to "finish novels with a strong sense of the individual personality of a particular character" (Palmer 176). *A Farewell to Arms* accomplishes this end surprisingly well, considering that Frederic Henry is a very restrained first-person narrator and very often contents himself with stating the indispensable facts and reproducing dialogues. This can already be seen in the opening chapter of *A Farewell to Arms*. Whereas many first-person narrators provide the reader with some preliminary information about themselves, the character cast and the setting before delivering their story proper, in order to facilitate orientation at the beginning of the book, Henry omits any such introductory phrases, which is best illustrated by the novel's famous opening line: "In the late summer of that year we lived in a house in a village that looked across the river and the plain to the mountains" (*Farewell* 3).

This sentence is somehow reminiscent of children's language. It might as well have been uttered by a six-year-old telling a distant relative about some holiday adventure, not knowing that said relative is unaware of the time, date and place of the holidays being referred to. As readers of this passage, we know nothing about who is narrating, who the narrator refers to by using the pronoun "we", in which year the action takes place or where the "house in a village" referred to might be exactly. Oddly enough, the use of definite articles usually suggests

intimacy (see Phelan, *Narrative* 62), however inexistent this is, at least at this point of *Farewell*. We know that the story is told in retrospect, but we are left in the dark about how much time has passed since the events depicted in the novel took place; we do not know the age or the whereabouts, let alone the name of the narrator. But even though the circumstances are more than opaque here, even though the lack of prefatory information and a proper introduction to the setting may strike readers as odd, this very first sentence and the tone it sets tell us something about the character of Frederic Henry. In the course of the novel, we learn that the introduction is very much in keeping with his general propensity to disclose little of his pre-war experiences and to hardly ever talk about more than just plain facts.

As readers, we very soon get the impression that Henry has been in the war from the beginning. “At no time in the novel does he appear as a novice. The reader never sees him learning how to do anything; he already knows” (Reynolds, *War* 230). It remains unclear where his expertise stems from, but what is obvious is that Frederic’s remarkable knowledge makes him appear to be a reliable narrator. Especially first-time readers are likely to accept Henry’s authority, for “the insider’s view produces a kind of credibility. (...) The reader is willing to accept much of Frederic’s knowledge because he has been presented as the insider who understands the territory” (Reynolds, *War* 230).

4. 3. 2. Exterior Perception

In the course of the novel, only a few details about Henry’s past life are disclosed. We learn that he has got a step-father (see *Farewell* 139), that he entered the ambulance corps because he had happened to have been in Italy and spoke Italian (see *Farewell* 21), that he spent some time in Rome, in order to become an architect (see *Farewell* 215) and that he quarreled much with his family in the past (see *Farewell* 270). The reader is far from having a total picture as regards Henry’s past, and even those few details come to our knowledge covertly via dialogue instead of overtly, for instance by explicit remarks on the part of the narrator. Also, Frederic hardly ever makes mention of his emotional state. The narrative mood thereby created renders him a narrator

merely recording “äußere[...] Wahrnehmung” (Peper 13, as opposed to “innere[...] Wahrnehmung” as found in stream-of-consciousness novels, such as Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*). In *A Farewell to Arms*, “[d]as Festhalten eines Geschehens auf der Stufe des dinglichen Vorganges” (Peper 101) prevails.

Such focus on exterior perception, resembling the functioning of a camera that does not distinguish between the things it records (see Peper 99), is apparent in the above-quoted opening of the first chapter of the novel, but the indiscriminate recording of events also resonates in its closing paragraph: “At the start of the winter came the permanent rain and with the rain came the cholera. But it was checked and in the end only seven thousand died of it in the army” (*Farewell* 4).

Already in the opening chapter of *A Farewell to Arms*, Frederic Henry presents himself as a very cynical narrator. How can a quantity of seven thousand dead people justifiably be referred to by using the qualifier “only”? Again, the notion of exterior perception comes into play. In the course of the war, people get accustomed to mass killings and demise on an unimaginable scale. One could argue that, compared to the millions of war dead resulting from the fighting, a quantity of seven thousand casualties is substantially smaller in the neutral perception of the camera. Thus, it seems justified to regard the attitude behind this remark as a consequence of the abominable cruelties Henry had witnessed, heard, or read about in the course of the war and his subsequent emotional hardening. These render him able to refer to thousands of dead with the cool air of a statistician, even if that makes him appear exceedingly coldhearted.

4. 3. 3. Henry’s Conversion

However, the image of the “callow, unreflective, self-centered youth” (Phelan, *Reading* 172) is challenged in the course of the novel. Henry is not indifferent to death. The large-scale dying in the opening chapter of *A Farewell to Arms* is mirrored in its very final chapter in the death of Catherine and her child. “The first disaster is collective and statistical; the second, individual and personal –

the two forms in which death appears to us" (Gurko 93). In between these two events, Henry's story takes place. It is the story of his love for Catherine Barkley, their growing isolation and Henry's conversion. It is "a study in isolation" (Reynolds, *War* 271); the portrayal of a man who seeks emotional and physical bonding with one single person, even if this includes the cutting off of all other ties with the world around him. As briefly mentioned above, the change in his personality also induces a change in his narrative stance. For many scholars, Frederic's role increasingly develops from that of detached observer to sorrowful experiencer, which finds its clearest expression towards the end of the novel. Shortly before Catherine dies, after the birth of their dead son, Frederic sheds his cool stoicism and lays bare his feelings: "Everything was gone inside of me. I did not think. I could not think. I knew she was going to die and I prayed that she would not" (*Farewell* 291).

Seen in this light, *A Farewell to Arms* is the story of a man discovering the inescapability of death, whose destructive force does not even spare the loved ones (see also Ganzel 594). An important landmark on Frederic's path to this insight is his wounding at the Italian frontline. Prior to that, he is ignorant of the dangers connected to his work as an ambulance driver: "I knew I would not be killed. Not in this war. It did not have anything to do with me. It seemed no more dangerous to me myself than war in the movies" (*Farewell* 35).

At the beginning of the novel, he merely regards the firing of the battery at Gorizia "a nuisance" (*Farewell* 15) and does not seem to be afraid at all. After Frederic has fallen victim to the shelling and is subsequently transferred to a hospital in Milan, his recklessness changes. "He realizes in the explosion of the trench-mortar shell that he does have a *me* that the war has something to do with" (Rovit 101). Just like John Andrews in *Three Soldiers*, he becomes aware of the preciousness of his own life. The depiction of the attack intensifies the notion of a second self, which he slips into, as it were, in the course of the shelling and occupies in its wake:

I tried to breathe but my breath would not come and I felt myself rush bodily *out of myself* and out and out and out and all the time bodily in the wind. I went out swiftly, all of myself, and I knew I was dead and that

it had all been a mistake to think you just died. Then I floated, and instead of going on *I felt myself slide back*. (*Farewell* 51, emphasis added)

After this crucial moment, Henry is no longer “a vacant shell of a man” (Beverluis 19) who tells his ambulance drivers that the war has to be finished, however bad it may be (see *Farewell* 48). After his wounding, Frederic learns to reciprocate Catherine’s feelings. Her love now increasingly “provides him with solace rather than discomfort” (Owens-Murphy 97). Their relationship and Catherine’s pregnancy serve as a means to cast off his former conception of life, which was ambivalent insofar, as Henry persuaded himself to be standing outside of the war, but he nevertheless sought to be on good terms with everybody and was eager to do his duty. After the shelling, this behavioural “code was rendered powerless” (Aldridge 30). What effort he earlier put into his work, Henry later dedicates to his relationship with Catherine. He himself sums up this new attitude at the beginning of Book IV, after his plunge into the river and the undercover train ride to Milan: “I was going to forget the war. I had made a separate peace” (*Farewell* 217). He starts a new life, which includes Catherine, but excludes his former important relationships with the priest and the surgeon Rinaldi: “I would never see any of them now. *That* life was over” (*Farewell* 206, emphasis added). Phelan’s (*Narrative* 83) assertion that Henry gradually takes over the voices of Catherine and Passini is truest at this point, considering that shortly before the shelling, Passini had predicted the conversion of Frederic towards the ideals of pacifism (see *Farewell* 48).

Seen from this angle, the above-mentioned lack of prefatory contextualisation in the opening chapters of *A Farewell to Arms* is easily understandable. The new life Frederic has found with Catherine renders the relation of any old stories unnecessary. The “separation from a familial past removes an obstacle to the suspension of Frederic’s imagination—there are no memories of past life and death to qualify the perceptions of the present” (Ganzel 579). The story he tells is the story of his relationship with Catherine, and what goes into the book is filtered along these lines.

4. 3. 4. The Structural Paradox

But from a narratological viewpoint, this insight spawns even more questions than it solves. Bearing in mind that Frederic Henry narrates in retrospect, perhaps years after the events depicted in the novel took place, the question arises as to why his narrative voice changes so much in the course of the book, as described above. Since *A Farewell to Arms* is not a work in progress, even the first half of the novel must have been composed after the experience of the “separate peace”, when Frederic has already undergone his “true emotional change” (Gurko 99). But throughout the narrative, Frederic conspicuously avoids pointing at his experiential growth. “Hemingway typically restricts us to Frederic’s vision and voice at the time of the action, even though he is narrating after the fact” (Phelan, *Narrative* 63). Although it has been shown above that there are some instances of either explicitly or implicitly dissonant narration in *A Farewell to Arms*, it is still striking how little the narrating Frederic Henry comments on the actions of his younger self, especially in view of his huge experiential growth. How, one could ask, is he able to maintain and reenact his stoicism or outright cynicism in the account of the cholera victims and the description of Aymo’s and Passini’s deaths after what has happened to Catherine and the child?

It could be argued, that Hemingway attempted to root the story deeply in the figural world of experience at the different stages of the novel and therefore mostly forbore to make explicit the experiential gap by authorial comments of any sort. The “quasi-annulment of the narrative distance” (Cohn, *Minds* 157) increases the narratological cohesion and intensifies the natural development of Frederic Henry as a character while it is also in keeping with Hemingway’s iceberg theory. According to this interpretation, we as readers witness Frederic’s changes and can partake impartially in his spatial and emotional journey, slowly adapting to a change in his narrative voice. But the forbearance to insert narratorial comments and the reduction of vision to the time of action for the most part of the novel occasions a structural paradox (see Phelan, *Narrative* 83): With knowledge that “[t]he growth or change in Frederic’s character occurs at the time of the action, not during the time of the narration or

through the act of narration,” (Phelan, *Narrative* 80) it seems utterly incomprehensible that Frederic could comment on the thousands of dead in the opening chapter in such a cold-hearted way, having undergone the experience of death himself, once with his offspring and once with his prospective wife. This paradox does not become apparent before the end of the novel (or before a second reading, for that matter), since the readers do not know then that “Frederic comes to an understanding of the war and the world that would make it impossible for him to utter such a sentence without being ironic” (Phelan, *Narrative* 83). Hemingway himself must have been aware of this narratological paradox, but it would seem that he accepted the structural weakness in order to highlight the change in Frederic Henry and to bring forth the story in such a manner as to make it most grappling (see also Phelan, *Narrative* 84).

4. 3. 5. Gradual Change or Sudden Eruptions of the ‘Wiser’ Voice?

But also another, totally different reading is possible. We have learned in the preceding chapters, that Frederic Henry undergoes a substantial change in the course of *A Farewell to Arms*, which is the reason for the existence of two distinct voices in the novel. The ‘wiser’ voice of the narrating I takes shape either explicitly or implicitly and very often not only suspends the narrative linearity, but also tends to literary experiment (see chapter 4. 4.). While there can hardly be any doubt about the existence of these different voices, some confusion can be caused by the equalisation of Henry’s voice with his changed way of living.

According to some scholars (Phelan for example), there is a gradual change in Frederic Henry’s voice as he approaches his narrating I in the course of *A Farewell to Arms*. Important landmarks on this experiential journey are the shelling at Pavla and Henry’s plunge into the river, as I have already pointed out above. On this reading, Henry increasingly sheds his former codes and learns to take his fate into his own hands. Instead of the pointless drinking and whoring, he applies his (will) power to something forceful and promising, which is manifested in the different narrative voice.

But such an equalisation does not really work. Although Frederic Henry slowly becomes a different person in the course of the book, there is no similar pattern of a gradual development in the change of his voice. It seems much more that “[f]rom the very first page of the novel, [...] his voice is always already the voice of a traumatized survivor of grievous wounds and losses” (Dodman 251). He might mostly be able to restrain himself, but sometimes he has those awkward moments when his narrating self comes to the fore. Such an interpretation would also explain why Henry is so dispassionate at the deaths of Passini and Aymo. When the former dies in chapter 9 of the novel, the exterior perception outlined above is again discernible: “There were four drivers. Passini was dead. That left three” (*Farewell* 52). This sounds more like the description of a photograph, than an account of a shelling which Henry has experienced himself. Equally, the death of Aymo is delivered in what is more of a scenic description than the heartfelt rendition of a personal disaster: “Aymo lay in the mud with the angle of the embankment. He was quite small and his arms were by his side, his puttee-wrapped legs and muddy boots together, his cap over his face. He looked very dead. It was raining. I had liked him as well as anyone I ever knew” (*Farewell* 191). Although Aymo and Passini both die before Frederic’s “conversion”, it seems slightly unrealistic that he should be utterly shattered when Catherine dies, and at the same time comment on the passing of these two in a matter-of-fact-way. His outbursts of grief occur always only in connection with Catherine. He reserves all his feelings for her, which also explains his reaction when he first lays eyes on his son: “I had no feelings for him. He did not seem to have anything to do with me. I felt no feeling of fatherhood” (*Farewell* 287).

Seen in this light, *A Farewell to Arms* does *not* trace “a coherent process of growth and change in Frederic Henry,” as Phelan (*Narrative* 60) asserts. Instead, it echoes the bewilderment of its narrator and proves false his assumed superiority over the experiencing I. Frederic Henry re-experiences the trauma at the time of writing. While he mostly narrates with great self-control, there are some landmarks in his narration when a past experience that he has not come to terms with causes a sudden narrative rupture. These are also the moments

when the novel employs more experimental stylistic devices such as stream-of-consciousness, which will be shown in the following chapter.

4. 4. Literary Experiment: Catherine Barkley and Unresolved Crises

As has been mentioned in the biographical part, Ernest Hemingway's writing style is usually very plain and fact-oriented and generally more traditional (or less "inventive") than that of his contemporaries such as William Faulkner or John Dos Passos during his middle period. This also pertains to *A Farewell to Arms*. Frederic Henry's narration is mostly laconic and factual, which has often been traced back to the disillusionment he underwent and the anguish he still feels at the time of narration (see Nagel 183). However, the novel features certain conspicuous passages in which the reportorial style and the narrative linearity are disrupted or abandoned altogether, for example during the retreat at Caporetto. Henry describes how he and his companions are stalled with their cars:

It was still raining hard and I thought some of the stops in the movement of the column might be from cars with wet wiring. More likely they were from horses or men going to sleep. Still, traffic could tie up in cities when every one was awake. It was the combination of horse and motor vehicles. They did not help each other any. The peasants' carts did not help much either. Those were a couple of fine girls with Barto. A retreat was no place for two virgins. Real virgins. Probably very religious. If there were no war we would probably all be in bed. In bed I lay me down my head. Bed and board. Stiff as a board in bed. Catherine was in bed now between two sheets, over and under her. Which side did she sleep on? Maybe she wasn't asleep. Maybe she was lying thinking about me. (*Farewell* 175)

Soliloquising in like manner for a few more sentences, Frederic suddenly seems to be talking to Catherine:

‘Good night, Catherine,’ I said out loud. ‘I hope you sleep well. If it's too uncomfortable, darling, lie on the other side,’ I said. ‘I'll get you some cold water. In a little while it will be morning and then it won't be so bad. I'm sorry he makes you so uncomfortable. Try and go to sleep, sweet.’
I was asleep all the time, she said. You've been talking in your sleep. Are you all right?

Are you really there?

Of course I'm here. I wouldn't go away. This doesn't make any difference between us. (*Farewell* 176)

The confusion is resolved when Piani wakes Henry and the 'normal' narrative continues. It is not unlikely that many first-time readers go over this passage a second time, assuming they might have missed some indication of a changed state of consciousness. But there is none. Henry does not report that he fell asleep, nor that he was dreaming, whereby Hemingway manages to deliver "a brilliant depiction of the consciousness at work" (Prescott: 48). According to Cohn (*Minds* 51), "the dreaming mind variously interacts with and reacts to the dreamed experience, so that a dream often includes the dreamer's thoughts in his dream." The narrative disarray of the passage is in keeping with this insight, but it goes even beyond the depiction of the dreamer's mind. A closer analysis of its exact content prompts the question as to who it is that is really dreaming here. There seems to be some evidence of a finely balanced mingling of the two voices of experiencing and narrating I:

Frederic the narrator, recalling his dream, contributes new details, informed as he is by the more recent memory of Catherine's death. The phrase "stiff as a board in bed" revives the image of Catherine, statue-like in death and "between . . . two sheets, over her and . . . under her," as she appeared when Frederic saw her for the last time. These associations are of course unavailable to the character as he dreams, but they are inescapable for the narrator. (Prescott 48)

In this dream sequence, Hemingway's style is formally very similar to what in Cohn's taxonomy is called self-narrated monologue, but it goes even beyond that. By avoiding reference to his dreamy state, Frederic Henry gives up the "temporally distanced vantage point and cognitive privilege for his past time-bound bewilderments and vacillations," (Cohn, *Minds* 167) thereby "bridging the distance that separates the experiencing from the narrating self" (Cohn, *Minds* 169). Past and present coalesce in what is now no longer simple self-narration, but a style touching the border of self-quoted monologue (whose quotation remains hidden, however) and what Cohn (see *Minds* 174) calls "autonomous monologue".

The more “events are translated into the interior language of a perceiving consciousness,” (Cohn, *Minds* 203), the more experimental it gets. Frederic’s narrative becomes incoherent and the changes to the present tense indicate an “inherent vagueness about circumstances of the act of narration or enunciation” (Fludernik 253).

The above passage establishes a general pattern for the entire novel, namely that of literary experiment in many of those parts that deal with Catherine Barkley. Indeed, whenever the more ‘modernist’ techniques such as autonomous monologue are used in *A Farewell to Arms*, Catherine is the focal point. At the time of narrating, Henry’s feelings toward her are still very strong, and in the course of his relation, he re-experiences his loss and suffers from the inability to “hold the wound closed,” (Dodman 250) as it were. The intensity of his emotions contrasts with the stoic detachedness he exhibits in all other parts of the novel, which adds significance to the passages under consideration (see Reynolds, *War* 59). Also, the focus on Catherine results in a deceleration (see Genette) of the narrative time, which makes them appear more important: “At the beginning of the novel, when his relationship with Catherine was not at a crucial stage, [Frederic] tended to narrate broad sweeps of time, using seasons as indicators of passing periods. As he tells about these crucial months, however, he becomes increasingly precise” (Nagel 181).

His emotions are particularly intense in the last chapter of *A Farewell to Arms*, when Catherine lies in labour, later bears a dead child and finally dies herself. When his pain gets too strong to bear, we witness Frederic’s unfiltered and immediate tribulations as he writes about (and relives) his experience:

Poor, poor dear Cat. And this was the price you paid for sleeping together. This was the end of the trap. This was what people got for loving each other. (...) So now they got her in the end. You never got away with anything. Get away hell! It would have been the same if we had been married fifty times. And what if she should die? She won’t die. People don’t die in child-birth nowadays. That was what all husbands thought. Yes, but what if she should die? She won’t die. She’s just having a bad time. The initial labor is usually protracted. She’s only having a bad time. Afterward we’d say what a bad time and Catherine would say it wasn’t really so bad. But what if she should die? She can’t die. Yes, but what if she should die? She can’t, I tell you. (*Farewell* 283)

The pain and fear even increase after Catherine has given birth to a dead child:

I sat outside in the hall. Everything was gone inside of me. I did not think. I could not think. I knew she was going to die and I prayed that she would not. Don't let her die. Oh, God, please don't let her die. I'll do anything for you if you won't let her die. Please, please, please, dear God, don't let her die. Dear God, don't let her die. Please, please, please don't let her die. God please make her not die. I'll do anything you say if you don't let her die. You took the baby but don't let her die. That was all right but don't let her die. Please, please, please, dear God, don't let her die. (*Farewell* 291)

In these passages, the dispensation with introductory phrases such as “I thought” or “went through my mind” creates the impression of immediacy. This suggests that the narrating I re-experiences this traumatic episode all over again. Caruth (11) notes that “the response to [traumatic] events occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena.” This seems to be the case here. Cohn (*Minds* 168) asserts in her analysis of self-narrated monologue that “when a highly self-centered narrator relates an existential crisis that has remained unresolved” and is “[u]nable to cast a retrospective light on past experience, he can only relive his dark confusions, perhaps in the hope of ridding himself of them.”

This is exactly what happens in these passages. In the course of the novel, Frederic Henry learns how he was mistaken in his assumption of invulnerability. According to Ganzel (590), this transformation and the awareness thereof provide the underlying structure of *A Farewell to Arms*. The experiential incision is too severe to leave its rendition in the novel without structural consequences, even if one need not agree that Frederic is unable “to transform his wartime experience into a coherent narrative” (Owens-Murphy 91). “Catherine’s loss, her echoing voice and broken body, takes shape as a trauma narrative relentlessly imposing itself on Frederic’s ordinary narrative progression of events” (Dodman 263).

The closing chapter of *A Farewell to Arms* offers the reader a view on Frederic Henry at the moment of his complete impotence. When Catherine’s death

looms ahead, just after he has received the news of the death of his son, his “nihilistic musings” (Owens-Murphy 100) set in:

Now Catherine would die. That was what you did. You died. You did not know what it was about. You never had time to learn. They threw you in and told you the rules and the first time they caught you off base they killed you. Or they killed you gratuitously like Aymo. Or gave you the syphilis like Rinaldi. But they killed you in the end. You could count on that. Stay around and they would kill you.

Once in camp I put a log on top of the fire and it was full of ants. As it commenced to burn, the ants swarmed out and went first toward the centre where the fire was; then turned back and ran toward the end. When there were enough on the end they fell off into the fire. Some got out, their bodies burnt and flattened, and went off not knowing where they were going. But most of them went toward the fire and then back toward the end and swarmed on the cool end and finally fell off into the fire. I remember thinking at the time that it was the end of the world and a splendid chance to be a messiah and lift the log off the fire and throw it out where the ants could get off onto the ground. But I did not do anything but throw a tin cup of water on the log, so that I would have the cup empty to put whiskey in before I added water to it. I think the cup of water on the burning log only steamed the ants. (*Farewell* 289)

This quote is very long, but it is important to include it here in its entirety. After having realised the inevitability of death, Henry “turns to a time and place where a sense of his own agency, however ambivalent, remains intact” (Dodman 265). He acts as a God who decides over the fate of the ants, just as some superior power seems to decide over Catherine’s. Interestingly enough, this is the only passage in the whole novel that sees Frederic reflect deeply on an event from the past, presumably from some time before the novel begins. Nagel (182) is, therefore, quite wrong in arguing that “Frederic’s rendition of the trauma of labor and the death of Catherine is almost entirely free of retrospective observations.” While Frederic Henry hardly ever looked back on his former self prior to this episode, he now shows one of his “rare bouts of reflection” (Gurko 97). Again, the narrating I pushes forward and disrupts the narrative cohesion. LaCapra (46-47) in a way sums up Frederic Henry’s situation when he points out that “in post-traumatic situations in which one relives (or acts out) the past, distinctions tend to collapse, including the crucial distinction between then and now.”

4. 5. Concluding Remarks

A Farewell to Arms is, ultimately, a love story. Bookshops might file it under war fiction, but the Great War actually just serves as the framework within which Frederic Henry becomes aware of his self-deception. Initially, Henry persuades himself of being detached; a mere on-looker of war. Although he is in the immediate danger zone, he feels invulnerable and goes about things coolly and professionally. In the wake of the shelling that causes his injury, he realises that he is vulnerable indeed. He reflects on his carelessness and becomes aware of the singularity of his own life. From then on, he devotes his (emotional) power to his relationship with Catherine Barkley, which he formerly has regarded as a mere game (see *Farewell* 29). The urge to put his story into words does not derive from the experience of shell shock. Instead, it is Henry's traumatic personal loss that lies at the centre of his narrative and that also affects it structurally, as I have explained above.

Henry is a very reserved narrator. He does not let the readers in on his secrets, tribulations and fears. His stoicism contrasts with the fact that he is actually immensely depressed. He is wary of revealing too many details about his personality and does not admit to his feelings of unease and desperation. However, the careful reader soon detects that there is more to his story than meets the eye. What the narratologist Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (65) observes about characterisation, namely that “[a]ction and speech convey character-traits through a cause and effect relation which the reader deciphers ‘in reverse’” (Rimmon-Kenan 2002: 65) is particularly true in the case of Frederic Henry's narrative. He turns out to be a very sensitive and emotionally instable man who is unable to cope with his traumatic experiences. The “internal tension between the self as hero and the self as narrator” (Stanzel, *Theory*: 212) that typically characterises first-person narratives with autobiographical elements remains unresolved in *A Farewell to Arms*.

5. E. E. Cummings and *The Enormous Room*

5. 1. Cummings' Life and Work

5. 1. 1. Biographical Sketch

Edward Estlin Cummings was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on October 14, 1894 to Edward Cummings, a professor at Harvard University and later Unitarian minister, and Rebecca Cummings. From a very early age, Cummings started writing poetry, encouraged to do so by his parents and particularly his mother. At the age of ten, Cummings entered the Agassiz School (now Maria L. Baldwin School) in Cambridge and later attended the prestigious Cambridge Latin School, whose graduates often enrolled at Harvard, including Cummings himself. Here he not only delved more deeply into poetry (he was writing a poem a day at that time); Cummings also contributed to the school newspaper, the *Cambridge Review*.

When he was 17 years old, Cummings entered Harvard College where he befriended other prospective writers such as John Dos Passos and Scofield Thayer. At Harvard, Cummings not only wrote for the *Harvard Monthly*, he also expanded his horizons in the literary field and was especially attracted to avant-garde poetry by writers such as Ezra Pound. The new art movements of the early 20th century also had an impact on his painting, Cummings' second artistic mainstay. His first poems were published in the 1917 anthology *Eight Harvard Poets*.

After the United States' entry into World War I in April 1917, Cummings was faced with the danger of being drafted. He decided to volunteer for ambulance service in order to evade that problem. His decision "had little to do with patriotism, nor did it mark a change in his anti-war feelings" (Sawyer-Lauçanno 104). During the trip to Europe he befriended fellow writer William Slater Brown, who also served in the Norton-Harjes Ambulance Corps in France. Brown was later to become immortalised as the character "B." in Cummings' only novel, *The Enormous Room*. Prior to their ambulance service on the French-German border, Cummings and Brown spent a few weeks at leisure in Paris as a result

of an administrative mix-up. Cummings loved the city and later made it his home.

After five months at the Norton-Harjes Corps, the two of them were imprisoned at the French detention camp La Ferté-Macé on account of letters Brown had written to relatives in America. Those letters did not only express the anti-war views of Cummings and Brown, but they also raised the suspicion of espionage. The three-month imprisonment at La Ferté-Macé was a momentous experience for the two young men and Cummings later tried to come to terms with it in his novel.

After his release from prison (in whose coming about the young writer's father was instrumental, entreating President Woodrow Wilson himself), Cummings was again subject to the draft, and this time he could not escape. In the summer of 1918, he was assigned to the infantry corps and was stationed at Camp Devens (now Fort Devens) in Massachusetts. He did not have to fight in Europe, however, and was freed from service in January 1919.

In the early 1920s, Cummings lived in Paris for more than two years and cultivated friendships with such writers as John Dos Passos and Ezra Pound. He frequently travelled through Europe and worked on his novel as well as on his first collection of poetry, released in 1923 under the title *Tulips and Chimneys*. In 1924, the debutant author married Elaine Orr, mother of his only child Nancy and ex-wife of his friend Scofield Thayer. However, the couple split after a few months and Orr moved to Ireland with the child, who did not know that Cummings was her father until it was revealed to her in the late 1940s. Cummings' second marriage to Anne Barton was also short-lived. His last relationship was with photographer Marion Morehouse, whom he did not marry. The two stayed together until Cummings' death.

In 1931, Cummings went on a six-week trip to the Soviet Union that made him change his views on socialism. He had hitherto been a leftist, but at the sight of poverty and oppression of the people under the dictator Joseph Stalin, the young author realised that Soviet communism was not acting in the interest of

the common good at all. Cummings reflected on the trip to Russia in his travelogue *EIMI* (1933). Cummings' changed political views were also reflected in his support for the Republican candidate Wendell Willkie in 1940's presidential election. The author also sympathised with senator Joseph McCarthy's anti-communist activities during the Cold War. Controversy did not abate with the publication of *Xaipe*, a collection of poetry that contained (allegedly satirical) pieces reflecting on the nature of "niggers" and "kikes".

Even though he became an increasingly controversial character, Cummings was also a popular lecturer at universities in the 1950s. By then he had already been suffering for some ten years from ailments of all sorts and he also had terrible backaches. Cummings suffered from poor quality sleep and his physical condition deteriorated, which can also be seen in photos from that time. E.E. Cummings died after a cerebral hemorrhage on September 3, 1962.

5. 1. 2. Cummings' Work

Apart from his four plays and the above-mentioned works, Edward Estlin Cummings chiefly wrote poetry. With his "modernism of spirit," (Walsh, *Literature* 10) he was one of the pre-eminent figures in the literary scene of the early 20th century and he put a lasting stamp on the literary movement of the time. Like other authors of his generation, "he was preoccupied with the failure of traditional symbols in representing the critical experience of his time" (Gaul 661). Cummings was part of a generation that came of age during one of mankind's darkest hours. He was convinced that traditional means of artistic expression could not do justice to their wholly new experiences. Thus, he disregarded literary conventions in an unprecedented way, not only in his prose, but also and especially in his poetry. Cummings subverted the rules of grammar and syntax; he experimented with form and spelling and exhibited buoyant playfulness with odd word formations. His poetry often deals with themes of love and eroticism, but also with nature and the power of the imagination. In addition, some of his work is downright satirical. Cummings was influenced by a whole range of literary and artistic movements, comprising Romanticism, Symbolism and Imagism, Dada, Surrealism and Cubism.

In *The Enormous Room*, his only novel (not counting the travelogue *EIMI*), Cummings tried to come to terms with his experiences at the French detention camp. Published only four years after the end of the Great War, it was one of the early literary masterpieces to deal with war-related experiences and it predated by a few years many of the canonised war novels of the period such as Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* and Erich Maria Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues*.

The Enormous Room is a unique representation of experience. It captures the multifacetedness of prison life in varying moods, comprising satirical, lyrical, surreal and many other elements. It even admits to the limitedness of language with regard to the rendition of new experiences. All of this will be discussed on the following pages.

5. 1. 3. Influence of Cummings' Experiences on His Work

Cummings' experiences had a huge influence on his work, in particular on *The Enormous Room*. Of the three books discussed in this paper, it is undoubtedly the most autobiographical. McCormick (*Literature* 92) even called it "the first American novel in which the distinction between a fictional 'I' and an autobiographical 'I' is eliminated." Not unlike Dos Passos' *Three Soldiers*, it is a eulogy to the individual spirit when faced with the overwhelming power of the military machine. But in contrast to Dos Passos, Cummings makes the former prevail over the latter. In *Three Soldiers*, individuality is suffocated by the insurmountable circumstances, whereas it is made to bloom and prosper in *The Enormous Room*. The colourfulness of Cummings' style reflects the victory of the individual over the uniformity of wartime rhetoric and the dull routine of camp life. The book mocks war propaganda more than any other novel of its time. The effects that are achieved – "amusement, irony, indignation, excitement, and even pathos" (Kennedy, *Cummings* 52) – are all sensations which belligerent nations try to subdue. In a way, *The Enormous Room* is an anarchic book, not only because it disregards narrative rules, but also because it ridicules governments and other forms of authority, or, in other words, those who make the rules.

5. 2. Opting Out: The Enormous Room as Social Criticism

Cummings' allegiance in *The Enormous Room* lies with his fellow prisoners and the power of the individual, not with a country or an army. The novel calls into question the predominant war logic of the time. Instead of condemning the atrocities of the Germans, it accuses the allegedly civilised Western world and especially the "good and great French Government" (*Room* 303), whose hypocrisy the narrator attacks.

5. 2. 1. The Narrator's Arrest

Cummings' contempt for the rule-makers and their black and white thinking is established very early in the novel. The preposterousness begins with the narrator's arrest, which takes place while he is still with the ambulance corps: He has to appear before a committee interrogating him about B.'s letters. The officials entertain the suspicion of treason and want to make sure of Cummings' allegiance to France. The interrogation culminates in the question whether he hates *les boches*, i.e. the Germans. Cummings is well aware of the intimation that reverberates in this question and knows that an affirmative answer could save him from arrest: "I had won my own case. The question was purely perfunctory. To walk out of the room a free man I had merely to say yes" (*Room*: 19). However, he refuses to comply with the simplistic war logic of the committee and answers that he likes the French a lot, at which he is told that it is "impossible to love Frenchmen and not to hate Germans" (*Room*: 19). The narrator has thus preserved his individual viewpoint while not falling victim to the propaganda machine, even though he could only do so at the expense of his freedom.

He refuses to believe that a differentiated view of things is impossible in times of war. His arrest on these preposterous grounds accounts for his growing disdain for the French government. Cummings no longer wants to serve a country that judges people by their nationality only. He rejects the bigoted idea that one cannot like people of two nations at war at the same time.

5. 2. 2. Renunciation of 'Civilisation'

Once in prison, the narrator soon finds out that his fellow inmates share a similar fate: Nobody seems to have committed a crime that would justify their detention at La Ferté-Macé. Cummings is sure about the other prisoners' innocence and he insinuates that the French authorities arrest people at random: "For who was eligible to La Ferté? Anyone whom the police could find in the lovely country of France (a) who was not guilty of treason, (b) who could not prove that he was not guilty of treason" (*Room* 115).

Not only that, the nation of human rights is also unable or unwilling to run its prisons humanely, which lays bare the hypocrisy of war: the French are upset about the atrocities of *les boches*, but what happens in their own prisons and to citizens of allied countries is not a whit better. Life inside the prison camp is dull, shameful and utterly ignominious. Oppression and punishment are daily fare. The idiocy of the situation is symbolised by the countless prison guards, the infamous *plantons*. These are portrayed as moronic heelers who frequently use violence in response to insubordinate behaviour. At the sight of the cruel punishment of Lena, one of the "female incorrigibles" (*Room* 164) at La Ferté-Macé, the narrator "[knows] once and for all where he [stands] in relation to any society that could authorize such horror" (McCarthy 129):

I realized fully and irrevocably and for perhaps the first time the meaning of civilization. And I realized that it was true—as I had previously only suspected it to be true—that in finding us unworthy of helping to carry forward the banner of progress, alias the tricolour, the inimitable and excellent French Government was conferring upon B. and myself—albeit with other intent—the ultimate compliment. (*Room* 167)

It is a distinction not to be associated with a society that inflicts such gruesome punishment on human beings. If this is what civilisation stands for, the author decides to opt out of it. The cruelties that are committed under the banner of civilisation lead Cummings to identify with those prisoners who are 'least civilised', the so-called 'delectable mountains'. These will be looked at in the following chapter.

5. 2. 3. The Delectable Mountains

Cummings appropriated this term from John Bunyan's Christian allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress*, where the delectable mountains are a fertile and peaceful region that offers a view on the Celestial City, the place of enlightenment.

In *The Enormous Room*, the delectable mountains fulfill a very similar function. They are milestones on the narrator's way to enlightenment. Cummings admires the naïveté of these four prisoners and through them he learns "the virtues of innocence, the saving grace of laughter in the face of despair, and the absolute and invaluable importance of not yielding one's self to any authority but one's own" (Sawyer-Lauçanno 177). The delectable mountains may be simple, naïve, childlike and uneducated characters, but they have the ability to express their inner feelings and are capable of what the narrator calls "unthinking" (see chapter 5. 4.). These men are esteemed because they are the very antithesis of the French government (or any form of authority, for that matter): the former are outwardly filthy, but they have a pure heart; whereas the latter appears to be impeccable, but is inwardly rotten to the core (see J. Smith 26). In its self-deception, the French government sees in them only "the human dirt who clog the machine and confuse [sic] its systems" (Dougherty 296). More than others, these prisoners manage to maintain their individuality and idiosyncrasies. The childishness of the delectable mountains (especially of Jean Le Nègre, whom the narrator cherishes most) makes their imprisonment appear all the more preposterous, for who would put an infant in prison? The answer is clear: only the "excellent and inimitable and altogether benignant French government" (*Room* 115) could commit such a misdeed.

5. 2. 4. A Romantic Novel?

According to Kennedy (*Dreams* 216), the central theme of *The Enormous Room* is "romantic individualism". This makes some sense with regard to the delectable mountains: Cummings' embracing of the individual, his veneration of childlike qualities and the triumph of feeling over thinking that plays a central role in the novel follow a Romantic tradition indeed. Also, the "hostility toward

civilization” (Kennedy, *Cummings* 48) that manifests itself in *The Enormous Room* is compatible with the ideas of this 19th-century literary movement. But Cummings’ conception of the individual somehow keeps the novel clearly apart from the Romantics nevertheless. What the author wanted to emphasise was the power of the individual under circumstances that are apt to subdue it. Recalcitrance, unruliness and imaginative power are what the French officials fear, for these are the ingredients of a revolution. Recalcitrance, unruliness and imaginative power are what Cummings cherished most. *The Enormous Room* is a phenomenological catalogue of insubordination; it praises the individual’s capacity for resistance and, at its heart, is of an anarchic nature. The individual in Cummings’ novel might be partly romantically conceived, but it wages a very modern struggle. If you will, Cummings translated Romanticism into the changed world of the early 20th century.

5. 3. The Rendition of Experiences inside The Enormous Room: The Shortcomings of Narrative Conventions

5. 3. 1. Dissonant Self-narration

Cummings’ narrator is a very passive character. Especially in those parts of the novel that are set at La Ferté-Macé (beginning with chapter IV, *Le Nouveau*), he mainly records things and remains outside of the action. The narrator focuses so much on the idiosyncrasies of his fellow prisoners that he somehow forgets to talk about himself. There are, however, certain clues in the novel which suggest that his self-narration is mostly of the dissonant type. The narrator might not give away much about himself, but the way he describes others also offers some insights into his own character and especially about how he is incapable of reproducing on paper the experience of his imprisonment. Cohn (*Minds* 153) notes that “the present, verbal act [...] can never recapture the non-verbal reality of past experience.” Had this idea not been formulated in the late 1970s, one could think that Cummings wrote *The Enormous Room* with Cohn’s quote in mind. The narrator does not even try to conceal his inability to establish order where there is chaos; to make seem logical what is illogical. His self-narration inevitably has to be of the dissonant type, insofar as he is aware of the

fact that words cannot do justice to real experience. This is also the reason for the many deviations from narrative conventions that can be found in *The Enormous Room*. In the following subchapter, I want to look at how this affects the structural organisation of the novel.

5. 3. 2. The Experience of Timelessness

Cummings tried to give expression to the experience of captivity by the suspension of narrative linearity. Thereby, he accounted for the “lack of an external frame of time” (Widmer 5) that is caused primarily by the prisoner’s indefinite sentence, as can be seen from the following passage:

How, in such a case, could events occur and be remembered otherwise than as individualities distinct from Time itself? Or, since one day and the next are the same to such a prisoner, where does Time come in at all? Obviously, once the prisoner is habituated to his environment, once he accepts the fact that speculation as to when he will regain his liberty cannot possibly shorten the hours of his incarceration and may very well drive him into a state of unhappiness (not to say morbidity), events can no longer succeed each other: whatever happens, while it may happen in connection with some other perfectly distinct happening, does not happen in a scale of temporal priorities—each happening is self-sufficient, irrespective of minutes, months and the other treasures of freedom. (*Room* 113-114)

Thus it appears that the imposed daily routines and the uncertainty concerning the length of his detention at La Ferté-Macé rob the individual prisoner of something that is otherwise taken for granted: a sense of time. In fact, time is of such a high value, that it is exalted to quasi-divine status by capitalisation. Because of this “Druck der Unzeitlichkeit” (Helms 61), the narrator is cast into a state of mere “Non-existence” (*Room* 176).

When “events can no longer succeed each other”, narrative linearity is rendered superfluous. Cummings displays the various incidents at the enormous room in a seemingly arbitrary manner instead of depicting, for example, an increasing deterioration of the prisoners’ situation or portraying a gradual epistemic enlightenment of the narrator. The period of incarceration is for him, retrospectively, “a vast grey box in which are laid helter-skelter a great many

toys, each of which is itself completely significant apart from the always unchanging temporal dimension which merely contains it along with the rest” (*Room* 113). These toys are the experiences that he has had and the people that he has met, and for the greater part of the novel, Cummings picks them up in a very playful way and with a literally colourful style:

I shall (...) lift from their grey box at random certain (to me) more or less astonishing toys; which may or may not please the reader, but whose *colours and shapes and textures* are a part of that actual Present—without future and past—whereof they alone are cognizant who, so to speak, have submitted to an amputation of the world. (*Room* 114, emphasis added)

This brief passage employs metaphors of the fine arts. As mentioned above, Cummings was also a painter and it therefore stands to reason that he drew on specific lexicon. But here, the images that are used also have a second meaning. It is no wonder that the author’s explanation of his method of depicting people and events recalls the art of painting, for that is the art form that best symbolises the experience of timelessness, since its consumption is not bound to a specific time interval, as for example music or the theatre are.

Ironically enough, the colours also symbolise that which makes the non-existence at La Ferté-Macé bearable, namely “the kinetic aspect of that institution” (*Room* 147). By this, Cummings refers to the arrivals of new prisoners, which constitute the only relief from the dull routine at the concentration camp. The bleak reality of confinement is opposed with the brisk ado inside the enormous room; the monotony of non-existence is countered with the varied idiosyncrasies of men of different nations, languages, classes, and ethnic groups; men who at first are nothing more than “a considerable mass of two-legged beings” (*Room* 110) to the narrator, but who quickly turn out to be “extremely interesting individuals” (*Room* 110). At the end of his first day at La Ferté-Macé, the narrator agrees with his fellow inmate B. that the prison camp is the “the finest place I’ve ever been in my life” (*Room* 111). The room, which in reality is rather small (considering the large number of prisoners), becomes enormous as the narrator takes the first step on his way to enlightenment and realises how full of life the place is.

5. 3. 3. The 'Indescribables'

But once he gets to know the other prisoners and embraces them as “extremely interesting individuals”, the narrator also realises that some of them defy description. Although he is usually very eloquent in the portrayal of his fellow inmates, he struggles with the task of putting into words the peculiar nature of the delectable mountains. He outspokenly admits to the ‘indescribability’ of these men, which is best expressed in the case of the Zulu:

He is, of all the indescribables whom I have known, definitely the most completely or entirely indescribable. Then (quoth my reader) you will not attempt to describe him, I trust.—Alas, in the medium which I am now using a certain amount or at least quality of description is disgustingly necessary. Were I free with a canvas and some colours...but I am not free. And so I will buck the impossible to the best of my ability. Which, after all, is one way of wasting your time. (*Room* 231)

Again, the narrator makes reference to painting, which to him seems the art form most suitable for the depiction of those individuals that are, literally, beyond description. The conventional language system cannot take account of the unconventional and unprecedented kinds of experiences inside the enormous room. The narrator tries to overcome these shortcomings by a very bold narrative act: He invents a new category of being:

There are certain things in which one is unable to believe for the simple reason that he never ceases to feel them. Things of this sort—things which are always inside of us and in fact are us and which consequently will not be pushed off or away where we can begin thinking about them—are no longer things; they, and the us which they are, equals A Verb; an IS. The Zulu, then, I must perforce call an IS. (*Room* 232)

This constitutes an assumption of (linguistic) power. The narrator “discredits the received language system” (Gaull 656) in that he subverts the rules of grammar, by pronouncing a person a verb. The IS can be identified as the “essential being of each person” (Kennedy, *Dreams* 217) and, according to the narrator, there is no known word (other than his own invention) that conveys a sense of this state of being. It is something that is outside the realm of what is ‘thinkable’, which is why language fails to define it. The Zulu has reached a state where feeling not

only prevails over thinking, but where the presence of the latter precludes the presence of the former: the state of 'unthinking'

5. 4. 'Unthinking': The Philosophy behind *The Enormous Room*

The idea of 'unthinking' lies at the heart of the narrator's philosophical model. He discusses this in more detail towards the end of the novel, when he ponders the relationship between society, education and art:

Had I, at this moment and in the city of New York, the complete confidence of one-twentieth as many human beings I should not be so inclined to consider The Great American Public as the most aesthetically incapable organization ever created for the purpose of perpetuating defunct ideals and ideas. But of course The Great American Public has a handicap which my friends at La Ferté did not as a rule have—education. Let no one sound his indignant yawp at this. I refer to the fact that, for an educated gent or lady, to create is first of all to destroy—that there is and can be no such thing as authentic art until the *bons trucs* (whereby we are taught to see and imitate on canvas and in stone and by words this so-called world) are entirely and thoroughly and perfectly annihilated by that vast and painful process of Unthinking which may result in a minute bit of purely personal Feeling. Which minute bit is Art. (*Room* 306-307)

If we attempt to imitate the world, the narrator insinuates, we are never going to produce real art, because art is a personal feeling. In order to create a piece of art you first have to go through a process of unthinking. The use of the word 'process' emphasises the fact that it is a continuous task to allow feeling to preside over thinking. In order to reach this state of being, the enlightened soul has to leave behind its education. Those who were not properly 'educated' in the first place (i.e. the delectable mountains) are better off, for nothing hinders them on the way to the enlightenment. In comparison, those who are unwilling to live by the principles of unthinking simply perpetuate conventions that "betray the immediacy of experience" (Dougherty 291) and thereby block the way to the enlightenment of the artistic consciousness. If thinking comes to stand for order and unthinking for art, it becomes very clear that the whole narrative organisation of *The Enormous Room* is an artistic act of self-assertion by itself.

The novel “reproduces in its very aesthetic form the avant-garde’s conceptual assault on traditional art” (McGuigan 97).

Ironically, he somehow owes the discovery of his (artistic) consciousness to the French authorities, which he indicates shortly before his release from the prison camp in an interview with the institution’s accursed director: “I expressed immense gratitude to my captors and to *le gouvernement français* for allowing me to see and hear and taste and smell and touch the things which inhabited La Ferté Macé, Orne, France” (*Room* 299). Before his imprisonment, the narrator was an unenlightened pilgrim. The three months at La Ferté-Macé have led to a spiritual and sensual awakening. He leaves the prison with the knowledge of what makes people unique and what is desirable in life. The irony behind all this is that the French don’t even know about the favour that they did him. Instead of having broken Cummings, they have paved the way for his enlightenment.

5. 5. Concluding Remarks

Of the three books discussed in this paper, *The Enormous Room* surely exhibits the most playful mood. Although it deals with a serious subject, there is an air of buoyancy and insouciance that permeates the novel. Readers might wonder why Cummings did not engage himself more deeply and seriously in the outrageous injustice behind his arrest. But my analysis showed that he actually did. *The Enormous Room* employs satire and irony in order to lay bare the idiocy of French bureaucracy. The novel wittily exposes the preposterousness of black and white thinking that blossoms especially at times of war. I don’t agree with McCormick (*Literature* 93), who argues that the irony in *The Enormous Room* is mostly “sophomoric and contrived.” Instead, Cummings uses this literary device in order to highlight his turning away from civilisation and its hypocrisy.

The narrator seeks “self-purification through resistance to society’s conspiracy against individual manhood” (Dougherty 295). *The Enormous Room* draws a very clear dividing line between the individual and society: “[T]he one

represents an actual world of spontaneous responsiveness while the other constitutes a dead world of sterile and often vicious habits" (Friedman 31). Cummings discovers the power of sensual perception and the meaning of unthinking. "[T]he novel traces the narrator's disenchantment and betrayal by a world that contradicts its own cultural tradition; it follows the slow erosion of his personality, and his gradual awakening as a creative consciousness" (Gaul 648). In the end, he leaves the prison a wiser man. His enlightenment is reflected in the closing lines of *The Enormous Room*, when he completes his pilgrimage before the skyline of New York City:

The tall, impossibly tall, incomparably tall, city shoulderingly upward into hard sunlight leaned a little through the octaves of its parallel edges, leaningly strode upward into firm, hard, snowy sunlight; the noises of America nearingly throbbed with smokes and hurrying dots which are men and which are women and which are things new and curious and hard and strange and vibrant and immense, lifting with a great ondulous stride firmly into immortal sunlight.... (*Room* 332)

Just like John Bunyan's pilgrim, who is awed by the sight of the Celestial City, Cummings feels an abundance of impressions descending upon him when he arrives in New York. He has to adapt to a new reality in order to live "the life of personal integrity and freedom for which he went to prison" (Dougherty 300).

6. Conclusion

Perhaps more than any other historic event, the Great War was a “genuine dividing line between the literary generations” (Fenton 119). It rendered powerless literary codes that had been prevalent only a few decades before. In the wake of the events, many artistic fields were subject to rapid changes, but especially in North America the impact of the war was bigger on writing than on any other art form. The novelists of the lost generation shared experiences that their predecessors had not (and could not have) known. These experiences called for means of expression that had to stand apart from the romantic and moral realist tradition of the 19th-century novel. With their artistic reorientation, writers such as John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway and E. E. Cummings paved the way for the transformation of American writing from a “provincial literature” (Cowley, *Return* 296) into an art form with a common denominator. It was the shared experience of the Great War that triggered this movement.

6. 1. Modern Warfare – Modern Literature

The Great War was the first modern war. It saw the engagement of seemingly civilised nations in one of the darkest episodes of human history. With the Great War, killing became an industry. Tanks and poison gas, machine guns and mortar shells were the modern commodities for mass murder and allowed for slaughtering on an unprecedented scale. The trenches became the bleak image of the war’s futility, where hundreds of thousands perished in battles of attrition. War literature had to mirror these changes if it wanted to be ‘true’, which was what the lost generation was aiming at (see Cowley, *Return* 298). Thus, it is not surprising that the heroic values of the 19th century are no longer present in the writing of its representatives. These authors simply did not see anything that would justify a continuation of complacent “armchair heroics” (Hoffman, *Novel* 92). Instead, they experienced the horror of the first modern war. They were soon to be the first modern US-American writers.

6. 2. Coming of Age as ‘Observers’

However, that is actually only half the truth. For writers such as Hemingway, Cummings and Dos Passos did not share the same experiences as the French or German soldiers. Hemingway, for example, had to study maps and military histories in order to make his novel more realistic. He had never seen Gorizia or the Plava at the time of writing. Dos Passos might have been more involved with what was actually going on at the Western front, but as an ambulance man, he did not go through the same ordeal as combatant soldiers. Many of the writers of the lost generation knew little about trench warfare and gas poisoning and if they did, they often obtained their information from the papers. As ambulance drivers, they were indeed in danger of being hurt, but still relatively well off compared to the soldiers in the trenches.

But even though they adopted an “attitude of non-participation” (Cowley, *Return* 43), they were nevertheless physically and mentally affected by the war. It must be borne in mind that the three writers were still teenagers or in their early twenties when they crossed the Atlantic. They came to Europe with “a set of apparently coherent and complete moral precepts” (Jones 4) that soon turned out to be hollow and had to be revised if not completely abandoned. Their world was shaken upside down. Youngsters that they were, they came of age during a period when also the world was ‘coming of age’, as it were. They had to find out where they stood in a society that saw the collapsing not only of countries and empires, but also of morals and traditions. Against the backdrop of a “great isolating experience” (Piep 10), they had to establish their own identity. Writing was one means of achieving that goal.

6. 3. A War without Heroes

The three authors realised, each in their own way, that what they had experienced in Europe could only be rendered fictionally without traditional concepts of heroism. Their novels more often resembled psychological studies than war epics. Although they partly took up an American tradition (Stephen Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage* was a major influence on many writers of

the 1920s), they created something new. This is mainly due to the fact that the experience of this generation was a completely new one. Unlike other authors writing about war, the US-American novelists of the lost generation had really been to the battle zones (with all due qualifications mentioned above) and they had seen nothing heroic. Quite on the contrary, what they saw was “the collapse of the heroic ideal” (Bergonzi 187). Romantic concepts of war could no longer be upheld, an idea that is summed up in Frederic Henry’s most famous statement:

I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain. We had heard them, sometimes standing in the rain almost out of earshot, so that only the shouted words came through, and had read them, on proclamations that were slapped up by bill posters over other proclamations, now for a long time, and I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except bury it. There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity. (...) Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates.” (*Farewell* 165)

Henry (or Hemingway) makes clear that war and the military machinery can only be demystified if a linguistic and behavioural change takes place (see Savage Brosman 89). Similarly, Cummings in *The Enormous Room* discovers the necessity of unlearning established conventions (see Dougherty 292). The narrator finds artistic and spiritual enlightenment within the four walls of the prison cell. His willingness to experiment in style and form not only mirrors the indescribability of his experiences, but it also exposes the stereotypical thinking of the French officials, who divide the world into good and bad, heroes and villains. The deliberate chaos of the novel underlines the fact that such a distinction does not do justice to reality.

6. 4. Discovering the Individual

The demystification of war went hand in hand with a discovery of the individual and its place in a disordered world. It could be argued that the writers of the lost generation focused so much on the individual because of their 'isolated' status during the war. Hemingway was injured and transferred to a hospital. Dos Passos spent much of his time at training camps. Far off the trenches and the ambulance units, they had time to think about what they had experienced. Cummings was detained in a concentration camp, where he pondered over issues of philosophy and society. Not that these were desirable conditions, but at least the three novelists did not have to worry about survival. They used their 'suspended time' at the hospital and in prison (Cummings makes explicit reference to this) and also their extended post-war-'exile' in Paris to get things straight in their heads. They thought a lot about the war, but they probably thought even more about themselves. The individual took centre stage in their novels and the self became "the essential *form* of literature" (Kazin, *Bright* 11).

The three novels portray individuals fighting "against a society which will dehumanise [them] and seek [their] extinction in its ultimate manifestation of a nation at war" (Garrety 18-19). So even though there might be relatively little actual fighting going on (or none at all, as in *The Enormous Room*), they are still war novels insofar as war and the military machinery create a mood of oppression that throws into relief the hardships and challenges that the young men have to face. For example, more than half of *Three Soldiers* is set in post-war France, far off the trenches and the killing fields. Nevertheless, John Andrews feels the burden of having to serve the military machinery even more strongly after the armistice. This highlights the fact that the individual soldiers do not have to fight in the trenches to experience the omnipresence and the misery of war. The "machine of living" (Cooperman, *Aesthetics* 23) inflicts that upon them all by itself.

But not everyone is willing to yield to the pressure. John Dos Passos uses a tripartite division of focalisers in *Three Soldiers* to stress the fact that there are people who want to assert their individuality and refuse to fall victim to the

destructive power of the military machinery. Others simply go with the flow and learn to accept their sad fate. Ultimately, none of the three soldiers can cope with the overwhelming circumstances, but it is John Andrews whose artistic consciousness awakes as a result of the conflict. Through him we are made to understand that war is “a crime against the individual and an aesthetic outrage” (Cooperman, *Novel* 175).

6. 5. A Changed Conscience

The three novels provide insights into the inner life of their protagonists and the spiritual and mental changes that they undergo. The circumstance of war puts each in a situation that forces a behavioural adjustment upon them. Whereas John Andrews – contrary to his initial desire – no longer wants to fall into line with the masses of anonymous soldiers, Frederic Henry is unable to maintain his attitude of non-participation after the shelling at Gorizia. Cummings, on the other hand, goes through the experience of imprisonment and this very fact triggers an ideological reorientation. All three of them realise the necessity of establishing a new set of rules they want to live by. Matsen (49) notes that “the greatest legacy of the Great War to the 1920s and beyond [...] is the basic, philosophical question of purpose in human existence which it served to emphasize.”

Frederic Henry, John Andrews and the narrator of *The Enormous Room* do not only physically depart from their original surroundings, they also embark on a spiritual journey. Combatant soldiers might conquer geographical territory, but these three men advance to an even more impenetrable area: they discover their own inner life and learn to assess which goals they want to pursue. Hemingway’s Frederic Henry finds out about the importance of love, Dos Passos’ John Andrews discovers art as the means of self-realisation and Cummings’ eponymous character goes through a process of enlightenment which makes him see the meaning of unthinking (see Walsh, *Process* 33).

The experience of war, though taking completely different shape in each novel, affects all three of them. Being left to their own resort, they find out things about

themselves they could not have before. This reorientation also goes hand in hand with a literal 'farewell to arms' in two of the novels.

Frederic Henry makes a "separate peace" (*Farewell* 217) after his plunge into the Tagliamento. His disengagement from the army is symbolised in his putting on of civilian clothes, which feels odd to him at first. Likewise, John Andrews takes off his uniform after his desertion. Already when he is still with his outfit near the front lines he feels pure joy at going swimming naked and says that putting on his uniform is like "voluntarily taking up filth and slavery again" (*Soldiers* 165). As 'civilians', both Frederic Henry and John Andrews have high hopes with regard to their future.

6. 6. Dashed Hopes and New Realities

But they are not given the chance to satisfy their expectations of building a family and becoming an artist, respectively. Fate denies them both a happy ending. Henry loses Catherine Barkley, his prospective wife, and is unable to cope with this loss. As he relates his story, he re-experiences the traumatic episode of her death, which also has a structural effect on the novel. Andrews, on the other hand, fails to assert his individuality by creating a piece of art. He turns down any help that his fellow soldiers offer him and ends up completely isolated. Ultimately, he even loses his dear music when he gets arrested.

In the case of *The Enormous Room*, it is more difficult to assess the meaning of its ending. The narrator tells us that his release from prison "cannot by any stretch of the imagination be conceived as constituting a Happy Ending to a great and personal adventure" (*Room* 314). He knows that he has to leave behind those who gave him a deeper understanding of the world. Through the contact with the delectable mountains he was able to conceive his personal philosophy whose validity has remained stable within the four walls of the enormous room. But upon leaving behind this microcosm, he has to adapt to a new reality. As impressions of the outside world descend upon Cummings, his narrative becomes even more ungrammatical and disordered. It seems that he still has to learn to draw on his newly gained knowledge outside the prison cell.

6. 7. Narrative Perspectives

It has been said that autobiographical elements play a role in all of the three novels. According to Dorrit Cohn (*Minds* 171), “[c]onsonant presentation of a past consciousness is dependent on the self-effacement of the narrating voice, and few authors of autobiographical fiction have been willing or able to silence this voice completely.” This basically also holds true for the first-person novels discussed in this paper. My analysis highlighted the dissonance between the narrating and the experiencing I in *A Farewell to Arms* and *The Enormous Room*. The former novel hardly ever makes mention of this experiential gap, but Hemingway skilfully planted clues that point towards it. The latter book, on the other hand, mirrors the narrative dissonance on a structural level. The whole arrangement of Cummings’ novel is an attempt to be true to the reality inside the enormous room. However, the narrator is well aware that writing is an insufficient narrative means to that end. More than any other war novel, *The Enormous Room* explicitly discusses the ineptitude of (written) language for advancing to what Fludernik (311) calls the “locus of experientiality”, i.e. human consciousness.

Cummings and Hemingway used first-person narration in order to contrast their protagonists’ current experiential horizon with that of their older selves. The incisive experience of the Great War and the events related to it open up a gap between these two. However, insofar as “the first-person narrator has less free access to his own past psyche than the omniscient narrator of third-person fiction has to the psyches of his characters,” (Cohn, *Minds* 144) the readers have to do a lot of interpretation themselves with regard to the experiential growth of the characters. Not every detail is brought to light in these novels, which is also what makes them so interesting. Their narrators have a “subjective and hence only conditionally valid view of the narrated events,” (Stanzel, *Theory* 89) because their experiences are too deeply rooted in the stories that they narrate.

In contrast, *Three Soldiers* is a much more 'conventional' narrative and leaves little room for interpretation. Cohn (*Minds* 172) argues that "[f]or writers seeking to present the most complex inner adventures in the most direct possible manner, the consonant techniques in third-person narration offer obvious advantages over the retrospective techniques." This might be true, but the reader of *Three Soldiers* soon gets a very clear picture of the protagonists' inner life. Once the reader identifies the novel's tripartite division as the author's means of commentary on the individual's reaction to the machine of war, little development takes place.

My impression is that first-person narration has obvious advantages over third-person narration in semi-autobiographical fiction. A first-person narrator's motivation to tell his story is existential (see Stanzel, *Theory* 150). Likewise, the writers of the lost generation felt an existential urge to make sense of their experiences. Dos Passos' 'epic' style appears a trifle inappropriate to that end.

6. 8. Writers Ahead of their Time

Upon reading and re-reading the three novels, I often found it hard to believe that they refer to events that took place a century ago and were written by authors of my great-grandparents' generation. If I had the chance to go back in time and meet one of my great-grandparents, there probably would be few things that we have in common. The generational divide would just be too big. Yet, the novels of these authors have a very modern appeal and readers can still relate to them in the 21st century.

It seems that the writers of the lost generation were ahead of their time. Upon release, their novels often caused outrage and puzzlement. Many people simply were not ready for an outspoken attack on the falseness and cruelty of war. Fortunately, a more sober judgment is possible today. These novels display war and what it does to people. In the final analysis, they are all eulogies to peace.

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9. German Summary

Die vorliegende Diplomarbeit behandelt die literarische Reaktion US-amerikanischer Autoren der sogenannten „Lost Generation“ auf Erlebnisse des Ersten Weltkriegs. Die Schriftsteller John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway und E. E. Cummings waren noch junge Männer, als sie zwischen 1917 und 1918 in den Rettungsdienst auf dem kriegsgebeutelten europäischen Kontinent traten.

Ihr Eindruck des Krieges entsprach nicht dem oft heldenhaften Bild, das von älteren Generationen – nicht zuletzt in Romanform – entworfen wurde. Die moderne Kriegsführung und das Massensterben entlarvten den Ersten Weltkrieg als menschengemachte Katastrophe. Allerdings beobachteten die drei Autoren das Geschehen aus einer verhältnismäßig distanzierten Position heraus: Keiner der drei war an tatsächlichen Kampfhandlungen beteiligt. Dennoch wurde etwa Hemingway Opfer einer Verletzung und musste im Spital behandelt werden. Cummings wiederum wurde von den französischen Behörden der Spionage verdächtigt und für drei Monate in einem Internierungslager verwahrt. Die Ausgangslagen waren also sehr unterschiedlich, was auch literarischen Niederschlag fand.

Die drei Romane *Three Soldiers* (Dos Passos), *A Farewell to Arms* (Hemingway) und *The Enormous Room* (Cummings) nähern sich dem Krieg auf sehr unterschiedliche Art und Weise. Dos Passos stellt die Allmacht der Militärmaschinerie und ihre Wirkung auf drei höchst unterschiedliche Soldaten in den Mittelpunkt. Einer der drei, John Andrews, beschließt zu desertieren und Komposition an der Sorbonne zu studieren. Er gerät jedoch in zusehende Isolation und wird am Ende des Buches verhaftet. Seine Komposition, das Symbol des Widerstandes, bleibt unvollendet zurück. Hemingways Roman handelt ebenfalls von einer Lossagung, in diesem Fall vom Dasein als Rettungsfahrer an der Front. Frederic Henry, der stoische Ich-Erzähler, wird bei einem Granatenangriff verletzt und dadurch der Einzigartigkeit seines Lebens gewahr. Die Indifferenz, mit der er bisher den Dingen begegnete, erscheint ihm ab diesem Zeitpunkt unangemessen. An einer entscheidenden Stelle des Romans entgeht er seiner bevorstehenden Exekution durch einen Sprung in

den Fluss Tagliamento. Danach entsagt er seinem bisherigen Leben völlig und will eine Familie gründen. Allerdings verstirbt seine Verlobte nach der Geburt des gemeinsamen Sohnes, was ihn zutiefst traumatisiert. Dieses Trauma wird in der erzählerischen Struktur des Romans an verschiedenen Stellen deutlich. Zu Beginn des dritten Romans, *The Enormous Room*, steht die absurde Verhaftung des Ich-Erzählers, der als Rettungsfahrer in Frankreich seinen Dienst tut. Er ist sich keines Verbrechens bewusst und attackiert in der Folge die Doppelmoral der französischen Behörden. Auch hier führen die Erlebnisse der Haft zu einer Absage an ein System: Der Erzähler beschließt, sich von der Zivilisation und ihrer Falschheit loszusagen und solidarisiert sich stattdessen mit seinen Zellenkollegen. Diese Loslösung findet auch in der Erzählstruktur des Romans ihren Niederschlag: Cummings missachtet bewusst grammatikalische Regeln und stellt der gleichmacherischen Militärmaschinerie eine freche Verspieltheit gegenüber. Durch den Kontakt mit den anderen Inhaftierten gelangt er zu einem tieferen Verständnis der Welt und erkennt die Notwendigkeit, das althergebrachte Denken zu überwinden und stattdessen die eigenen fünf Sinne zu aktivieren.

In den drei Romanen spielen kämpferische Auseinandersetzungen oft nur eine minimale Rolle. Vielmehr stellen der Krieg und damit zusammenhängende Ereignisse die Kulisse dar, vor der die Protagonisten zur Selbsterkenntnis gelangen. Dennoch zeigt sich die Omnipotenz der Militärmaschinerie, vor allem im Roman *Three Soldiers*: John Andrews hat einem System zu dienen, dessen Zweck sich mit Kriegsende eigentlich erfüllt haben müsste. Doch erst nach dem Krieg wird seine Situation immer verzweifelter.

Die Arbeit analysiert auch die verschiedenen Erzählweisen in den Romanen. Hemingway und Cummings verwenden in ihren Büchern die Form des Ich-Erzählers. Besonderes Augenmerk habe ich hier auf die Analyse des erzählenden und des erlebenden Ich gelegt, zwischen welchen häufig eine Spannung besteht. Dos Passos' Roman wiederum ist in der dritten Person geschrieben. Oft verwendet er neben monologischen Erzählformen den Gedankenbericht, um das Innenleben der Protagonisten darzustellen. Dabei wird auch klar, mit welchen Figuren der Autor sympathisiert.