

An Exiled Expatriate's Time Travel to Cosmopolitanism and his Living the American Dream: A study with reference to E.E. Cummings' *The Enormous Room*

Rima Chakraborty

Abstract

The World War I was indeed a great shocker to the global consciousness. Though the war officially ended in 1918, the trauma it left in the psyche of the entire human race was surely going to take long to heal. The Central Powers were defeated and the Treaty of Versailles sealed the fate of Germany. It is however curious to note that apart from taking thousands of innocent lives, and leaving almost everyone disillusioned regarding the aura of the battle, the World War also stimulated the condition of transnationality. Today, as inhabitants of a cosmopolitan world, we may find E.E Cummings' emphasis on the idea of 'deterritorialization' in his autobiographical novel *The Enormous Room*, to be of accentuating relevance. The novel depicts the author's experience in a detention camp of France, where he and his friend William Slater Brown were held up under suspicion of treason during World War I. The room in which they were detained, united the prisoners of Dutch, Belgian, Spanish, Turkish, Arabian, Polish, Russian, Swedish, German, French, English and American origin. Having gained acquaintance with them, Cummings came to realize the false notions of superior national identity and uncritical patriotism. This paper intends to highlight how Cummings traces his transformation from an American expatriate to a French exile and finally to an individual who vindicates the paramountcy of humanity over national, patriotic and political interests. Moreover, Cummings' imprisonment also gave him the opportunity to live the American Dream. In other words, the protagonist's arduous journey to freedom can be seen as a metaphor of his liberation from restrictive nationalistic ideas, towards the celebration of a transnational identity which incorporates the idea of un monde un rêve to its fullest extent.

Keywords: Exile, Expatriate, Transnationality, Deterritorialization, Global Citizenship, American Dream



The World War I was indeed a great shocker to the global consciousness. Though the war officially ended in 1918, the trauma it left in the psyche of the entire human race was surely going to take long to heal. The Central Powers were defeated and the Treaty of Versailles sealed the fate of Germany. It was in the milieu of the World War I, that Edward Estlin Cummings, the renowned American poet, author, essayist, painter, and playwright published his contentious autobiographical novel *The Enormous Room* in 1922. Since its publication, Cummings' work has been a center of prolific critical discussion. *An Enormous Room* wasn't really a novel or an autobiography and there was indeed an ambiguity regarding whether one may consider the author and his fictional persona to be the same or not. The work is an account of the author's experience while being detained on the charge of espionage by the French Government. Moreover, typographically Cummings' writing was unconventional and the manuscript was replete with a number of French phrases. Hence half a dozen publishers rejected Cummings' manuscript before his father finally placed it with Boni & Liveright and the book came out as a scathing criticism of the atrocities of war as well as the unscrupulous socio-political institutions which trigger wars with purely selfish motives, and yet maintain a façade of social, political and national welfare.

In 1925, Cummings won the prestigious Dial Poetry Award for *The Enormous Room*, but the book was not a commercial success and had already been remaindered when he won the award. Nevertheless, many critics praised it for its uniqueness. For instance, while reviewing World War I novels in 1926, F. Scott Fitzgerald singled *The Enormous Room* and stated: "Of all the work by young men who have sprung up since 1920 one book survives- *The Enormous Room* by E. E Cummings. Those few who cause books to live have not been able to endure the thought of its immortality" (Fitzgerald). Samuel Hynes too made similar comments in 1995 while reviewing a reissue of Cummings' work:

as jail literature it is moving, funny, endlessly interesting. But it is as an early American modernist text that it is most touching. It is our modernism when young: lively, energetic, playful, both overwritten and underwritten, endlessly confident in what a new art of prose could do, at that point in history when our brash nation thrust itself forward into the great confusion of the world after the war. (Hynes 156)

A number of essays and articles were also written and published on *The Enormous Room* in the latter half of the 20th century which include those by John Dos Passos, Gilbert Seldes, John Peale Bishop, Stanley Coben, R.P Blackmur, Cohen Milton, Jameson Frederick, Edmund Pearson, Thomas L. Masson et al.

In fact, World War I continued to be a popular subject for fiction, mainly novels, in the Post-War era. Hence the novels like Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, (A.P. Herbert's *The Secret Battle* (1919), Thomas Alexander Boyd's *Through the Wheat* (1923), Ralph Hale Mottram's the "Spanish Farm Trilogy"—*Sixty-Four* (1925), *Ninety-Four* (1925) and *The Crime at Vanderlynden's* (1926), Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero* (1929), Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), Frederic Manning's *The Middle Parts of Fortune* (1929), Henry Williamson's *The Patriot's Progress* (1930) Charles Yale Harrison's *Generals Die in Bed* (1930) and Victor Maslin Yeates' *Winged Victory* (1934) etc. were immensely popular and acclaimed by critics and scholars of the Modern Period. In 1923, Willa Cather even won the Pulitzer



Prize for *One of Ours*, which tells the story of a Nebraska farmer, Claude Wheeler, who escapes a loveless marriage to fight in World War I. But in the Postmodern era the subject lost its vogue and hence lesser pieces of War literature were composed and criticized. This is perhaps the reason why one may note the lack of serious literary criticism addressing Cummings' novel in the 21st century, as the work too was categorized exclusively as a piece of War literature. But it is important to note here that, unlike the war narratives, which focus exclusively on the causes and the repercussions of the World War I, Cummings' *The Enormous Room* can also be read as a story of the author's time travel to the Postmodern era of Globalization. This paper, therefore intends to highlight how Cummings traces his transformation from an American expatriate to a French exile and finally to a cosmopolitan individual during his imprisonment. While his stay at the detention camp, he gets to understand the essence of global citizenship and also gets a chance to live the American Dream. Thus, following the depiction of Cummings' arduous journey from detention to freedom (which the author himself has equated with Christian's journey in *Pilgrim's Progress*), in the paper there is an application of the theories of Expatriation and Territorialization propounded by Christine Gomez and the French philosophers – Deleuze and Guattari respectively. Then there is also broaching of the idea of American Dream, articulated by President Abraham Lincoln to facilitate a better understanding of Cummings' liberation from restrictive nationalistic ideas, his attainment of a transnational identity and his celebration of un monde un rêve in his autobiographical novel, *The Enormous Room*.

Cummings, after passing out of Harvard, joined Norton-Harjes Ambulance Corps in 1917, which was a volunteer ambulance brigade working under the Red Cross. He got into this service out of sheer penchant for adventure at a young age. His friends John Dos Passos and William Slater Brown too joined him in this adventure. One fine morning, while being on duty, William Slater Brown (Referred to as 'B' in the book) was arrested by the French on the charge of writing objectionable letters. As a close friend of Brown, when Cummings (known as 'C' in the book) was interrogated, he made some sardonic remarks to the police regarding the war and also supported his Friend's Anti-War sentiment. Consequently, both the friends were arrested. Cummings however presents his detention to be sudden and unexpected, and also claims to have no clear idea regarding the charges brought against him. In this regard, it is relevant to mention another letter which William Slater Brown wrote in 1988. According to him,

It was not those dumb, jejune letters of mine that got us into trouble. It was the fact that C. and I knew all about the violent mutinies in the French Army a few months before Cummings and I reached the front. We learned all about them from the poilus. The French did everything, naturally, to suppress the news. We two were loaded with dynamite. (Friedman and Forrest 90)

Being incarcerated by the French Police, Cummings and Brown were to face the judgement of the law-enforcement Commission which assembled at an interval of three months. But C and B were arrested just a few days after the Commission had already had its assemblance. And hence, they had to wait for its next session. With their case pending, both the friends were sent to La Ferté-Macé, where they were kept in an 'enormous room' with around thirty other detainees.

After arriving at the La Ferté, and considering its despicable situation the Americans considered themselves lucky to at least have their mobile beddings and other



necessary possessions with them. If not so, they too would have been compelled to sleep on straw mattresses laid on frigid and mucky floor like the other hapless and unfortunate prisoners. Cummings found several buckets mounted on the wall for urination and defecation. The buckets used to overflow by the end of each day and one can only imagine the nauseating ambience which prevailed in the prison. Along with the unhygienic living conditions, the room was also chilling, as there was a single heating stove which was obviously insufficient. The prisoners did not get enough food as all that was delectable and nutritive was consumed by the guards. The detainees were allowed to take bath only once a week. But then, there was an extreme scarcity of water, and hence each of them got only a bucket of cold water, to pour on their heads.

Along with the men, there were women detainees in the camp as well. There was a separate room and their activities were timed in such a manner, so as to avoid their interactions with the male prisoners. These women were mostly prostitutes, though the charge against them was not prostitution, as the profession was legal in France in the 1900s. They were mostly arrested for being present in areas, which were reserved for the army. There were also women like the wife of The Wanderer, who have voluntarily accompanied their husbands to La Ferté. Such women brought their children along with them, as being alone and outside the prison was far more dangerous than compromising with inhuman living standards inside the prison. C estimates that there were more than hundred detainees cramped into the women's wing. Though his acquaintance with the women prisoners was quite limited, yet he gives us life like and indelible descriptions of a translator, La Belge, and five prostitutes, Tek, Lulu, Renée, Celina, Lena and Lily. While living in hellish state of affairs, the activities and the antics of the women were the only source of amusement and entertainment for Cummings and others like him. Such an attachment to his fellow women detainees made Cummings despise the atrocities meted out to them. Hence, at one instance, he tries to capture their humiliation and embarrassment while "carrying their slops along the hall and down-stairs" (90). To quote from novel,

Five or six women staggering and carrying pails full to the brim of every-one knew what; five or six heads, lowered, ill-dressed bodies tense with effort, free arms rigidly extended from the shoulder downward and outward in a plane at right angles to their difficult progress, and thereby helping to balance the disconcerting load -all embarrassed, some humiliated, others desperately at ease. (90)

Coming back to Cummings' detention, at the end of November 1917, the Commission showed up and both B and C had to appear before it. Once again, they were questioned, and on the basis of their answers, judgement was passed. After a couple of days, B was sent to prison, and C was about to be given a conditional supervised release, being still considered a suspect by the French Government. But before this could happen, Cummings' father made use of his contacts with the bureaucrats and secured a 'no-strings-attached' release for his son. In this way Cummings got his unrestricted liberation and on 1st January 1918, he came back to New York.

The *Enormous Room* thus gives punctilious details of Cummings' imprisonment, stay and release from the detention camp in France. Conventionally speaking, the novel hardly has any plot. It just relates the everyday happenings at La Ferté-Macé and also gives us graphic portraits of some very interesting and unique personalities. Speaking of Cummings himself, we find him to be a passionate Bostonian, who is exceptionally sensitive to what he sees and smells in the prison. Structurally however, Cummings' *The*



Enormous Room is based on John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, though there are remarkable differences between the works. Living in a world of global catastrophe where, according to Hemmingway "all our words from loose using have lost their edge" (Hemmingway 63), Cummings adopts an inverted scheme of things to emphasize the values and morals expounded in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. He successfully uses dirt, filth and excrement as metaphors to highlight the brutality prevailing in the prisons and detention camps during the World War. In this regard, one is reminded of Swift's depiction of Yahoos in *Gulliver's Travels* Book Four, who look like humans but are the dirtiest and the filthiest creatures imaginable. But then, Cummings' genius lies in his presentation of Elysium within the Inferno. As his pilgrim, unlike Bunyan's Christian cannot travel to the 'Delectable Mountains', he makes it possible for C to be with the mountains right within the four walls of the 'enormous room'.

Following the pattern of reversal, in Cummings' novel, cleanliness is equated with blasphemy. Hence, we find the Director of the detention camp to be particularly conscious about his dressing. He is a disgusting and ruthless man who has a fetish for personal hygiene. Cummings calls him the "very definite fiend" (Cummings 83). While he adjusts his sleeves to look prim and proper, he hurls abuses on the women detainees by calling them "PROSTITUTES and WHORES and DIRTY FILTH OF WOMEN" (131). Ironic it seems that a man so conscious about his personal cleanliness is accountable for the filthiest of prisons, so much so that Cummings names him Apollyon, and describes him as the "very definite fiend... a Satan whose word is dreadful not because it is painstakingly unjust but because it is incomprehensibly omnipotent" (83). Amidst such a miserable situation, friendship could only prevail among the despondent detainees of La Ferté-Macé.

So, coming to the prisoners of the enormous room, it is interesting how Cummings introduces them to the readers. He tells his readers that he was arrested by the French Police from his work-place. After spending three nights in the gendarmeries in Noyen and Grez, when C wakes up on Day 4 at La Ferte, he thinks he is probably at the gendarmerie in Marseilles. He is woken up by a young man wearing a Belgian uniform "with a red tassel bobbing in its eyes" (36). Unable to grasp his immediate reality, C feels that he has perhaps "gone completely crazy" (36). Being disoriented after his immediate waking up, he gazes "blankly around" (37), without having the slightest idea about the "startling identities" surrounding him. Tensed and anxious C finds his hands shaking "Trembling with this chaos my hand sought the cup. The cup was not warm; its contents, which I hastily gulped, were not even tepid. The taste was dull..." (37). Around him he sees numerous shabby mattresses spread on the floor, and on each of them he finds a "crude imitation of humanity" (37). All on a sudden, a "vulture like silhouette" comes in from nowhere and causes an "insane confusion" (37). But then "a handsome figure" conveys that, "Your friend's here, Johnny, and wants to see you" (38). In this rapid, yet lucid and comprehensible manner, C introduces his fellow detainees one after another. At the same time, he finds comfort in the information that he is not alone and his friend is there with him in his detention.

It is worth mentioning that, C introduces only a few of his inmates in the beginning so that the readers are not overwhelmed with too much information. He recounts their appearance at first, and then in the due course of the narrative shares their names with the readers. After mentioning about the three inmates in the very beginning, C could, if he wanted, take their names. We have already come across the young man

wearing Belgian Uniform, the 'vulturelike figure' and the 'handsome man'. C however does not reveal their names immediately, as he himself is yet to acquire a complete understanding of the situation he is in. And in such a mental and physical state, he can hardly remember any name whatsoever. It is indeed remarkable that, as a narrator Cummings has kept such little yet significant details in mind while narrating his experiences. But then, slowly, as he settles in 'the enormous room', C is again terrified by the sight of four men tugging his straw mattress. One of them is "a clean-shaved youngish man with lively eyes, alert and muscular ... who had called [him] 'Johnny' (39). The other is "an incoherent personage enveloped in a buffoonery of amazing rags and patches, with a shabby head on which excited wisps of dirty hair stood upright in excitement, and the tall ludicrous extraordinary almost noble figure of a dancing bear" (39). The third person is "a six-foot combination of yellow haired hooligan face, and sky-blue trousers" (39). And the fourth man is, "the undersized tasseled mucker in Belgian uniform, with a pimply rogue's mug ..." (39). This episode comes to an end with the intervention of a "fluffy little gnome-shaped man" (39) whose "child's voice" (39) ultimately separates the mattress-yanking men. Then there is also the mention a man in a "perfectly fitting swallowtail coat" (43), whom C finds to be the "apotheosis of injured nobility" (43). Together, B and C even gives nicknames to a few of the inhabitants of the prison. For instance, a man whose name is Jan, is called Judas by them as "On gazing for the first time directly at him [C] experienced a feeling of nausea" (57). From such descriptions it is apparent that C's fine observational skills make him take note of the physical features as well as the appearances of all those who come in close proximity to him. And it is totally on the basis of how a person looks, that he calls them 'hooligans', 'muckers', 'rogues' or 'noble-men'.

C's recounting of his acquaintances is adequate to such an extent that soon the readers too can identify the people from merely two words phrases like 'Belgian uniform', 'hooligan visage', 'clean-shaven man', 'incoherent bear', 'child's voice', 'the gnome', 'swallowtail coat' etc. As the narrative proceeds, C does provide the names of all these men to the readers. Having done so, he introduces the next batch of prisoners, who are sixteen in number. Each of these men are named and meticulously described. Almost all the prisoners mentioned so far, are among those who were already present when C came into the prison. Cummings tells his readers that, after spending a whole day in the camp, he had come to the realization that, he was among "a number of extremely interesting individuals" (64). He also recounts that, from the second day, time ceased to exist for him as he felt that "events can no longer succeed each other ..." (67). But irrespective of this, the newcomers continue to arrive, and C too goes on describing their looks, habits and peculiarities. In between such elaborate description of the detainees, we find a chapter dedicated to Apollyon, who impresses to be an obnoxious human being, detested and abhorred by C and almost every other prisoner. After describing Apollyon, as he comes back to the prisoners, he alerts his readers, by saying, "[Let us] tighten our belts ... seize our staffs into our hands, and continue the ascent begun with the first pages of the story" (101).

Much in keeping with this warning, we find new prisoners appearing in greater numbers. They arrive in smaller or larger groups and C calls them "les nouveaux whose arrivals and reactions constituted the actual or kinetic aspect of our otherwise merely real Nonexistence" (101). Such an unrestricted inflow of prisoners, though provides amusement and entertainment to those already present, but at the same time it makes the room claustrophobic as, by now we find it packed with some "sixty or seventy mattresses"



(119). C purposefully keeps a few of his companions anonymous for the sheer difficulty of naming all of them. The man who queries about Shakespeare is one such fellow whose name is not mentioned in the narrative. Yet, we find that the total number of individuals whose names have been registered in E.E Cummings' *The Enormous Room* exceeds sixty.

While speaking about the prisoners of the enormous room, B has earlier stated that, they are "the finest people here" (38). Speaking further of them, he mentioned, "This is Camp de Triage de La Ferté-Macé, Orne, France, and all these fine people were arrested as spies" (38). Baffled by such a disclosure, C has asked his friend, "Do you mean to say we're espions too?" (38). And to this, came B's enthusiastic confirmation, "'Of course...Thank God!'" (38). Gradually, as days pass, and more and more prisoners flood in, C's initial bemusement gives way to sagacity, and he understands that the enormous room is actually a union ground for Dutch, Belgian, Spanish, Turkish, Arabian, Polish, Russian, Swedish, German, French, English and American prisoners. Out of them Cummings isolates four such prisoners and identifies them as 'Delectable Mountains'. Needless it is to say that all four of these Delectable Mountains are then described in a fastidious manner. They are, The Wanderer, Zulu, Surplice, and Jean Le Negre.

In *Pilgrim's Progress*, the 'Delectable Mountains' enable the pilgrims to have a comprehensive view of God's world and the divine scheme of things prevailing in it. With paradise in view, the worldly pleasures fail to tempt the pilgrims any more. Similarly, in *The Enormous Room*, The Wanderer, Zulu, Surplice, and Jean Le Negre are unpretentious and naïve victims, targeted by the cruel and manipulative bureaucrats. And Cummings' proximity with them makes him discern the false notions of superior national identity and uncritical patriotism. Contrary to the Delectable Mountains we have the portrayal of the Director of the detention camp, Apollyon. In *Pilgrim's Progress*, Apollyon is evil personified. He is an anomalous creature, with parts of dragon, human, fish and bear. Drawing his strength from fire, earth, air and water, Apollyon stands in contrast with Christian's simplicity. As a representative of the material powers, he is oppugnant to the spiritual transcendence, which Christian seeks. His purpose is to thwart Christian from progressing towards his pilgrimage. In the same fashion, in Cummings' novel, the Director betrays political fanaticism, which makes him completely indifferent to the pain and suffering of the prisoners. Having gained familiarity with the multi-national prisoners, Cummings also finds the Chief of their Ambulance Section, Mr. A. to be detestable. Mr. A. once said, "You boys want to keep away from those dirty Frenchmen.... We're here to show those bastards how they do things in America" (1). He further instructed his men, "We gotta show these lousy Frenchmen what Americans are... want me to send you out, you gotta shave and look neat, and keep away from them dirty Frenchmen" (39). In opposition to Mr. A's assertion, C experiences immense joy while being surrounded by multitude of detainees whose respective nationalities no longer abstain them from enjoying the camaraderie of one another.

It is interesting to mark C's immense joy during his detention. Even amidst such infernal conditions, in which he lives, C feels alive and the company of B makes his experience even more exhilarating. This is evident from the comment he makes at the end of his first day in prison. He confides in B and says, "By God ... this is the finest place I've ever been in my life" (65). And then with the passing of days, he starts deriving happiness out of various incidents occurring at La Ferté. With Afrique and the Cook, he experiences delight in the kitchen. The story of the Mexican revolution, narrated by Mexique astounds



him. The “night Rockefeller and his slave arrived was a night remembered by everyone” (109). Rockefeller “proceeded to light one of his candles and began a pleasant and conversational evening” (110) which in turn filled C with “immense astonishment and delight” (111). And then, at one instance, he recollects laying “on the floor for some minutes half on top of the Zulu and three quarters smothered by Monsieur Auguste shaking with laughter” (160). Such instances make C declare just before his release, that, “I was happier at La FertéMacé, with the Delectable Mountains about me, than the very keenest words can pretend to express” (181).

Evidently therefore, being conditioned by the pseudo-patriotic sentiments preached by people like Mr. A, Cummings entered La Ferté-Macé as an American expatriate, who was initially disconcerted by the filthy surrounding and the pitiful condition of the inmates. In this regard, Christine Gomez’s insightful definition of the term expatriation is of much relevance. She explains:

Expatriation is actually a complex state of mind and emotion which includes a wistful longing for the past, often symbolized by the ancestral home, the pain of exile and homelessness, the struggle to maintain the difference between oneself and the new, unfriendly surroundings, an assumption of moral and cultural superiority over the host country and a refusal to accept the identity forced on one by the environment. (Gomez 72)

Cummings’ stay at the detention camp however makes him conscious of the spirit of cosmopolitanism prevailing within the prison. Indeed, La Ferté-Macé can be viewed as a site of deterritorialization at a microscopic level. Here mention should be made of two eminent French philosophers – Deleuze and Guattari who explained the idea of “territorialization” in their two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Anti-Oedipus and A Thousand Plateaus*. Guattari elucidates that ‘Territorialization’ means segregating people on grounds of their respective geographical, cultural, or ethnic territories. “Such territories bestow an individual with a sense of belongingness and also shapes his/her personality” (Guattari142). But in the present era of globalization, studies have proved beyond doubt that the national as well as ethno-cultural territories cannot circumscribe an individual for long. Interestingly the trans-national situation in which Cummings found himself back in 1917, is the reality of the postcolonial era we live in. The advanced ICT mediums have given birth to global citizens, whose identities are not confined to a particular country. They are dynamic and keep altering with time and place. Here it is interesting to mention that, once the U.S State Dept. was suspicious of citizens carrying more than one passport. But today, the reality is that, it hardly takes notice of such people. The situation may however change in the condition of war. While speaking on the issues of transnationalism, maximalism and expansionism in the present-day global politics, an eminent South Asian Diasporic author Bharati Mukherjee claimed: “Time travel is a reality... I have seen it in my own life. Bionic men and women are living among us” (Mukherjee 29). The 21st century reader of Cummings’ biography might find him to be a time traveller, who could experience the essence of Global Citizenship during his stay at the Enormous Room. And such an experience made him the vindicator of the paramountcy of humanity over national, patriotic and political interests. This is perhaps the reason why C rejected his release from the prison to be a happy ending. He declares that his departure "cannot by any stretch of the imagination be conceived as constituting a Happy Ending to a great and personal adventure" (Cummings181).



An examination of the reviews of *The Enormous Room* and the critical essays written on Cummings' autobiography show that, the changing political scenario has shaped its reception among readers and critics alike. Since its publication, Cummings' novel has garnered both positive and negative reviews. Those who did not speak well of the book have treated it as a work of non-fiction and have criticized Cummings for his political bias. Edmund Pearson for instance wrote in *The Independent* that, Cummings got no more than what he deserved. To quote Pearson, "If his book, *The Enormous Room*, which he now publishes to describe his prison experiences, may be taken as indication of his judgment, his friends and correspondents may well have been men who engaged in letter writing of a kind which in war time has an ugly name (Pearson 255). Thomas L. Masson, in the *New York Times Book Review*, also made similar claims, and vilified Cummings' political stance:

[I]f he really likes the Germans and thinks them a much better people than the French, why not say so clearly? Why smother us with word pictures of what was happening to him and leave us in too much painful doubt about his own honest opinion?... his book is a Bolshevik Book none the less because it is vague. (Masson12)

Contrary to such negative reviews which are based on the non-fictional treatment of Cummings' novel, there are reviewers like John Dos Passos, who emphasized on its aesthetic brilliance. They refused to read *The Enormous Room* as a political treatise and instead exalted it as a pure work of art. Hence, in *The Dial* Passos argued that, "It's not as an account of a war atrocity or as an attack on France or the holy Allies timely calling of the Genoa Conference that *The Enormous Room* is important, but as a distinct conscious creation separate from anything else under heaven" (Passos 455). Echoing Passos, Gilbert Seldes in *The Double Dealer* claimed, "I have spent so much time on the aesthetic qualities of *The Enormous Room* because they seem to me of the first importance and because (with the exception of Mr. Dos Passos, also a painter and poet) no one has more than touched upon them" (102). Such a critical position taken by those who eulogize Cummings' avant-garde narrative, is due to their belief in the autonomy of the text. This approach can certainly be viewed in relation to New Criticism as we know it today. Following the New Critical perspective, if we read Cummings' *The Enormous Room* as a complete and independent work without being influenced by any political perspective whatsoever, we find its contemporaneity to be quite indubitable. Cummings' autobiography seems to be of accentuating relevance in the 21st Century, in which the notions of hybridity, transnationalism and multiculturalism are ubiquitous.

'The enormous room' taught Cummings to designate primordial position to human beings and their capabilities. His suffering united him with the other inmates of various nationalities and he grew concern for their wellbeing. He could now comprehend how the bureaucratic forces exploited the mass population for the purpose of self-aggrandizement. This realization made him reluctant to leave his 'delectable mountains' for a life of 'manipulative liberty'. This is the reason why he felt lonely and alienated after his return to America and found the busy Americans to be absolutely nescient of the knowledge, which he had gained while being in the detention camp. Instead of feeling the comfort of being at home after so long, he felt both connected and separated from his homeland at the same time. Though he was grateful for being alive and also intended to share his experiences, which he did, he found himself to be strangely disconnected with



his fellow citizens. Being conscious of the false notions of nationalism promoting war, Cummings could now comprehend the idea of Global Citizenship which awaited in the future. Moreover, it is also evident that, his stay at La Ferté-Macé, gave Cummings chance to live the American Dream.

While explicating the idea of American Dream, the 16th President America, Abraham Lincoln, in 1948 claimed that the objective of the Government “was to lift artificial weights from all shoulders, to clear the paths of laudable pursuit for all, to afford all an unfettered start and fair chance in the race of life” (Maclver 1). The President’s vision was cognized as the American dream. President Lincoln actually tried to build up a concord among the citizens irrespective of their race, creed, gender and ancestry. America has always been the land of immigrants who have sought refuge as and when they faced political, economic or social crisis. Be it the potato famine of 1845-49, when a large number of Irish immigrants arrived in America, or the revolutions of 1830 and 48, which led the Germans to migrate to USA, the nation has always given shelter and protection to the migrants. Among other groups of migrants, mention can be made of Jews, Poles, Hungarians, Chinese, Indians, Portuguese, Russians, Greek, Spanish and many others who migrated with the purpose of living the American dream. They sought harmony in diversity, which Cummings too experienced during his stay in ‘the enormous room’. Interestingly, having lived the days of future past, his documentation of his life in La Ferté-Macé, serve different purposes for his contemporary and future readers. While it gave his contemporary readers a glimpse into the future, Cummings’ narrative style, presentation of characters and engaging way of describing even mundane everyday experiences have made his autobiography much more than a mere political manifesto, or a historical document. It has remained and will forever be a piece of sheer creative brilliance for the generations to come.

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