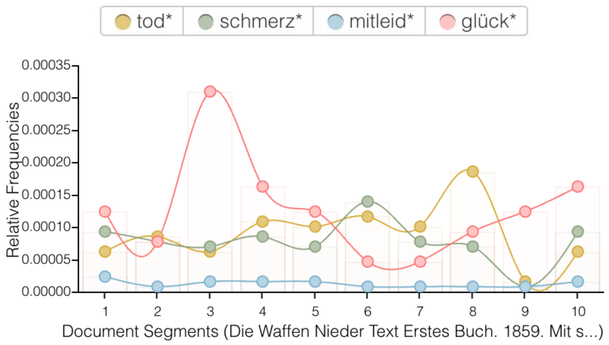
# Feeling at War:
# Emotion and Rationality as Narrative Responses in German Antiwar Literary Traditions

Claire Woodward, PhD Candidate in Germanic Studies

## *Lay Down Your Arms* (1889)

1. Cirrus of select words

2. Relative frequency of words [death], [pain], [compassion], and [happiness] throughout the novel




**Overview**

In this project, I compare affective character reactions to suffering in Bertha von Suttner's *Lay Down Your Arms* (*Die Waffen Nieder!,* 1889) and Erich Maria Remarque's *All is Quiet on the Western Front* (*Im Westen Nichts Neues,* 1928), using textual analysis to support identifiable narrative arcs. German antiwar texts rely on depictions of suffering as consequence of war violence, but the narrative framing of such stories differs, namely in observer reactions to suffering.

Using these two texts as representative of larger trends, I argue that before The First World War, German antiwar literature relies on impassioned emotional pleas to alleviate suffering whereas thereafter, characters are led by rational compassion surrounded by the chaos of war and a sense of futility.

**Methods**

Using Voyant, I created a cirrus of select words (1 and 3) and a textual analysis of the words [death], [pain], [compassion], and [happiness] (*Tod, Schmerz*, *Mitleid*, *Glück*) (2 and 4). These textual visualizations support rather replace the narratological methods and traditional literary analysis. I used Lucid Charts and BioRender to develop visualizations of the observed narrative arcs in reacting to suffering (5 and 6).

**Results**

The relative frequencies of strong affective words [death], [pain], [compassion], and [happiness] is much lower in *All is Quiet on the Western Front* than in *Lay Down Your Arms*, with the notable exception of [death] in the final section of Remarque's novel (2 and 4). There are more positive affect words overall in *Lay Down Your Arms* (1) in a direct comparison to *All is Quiet on the Western Front* (3).

**Takeaways**

Von Suttner's novel follows Martha, a woman not physically engaged in combative war but affected by the widespread domestic harms caused by war and perceptive to those occurring on the front. Her narration includes strong affect in describing the violence of war and although the suffering itself is not resolved, observers of suffering may feel a sense of resolution through emotional interventions.

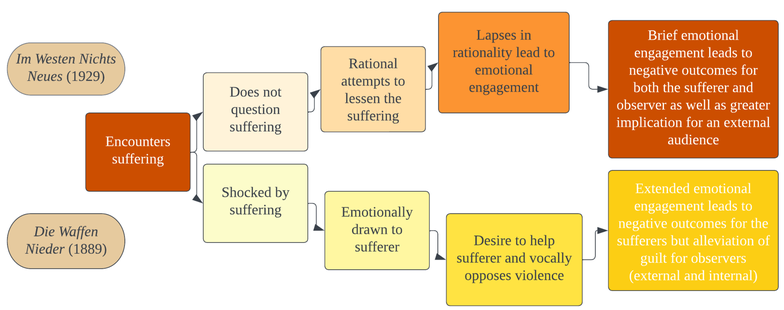
Alternatively, *All is Quiet on the Western Front* suggests a sense of futility with low affective descriptors until death becomes all-consuming. In the antiwar tradition of the twentieth-century, war would-be heroes like Remarque's soldier Paul became victims of the chaotic war machine, surviving or dying entirely by chance and rationally watching others condemned to the same fate (see 6 for an observer narrative arc comparison).

This mismatch of conflict without affective intervention from an intertextual bystander and of the compassion felt by an external audience (us as readers) along with attempted perspective-taking leads to what I call chaotic compassion in post-Great War texts (5).

**Corpora**

Remarque, Erich Maria. *Im Westen Nichts Neues.* Berlin: Propyläen-verlag, 1929.
Suttner, Bertha von, Sigrid Bock, and Helmut Bock. *Die Waffen Nieder! : Eine Lebensgeschichte.* 1. Aufl. Berlin: Verlag der Nation, 1990.

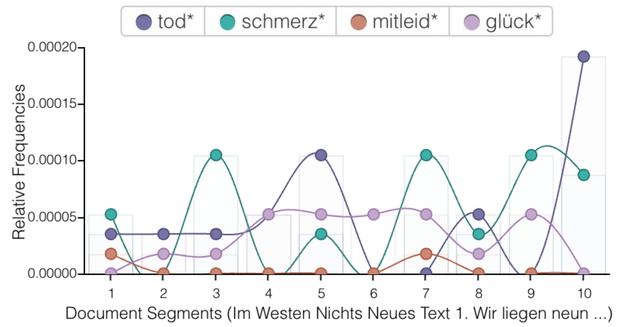
6. Narrative Character Arcs of Observing Suffering

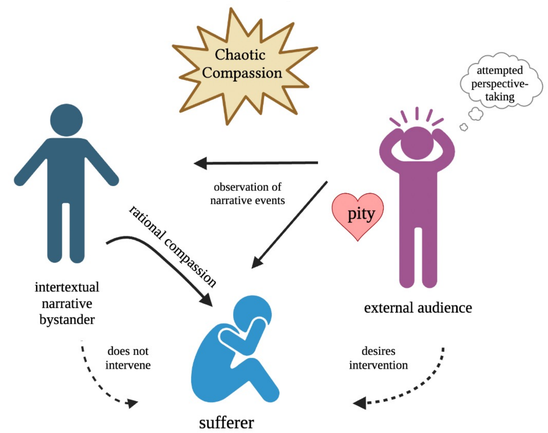



## *All is Quiet on the Western Front* (1928)

3. Cirrus of select words

4. Relative frequency of words [death], [pain], [compassion], and [happiness] throughout the novel




5. Visualization of Chaotic Compassion