MEANING AND TECHNIQUE: UNITY IN THE LATER POETRY OF e. e. cummings

Dissertation for the Degree of Ph. D.
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
WILLIAM ELLIOT THOMPSON
1976

This is to certify that the

thesis entitled

MEANING AND TECHNIQUE:
UNITY IN THE LATER POETRY
OF e. e. cummings

presented by

WILLIAM ELLIOT THOMPSON

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

Ph.D. degree in English

Linda C. Wagner
Major professor

Date July 28, 1976

O-7639

ABSTRACT

MEANING AND TECHNIQUE: UNITY IN THE LATER POETRY OF e. e. cummings

By

William Elliot Thompson

The criticism most persistently made during the half-century of e. e. cummings' writing career was that he was limited by "permanent adolescence." Every admirer of cummings' unique style has had to counter this charge; accordingly, cummings' life-view has been compared to the philosophies of the Romantic poets, to Martin Buber's "I-thou" concept and to the christian (with a lower case "c") love ethic. This dissertation employs a humanistic psychological analysis of cummings' life-view to affirm the positive value of his vision.

In the first four chapters I inductively derive the major elements of his life-view from his poems, fiction and prose, demonstrating a reading process which any careful reader can replicate, showing by example the processes a reader might use to discover the ethical system expressed in the poems. Comparison of the major elements of cummings' life-view with the principles of

Abraham Maslow's "Psychology of Being" shows that, according to Maslovian standards of health, cummings' persona presents attitudes which are mature, humanistic and psychologically healthy.

The second charge lodged against cummings is that he violated poetic conventions irrationally, that his technical innovations are idiosyncratic and usually unsuccessful. An argument central to this dissertation is that the form of each cummings poem is derived from the content value-system he wished to express. His techniques were developed in an attempt to express his poetic vision properly.

Far from being irrational violations of conventions, his techniques may be seen as growing logically out of a conviction that techniques should express individual experience. If a convention seemed useful and appropriate to the subject-matter of the poem, then cummings used that convention. But if a convention impeded or obscured the precise presentation of a poem's substance, that convention was either modified or discarded. In 1913 Ezra Pound announced a similar position as part of the Imagist movement, and there are strong reasons to believe that much of cummings' aesthetic theory stemmed from his admiration for the theory and practice of poets connected with Ezra Pound and the Imagiste movement.

In the last four chapters I derive the elements of cummings' aesthetic theory from his poetic practice and his prose. In Chapters VI and VII I demonstrate that cummings' technical innovations were probably developed as brilliant responses to the aesthetic challenges of (1) adhering to a personal set of vigorous aesthetic demands similar to those set by the Imagist poets between 1908 and 1917, and (2) creating a form in each poem organically derived from the poem's content. Thus cummings is placed in the mainstream of an experimental literary tradition, incorporating elements of Imagist aesthetic theory and the principles of Organic Form. In the concluding chapter cummings' influence on contemporary poets is explored. Several contemporary poets have acknowledged their indebtedness to cummings' experiments, and many of his techniques have been incorporated into the styles of poets writing today.

73 poems, cummings' final book, yields rich rewards from careful reading and comparison with the books of poems which preceded it. It is a masterpiece of poetic technique, expressing mature attitudes toward self, others, America, the world and life's mysteries. Many of his values remained unchanged throughout his life, but his expression of them grew more complex, integrated and effective over the years. This study

focuses on cummings' last and finest book of poems, ranging back through his earlier work to show the growth and development of his vision and poetic techniques.

MEANING AND TECHNIQUE: UNITY IN THE LATER POETRY OF e. e. cummings

By

William Elliot Thompson

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of English

1976

For Carol and Linda

"Ideals are like the stars:
we cannot reach them
but we set our course by them."

and in memory of my parents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A community of teacher-scholars and family supporters has made this dissertation possible. I am especially indebted to Linda W. Wagner, who read and corrected the manuscript several times and discussed it with me in all its phases. She shared her knowledge of Imagism and Organic Form, her appreciation for cummings' poetry and her enthusiastic concern for how a poem is made. Her fine teaching and scholarly excellence make her a model of the humanistic teacher-scholar.

Herbert Greenberg communicated his appreciation of Abraham Maslow's psychological principles and encouraged the work at every stage. William H. Johnsen lent dialectical assistance, causing me to reconsider my position on several key points.

Bert G. Hornback read, criticized and encouraged the work; he is also the person whose excellent teaching inspired my undergraduate interest in pursuing a doctoral program in literature.

Cummings' appreciative critics, particularly Norman Friedman, Charles Norman and Barry Marks, prepared

the way in their books for the roads I have taken; all of the books of cummings criticism demonstrate sensitivity to and intelligent affirmation of the poet's work.

The English Department gave financial assistance in the form of a Dissertation Grant. Thanks are also due Marty North for editorial assistance and typing.

Yet with all of that assistance the writing would still not have been possible without the encouragement of friends and adopted families. Finally, the emotional support and technical assistance of my wife, Carol, herself a dedicated scholar-teacher, was essential to the successful conclusion of this endeavor.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Critical opinion regarding cummings' poetry was sharply divided during the forty years between the appearance of Tulips & Chimneys (1923) and 73 poems (1963). Fellow poets such as Ezra Pound, Marianne Moore, John Dos Passos and William Carlos Williams recognized his achievements from his Harvard days until his death. These were the Imagist poets, the experimenters, the modernists of the 1920s. However, more formally conservative poets like John Crowe Ransom, Randall Jarrell, Yvor Winters and R. P. Blackmur disliked his experiments with language and tended to judge his poetry from standards they took to be sacrosanct. They confessed to finding cummings enjoyable but somehow threatening in his apparent disregard for the conventions of poetic craft.

With a few exceptions, the criticism before 1954 coming out of the academic community is almost uniformly hostile. The first book of criticism of cummings' work was S. V. Baum's collection of thirty-two articles, all

written prior to the publication of Poems 1923-1954. The main lines of attack evident in that book (and representative of the body of criticism written up to 1954) are three: first, critics like Ludwig Lewisohn asserted that "I think it is absurd to take him so seriously. He who is indiscriminatingly bitter about everything has evidently no balanced judgment or assured sense of values" (Baum, 177).[1] Second, in his 1931 "Notes on E. E. Cummings' Language" R. P. Blackmur argued that "so far as meaning goes, in the poetry into which he translated it, sentimentality, empty convention and commonplace rule." Third, Harriet Monroe attacked his "eccentric system of typography which, in our opinion, has nothing to do with the poem, but intrudes itself irritatingly, like scratched or blurred spectacles, between it and the reader's mind" (Baum, 21).

In his "Polemical Introduction" to The Anatomy of Criticism Northrop Frye argues that all value judgments generate from some implied ethical system:

> Every deliberately constructed hierarchy of values in literature known to me is based on a concealed social, moral, or intellectual analogy.[2]

The negative criticisms cited above probably stem from value systems different from cummings' or from views of aesthetic decorum more conservative than cummings' views, since they contain words laden with emotional negation such as "absurd," "sentimentality," "empty convention,"

"commonplace," "eccentric" and "irritatingly." Frye continues with the observation that "the various pretexts for minimizing the communicative power of certain writers, that they are obscure or obscene or nihilistic or reactionary or what not, generally turn out to be disguises for a feeling that the views of decorum held by the ascendant social or intellectual class ought to be either maintained or challenged" (Frye, 23). Such "social fixations" are seen by Frye as "prejudices derived from" the critic's "existence as a social being" in most cases. Frye also asserts that "prejudice is simply inadequate deduction, as a prejudice in the mind can never be anything but a major premise which is mostly submerged, like an iceberg" (Frye, 22).

I will counter such negative criticisms in this dissertation by surveying in this chapter the work of the major positive critics of cummings' work, summarizing their defenses of cummings' value-system. Another chapter will attempt to derive inductively his ethical system from his poetry, fiction and prose. As this process proceeds I will compare each element of the ethical system with Abraham Maslow's psychological theories in order to show that cummings' approach to life is mature, humanistic and psychologically healthy by Maslovian standards. The inductive method insures that I am describing cummings' values and not superimposing my

own (positive) prejudices on his work. The inductive method may also be replicated by any reader, and so demonstrates ways a reader can discover cummings' values for her/himself.

Next I will show that many of cummings' techniques grew out of the aesthetic theory and practice of the Imagist poets; therefore his techniques are not as "idiosyncratic" as they at first appear to be, but instead his technical methods are part of a modern tradition (in which his hostile critics are not participants) which extends into contemporary poetic practice.

In Chapter VIII I will prove that cummings is one of the practitioners of Organic Form, and that his typography is not merely "eccentric" but was crafted to perfectly express the ethical content of his poems. The theory and practice of Organic Form may be traced to the writings of Aristotle and Plato, again proving that cummings was not "eccentric," but was a participant in a poetic tradition which is within the mainstream of western aesthetic theory and practice. A final proof that cummings is not so idiosyncratic as his antagonistic critics have maintained is the fact that many contemporary poets have specifically credited cummings with pioneering techniques which they have incorporated into their own writing methods.

My critical goals are those of Walter Pater, Norman Friedman and Northrop Frye in their emphasis on positive criticism. As Frye says, "every new critical fashion has increased the appreciation of some poets and depreciated others, as the increase of interest in the metaphysical poets tended to depreciate the Romantics [in the 1930s]. On the ethical level we can see that every increase of appreciation has been right, and every decrease wrong: that criticism has no business to react against things, but should show a steady advance toward . . . catholicity" (Frye, 25). The object of this dissertation is simply to increase the appreciation of cummings' work, especially his final book, 73 poems. As Frye's essay argues, cummings deserves to be read through an ethical system sympathetic to his own.

Each of the full-length critical studies of cummings' work is a positive assessment. Each of these positive critics has described cummings' values and has compared his ethical system to another philosophical system in an attempt to establish the value of cummings' life-view. In 1960 Norman Friedman echoed Northrop Frye's objection to "prejudiced" negative criticism in E. E. Cummings: The Art of His Poetry:

> . . . Some of our reigning critics are bound by certain limiting conceptions as to what poetry should be and . . . these conceptions do not happen to apply very comfortably to Cummings. To look in his work for the signs of a tragic

> vision, for an ambivalence of structure, for a studied use of verbal ambiguity, for the display of a metaphysical wit, for the employment of mythic fragments, for the climax of a spiritual conversion--this is to look for things which are simply not there. And to complain, accordingly, that he lacks maturity of vision, variety of forms, intelligibility of diction, true seriousness, a sense of artistic purpose, and development is to misconstrue the nature both of critical principles and of Cummings' poetry.[3]

Friedman's far-ranging study effectively counters most of the negative criticism published before 1960 in article and review form. He points out the ironic fact that critics like Blackmur and Monroe attack cummings' poetry on the basis of preconceived standards, yet confess that they are often delighted by the poems:

> To feel delight and yet to be persuaded of the insignificance of its causes is not the proper state of mind in which to approach the poetry of Cummings--or of any other poet. Indeed, it is the right of any poet to be evaluated in terms of what he does rather than in terms of what he should do, and it is the duty of his critic to allow the work to flower before him in terms of its own inner necessities rather than merely what a given fashion has taught us to care for. (p. 4)

Friedman describes the content of cummings' poems in terms of the value-system of a poet and artist: "The poet, for cummings, is merely the type of the true man, and all true men are poets: men who can see with clear eyes, feel with unconditioned emotions, and love without fear; men who are whole, entire, and alive" (p. 10).

Barry Marks points out in the Twayne series E. E. Cummings (1964) the similarities between the methods of cummings, Melville and Thoreau. All three writers wanted the reader to "share the experience" being expressed in the writing. Henry James pursued a goal similar to cummings' attempt to shake readers from "their expectation of being merely entertained, of merely reading a book, into a readiness to participate with their whole beings in a deep encounter with life itself" (p. 134). Marks particularly points to cummings' typographical "distortions" as accomplishing what Henry James describes as placing "readers in a position where they would genuinely participate in the hero's progress from confusion to knowledge" (135).

Friedman's earlier book focused on cummings' poetry; in his 1964 E. E. Cummings: The Growth of a Writer, he emphasizes on the "vision and development" and covers cummings' fiction, drama and prose as well as the poetry. In the latter book Friedman describes cummings' vision as "Romantic":

> Cummings belongs with Coleridge and the Romantic tradition in seeing the natural order as superior to man-made orders. He, like Coleridge, views nature as process rather than product, as dynamic rather than static, as organic rather than product, and as becoming rather than being. And he, like Coleridge, believes that the intuitive or imaginative faculty in man can perceive this natura naturans directly, and so he is a transcendentalist. (p. 5)[5]

Friedman's placing of cummings in the English Romantic and transcendental tradition is helpful in refuting the charge that his vision is "immature" and "eccentric." Friedman describes cummings' Romanticism as a "transcendental" world in which objects are infused with values, things become verbs and life is vitalized by "magic, miracle, and mystery" which is perceivable if we open ourselves to its presence all around us:

> The ordinary world is a world of habit, routine, and abstract categories, and hence lies like a distorting film over the true world of sponteneity, surprise, and concrete life. . . . The true world is a world of three-dimensional depths, truths, and verbs. . . . For cummings, it is the poet's function to decry the ordinary world and exalt the true, to represent not what any camera can see but to imitate the "actual crisp organic squirm" itself. Cummings' transcendental vision, then, is of a spiritual world, a world where facts are saturated in values, a world of magic, miracle, and mystery. (pp. 5-6)

Friedman continues from this description to state that the intuitively perceived Romantic world has a "natural order of its own"; thus "an attempt to grasp it represents not an abandonment to disorder but rather a struggle to realize a higher order" (p. 6). He shows us that cummings' poetry, like much of modern literature, embodies the insight that "reality exceeds the forms which man has devised for dealing with it" (p. 4).

Eve Triem has added a footnote to Friedman's explanation of cummings' brand of "transcendence" in

her University of Minnesota Pamphlet E. E. Cummings (1969): "Growing from poem to poem--shedding skin after skin--Cummings emerges as really himself, and therefore as everyone: that is the true definition of transcendence" (44).[6]

The 1972 Twentieth Century Views collection of critical essays organizes fourteen articles into three groups: cummings' view of life; his language, style and techniques; his longer prose works. Friedman has edited this collection, and it differs from his two critical books on cummings in moving away from defensiveness by choosing essays "primarily for the information they give about and the insight they offer into the actual nature of cummings' accomplishment," preferring "depth and breadth of analytical penetration to cleverness, appreciation, tribute, testimonial, or memoir."[7] Friedman summarizes the present state of critical opinion regarding cummings' work in these words:

> The fact is that Cummings changed quite markedly all through his life. His love poetry, for example, became less erotic and more transcendental. His typography exploded--and then imploded. His linguistic distortions became more meaningful and luminous. Most important of all, his vision of life deepened and crystallized to a degree not yet sufficiently appreciated by the critics, for the current expectations about vision are the most excluding of all. (p. 5)

The critical community is moving toward appreciation of cummings' technical innovation and craftsmanship, but is not yet ready to appreciate the positive attributes of his vision. The first half of this dissertation explores cummings' vision in the light of Abraham Maslow's theory of psychological health, supporting Friedman's appreciations from a psychological viewpoint. Once we understand cummings' values we can better recognize the technical excellence of the poems he wrote to express that vision.

Humanistic psychology, pioneered by Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers and a group of about seventy psychologists and psychiatrists, has supplied us with terminology and conceptual apparatus with which we may more fully describe cummings' life-view and value system as it is expressed in his poems.

Three books by Maslow are especially useful in setting out his psychological theories: Toward a Psychology of Being (1962), Religions, Values, and Peak Experiences (1964) and The Farther Reaches of Human Nature (1971). One article by Maslow is also useful as a summary, "A Theory of Human Motivation," Psychological Review, vol. 50, pp. 370-396 (1943). The best discussion of the ways Maslow's theories may be applied to literature is Bernard J. Paris's A Psychological Approach to Fiction, Indiana University Press, 1974. Paris applies Third

Force psychological theories to the fiction of Thackaray, Stendhal, George Eliot, Dostoevsky and Conrad. He is concerned primarily with patterns of neurosis in the fictional works he discusses, whereas this dissertation is concerned with patterns of psychological health.

Maslow's psychological theory is inclusive rather than exclusive. His aim has been to consider all other psychological theories as parts of a larger picture; thus he has hypothesized a hierarchy of needs. Maslow asserts that "the basic human needs are organized into a hierarchy of prepotency" and that "the organism is dominated and its behavior organized only by unsatisfied needs" (THM, 87).[8] Maslow divides the human needs into five categories. Hunger is the most basic human need. When the hunger need is gratified, the person moves on toward satisfying "higher needs."

The second need is "safety." The "healthy, normal, fortunate adults in our society" are "largely satisfied" in their safety needs. Third comes the need both to give love successfully and to receive love from others.

The fourth category of needs is the need for esteem. This involves self-esteem "which is soundly based upon real capacity, achievement, and respect from others." These in turn are subdivided into "two subsidiary sets." The first subset includes the "desire for strength, for achievement, for adequacy, for

confidence in the face of the world, and for independence and freedom" (92). The second subset includes "the desire for reputation or prestige, recognition, attention, importance or appreciation. These are the needs stressed by Alfred Adler and his associates" (p. 92).

Finally we come to Maslow's fifth category, the need for "self-actualization, the need for self-fulfillment." According to Maslow, this need includes the "tendency . . . to become actualized in what [one] is potentially," or the desire "to become everything that one is capable of becoming" (92). Maslow reports that it is his "impression (as yet unconfirmed) that it is possible to distinguish the artistic and intellectual products of basically satisfied people from those of basically unsatisfied people by inspection alone" (93).

The poetic experience we share with cummings as we read his poetry, especially his final book of poems, is similar to the kind of experience attributed to the "self-actualizing" personality in Maslow's books Toward a Psychology of Being and Religions, Values, and Peak Experiences. Through clinical studies of "fully functioning and healthy human beings," Abraham Maslow has compiled a "composite photograph" of the "highest reaches of human nature and of its ultimate possibilities and aspirations" (TPB, 72).[9] In Toward a Psychology of Being Maslow defines self-actualization as:

> An episode, . . . in which the powers of the person come together in a particularly efficient and intensely enjoyable way, and in which he is more integrated and less split, more open for experience, more idiosyncratic, more perfectly expressive or spontaneous, or fully functioning, more creative, more humorous, more ego-transcending, more independent of his lower needs, etc. He becomes in these episodes more truly himself, more perfectly actualizing his potentialities, closer to the core of his Being, more fully human.
>
> (TPB, 97)

In the 1970 Religions, Values, and Peak Experiences, Maslow describes qualities which are part of the "Peak Experience," offering a descriptive definition of these highest of human insights. He notes that traditionally such experiences have been considered to be "Religious happenings"--mystical experiences or revelations; but Maslow claims that such experiences are naturalistic and may happen to anyone:

> Such states or episodes can, in theory, come at any time in life to any person. What seems to distinguish those individuals I have called self-actualizing people, is that in them these episodes seem to come far more frequently, and intensely and perfectly than in average people.[10]

The most creative and self-actualizing individuals achieve the intensest Peak Experiences, attain them more often than most of us and are often able to describe them or create works of art while in the midst of them. Then such artists are able to go back to these creations after the "Peak Experiences" (moments of creation) have passed

and apply logic, their critical skills, and their artistic sensibilities to the work of art to make the rough drafts into masterpieces.

I will try to show the ways in which the speaker of cummings' lyric poems fits Maslow's definition of the "self-actualizing" individual and that the poems tend to demonstrate and dramatize peak experiences so that by participating in cummings' poetic process and by following the stage directions of his poems, we can participate with him in some of his peak experiences. To accomplish this I will compare some of the perceptions and feelings a person is likely to feel when in the midst of a Peak Experience with sections of cummings' poems in which the same feelings or the same type of perceptions are being expressed by the speaker of the poem. A list of Peak Experience perceptions is reproduced in Appendix A. Further reference to this list and comparative analysis of cummings' poems will be found in later chapters.

This dissertation does not insist that the author of cummings' poems is a healthy person. Instead it offers the comparison of attitudes exhibited by the persona of the poems with attributes considered to be "healthy" in the light of Maslow's psychological hypotheses. The reader of the poems will draw his own conclusions in any case; I merely add this approach to the assertions of Friedman, Marks, Wegner, Triem, the Lindroths and

others that the philosophy of life presented in cummings' poems is one which should be given serious consideration as an attitude which may be helpful in responding to the challenge of living in the twentieth century.

CHAPTER I--NOTES

[1]S. V. Baum, ed., E. E. Cummings and the Critics (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1962).

[2]Northrop Frye, The Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957), paperback ed., 1971, pp. 3-29.

[3]Norman Friedman, e. e. cummings: The Art of His Poetry (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1960), p. 4.

[4]Barry Marks, E. E. Cummings, Twayne's United States Authors Series (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1964), p. 134.

[5]Norman Friedman, E. E. Cummings: The Growth of a Writer (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964).

[6]Eve Triem, E. E. Cummings (University of Minnesota Pamphlet Series, 1969).

[7]Twentieth Century Views Series, E. E. Cummings, ed. and with an introduction by Norman Friedman (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972). Hereafter referred to in the text as "TCV" in parentheses, followed by page numbers.

[8]Abraham Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," Psychological Review," Psychological Review, 50 (1943), 370-96.

[9]Abraham Maslow, Toward a Psychology of Being, 2nd ed. (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1968). Hereafter referenced in parentheses in the text as "TPB," followed by the page number.

[10]Abraham H. Maslow, Religions, Values, and Peak Experiences (New York: Viking Press, 1970). Referred to hereafter in parentheses within the text as "RVPE," followed by the page number.

CHAPTER II

INNOCENCE, MYSTERY, ALIVENESS, AND FEELING: ELEMENTS OF CUMMINGS' "YES" VISION

> yes is a world
> & in this world of
> yes live
> (skilfully coiled)
> all worlds
>
> (#58, NO THANKS, second stanza)

The speaker in a typical cummings poem is celebrating what Maslow would call a "peak experience," one in which the person is "more truly himself, more perfectly actualizing his potentialities, closer to the core of his Being," and "more fully human" (TPB, 97). In many cummings poems we find that the speaker is "more integrated and less split, more open for experience, more idiosyncratic, more perfectly expressive . . . or fully functioning, . . . more humorous, more ego-transcending, more independent of his lower needs" (TPB, 97). The speaker is often reporting or demonstrating what it is like to engage in a "peak experience." This section of

the dissertation explores the similarities between Maslow's theory of psychological health and the experiences presented in cummings' poems.

Life to e. e. cummings is positive, mysterious, growing, feeling and beautiful: "Everywhere tints childrening, innocent, spontaneous, true. . . . Nothing believed or doubted; brain over heart, surface; nowhere hating or to fear; shadow, mind without soul" (i6n, 80). Each individual is responsible for making his or her life beautiful. The secret to a rich, positive life-view for cummings is the attitude with which we approach life's mysteries. If we are afraid of pain or sorrow or if we insist on feeling threatened by phenomena we do not understand, we will be emphasizing the negative elements in life and will reap only sorrow, pain, bitterness. We must approach life's adventures with an open heart, a willingness to love and to be amazed:

> who were so dark of heart they might not speak,
> a little innocence will make them sing;
> teach them to see who could not learn to look
> --from the reality of all nothing
>
> will actually lift a luminous whole;
> turn sheer despairing to most perfect gay,
> nowhere to here, never to beautiful:
> a little innocence creates a day.
> . . . . . .
>
> (XAIPE, #51)

According to the poem, "a little innocence" can work wonders in any human being.

By "innocence" cummings means a childlike perception of an object or person which is a totally absorbed, completely attentive attitude in which he refrains from "only abstracting, naming, placing, and comparing" (TPB, 91). Such an attitude, according to Maslow, allows him to keep the experience free of all of the rigid linguistic categories and allows him to perceive "more aspects of the many-sidedness of the person" or object (TPB, 91). Maslow insists, with cummings, that the "ineffable" (cummings' term "spirit") can be perceived only through a unification of emotional and rational processes.

"Innocence," an attitude of openness, "creates a day" where before there was only dark despair, frustration or self-doubt. Those people "who were so dark of heart" that they were unable even to "speak" (a form of communication inferior to singing, by cummings' standards) are transformed into singers of life's beauty by "a little innocence."

Maslow describes "innocence" as one of the attitudes found in the psychologically healthy people he has studied. Like cummings, Maslow finds that a "healthily growing" adult retains the child's curiosity, his innocent ability to explore, wonder at and delight in "the moment" (TPB, 44). According to cummings' poem, "innocence" is an attitude toward life which may be adopted by anyone if "they" (who until now "could not learn to

look" outside themselves, could not perceive anything in the world which would excite them) would only let "innocence" be their teacher. Then they would be freed "from the reality of all nothing," from the state of mind in which the world seems meaningless. Maslow agrees. If one has no "apprehensions," if one responds to the world as a child responds, "because the child is moving totally 'here-now'," there is "no worry, no anxiety, no apprehension, no foreboding" (FRHN, 265). In cummings' poem "a little innocence" can make the individual feel "most perfect gay" instead of the "sheer despairing" s/he felt in his or her former attitude of pessimism or cynicism. Instead of thinking of life as meaningless and chaotic, s/he will be able to appreciate the beauty implicit in the "here" and now. "Luminous" joy in the beauty of everyday experiences can banish "dark" fear as the rising sun transforms darkness into light. Cummings' description of the ideal attitude toward life as "a little innocence" correlates with Maslow's description of a healthy person's outlook, that is, "spontaneously curious, exploratory, wondering, interested, . . . experiencing, delighting, enjoying" the minutia of everyday living.

Again and again in cummings' poetry we find the poet singing a celebration of the particular, the minute, the immediate. In poem number 37 from 73 poems the poet

sings a sonnet of appreciation for "this miracle of summer night," a falling star, and "a single kiss":

> now that,more nearest even than your fate
>
> and mine(or any truth beyond perceive)
> quivers this miracle of summer night
>
> her trillion secrets touchably alive
>
> --while and all mysteries which i or you
> (blinded by merely things believable)
> could only fancy we should never know
>
> are unimaginably ours to <u>feel</u>--
>
> how should some world(we marvel)doubt,for just
> sweet terrifying the particular
> moment it takes one very falling most
> (there:did you see it?)star to disappear,
>
> that hugest whole creation may be <u>less incalculable</u> <u>than</u> a single kiss
>
> (italics mine)

As the Shakespearean sonnet form suggests, the argument of the poem is set up primarily as a tension between two opposing viewpoints. While "some world" of doubters "doubt," the poet and his beloved stand together, looking up at a summer night sky, watching the "trillion secrets" of the visible stars. The lovers <u>feel</u> "all mysteries" of the universe which "some world" of thinkers have always questioned--such as "your fate and mine," and "any" other "truth" which lies outside the realm of our senses. The poet explains to his companion, and indirectly to his reader, that pure sensory experience is more complex and wonderful than any rational

classifying, explaining, or philosophizing could begin to logically explain. Further, "all mysteries," including the "trillion secrets" of "this miracle of summer night" with "her trillion secrets" being "touchably alive," can be felt by anyone open to the wonder of their mystery.

In The Farther Reaches of Human Nature, Maslow reports that one characteristic of the peak experience is "a kind of 'innocence' of perceiving and behaving." Many "highly creative people" have described this feeling as an aspect of their peak experiences, reporting the feeling of being "guileless, without a priori expectations, without 'shoulds' or 'oughts', without . . . dogmas, habits, . . . as being ready to receive whatever happens to be the case without surprise, shock, indignation, or denial" (64). Maslow notes that children "are more able to be receptive in this undemanding way" than are the more experienced, less spontaneous persons.

Anyone who can accept and be comfortable with the idea that there are no cut and dried answers to man's perennial questions about the meaning of life and the nature of death ("your fate/and mine") can share with cummings the feeling that "all mysteries . . . are unimaginably ours to feel." Cummings and his companion(s) marvel at the momentary phenomenon of a beautiful shooting or "falling . . . star"; and we chuckle together over the question being asked by "some world" of strange, mixed-up

people: which is less incalculable, "that hugest whole creation?" or "a single kiss?" For anyone who can feel the touchably alive quality of all such mysteries, both phenomena are completely incalculable; neither mystery can be totally reduced to a scientific formula or theoretically defined. Both are complex, wonderful, "mysterious" experiences which the rational faculty pauses before, while the whole human being "feels" awe, reverence and love.[1]

In his nonlectures cummings emphasizes the emotional connotations of feel and feeling, implying that a consciously emotional commitment or openness to experience is the "aliveness" he appreciates and personally enjoys: "To feel something is to be alive," cummings tells us. Mystery, aliveness and Art are synonymous with feeling: "A mystery is something immeasurable." In so far as every person "may be immeasurable, art is the mystery of every person. . . . In so far as every human being is an artist,skies and mountains and oceans and butterflies are immeasurable; and art is every mystery of nature. Nothing measurable can be alive; nothing which is not alive can be art; nothing which cannot be art is true:and everything untrue doesn't matter a good God damn . . ." (i6n, 68). Mystery, aliveness and feeling are qualities which exist in the world outside ourselves as well as being an

attitude inside each individual. That attitude, called innocence in some poems, is mostly what being an artist consists of; and any human being may adopt the attitude of innocence, may bring out the artist in him/herself.

Lines five through seven describe "i or you" as "we" would still be if "we" had not become aware of that better way of seeing reality:

> 5 --while and all mysteries which i or you
> (blinded by merely things believable)
> 7 could only fancy we should never know

That is, "i or you" still would have been "blinded" by our classifying, our philosophizing, our analyzing and our preconceptions (beliefs) about what the universe "should" be like. Instead, speaker and lover enjoy the flash of a shooting star--a momentary, fleeting perception of beauty--as a perceptual mystery which should NOT be logically analyzed or questioned. The two lovers simply feel the wonder of the experience. The total experience of wonder results from the ability of human eyes to record the fact of a meteorite glowing incandescent as it hits the earth's atmosphere.

Cummings is aware of the complexity of factors which contribute to the experience, as we may see by studying the structure of the poem. His syntax is quite complex, the grammatically correct elements carefully arranged so as to create a sense of simultaneity of

experience--perception of the star, thought, feeling and commentary are carefully integrated in the poetic presentation.

Cummings has studied his emotional and mental responses to the physical perception of a shooting star and has presented those complex responses in written, sequential form. This seems to be the kind of activity Maslow is referring to when he says that the healthy person studies each problem separately, studies "it and its nature" and tries "to perceive within it the intrinsic interrelationships." Such a method is opposed to that of the person who, "confronting an unknown painting hurriedly runs back through his knowledge of art history to remember how he is supposed to react." Such a person "then enjoys it if he is supposed to, and doesn't if he is not supposed to" (FRHN, 62-63).

Absorption in the work of art before us enables us to be "attracted by mystery, by the unfamiliar, by the novel, by the ambiguous and contradictory, by the unusual and unexpected." In such cases we leave behind our normal "anxiety-allaying mechanisms and defenses" of suspicion, fear or guardedness. The state of mind cummings would have us be in when we approach every experience is the "positive attitude" Maslow describes of persons in peak experiences: "No blocks against the matter-in-hand means that we let it flow in upon us. We let it

wreak its will upon us. We let it have its way. We let it be itself. This makes it easier to be Taoistic in the sense of humility, noninterference, receptivity" (FRHN, 67).

The poetry of e. e. cummings asks us to trust our feelings about life, to set aside our classifying and analyzing and to concentrate on fully appreciating each moment of our experience:

> life is more true than reason will deceive
> (more secret or than madness did reveal)
> deeper is life than lose:higher than have
> --but beauty is more each than living's all
>
> (#52, 1 x 1, first stanza)

If we insist on categorizing and generalizing every experience, if we fail to see each object, person and event as a single, unprecedented adventure, then we are misusing "reason."[2] Very few things in life are so simple that they may be accurately perceived merely as ciphers in some rational category. Instead, cummings asks us to pay attention to "each" object or person, to perceive the complex combination of identifiable qualities which are embodied in "each" object of perception:

> multiplied with infinity sans if
> the mightiest meditations of mankind
> cancelled are by one merely opening leaf
> (beyond whose nearness there is no beyond)
>
> (#52, 1 x 1, second stanza)

The contemplation of "one merely opening leaf" fills the speaker with awe as the leaf enacts the natural mystery of growth. Men have written thousands of words failing to understand life; meanwhile the leaf simply opens, lives, grows.

Maslow describes a similar attitude toward life's experiences as one element of perception in the peak experience: "Self-actualizing people are more able to perceive the world as if it were independent not only of them but also of human beings in general. This also tends to be true of the average human being in his highest moments, i.e. in his peak experiences" (TPB, 76). This type of cognition, "because it makes human-irrelevance more possible, enables us thereby to see more truly the nature of the object itself." In the case of this poem we are better able to see the "nearness" of "one merely opening leaf."

"Reason" is portrayed in the first two stanzas of the poem as obscuring the mystery of life experiences by a reductive process symbolized by the words lose, have and if. Lose and have are ways people habitually relate to objects around them. Things are often classified as mine or theirs; we either win or lose something we thought we wanted or were striving for; we may be goal-oriented, seeking money so that we may control or have property or prestige. Maslow agrees with cummings, identifying as

"deficiency-motivated need" the tendency to consider an object or activity as merely "a means, an instrument, not having self-contained worth but having only exchange value" (FRHN, 262).

Cummings' poem also insists that life is much "more true, more secret or" (full of more possibilities), "deeper" and "higher" than ego-centered goals. Maslow reports that the self-actualizing person, when involved in a peak experience, is "self-forgetful, ego-transcending, and unselfish" (FRHN, 262). The self-actualizing person experiences a "transcendence of ego, self, and selfishness" when s/he is responding to the intrinsic worth of "external tasks, causes, duties, responsibilities to others and to the world of reality" (FRHN, 271).

In cummings' poems the term "reason" refers to mental processes which Maslow also considers to be "deficiency motivated," thinking processes which involve "only abstract categorized, schematized classifying," the reduction of everything to abstraction. In contrast, the self-actualizing person perceives both "concretely and abstractly, all aspects at once" (FRHN, 263).

Because of the synergistic unity of their rational and irrational faculties, their conscious and unconscious perceptions, healthy people are more aware of the "limitations of purely abstract thinking, of verbal thinking and of analytic thinking" (TPB, 208): "If our hope is to

describe the world fully, a place is necessary for pre-verbal, metaphorical, concrete experience, intuitive and esthetic types of cognition, for there are certain aspects of reality which can be cognized in no other way" (TPB, 208). Pure rational thought, according to Maslow, is limited to dealing with reality through overly simplistic, reductionary concepts. Science tends to reject the irrational as an aspect of experience which is not objectively measurable and therefore is to be ignored, if not denied as "real" experience altogether: "Even in science we know (1) that creativity has its roots in the nonrational, (2) that language is and must always be inadequate to describe total reality, (3) that any abstract concept leaves out much of reality and (4) that what we call 'knowledge' (which is usually reductive abstraction or oversimplified definition) often serves to blind us to portions of reality not covered by the abstraction. That is, knowledge makes us more able to see some things, but less able to see other things. Abstract knowledge has its dangers as well as its uses" (TPB, 208).

In poem #64 from 95 poems (1958), cummings' persona describes a peak experience in which "the object" is "uncontaminated and unconfused with self." The violet is appreciated as "intrinsically interesting for its own sake," and is "permitted to be itself"--perceptions which Maslow has described as "self-actualizing" (FRHN, 262):

out of the lie of no
rises a truth of yes
(only herself and who
illimitably is)

making fools understand
(like wintry me) that not
all matterings of mind
equal one violet

Here cummings describes a transcendental experience in abstract, conceptual terms. The only images of concrete reality are the suggestions of winter and the closing "violet" flower. The speaker has been depressed or in some other state of "wintry" deprivation-motivated normality. But suddenly his ability to experience the beauty of a single flower, something totally independent of his own ego, provides him with a moment of transcendence, which he celebrates in this short poem: "out of the lie of no," a negating state of mind, "rises a truth of yes," rises a perception of a flower in which (in Maslow's terms) the violet is "seen as independent" and valuable "in its own right" (FRHN, 261). The fact of this one flower, fully appreciated by the self-actualizing person, is seen by the poet as "human-irrelevant." This is the perception of a person experiencing "Being-cognition," or having a "peak experience," as opposed to the "deficiency cognition" of the object as "relevant to human concerns, e.g. what good is it, what can it be used for, is it good for or dangerous to people" (261). Such a negative, rational approach to a flower is for "fools,"

including the poet in less enlightened states of mind ("like wintry me"). The best attitude to take toward a beautiful fact in the natural world is that of the poet in the final two lines of the poem: "not/all matterings of mind/equal one violet."

In the final poem of 73 poems cummings described his own "holistic" perception of reality. Life attains a unity of spiritual and material reality if viewed with an open attitude, not pre-formed by theories or philosophies from the past. A "world" in the poem is any perceptual process or system of thought which excludes any portion of the experiential whole: physical, spiritual, magical, emotional, mental, sensual. Maslow specifically argues this same concern over Western man's tendency to dichotomize in all his thought, arguing as cummings does that the healthier attitude is one which integrates and synthesizes experience: "It is extremely important, even crucial, to give up our 3,000-year-old habit of dichotomizing, splitting and separating in the style of Aristotelian logic ("A and Not-A are wholly different from each other, and are mutually exclusive. Take your choice--one or the other. But you can't have both."). Difficult though it may be, we must learn to think holistically rather than atomistically. All these "opposites" "are in fact heirarchically-integrated, especially in healthier people, and one of the proper

goals of therapy is to move from dichotomizing and splitting toward integration of seemingly irreconcilable opposites" (TPB, 174).

Cummings sees the objects around him as imbued with a living, spiritual quality. Spirit and object are a single, inseparable entity which must be viewed as a unified whole:

> all worlds have halfsight, seeing either with
>
> life's eye (which is if things seem spirits) or
> (if spirits in the guise of things appear)
> death's:any world must always half perceive.
>
> Only whose vision can create the whole
>
> (being forever born a foolishwise
> proudhumble citizen of ecstasies
> more steep than climb can time with all his years)
>
> he's free into the beauty of the truth;
>
> and strolls the axis of the universe
> --love. Each believing world denies, whereas
> your lover (looking through both life and death)
> timelessly celebrates the merciful
>
> wonder no world deny may or believe
>
> (73 poems, #73)

Here cummings tells us that any philosophical system which denies the existence of either "things" (the concrete, observable world outside ourselves) or "spirits" (life-force, energy or metaphysical reality) "must always half perceive" (sees only half the truth). Any system chooses between components of experience, ranks parts in

hierarchic or chronological order, separates elements which are integrated aspects of a whole.

The first four lines may best be paraphrased with Maslow's help. Maslow's healthy individuals enjoy a "healthy unconscious, . . . a healthy irrationality." Their unconscious desires are "more integrated" and "less separated" from the conclusions of their "rational, cognitive thinking" (TPB, 208-09). This unity of thought, feeling, desire and physical ability is similar to cummings' "proudhumble citizen of ecstasies," the poet himself and anyone else who shares cummings' life view. Only persons who perceive the unity of these philosophical elements can perceive the "merciful wonder" which is life as viewed by one who loves life: "Only whose vision can create the whole/ . . . he's free into the beauty of the truth." The "truth" is seen by the individual who loves living, who appreciates the "miracle" of now and who "celebrates" the unity of spiritual with physical as he perceives it to be operating in his everyday experience. Maslow has described just such a unified vision, asserting that it is a normal perceptual experience for the self-actualizing people he has studied.

Poem #73 serves as an example of Maslow's thirteenth quality of the peak-experience: "In peak-experiences, the dichotomies, polarities, and conflicts of life tend to be transcended or resolved. In other

words there tends to be a moving toward the perception of unity and integration in the world. The person himself tends to move toward fusion, integration, and unity and away from splitting, conflicts, oppositions."

Maslow agrees with cummings; both note the limitations of abstract, analytical thinking for its tendency to oversimplify, to reduce the complexity of life to a simple, but false, set of measurable variables. A science based purely on manipulation of observable variables denies the reality of man's emotional, irrational, subjective reactions to his world: "Science and education, being too exclusively abstract, verbal and bookish don't have enough place for raw, concrete, esthetic experience, especially of the subjective happenings inside oneself" (TPB, 209). Maslow sees the need for a balanced consideration of abstract reasoning and irrational, emotional sensation in his quest to objectify and understand the psychological states and processes which occur in healthy human beings.

Both agree that the goal to be achieved is a "holistic" view of life--a unification of heart and head resulting in a sense of the coexistence of apparently conflicting or opposing elements in spectrum-like integration. Maslow and cummings both report the existence of a lifeview which emphasizes the whole instead of concentrating on the fragmented parts of a perceptive

experience. Cummings says: "all worlds have halfsight, seeing either with/ life's eye . . . or/ . . . death's: any world must always half perceive./ Only whose vision can create the whole/ . . . he's free into the beauty of the truth;/ and strolls the axis of the universe/--love." For the poet, "each believing world denies" a part of reality and a part of the self "whereas your lover"--the person whose attitude is one of love and care, empathy and openness--"timelessly celebrates the merciful wonder/ no world deny may or believe." In Maslow's words, "The ultimate of abstract, analytical thinking is the greatest simplification possible. . . . Our mastery of the world is enhanced thereby, but its richness may be lost as a forfeit, unless we learn to value perception-with-love-and-care, free-floating attention . . . which enrich the experience instead of impoverishing it" (TPB, 209).

As Norman Friedman has explained, cummings "takes extremes and puts love beyond them: . . . his vision is directed toward a state of unified awareness beyond, outside of, and apart from . . . conflicts." In the poem cummings' speaker tells us that the lover of life celebrates all elements of existence (death included) and thereby transcends all mere space and time categories: "Each believing world denies, whereas/your lover(looking through both life and death)/timelessly celebrates the merciful/wonder no world deny may or believe." In these

lines we see as Friedman does that when cummings "reaches those moments of pure transcendence--as he often does--he gives us a vision of what it means to achieve, beyond achievement, our full and fully human potential" (TCV, 12). Maslow calls these moments "peak experiences," the highest points of human experience, points at which people are most fully human, living up to their highest potential.

Poem #65 from XAIPE praises the beauty of the natural world and celebrates an open "yes" attitude which allows human beings to transcend logical distinctions between matter and spirit by seeing physical objects in the natural world as infused with a spiritual essence. Material and spiritual elements of reality become fused into a transcendent unity when viewed with cummings' "yes" attitude:

> i thank You God for most this amazing
> day:for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
> and a blue true dream of sky;and for everything
> which is natural which is infinite which is yes
>
> (i who have died am alive again today,
> and this is the sun's birthday;this is the birth
> day of life and of love and wings:and of the gay
> great happening illimitably earth)
>
> how should tasting touching hearing seeing
> breathing any--lifted from the no
> of all nothing--human merely being
> doubt unimaginable You?
>
> (Now the ears of my ears awake and
> now the eyes of my eyes are opened)

The poem is divided into fourteen lines separated into four stanzas, consisting of three quatrains and a couplet, the traditional appearance of the Shakespearean sonnet. The stanza format leads us to expect a "serious, personal," artistically integrated statement about life.[3] Cummings' sonnet divides itself into four discrete thoughts, as indicated by the stanzaic division;[4] but as the rhyme scheme and punctuation indicate, the first and third, second and fourth stanzas are directly related with one another, juxtaposing the two ideas visually. Juxtaposition here indicates the essential unity of the two entities being presented, the perceived outer world and the inner attitude of the perceiver. This unity correlates with Maslow's description of the state of "Being' Cognition" in which there is a "resolution of dichotomies, polarities, conflicts," with the "transcendence of dichotomies" being brought about by rising "from dichotomies to superordinate wholes" (FRHN, 272).

The poet gives thanks not only for the things outside himself (day, trees, sky), but also for his own positive yes attitude toward life. Because of his positive response to life the poet sees trees as alive, exciting things with individual spiritual and physical existence apart from the perceiver's mind. Yet both speaker and trees are also seen as cohabitants of "the gay/great illimitably happening earth," a natural world which

includes "everything/which is natural which is infinite which is yes." Both the perceiver and the objects perceived have their separate existence while being part of a larger whole. This compares favorably with another quality Maslow describes as healthy: "transcendence of the We-They polarity," which means "to ascend up to the level of synergy" (FRHN, 272).

The natural world which man physically and consciously perceives and the infinite which man can only feel or irrationally perceive are unified by the yes, the miraculous, healthy attitude any person may adopt if s/he wishes. Yes is the attitude through which spiritual and physical, rational and irrational unity may be attained by anyone. Thus "i thank You God" exemplifies the sixteenth element of Maslow's definition: "The conception of heaven that emerges from the peak experience is one which exists all the time all around us, always available to step into for a little while at least." The beautiful world is there outside the poet, waiting to be perceived by any human content with merely being, a person with the properly open, positive attitude toward reality.

The second and fourth stanzas are set off from the main argument of the poem by parentheses indicating, in this case, the poet's introspective self-analysis. As he praises the beautiful world outside himself, the poet

realizes parenthetically that he has personally awakened to a full consciousness of "reality" as defined in stanzas one and three: "(i who have died am alive again today . . ."). And the poet celebrates his newly discovered or rediscovered yes attitude which enables him to see and hear life's experiences completely--physically, rationally, and emotionally: "(now the ears of my ears awake and/now the eyes of my eyes are opened)." Cummings is one of the people who can fully perceive the complex, unified world due to his loving, receptive attitude. This is one of the characteristics of the peak experience, according to Maslow: "the universe is perceived as a unified whole" (FRHN, 273).

Cummings is demonstrating for us his experience of a spring-like ritual of rebirth. He has supplied the script so that we may join him.[3] De-emphasize thought of the self, says the lower case "i";[4] the emphasis (capitalization) is only on "You, God." Maslow agrees; criterion eleven of the peak experience definition is: "Being-cognition in the peak experience is much more passive and receptive, much more humble, than normal perception is. It is much more ready to listen and much more able to hear." In the third stanza the poem suggests the limitations of man's physical faculties of perception; but intuitive perception is not circumscribed by such limitations:

> how should tasting touching hearing seeing
> breathing any--lifted from the no
> of all nothing--human merely being
> doubt unimaginable You ?

One possible reading of this section is to see it as a rhetorical question in which mere human beings could not possibly doubt the existence of You. You refers ambiguously to the God of the first line and the everything of line three (including the leaping greenly spirits of trees). This amazing day includes mankind as well as everything outside man. All aspects of this amazing day are available to the perception of anyone who will open him/herself to the power of external natural presences.

The trees in the poem share with men a spiritual quality, another "mystery" for cummings which he "feels" to be true. It does not need to be explained, according to the cummings philosophy; it simply "is." In i, six nonlectures cummings describes his distrust of logical constructions devoid of the test of "feeling": "No simple (if abstruse) system of measurable soi-disant facts, which anybody can think and believe and know--or, when another system becomes popular, and the erstwhile facts become fictions--can unthink and unbelieve and unknow--has power over a complex truth which he, and he alone, can feel. . . . One thing . . . does always concern this individual: fidelity to himself" (i6n, 82). Cummings would apply the test of his compassion for

and sympathy with all living things to any philosophical theories about "the nature of life." And in this poem he is attempting to share his feelings about "Nature" with his readers.

Cummings said in a letter to Hildegarde Watson on January 30, 1960: " . . . Well do I remember taking AJ (Freddy) Ayer--the foremost 'logical positivist' quote-philosopher-unquote extant--for a promenade near Joy Farm; during which stroll, my guest observed (probably anent some entirely spontaneous tribute to Nature which had escaped me) 'you're almost an animist, aren't you.' Quick-as-a-flash--without thinking at all--I deeply surprised myself by replying 'almost? I AM an animist'." Cummings sees the objects around him as imbued with a living, spiritual quality. Spirit and object are a single, inseparable entity which must be viewed as a unified whole and not as consisting of predominantly one element or the other.

Images of birth and awakening flood over us as we read the script. If we allow the stage directions to prod our imagination, we feel the joi de vivre cummings is expressing for us. Cummings builds his poem around objects and experiences familiar to everyone (sun, sky, trees). But he infuses each object with an implied animation by giving his sun a birthday, infusing trees with leaping spirits. In the process he explodes our

memory of trees from a visual recollection of sticks rooted in the ground into mysterious, elfin creatures capable of generating wonder and amazement for anyone who will see things from the poet's point of view.

The destruction of limits, the breaking out of stereotyped conceptions of natural things, growth of sensitivity to the wonders of life as cummings perceives it--these are the effects of cummings' poem. Thus, "i thank You God" exemplifies the last element in Maslow's definition of a peak-experience: "What has been called the 'unitive consciousness' is often given in peak-experiences, i.e., a sense of the sacred glimpsed in and through the particular instance of the momentary, the secular, the worldly."

Norman Friedman has described the transcendental aspect of cummings' vision in these terms:

> The poetry of transcendence . . . tries to recapture or reawaken . . . a purer vision, one that will be outside . . . categories and consequently free of the usual polarities. . . . The ultimate awareness we must try to grasp, according to this . . . world view, is not so much an integration of polarities--thought and feeling, for example--as a rising above them.[7]

Cummings' poems often begin with rational categories and distinctions, but his "yes" vision carries us to a new comprehension of the larger whole (or synergy) in which the parts participate. What at first seems to be a paradoxical either/or relationship between opposites is

often seen finally as opposite sides of a single coin, two ways of looking at a single entity, each side of the coin expressing a different point of view or attitude or feeling about the metal which makes up the thickness of the coin. The material of the coin, that which unites opposing views and is the essence about which the opposing opinions have been expressed--is "love."

CHAPTER II--NOTES

[1]"Feel" is defined in the 1955 edition of The Oxford Universal Dictionary on Historical Principles, ed. C. T. Onions, 3rd ed., revised with Addenda (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 685. Pertinent denotations are listed here:

> "(transitive verb:) To perceive by . . . touch, . . . smell, or taste. To perceive mentally. To be conscious of, to experience. To perceive mentally. To be conscious of, to experience. To undergo consciously. To be sensibly affected by; also, in transferred and figurative use, of inanimate objects. To have sympathy with, compassion for. . . . To believe on grounds not distinctly perceived; to have a conviction of (a fact)."

The definition of "feeling" (in the same source) emphasizes the emotional and intuitive aspects of the word "feel," bringing the connotations of the two words more closely parallel to the senses in which cummings normally uses the two terms (the following is an extract):

> "The condition of being emotionally affected; an emotion; emotions, susceptibilities, sympathies. Susceptibility to the higher emotions; especially tenderness for the sufferings of others. Pleasurable or painful consciousness. In psychology, a fact or state of consciousness (J. S. Mill); a generic term comprising sensation, desire and emotion only (Kant); an intuitive cognition or belief. In painting, that quality in a work of art which depicts the mental emotion of the painter.
>
> (As a past participle:) Sentient, capable of sensation. Accessible to emotion; sympathetic, compassionate. Deeply or sensibly felt or realized, heart-felt, vivid."

[2]When cummings speaks of "Reason" as "deceiving" us, he refers to twentieth century America's infatuation with logical analysis and scientific methodology. Charles Hampden-Turner says in his book Radical Man: The Process of Psycho-Social Development (Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman

Publishing Co., 1970), p. 8: that "when science spreads its mantle of prestige over all those aspects of social life which lend themselves most easily to observation, then outward behavior and appearance are elevated above inner conviction. It is no use for Martin Luther King to declare movingly, 'I have a dream--that one day men will be judged not by the color of their skins but by the content of their characters'--as any proponent of the scientific method will explain, content of character and dreams are extremely inferential and represent at best 'soft data'." Hampden-Turner goes on to say that one can make a science out of the study of "skin color, ethnic group, income position," and other concrete, "measurable" aspects of "visible outward behavior." He attacks the social sciences for failing to "explore the depths of human feelings and experiences." Hampden-Turner is a social scientist who is trying to reform the methods of his science so that it will take into account elements not yet considered in the study of man. These elements are "central to man's deepest needs," and he specifically mentions "love" along with other types of emotions or "feelings" as having been neglected.

Cummings reacted against what Hampden-Turner calls the "reductive" tendencies of scientific methodology as practiced by "elitist, heirarchical" scientists who tend to be "anxious to control others" (Hampden-Turner, p. 13). Hampden-Turner insists that the men who are most comfortable with the abstract, conceptualizing techniques of modern sciences emulate "abstraction, reification and deadness" above all other ways of approaching their human subjects. He asks that the social sciences take into account the findings of "humanistic psychology," with specific attention to Abraham Maslow's theories.

[3]Charles B. Wheeler, The Design of Poetry (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966), p. 260.

[4]Alex Preminger, ed., Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, entry by L. J. Z. (Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 781: "Shakespearean patterns . . . invite a division of thought into three quatrains and a closing of summarizing couplet. . . . The open rhyme schemes tend to impress the fourfold structure on the reader's ear and to suggest a stepped progression toward the closing couplet."

[5]Cummings describes his own experience, acting out his lifeview for the reader's benefit. A suggestion that the reader may follow along and experience the poet's excitement with him is implied, never openly stated.

Cummings performs a little play for us, in which his attitude toward life is vividly expressed. The first person, present-tense presentation makes the experience he reports seem immediate and real to the reader. Cummings seems to be describing a "peak experience" as he lives it. The poem reads like a testimonial, celebrating the experience as it happens.

[6]"Concerning the small 'i': did it never strike you as significant that, of all God's children, only English and Americans apotheosize their ego by capitalizing a pronoun whose equivalent is in French 'je', in German 'ich', and in Italian 'io'?" (Letters, p. 195)

[7]"Introduction" to the Twentieth Century Views series E. E. Cummings, ed. Norman Friedman (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972), p. 6.

CHAPTER III

CUMMINGS' ETHICAL SYSTEM: TRANSCENDENCE THROUGH LOVE

love is a place
& through this place of
love move
(with brightness of peace)
all places

(#58, NO THANKS, first stanza)

William Carlos Williams said in a 1945 essay that if "a great number" of men "took to heart" cummings' request that we love one another and our world, if men would do as cummings asked and simply open themselves to the wonder of life and the beauty inherent in all existing persons and things, "the effect would be . . . a veritable revolution . . . of morals . . . of love." According to Williams, "much or even all of cummings' poems are evidences of love."[1] Williams defines cummings' variety of "love" as looking to Christianity "solely for what that says to the christian (with a small 'c') conscience." Williams sees that cummings' poetry tells the reader to "ignore the dress in which

the Word comes to you and look to the Life of which that is the passing image." As Williams points out, cummings' poems "lay bare the actual experience of love . . . in the chance terms which his environment happens to make apparent to him."[2] Williams himself tried to discover images of love in his "local" environment, expressing his ethic through details experienced in the everyday life of the common people; thus he was especially sensitive to this aspect of cummings' poetry.

For cummings, "love" is an attitude toward experience and a way of life. In poem #4 of 73 poems the poet tells us "it's love by whom/(my beautiful friend)/the gift to live/is without until:/. . . love was and shall/ be this only truth." In the poem love is both a feeling which two people share with each other and a way of relating to life experiences which allows them to perceive the beauty of the physical and spiritual world:

SONG

but we've the may
(for you are in love
and i am)to sing,
my darling:while
old worlds and young
(big little and all
worlds)merely have
the must to say

and the when to do
is exactly theirs
(dull worlds or keen;
big little and all)
but lost or win
(come heaven,come hell)
precisely ours
is the now to grow

it's love by whom
(my beautiful friend)
the gift to live
is without until:
but pitiful they've
(big little and all)
no power beyond
the trick to seem

their joys turn woes
and right goes wrong
(dim worlds or bright;
big little and all)
whereas(my sweet)
our summer in fall
and in winter our spring
is the yes of yes

love was and shall
be this only truth
(a dream of a deed,
born not to die)
but worlds are made
of hello and goodbye:
glad sorry or both
(big little and all)

Love is an attitude which turns fall into our summer, makes spring happen for the lovers in winter. For lovers always view life's mysteries with a springlike feeling which is the yes of yes, a positive, loving approach to experience and to other human beings.

Cummings also uses love in a very personal sense, indicating through his love poems to Marion Morehouse Cummings many of the healthy ways the feeling of love

can work between two people who are not prevented psychologically from loving authentically. Two poems from 73 poems will serve as a small sample of cummings' many poems which deal with the theme of love between man and wife.

In the sestet of poem #38, the poet sings a sonnet of self-transcendence:

> losing through you what seemed myself,i find
> selves unimaginably mine;beyond
> sorrow's own joys and hoping's very fears
>
> yours is the light by which my spirit's born:
> yours is the darkness of my soul's return
> --you are my sun,my moon,and all my stars

The lover seems to lose his identity in the interaction between himself and his beloved; yet the very act of experiencing fully another's Being is a growing experience for the poet. The colon in the fourth line of the sestet tells us that the line before the colon and the line immediately following it are to be thought of as two parts of an integrated whole. The loved one acts as a catalyst for the continual birth or reawakening of the poet's appreciative spirit. The poet feels reborn as he responds with his whole being to the light of his lover's unique self.

"Being-love" is defined by Maslow in Toward A Psychology of Being as "Love for the Being of another person, unneeding love, unselfish love" (TPB, 42).

The healthy, self-actualizing person feels that his/her love "in a profound but testable sense, creates the partner." The beloved's love "gives him a self-image, it gives him self-acceptance, a feeling of love-worthiness, all of which permit him to grow" (TPB, 43). When cummings' speaker reports that "losing through you what seemed myself,i find/selves unimaginably mine" and that "yours is the light by which my spirit's born," he is expressing a healthy state of "Being-love." The speaker of the poem is reporting a "transcendence of the selfish Self" (FRHN, 272).

Following the initial infusion of his lover's unselfish love into his formerly "selfish self," the poet's soul returns to its individual existence, his beloved's presence remaining always a part of him, "beyond/sorrow's own joys and hoping's very fears," as all-pervasive as light and darkness. According to Maslow, another characteristic of a self-actualizing person is that s/he is "able to be strong and responsible in addition to being dependent, to transcend one's own weakness, and to rise to being strong" (FRHN, 273). The speaker in cummings' poem achieves a new, transcendent sense of his own ability to overcome fear and sorrow through his "Being-love" relationship with the beloved.

The poem "one's not half two," from his 1944 book 1 x 1, demonstrates that cummings' conception of love as

a unifying, holistic (and psychologically healthy) experience had solidified as early as the 1940s:

> one's not half two. It's two are halves of one:
> which halves reintegrating,shall occur
> no death and any quantity;but than
> all numerable mosts the actual more

In this first stanza cummings insists that "one times one" (the title of this book of poems) equals more than one when love enters the picture. If each person remains an individual "one," then a marriage of the two individuals through "Being-love" will produce "an isomorphism" in Maslow's terms--"a molding of each to each other, a better and better fitting together or complementarily, a melting into one" (FRHN, 71).

This sense of two persons becoming, through love, "more than you and i" is also stated in poem #10 in 73 poems:

> because it's
>
> Spring
> thingS
>
> dare to do people
>
> (& not
> the other way
>
> round)because it
>
> 's A
> pril
>
> Lives lead their own

persons(in
stead

of everybodyelse's)but

what's wholly
marvellous my

Darling

is that you &
i are more than you

& i(be

ca
us

e It's we)

In this light, playful celebration of Spring, the poet plays with punctuation, spelling, words-within-words and capitalization to sing of Spring and love. Spring-time, for cummings, is not merely a time of the year. Throughout his poems we find the word Spring used to represent a feeling of growth, vitality, aliveness, happiness and love. In this poem "because it's/Spring" all kinds of wonderful things are happening: people are getting excited about things, seeing beauty where they never noticed it before; people are being totally themselves, acting as they like to act, acting as they feel ("Lives lead their own persons"); and Spring is the state of love in which "you &/i are more than you/& i"--we are more than two separate individuals, symbolized by the position of you and i in separate lines, separated by double-spacing--and the reason we are greater than we

were as individuals is "because It's we." Love creates a greater whole than either individual could possibly anticipate. The speaker tells us that his love (in Maslow's words) is ego-transcending. Maslow tells us that "in the 'love' experience we may . . . speak of identification of the perceiver and the perceived, a fusion of what was two into a new and larger whole" (FRHN, 71).

Cummings uses several technical devices to emphasize his point visually. The feeling or attitude which is like experiencing Spring is a state of excitement, a recognition that everything has a spiritual aliveness of its own. This is demonstrated by the repeated combinations of is, signifying a state of being or aliveness, with it, a static pronoun, by contraction: it's, it/'s (emphasizing through spacing the change from a static it to a state of being, it + is = it's). And in the final line It's signifies by capitalization the larger, more important state of being resulting from the unifying influence of love.

Capitalization is used to emphasize those things which are most important to the poet: Spring; A (indicating a unique experience); A/pril (=Spring); Lives (individuals acting in a unique, personal way; people being themselves); Darling (the poet's beloved); and It's (the combination of you with i into a we, a

togetherness more beautiful than either of us taken separately). One other instance of capitalization is found in the second stanza, which consists of two lines with one word in each line: Spring / thingS. Each of the two words is made up of six letters and cummings further emphasizes this numerical symmetry by capitalizing the "S" which begins and ends the stanza. Parentheses are used to set off the contrasting, clarifying phrases just as we might use them in ordinary speech.

Spacing is used to emphasize visually the words which can be found within words: it/'s is made up of the pronoun it and the verb is; A is ambiguously an is (juxtaposed in the same line with 's), a state of unique existence, and also a part of spring, of A/pril; (in both tells us that Lives are found inside persons--life is the essence of any person--and also combines with stead (a static place or position being filled by someone else) to form instead of everybody else's [life]. Cummings often finds words within words, concepts within larger constructs, his poems opening to the reader like a set of Chinese boxes, one inside the other. Thus he is able to present a complex of ideas simultaneously; the reader sees how each idea is interrelated with the others, even while also seeing the individuality of each element.

The last four stanzas consist largely of an exploration of the words included within the word because: be is a state of existence which the you & i of the poem feel to be the whole meaning of existence--meaning is being; ca is the French word meaning here--the here and now which are the most important things in life; us is the we discussed above; e is a prefix meaning from or out of; thus out of you and i, two separate people, is created a wholly marvellous unity, a togetherness which is more than two separate individuals, a symbolic It which is called we. This statement, reduced to twenty-one characters on a page of poetry, is what cummings means by the word INTENSITY. A thorough reading of a cummings poem requires a full commitment on the reader's part; it requires an examination of every character, space, word and punctuation mark present. The poetry of e. e. cummings is not "difficult" but it is often intense.

Cummings' concept of love is not sentimental, nor is he advocating rejection of rational thought in favor of the emotions. In fact he is not advocating anything; he merely demonstrates the possibility of complete integration, within his own persona, of thought and feeling. The persona in most cummings poems is able to act as he feels because, for his healthy, integrated personality, thought and feeling lead to the same positive action in terms of what is helpful for others and

"good" for himself. Cummings leaves the advocating function for Maslow, who asserts that "what healthy people choose is . . . conducing to their and others' self-actualization" (TPB, 169).

Maslow concludes from his observations of healthy individuals that "our deepest needs are not, in themselves, dangerous or evil or bad. This opens up the prospect of resolving the splits within the person between Appollonian and Dionysian, classical and romantic, scientific and poetic, between reason and impulse, work and play, maturity and childlikeness, . . . masculine and feminine, growth and regression" (TPB, 158). Cummings did not argue his position in prose. He was a poet who tried to be aware of and express his own feelings authentically in poetic form. He apparently found that his appreciation of reality was tremendously deepened when he completely opened himself to experience, circumventing the reductionary, limiting effects of pure intellectual categorizing.

Maslow has shown that the most healthy people tend to desire things which are "good" for themselves and others, that the things healthy people enjoy doing satisfy their own needs and simultaneously are helpful to other people. Such is the case with cummings' "love." If everyone felt the reverence for experience and for positive acts of kindness cummings celebrates in his

poetry, if everyone loved everyone else in the way cummings' poetry describes his love for Marion Morehouse Cummings, then, as William Carlos Williams has stated, we would have a moral revolution.

Thanks to Maslow and his fellow "third force psychologists," we can now view cummings as the positive poet of growing, being and loving; a poet whose poetry demonstrates what it means to be a "healthy, self-actualizing person" in a world which desperately needs to hear the sounds of positive, human voices.

CHAPTER III--NOTES

[1]William Carlos Williams, "Lower Case Cummings," The Harvard Wake, 5 (Spring 1946), 20. Hereafter referred to in the text in parentheses as "Wake," followed by the page number.

[2]Both Norman Friedman and Barry Marks discuss cummings' love ethic as it pervades and forms the core of his speaker's value-system. Both critics approach the concept of "love" from the Christian context and usage of the term. Both analyses work well when applied to 73 poems.

CHAPTER IV

CUMMINGS' ETHICAL SYSTEM: INDIVIDUALITY

Individuality was a cornerstone of cummings' vision as well as a primary element in his aesthetic theory and practice.

The content of a cummings poem usually involves the poet's personal interaction with Others, both animate and inanimate. In a 1925 article cummings asserted, "happy is the writer who, in the course of his lifetime, succeeds in making a dozen persons react to his personality genuinely or vividly" (Misc., 112). In the typical cummings poem the persona seems to be the artist, expressing the poet's values, personality, feelings, experiences and perceptual processes.

Cummings may be considered to be a lyric poet in the sense that his poetry is "characterized by or expressive of direct and usually intense personal emotion; for the writer, lyric virtue usually depends upon the intensity with which the personal vision is rendered."[1] On the book jacket of his first play, Him (1927), cummings wrote

a short "Imaginary Dialogue Between An Author and A Public," in which A Public asks An Author "what is Him About?" An Author responds with a question which implies that everything an author writes is essentially about himself: "Why ask me? Did I or didn't I make the play?" A Public responds with the widely held assumption that all artistic works represent some theory or represent something outside the artist--something external, which one can see in the world. Cummings answers "Beg pardon, Mr. Public; I surely make what I'm knowing." The poetry and paintings cummings "makes" are expressions of his attitudes, values, likes, dislikes and feelings about life's mysteries.

Maslow considers the lyric impulse to be one of the essential elements of self-actualizing life processes. Maslow says that persons who are consistently self-actualizing "go about it in these ways: (1) they listen to their own voices; (2) they take responsibility; (3) they are honest; (4) and they work hard. (5) They find out who they are and what they are, not only in terms of their mission in life, but also in terms of whether they do or do not like eggplant . . . or stay up all night if they drink too much beer. All this is what the real self means. They find their biological natures, their congenital natures, which are irreversible or difficult to change" (FRHN, 50). In his writing,

cummings seems to maintain self-actualizing attitudes throughout his career. In his nonlectures cummings insisted that the artist must look inside him/herself to discover who s/he is and what s/he believes to be true:

> no simple(if abstruse)system of measurable soi-disant facts, which anybody can think and believe and know--or, when another system becomes popular; and the erstwhile facts become fictions--can unthink and unbelieve and unknow-- has power over a complex truth which he, and he alone, can feel. . . . One thing . . . does always concern this/individual: fidelity to himself.
>
> (i6n, 82)

Maslow considers cummings' attitude a healthy one: "Most of us, most of the time, listen not to ourselves but to Mommy's introjected voice or Daddy's voice or to the voice of the Establishment, of the Elders, of authority, or of tradition." Instead, Maslow says that "a human being is, at a minimum, his temperament, his biochemical balances, and so on." Individuals should listen "to the impulse voices" and "let the self emerge" (FRHN, 46). Cummings' "individuality" seems to fit Maslow's concept of the self-actualizing person as one who honestly and responsibly explores and discovers who s/he is and what s/he believes.

According to Maslow, self-actualizing persons are able to perceive the growth-inhibiting elements in their culture and to expose those elements. (A culture may be partly "growth-fostering" and partly "growth-inhibiting.") "The sources of growth and of humanness are essentially within the human person and are not

created or invented by the society, which can only help or hinder the development of humanness" (TPB, 213). Maslow theorizes that a "good" culture is one "which gratifies all basic human needs and permits self-actualization. The 'poorer' cultures do not." Individual acts of governments or groups within the culture may also be judged by these criteria. Cummings' writings often satirize specific aspects of the American culture or the culture as a whole. In a letter to Elizabeth Kaiser-Bream (26 November 1956) cummings explained the feelings which prompted his politically satiric poems:

> when "America" cheered wildly for Finland while
> secretly selling hightest gasoline to Russia so
> Its tanks could murder Finns,i ceased to be--in the
> only true sense,that is spiritually--an "American."

Cummings satirized any cultural phenomenon which tended to repress individuality. Quoting Saint-Exupery in a letter written 26 November 1956, cummings says "there are notafew Americans who feel as i do--& as Marion does--but they(we)are, thanks to 'democracy',helpless as far as 'action' goes. Comme disait Saint-Exupery: when one person oppresses many people,everybody cries 'tyranny'! but tyranny occurs just as truly whenever many people oppress one single individual . . . & nobody even whispers" (Letters, 253-54).

Maslow sees such resistance as a healthy response to unhealthy environments: "As soon as we speak of

"good" or "bad" cultures, and take them as means rather than as ends, the concept of 'adjustment' comes into question. We must ask what kind of culture or subculture is the 'well-adjusted' person 'well-adjusted to?' Adjustment is not necessarily synonymous with psychological health" (TPB, 213). In 1944, with mankind busily destroying itself with atom bombs, the German V-1 missile, and napalm, cummings wrote in 1 x 1:

> pity this busy monster,manunkind,
>
> not. Progress is a comfortable disease:
> your victim(death and life safely beyond)
>
> plays with the bigness of his littleness
> --electrons deify one razorblade
> into a mountainrange;lenses extend
>
> unwish through curving wherewhen till unwish
> returns on its unself.
> A world of made
> is not a world of born--pity poor flesh
>
> and trees,poor stars and stones,but never this
> fine specimen of hypermagical
>
> ultraomnipotence. We doctors know
>
> a hopeless case if--listen:there's a hell
> of a good universe next door;let's go

The poem asks the reader NOT to pity "man-UN-kind," the people who are victimizing other people and the rest of the planet (mountains, trees, stones) as well. The poet refuses to adjust to the "comfortable disease" of "Progress" in which a very small animal (ManUNkind) deifies itself into "hypermagical//ultraomnipotence."

Cummings' response is to remain un-adjusted and to write many satirical poems.

In "why must itself up every of a park/anus stick some quote statue unquote to/prove that a hero equals any jerk/who was afraid to answer 'no'?", cummings satirizes the American glorification of war and soldiers. A soldier becomes a saint in America only if he kills people in combat; it also helps if he dies in the process.

A 1925 poem ridicules the super-patriot (politician?) who sits at home and mouths platitudes and clichés about the glorious honor of dying for one's country:

> "next to of course god america i
> love you land of the pilgrims' and so forth oh
> say can you see by the dawn's early my
> country 'tis of centuries come and go
> and are no more what of it we should worry
> in every language even deafanddumb
> thy sons acclaim your glorious name by gorry
> by jingo by gee by gosh by gum
> why talk of beauty what could be more beautiful than these heroic happy dead
> who rushed like lions to the roaring slaughter
> they did not stop to think they died instead
> then shall the voice of liberty be mute?"
>
> He spoke. And drank rapidly a glass of water
>
> (First published in Vanity Fair, xxiv, 3 (May 1925), 44; CP, 268)

The combination of dramatic monologue with a sonnet form allows cummings to compound the ironies in the poem without ever making a direct judgment about the speaker. A

sonnet traditionally celebrates love between human beings, while the speaker of this sonnet celebrates love of killing and death: "what could be more beaut-/iful than these heroic happy dead."

The sestet glorifies "america" in fragmented slogans, as if a reporter were taking notes on the speaker's monologue, or as if the speaker were getting his clichés mixed. The incomplete, run-on statements symbolize the meaningless nature of the speech. In line seven the word "gorry" stands at the end of a line for added emphasis, calling attention to the fact that it rhymes with the "gory" story of bloodshed being eulogized. It is the first word in the poem to strike a sour note in its eye rhyme with "worry"; the two words <u>appear</u> to rhyme, but unlike the preceding end-rhymes (i=my, oh=go, dumb=gum) "worry" and "gorry" in reality do <u>not</u> rhyme. Cummings uses a technical eye-rhyme to convey the tone of his poem; that what this speaker says may appear to be patriotic, noble and good; but in reality this speech is a facade of empty rhetoric.

"Mute," the last word the speaker utters, ironically is exactly what the speaker should be: silent. However, as the final line reminds us, "He spoke" instead of keeping his mouth closed. The final rhyme adds a last note of irony. As the speaker stands on his podium

drinking his comfortable glass of "water," the soldiers he has been eulogizing have become victims of "slaughter" in a war far from home.

Every element of the poem has been carefully arranged to maximize the irony of the dramatic monologue. Cummings has used the traditional elements of the sonnet form to heighten the effectiveness of his satire. It was the type of politician attacked in that sonnet which drew from cummings this epigrammatic definition:

> a politician is an arse upon
> which everyone has sat except a man
>
> (1 x 1, CP, 550)

Anyone who failed to be an individual with an identifiable personality drew satirical fire from cummings.

By contrast, cummings defended Ezra Pound as an individual who held a set of beliefs which were of his own making, not borrowed from anyone:

> so you think Ezra Pound needs rehabilitating? Allow me to disagree. . . . if you're trying to render the poet socially respectable,that's an insult;because no poet worth his salt ever has given or ever will give a hangnail for social respectability. In this UNworld of "ours",lots of UNpoets and plenty of UNcountries(UNamerica,for example)need rehabilitating the very worst way. But whoever or whatever he may be,Ezra Pound most emphatically isn't UNanyone or UNanything
>
> (Letters, 255-56--18 August 1958)

In the materials which have so far come to light, cummings has not made any derogatory statement about Pound's political opinions. Cummings disagreed with Pound, for he disliked the state's controlling the individual--the essence of Fascism. (His book EIMI condemns Russia for the anti-individualism of Communist theory and practice.) But cummings respected Pound's courage and individuality, believing that each person had the moral imperative of forming his or her own opinions with no regard for whatever might be considered "socially respectable."

In the cummings-Pound correspondence the blue-jay appears as cummings' symbol for Pound. Both poets admired the bird's courage and individuality. In 73 poems cummings immortalized these same qualities in a "kingbird" (poem #2):

> for any ruffian of the sky
> your kingbird doesn't give a damn--
> his royal warcry is I AM
> and he's the soul of chivalry
>
> in terror of whose furious beak
> (as sweetly singing creatures know)
> cringes the hugest heartless hawk
> and veers the vast most crafty crow
>
> your kingbird doesn't give a damn
> for murderers of high estate
> whose mongrel creed is Might Makes Right
> --his royal warcry is I AM
>
> true to his mate his chicks his friends
> he loves because he cannot fear
> (you see it in the way he stands
> and looks and leaps upon the air)
>
> (CP, 774)

Cummings here celebrates the kingbird's self-sufficiency, the courage to stand firm against predatory creatures. Self-sufficiency also accompanies many peak experiences. The person during those moments feels

> . . . himself, more than at other times, to be the responsible, active, creating center of his activities and of his perceptions. He feels more like a prime mover, more self-determined (rather than caused, determined, helpless, dependent, passive, weak, bossed). He feels himself to be his own boss, fully responsible, . . . with more "free will" than at other times, master of his fate. . . .
>
> All this can be phrased in still another way as the acme of uniqueness, individuality, or idiosyncrasy.
>
> (TPB, 107-08)

Maslow further states that the peak experience is the basis for many satirical expressions, since in the peak experience the individual feels "more decisive, more single-minded, more strong, more apt to scorn or overcome opposition, more grimly sure of himself, more apt to give the impression that it would be useless to try to stop him" (TPB, 107). There is a fine line between brilliant satire and abusive insult; perhaps the judgment depends upon the reader's individual views on the subject, object or person being attacked. Cummings' works of satire seem to fit into the description of a man in the midst of a peak experience, viewing the faults of his society clearly, and writing poetry or prose which conveys those experiences to the reader.

Cummings' appreciation of individuality and simultaneous attack on inhumane social norms appears in his earliest published major work. In The Enormous Room, cummings carries out an elaborate satire by reversing the traditional connotations of cleanliness and filth. Whereas we expect the "good" people to be clean and proper, in The Enormous Room the clean characters are reprehensible, while the dirty fellows are delightful.

The action begins in the ambulance service, called "Section Sanitaire," or the Sanitary Section. Lieutenant A is a spic and span American chauvenist who insists that cummings and Brown (a name with dirty connotations) stay away from "those Dirty Frenchmen" (pp. 9, 61). Our two heroes loved the Dirty Frenchmen much more than the clean Americans, for the French knew how to appreciate life, enjoy the sensual possibilities and be more individualistic than the rigid American military structure could tolerate.

Ironically, the punishment considered most devastating by the American lieutenant was to assign cummings and Brown to cleaning and greasing his personal auto (p. 10). Brown and cummings were not allowed to drive the ambulances "on the ground that our personal appearance was a disgrace to the section" (p. 10). The American officer was concerned only with greasy uniforms, while the ambulances were filled with blood and gore,

all around him people were suffering, and soldiers were killing one another. Somehow the officer thought it was a privilege to go out in an ambulance and get blown up while it was somehow a dishonor to remain alive.

The police who arrested our two unheroes and trundled them around the country were also presented as superficially clean and proper but officially inhumane nonpersons. Gendermes, police and prison guards are constantly described as "pigs" who are "spic, not to say span, gentlemen in suspiciously quite French uniforms" (10), men who use "positively sanitary English" (111). One Genderme is described as "neat as a pin, looking positively sterilized" (47). The police are most dehumanized when they are performing their duty, symbolized in the novel by their caps or "tin derbies." In donning their caps the police dehumanize themselves, putting on "a positive ferocity of bearing" (49).

A third group of nonpeople who are continually described as "clean" includes administrators of all kinds. Le Directeur, the arch villain in the prison, is described as "immaculate, decently and neatly clothed," having "pinkish, well-manicured flesh" and "soggily brutal lips." In the administrative machinery of the world cummings finds a perfectly institutionalized ethic of inhumanity and anti-individualism: "It takes a good and great government perfectly to negate mercy" (184).

The final group of superficially clean but inwardly corrupt nonpersons are those within the walls of the prison itself who are "Trusties," or collaborators with the prison guards and administration. The Fighting Sheeney is one of these, a character who wears "immaculate clothes" including an "Immaculate velour hat," a "specimen of humanity in whose presence one instantly and instinctively feels a profound revulsion" (155). The Fighting Sweeney is shown to be "almost as vain as he was vicious" (163). His attitude is similar to Count Bragard's snobbish attitude toward the other unfortunates in the prison: both men feel superior to the others, separate themselves from their fellow prisoners, and hence deny the love or comraderie which allows all to survive persecution. The Count tries to pretend the filth and squalor of the environment doesn't exist: he denies a major part of reality. The Count says he's a painter, but only of the beautiful--he sees no beauty in the enormous room.

In contrast, when cummings paints his picture of the enormous room (literally in prison on canvas, and figuratively in his novel), he is careful to include the slop bucket/toilet as an organic part of the picture. Cummings attempts to perceive the world as it is, find good and bad where they are, appreciate every facet of human experience including the dirty and smelly, the

beautiful people and the ugly, the prisoners and the administrator-guards alike.

The irony lies in the discrepency between the cleanliness freaks' moral filth (torturing people and having anti-humanistic values), and the unkempt prisoners' positive humanistic values (loving one another and affirming the joy of life). When a social system demands inhumane behavior of its members, cummings' true individual will act in accordance with his own values, rejecting society's dictates. Maslow has made a similar observation about the healthy individuals he studied. According to Maslow, individuals are alive, independent and think for themselves. Individuals are not afraid to react emotionally to life's happenings. Individuals care about other people and are able to love their fellow human beings. Individuals are artists in that they express a distinct, unique personality in the face of all pressures to conform.

Cummings' interest in individuals lasted throughout his career, as Charles Norman tells us in his biography:

> Cummings was unlike most of the poets I have known--he was interested in people. His poetry reflects that interest, and The Enormous Room, of course, is not so much autobiography as a celebration of individuals under that peculiarly twentieth century kind of duress, the concentration camp. He went where people congregated--to prize fights, burlesque, and wrestling. . . .
>
> (MM, 234)

Cummings also took daily walks to Washington Square Park in New York City, a few blocks from his home. Here he sketched (in both paint and words) people, trees and animals--anything or anyone who demonstrated attributes of individualism. One such descriptive poem is #30 from his 1963 book, 73 poems:

one winter afternoon
. . .

a bespangled clown
standing on eighth street
handed me a flower.

Nobody,it's safe
to say,observed him but

myself; and why?because

without any doubt he was
whatever(first and last)

most people fear most:
a mystery for which i've
no word except alive

--that is, completely alert
and miraculously whole;

with not merely a mind and a heart

but unquestionably a soul--
by no means funereally hilarious

. . .
but essentially poetic
or ethereally serious:

a fine not a coarse clown
(no mob,but a person)

and while never saying a word

who was anything but dumb;
since the silence of him

self sang like a bird.
Mostpeople have been heard
screaming for international

measures that render hell rational
--i thank heaven somebody's crazy

enough to give me a daisy

The hero of this poem is celebrated as one who is "no mob, but a person." This "alive" individual made contact with another person in the midst of New York's renowned impersonality, silently giving the speaker "a daisy," an actual and symbolic example of natural beauty.

The "bespangled clown/standing on eighth street" who handed cummings a flower is compared to a bird in the last nine lines: "and while never saying a word//who was anything but dumb;/since the silence of him//self sang like a bird." A bird is often used in cummings' poetry as a symbol of the individual who is nobody but him/herself. In 73 poems a rooster's monologue opens the book, followed immediately by the "kingbird" poem discussed elsewhere.

A third poem in 73 poems celebrating the individuality of a hummingbird, humans in general, and cummings in particular, is number 54:

i
never
guessed any
thing(even a
universe)might be
so not quite believab
ly smallest as perfect this
(almost invisible where of a there of a)here of a
rubythroat's home with its still
ness which really's herself
(and to think that she's
warming three worlds)
who's amazingly
Eye

Individuality is signified by the i of the opening line, the Eye of the closing line, and the l opening the seventh line. The longest line of the poem, visually representative of the hummingbird's bill is the letter a, also representative of a particular individual. In celebrating the particular hummingbird cummings implicitly celebrates every creature which is really herself and therefore perfect.

The hummingbird poem celebrates a specific mother bird, her three offspring, and their perfect nest; and the poem simultaneously celebrates the individual's ability to perceive such natural wonders and to feel wonder and love for nature's miracles. Cummings feels a part of natural marvels, as indicated by his opening and closing rhyme i/Eye. His "yes" attitude allows him to appreciate the individuality of others while asserting his own uniqueness simultaneously.

In his nonlectures he explains that the elements of his ethic which I have isolated here and in preceding chapters are integrated. After quoting a portion of the play Him, cummings says that "this fragment of dialogue renders a whole bevy of abstractions among which i recognize immediately three mysteries: love, art, and self-transcendence or growing . . ." (i6n, 81). The individual or artist "tells us something far beyond either fact or fiction; a strictly unmitigated personal truth: namely, how he feels." Further, cummings says that an artist feels "absolutely and totally alone" as a "solitary individual" who remains "separated from everybody else by . . . his individuality, . . . without which he would cease to exist at all."

Here cummings begins to show the way the elements of his ethical system are interrelated: "yet(and here is perhaps the essence of the mystery)this incarnation of isolation is also a lover." The individual loves another individual "so deeply" that "if selftranscendence actually occurs," the poet will feel himself one with the beloved. The term "beloved" is also a symbolic term, representing the Other, whether that other individual be a "bespangled clown," a hummingbird or "love herself." Later in the nonlectures cummings completes his explanation of the way "love" and "art" are transcendental processes: "we should go hugely astray in assuming that

art was the only selftranscendence. Art is a mystery; all mysteries have their source in a mystery-of-mysteries who is love: and if lovers may reach eternity directly through love herself, their mystery remains essentially that of the loving artist whose way must lie through his art, and of the loving worshipper whose aim is oneness with his god" (i6n, 82). Feeling, being aware of self and others, caring about others and loving other individuals are the subjects of cummings' art. His celebration of the loving process in his works of art creates in him a renewing awareness which is self-transcendence.

A final poem may demonstrate that cummings' poems are records of his efforts to keep his individuality open to the uniqueness of other individuals, a growth process which involves a momentary death of the old self in a renewing contact with others. Each new contact with another is then integrated into the elements of the poet's former self to create a new individuality. Cummings is constantly growing, constantly participating in a cycle of self-transcendence and self-creation. Poem #68 in 95 poems demonstrates this process, focusing on the poet's perceptual processes in action as he sees a child's eyes briefly light up (like shooting stars) in pleasure over some unspecified experience before they disappear from view:

```
the(oo)is

l00k
(aliv
e)e
yes

are(chIld)and

wh(g
o
ne)
o

w(A)a(M)s
```

In a 1960 letter to an unidentified correspondent cummings explicated the process celebrated in this poem:

> what at first impresses me as
> merely a pair of wideopen eyes
> "the(oo)is"
> becomes an intense stare
> "l00k"
> of alive eyes-which-say-yes
> "(aliv/e)e/yes"
> belonging to a child who is(reminds me of) myself
> "are(chIld)and"
> who's gone
> "wh(g/o/ne)o"
> leaving me with a memory of his eyes
> "o...o"
> & by becoming was instead of is
> (i.e. disappearing) at the same time
> becoming-intensely (the am of) myself
> "w(A)a(M)s"
>
> (Letters, 268)

Cummings gives us the initial impression of the child's eyes before any real contact has been made between poet and child"(oo)"; then the intense stare "OO" which says "yes" to risking contact with another individual. The

integration of self with other is facilitated by cummings' memory, comparing the child with himself at an earlier age. In the final lines the eyes of the child have become "intensely (the am of) myself": "w(A)a(M)s." The poet has made contact with the child, has left his own individuality to feel or empathize with another being and has integrated the feeling of that other being into his own (growing) personality.

Mysteries such as these are better presented in poems, so the rest of this dissertation will be concerned with analyzing the many ways cummings expressed his ethical system in poetry whose forms grew out of the ideas he wished to express.

CHAPTER IV--NOTES

[1]J. W. Johnson, "Lyric," The Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, ed. Alex Preminger (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 468.

CHAPTER V

CUMMINGS' AESTHETIC THEORY AND PRACTICE: INTENSITY

Intensity was the second cornerstone in cummings' vision as well as being a primary element in his aesthetic theory throughout his career. In his Dial review of T. S. Eliot's Poems (June 1920), cummings stressed that "every poem impresses us with an overwhelming sense of technique."[1] He expanded on this comment in a 1925 review, using the circus as a metaphor for his idea of what Art should be. At the circus, the spectator/reader is continually amazed by the "unbelievably skilful and inexorably beautiful and unimaginably dangerous things" which are "continually happening" in the circus/poem. There should always be such an intense experience happening in the tent or on the poetic stage that the spectator/reader "feels that there is a little too much going on at any given moment."

"Intensity" for cummings includes many critical elements, one of which is "compression." Cummings selected every word in each writing with care, attempting

to place exactly the right word in exactly the right place on the page. Cummings' object was to capture the essence of each experience he recorded with the fewest possible words.[2] His period of greatest compression came in the 1915-25 period of his writing.

The Enormous Room was rewritten from notebooks and journals he kept while in the World War I French prison camp which is the setting of the novel. A comparison of materials from his notebooks with corresponding sections from the novel reveals the rigorous selection of detail so much a part of cummings' methodology. The notebook version is so compressed that it is almost incomprehensible for the reader:

> In one of my numerous notebooks I have this perfectly direct paragraph:
>
> Card table: 4 stares play banque with 2 cigarettes (ldead) & A pipe the clashing faces yanked by a leanness of one candle bottle-stuck (Birth of X) where sits the Clever Man who pyramids, sings (mornings) "Meet Me . . ."
>
> (ER, 110)

The notebook version is a form of shorthand. Key images have been recorded so that the scene may be recalled in detail. The passage is an example of Ezra Pound's Imagist principle of "direct presentation of the thing, whether subjective or objective" using the fewest possible number of words. To the general reader, however, the notebook entry may seem cryptic, for extreme compression treads

the fine line between communication and incomprehensibility. Sometimes leaving out transitions and apparently unnecessary connectives interferes with the reader's ability to "translate" the compressed statement into a logical or even an intuitive understanding of the author's intended meaning. But the passage communicates more than the scribbles in a secretary's notebook communicate to one unversed in the symbols of shorthand.[3] The notebook version uses images to carry the impression of the scene just as a pencil sketch carries the essential outline of a scene which may appear later in a finished oil canvas.

In the published novel cummings adds color and shadow to his sketch, but still uses only the words absolutely necessary to his presentation. He interprets this particular notebook passage for us in the novel:

> . . . which specimen of telegraphic technique, being interpreted, means: Judas, Garibaldi, and The Holland Skipper (whom the reader will meet de suite)--Garibaldi's cigarette having gone out, so greatly is he absorbed--play banque with four intent and highly focussed individuals who may or may not be The Schoolmaster, Monsieur Auguste, The Barber, and Meme (myself); The Clever Man (as nearly always) acting as banker. The candle by whose somewhat uncorpulent illumination the various physiognomies are yanked into a ferocious unity is stuck into the mouth of a bottle. The whole, the rhythmic disposition of the figures, construct a sensuous integration suggestive of The Birth of Christ by one of the Old Masters. The Clever Man, having had his usual morning warble, is extremely quiet. He will win, he pyramids--(speculative technique in which one continually bets all he has previously won on the next bet, hoping to win ever-increasing quantities of $)--and he pyramids because he has the cash

> and can afford to make every play a big one. All he needs is the rake of a croupier to complete his disinterested and wholly nerveless poise. He is a born gambler, is the clever man. . . .
>
> (ER, 110)

Even his interpretation, however, is an example of extraordinary compression. For example, he uses the single word "pyramids" to represent a whole gambling philosophy. After explaining parenthetically the process of "pyramiding," he uses only the single word to convey the idea. Visually, cummings also used typewriter symbols like "$" to represent words and concepts.

Cummings considered his inmate-companions as persecuted by paranoid elements of wartime French society in much the same way as the early Christians were persecuted by the Romans. An analogy between this card game and the biblical manger scene is suggested by this brief comment: "suggestive of the Birth of Christ by one of the Old Masters." The sketch captures the essence of the scene in economical language suggesting a situation, participants, a mood and the poet's perceptions of and reactions to it.

The scene is so distilled that it borders on caricature. Each participant is referred to by a name which denotes his or her primary characteristic. Auguste was the barber of the prison community, and is referred to as "The Barber." "Judas" was one of the inmates who

was constantly spying on and betraying his comrades. The book includes an immense number of characters; many important personalities are captured in thumbnail sketches. Cummings' vivid sketches capture the essential or most memorable characteristics of the person, and help the reader to keep track of the many characters as they move about The Enormous Room.

Cummings compared his use of caricature in fiction to the selection of details and elimination of all unnecessary words in poetry-writing. In his 1920 review of T. S. Eliot's Poems, cummings wrote that the style of the extremely great artist "secures its emphasis by always hesitating on the edge of caricature at the right moment." Eliot's poetry was praised in terms which explain cummings' own use of near-caricature: "this intense and serious and indubitably great poetry . . . like some great painting and sculpture, attains its effects by something not unlike caricature."[4] Cummings is here referring to a selection of details so economical that the scene is painted as Ezra Pound's Imagist credo asserts poetry should portray a scene: concretely, with only the most important details present, with every word contributing directly to the presentation and with all excess words cut away. One development in cummings' poetic technique was from an early compression so severe as to make the poem nearly unintelligible to

a later readable compromise between intensity of compression and reader-accessibility.

By comparing early and late versions of a single poem, we can see the development toward greater reader accessibility vividly demonstrated. "Listen" was first published in The Little Review in 1923. It was carefully revised by cummings forty years later for inclusion in his last complete manuscript, 73 poems. In its final 1963 version, the poem represents the mature craftsman's style, vision and aesthetic theory. By comparing the two versions of "Listen" we can see some of the most significant developments in cummings' artistic expertise and in his attitudes toward his reader-audience.[5]

As printed in 1923 the poem reads as follows:

listen
this a dog barks and
this crowd of people and are these steeples
glitter O why eyes houses the smiles
cries gestures buttered with sunlight
O, listen
leaves in are move push leaves green are crisply writhe
a new spikes of the by river chuckles see clean why
mirrors cries people bark gestures
come O you if come who with listen run
me with I quick
Listen
irrevocably
(something arrives
noiselessly in things lives trees
at its own pace, certainly silently)
comes

yes
you cannot hurry it with a thousand poems

you cannot stop it with all the policemen in the world

Cummings is telling us that he can sense something--a positive life-affirming yes attitude or response--arriving in himself and insists that the reader join him in running through the streets appreciating the beauty accessible to an open mind and heart: "come O you if come who with listen run/me with I quick/Listen." Translated into more normal syntax, this statement might read: "if you (reader) will only come with me and listen, if you will run beside me quickly down the street, then you too will be able to perceive the excitement of simply being alive." But you must Listen. Only if you seek out this experience of delight in living will you be able to "hear" or otherwise sense the arrival of "something":

> (something arrives
> noiselessly in things lives trees
> at its own pace, certainly silently
> comes
>
> yes

Cummings often tried to recreate perceptual experiences in his poems. As he matured he became more effective in presenting his experience faithfully, yet allowing the reader to follow his line of presentation. In this 1923 poem the syntax is so fragmented, the juxtaposition of words is so unusual, the deletion of transitions is so complete, that only careful study and dissection supply us with a comprehensible reading of the poem.

He has carried the theory of compression--using only the most significant words--to an extreme. The result is nearly unreadable. Part of his message is that such vivid perceptions as the one pictured here are not available to the logical, classifying, mental faculties which are tied to linear reasoning processes. Instead, cummings wants us to break down our tendency to classify and categorize; he wants us to let the images and sounds flood into us in whatever nonorder they happen to strike us. Cummings is trying to expand our awareness of the elements available to the open senses of an aware person on any sunny day. But the method he has used is akin to presenting a boring scene through boring, monotonous language: the reader may be alienated from the poem in the process of trying to read it. Careful analysis can help us appreciate the poem's accurate depiction of an emotional state.

Cummings places this at the beginning of the second line to call attention to the vibrant immediacy of the sound of this particular dog barking right now. Repetition of this as the opening word in line three further emphasizes the specific and unique quality of the experience being considered.

In lines 3-5 and 7-9 the poet attempts to demonstrate the complexity of sensual impressions which strike him in this moment of time during which he listens:

3 this crowd of people and are these steeples
glitter O why eyes houses the smiles
5 cries gestures buttered with sunlight
. . .
7 leaves in are move push green are crisply writhe
a new spikes of the by river chuckles see clean why
9 mirrors cries people bark gestures

The poet, totally alive and open to every facet of experience, describes in a shotgun blast of words the impressions he is receiving as he "listens." Smiles, cries, gestures of people are juxtaposed in the speaker's mind with houses, church steeples and growing things. All aspects of life crowd in at the poet's senses in chaotic profusion: objects (river, mirrors, houses, steeples); animals (dogs); people; other growing things (leaves, spikes of new grass, green); actions and motions (move, push, writhe, smiles, gestures, mirrors, buttered, see); visual phenomena (glitters, gestures, sunlight, green, see, mirror); and sounds (cries, chuckles, bark). All of these images are mixed with the poet's spontaneous reactions (listen, O, why, O, Listen, see, why, come, O, listen, run) in an ecstatic moment of total involvement with experience. The juxtaposition of images with all transitions eliminated in these six lines recreates on paper the spontaneous, disorganized nature of the impressions which cummings receives when he opens himself completely and unthinkingly to every sensation he can perceive.

The syntax takes on a normal speaking pattern in the last nine lines of the poem as cummings explains how he derived a sense of unity out of all the preceding sensual chaos:

```
13 irrevocably
                (something arrives
   noiselessly in things lives trees
   at its own pace, certainly silently)
   comes
18
19 yes
   you cannot hurry it with a thousand poems

22 you cannot stop it with all the policemen in the world
```

Unity comes from the attitude called yes, which remains a constant, unifying element throughout cummings' poetry. In the external world, the equivalent of yes is the season of spring; in cummings' internal world of feeling, yes is an attitude of sensitive attentiveness to all stimuli. The poet insists that we uninitiated readers listen while the poem's speaker describes what may be perceived if we adopt a positive life-affirming response to the potentially exciting world around and inside ourselves. The early poem is only partially narrative, more an act being staged visually for the reader. When read aloud, the extreme compression of language creates unintelligibility. Only when the early poem is read slowly, carefully and treated as an exercise in meditation do the juxtaposed images become meaningful. The

connotations and denotations of each word must be digested slowly before the meaning becomes clear.

In the later poem, however, the reader is able to plunge through the verbal experience with cummings. The later version of "(listen)" reveals its increasingly deeper significance with each reading, but there is no longer the sensation of disorientation which must be encountered before we can see even the most literal meaning. The persona of the later poem is less hostile, less arrogant, less stubborn. He is asking for the reader's participation rather than demanding the reader's total commitment a priori:

(listen)

this a dog barks and
how crazily houses
eyes people smiles
faces streets
steeples and eagerly

tumbl

ing through wonder
ful sunlight
--look--
selves, stir:writhe
o-p-e-n-i-n-g

are(leaves;flowers)dreams

,come quickly come
run run
with me now
jump shout(laugh
dance cry

sing)for it's Spring

--irrevocably;
and in
earth sky trees
:every
where a miracle arrives

(yes)

you and i may not
hurry it with
a thousand poems
my darling
but nobody will stop it

With All The Policemen In The World

The syntax is relatively conventional, with the only inversions arranged for emphasis and sound pattern: (listen) emphasizes the "now"ness and "here"ness of the dog's bark; the abrupt insertion of crazily lends a wild, happily crazy quality to the house/eyes people smiles/ faces streets as well as to their eagerly/tumbl/ing. The punctuation serves as vocal choreography.

The experience of "Spring" is much more complete in this poem than it is in the early in Just-/Spring, due primarily to the strong use of parentheses in cummings' later work. Here the parenthetical insertions serve a triple purpose. First, they work as stage directions to the reader/actor/participant in the poem's experience (listen), (laugh/ dance cry/sing), (yes). Second, parentheses reveal the "aliveness" of natural things: listen . . . leaves;flowers . . . laugh/dance cry sing . . . yes--if we listen we can hear natural things singing "yes," an affirmation of life. Third,

the felt experience of nature's aliveness as something outside (or rather inside) the realm of the five senses is symbolized by placing the concrete sensually-experienced description of Spring outside the parentheses while sowing the felt sense of deep affirmation of life's "yes"ness throughout the poem inside the parentheses.

The first parenthetical insertion is the opening line of the poem, stressing the importance of this normally "modifying" insertion. Parenthetical insertions are normally phrases; the importance of this thought is stressed by its clause construction ("flowers . . . sing"). Beginning as a separate thought, set off from the main series of stanzas as a refrain, the parenthetical part of the poem suddenly inserts itself into the midst of the description in the thirteenth line: o-p-e-n-i-n-g/ are(leaves;flowers)dreams. The opening of dreams is the conceptual, descriptive level of action; in the midst of this is juxtaposed the "happening" of leaves and flowers opening, laughing, dancing, crying and singing yes. Two different kinds of experience are being juxtaposed: we participate fully in the immediate happening of the parenthetical flowers and leaves dancing, etc.; and we are simultaneously shown by the narrator at our elbow how the dog is barking, how our perceptions seem to be tumbl/ing, how selves are stirring and writhing and opening to the presence, reality, beauty, arrival of

the miracle of Being: (Spring), and how the experience may not be hurried or stopped by anything outside ourselves. Thus, while the narrator is reading us his poem about the arrival of spring, Spring or openness or Being is arriving inside himself (in parentheses) and hopefully in us as well.

Parentheses often function in this way in 73 poems and throughout cummings' later work: they attempt to juxtapose a demonstration of the actual experience or feeling, a description of the external stimulus which provoked it and the physical manifestations of the experience which are available to the five senses. In the best of these poems, the two aspects of the experience fully complement and supplement one another, as in (listen). The words in parentheses function equally well as part of the visual experience of the poem as it stands on paper and as part of the parenthetical expression in isolation. By contrast, the 1923 version of "listen" uses parenthetical statement only to further define or limit the word yes: irrevocably . . . comes a thing called yes, where yes equals something which arrives noiselessly in things, in people's lives, and in trees, coming at its own pace, and certainly arriving silently. Both statements are from the same point of view, both are explaining a phenomenon which the poet alone is

experiencing. The later version of "(listen)" is remarkably superior in its use of parenthetical technique.

Punctuation in the early version of "listen" is almost nonexistent. The only period appears in line 12, which would seem to indicate that the poet wishes us to consider the first twelve lines and the final ten (including line-spaces) as two separate meaning-units. Capitalization and spacing are alternate forms of punctuation utilized in this poem, but the first line-space stanzaic break does not come until the eighteenth line, leaving only line-breaks and four capital letters to guide us. Of the four capitalized words in the poem, three of them are repetitions of "O." "O" is cummings' letter-symbol for a state of wonder and pleasant surprise. The letter is visually representative of an open-mouthed state of awe, as well as the shape of the sun ("buttered in sunlight"), or the shape of the moon. "Listen" is the only other capitalized word in the poem, leading immediately to the logical conclusion that the state of awe ("O") and the state of intense awareness ("Listen") are synonymous states of being; both states of awareness are included in the positive "yes" attitude whose arrival is announced in line 19.

Because cummings chooses each word with care, a repeated word acquires added import with each recurrence.

The key words "Listen," "O," "you" and are each occur three times in the poem.

A major developmental change in cummings' style is in his attitude toward the reader, as illustrated by these two versions of "Listen." His early work implies an adversary relationship between poet and audience. In his first four books of poems cummings deliberately ignored (or violated) the traditional reader expectations about the way poems should be written, choosing instead to invent individualistic modes of poetic expression. In his 1952 "nonlecture two" he was still asserting that "so far as i am concerned, poetry and every other art is and forever will be strictly and distinctly a question of individuality" (i6n, 24). The object of his earliest poems was to express the ideas and feelings of nobody-but-himself in a style specifically designed to express his insights. He seems to have cared little about reader response to his unusual techniques.

In The Magic-Maker, Charles Norman reports a conversation in which cummings discussed his early attitude toward his readers: "The relation of an artist to his audience is neither positive nor negative. It's at right angles. I'm not writing 'difficult' so that simple people won't understand me. I'm not writing 'difficult' for difficult people to understand. Insofar as I have

any conception of my audience, it inhibits me. An audience directs things its own way" (MM, 134).

The 1923 version of "Listen" demonstrates the young poet's commitment to sincere self-expression in his poetry. It is a poem which attempts to record in visual form the very essence of his experiences--with little regard for any reader's ability to enter easily into that experience through conventional reading techniques. The poem chastises its reader to (imperatively) "listen" to the perceptual processes of the poet who demonstrates the way it feels to be truly open to experience. The poet is telling us that he can sense something, or a positive, life-affirming yes attitude or response, in the everyday world of things buttered in sunlight. He insists that we listen as he describes his personal experience of something which arrives silently, in the things, the lives, the trees around him. The fact that "something" arrives/noiselessly tells us that, paradoxically, to simply listen (repeated four times throughout the first section of the poem) with our ears will not be a sufficient level of awareness to perceive the arrival of the something. We must "listen" in some deeper sense if we are to hear.

The reader receives the impression that this special listening process is something unique to the poet--that only cummings can really hear or feel the

excitement and wonder--signified by O, listen in line 6. For you, dear reader, cannot hurry it with a thousand poems, nor can you, the reader, stop it with all the policemen in the world. The reader is assumed to be antagonistic to the state of wonder and excitement related by the poet in the early lines of the poem. This is one of the most important differences between the two versions.[6]

In the final version, as it appears in 73 poems, the reader is assumed to be a willing sharer in the perception of wonder: the poet excitedly asks the reader to (Listen), look, come quickly come / run run /with me now. It is no longer the poet alone against the world (and against the reader). Now it is the poet and reader together: you and i may not /hurry it with a thousand poems, and we share the secret that nobody will stop it/ With All The Policemen In The World. Cummings' perception of the something in the early "listen" has changed to a feeling of Spring arriving irrevocably. A miracle arrives in the external objects: earth sky trees / every /where. In the early "listen" the something also arrives in men's lives only at its own pace. There is no way to hurry it if you, the reader, don't already possess this sense of wonder even if you want to have it happen to you: YOU CANNOT hurry it with a thousand poems (emphasis mine). But in the 1963 version we find that the miracle MIGHT

(may) take place in us if we "run run /come with me now /jump shout (laugh /dance cry /sing) for it's Spring," and "you and i may not /hurry it with /a thousand poems /my darling /but nobody will stop it /With All The Policemen In The World." There is a possibility that participating in the poetic experience may bring you and i to participation in the miracle a little sooner than it might otherwise occur in us.

This positive attitude toward his reader first appeared explicitly in the introduction to his 1938 edition of Collected Poems: "The poems to come are for you and for me and are not for mostpeople--it's no use trying to pretend that mostpeople and ourselves are alike. Mostpeople have less in common with ourselves than the squarerootofminusone. you and i are human beings; Mostpeople are snobs."[7] Here the poet includes the reader, a solitary person who is sharing cumming's poetry, as one of the human beings. Every one who is not true to himself, but lives by the ethics and platitudes voiced by others may be considered to be mostpeople. Then follows a page and a half of satirical prose blasting the deadly philosophy of mostpeople as contrasted with the alive, growing, yes outlook of e. e. cummings.

By 1952, when cummings included a revised version of this introduction in his fourth nonlecture, he was even less overtly hostile toward mostpeople. In the

nonlecture he eliminated the first paragraph (quoted above) along with almost all of the other satirical, antagonistic passages. He used only sixteen lines of the introduction, and these were only the positive parts which described his own outlook. However, cummings did not change his negative opinion of people who were insincere or who failed to examine their world critically and assert their right (duty) to be unique, feeling individuals. But he did change the way the poet-speaker addressed the reader in many of his poems and in his introduction to books of poems.

In the 1963 version of "(listen)," the effect of the speaker's changed attitude toward his listeners is to encourage our participation in cummings' sense of wonder; whereas in the 1923 version we feel as though we are being castigated for not participating--before we are given a chance to join in the poet's outlook. We are assumed to be guilty in the early poem; not until the later poetry does he more often assume we are innocent until proven guilty.[8]

Cummings also changed a few of the images in the later version of "(listen)." "This crowd of people" in the early version becomes simply people in the 1963 poem, "and are these steeples" becomes simply steeples; "glitter/O why . . . buttered in sunlight," is simplified into "are eagerly/ tumbl/ ing through

wonder/ ful sunlight," the syntax and diction of a simple childlike singing voice. The four occurrences of listen are reduced to the single opening "(listen)" in the later poem and other verbal requests are added to involve all the reader's senses in the miracle: look, selves,stir:writhe/ opening, dreams, come, run, jump, shout, laugh, dance, cry, sing. The scene we are witnessing also involves more sensations, more aspects of growth than the older poem gave us: crazily, eagerly tumbl/ ing, wonder, wonderful, and full sunlight, selves,stir:writhe, opening, dreams and Spring are either absent from the earlier poem or are buried in the fragmented syntax which is more pervasive in his earlier poems.

The early poem characterizes the something as silent, noiseless; the only sound images in the poem are those of the dog barking, the cries and the river chuckling. The later version of the poem is alive with sound images. The dog still barks, but now poet and reader are loudly rejoicing at the arrival of the miracle: both shout, laugh, cry and sing.

Both poems celebrate an intense commitment to the appreciation of all external and internal life-experiences. Thus "intensity" is for cummings not only a way of writing, but also a way of perceiving.

His poems recreate in compressed language the experience of living intensely, of living each moment to the fullest.

Several letters have been published in which cummings explains a particular poem for a puzzled reader. A survey of these letters indicates that he apparently began explaining poems to readers around 1949. However, in that first known explication cummings' tone is the somewhat haughty tone of a master craftsman to a bumbling apprentice. He is discussing one of the poempictures in his 1950 book XAIPE:

chas sing does(who
,ins
tead,
smiles alw

ays a trifl
e
w
hile ironin

g!
nob odyknowswhos esh
?i
rt)n't

Cummings tells his unknown correspondent that "chas sing" is the name of a Chinese laundryman on Minetta Lane (maybe Street). This poem tells you that, in spite of his name, he doesn't sing(instead,he smiles always a trifle while ironing nobody knows whose shirt." So far his explication is very straightforward and helpful, written in a discursive tone of voice. Here the tone changes, however: "I can't believe you've never done

any ironing;but,if you have,how on earth can you possibly fail to enjoy the very distinct pictures of that remarkable process given you by the poet's manipulating of those words which occur in the poem's parenthesis?!" His concluding line sounds as though the master was having a difficult time trying to communicate with another one of those "mostpeople": "ah well;as Gilbert remarked to Sullivan, when anybody's somebody everyone will be nobody". Still, he did explain the poem to a reader who was not included among those he thought of as his friends, so he was indeed moving toward more of a dialogue with his audience than was the case in 1923.

By 1959 the tone of these explanatory letters was much more friendly and their frequency of occurrence had increased significantly. In a letter written 03 February [1959?] he discussed poem 19 from 95 poems:

un(bee)mo

vi
n(in)g
are(th
e)you(o
nly)

asl(rose)eep

Cummings tells his correspondent that "all" the poem "wants to do is to create a picture of a bee,unmoving,in the last blossom of a rosebush. Taken alone,the parentheses read 'bee in the only rose'. Without parentheses,

the poem asks 'unmoving are you asleep'. Put these elements together & they make 'bee in the only rose (unmoving)are you asleep?'" Again he has given an explanation of a poem in a discursive tone of voice. However, his explanation is more complex in this case, perhaps demonstrating that his understanding of the use of parentheses in his poems has become more complex in his later poetry, and perhaps also demonstrating that he is now more willing to explain his poems in more depth.

The last paragraph of cummings' letter demonstrates the change in attitude toward his audience which had taken place by 1959 (if Stade and Dupee have dated the letter correctly). Cummings exhibits an attitude toward his reader which is friendly and open: "if you'll let me know which of the other poems seem least comprehensible,I'll gladly furnish explanations;which are certainly harmless,as long as a person doesn't mistake the explanation for the poem".

This statement assumes his reader to be a friendly participant in the poetic process and parallels the attitude revealed in his 1962 version of "(listen)." The correspondent to whom the letter is addressed is Mrs. Frances Ames Randall. Since there are no other letters addressed to her in the Selected Letters, and since she is never mentioned in the biography nor in the other selected letters, it would appear that Mrs. Randall was

not an especially close friend of cummings, which is the only other explanation for such a warm reply. Furthermore, the number of explanatory letters increases sharply after 1950 and they grow increasingly more friendly and helpful through these later years. These data would tend to support my observation that cummings' attitude toward his audience changed significantly in his later years.

Many of the later poems are more accessible to "mostpeople," but the basic aims of writing poems never changes throughout his long career: to make "a dozen persons react to his personality genuinely or vividly" and to substitute in his readers a fully aware, vital experience for their normally un-intense impressions of reality.

CHAPTER V--NOTES

[1]e. e. cummings, "T. S. Eliot," The Dial (June 1920), rpt. in George J. Firmage, ed., A Miscellany Revised (New York: October House, 1965), pp. 25-29. All articles quoted hereafter which may be found in A Miscellany Revised will be noted in the text as indicated, viz. (Misc., --) with page reference in parentheses.

[2]Norman Friedman has demonstrated cummings' craftsmanship in Chapter Five of his second critical book on cummings, eec: The Art of His Poetry. In that chapter Friedman reconstructs 175 pages of revisions which cummings made to poem #90 in 95 poems, "rosetree,rosetree." Friedman concludes from his analysis of cummings' revision process that: "cummings is . . . a poetic maker. This claim is based on an assumption that a man, to write great poems, needs, in addition to a great moral vision and a flair for language, certain constructive and critical powers pertaining to the organization of a poem--to the adjustment of its various parts and devices to the whole for the sake of achieving a unified effect" (126). Friedman shows that "the whole poem was rewritten dozens and dozens of times in its entirety so as to incorporate at each step in the process the new with the old, the altered with the unchanged; it moved forward as a growing and developing unity from stage to stage, adding, changing, rearranging, dropping, and adding bit by bit the elements of the finished design, and "without breaking anything" (158).

[3]Robert E. Maurer has also found this to be true. In his article "Latter-Day Notes on E. E. Cummings' Language," Bucknell Review, 5 (May 1955), 1-23, rpt. in Norman Friedman, ed., Twentieth Century Views Series e. e. cummings (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972), p. 81, he said: "At its most highly developed state, in his later books, Cummings' language becomes almost a foreign one, usually possible to figure out for a reader who knows English . . .; but he will get its full meaning only if he has read a great deal of cummings and if he 'knows the language'."

[4]"T. S. Eliot," Misc., 26.

[5]e. e. cummings, "Three Poems," The Little Review, 9, No. 3 (Spring 1923), 22-24. This poem has not been discussed in cummings' criticism to date.

[6]Cummings at the beginning of his career was generally more antagonistic to critics and readers than he was later in his career. One possible reason for the change in attitude may be simply that his audience grew larger later in his career; therefore he felt less and less that he was speaking into a vacuum as the years passed; later in his career he felt that there were quite a few readers who took his poetry seriously.

[7]e. e. cummings, "Introduction" to the 1938 edition of Collected Poems, rpt. in Poems 1923-1954 (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1954), p. 331.

[8]Even the satire in 73 poems is directed at them. We no longer see an angry poet attacking all beside himself with Swiftian vehemence; now the reader is assumed to be with him, sharing the poet's confidence:

> the greedy the people
> (as if as can yes)
> they sell and they buy
> and they die for because
> though the bell in the steeple
> says Why
>
> (73 poems, #29)

CHAPTER VI

CUMMINGS' AESTHETIC THEORY AND PRACTICE: ELEMENTS GROWING OUT OF THE IMAGIST TRADITION

Intensity of expression was the central element in Ezra Pound's Imagist aesthetic, and it is quite likely that cummings learned his principles of careful word selection and linguistic compression from Pound and his fellow Imagists. Cummings began his writing career at a time when the Imagist movement championed by Ezra Pound, F. S. Flint and T. E. Hulme was flourishing.

Charles W. Bernardin reports that "e. e. cummings led the experimentalists" and Robert Hillyer led "the outraged conservatives" in the Harvard Poetry Society in the 1912-1916 period. During those years the Poetry Society had as guest speakers "Robert Frost, Vachel Lindsay, John Gould Fletcher, Conrad Aiken, Ezra Pound, Amy Lowell, and many others."[1] Cummings was in the group of editors and writers who published in The Harvard Monthly; Bernardin states that "The Harvard Monthly group was interested in Joseph Conrad, Clive Bell,

Richard Aldington, Ezra Pound, and the other Imagists" (p. 11). The Harvard Monthly was filled with positive comments about the Imagists during cummings' time at Harvard--the magazine cummings called "our university's only serious undergraduate magazine" (i6n, 50).

George Wickes has further documented the relationship between cummings and the Imagist poets in his book Americans in Paris:

> At Harvard he [cummings] had received what might be called the classic education in modern verse. He . . . knew Foster Damon who was then reading LaForgue and Verlaine and who enthusiastically shared such discoveries as . . . Des Imagistes. And he met Amy Lowell, whose formidable presence in Boston made his generation fully aware of imagism. In 1916 she spoke to the Harvard Poetry Society on the subject of vers libre. . . .[2]

Cummings established a friendship with Ezra Pound that lasted his entire life, as is evident from the many letters back and forth which may be found in both poets' Selected Letters. Cummings reported in a 1923 letter to his mother from Paris "as you may know, I have for some years been an admirer of Pound's poetry: personally he sometimes gives me a Father Complex" (Letters, 104). And in 1957 cummings wrote Charles Norman that "from my standpoint, not eec but E[zra] P[ound] is the authentic 'innovator'; the true trailblazer of an epoch." Later cummings refers to Pound as "this selfstyled world's greatest and most generous literary figure" (Letters, 254).

Pound returned cummings' admiration, arranging for the publication of cummings' poetry in small magazines like the Transatlantic Review, which was edited by Ford Maddox Ford at the time. Pound also included cummings' poem "plato told/him:he couldn't/believe it" in his anthology of poetry entitled Confucius to Cummings.[3] Cummings, William Carlos Williams, Ford Maddox Ford, Marianne Moore, H. D., Wyndham Lewis and T. S. Eliot are represented in this collection which reads like an Imagist anthology, complete with a critical introduction which promotes the Imagist aesthetic.

Cummings absorbed the Imagist doctrines during his undergraduate and Masters' degree study at Harvard from 1911 to 1916. During these years he was exploring and defining his own aesthetic theory and practice, moving out of the period in which he wrote poems like "Epithalamian" (the opening poem in his Collected Poems) toward his stance by 1923 (when Tulips & Chimneys was published) as an extreme modernist. The transformation cummings underwent in his Harvard years of poetry writing was a major one.

In Eight Harvard Poets, published in 1917 at personal expense in conjunction with seven of his Harvard classmates, two poems appear which illustrate the changes then taking place in cummings' aesthetic theory and practice. The first poem is a sonnet in the traditional

sonnet form, fourteen lines divided into the standard octave and sestet, standard iambic pentameter meter, traditional rhyme scheme: abbcabbc defdfe, with a slight inversion in the sestet for humorous effect, rhyming "trod" with "God" and "dust" with "Lust":

A CHORUS GIRL

When thou hast taken thy last applause, and when
The final curtain strikes the world away,
Leaving to shadowy silence and dismay
That stage which shall not know thy smile again,
Lingering a little while I see thee then
Ponder the tinsel part they let thee play;
I see the red mouth tarnished, the face grey,
And smileless silent eyes of Magdalen.

The lights have laughed their last; without, the street
Darkling, awaiteth her whose feet have trod
The silly souls of men to golden dust.
She pauses, in the lintel of defeat,
Her heart breaks in a smile--and she is Lust . . .
Mine also, little painted poem of God.

The celebration of an erotic experience, of watching a chorus girl's performance, is a poem-content typical of cummings--especially when presented ironically and humorously in a traditional sonnet form (the form traditionally used to express stately sentiments of courtly love).

But in this early poem cummings is still demonstrating his mastery of the traditional form, parodying it from within its confines, complete with a title, the capital letter beginning each line, and archaic poetic language. In 1923, when he included the poem in his

"Tulips & Chimneys" manuscript, cummings eliminated almost all the capital letters (including "God"), leaving only Magdalen, The (in line 9), and Lust capitalized. Cummings had decided that capital letters could be used more effectively for emphasis if they were not strewn loosely around at beginnings of lines and of sentences. The beginning of a line is automatically emphasized visually, and the beginning of a sentence is already emphasized by the period or other punctuation mark preceding it. Cummings eliminated such capital letters as redundant.

This decision seems to follow an aesthetic doctrine established by Ezra Pound in his 1912 "CREDO": "I believe in technique as the test of a man's sincerity; in law when it is ascertainable; in the trampling down of every convention that impedes or obscures the determination of the law, or the precise rendering of the impulse" (Essays, 9). Cummings "violated" the rules of syntax, punctuation, capitalization and adapted the structures of traditional forms whenever the conventional way of doing things impeded the "precise rendering of the impulse" he was trying to express.

In the 1917 version of "A CHORUS GIRL" the "trampling down of . . . convention" is minimal. The poem uses archaic language ("thou," "hast," "thy," "awaiteth") and format. In the 1923 version the

language remains archaic, but the capitalization and stanzaic arrangement have been modified from the standard 8-6 line grouping for a sonnet (with the first word in each line capitalized) to the more organically accurate organization of 13-1 (with all unnecessary capital letters eliminated). The 13-1 stanzaic arrangement is more accurate because the first thirteen lines are a description of the chorus girl, while the last line is the "turning" line in which cummings speaks of his own emotional state directly: "mine [my Lust] also, little painted poem of god." The 1923 version is number six in a set of "SONNETS--REALITIES":

VI

when thou hast taken thy last applause,and when
the final curtain strikes the world away,
leaving to shadowy silence and dismay
that stage which shall not know thy smile again,
lingering a little while i see thee then
ponder the tinsel part they let thee play;
i see the large lips vivid,the face grey,
and silent smileless eyes of Magdalen.
The lights have laughed their last; without,the street
darkling awaiteth her whose feet have trod
the silly souls of men to golden dust:
she pauses on the lintel of defeat,
her heart breaks in a smile--and she is Lust. . . .

mine also, little painted poem of god

(CP, 75)

The title has been eliminated in the 1923 version. The title is unnecessary because the poem presents the image of "A CHORUS GIRL"; if this particular title were

necessary, it would mean that the poem did not convey its meaning clearly. Cummings seems to have followed Pound's advice as printed in the March 1913 issue of Poetry: "Use no superfluous word, no adjective which does not reveal something."[4]

In eliminating the title in the 1923 version, cummings also seems to have followed Pound's advice: "use no word that does not contribute to the presentation."[5] The title is unnecessary because the poem presents the image of "A CHORUS GIRL." If this particular title were necessary, it would mean that the audience had to be told what kind of person the poem was about, that the poem did not present its meaning clearly. The answer would be to change the wording of the poem so that the idea of a chorus girl came across more clearly.

This is in fact what cummings did. In the 1923 version cummings replaced the words "I see the red mouth tarnished, the face grey" with the more vivid, accurate and specific words "i see the large lips vivid, the face grey." "Large lips" gives the direct presentation of lips, replacing the more general term "mouth." The use of the natural object, "large lips," as a substitute for the less specific "red mouth" illustrates the principle of finding "the exact word," which cummings, Pound, Ford Maddox Ford and all the Imagist poets adhered to.[6] In a 1917 essay Pound quotes Ford Maddox Hueffer [Ford] as

having "pointed out that Wordsworth was so intent on the ordinary or plain word that he never thought of hunting for le mot juste." F. S. Flint's 1913 statement similarly asserted that one of the rules of good poetry-writing was "to use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation."[7]

Pound notes in his 1917 "Retrospect" that H. D. and Richard Aldington also agreed to the "three principles" of Imagist poetry printed in that 1913 issue of Poetry magazine:

> 1. Direct treatment of the "thing" whether subjective or objective.
> 2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
> 3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome.
>
> (Essays, 3)

Cummings stated a similar aesthetic stance in a 1920 essay on Gaston Lachaise. Here, cummings praised "economy of form through the elimination of unessentials" and asked that the resulting work of art be a "form which completely expresses itself, form that perfectly tactilizes the beholder, as in the case of an electric machine which, being grasped, will not let the hand go." In asking for "economy of form" through careful word selection, cummings echoed the Imagist writings of 1913-1917 (Misc., 15).

Cummings' principle of word-selection is further explained in considering the effect of changing the adjective "tarnished" in the 1917 version of "A CHORUS GIRL" to "livid" in the 1923 version. "Livid" is more active than "tarnished," presenting an image of brilliant anger as opposed to the passive and more abstract "tarnished." "Livid" is an unusual, interesting word because it implies an emotional state; "tarnished" is by contrast more descriptive, denoting a static state of discoloration. In his 1913 essay Pound urged that the poet "use no adjective which does not reveal something" (Essays, 4). Pound gave as an example of good writing a line from Shakespeare: "When Shakespeare talks of the 'Dawn in russet mantle clad' he presents something which the painter does not present. There is in this line of his nothing that one can call description; he presents" (Essays, 6). The word "livid" is surprising in its accuracy, presenting the brazen, lurid smile which both expresses "Lust" and evokes "Lust" in the poem's speaker; "tarnished" is inaccurate since it accomplishes neither of these objectives. In making this single word change, cummings selects a more accurate word, a word which "reveals something" about the woman and "presents" a vivid image.

A second poem from Eight Harvard Poets illustrates the metamorphosis occurring in cummings' work during his Harvard years. As printed in 1917 the poem reads:

THE LOVER SPEAKS

YOUR little voice
Over the wires came leaping
and I felt suddenly
dizzy
With the jostling and shouting of merry flowers
wee skipping high-heeled flames
courtesied before my eyes
or twinkling over to my side
Looked up
with impertinently exquisite faces
floating hands were laid upon me
I was whirled and tossed into delicious dancing
up
Up
with the pale important
stars and the Humorous
moon
dear girl
How I was crazy how I cried when I heard
over time
and tide and death
leaping
Sweetly
your voice

In contrast to the fairly traditional sonnet "A CHORUS GIRL," this poem's form is determined by its content. The poem dances across the page as the lover's voice danced in the speaker's ears. Just as the speaker "was whirled and tossed into delicious dancing" by the phone call, so the words leap, jostle and twinkle on the page. This free-form poem follows Pound's 1913 "CREDO" on "Form": "I think there is a 'fluid' as well as a 'solid'

content, that some poems may have form as a tree has form, some as water poured into a vase. That most symmetrical forms have certain uses. That a vast number of subjects cannot be precisely, and therefore not properly rendered in symmetrical forms" (Essays, 9). Whereas cummings felt the subject-matter of "A CHORUS GIRL" could be poured like water into the pre-set "sonnet" vase, he apparently felt that the emotion expressed in "THE LOVER SPEAKS" should grow as a tree grows, into a free-form shape which would best fit the emotion.

Cummings would alternate between his own version of the traditional forms and an organic form growing out of the subject-matter of the poem during the rest of his career. (Two examples of free-form poems will be discussed later in this chapter.) But never again would he use quite so rigid a definition of the sonnet form as he adhered to in the 1917 sonnet. In varying degrees, cummings practiced Pound's "CREDO" of "trampling down . . . every convention that impedes or obscures . . . the precise rendering of the emotional 'impulse' which was the subject-matter of each poem" (Essays, 9).

"THE LOVER SPEAKS" also exhibits a characteristic of the "Impressionist" poem championed by Ford Maddox (Hueffer) Ford, the idea that "the unit of free verse is really the conversational sentence of the author."[8] The language of the poem seems exaggerated or heightened,

but John Dos Passos has described cummings' brilliant monologues in everyday conversations:

> After a couple of brandies on top of the wine Cummings would deliver himself of geysers of talk. I've never heard anything that remotely approached it. It was comical ironical learned brilliantly-colored intricatelycadenced damnably poetic and sometimes just naughty. It was as if he were spouting pages of prose and verse from an unwritten volume. Then suddenly he would go off to Patchin Place #4 to put some of it down before the fountain ceased to flow.[9]

Cummings seems to have developed a highly individualistic "personal voice" which partly stemmed from his natural verbal abilities and partly was derived from his desire to create a personal voice in his poetry which could belong to nobody but himself.

Malcolm Cowley also reports that cummings was "the most brilliant monologuist I have ever known. What he poured forth was a mixture of cynical remarks, puns, hyperboles, outrageous metaphors . . . spoken from the corner of his . . . mouth: PURE CUMMINGS, as if he were rehearsing something that would afterward appear in print. Sometimes it did."[10] It is impossible to know whether "THE LOVER SPEAKS" is a recorded monologue or not; but certainly the linguistic facility of the poem is not entirely contrived. Cummings was capable of extemporaneously inventing brilliant analogies and metaphors--the very elements which seem so contrived in his poems

apparently were elements essential to his personal voice. Cummings' letters also show a brilliant monologuist at work. The editors of his Selected Letters note that several drafts of some letters exist, demonstrating cummings' devotion to artistic craft even in his correspondence, but that often his dazzling language seems to have been spontaneous. Language which might seem contrived to a reader was often simply another example of cummings' inventive mind at play.

William Carlos Williams, another poet who learned a great deal from Pound and the Imagists,[11] described the similarities he saw between cummings' use of language and his own: "to me . . . e. e. cummings means my language." Williams went on in his 1946 essay to explain the "esoteric" qualities of cummings' language as "a christian [with a lower case "C"] language" that speaks to "each of us in turn":

> To me, of course, e. e. cummings means my language. It isn't, of course, mine so much as it is his, which emphasizes the point. It isn't, primarily, english.
> . . . . . .
> We speak another language. . . .
> Esoteric is the word the englishers among us would give to the languages we americans use at our best. They are private languages. That is what cummings seems to be emphasizing, a christian language--addressing to the private conscience of each of us in turn.

> But if, startlingly, each should disclose itself as understandable to any great number, the effect would be . . . a veritable revolution, shall we say, of morals? Of, do we dare to say, love? Much or even all cummings' poems are evidences of love.
>
> (Wake, 20)[12]

As early as 1917 cummings was expressing his "love" of individuals. "THE LOVER SPEAKS" is a love poem expressing the potential joy language can communicate. The experience celebrated is a telephone call from his beloved; nothing but words is exchanged; yet the loving words create an intense joy in the speaker/listener/audience. The sparkling sprinkle of unusual words inspires in the reader a similar "dizzy" emotion of "Jostling and shouting of merry flowers" and "wee skipping high-heeled flames" dancing before our eyes. With cummings the reader is "whirled and tossed into delicious dancing/up/Up/with the pale important/stars and the Humorous moon." As Williams insists, we as readers can catch this joyful feeling if we open ourselves to the highly contagious effects of cummings' linguistic fireworks.

Williams describes that use of words as "a toughness which scorns to avoid fragility":

> Words are his proper medium, the specific impact of words, which give them in his work such a peculiarly unhistoric, historical new world character. A toughness which scorns to avoid fragility.
> . . . . . .

> cummings is the living presence of the drive to make all our convictions evident by penetrating through their costumes to the living flesh of the matter. He avoids the cliché by avoiding the whole accepted modus of english. He does it, not to be "popular," . . . nor to sell anything, but to lay bare the actual experience of love, let us say, in the chance terms which his environment happens to make apparent to him. He does it to reveal, to disclose, to free a man from habit.
>
> (Wake, 20-21)

Cummings' speaking style was distinctive as his poetry is distinctive. He carefully chose each word in each poem as the Imagist poets chose each word, using "absolutely no word which does not contribute to the presentation" (Pound's advice). His poems violate syntactical "laws" whenever the subject matter of his poem requires an unusual construction for its apt expression.

In his essay on T. S. Eliot's poetry cummings appreciated an effect similar to the one Williams found in cummings' own poems: "the alert hatred of normality, . . . the unique dimension of intensity, which it amuses him to substitute in us for the comforting and comfortable furniture of reality" (Misc., 27). The methods cummings admired in Eliot were the same methods Pound admired in Eliot, and the same methods Williams admired in cummings' verse: "a vocabulary almost brutally tuned to attain distinctness; an extraordinarily tight orchestration of the shapes of sound; the delicate and careful murderings--almost invariably interpreted, internally as

well as terminally, through near-rhyme and rhyme--of established tempos by oral rhythms" (Misc., 27-28). Marianne Moore wrote in praise of cummings: "He does not make aesthetic mistakes" (Wake, 24).

Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams and e. e. cummings each wrote several poems which exemplify Imagist poetic theories in practice. In the concluding section of this chapter I will examine an example of the pure Imagist poem from Pound's work, one from Williams' work and two from cummings' final book of poems. Such a comparison may show that cummings learned the Imagist writing techniques and continued to use those techniques to create Imagist poems throughout his life, even in his final book of 73 poems, whenever the content or subject of the poem seemed to warrant the use of those techniques.

Using the definition of Imagist goals and methods that Pound presented in his 1913 essay in Poetry, we find that for Pound "An Image is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. . . . It is the presentation of such a complex instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art."[13] Pound's emphasis on speed of presentation is paralleled in cummings' praise of "those superlative aesthetic

victories which are accidents of the complete intelligence, or the intelligence functioning at intuitional velocity" (Misc., 12). Ezra Pound insisted that it was "better to present one Image in a lifetime than to produce voluminous works."[14] Pound seems to have been referring to single-image poems stripped of all philosophical elaboration and unnecessary ornamentation.

Pound asked that the "image" out of which the poem was constructed be concrete and tangible--a real "strawberry" and not simply the vehicle for symbolic meaning--as in his poem "L'Art" (1910):

> Green arsenic smeared on an egg-white cloth,
> Crushed strawberries! Come, let us feast
> our eyes.
>
> (--Pratt, 50)

Pound cannot resist proclaiming his presence and his attitude with the exclamation mark and the insistent tone of "Come, let us feast/our eyes." But otherwise the poem fits the theoretical prescription: no wasted words, speed of presentation, and the images intended to be taken literally.

Perhaps an even better example of Pound's theory in its purest practice is in William Carlos Williams' poem "The Red Wheelbarrow,"

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens

Williams manages to keep the speaker almost completely hidden from view, with only a hint of his attitude toward the scene coming out in the opening lines "so much depends upon." We gain a sense of the poet's appreciation of and celebration of the concrete sensory details of life. A celebration of colors and objects available to the senses in a rural community is presented in the poem, but without any of this abstract statement.

The open presentation of images conveys feelings of intense awareness and joie de vivre directly. The wheelbarrow may be a symbol of manual labor, the rain water and chickens may symbolize the natural world and the juxtaposition may be interpreted symbolically as the unity of the "human" and "natural" worlds; but such interpretation is not necessary. The poem functions simply as a celebration of the world perceivable to our senses. The chickens may be seen as real chickens and the wheelbarrow functions well as the garden-store variety. "No ideas but in things" results in a poetry of vivid, clear presentation.

Cummings knew and appreciated Williams' "wheelbarrow" poem, as he remarked in a letter written 14 September 1951. In this letter cummings thanks his daughter Nancy for her gift of a red wheelbarrow. The occasion reminds cummings of Williams' poem, which he describes as the Williams poem that he likes best:

> thank you a millionmillion times for the marvellous gift ! A red wheelbarrow ! A genuine (wooden)one, not some pseudo tin-bathtub with a rubbertired diskwheel; praise be. Why, I was so surprised it's hard to even begin to explain. Quite incidentally, the only poem of Doctor WCWilliams--someone whom the undersigned should respect, since he(WCW) (too) received the Dial Award--which ever truly pleased me as a poem should(from finish to start and v[ice]-v[ersa]) is one affectionately concerning a red wh[eel]-b[arrow].
>
> (Letters, 214)

In his own work cummings attempted to create poems which were "accidents of the complete intelligence," placing images in juxtaposition with one another such that the effect on a reader was one similar to Pound's "intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." Cummings described this effect as "the intelligence functioning at intuitional velocity" (Misc., 17). Most of his poems were Imagistic in important ways; many conformed exactly to Imagist aesthetic criteria. Two poems from his final book stand out as exhibiting elements of the Imagist aesthetic.

One poem of the Imagist type deals with an auditory phenomenon. An auditory effect can perhaps be rendered best through an auditory medium, as a bird call is most realistically mimicked by musical instruments. The mood of "stillness" often occurs in music by placing a quiet, lyrical section of solo instruments between loud, full-orchestra sections. But how can music create "silence"? Only in relation to what has gone before or after can "stillness" or silence occur in music. It should follow that poetry, a verbal, auditory medium, would be unable to recreate the phenomenon of silence. Yet cummings has succeeded in creating the linguistic equivalent of "stillness" in this poem:

n
OthI
n

g can
s
urPas
s

the m
Y
SteR
Y

of

s
tilLnes
s

(73 poems, #42)

Translated into verbal terms, the letters indicate that "nothing can surpass the mystery of stillness." In breaking up the words into unpronounceable "lines" of letters, cummings has demonstrated the "silent" quality of stillness. His poem also tells us that "stillness" is the essence of perfection, symbolized by visual symmetry. Balance and symmetry pervade every aspect of the poem's form. The poem is divided into seven stanzas, alternating symmetrically between one and three lines per stanza: 3-1-3-1-3-1-3. Each of the three-line stanzas further emphasizes the symmetry of the form by bracketing the middle line with lines consisting of a single, identical letter.

A third method of creating poetic symmetry is the use of capital letters. In lines of four letters, the capital letters open and close the line, framing the smaller letters between them; in the five and seven letter lines, the middle letter is capitalized. The s (sibilant) letters in the third and seventh stanzas echo one another visually, providing a more subtle sense of unity, symmetry, and hence perfection to the experience being created for us. The result is a conceptual experience made concrete by a vivid linguistic (yet nonverbal) technique. We are presented with an "image" of stillness--yet not an "image" in the ordinary sense of "a sensory experience." This image, like many of

cummings' images, is a "word-portrait" of the phenomenon being described, in which the form perfectly fits the meaning, giving the reader a visual, sensual and conceptual experience of the subject of the poem. Form and content completely reinforce one another in the best cummings' poems. Cummings has written many poems which fit Pound's description of an Imagist poem in that there are no wasted words, the poem consists of a single image, and there is no overt philosophizing in the poem.[14]

In poem #24 from 73 poems cummings gives us his most perfect example of an Imagist poem. The poem presents a visual and linguistic picture of yesterday's newspaper. His poem presents an objective linguistic correlative of the emotional and mental processes involved in the poet's perception of his experience, watching a newspaper tumbling across a street:

insu nli gh t

o
verand
o
vering

A

onc
eup
one
tim

e ne wsp aper

Here cummings uses the kinetic quality of language to infuse a "newspaper" with motion and vitality. The poem is an impressionistic word-painting of yesterday's newspaper lying in the sun. A light wind is ruffling the pages, or perhaps somersaulting the paper across a sunlit street, as indicated by the overall pattern of the letters on the page: "3" (like the number three). Within that overall pattern, the letters are combined in a visually satisfying but verbally fragmented way. in sunlight is a one-line stanza with its letters grouped in a decreasing series of letter-units, arranged 4-3-2-1. The final line of the poem is the mirror-image of in sunlight, a one-line stanza with its letters divided into an increasing series of letter-unity, grouped 1-2-3-4. The stanzas alternate between one and four lines.

The second stanza, over and overing, describes the motion of the pages; "ing" is used in conventional grammar to indicate "action or process" or "something connected with an action or process." Over is traditionally an adverb meaning "away from . . . a prone position" or "on the other side of an intervening space." Cummings combines the two elements to create a new verb, an active movement, an over-ing supplants the traditional conception of "over" as a dead adverbial concept. The enlivening of over parallels what happens to the newspaper under the perceptive poet's gaze. The lines alternate in length between the single letter o

(an expression of wonder) and six letters grouped together, both six-letter groups beginning with v. The middle stanza is the single letter A, capitalized and set apart as the central focus of the poem to demonstrate (symbolize) the unique, individual character of the newspaper. A simple visual phenomenon is transformed by the perceptive "poet" (which is in each of us) into an exciting experience of the unique qualities of this newspaper in its environment of sunlight and wind. The other four-line stanza consists of lines made up of groups of three letters per line. Once upon a time describes the newspaper as being out-of-date, no longer of any use or significance to "mostpeople." It has been discarded and is now ignored.

Fragmentation of the words into unpronounceable groups indicates that the words no longer have any meaning since they are outdated and since the movement of the pages in the wind interferes with our ability to read the articles. The fragmentation of words emphasizes the point that the experience is a visual and felt experience, not a verbal one. Only the two exclamations of wonder, o, make sense when uttered aloud, indicating that this might be a verbal response of the poet or reader perceiving the phenomenon.

The poem demonstrates the poet's growing awareness of the object under surveillance beginning with an initial

sense of sunlight with something enclosed or wrapped in sunlight in the first line-stanza. Next comes the perception of motion with the still unclassified object moving in an over and over-ing way. The sense of its distinctness, its uniqueness, its individuality comes next with the single word-stanza A. The mind begins to categorize this visual phenomenon with once upon a time, trying to decide what the object was called before it became this fascinating visual experience. Finally the mind succeeds in labelling what the phenomenon used to be--A . . . newspaper--and the poem ends. The implication is that when the classification faculties succeed in breaking in on a beautiful experience, the experience ends.

In its concentration on the external, concrete, physical object (the newspaper), in its focus on a single experience with a single object, in its tightly controlled language, and in the presentation of "an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time" which it presents for us, the poem is certainly one of the finest poems in the Imagist tradition.

A final reading of the poem links it to Maslow's psychological insights. Maslow tells us that in a peak experience our "perceptual experience may be organized around the object as a centering point rather than being based upon the ego" (TPB, 79). Cummings' poem is

centered around the newspaper. Cummings describes the newspaper as if it had an "independent reality of its own, and was not dependent" for its existence "on the beholder" (TPB, 79). Cummings recreates in the first three stanzas of the poem his state of cognition in which he sees an object "in its own Being, rather than as something to be used or something to be afraid of, or to be reacted to in some other human way" (TPB, 76). The object is seen as having certain individual characteristics: it is in sunlight, it is over and overing, and it is uniquely A. These aspects of the object are separate from any human use for the object. Then in the second half of the poem we see the sonnet-like "turning" as the human uses are recognized and the object is classified into a generalized once upon a time newspaper. The second part of the poem portrays the "more usual kind of perception which is so frequently anxiety-based" (TPB, 77). This type of perception simply classifies objects "into useful or not useful, dangerous or not dangerous." This classification can be accomplished in one quick viewing. "Need-to-perceive then disappears, and thereafter the object or person, now that it has been catalogued is simply no longer perceived" (TPB, 77). After classification the poem ends. Only a self-actualizing poet or someone perceiving the newspaper in the midst of a peak experience would

bother to meticulously re-create his perceptual process and his experience of in sunlight over and overing A once upon a time newspaper.

Looking at cummings' work we find that he often used all three of Pound's rules for writing Imagist poetry: "direct treatment of the 'thing' whether subjective or objective"; "to use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation"; as well as composing according to oral rhythms. His primary artistic principle was that of artistic selection, ensuring that only the best words were used and only in the very best sequence; cummings called this principle "intensity." In The Shores of Light Edmund Wilson notes the tendency of young artists (like cummings) to try to create "something in which every word, every cadence, every detail, should perform a definite function in producing an intense effect. . . . Ezra Pound and the Imagists, to be sure, had a good deal to do with this" (p. 15).[15]

By 1917 the Imagist movement was "no longer a movement" according to William Pratt. In his "Introduction" to Modern Poetry in Miniature: The Imagist Poem, Pratt lists cummings as among the poets who learned from Imagist principles without actually allying themselves in the Imagist doctrinal camp:

> Younger poets like e. e. cummings and Archibald MacLeish would make new poems of the Imagist type, but without forming any association or publishing

> further rules. . . . Older poets like Pound, who had already formed their weapons in the Imagist fire, would use them to fight bigger wars than the strict Imagist poem permitted.
>
> (Pratt, 23)[16]

As writers outside the small group of original Imagistes began using and changing the 1913-1917 principles of Imagism, the purity of the movement was absorbed into a multitude of divergent, individualized styles. Cummings used Imagist techniques throughout his career, but used them selectively. He used traditional forms, free forms, dramatic monologues or pure prose poems depending on the specific content he was trying to express. In allowing the form to grow naturally out of the content of each poem, cummings was an active participant in the tradition of Organic Form.

CHAPTER VI--NOTES

[1]Charles W. Bernardin, "John Dos Passos' Harvard Years," New England Quarterly, 27 (March 1954), 20.

[2]George Wickes, Americans in Paris, 1903-1939 (New York: Doubleday, Paris Review Editions, 1969), p. 109. F. W. Dupee and George Stade have also traced the relationship between Pound and cummings as revealed in cummings' letters: "When they first met, Pound was 36 and cummings 26. Pound had published his first volume in 1908 and had long been the leading poet of the (then) younger generation. Cummings had been introduced to Pound's poetry by S. Foster Damon while cummings and Damon were Harvard undergraduates. . . . Pound's example contributed greatly to the younger poet's transformation from a belated Romantic into an extreme Modernist." Although George Wickes, Charles Norman and F. W. Dupee have documented the close personal association and friendship between cummings and Imagist poets like Ezra Pound, Marianne Moore and Amy Lowell, none of these critics has examined the relationship of cummings' techniques to Imagist theory and practice.

[3]Ezra Pound and Marcella Span, eds., Confucious to Cummings: An Anthology of Poetry (New York: New Directions, 1954, 1964).

[4]Ezra Pound, "Language," Poetry, 1, No. 6 (March 1913), rpt. in Literary Essays of Ezra Pound (New York: New Directions, 1918, 1920, 1935), 1968 paperback ed., p. 4.

[5]Ibid., p. 7.

[6]Ezra Pound, "A Retrospect," Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, op. cit., p. 7.

[7]Poetry, 1, No. 6. Hereafter, all quotations from the Literary Essays of Ezra Pound will be designated "Essays" in the text, followed by the page reference.

[8]F. M. Ford, "On Impressionism," Poetry and Drama, 2, No. 2 (June 1914), 175.

[9]John Dos Passos, The Best Times, quoted by Dupee and Stade in their introduction to cummings' Selected Letters, op. cit., p. xviii.

[10]Malcolm Cowley, "One Man Alone," A Second Flowering, op. cit., 97.

[11]See Linda W. Wagner, The Poems of William Carlos Williams: A Critical Study (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1964) and The Prose of William Carlos Williams (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1970).

[12]WCW, "Lower Case Cummings," Harvard Wake, No. 5 (Spring 1946). Hereafter referenced in the text as "Wake," followed by the page number.

[13]Ezra Pound, "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste," Poetry, 1, No. 6 (March 1913), 199. Imagist theory is based on a conception of what an "image" is and how images function in literature. Norman Friedman, in The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, has defined "an image" as "the reproduction in the mind of a sensation produced by physical perception." In literary usage the term refers to "images produced in the mind by language, whose words and statements may refer either to experiences which could produce physical perceptions were the reader actually to have those experiences, or to the sense impressions themselves. Imagery, whatever its sensory qualities may be, may function either literally, figuratively, symbolically, or in some combination."

Psychologists have identified seven categories of mental images: (1) visual (sight, which can be further subdivided for brightness, clarity, color and motion); (2) auditory (hearing); (3) olfactory (smell); (4) guatatory (taste); (5) tactile (touch, which can be further subdivided for heat, cold, and texture); (6) organic (awareness of heartbeat, pulse, breathing and digestion); (7) kinesthetic (awareness of muscle tension and movement).

Friedman has also described "what imagery does in a poem": "imagery has come to be regarded as a special

poetic device. Neither its presence nor the use of one kind of imagery or another makes a good poem; the poet needs more than a unified sensibility to compose a poem--he needs, in addition, certain constructive powers." Imagery "must be part of a larger whole and cannot in and of itself constitute a whole" but "must be unified with all the other elements of a poem (such as rhyme and meter; stylistic, rhetorical, and grammatical schemes; patterns of sequence and order; the devices of point of view; the methods of amplification and condensation; the methods of selection and omission; aspects of thought and character and action)." Recognizing "economy" or compression as "a fundamental artistic principle," Friedman recognizes "that usually literal imagery is converted into a pseudo-subject, becoming the symbol of something else as a result of the speaker's reflective and meditative activity."

[14]Ibid., pp. 200-01.

[15]Edmund Wilson, The Shores of Light, op. cit., p. 15.

[16]William Pratt, "Introduction," Modern Poetry in Miniature, The Imagist Poem (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1963), p. 23.

CHAPTER VII

CUMMINGS' AESTHETIC THEORY AND PRACTICE: ELEMENTS GROWING OUT OF THE ORGANIC FORM TRADITION

The Imagist concept that a poem should be designed to express the poet's feeling (rather than modifying a psychic experience so as to fit into a pre-existing literary form) stems from the older tradition of Organic Form. G. N. Giordano Orsini has traced the origins of Organic Form through Emerson, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley to the writings of Plato and Aristotle. In "The Organic Concepts in Aesthetics" Orsini defines the modern concept of Organic Form as insisting on the presence of four elements in each poem: (1) each "aesthetic whole" is individual and unique; (2) the "aesthetic whole" is greater than the sum of its individual parts; (3) every part is necessary to the effect of the whole, and there are no unnecessary elements included; (4) all the parts are interrelated with one another and are congruent with the total effect of the "aesthetic whole."[1]

Many of the poets cummings admired held views which correlate either implicitly or explicitly with the principles of organic form. Keats advised Shelley to "load every rift with ore"; cummings quoted Keats' odes and Shelley's Prometheus Unbound in his nonlectures as poems which influenced him greatly when he was a young poet. Coleridge said that a poem proposes to itself "such delight from the whole, as is compatible with a distinct gratification of each component part."[2] In his criticism of Shakespeare, Coleridge added that poetry permits "a pleasure from the whole consistent with a consciousness of pleasure from the component parts" and that it communicates "from each part the greatest sum of pleasure compatible with the largest sum of pleasure of the whole."[3] Because cummings was a student of the romantic poets who quoted Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" in his nonlectures as well as being an admirer of Shakespeare's work, we may assume that he was familiar with Coleridge's thoughts on organic form. Coleridge derived from Plato the idea that "internality, or self-organization, is one of the characters of the poetic organism."[4]

In his article "Organic Form: The Ancient Roots of a Modern Idea," Orsini analyzes the Platonic dialogues to show that Plato originated the concept. In the Phaedrus dialogue, Plato asserts that "the subject of

a composition should determine its divisions and arrangement; the subject as conceived by the mind of the author, in its particularity, not as an abstract scheme."[5]

In his appreciative review of the work of sculptor Gaston Lachaise (The Dial, June 1920) cummings expressed a parallel concept, that the form of a work of art should be determined largely by the feeling the artist wished to express. Cummings worked in words (and paints) as Lachaise worked in stone, skillfully creating a linguistic sculpture which seemed best suited to expressing the feeling he wanted to express, "actualizing the original conception of its creator" (Misc., 23). When asked by "Mr. Public" in the foreward to Him "But surely you know what you're making," cummings replies "Beg pardon, Mr. Public; I surely make what I'm knowing" (i6n, 64). In cummings' aesthetic essence precedes existence; art attempts to express the artist's feelings in the most appropriate form, a form growing out of the experience being communicated.

In Chapter 5 of The Enormous Room, cummings explains that the form of that novel has been designed to express personal feelings--here, those he felt as a prisoner facing an indefinite sentence. As in real life, the prison in the novel serves as a grey, uniform background (or "box") against which the essence of each character's personality shows clearly:

> [The enormous room in which the prisoners are held] is like 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. I make this point clear for the benefit of any of my readers who have not had the distinguished privilege of being in jail. To those who have been in jail my meaning is at once apparent; particularly if they have had the enlightening experience of being in jail with a perfectly indefinite sentence. How, in such a case, could events occur and be remembered otherwise than as individualities distinct from time itself?
>
> (ER, 113)

Characters are described or shown in action as individuals pulled out of their cultural and social context. All of the characters are faced with the same circumstances, the same environment, so their essential generosity or essential selfishness, their individuality or their conforming natures--all their personal qualities--stand clearly revealed. Cummings simulates this environment in the episodic form of the novel, each episode indistinctly related in time, allowing one or two characters to demonstrate his values.

Since each person's every action is "public" to the audience of his fellow prisoners, the authentic persons are quickly separated from the nonpersons; the helpful, loving persons are soon differentiated from the selfish, spiteful characters. This fact of prison life is expressed in cummings' novel by the technique of caricature. Cummings selected the most significant

characteristics of each of his fellow prisoners and presented them in vignettes through which the characters demonstrated those characteristics vividly.

As he further makes clear in The Enormous Room, in prison cummings was completely cut off from the past and felt that the future was totally uncertain (due to his being given an indefinite sentence); thus he felt that each moment had to be lived to the fullest. Living each moment to the fullest, a feeling that also comes in the midst of Maslow's peak experiences, produces a sense of "timelessness":

> 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 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.

In the novel cummings created the effect of "timelessness" by presenting scenes not in strict chronological or "diary" order, but in a collage pattern, juxtaposing key scenes in which characters reveal important aspects of their personalities:

> It is for this reason that I do not purpose to inflict upon the reader a diary of my alternative aliveness and nonexistence at La Ferte--. . . because

> the diary or time method is a technique which cannot possibly do justice to timelessness. I shall (on the contrary)lift from their grey box at random certain(to me)more or less astonishing toys . . . 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.
>
> (ER, 113)

The method of these sections of the novel occurs regularly throughout cummings' poems.[6]

Many poems present brief sketches of individual personalities who impressed him (either positively or negatively). The now-famous "Buffalo Bill's/defunct" is an early example, in which the form is designed to express cummings' impression of the wild-west show performer in action:

```
1 Buffalo Bill's
  defunct
3         who used to
          ride a watersmooth-silver
                                  stallion
6 and break onetwothreefourfive pigeonsjustlikethat
                                                  Jesus
8 he was a handsome man
                        and what i want to know is
10 how do you like your blueeyed boy
   Mister Death
```

(CP, 60; first published in The Dial, 68 [Jan. 1920] 23)

The enjambement of the words "onetwothreefourfive" asks the reader to rush through them, the speed of reading acting as a visual and oral equivalent to the speed with which Buffalo Bill would shoot the "pigeonsjustlikethat."

The two segments just quoted make up the longest line of the poem, representing the attention riveted on the man as he performs his impressive stunts. The short, broken lines preceding that climax may signify the casual glances given the performer as he rides his "stallion" around the ring prior to the shooting exhibition. The short, choppy line segments in lines 1-5 also suggest the impression of a horse galloping across the page; the sibilants and the "el" consonance in "silver stallion" emphasize the "smooth"ness of the horseback riding being celebrated.

The single-word sixth line "Jesus" accurately depicts the gasp of appreciation elicited from the audience by the flawless shooting performance. "Jesus" is dropped slightly at the end of the shooting line, indicating that a slight pause occurs between the shooting and the gasp of awe from the audience. It is ambivalent because it can also go with the next line as easily--"Jesus, he was a," and in that context conveys the poet's appreciation of the "handsome man."

The pace of the poem is that of conversational speech in lines 1-5, speeding up rapidly in the sixth line, then returning to the beginning tempo in lines 8-11: its shape suggests its movement. The rhythms and tempos of cummings' poems are derived from the subject matter of the poem, from the oral rhythms of the poet and from the

internal necessities each poem develops as it grows in the poet's mind. In her essay "Some Notes on Organic Form," Denise Levertov has described the way a poet discovers the individual rhythm of each poem: "A manifestation of form sense is the sense the poet's ear has of some rhythmic norm peculiar to a particular poem, from which the individual lines depart and to which they return." Levertov goes on to list a group of writers who have mentioned a similar "rhythmic norm" in their poems: "I heard Henry Cowell tell that the drone in Indian music is known as the horizon note." She notes that Ralph Waldo Emerson referred to a similar element when he said "the health of the eye demands a horizon." Levertov considers a "sense of the beat or pulse underlying the whole" to be "the horizon note of the poem." This tempo or rhythm "interacts with the nuances or forces of feeling which determine emphasis on one word or another, and decides to a great extent what belongs to a given line."[7]

The variable-length lines of cummings' "Buffalo Bill" poem suggest that cummings was prompted by similar concerns. The rapid movement of the shooting line correlates with the rapid shooting being described. The one-word line "Jesus" accurately depicts a single-word gasp of surprise. In "Buffalo Bill" and in many other cummings poems the line arrangement creates a rhythm or

"pulse" which (in Levertov's words) "relates the needs of the feeling-force which dominates the cadence to the needs of the surrounding parts and so to the whole" (PW, 12).

Cummings' observation about his method of writing The Enormous Room reveals a "form sense" similar to the one Levertov describes. In a letter written 25 November 1919 cummings tells his mother that he has been "making every paragraph" of The Enormous Room "a thing which seemed good to me,in the same way that a 'crazy quilt' is made so that every inch of it seems good to me. And so that if you put your hand over one inch,the other inches lose in force. And so that in every inch there is a binding rhythm which integrates the whole thing and makes it a single moving ThingInItself" (Letters, 64). Later in this letter he adds "It is not a question of cold facts per se. That is merely a fabric:to put this fabric at the mercy of an Everlasting Rhythm is somethingelse" (Letters, 64). This "binding rhythm" correlates with Ezra Pound's "absolute rhythm" which every piece of writing needs to have, "a rhythm which corresponds exactly to the emotion or shade of emotion to be expressed."[8] Different from the iambic pentameter of a traditional sonnet, this rhythm is more a matter of tempo, like the tempo markings in a musical composition. In the nursery rhyme "Hickory dickory dock, the mouse

ran up the clock" the tempo is rapid-paced with many hard consonants and short vowel sounds which invite the reader to race through the lines. In contrast, the prayer "Now I lay me down to sleep/I pray the Lord my soul to keep/if I should die before I wake/I pray the Lord my soul to take" is constructed of long, open vowel sounds and has a distinctively meditative tone.

As examples of variation in tempo in cummings' work, one could turn to any number of early or middle period poems; however, to demonstrate that cummings continued to listen to his own lines carefully throughout his career, I will use poem #44 from 73 poems which has the added advantage of being based on the "now I lay me down" prayer discussed above:

> Now i lay(with everywhere around)
> me(the great dim deep sound
> of rain;and of always and of nowhere)and
>
> what a gently welcoming darkestness--
>
> now i lay me down(in a most steep
> more than music)feeling that sunlight is
> (life and day are)only loaned:whereas
> night is given(night and death and the rain
>
> are given;and given is how beautifully snow)
>
> now i lay me down to dream of(nothing
> i or any somebody or you
> can begin to begin to imagine)
>
> something which nobody may keep.
> now i lay me down to dream of Spring

Cummings here takes a children's prayer and develops it into an intense meditation which builds to a convincing and triumphant "yes" attitude toward death (and spiritual living). There is no prayerful begging for a Father-figure "Lord" to save the supplicant's "soul" from some unstated horror. Instead we are given cummings' deep feeling that dying is yet another form of self-transcendence, a movement through "dream" to rebirth in "Spring."

The fourteen lines suggest a sonnet (cummings variety), with the stanza division an unusual 3-1-4-1-3, plus a concluding couplet. Visual symmetry suggests the peacefulness of the feeling being expressed, and the tempo is not that of a dirge but that of one evoking the Lord's Prayer.

Every line of the poem is focused on a celebration of the only two capitalized word-symbols in the poem, "Now" and "Spring." The second line tolls forth the four accented syllables in succession like a celebrating liberty-bell: "great dim deep sound" of a gentle, natural, cyclical occurrence "of rain." The four accented words juxtaposed in sequence and the alliteration of "d" slow the reading of this line to establish the stately, meditative tempo of the poem. Long, open vowel sounds abound throughout the poem and slow the reading pace: Now, around, me, deep, sound, rain,

nowhere, are examples in the first stanza. Internal rhyme of open vowel sounds establishes a soothing sense of peacefulness (deep, steep, keep; around, sound); the rhymes are supplemented by assonance (me, dream; down, now); and many words are repeated from stanza to stanza to give a sense of unity to the poem (Now i lay in lines 1, 5, 10, 14; me in lines 2, 5, 10, 14; given three times in lines 8, 9; night and rain are also repeated).

The form is expressive of the meaning, all parts integrated, with an "Everlasting Rhythm" moving the sonnet toward the transcendent climax in the final line: "now i lay me down to dream of Spring." The whole fabric of the poem has built toward this line so well that the climax seems absolutely "right" and cathartic; death has been successfully transformed into "Spring" through concentration on the particular, natural, cyclical elements of "Now."

Cummings was introduced to Aristotle at Harvard, so was probably familiar with the important element Aristotle added to Plato's original statement about organic form: that "the subject of a composition should determine its divisions and arrangement."[9] In his Poetics Aristotle added the idea that "any alteration of the parts involves an alteration of the whole."[10] Aristotle's idea was echoed by Henry James in his "Art of Fiction" essay, and cummings' knowledge of the work

of Henry James came from an even earlier introduction. Since William James, Henry's philosopher-brother, introduced Estlin's parents and remained as the next door neighbor in Cambridge all the time Estlin was growing up, and because Henry James was one of the writers appreciatively discussed by the Harvard Monthly staff, cummings would very likely have been familiar with the novelist's theory of organic form: "a novel is a living thing, all one and continuous, like any other organism, and in proportion as it lives will be found, I think, that in each of the parts there is something of each of the other parts."[11] In The Enormous Room cummings adheres to the principle of selecting only the most important details (an Imagist technique as well) so as to make each part of the novel contribute to the overall effect. In a letter to his mother written while he was writing the novel, he explains his methodology:

> As for the Story Of The Great War Seen From The Windows Of Nowhere,please don't expect a speedy conclusion or rather completion of this narrative [The Enormous Room]; for this reason:that in consenting(it almost amounted to that)to "do the thing up" I did not forego my prerogative as artist,to wit--the making of every paragraph a thing which seemed good to me,in the same way that a "crazy-quilt" is made so that every inch of it seems good to me. And so that if you put your hand over one inch,the other inches lose in force.
>
> (Letters, 63-64)

As in Aristotle's theory, cummings here asserts that he is selecting only those details essential to creating a unified whole, an organic unity built so that "any alteration of the parts involves an alteration of the whole." Cummings' strict insistence throughout his life that each piece of writing be printed exactly as is, with no deletions or substitutions, demonstrates that he held this view of his work throughout his career.

In a 1935 letter to his Aunt Jane, cummings described the difficulty of translating his typed poems into the variable spacing of the printing linotype machine. Whereas a typewriter space is a fixed distance on the page regardless of which letter is typed, the linotype machine uses less space for an "i" character than it does for an "m" character. This was a visual disaster for a poet who had carefully selected his words so as to present a visual impression of the subject of his poem; suddenly the visual picture was distorted automatically (without the poet's consent):

> . . . am fighting--forwarded & backed by a corps of loyal assistants--to retranslate 71 poems out of typewriter language into linotype-ese. This is not so easy as one might think;consider, if you dare, that whenever a typewriter "key" is "struck" the "carriage" moves a given amount and the "line" advances recklessly or individualistically. Then consider that the linotype (being a gadget)inflicts a preestablished whole--the type "line"--on every smallest part; so that words,letters,punctuation marks &(most important of all)spaces-between-these various elements,awake to find themselves rearranged automatically"for the benefit of the community" as

> politicians say. Oddly,this malforming or standardizing process is technically called "justify"ing: thanks to it,the righthand margin of any printed page which has been "set" on a linotype has a neat artificial even-ness--which the socalled world-at-socalled-large considers indispensable forsooth.
>
> (Letters, 141)

Cummings goes on to describe himself as "the army of the Organic" attempting to march against "Mechanism":

> . . . with 10,000th-of-an-inch(or whatever)"hair-spaces";you should watch me arguing for two and a half hours(or some such)over the distance between the last letter of a certain word and the comma apparently following that letter but actually preceding the entire next word. . . .
>
> (Letters, 141)

Such a concern for the interrelation of all parts to the effect of the whole, including the spacing between letters and between marks of punctuation, echoes Aristotle's concern that "any alteration of the parts involves an alteration of the whole" and places cummings among the proponents of organic form.

Cummings added a visual aspect to the traditional concept of organic form. In a letter to Charles A. Pearce, editor at Harcourt, Brace at the end of May, 1937, the poet explained: "Concerning format: . . . what i care infinitely is that each poempicture should remain intact. Why? Possibly because, with a few exceptions, my poems are essentially pictures. And (in my naif way) i believe that you're one of the few

people in America who can work out such a combination of typesize and papersize as will allow every picture to breathe its particular life (no "runover" lines) on its own private world."[12]

Poem #58, in 73 poems, for example, presents a linguistic drawing of a chipmunk asleep on a boulder. Since the experience was for cummings primarily a visual one of seeing the chipmunk lying still, sound asleep, making no sound, he has broken most of the words into unpronouncable but visually symmetrical letterclusters:

```
& sun &

sil
e
nce
e

very

w
here
noon
e

is exc

ep
t
on
t

his

b
oul
der
a

drea(chipmunk)ming
```

The few pronouncable words (which are often words discovered inside other words) present the chipmunk's consciousness and the "lesson" which has been derived from the scene by the poet who pauses to meditate at the scene of the sleeping animal. The entire poem, unified by the reader who perceives the words in their traditional order, is: "and sun and silence everywhere no-one is except on this boulder a dreaming chipmunk."

The pronouncable syllables singled out by the poet's symmetrical, visual arrangement of letters highlight the immediacy of the experience, the entire existence of the animal (and the admiring poet) in the present moment of sensation: "sun, very here, noon, IS, on, his, chipmunk." The poem is a very simple statement, yet it yields rich rewards to the careful reader and re-reader of its lines. Silence, stillness, sleep and dreaming are found in the context of cummings' other poems to be aspects of or analogous to "death." Thus one implication of the poem is that living, sleeping, dreaming and dying are all pleasant life-processes--like taking a noon siesta on a boulder in the middle of a still forest clearing.

If we accept the poet's invitation and read from the beginning of the poem to its end, then begin again (the opening "&" implies a preceding statement), we find that there are at least three readings of the poem, each reading adding to the total effect (the organic whole).

Once we have noticed the first impression of the scene with the poet ("sun, silence, noon," the chipmunk in the midst of everything), next we put all the separate parts of words together into their normal word order, and finally we may notice the symmetry of the lines and begin to ask why the poet decided to put the "chipmunk" in parentheses. Several possible answers occur immediately, although the strategy of the poem is to allow each reader to meditate the question for him/herself. Once we notice that all of the things we normally classify as "objective reality" are grouped outside the parentheses in the same category as "dreaming," and that only the individual animal "chipmunk" is enclosed in parentheses, we are launched into philosophical speculation. What is cummings' view of the logical distinction between dream and objective reality? Is the word "chipmunk" being used to represent an <u>individual</u>, and therefore someone alive and unclassifiable? Or is the word being used to symbolize what "mostpeople" do when they see an individual, that is, immediately classify him with some group designation? In most cummings poems the answer to such questions is "all of the above," and so it is with this poem.

In the 1927 introduction to <u>Him</u> the "Author" answers the harassing question of the "Public" (Mostpeople) with a statement that helps us to understand the "chipmunk" poem:

Author: And so far as you're concerned "life" is a verb of two voices--active, to do,and passive,to dream. Others believe doing to be only a kind of dreaming. Still others have discovered(in a mirror surrounded with mirrors),something harder than silence but softer than falling; the third voice of "life",which believes itself and which cannot mean because it is.

Public: Bravo, but are such persons good for anything in particular?

Author: They are good for nothing but walking upright in the cordial revelation of the fatal reflexive.

The chipmunk is doing two things which our Author respects above all other things: he is being nobody-but-himself, lying on his boulder enjoying the noon sun; and he is "dreaming" (which includes the central word "am," as we know from other cummings poems). Living in "the cordial revelation of the fatal reflexive" means that an author or a poet must be self-aware, aware of everything going on inside and outside of himself at every instant of "now"-time, and must have his/her imagination engaged at all times. To mostpeople, imagination equals "dreaming"; but to cummings an active/meditative "dreaming" is the essence of "am" (being). The person who thinks a chipmunk is a ridiculous subject for a poem probably overlooks a vast number of the other life experiences which will provide food for meditation if attended to with an intense, appreciative "yes" attitude.

Thus every aspect of the poem contributes to its effectiveness, including the apparently mundane rodent who occupies stage center. The poem expresses cummings' life view, jostles the reader's preconception of what subjects are "fit" for poetry and serves as a guide for meditative processes. Thus the form of the "chipmunk" poem may be seen to have evolved directly from the experience of meditation which the poem celebrates.

Cummings insisted upon leaving the process of finding the appropriate form in the material as a "mystery," and hence incapable of rational explanation. However, other authors who also see themselves as participants in the organic form tradition have attempted to describe the process by which one discovers significant form within the subject of the poem. Denise Levertov, a contemporary exponent of organic form, has provided a critical vocabulary through which we can better understand cummings' method of composition.

Levertov's essay "Some Notes On Organic Form" stands as the most thorough discussion by a practicing poet of the creative process of organic formulation presently available. She defines Gerard Manley Hopkins' term Inscape as referring to "intrinsic form," that is "the pattern of essential characteristics both in single objects and (what is more interesting) in objects in a state of relation to each other." Hopkins used another

term, "instress," to "denote the experiencing of the perception of inscape. . . ." Levertov continues, "in thinking of the process of poetry as I know it, I extend the use of these words, which he seems to have used mainly in reference to sensory phenomena, to include intellectual and emotional experience as well; I would speak of the inscape of an experience (which might be composed of any and all of these elements, including the sensory) or of the inscape of a sequence or constellation of experiences" (PW, 7).

Levertov's "sequence or constellation of experiences" achieves the same "sense of sudden liberation" the Imagist poets attempted to achieve through an "intellectual and emotional complex" of images. Cummings attempted to achieve a similar effect with his aesthetic of "intensity"; cummings described the effect he was trying to achieve as "the intelligence functioning at intuitional velocity" (Misc., 17), and elsewhere as "involving" the reader "in a new and fundamental kinesis" in which the reader becomes a "protagonist of the child's vision." The complex is both intellectual and emotional for cummings, with emphasis on liberating emotion from mental restrictions, and the goal to be achieved in writing a poem is "finally to liberate the actual crisp organic squirm--the IS" (Misc., 19). We need Levertov's essay to explain the process because cummings is

deliberately ambiguous about it, leaving it in the realm of "mystery." Cummings characteristically distrusts rational processes, yet he realizes too that comprehension of language begins as a rational process. He asks that we "allow our intelligences to be digested"; a good poem requires of us "an intelligent process of the highest order, namely the negation on our part, by thinking, of thinking." Only then are we free to fully comprehend the poem's "significance" as an intellectual and emotional complex (Misc., 18).

Levertov continues in her essay to state that "a partial definition . . . of organic poetry might be that it is a method of apperception, i.e., of recognizing what we perceive, and is based on an intuition of an order, a form beyond forms, in which forms partake, and of which man's creative works are analogies, resemblances, natural allegories. Such poetry is exploratory" (PW, 7). We have seen the exploratory nature of cummings' poetry,[13] and in the final letter in Selected Letters cummings gives a reason quite similar to Levertov's for the exploratory nature of his poetic forms:

> Here's hoping that what you [Matti Meged, Israeli writer and teacher] call "an independent world, consistent of spiritual elements only and resistable to all destruction" may remain the undersigned's solace,challenge,home,unknownness,& shieldspearsword while his earthly life lasts! That such a world needs no excuse for itself is(of course)always being rediscovered:less than a year ago,Marion

> brought a "remaindered"(i.e. financially worthless) volume wherein I met these wonderful words, translated from the Greek of Plato's Republic:
>
> "it"(the Ideal State)"is laid up in heaven as a pattern for him who wills to see,and seeing to found a city in himself. Whether it exists anywhere or ever will exist is no matter. His conduct will be an expression of the laws of that city alone, and of no other."

Both cummings and Levertov have "an intuition of order" which seems to be similar to Plato's "Ideal State." Cummings' poems, like T. S. Eliot's "objective correlative," are "analogies" of the "form beyond forms, in which forms partake" [in Levertov's words].

In that final letter cummings goes on to explain the attention which he, the Imagists and the proponents of Organic Form all devote to the image, the specific object as it appears in the external world:

> What can mere "use" say to the truth underlying those noble words--the truth which you yourself call "man's own and true domain"? How infinitely morethanright you are in feeling that instead of "detach"ing you from life, "it teaches me to attend only to this domain,where the word 'life' is still meaningful, intense, has a chance of growth and victory"!
>
> --bravissimo !
>
> (Letters, 275-76)

The insistence that Plato's natural "pattern" is present in the things of this world and is perceivable by the poet who seeks to discover that pattern in natural objects and events may also be found in the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Emerson is credited as being the first American theoretician and practitioner of organic form. His Journals and essays Nature and The Poet present a theory of poetic inspiration similar to that proposed by Plato, Aristotle and the British Romantics, and anticipatory of cummings and Levertov. Emerson began his career as a Unitarian minister; Edward Cummings, Sr. was also a Unitarian minister. Cummings discussed Emerson in letters to his father and quoted Emerson in EIMI, the diary of his trip to Russia. Cummings' concept of "Individuality" may be based partly on Emerson's concept of "Self Reliance." The young cummings would have encountered Emerson's ideas wherever he turned as he grew up in Cambridge, and many of those ideas seem to have been absorbed into cummings' life view. For example, in his Journals Emerson presents this theory of organic form:

> The poet . . . resigns himself to his mood, and that thought which agitated him is expressed, but . . . in a manner totally new. The expression is organic, or the new type which things themselves take when liberated. As, in the sun, objects paint their images on the retina of the eye, so they, sharing the aspiration of the whole universe, tend to paint a far more delicate copy of their essence in his mind. Like the metamorphosis of things into higher organic forms is their change into melodies. Over everything stands its . . . soul, and, as the form of the thing is reflected by the eye, so the soul of the thing is reflected by a melody. The sea, the mountainridge, Niagara, and every flowerbed, pre-exist, or super-exist, in pre-cantations, which sail like odors in the air, and when any man goes by with an ear sufficiently

> fine, he overhears them and endeavors to write down the notes without diluting or depraving them. . . . A rhyme in one of our sonnets should not be less pleasing than the iterated nodes of a seashell, or the resembling difference of a group of flowers. . . . A tempest is a rough ode, without falsehood or rant; a summer, with its harvest sown, reaped and storied, is an epic song, subordinating how many admirably executed parts. Why should not the symmetry and truth that modulate these, glide into our spirits, and we participate the invention of nature?
>
> The insight, which expresses itself by what is called Imagination, is a very high sort of seeing, which does not come by study, but by the intellect being where and what it sees; by sharing the path or circuit of things through forms, and so making them trans-lucid to others. . . . The condition of true naming, on the poet's part, is his resigning himself to the divine aura which breathes through forms, and accompanying that.
>
> If the imagination intoxicates the poet, it is not inactive in other men. The metamorphosis excites in the beholder an emotion of joy. The use of symbols has a certain power of emancipation and exhilaration for all men. We seem to be touched by a wand which makes us dance and run about happily, like children. We are like persons who come out of a cave or cellar into the open air. This is the effect on us of tropes, fables, oracles and all poetic forms.[14]

Emerson stresses the concept of the poem coming spontaneously from the poet's perception of his experience. He was traditional in feeling that every experience had its proper equivalent expression in a traditional form or genre; but he insists that the experience suggest its proper form. Cummings often felt that his experiences could best be expressed in more visual than musical forms of word composition, and created new "forms" to more perfectly express his perceptions of the world and his feelings about those perceptions. Cummings also was more interested in the unique mode of expression as it

conveyed a very individual and unique perception. He wrote many sonnets and ballads, using traditional forms when they seemed to express his perception most perfectly; but he always took his cue directly from the experience itself; if it were a visual experience, he often used simply paint and canvas to express its artistic equivalent; if it were both visual and aural he used poetry which had a visual element as well as a vocal quality; if the experience were primarily an aural or vocal one he used one of the traditional lyric forms to express it, but adapted the form to more perfectly express his perception of the experience.

Cummings knew the traditional forms well and wrote fine poems in those forms whenever the experience dictated their use. An example of the traditional cummings is this sonnet from XAIPE, poem number 65 mentioned earlier in a different connection:

> i thank You God for most this amazing
> day:for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
> and a blue true dream of sky;and for everything
> which is natural which is infinite which is yes
>
> (i who have died am alive again today,
> and this is the sun's birthday; this is the birth
> day of life and of love and wings: and of the gay
> great happening illimitably earth)
>
> how should tasting touching hearing seeing
> breathing any--lifted from the no
> of all nothing--human merely being
> doubt unimaginable You?
>
> (now the ears of my ears awake and
> now the eyes of my eyes are opened)

The closing couplet echoes the following lines from Walt Whitman's "Preface" to the 1855 edition of Leaves of Grass:

> The fruition of beauty is no chance hit or miss . . . it is inevitable as life . . . it is exact and plumb as gravitation. From the eyesight proceeds another eyesight and from the hearing proceeds another hearing and from the voice proceeds another voice eternally curious of the harmony of things with man.
>
> (Whitman, 142)

Cummings exhibits the love of life and the fascination with each experience which marks Emerson's, Whitman's and Levertov's primary requirements for the poetic sensibility. In the sonnet here quoted cummings even expresses a sense of "order" in that man and nature are seen as a unified whole. The poet is able to find in nature an "objective correlative" for his feelings of joy in living; cummings finds beauty, whether in nature or in art, to be as "inevitable as life" in exactly the same way Whitman describes his own sense of beauty, as a miraculous awakening of the senses and the poetic sensibility to new, exciting possibilities, combinations and perceptions of experience.

Cummings' sonnet further acts to liberate the traditional sonnet form from the kind of rigidity which William Carlos Williams has criticized in his essay "Of Medicine and Poetry":

> . . . a rich opportunity for development lies before us at this point. [Through experimentation with forms we can find] ways of managing the language, new ways. Primarily it means to me opportunity to expand the structure, the basis, the actual making of the poem. . . .
>
> It is . . . in the mouths of the living, that the language is changing and giving new means for expanded possibilities in literary expression and, I add, basic structure--the most important of all.
>
> . . . But before I extol too much and advocate the experimental method, let me emphasize that, like God's creation, the objective is not experimentation but man. In our case, poems!
>
> . . . Do you not see now why I have been inveighing against the sonnet all these years? And why it has been so violently defended? Because it is a form which does not admit of the slightest structural change in its composition.
>
> (Williams, 253)[15]

Cummings uses a modified sonnet form when the experience seems to call for a sonnet; but he alters its traditional rigidities to conform to the particular experience he is attempting to convey to his readers. A kind of visual rhyme is being used in the second and fourth lines--the final two letters of the line are identical, although the sounds are slant rhymes at best (trees/yes). The tenth and twelfth lines make no attempt to rhyme, even visually (no/You). The final couplet uses only two consonant sounds to approximate a form of rhyme, the n and d sounds in "and"/"opened." As cummings reads this poem on his record the first stanza has five stresses per line, unevenly distributed so as to emphasize meaning and not rhythm. The second stanza uses four stresses per line. The third stanza consists of an uneven number of stresses

per line: 4, 4, 5, 3 respectively. The couplet contains four and five stresses in each of its lines. Rhythm and rhyme are subordinate to meaning; alliteration, consonance and assonance support the meaning; punctuation supports the meaning; everything in the poem contributes to meaning. Form and structure grow out of the experience and express it not as one of a million similar sonnet-type experiences, but as a unique perception which happens to express itself in a sonnet-like poem. Cummings had overcome the rigidities of the sonnet form without entirely throwing it out, as Williams' "inveighing" would seem to ask.

Thus cummings consistently avoids falling into the trap Levertov indicates in her lecture "Asking the Fact for the Form":

> There are many poets who do not agree that in the best poetry "the sense dictates the rhythm." Their argument is that a form, a chosen, preconceived form, is a discipline to which they must submit their otherwise formless material, and that the stricter the discipline the more the material is purged of dross. I would not deny that many good poems have been written by poets who hold this belief; but I think this is rather in spite of, than because of it.

Cummings is one of those "gifted poets" Levertov describes who,

> . . . when his sense of language is original and he is indeed inspired, that is, when the breath of his content blows through him like the wind in a tree, then poetry overcomes, overrules, the

> limitations he has imposed on it. When a poet using preordained forms, however, is not thus seized and overruled, he is more likely to distort his material than is a poet working in organic forms; he is more likely, for obvious reasons, to pad out his lines, and the exigencies of rhymes that are bound to occur at strictly prescribed intervals have led many a poet into saying a great deal that he did not mean.[16]

Levertov described in a later essay her method of writing in organic form, a method I imagine cummings might easily have used himself:

> How does one go about such poetry? I think it's like this: First, there must be an experience, a sequence or constellation of perceptions of sufficient interest, felt by the poet intensely enough to demand of him their equivalence in words: he is brought to speech. . . . The beginning of the fulfillment of this demand is to contemplate, to meditate; words which connote a state in which the heat of feeling warms the intellect. . . . The experience is not fully known until it is manifested in the poem which reveals its form. . . . Certainly the process of choosing a structure and conforming honorably to its demands is not, in my experience, comparable. The organic process, in which one doesn't know what is going to happen next, uses more of oneself, more areas of one's being are called into play. This partially answers one of the questions I have posited: why I believe this approach to poetry is of value. Because the more areas called into play in the poet, the more profound the source of image and symbol, the deeper the responses awakened in the reader. Deep calleth unto deep.
>
> . . . Form is never more than a revelation of content.[17]

Cummings' poetry demonstrates that he agreed certainly with Levertov's comment "Form is never more than a revelation of content." Without ever having made a

loud, theoretical defense of the concept, e. e. cummings was one of the finest practitioners of organic form.[18]

CHAPTER VII--NOTES

[1]G. N. G. Orsini, "The Organic Concepts in Aesthetics," Comparative Literature, 21 (Winter 1969), 5.

[2]Biographia, II, Chapter 14.

[3]T. M. Raysor, ed., "Definition of Poetry," Shakespearian Criticism, I, p. 148.

[4]William K. Wimsatt, "Organic Form: Some Questions About A Metaphor," Organic Form: The Life of An Idea, ed. G. S. Rousseau (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1972), p. 70.

[5]Plato, Phaedrus as translated by Jowett, lines 268E, 269A and C, quoted by G. N. Orsini in "The Ancient Roots of a Modern Idea," Organic Form: The Life of An Idea, ed. G. S. Rousseau (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1972), pp. 7-24. Cummings was introduced to Plato at Harvard, where he received his B. A. degree "magna cum laude" in 1915, as well as an M.A. degree in literature in 1916. In i, six nonlectures he reports receiving at Harvard a large dose of classical philosophy including Plato, "a glimpse of Homer, a more than glimpse of Aeschylus Sophocles Euripedes and Aristophanes" (i6n, 47). He was familiar with Plato's dialogues and with the Republic, as we know from his drama Anthropos: The Future of Art, which is a retelling of Plato's allegory of the cave. He quotes from Plato's Republic in his Letters, 275.

[6]Contemporary novelists have used techniques similar to cummings' to describe the existential feeling of being trapped or imprisoned in a madhouse (America), living out a life which has no definite termination date (death) and feeling that everything which goes on around them is without ultimate meaning. Barthelme's Snow White, Billy Pilgrim's time-tripping in Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse

Five and Pynchon's novels (especially The Crying of Lot 49 and V) all present a flood of experiences without cause and effect, a series of vignettes "unstuck in time." The chief difference between these contemporary novelists and cummings may be that cummings believes in the positive potential in each human being, while most contemporary novelists are overwhelmed by the potential for evil harbored in each human soul.

[7]Denise Levertov, "Some Notes on Organic Form," first published in Poetry, 106, No. 6 (September 1965), rpt. in New Directions in Prose and Poetry 20 (New York: New Directions, 1968) and in Naked Poetry, ed. Stephen Berg and Robert Mezey (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), pp. 141-50. Also reprinted in Denise Levertov's The Poet in the World (New York: New Directions, 1973), pp. 7-13. This quote appears on page 7 of Poet in the World, which will hereafter be designated in the text as "PW," followed by the page reference.

[8]Ezra Pound, "Vorticism," Fortnightly Review, 96 (September 1, 1914), 463.

[9]Orsini, "The Organic Concepts in Aesthetics," op. cit., p. 5.

[10]Orsini, "The Ancient Roots of a Modern Idea," op. cit., 16. See Aristotle's Poetics, lines 1451, A32.

[11]Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," p. 596.

[12]Letter cited by Charles Norman, MM, 197.

[13]Many of his poems are exploratory in seeking to discover and express a linguistic analogy of a perceptual process. This creative process corresponds with an element found by William K. Wimsatt in the aesthetic of virtually every proponent of organic form: "What we call the 'finished product', the poem, is a moment of spiritual activity, hypostatized, remembered, recorded, repeated. The human psyche makes the poem out of itself, or offers a remembered action of itself as the poem" (Wimsatt, 68). Nearly all of cummings' later poetry attempts to express moments "of spiritual activity," or "peak experiences" in Maslow's terms, in a linguistic framework.

[14]Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Poet," Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Stephen E. Whicher (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1957, 1960), rpt. in American Poetic Theory, ed. George Perkins (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1972), pp. 105-08.

[15]William Carlos Williams, "Of Medicine and Poetry," 253.

[16]Denise Levertov, "Asking the Fact for the Form," a lecture quoted by Linda W. Wagner in Denise Levertov (Newhaven, Conn.: College & University Press, 1967), Twayne's American Authors Series, p. 93.

[17]Denise Levertov, "Some Notes on Organic Form," PW, 8.

[18]The implications of the theory of organic form for literary critics have been summarized in the Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics. The critic, faced with a work of art which is based on principles of organic form, should be chiefly concerned with "the unity of the literary work." Since the parts of a work of organic form are designed as integrated elements of an organic whole, they must "have qualities . . . or effects which they would not have separately." Therefore "the most important excellence that can be attributed to any of the parts is to show that it is a necessary element of that whole." The Imagist principle of word selection was designed to assure that all words in the poem were absolutely necessary to the presentation; word selection is thus one method of creating an organically integrated work of art, making Imagism a set of techniques designed to create a work of art which adheres to the standards of organic form. "If all the distinguishable parts of a whole are essential and in the proper order and if the whole lacks no part necessary for its completeness, then the parts are 'organically related' and the whole has 'organic unity'!" (p. 594). According to these criteria, the cummings critic should concentrate on the overall effect of the poem first, proceeding next to a consideration of the parts and their contribution to the whole. This is, in fact, the critical method I have used, and is the critical method which arrives at the most accurate assessment of contemporary poems.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

As the previous chapters have suggested, cummings is among the poets for whom the form of the poem is derived from its subject matter, from the artist's personal mode of expression and from the artist's feeling about the subject matter of the poem. "Craft" is still important to the practitioners of Imagism, Vorticism and Organic Form, but "craft" is no longer limited to the carving of a "good sonnet" or a "perfect ode" in the traditional manner. Each of the modern movements builds on the preceding movement's aims and accomplishments. The trend is toward concreteness of sensory experience as the highest value in the poem, with technical emphasis shifting away from the obvious (rhyme, end-rhyme, simple and repetitive rhythm) toward the subtle (alliteration, assonance, consonance complex musical phrasing, the rhythm-patterns of the poet's individual speech characteristics); away from the stereotypical (traditional forms) toward the unique and innovative.

As twentieth century American society has put more and more pressure on the mass of its citizens to conform, American poets have reacted further toward the opposite pole of individuality. Cummings was one of the greatest experimenters in an age of literary experimentation--the first two decades of this century. He participated in the experiments of the Imagists and Vorticists; then used techniques he learned from every "school" plus several of his own invention to make each of his poems an "organic unity" of form and content. We have seen that cummings learned some of his techniques from the literary movements of the early twentieth century. We can now see him not only as a unique, isolated individual poet, but also as a vital participant in the shaping of contemporary poetic theories and practices.

In his Revolution of the Word: A New Gathering of American Avant Garde Poetry, Jerome Rothenberg includes cummings as "a major innovator in the use of typography, both as a notational device & as a basis for new visual forms, somewhere along the road to concrete poetry."[1] Mary Ellen Solt, in her "Introduction" to the anthology Concrete Poetry: A World View, traces the methodology of the Brazilian Noigandres group of concrete poets directly to cummings:

> The actual method of the Noigandres poets derives from the CANTOS of Ezra Pound ("ideogrammic method"); James Joyce's ULYSSES and FINNEGAN'S WAKE

> ("word-ideogram; organic interpenetration of time and space"); and the experimental poems of e. e. cummings ("atomization of words, physiognomical typography; expressionist emphasis on space").[2]

Both Solt and Rothenberg trace contemporary visual experiments in poetic construction through cummings to Pound and his Imagist/Vorticist movements. However, their discussion of the relationship of cummings to Pound and the concrete poets is brief. Rothenberg includes the well-known cummings poem "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r" in his anthology, a visual depiction of a leaping grasshopper:

```
                    r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r
                who
 a)s w(e loo)k
 upnowgath
          PPEGORHRASS
                      eringint(o-
 aThe):l
        eA
           !p:
S                                        a
             (r
 rIvInG          .gRrEaPsPhOs)
                                 to
 rea(be)rran(com)gi(e)ngly
 ,grasshopper;
```

The poet sees a grasshopper in the grass. As the poet watches the insect and the reader watches the letters on the page, the parts of the insect "up now gather" for a linguistic and actual "l eA !p" after which the legs and letters "rearrangingly arrive," finally sorting themselves into a pattern which we recognize as a

"grasshopper." Cummings has presented a word picture of an event and a perceptual process.

In a 1937 letter to Charles Pearce, editor at Harcourt, Brace, cummings discussed the "format" of a book of poems the publisher was printing: "what i care infinitely is that each poempicture should remain intact. Why? Possibly because, with a few exceptions, my poems are essentially pictures" (MM, 197).

Cummings thought of himself as "an author of pictures, a draughtsman of words" (MM, 4). He continued to paint throughout his life even though no one paid any attention to his painting, as he wrote in a 1959 letter to his daughter:

> i know how you feel about having nearly nobody read your book,since . . . almost nobody has ever shown the slightest interest in my drawing & painting. . . . But if our nonhero has been not really impatient for 60some years,perhaps you can keep relatively calm for(say)10 or 15? Anyhow:from my standpoint the only thing--if you're any sort of artist--is to work a little harder than you can at being who you are: while if you're an unartist . . . nothing but big&quick recognition matters. . . .
>
> (Letters, 263)

His painting is similar to his poetry in the elimination of all unnecessary lines, attempting to achieve the strongest effect with the most precise and economical technique.

As "a draughtsman of words" cummings continued to create poem-pictures until his death, as poem #61 from 73 poems demonstrates:

one

t
hi
s

snowflake

(a
  li
    ght
  in
g)

is upon a gra

v
es
t

one

(73 poems, #61)

Put into verbal terms instead of the visual phenomenon as it is written, the poem celebrates the beauty of a single snowflake alighting upon a gravestone: "one/ this snowflake (alighting) is upon a gravestone." Cummings indicates his feelings about the event in the way he divides words and places them on the page. He apparently saw a natural pattern, a symmetrical motion, in the snowflake's slow descent, since he chose to arrange the letters of the words in symmetrical stanzas,

in lines of symmetrical numbers of letters, and since he arranged the poem in a long, thin shape indicating the vertical path of a snowflake falling through space. The word "alighting" forms the middle stanza and is arranged to give the spiralling effect of a falling snowflake; in following the letters we trace the pattern a spiralling snowflake would make as it fell.

The experience is essentially a nonverbal one, which cummings indicates by breaking words into mainly unpronouncable (and at first glance consciously unrecognizable) letter combinations. But the organization of the poem asks its readers to meditate with cummings the implications of our ability to perceive this common experience. Maslow tells us that one of the attributes of a person in the midst of a peak experience is that: "Perception becomes more object-centered than ego-centered. The perceptual experience can be more organized around the object itself as a centering point rather than being based upon the selfish ego. . . . Objects and people are more readily perceived as having independent reality of their own" (RV&PE, 62).

The fact that cummings has written a poem celebrating his experience of watching a snowflake settle to earth tells us that the poet has described what for him was a "peak experience" in the sense of Maslow's fifth

quality: "The peak-experience is felt as a self-validating, self-justifying moment which carries its own intrinsic value with it" (Maslow, RV&PE, 62). As we watch the snowflake settle to the gravestone we may meditate with cummings on the beauty of something as small as a snowflake and gain through the poem a sense of the infinite possibilities for seeing the beauty of the natural world around us.

Poem 61 begins and ends with the word "one"; and its subject is a single, individual snowflake. Thus the poem celebrates individuality, the importance of the unique organism or object, the importance of our being open to perceive the individuality of all people and things. Such a sense of individuality is an important part of Maslow's definition of a self-actualizing person and is central to the peak-experience. "Hi" expresses discovery--the poet's discovery of a unique, exciting event and the reader's discovery of that same event through the medium of visual poetry. "A light in[side]" gives a second level of meaning to the visual fact of a settling snowflake--in Confucius' words, "everything has its beauty but not everyone sees it." For cummings, the perception of a falling snowflake is a positive, yes experience which can be captured in poetry. Finally through contemplation of a single snowflake we share with cummings his sense of the beauty of our natural world,

his reverence for the individual thing, person or experience, and the wonder/mystery of our ability to perceive that fascinating world of individual things--of our ability to BE one of those individual persons for a while.

In both the grasshopper and the snowflake poems the form grows out of the meaning; the form of the poem is the content. In singling out cummings as one of the poets who "laid the foundation stones" of the American and Brazilian concrete poetry movements, Mary Ellen Solt points to the central tenet of "all definitions of concrete poetry": "form = content/content = form" (p. 13). Most concrete poets distinguish between cummings' use of language to interpret "exterior objects and/or more or less subjective feelings" from their own aim of simply creating a "nonverbal communication" which "communicates its own structure." But cummings is still seen as the purest American practitioner of concrete poetry, and his experiments led directly to the movement's present aesthetic theories. Solt lists several other American poets who include concrete poetic techniques in their repertoire of technical tools: Walt Whitman's "long catalogues," Gertrude Stein's "rose," Charles Olson's concept of Projective Verse, Robert Creeley's "ideogram," plus

several poems by Louis Zukovsky, Louise Bogan and a dozen young (unknown) poets.

Jerome Rothenberg, himself the author of fourteen books of poetry, describes a second line of influence from cummings to contemporary writers. While the concrete poets look to cummings for his linguistic rendering of visual (nonverbal) experiences in nonverbal poetic forms, Rothenberg notes that cummings' use of oral rhythms has also influenced later poets:

> His insistence on lower-case & innovative punctuation (devices now in common use by poets & others) was a signal that writing, far from being the normative state of language, is itself derived from speech. While the wide appeal of his modernism has often brought scorn from guardians-of-letters, he has remained a bridge to resources & possibilities for many later poets.
>
> (Revolution, 6)

Rothenberg does not specify which poets were directly influenced by cummings in the ways he outlines. However, Charles Olson appears in the list of both concrete poets and Rothenberg's anthology of American Avant Garde poets. In his essay on Projective Verse Olson specifically designates cummings as the originator of certain methods of visually representing oral rhythms on the poetry page. Through an examination of cummings' poem "in Just-/ spring" in the light of Olson's essay several other direct influences of cummings on contemporary poets may be deduced.

Cummings demanded that all conventional restrictions arbitrarily imposed on the English language be re-examined. Punctuation, capitalization, syntax, diction, spacing between words, line-length, arrangement of lines on the page, rhyme, meter and stanzaic division were all open to question and manipulation by the skillful poet. The result is poetry which reads like a theatrical script. It requires the reader first to stop, think about and finally to <u>feel</u> the impact of each word.

In his 1923 poem "in Just-/spring" cummings celebrates life experiences by describing his childhood impression of Norton Woods (where he grew up, near Harvard University) in springtime. From other cummings poems (for example #29 in <u>73 poems</u>) we learn that "spring" is symbolic of an awakened, open appreciation of all life experiences, whether positive or negative. It includes everything alive, innocent, growing, opening, living, perceiving, engaged and feeling. "Spring" is e. e. cummings' approach to life. In this poem's presentation of "spring" we are given a sample of several positive cummings' values:

in Just-
spring when the world is mud-
luscious the little
lame balloonman

whistles far and wee

and eddieandbill come
running from marbles and
piracies and it's
spring

when the world is puddle-wonderful

the queer
old balloonman whistles
far and wee
and bettyandisbel come dancing

from hop-scotch and jump-rope and

it's
spring
and
  the

    goat-footed

balloonMan whistles
far
and
wee

The little/lame balloonman places us immediately in a circus atmosphere. Cummings' sister Elizabeth has reported that in the cummings' childhood the circus and the balloonman both arrived every spring: "The first and most exciting sign that spring had really come was the balloon man. First you heard his whistle in the distance; then he would come walking down the street, carrying a basket full of balloons of all colors tugging at their strings" (MM, 18). The circus, in turn, became

cummings' analogy for the way a poem should work: "movement is the content, the subject matter, of the circus-show, while bigness is its form: . . . here (as in all true 'works of art') content and form are aspects of a homogenous whole" (Misc., 113). The form of a poem is designed to convey the content, which in any cummings poem is his effort to recreate his attitudes, feelings and life-view in public, poetic form. In the same article he says: "happy is the writer who, in the course of his lifetime, succeeds in making a dozen persons react to his personality genuinely or vividly" (Misc., 112). "in Just/spring" allows us to participate in cummings' feelings about "spring." At the circus, as in cummings' poems, the spectator/reader is continually amazed by the "unbelievably skillful and inexorably beautiful and unimaginably dangerous things" which are continually happening in the circus-tent/poem. There should always be such an intense experience being acted out in the tent or on the poetic stage that the spectator/reader "feels that there is a little too much going on at any given moment" (Misc., 113). Thus even an apparently simple reminiscence should and does contain a multitude of connotative activities.

The poem begins "in Just-/spring," at the (re-) birth of beauty and life after winter's sleep, or after a period of introspective, emotional withdrawal from our

receptiveness to external stimuli. The narrator/singer promises that "we(e)"--poet and reader--will whistle and dance "far" and 'for a little while'("wee") if we open ourselves to the experience offered through the poem. Multiple connotations are afforded "wee" through the run-on syntax.

The diction is simple and child-like, with children "running from marbles and/piracies" as well as coming "dancing/from hop-scotch and jump-rope," (creating a tone of nursery rhyme innocence). The lack of punctuation and the enjambment of phrase after phrase gives the poem a breathless, tumbling, rushing effect reminiscent of children at play, caught in the midst of some springtime game ("hop-scotch" or "jump-rope"). "Mud-luscious" reminds us of mud pies after a rainstorm when the world seems fresh and new and all the grownup pessimists are inside hiding. Now we can go splashing through the "puddle-wonderful" streets singing and whistling and glad to be alive.

Punctuation helps to organize our perception of this group of words; cummings revitalizes marks of punctuation, using them in unusual ways. In hyphenating "Just-/spring," "mud-/luscious," "puddle-wonderful," "hop-scotch," "jump-rope," and "goat-footed," the poet indicates visually that the two words should work as a single meaning-unit; but by placing "Just-" and "spring,"

"mud-" and "luscious" on separate lines he asks us to pause vocally and mentally between the elements of these meaning-units, to consider each word as a separate element, then to feel the synergy of each pair of separate elements working together. Extreme economy of expression is achieved with this technique, since a reader will feel compelled to re-read the lines two or three times to savor the resultant changes in meaning.

Capitalization has been a favorite tool for cummings since his earliest book of poems. Three original uses of capitalization are evident in this poem. By banishing the meaningless convention of automatically capitalizing the first word in each sentence, he renovates the capital letter as a symbol of deliberate emphasis. In a cummings' poem a capital letter does not simply flag a proper name or some other abstract classification of whole groups. A cummings capital letter draws special attention to a word which may have several meanings in the context of the poem; or the capitalized word may receive special stress in verbal reading of the lines. The capitalization of "Just-" has both of these effects. Like an accent mark in Hopkins' poems, we treat the capitalized "Just-" as a stressed word in scanning the poem's meter. The capitalization also points to two levels of meaning for the word: we are treated to a sense of spring's "just"

beginning to arrive, as well as to a sense of spring as the "right" or "correct" season. A third use of capitalization is to change the meaning of a repeated word, as with "balloonman" and "balloonMan." Our sense of the person's identity is changed from the dictionary definition "a nameless anybody whose identity is gained from his social function of selling balloons" to a Man, a person representative of all mankind.

Paradoxically, the changing adjectival modifiers of "balloonman" work the simultaneous transformation of a "little lame" and "queer old" man selling balloons into the final apparition of a "goat-footed" Pan, the ancient Greek god of woods, shepherds and music. The whole procession, including "we(e)" and "bettyandisbel," goes dancing off through poetry behind Pan-cummings, the poet of life and "spring."

Cummings has been credited by Charles Olson as the pioneer in the contemporary use of the "space" symbol. We all take for granted the standard system of arranging letters into words, but cummings examined the significance of spacing between letters (about half the amount of space a typed "i" takes up on the typewritten page). We expect to see unvarying, larger spaces between words (the width of a typed "w"), full two-letter spaces between sentences and the five-letter indentation of each new paragraph. Cummings revises these conventions,

using the blank spaces on a page in the same meticulous way he uses the marks of punctuation--to intensify the effects of his poems.

The spacing techniques used by cummings in "in Just/-spring" are similar to those described by Charles Olson in his essay "Projective Verse." Olson suggested that spacing be used in poems to indicate the "correct" oral reading of each poem. He hailed the typewriter as a revolutionizing element in poetic composition: "Due to its rigidity and its space precisions, it can, for the poet, indicate exactly the breath, the pauses, the suspension even of syllable, the juxtapositions even of parts of phrases, which he intends."[3] The poem "in Just-/spring" reads very satisfactorily if we follow Olson's prescription for reading the cues of line-length and spacing between words:

> If a contemporary poet leaves a space as long as the phrase before it, he means that space to be held, by the breath, an equal length of time. If he suspends a word or syllable at the end of a line (this was most cummings' addition) he means that time to pass that it takes the eye--that hair of time suspended--to pick up the next line.
>
> (italics mine)

in Just-/Spring is an example of the type of vocal script-writing Olson describes. The space between spring and when in line two is eight spaces long; thus there should be a pause between the two words, a pause

lasting as long as it takes to say spring. The pauses between whistle . . . far . . . and wee in line 5 should be about the length of time it takes to say the word far, since the spaces between the words are both three typewriter-spaces. The reader is asked to take his breaths either before or after the one-line stanzas in lines 5, 10, 15 and 20. The vocal pause is greatest between the stanzas, distinct between the lines within each stanza, less noticeable between widely spaced words, smaller yet between words like and/the in lines 18-19, slight between words of normal spacing, almost nonexistent between hyphenated words (unless the parts are separated by a line division), and the words are run together when there is no space between them (i.e. eddieandbill instead of "eddie and bill," bettyandisbel instead of "betty and isbel"). Caedmon records has issued a recording which was made when cummings read this poem in his "nonlecture two" at Harvard in 1952 (Caedmon record #TC 1187). His reading demonstrates the methodology Olson describes.

Olson wishes to bring his ideas to the status of a new "convention": "It is time we picked the fruits of the experiments of cummings, Pound, Williams, each of whom has, after his way, already used the machine as a scoring to his own composing, as a script to its vocalization. It is now only a matter of the recognition of the conventions of composition by field for us to bring

into being an open verse as formal as the closed, with all its traditional advantages." Many contemporary poets have either adopted or adapted "cummings' addition"--visual clues to verbal performance of the poem--into their own work. Robert Creeley may be the poet who has worked most extensively with the techniques of "composition by field" in recent years, but comparison of the printed poems with recorded readings by poets as diverse as Robert Duncan, Adrienne Rich, Galway Kinnell, Allen Ginsberg and Ted Hughes can give some indication of the extent to which cummings' experiment has become a standard tool in the poetic craftsman's trade.

In conclusion, whether or not one accepts my conception of e. e. cummings as a fully self-actualizing person in terms of Maslow's "psychology of being," we can certainly see that to participate in 73 poems, and indeed in all of cummings' poetry, is to engage in poetic experiences which imitate or synthesize "peak experiences." Cummings' poetry leads us toward exciting, healthy experiences, teaching us to enjoy and appreciate the wonder of life, the mystery of death and the beauty of love. We can participate in a healthy anger at the in-human-ness of our twentieth century "scientific" world. We can love with him some of the world's individuals and laugh or cry with him at many of the unworld's nonpeople.

Cummings presents a way of looking at the world which is unifying rather than fragmenting, transcendent rather than devisive or limiting. Cummings has been joined by Robert Pirsig, Loren Eisley, Diane Wakoski, Denise Levertov, Robert Bly, Richard Wilbur, Nikki Giovanni, Alice Walker and other contemporary poets in celebrating the joy of living, believing in the possibility of human relationships and presenting a positive world-vision which is sorely needed today.

With cummings we may discover "love" and "yes" attitudes within ourselves as well as in the external world.

love is a place
& through this place of
love move
(with brightness of peace)
all places

yes is a world
& through this world of
yes live
(skilfully coiled)
all worlds

(NO THANKS, #58)

The craftsmanship of this poem and of most of the other poems cummings has written is admirable; craftsmanship combined with a positive affirmation of life makes most of cummings' poems examples or demonstrations of "self-transcendence." Cummings' description of other poets' work he loved holds true for his own work: " . . . Every human being is in and of himself or herself

illimitable; but the essence of his or of her illimitability is precisely its uniqueness--nor could all poetry (past present and future) begin to indicate the varieties of selfhood; and consequently of selftranscendence" (i6n, 82).

CHAPTER VIII--NOTES

[1]Jerome Rothenberg, ed., Revolution of the World: A New Gathering of Avant Garde Poetry, 1914-1945 (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974), p. 15.

[2]Mary Ellen Solt, ed., Concrete Poetry: A World View (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), p. 13.

[3]Charles Olson, "Projective Verse," Poetry New York, No. 3 (1950), rpt. in New American Poetry, ed. Donald M. Allen (New York: Group Press, 1960), p. 39.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

B-VALUES AS DESCRIPTIONS OF PERCEPTION IN PEAK EXPERIENCES

Excerpted from Abraham Maslow, Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences (pp. 91-95)

The described characteristics of Being are also the values of Being. These Being-values are perceived as ultimate and as further unanalyzable (and yet they can each be defined in terms of each and all of the others). They are paralleled also by the characteristics of self-hood (identity) in peak-experiences; the characteristics of ideal art; the characteristics of ideal mathematical demonstrations; of ideal experiments and theories; of ideal science and knowledge; the far goals of all ideal, uncovering (Taoistic, noninterfering) psychotherapies; the far goals of the ideal humanistic education; the far goals and the expression of some kinds of religion; the characteristics of the ideally good environment and of the ideally good society.

The following may be seen either as a list of the described attributes of reality when perceived in

peak-experiences, or as a list of the irreducible, intrinsic values of this reality.

1. Truth: honesty; reality; (nakedness; simplicity; richness; essentiality; oughtness; beauty; pure; clean and unadulterated completeness).

2. Goodness: (rightness; desirability; oughtness; justice; benevolence; honesty); (we love it, are attracted to it, approve of it).

3. Beauty: (rightness; form; aliveness; simplicity; richness; wholeness; perfection; completion; uniqueness; honesty).

4. Wholeness: (unity; integration; tendency to oneness; interconnectedness; simplicity; organization; structure; order; not dissociated; synergy; homonomous and integrative tendencies).

4a. Dichotomy-transcendence: (acceptance, resolution, integration, or transcendence of dichotomies, polarities, opposites, contradictions); synergy (i.e. transformation of oppositions into unities, of antagonists into collaborating or mutually enhancing partners).

5. Aliveness: (process; not-deadness; dynamic; eternal; flowing; self-perpetuating; spontaneity; self-moving energy; self-forming; self-regulation; full-functioning; changing and yet remaining the same; expressing itself; never-ending).

6. Uniqueness: (idiosyncrasy; individuality; singularity; non-comparability; its defining-characteristics; novelty; quale; suchness; nothing else like it).

7. Perfection: (nothing superfluous; nothing lacking; everything in its right place; unimprovable, just-rightness; just-so-ness suitability; justice; completeness; nothing beyond; oughtness.

7a. Necessity: (inevitability; it must be just that way; not changed in any slightest way; and it is good that it is that way).

8. Completion: (ending; finality; justice; it's finished; no more changing of the Gestalt; fulfillment; finis; and telos; nothing missing or lacking; totality; fulfillment of destiny; cessation; climax, consummation; closure; death before rebirth; cessation and completion of growth and development; total gratification with no more gratification possible; no striving; no movement toward any goal because already there; not pointing to anything beyond itself).

9. Justice: (fairness; oughtness; suitability; architectonic quality; necessity; inevitability; disinterested-ness; non-partiality).

9a. Order: (lawfulness; rightness; rhythm; regularity; symmetry; structure; nothing superfluous; perfectly arranged).

10. Simplicity: (honesty; nakedness; purity; essentiality; succinctness; [mathematical] elegance; abstract; unmistakability; essential skeletal structure; the heart of the matter; bluntness; only that which is necessary; without ornament, nothing extra or superfluous).

11. Richness: (totality; differentiation; complexity; intricacy: nothing missing or hidden; all there; "non-importance," i.e., everything is equally important; nothing is unimportant; everything left the way it is, without improving, simplifying, abstracting, rearranging; comprehensiveness).

12. Effortlessness: (ease: lack of strain, striving, or difficulty; grace, perfect and beautiful functioning).

13. Playfulness: (fun; joy; amusement; gaiety; humor; exuberance; effortlessness).

14. Self-sufficiency: (autonomy; independence; not needing anything other than itself in order to be itself; self-determining; environment-transcendence; separateness; living by its own laws; identity).

The descriptive B-values, seen as aspects of reality, should be distinguished from the attitudes or emotions of the B-cognizer toward this cognized reality

and it attributes, e.g. awe, love, adoration, worship, humility, feeling of smallness plus godlikeness, reverence, approval of, agreement with wonder, sense of mystery, gratitude, devotion, dedication, identification with, belonging to, fusion with, surprise and incredulousness, fear, joy, rapture, bliss, ecstasy, etc.

Of course, these "ultimate truths," if they are confirmed, are still truths within a system. That is, they seem to be true for the human species. That is, in the same sense that Euclidian theorems are absolutely true within the Euclidian system. Again, just as Euclidian propositions are ultimately tautologous, so also the B-values may very well turn out to be defining characteristics of humanness in its essence, i.e., sine qua non aspects of the concept "human," and, therefore, tautologous. The statement, "The fully human person in certain moments perceives the unity of the cosmos, fuses with it, and rests in it, completely satisfied for the moment in his yearning for one-ness," is very likely synonymous, at a "higher level of magnification," with the statement, "This is a fully human person."

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bate, Walter Jackson. "Negative Capability." Keats. Twentieth Century Views, ed. W. J. Bates. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964, pp. 51-68.

Baum, S. V., ed. E. E. Cummings and the Critics. East Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State University Press, 1962.

Bernardin, Charles W. "John Dos Passos' Harvard Years." An Anthology of Poetry. New England Quarterly, 27 (March 1954).

Bloom, Edward A., Charles H. Philbrick, and Elmer M. Blistern. The Order of Poetry. New York: Odyssey Press, 1961.

Coffman, Stanley K., Jr. Imagism: A Chapter for the History of Modern Poetry. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951.

Cowley, Malcolm. "One Man Alone." A Second Flowering. New York: Viking Press, 1973.

Cummings, Edward Estlin. [no title]. New York: Covici Friede Publishers, 1930. 1st ed. signed by Cummings, in Special Collections Library, Michigan State University.

_____. A Miscellany. Ed. George J. Firmage. New York: The Argophile Press, 1958. Copy signed by Cummings, in Special Collections Library, Michigan State University.

_____. Anthropos: The Future of Art. Mount Vernon, N.Y.: The Golden Eagle Press, 1944. Copy signed by Cummings, in Special Collections at Michigan State University Library.

Cummings, Edward Estlin. CIOPW. New York: Covici-Friede Publishers, 1930. Copy signed by Cummings, in Special Collections at Michigan State University Library.

_____. Complete Poems 1913-1962. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972.

_____. E. E. Cummings: A Miscellany Revised. Ed. George J. Firmage. New York: October House, 1965.

_____. Him. New York: Boni & Liveright, 1927.

_____. i, six nonlectures. Harvard University Press, 1953; rpt. New York: Atheneum, 1965, fourth printing.

_____. Poems 1923-1954. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1954.

_____. 95 poems. New York: Harbrace Paperbound Library, Harcourt Brace Janovich, Inc., 1958.

_____. Santa Claus: A Morality. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1946.

_____. Selected Letters of E. E. Cummings. Ed. F. W. Dupee and George Stade. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969.

_____. 73 poems. New York: H brace Paperbound Library, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1963.

_____. The Enormous Room. New York: Liveright Paperbound Edition, Liveright, 1970.

_____. Three Plays and a Ballet. Ed. George J. Firmage. New York: October House, 1967.

_____. "Three Poems." The Little Review, 9, No. 3 (Spring 1923), 22-24.

Deutsch, Babette. "e e cummingsesq." The Nation, 152 (May 17, 1941), 59.

Dumas, Bethany K. E. E. Cummings: A Remembrance of Miracles. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1974.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson. Ed. Stephen E. Whicher. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960.

Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics. Ed. Alex Preminger. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965.

Fairley, Irene R. *E. E. Cummings and Ungrammar*. Scarington, N.Y.: Watermill Publishers, 1976.

Firmage, George J. *E. E. Cummings: A Bibliography*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1960.

Ford, Ford Maddox (Hueffer). "On Impressionism." *Poetry and Drama*, 2, No. 2 (June 1914), 175-81.

Friedman, Norman, ed. *E. E. Cummings: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Twentieth Century Views Series. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972.

_____. *e. e. cummings: The Growth of a Writer*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964.

_____. *e. e. cummings: the art of his poetry*. Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1960.

Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957.

Hampden-Turner, Charles. *Radical Man: The Process of Psycho-Social Development*. Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman Publishing Co., 1970.

The Harvard Wake. No. 5 (Spring 1946). (A special cummings number.)

Horton, Philip, and Sherry Mangen. "Two Views of Cummings." *Partisan Review*, 4 (May 1938), 58-63.

Hulme, T. E. *Speculations*. New York: Boni & Liveright, 1924.

Jerome, Judson. *Poetry: Premeditated Art*. Boston, Mass.: Houghton-Mifflin, 1968.

Keats, John. *Selected Poetry and Letters*. Ed. Richard H. Fogle. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1951.

Lane, Gary. *I Am: A Study of E. E. Cummings' Poems*. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1976.

Levertov, Denise. *The Poet in the World*. New York: New Directions, 1973.

Lindroth, Colette and James R. The Poetry of E. E. Cummings. New York: Monarch Notes Series, Simon & Schuster, 1966.

Marks, Barry A. E. E. Cummings, Twayne's United States Authors Series. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1964.

Maslow, Abraham. "A Theory of Human Motivation." Psychological Review, 50 (1943), 370-96.

_____. Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences. New York: The Viking Press, 1964.

_____. Toward a Psychology of Being. 2nd ed. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1968.

Maurer, Robert E. "Latter-Day Notes on E. E. Cummings' Language." Bucknell Review, 5 (May 1955), 1-23.

Norman, Charles. The Magic Maker: E. E. Cummings. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958.

Olson, Charles. "Projective Verse." Poetry New York, no. 3 (1950), rpt. New American Poetry, Ed. Donald Allen. New York: Grove Press, 1960.

The Oxford University Dictionary on Historical Principles. Ed. C. T. Onions. 3rd ed. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1955.

Pater, Walter. "Plato and Platonism." English Prose of the Victorian Era. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938.

_____. "Preface" to Studies in the History of the Renaissance (1873), rpt. in The Norton Anthology of English Literature. Ed. M. H. Abrams. New York: W. W. Norton, 1962. Vol. 2.

Pound, Ezra. ABC of Reading. New York: New Directions, 1934.

_____. The Literary Essays of Ezra Pound. New York: New Directions, 1968.

_____. Selected Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941. Ed. D. D. Paige. New York: New Directions, 1971.

_____ and Marcella Span, eds. Confucious to Cummings: An Anthology of Poetry. New York: New Directions, 1954.

Pratt, William. "Introduction." Modern Poetry in Miniature: The Imagist Poem. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1963.

Rothenberg, Jerome, ed. Revolution of the Word: A New Gathering of Avant Garde Poetry, 1914-1945. New York: The Seabury Press, 1974.

Solt, Mary Ellen, ed. Concrete Poetry: A World View. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968, 1970.

Spears, Monroe. Dionysus and the City: Modernism in Twentieth Century Poetry. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970.

Triem, Eve. E. E. Cummings. University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, no. 87. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969.

Wagner, Linda Welshimer. Denise Levertov. New York: Twayne, 1967.

_____. Hemingway and Faulkner: inventors/masters. Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1975.

_____. The Poems of William Carlos Williams: A Critical Study. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1964.

Wegner, Robert E. The Poetry and Prose of E. E. Cummings. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1965.

Wheeler, Charles B. The Design of Poetry. New York: W. W. Norton, 1966.

Wickes, George. Americans in Paris. New York: Doubleday and Co., 1969.

Wilson, Edmund. The Shores of Light. New York: Farrar, Straus, & Young, 1952.

Winters, Yvor. "Merely a Penumbra." American Literature, 10 (January 1939).

Zillman, Lawrence J. The Art and Craft of Poetry. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967.