Edward Estlin Cummings (who eventually had his name legally changed to e. e. cummings) was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1894. His father was a Harvard English professor who became, in 1905, the pastor of Old South Church in Boston. This background probably played a considerable part in Cummings' work throughout his lifetime. As one critic put it, "...though he has constantly cried his repudiation of his birthplace and all its academic works...it is only as a child of Cambridge that he can be so passionately private and peculiar."¹ Another commented, "To some readers, Cummings' lighter verses may have seemed to be a virtual deflowering of New England; actually they extended life of an area that had its precincts marked by the proximity of Boston's State House, Harvard University, the Charles River, Lexington and Concord's bridge."² The fact that he was the son of a New England clergyman probably helped to establish in his mind a view that life consisted wholly of moments of inspiration and thereby was lacking in the

¹Stanley Vergil Baum, Eoviseec; E. E. Cummings and the Critics (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1962), 104.

²Ibid., 124.
fundamental requisite for growth.\textsuperscript{3}

Cummings attended Harvard, receiving his B.A. in 1915 at the age of twenty-one and his M.A. one year later. The traditionalism that one associates with Harvard at this time plays its part in Cummings' work. His master's thesis deals with the "new art" but stresses the tradition underlying this contemporary art.\textsuperscript{4}

In 1917 Cummings joined the Norton Harjes Ambulance Corp in France to assist in the war effort. Because of an error, he was confined in a French concentration camp for several months. This experience provided the material for his first book, The Enormous Room, in 1922 and for poems throughout his life. The spirit of the times that so affected writers of this period that they produced works like the wastelands of Eliot and Hemingway also affected Cummings. That Cummings was part of the Lost Generation is significant, especially in his earlier works.\textsuperscript{5} He experienced, at the age of twenty-three, "the disease of modern civilization."\textsuperscript{6}

After the war Cummings returned to the United States and settled down to a life of continuous writing and pub-

\textsuperscript{3}Ibid., 117.
\textsuperscript{5}Baum, Op. Cit., 102.
Even now, however, John Ciardi still sees the "uncritical undergraduates" as greatly enchanted with Cummings while the faculty members simply "shake their heads."\textsuperscript{10}

The question then arises, on what grounds do the numerous critics divide concerning Cummings? Their favorite areas of contention, generally, are style, artistic worth and maturity.

Stylistically his detractors find "the poet is often too nimble - he tires the reader with intricate intellectual acrobatics which scarcely repay one for puzzling out their motive over the slippery typographical stepping-stones."\textsuperscript{11} Edmund Wilson even feels that "his poems on the page are hideous."\textsuperscript{12} Or again the detractors may find fault with the use of any particular one word "in itself vague and cloudy [being] made to take on the work of an entire philosophy."\textsuperscript{13} Friedman answers these charges by saying that anyone who claims that the same effects can be produced by more traditional means "must bear the burden of proof, realizing first of all what Cummings was aiming at, and secondly showing what the alternatives are for achieving it."\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{11}Baum, \textit{Op. Cit.}, 22.
\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., 27.
\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., 67.
\textsuperscript{14}Friedman, \textit{Op. Cit.}, 84.
The critics have been divided about the final worth of Cummings' work also. Ludwig Lewisohn claims, "Fundamentally he is nothing. The charm of his work is in the sprightly dexterities of his language."\(^{15}\) Lewisohn sums up a rather common feeling that the work lacks meaning. At the other extreme it is felt that "Cummings is the most provocative, the most sentimental, the funniest, the least understood" poet of the age.\(^{16}\) Baum's comment is, "That Cummings today can excite as much disagreement as he did in the 1920's is a sincere tribute to his essential vitality."\(^{17}\)

Cummings has often been accused of not growing up. As Jacobsen sardonically put it, "If E. E. Cummings ever had maturity thrust upon him, he repulsed it cleanly."\(^{18}\) The critics take his unusual punctuation as symptomatic of artistic immaturity.\(^{19}\) Matthiesen says that interestingly enough, although Cummings continually talks about growth, he remains always the same.\(^{20}\) His poetry, to people of this bent, does not demonstrate any technical

\(^{15}\) Baum, Op. Cit., 177.
\(^{17}\) Baum, Op. Cit., viii.
\(^{20}\) Ibid., xiii.
6.

or intellectual development. 21 On the other side of the coin are those critics (like Friedman) that as staunchly defend Cummings as a mature artist who does, in fact, show development in his poetry.

21 Ibid., 88.
II.

After examining the total body of Cummings' work and the comments of numerous critics, one conclusion seems clear. Cummings began writing with a certain viewpoint which did not change or expand but which was refined with time and experience.

Norman Friedman, an outstanding Cummings' scholar, has suggested that Cummings' over-all vision may be summed up "under four related headings: his metaphysics, his epistemology, his politics and his aesthetic."\(^{22}\)

The meaning of Cummings' work is to be found in "the relationship between what he is trying to do (his means) and why (his ends) - between his technique on the one hand, and his attitudes and vision of life on the other."\(^{23}\)

According to Friedman, Cummings' metaphysic, or vision of the true world, is "the natural world, the world of natural cyclical process. It is a timeless world of the eternal present. It is an actual world, and paradoxically a world of the dream."\(^{24}\) Sometimes Cummings even conceives of nature as if separated from its most essential


\(^{23}\)Ibid., 3.

\(^{24}\)Ibid., 8-9.
qualities. In viewing natural order as superior to man-made order Cummings can be grouped with Coleridge and the Romantic tradition. He sees nature as "becoming rather than being," and, with Coleridge, he believes "that the intuitive or imaginative faculty in man can perceive this nature directly." His attempts to grasp an intuitively perceived world having a natural order of its own represent "not an abandonment to disorder but rather a struggle to realize a higher order." This outlook, according to Friedman, makes Cummings a transcendentalist.

Feeling that nature itself is the greatest work of art, Cummings' style of presentation is often lyric. He exhibits all the usual concerns of the lyric poet: himself, his likes and dislikes, nature, the seasons, love and so on. While his lyrics are often graceful, "yet the dangers of lyricism - sentimentality, bathos -" are to be found too. This is, however, a contested point. What Cummings seeks to do is capture sensations "not so much for their own sakes as for the sake of

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25 Barry A. Marks, E. E. Cummings (New York: Twayne), 60.
27 Ibid., 6.
touching the living process of nature which creates them."\(^{31}\)

His object is experiencing life rather than theorizing about it. To him nature is just being born and not always dying.\(^ {32}\)

The feeling of immediacy hinted at as nature is just being born is a key note throughout Cummings' work. He decries future-oriented society, ignores the past, and holds to the fullest possible experiencing of the present moment. Only the now is of any importance to Cummings.

There is an old and august theory, found frequently in modern literature, that "reality exceeds the forms which man has devised for dealing with it."\(^ {33}\) Cummings is of this school of thought. For this reason he has been called "a sensual mystic...not of this world" and "both realistic and fanciful."\(^ {34}\) It has been theorized that this so-called mystical insight is the real foundation of his work.\(^ {35}\) Actually, his transcendental vision "is of a spiritual world, a world where facts are saturated in values, a world of magic, miracle and mystery. Nothing which is merely measurable is for him of the slightest


\(^{32}\) Ibid., 18.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 4.

\(^{34}\) Norman Friedman, E. E. Cummings, The Art of His Poetry (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1960), 35.

significance." Specifically he believes that there is a world of awareness - the true world - which is outside of, above, and beyond the ordinary world of everyday perception.

However, the transcendental world, while being outside of, above, and beyond the ordinary everyday world, still is integrally connected to the ordinary world, and really depends upon it for existence.

Given Cummings' view of nature and reality, it then becomes necessary to see how man fits into the picture. Cummings seems to be putting forth a dualistic impression of the fundamental nature of man. He draws a comparison between man and a penguin to show what he means by his dual concept. A penguin is an awkward waddler, but at the same time a graceful swimmer. To Cummings, "The swimming penguin symbolizes each human being's second, inner, or unconscious self, and this unconscious self is the function which determines or fulfills each human being's destiny and which contains the essence or meaning of all destiny. That is, despite all the inadequacy of most people's lives, a meaningful existence of love and beauty and joy is always and immediately available." Even then, Cummings believed that human fulfillment was perpetually possible. His

37 Ibid., 5.
38 Ibid., 7.
unresolved problem was that he both believed and doubted that man could attain fulfillment by himself. In fact, "his prime antagonist was the secular faith that human fulfillment can be produced by human power." Nevertheless, "man, for him, is still noble, virtuous, and not just potentially in a state of Grace." Cummings' satire is based on his faith in the nobility of the human spirit. His premise is that it is within man's power to choose - and to choose rightly. How, then, Cummings would ask, can man be pitied if he consciously chooses wrongly out of fear? If he had directed his satiric barbs only against a minority group like the Jews, then the case against him would have been glaring; however, his satire spares no one, from Uncle Sam to Buffalo Bill. The nobility of his own spirit shines forth in this respect. He never refrains from saying what he feels is the truth simply because such statements might bring him under criticism. His poem "what if a much of a which of a wind" testifies to his belief in the "inherent importance of man beneath modernism's encrusted idiocies." To

40Ibid., 123.
41Ibid., 137.
42Friedman, E. E. Cummings, The Art of His Poetry, 14.
43Ibid., 51.
44Marks, Op. Cit., 175.
45Ibid., 60.
12.

Cummings, the poet is 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." 46

Cummings' dual concept of man makes it difficult to ascertain his religious outlook. Jackinson sees him as an iconoclast to whom "nothing is sacred" 47 while Friedman feels that he "believes deeply in the insufficiency of man and the Grace of God." 48 Undoubtedly Cummings believes that there has been undue faith placed in science and technology. As already mentioned he deplores the secular faith that human fulfillment can be accomplished through human power. 49 Cummings would have us renounce our desire for security, success, stability and comfort — but not our intuitive life. 50 According to Gregory and Zaturenska, "the world of Cummings' conventions is too small to admit the presence of a complete moral order, but it has within it the clear (and one almost says courageous) recognition that a Christian faith exists in twentieth century America." 51 Perhaps, considering

46 Friedman, E. E. Cummings, The Art of His Poetry, 10.
49 Ibid., 137.
13.

Cummings' family background, this outlook has some validity. In Cummings' universe, evil exists, but not sin.\textsuperscript{52} The principle of Evil is opposed by the principle of Nature; Evil is not a part of Nature.\textsuperscript{53} Transcendence "has its source in a sinless universe."\textsuperscript{54} To Cummings, good and bad are absolutes.\textsuperscript{55}

Amid all the confusion caused by his dual concept of man, there emerges a quite clear principle - that of death-in-life.\textsuperscript{56} His vision frequently runs counter to ordinary conceptions in this instance: he sees life where others see death. To him society is dead.\textsuperscript{57} Cummings expresses the linguistic demonstrable truth of the opposites, life and death, by joining "now" plus "here" to arrive at "nowhere".\textsuperscript{58} Cummings' man is "in harmony with nature, not demanding a deathless life on earth, 'his autumn's winter being summer's spring.'"\textsuperscript{59} Approaching winter and death do not frighten him because he has confidence in the eventual return of spring and life. Hell is not real to

\textsuperscript{52} Friedman, E. E. Cummings, The Art of His Poetry, 13.
\textsuperscript{53} Friedman, E. E. Cummings, The Growth of a Writer, 106.
\textsuperscript{54} Friedman, E. E. Cummings, The Art of His Poetry, 16.
\textsuperscript{57} Friedman, E. E. Cummings, The Growth of a Writer, 30.
\textsuperscript{58} Marks, Op. Cit., 120.
\textsuperscript{59} Friedman, E. E. Cummings, The Art of His Poetry, 12.
Cummings in the same way that it is to Dante. In the long run "the only necessity that he acknowledges is the movement toward joy."\(^{60}\)

Cummings' view of life is further tempered by his epistemology. The facet added in this aspect of his vision is that life is non-rational.\(^{61}\) The "villain of Cummings' drama, the Satan of his Eden" seems to be the mind.\(^{62}\) Mind substitutes for original sin which otherwise is totally lacking in his view of the sinless universe. Cummings' speaker finds nothing noble in the intellectual strivings of mankind, for such strivings cut man off from truth.\(^{63}\) The mind seeks to "make static the moving and finish the never ending," causing, when it is allowed to be dominant, an artificial world for man.\(^{64}\) The mind is the source of the disease of asking and dissatisfaction.\(^{65}\) This should not leave the impression that Cummings is against thinking "in a sense of allowing the brain to usurp or thwart the rightful functions of the heart and the senses."\(^{66}\) When mind is separated from the heart and soul, then man is

\(^{60}\)Ibid., 14.


\(^{62}\)Friedman, E. E. Cummings, The Art of His Poetry, 19.

\(^{63}\)Ibid., 19-20.

\(^{64}\)Ibid., 21.

\(^{65}\)Ibid., 20.

\(^{66}\)Ibid., 30.
prevented from being in harmony with natural process.\textsuperscript{67} Therefore, "Intelligence operating at intuitional velocity" is the only essential intelligence in Cummings.\textsuperscript{68}

The mind, however, must be educated to become the evil that Cummings sees it to be. To Cummings, only children and artists are detached from society\textsuperscript{69} - children because they are as yet uneducated into adulthood, and artists because they use thinking to negate thinking.\textsuperscript{70} Cummings feels that children perceive sense impressions with precision and accuracy until they are badgered from without by their parents and teachers into accepting an adult outlook on life.\textsuperscript{71} As Cummings sees it, a child's world is always "now"; there are no plans for the future. This yielding on the part of a child to the immediate experience is, of course, Cummings' idea of an ideal life.\textsuperscript{72} He did realize, though, that "children cannot serve as an ultimate standard of value."\textsuperscript{73} His ultimate standard would be the artist, the true man, who experiences life in the same manner as children do, but who accomplishes

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{67} Friedman, E. E. Cummings, The Art of His Poetry, 19.
\item \textsuperscript{68} Friedman, E. E. Cummings, The Growth of a Writer, 12.
\item \textsuperscript{69} Marks, Op. Cit., 57.
\item \textsuperscript{70} Friedman, E. E. Cummings, The Growth of a Writer, 12.
\item \textsuperscript{71} Marks, Op. Cit., 48.
\item \textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 51.
\item \textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 52.
\end{itemize}
16.

this by the highest mechanical thought process, that of negating thinking.

Naturally, his view of adults in general suffers accordingly. He specifically finds fault with their attempts to reduce life to abstractions and their underlying effort to make life conform to the purposes of man. 74 Besides that, the goal of the adult is always in the future, never now. The final tragedy of the adult world of not-living is the manner in which children are hurried into it. 75

Concerning the third area that Friedman has suggested, Cummings' politics, two words adequately summarize it: love and the individual. 76 Cummings is not a politician in the ordinary sense of the word. His is not the politics of Democrat versus Republican. To be for or against any form of organized mass action would involve Cummings in the very categories that he wishes to transcend. 77 His only concern with government is its effect on the governed. 78 As far as he is concerned, the one freedom is the freedom of the responsive and responsible will, and all other freedoms derive from it. 79

74 Ibid., 70.
75 Ibid., 50.
77 Ibid., 111.
79 Ibid., 109.
The only solution that Cummings sees to the world's problems is love (i.e. "the courage to hope, the determination to be oneself, the ability to dream, the capacity for surrender, and the desire for life.")\textsuperscript{80} To the idea of man as builder he opposes the idea of man as lover, which he considers the better way of life.\textsuperscript{81}

When Cummings' persona is not with his lady, he is alone. This demonstrates the other half of Cummings' politics - the individual. His individual is "an apotheosis, a revelation of the organic miracle of life, a vision of nature in man which is salvation for the beholder, redeeming him from the death of the stereotype into the life of the actual and transcendent world."\textsuperscript{82}

Opposed to the individual are "mostpeople" who live ordinary lives of standardization and planning and ordering. In Cummings' terms a 'one', a 'Yes', an 'Is', stand for the true individual.\textsuperscript{83}

Cummings' aesthetic, then, follows from these metaphysics, this epistemology, and these politics. The technique he uses is a direct result of his point of view.\textsuperscript{84} Once again the reader will note a dualism, however, this

\textsuperscript{80}Friedman, E. E. Cummings, The Art of His Poetry, 22.
\textsuperscript{81}Marks, Op. Cit., 86.
\textsuperscript{82}Friedman, E. E. Cummings, The Growth of a Writer, 29.
\textsuperscript{83}Baum, Op. Cit., 162.
\textsuperscript{84}Ibid., 119.
time between realism and formalism. This dualism poses no problem to Cummings' way of thinking. His definition of a poet as "somebody who feels, and who expresses his feelings through words" juxtaposes the two ideas. He expresses realism in his concept of what a poem is, and in the use of the 'cult of the ugly' in his writing. To him poems are natural products since "they are in competition with flowers and sunsets." He does not see a poem as an idea, but rather as an experience through which the reader can discover something about the author, or himself, or life. Closely tied to Cummings' view that poetry is part of nature is his use of the ugly in his work. With it he exhibits "the realist's faith in nature as the ultimate art." Ugliness is to be found throughout Cummings' poetry - in choice of subject matter, language, and attitudes of his persona.

On the formalist side, "the side that values technique over subject matter," Cummings was a true professional. He admired and studied professional art and strived for it in his own work. As a result, his

88 Ibid., 97.
89 Ibid., 100.
90 Ibid., 114.
technical innovations are many. Particularly in the realms of typography, word usage, rhythm and imagery is Cummings an innovator. The reader is immediately struck by Cummings' typography on the first encounter with his poetry. His capitalization (or lack of it), punctuation, and line arrangement are immediately arresting. It was Cummings' belief that a poem's appearance on the page was especially important in supporting the poet's intention. He wanted and expected his typography to affect the reading of the poem. By this means he sought to control the "reading rate, emotional evocation, and aesthetic inflection," so that there might be the smallest possible gap between the actual experience and its expression. Orthodox forms only falsified the true experience in his opinion. He uses capitals for emphasis only. Commas serve to indicate pauses wherever Cummings feels that natural cadence require them - even if that involves breaking up words never before divided in that manner. Blank spaces are used sometimes to isolate a word for emphasis and sometimes to slow down the reading rate. Hyphens also serve to slow down the

92 Ibid.
93 Baum, Op. Cit., 120.
tempo. Parentheses may be used to set the mood or to indicate visually immediacy or simultaneity. To indicate rapid tempo, Cummings frequently runs several words together as one word. Every space or utilization of it in a Cummings poem serves some purpose in the total attempt to relate an experience.95

Usage is also an important part of Cummings' aesthetic. His problem is one of getting rid of the deadness of language without losing all vestige of intelligibility.96 Quite frequently a change in the usual position of words is enough to significantly enliven a passage.97 Never does he change the root meanings of words even when changing their grammatical forms.98 He particularly likes to experiment with fragmentation and recombination of words, arriving at the coinages and composites that are his peculiar trademark.99 Prefixes, conjunctions, and even interrogative pronouns become nouns; the addition of adverbial or adjectival suffixes result in meaningful coinages.100 Since he is so concerned with creating an actual experience for his reader, naturally verbs (in the present indicative)

100 Friedman, E. E. Cummings, The Growth of a Writer, 16.
are important, too. Cummings' use of pronouns is equally important in his aesthetic. Their usage reflects his politics. He opposes "i" plus "you" which equals "we" to "they". "They" are the pernicious "mostpeople", while "we" are the individuals, the poets, the truly alive.

This language that Cummings has created is held together by rhythm. Dos Passos has commented that Cummings uses the rhythms of American life as the material of his poetry. He claims, "It is writing created in the ear and lips and jotted down." Indeed, the creation of movement is one of the few aesthetic intentions to which Cummings has ever admitted. He has accomplished this intention by means of the already mentioned devices of typography and word usage. When he turns nouns into verbs he maintains the root meaning of the words and at the same time creates motion. Or when he runs words together or strings them out across the page he creates motion. The concern with rhythm is, once again, a reflection of Cummings' concern with the accurate presentation of

103 Friedman, E. E. Cummings, The Art of His Poetry, 25.
experience. 107

The final element of Cummings' aesthetics is his imagery. His most favored images have to do with nature. The word "flower", for instance, is the most used word in his vocabulary. 108 Also of importance are times of day which "constitute his chief symbolic cluster." 109 These include sunset, twilight, night, moon, and star particularly. Seasons are important, too; he exhibits a slight preference for spring and summer over fall and winter in this group. 110 Urban and rural settings are used about equally. 111 Frequently animals enter into Cummings' imagery, too. Usually his concern is with the smaller creatures (goldfish, grasshoppers, chameleons, or birds) because of their vast capacity for movement and change. 112 However, he does occasionally use a horse or a goat.

In the final analysis, what makes Cummings' aesthetics peculiarly his own is the combination of all these things - typography, word usage, rhythm, and

109 Friedman, E. E. Cummings, The Art of His Poetry, 41.
110 Ibid., 42.
111 Ibid., 43.
112 Ibid.
imagery. In a sense, the language that he has developed has become in itself his principal metaphor.\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{113}Marks, Op. Cit., 121.
III.

Given, then, this transcendental outlook, let us examine its application throughout Cummings' poetry. Basically the works can be divided into three chronological periods: early poems, published in the 1920's; middle poems, published during the 1930's and 1940's; and later poems, published during the 1950's. The point to be made is that over this span of approximately forty years the poet's viewpoint remained the same, the only change coming from refinement of the basic outlook and technique. (Cummings did not perfect and then discard techniques as he continued to write, but gradually discovered, mastered, and retained devices instead.\(^\text{113}\) The range and variety of his style is one of its outstanding characteristics.\(^\text{114}\))

In 1923 Cummings' first volume of poetry, *Tulips and Chimneys*, was published. This volume already contains elements of every part of Cummings' overall vision - the metaphysics, epistemology, politics and aesthetic. In order to demonstrate the validity of such an assertion, let us examine a few typical selections from *Tulips and Chimneys*.


\(^{114}\) Friedman, E. E. Cummings, *The Art of His Poetry*, 62.
The very earliest Cummings poems are extremely derivative, reminding one of Keats, Shelley, Swinburne and Rosetti especially. "Puella Mea" and "Epithalamion" are representative. However, this kind of poem very quickly evolves in *Tulips and Chimneys* into the usual Cummings poem. By the end of the 1920's all traces of any outside literary influences disappear. During the transition period, "the Cambridge ladies who live in furnished souls" is written. Although this poem does contain several hold over traditional strains, it also begins to fuse in the modern experimental style of Cummings.

the Cambridge ladies who live in furnished souls are un beau tiful and have comfortable minds (also, with the church's protestant blessings they believe in Christ and Longfellow, both dead, are invariably interested in so many things— at the present writing one still finds delighted fingers knitting for the is it Poles? perhaps. While permanent faces coyly bandy scandal of Mrs. N and Professor D ....the Cambridge ladies do not care, above Cambridge if sometimes in its box of sky lavender and cornerless, the moon rattles like a fragment of angry candy

Traditional Petrarchan sonnet form is employed, an octave and a sextet forming the foundation of the poem. Cummings deviates from the form immediately, however, by

116 Ibid., 50.
using an experimental abcddcba efggfe rhyme scheme.

Thematically "the Cambridge ladies" voices various aspects of Cummings' politics, epistemology, and metaphysics. Women of Cambridge, interested in gossip and pious good works, are seen as actually self-centered, comfortably existing adults with "furnished souls." Already there exists in Cummings' theme a rebellion against a life devoid of actual experiential awareness. He says, "Christ and Longfellow, both dead," and firmly implies that the Cambridge ladies are the same. Here, too, is an early awareness of contemporary surroundings.

Aesthetically the poem is readily marked as an early product of transitional nature. Lack of capitalization at the beginning and in the ninth line are slightly experimental touches, but, for the most part, the punctuation is quite regular. Only one word in the entire poem hints at Cummings' future experiments in the area - the word "unbeautiful" in the second line. The rhythm and imagery are also basically conventional.\textsuperscript{118}

In "the Cambridge ladies" Cummings is bridging the gap between the romantic tradition and modern poetry. Although the romantic tradition in technique and material drops away quickly in Tulips and Chimneys, the romantic attitude toward existence remains throughout Cummings.\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{118}Baum, Op. Cit., 122.

\textsuperscript{119}Ibid., 100.
27.

The difference in "O sweet spontaneous" immediately is noticeable:

O sweet spontaneous
earth how often have
the
doting fingers of
prurient philosophers pinched
and poked
thee,
, has the naughty thumb
of science prodded
thy beauty
how
often have religions taken
thee upon their scraggy knees
squeezing and
buffeting thee that thou mightest conceive
gods
(but
true
to the incomparable
couch of death thy
rhythmic
lover
thou answerest
them only with

spring) 120

Obviously all vestiges of a traditional form have disappeared. Line arrangement and spacing are totally unconventional.

Elements of Cummings metaphysics and epistemology do appear again, though. The topic under discussion in this poem is nature ("earth") and its relation to science, philosophy, and religion. Nature is orderly, steadfast, and beautiful, and able to withstand the probing onslaught

of those three forces. Death appears in this early poem, also, in the light of a "rhythmic lover" rather than some dread phenomenon. The answer of nature to all attempts at understanding is the simple natural process of continual return to spring and rebirth.

With this poem one can find evidence of the free verse visual stanza pattern that is common in Cummings.\(^{121}\) Experimentation in punctuation for the purpose of controlling the reading rate is in evidence in the ninth and eleventh lines particularly with the comma at the beginning of a line and the period spaced apart from the final word of the sentence. Emphasis on spacing of words is to be seen in the very last line of the poem where the word "spring" is left by itself in the middle of the page. Unconventional spacing of this kind is another common technique in Cummings' aesthetics that is thus to be found in his very earliest work.\(^{122}\) Vivid figurative effects are frequently to be found in the earlier poetry, also. In "0 sweet spontaneous" the element of figurative language can be seen in "the naughty thumb of science" and "scraggy knees squeezing," in reference to science and religion.

Another example of early Cummings work found in \textit{Tulips and Chimneys} is "in Just -":

\begin{flushright}
\textit{121}Friedman, E. E. Cummings, The Growth of a Writer, 45.  
\textit{122}Ibid., 39.
\end{flushright}
in Just-
spring when the world is mud-
luscious the little
lame balloonman

whistles far and wee

and eddie and bill 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 betty anddisbel come dancing

from hop-scotch and jump-rope and

it's
spring
and

the
goat-footed

balloonman whistles
far
and
wee123

"in Just-" gives an example of the descriptive
type of poem that makes up the largest proportion (almost
one fourth) of his work as a whole.124 Besides that, it
affords a glimpse of Cummings' politics as well as his
metaphysics, epistemology, and aesthetics. The emphasis
in this poem on the joy of childhood and spring typifies
Cummings' epistemological point of view that children

124 Friedman, E. E. Cummings, The Art of His Poetry, 39.
are truly alive for they experience and respond to the immediate. At the same time Cummings' attitude toward adults shows through the phrase "the queer old balloon-man." Once again there is a romantic metaphysical concern with nature. Spring has barely arrived, and the world is "mud-luscious" and "puddle-wonderful," a uniquely lyrical description of a much used poetic subject. To add to the sense of joyousness Cummings has included an allusion to Pan, the goat footed Greek god of shepherds and pastures.

Clearly in evidence in this poem are several elements of Cummings' aesthetics. Motion is stressed as always through spacing of words on the page. "eddieandbill" and "bettyandisbel" are strung together just as they would be if spoken by excited, happy, busy children. The picture of the retreating balloonman is stressed by the spread out spacing of the last seven lines. Capitalization of the word "Just-" in line one emphasizes that the season has barely changed, thereby calling to mind the almost frenzied gaiety felt by children released from a long winter's confinement indoors. Cummings' early "adjectival style" is noted in this poem too. By combining nouns and adjectives into hyphenated predicate adjectives, Cummings creates effective new descriptive coinages, "mud-luscious" and "puddle-wonderful."

Moving to the second volume of poems published during this early period, & (1925), one finds an early expression of Cummings' vision of some ideal transcendental world in "who knows if the moon's":\footnote{126}

who knows if the moon's
a balloon, coming out of a keen city
in the sky-filled with pretty people?
(and if you and i should
get into it, if they
should take me and take you into their balloon
why then
we'd go up higher with all the pretty people
than houses and steeples and clouds:
go sailing
away and away sailing into a keen
city which nobody's ever visited, where
always
it's
Spring) and everyone's \footnote{127}
in love and flowers pick themselves

Cummings presents parts of all four aspects of his vision in arriving at a vague transcendental ideal in this poem. Nature and reality are the aspects of his metaphysics which appear. The moon, an image taken from nature, is the central image of the poem. The question posed is one of identification of reality. Who really knows what the moon is? Cummings suggests an answer that involves his epistemology and politics. The mind, he implies, is capable of rising above the "houses and steeples and clouds," of transcending this world to a

\footnote{126} Ibid., 46.
\footnote{127} Cummings, Op. Cit., 73.
better world where individuals ("you and i") are "in love" and where only the present is important for "always/it's/Spring."

In order to express these sentiments Cummings naturally employs his developing aesthetics. Later on, the language he develops to express his ideas is of a more philosophical nature, but already included are such key words as above, depth, height, and beyond. "Spring" is the only word in the poem which he deemed important enough to emphasize by use of a capital letter. Actually the poem is set up in four line free verse stanzas although the spacing in the last stanza might cause one to overlook the fact. Perhaps the contained form might be representative of the contained spirit straining for transcendence of this world. At any rate, "who knows if the moon's" voices vaguely Cummings' vision of an ideal transcendental world.

Also published in 1925 was XLI Poems. From that volume comes "the skinny voice," an early satire which indicates Cummings' increasing interest in people:

the skinny voice

of the leatherfaced woman with the crimson nose and coquettishly-cocked bonnet

having ceased the

---

128 Friedman, E. E. Cummings, The Art of His Poetry, 16.
33.

captain announces that as three dimes seven nickels and ten pennies have been deposited upon the drum there is need of just twenty five cents dear friends to make it an even dollar whereupon the Divine Average who was attracted by the inspired sister's howling moves off will anyone tell him why he should blow two bits for the coming of Christ Jesus?

This increasing interest is gradual and is concerned with people as both individuals and types. The Salvation Army lady is a well described individual with a "skinny voice," a leathery skin, a red nose, and a typical Salvation Army bonnet made individual by its being "coquettishly cocked." Opposed to her is the Divine Average, the ordinary man on the street, without physical description, who has chanced by and hears the pitch of the woman and the captain. This typed individual thinks briefly about the plea, dismisses the idea, and


130 Friedman, E. E. Cummings, The Art of His Poetry, 32.
continues on with his ordinary life.

Perhaps one of the most intriguing aesthetic aspects of this poem is Cummings' use of punctuation in place of words in the last few lines. The Divine Average questions in his mind the plea before him, becomes more and more agitated by it, and finally rather indignantly and quite emphatically ("!") rejects the whole idea. If the reader misses the implication of the series of punctuation marks, Cummings kindly restates the reaction in the language of the Divine Average in the very last line.

The final volume of the early period of Cummings' writing is *is 5*, published in 1926. According to Friedman "*is 5* is Cummings first consistently characteristic book of poems." From that volume come two poems of interest, "next to of course god" and "in spite of everything."

"next to of course god" is an example of Cummings' satiric vision which basically starts in *is 5*. After this time poems of a satirical nature are more predominant, taking up from a fifth to a third of each book. Topics which fall under the heading of national affairs receive the brunt of Cummings' satire. "next to of course god" is typical in this respect:

132 Ibid., 48.
133 Friedman, E. E. Cummings, The Art of His Poetry, 48.
"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 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 beaut-
ful than these heroic happy dead
who rushed like lions to the roaring slaughter
did 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.134

In this poem the persona is listening to a patriotic
speech. All the common cliches are employed to arouse
sympathy and lull thought in the hearer, and the speech
is made rapidly so that hopefully there is no time for
applying reason to what is being said. Although Cummings' epistemology is generally anti-rational, his political
belief in the individual overpowers his antipathy for
forethought in this poem. The individual stands opposed
to the mass of "heroic happy dead" who "did not stop to
think." To the final question posed by the speaker Cummings would answer "yes!"

No punctuation or capitalization slow down the
reading rate of the first thirteen lines of the poem.
In contrast, the last line contains two capitals and two
periods, and it is set out from the rest of the poem by
the space between the last two lines. In this manner
does Cummings cast doubt on the preceding thirteen lines.

The rhyme scheme is experimental, but regular - ababced cdefe g. Line eight contains the only unusual words in the poem, and they are only American slang terms tossed in to cover up for the truth which is missing. The imagery used in the speech is the much used imagery of patriotic speakers. Soldiers are compared to lions and liberty is personified. Undoubtedly Cummings has recreated a fairly accurate representation of a political speech in "next to of course god" and just as undoubtedly he disapproves of the jingoistic political philosophy.

"in spite of everything" is a completely different kind of poem found in is 5.

in spite of everything
which breathes and moves, since Doom
(with white longest hands
neatening each crease)
will smooth entirely our minds

-before leaving my room
i turn, and(stooping
through the morning)kiss
this pillow, dear
where our heads lived and were 135

Love has been, since the very beginning, one of Cummings' favored topics. In is 5 over forty poems out of eighty-nine deal with this topic, while less than half that many are satires. 136 "in spite of everything" presents the view of Cummings' politics that love alone, on an individual basis, is the solution to the world's problems.

135 Ibid., 168.
The world "of everything that breathes and moves" can be largely ignored because death "will smooth entirely our minds." ("Doom" is a neatener, a smoother, rather than a dreaded blackness.) What is worthwhile in the world, then, is love, and it should be revered accordingly.

There is a typical lack of capitalization here. "Doom" is capitalized for emphasis, however. Parentheses are used once in each stanza, but their usage is fairly normal. Spacing in this poem is quite conventional as well. There are two visual free verse stanzas of five lines apiece. For the most part, then, "in spite of everything" is less flamboyantly unconventional than some of Cummings' other early poems, yet it still voices parts of his overall vision.

Thus, in the early period of Cummings' writing four volumes of poetry are published within three years. Already most of his predominant themes are being incorporated: love, spring, children, death, society, war, and time. His technique is developing at the same time. The echoes of outside literary influences have died away; experimentation with spacing, typography, and coinage of words has begun; and there is fusion of thought and technique in attempts to accurately recreate experience.

After is 5 in 1926, five years elapse until Cummings

136 Ibid., 49.
again publishes a volume of poetry. With *Viva* in 1931 the middle period of his writing begins. By again examining some typical examples from the volumes of poetry published in the 1930's and 1940's we can see in what ways, if any, Cummings is developing.

In is 5 Cummings developed the satirical vision that is now a standard part of his outlook. World War I and the Depression have helped to bring his satire into focus. 137 His satire is now sharper and has deeper emotional subject matter. 138 "i sing of Olaf" is an example:

```
i sing of Olaf glad and big
whose warmest heart recoiled at war:
a conscientious object-or

his wellbeloved colonel (trig
westpointer most succinctly bred)
took erring Olaf soon in hand;
but-though an host of overjoyed
noncoms(first knocking on the head
him)do through icy waters roll
that helplessness which others stroke
with brushes recently employed
anent this muddy toiletbowl,
while kindred intellects evoke
allegiance per blunt instruments-
Olaf(being to all intents
a corpse and wanting any rag
upon what God unto him gave)
responds,without getting annoyed
"i will not kiss your f.ing flag"

straightway the silver bird looked grave
(departing hurriedly to shave)
but-though all kinds of officers
(a yearning nation's blueeyed pride)
```

137 *Friedman, E. E. Cummings, The Growth of a Writer*, 76.

their passive prey did kick and curse
until for wear their clarion
voices and boots were much the worse,
and egged the first class privates on
his rectum wickedly to tease
by means of skillfully applied
bayonets roasted hot with heat—
Olaf (upon what were once knees)
does almost ceaselessly repeat
"there is some s. I will not eat"

our president, being of which
assertions duly notified
threw the yellow son of a bitch
into a dungeon, where he died

Christ (of His mercy infinite)
I pray to see; and Olaf, too

preponderatingly because
unless statistics lie he was
more brave than me: more blond than you

Olaf is a conscientious objector. He is the epitome
of Cummings' individual for he will not give up his be-
liefs even in the face of physical as well as verbal
abuse. The situation is carried to its furthest extreme
and Olaf dies as a result of his refusal to relinquish
his position. The army personnel, from highest to
lowest, come in for their share of the blame—particu-
larly the "succinctly bred" Westpoint colonel who takes
it upon himself to correct the "erring Olaf." But it
was the action of the president that was the immediate
cause of Olaf's death, so the president receives most
of the blame.

The poem is presented in narrative style, with no

particular set form. Stanza length varies according to the subject matter ("our president" receiving a four line stanza all to himself, for example). The rhyme scheme, while by no means regular, does eventually wind up rhyming the majority of the lines. The "i" that narrates the poem is uncapitalized, while "Olaf" and the "I" when Olaf speaks are capitalized. Olaf and Christ are ranked equally by Cummings' use of capitals. This poem presents some position changes, too, as in lines eight and nine, "first knocking on the head him." Cummings' typographical and experimental techniques, which are now becoming more frequent, are "used most often in the satirical and comic poems for mockery...and in the city and descriptive poems for movement and vision."\(^{140}\)

After topics of national concern come topics of scientific commercialism as objects of Cummings' satire.\(^{141}\) These topics begin to be developed in the 1930's as America becomes grossly concerned with Progress. Cummings expresses his opinion of progress in "o pr":

```
o pr
  gress verily thou art m
  mentous superc
  lossal hyperpr
  digious etc i kn
  w & if you d
```

\(^{140}\)Friedman, E. E. Cummings, The Growth of a Writer, 77.

\(^{141}\)Friedman, E. E. Cummings, The Art of His Poetry, 49.
n't why go
to yonder s
called newsreel s
called theatre & with your
wn eyes beh
ld The
(The president The
President of The president
of the The) president of
the(union The president of the
united states The president of the united
states of The President of the) United States
Of America unde negant redire quemquam supp
sedly thr
w
i
n
g
a
baseball

Cummings' view of scientific advance has always been
dim, and in this poem progress is definitely under attack.
It has produced nothing better than a "so called newsreel"
or "so called theatre" which only replaces the much-more-
to-be-desired actual experience. Anything second-hand is,
to Cummings' way of thinking, evil, even if that second-
hand experience be witnessing the president of the United
States wasting his time throwing a baseball.

This poem typifies, too, a few new devices that
Cummings is developing in No Thanks. With this volume
comes more emphasis on obvious visual shape (one notices

the "o" placed outside the left hand margin of this poem, the inset parenthetical experiments with the words "the president of the United States," and the descending arrangement of the last seven lines), interlacing of words (particularly noticeable in the parenthetical material and experiments with setting the "o" out and letting it tie together the whole poem), and typographical spacing (evidenced especially in the last seven lines).

Other new devices in this volume are capital letters that appear and disappear and words that are built by cumulative additions. What is developing is a more conceptual vocabulary for expressing his ideas.

From the "New Poems" section of Collected Poems, published in 1938, comes "you shall above all things be glad and young," which expresses parts of Cummings' metaphysics, epistemology, politics, and aesthetics without being satirical as "o pr" and "i sing of Olaf" are. During this period (No Thanks and "New Poems"), love poems per se seem to be on the wane. Only two poems out of ninety-three can actually be classified as such.

However, there are a number of transcendental poems which praise love and lovers in general, and "you shall above all things be glad and young" is of this variety:

143 Friedman, E. E. Cummings, The Growth of a Writer, 84.
144 Ibid., 127.
you shall above all things be glad and young. For if you're young, whatever life you wear it will become you, and if you are glad whatever's living will yourself become. Girlboys may nothing more than boygirls need: whose any mystery makes every man's flesh put space on; and his mind take off time that you should ever think, may god forbid and (in his mercy) your true lover spare: for that way knowledge lies, the foetal grave called progress, and negation's dead undoom.

I'd rather learn from one bird how to sing than teach ten thousand stars how not to dance.

Once again one finds a poem incorporating some aspects of all four parts of Cummings' vision. From his metaphysics comes the accent on nature found in the last two lines of the poem. His metaphysics provide, also, the view of "the foetal grave called progress" and one remembers that where society sees life, Cummings sees death. From his epistemology comes the emphasis on youth and the plea that the "mind take off time," i.e. stop planning for the future and live for the present. From his politics comes the stress on the individual - the "you" - and the individual's lover.

His aesthetics bind the whole together. The form that Cummings uses in "you shall above all things be glad and young" is an alternating pattern of two line stanzas, with a three line and four line stanza in between. Written in free verse, this poem continues the development of the

appearing and disappearing capitals noted in the last volume, *No Thanks*. It also hints at a more controlled, complex style. 146

Even more representative of Cummings' transcendental vision as a whole is "anyone lived in a pretty how town":

anyone lived in a pretty how town
with up so floating many bells down
spring summer autumn winter
he sang his didn't he danced his did.

Women and men (both little and small)
cared for anyone not at all
they sowed their isn't they reaped their same
sun, moon, stars, rain

children guessed (but only a few
and down they forgot as up they grew
autumn winter spring summer)
that noone loved him more by more

when by now and tree by leaf
she laughed his joy she cried his grief
bird by snow and stir by still
anyone's any was all to her

someone's married their everyones
laughed their cryings and did their dance
(sleep wake hope and then) they
said their nevers they slept their dream

stars rain sun moon
(and only the snow can begin to explain
how children are apt to forget to remember
with up so floating many bells down

one day anyone died i guess
(and noone stooped to kiss his face)
busy folk buried them side by side
little by little and was by was

all by all and deep by deep
and more by more they dream their sleep
noone and anyone earth by april
wish by spirit and if by yes.

Women and men (both dong and ding)
summer autumn winter spring
reaped their sowing and went their came
sun moon stars rain

Published in 1940 in 50 Poems, "anyone lived in a pretty how down" presents a narrative picture of Cummings' vision and development to that date. "anyone" is an individual in the true Cummings sense of the word. He responds joyously to life and is truly alive. Anyone is placed in the setting of an ordinary town, surrounded by a cyclical ordered natural universe ("summer autumn winter spring"). Also in the setting are the ordinary "someones" and "everyones" of the town whose scope of life stretches from little to small. Their daily life is unimaginative and unresponsive. They don't understand and therefore "care for anyone not at all." But anyone is not to face the someones and everyones of pretty how town alone. Noone, his lover, who is also a responsive Cummings individual, is there to share in anyone's day by day positive acceptance of experience. Thus one sees Cummings' vision of the individual, the lover, opposing the mass society of unresponsive citizens. Individualism and love are the answers to finding the happy life inside the confines of the ordered universe. Cummings suggests that perhaps a few of the children of pretty how town understand the feelings of anyone and

147 E. E. Cummings, 50 Poems (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1940), 39.
noone but "down they forgot as up they grew." One day, however, anyone dies. His death is no traumatic incident in the poem, reflecting Cummings' lack of fear of the eventuality. There is instead a confidence in the rightness of the cyclical process that is continually leading back to spring.

Here, too, is Cummings' aesthetic developed to its fullest extent to date. The poem exhibits a controlled command of rhyme and meter set in a regular stanza. (From 50 Poems on the use of a regular stanza increases in importance.) Throughout the poem Cummings uses his developed conceptual vocabulary in phrases like "with up so floating many bells down" and "down they forgot as up they grew." His parallels are also of a conceptual nature - "bird by snow and stir by still" and "wish by spirit and if by yes." As usual there are the capitalization and punctuation quirks that add emphasis and motion to any Cummings poem. And, as frosting to the cake, besides the successful combination of all the developed techniques used previously, Cummings manages to add a new touch - a refrain. Or perhaps refrains is more accurate, for both "spring summer autumn winter" and "sun, moon, stars, rain" are repeated throughout the poem.

148 Friedman, E. E. Cummings, The Art of His Poetry, 100.
There is yet one more volume of poetry published in this middle phase of Cummings' evolution: \textit{1xl}, published in 1944. As \textit{1xl} reflects the events of early years of the forties,\footnote{Ibid., 133.} the particular poem "what if a much of a which of a wind" considers the particular question posed at that time (and ever since) about the results of an atomic war.

\begin{verbatim}
what if a much of a which of a wind
gives the truth to summer's lie;
bloodies with dizzying leaves the sun
and yanks immortal stars awry?
Blow king to beggar and queen to seem
(blow friend to fiend; blow space to time)
-when skies are hanged and oceans drowned,
the single secret will still be man

what if a keen of a lean wind flays
screaming hills with sleet and snow:
strangles valleys by ropes of thing
and stifles forests in white ago?
Blow hope to terror; blow seeing to blind
(blow pity to envy and soul to mind)
-whose hearts are mountains, roots are trees,
it's they shall cry hello to the spring

what if a dawn of a doom of a dream
bites this universe in two,
peels forever out of his grave
and sprinkles nowhere with me and you?
Blow soon to never and never to twice
(blow life to isn't; blow death to was)
-all nothing's only our hugest home;
the most who die, the more we live\footnote{E. E. Cummings, \textit{1xl} (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1944), 20.}
\end{verbatim}

Most of Cummings' metaphysics come into play here. The poem itself may be seen as an affirmation of the indestructability of man. Nature is once more brought into
the play as the bomb is likened to a wind which blows everything awry - including the more or less constants of nature, the skies and the oceans. Man, as an enigma only, will remain the one constant. If a bomb should destroy the universe, Cummings says, blowing "me and you" to "nowhere", only those individuals who had had had a firm close relationship with nature will "cry hello to the spring."

As suggested earlier, Cummings' stanza pattern is becoming increasingly more regular. "what if a much of a which of a wind" is set up in three regular eight line stanzas. The rhyme scheme is fairly irregular except that the second and fourth lines of every stanza rhyme. The seventh line of each stanza is introduced by a dash, and each stanza begins with "what if a..." thus maintaining a parallelism and balance throughout the poem without the use of an absolute rhyme scheme to keep balance. Almost half the poems in this volume utilize regular rhyme and meter thereby producing the distinct impression that this is a "crystallized book, both in art and in vision."152

So, in the 1930's and 1940's one finds in Cummings' poetry a broadening and deepening of the satirical vision, and an increasing control of form and technique. The predominant themes have remained unchanged.

152 Friedman, E. E. Cummings, The Growth of a Writer, 139.
Moving to the third and final period of Cummings' writing, one finds three volumes of poetry published during the 1950's: *Xaipe* (1950), *Poems 1923-1954* (1954), and *95 Poems* (1958). When *Xaipe* appeared Cummings was fifty-six years old. Therefore, these poems represent "the full flowering of his development." Examination of a few typical selections would seem to be in order to judge whether, or how, his work is changing.

In both *Xaipe* and *95 Poems* there appears "a resurgence of interest in typographical experimentation, which seems to be directly related to the increased emphasis upon description." Past emphasis on people seems to be decreasing and impressions increasing. There is also a trend toward rural scenes. Examples of these developments are "(fea" from *Xaipe* and "un(bee)mo" from *95 Poems*:

(fea
therr
ain
:dreamin
g field o
ver forest &;
wh
o could
be

153 Ibid., 152.
154 Ibid., 156.
155 Ibid., 127.
156 Ibid., 156.
"(fee) presents an impressionistic description of a soft rain falling on a rural scene. Here is part of Cummings' metaphysics once again. The dreamlike quality is enhanced by the use of parentheses which enclose the whole poem. The setting, in nature, presents the same metaphysical emphasis that has been remarked throughout Cummings' work.

Typographical experimentation is not only to be noted in the use of the parentheses and the visual split-up arrangement of the words on the page, but also in the use of punctuation to add emphasis and impact to the word "softer." Other punctuation is, as usual, to slow down the reading rate and control the emotional evocation as much as possible.

un(bee)mo

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

asl(rose)leep

"un(bee)mo" creates a different kind of impression.

on the other hand, and employs a different typographical experimental technique in so-doing. Cummings has again chosen a subject from nature in this poem - a bee enclosed in the petals of a rose. Typographically this enclosure is expressed by parentheses which place one poem within another. Both exist simultaneously. Although both parts of the poem are separate entities, they depend on one another for unity of meaning and impression.

There are concerns other than typographical experimentation in these last volumes, of course. For example, "I thank You God for most this amazing" is concerned with a number of Cummings' favorite topics - nature, death, and life:

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)159

This poem is a hymn to a life of responsiveness -
one of the permeating involvements in Cummings' metaphysics.

159 Cummings, Xaipë, 65.
Involved in this overriding theme is praise of God and praise of nature. His politics are involved too, insofar as only the true individual, the lover, can experience life in this manner. "I who have died" in line five expresses Cummings' constant view that society is dead, and in order to escape that death and be reborn one must become an individual responding to that "which is natural which is infinite which is yes." Cummings strongly implies that everyday can be and ideally is "this amazing day...the birthday of life and of love and wings."

The method of presentation is Cummings' developed controlled sonnet form. As a matter of fact, he has brought this technique so far under control that he can fit it smoothly into a regular Shakespearean sonnet rhyme scheme. Cummings' later sonnets all exhibit more regular spacing, meter, and rhyme scheme; however, at the same time he seemingly compensates by using more coined words and half rhymes. 160

As usual, the phraseology Cummings' uses particularly suits his needs. Making "yes" and "no" serve as nouns, and making adjectives into adverbs always are intended to result in revitalizing worn out words. He manages to capture the transcendental outlook, too, by using the word "wings" and its connotations. This sonnet blends a now controlled technique with Cummings'

160 Friedman, E. E. Cummings, The Art of His Poetry, 102.
long term vision.

A poem of a similar theme, "maybe god," also from *Xaipe*, does present one more new aspect of Cummings' development:

maybe god

is a child
's hand)very carefully
bring
-ing
to you and to
me(and quite with
out crushing)the

papery weightless diminutive

world
with a hole in
it out
of which demons with wings would be streaming if

something had(maybe they couldn't
agree)not happened(and floating-
ly int

°161

The difference in "i thank You God for most this
amazing" and "maybe god" is especially to be noted in
the first three lines of the latter. Cummings' epistemologica
faith in children has translated itself
into a symbol in this poem, and this shift to symbolism
in Cummings' later work is significant for it makes his
later poetry "more lucid, more moving, and more pro-
found."162 These poems do not indicate that Cummings

161 Cummings, *Xaipe*, 54.
is "becoming mellower," but rather that he is generally "more absorbed in visionary things." 163

However, Cummings is still very much aware of what is going on in the world around him. "Thanksgiving, 1956" testifies to that fact:

THANKSGIVING
(1956)

a monstering horror swallows this unworld me by you as the god of our father's fathers bows to a which that walks like a who

but the voice-with-a-smile of democracy announces night & day "all poor little peoples that want to be free just trust in the u s a"

suddenly uprose Hungary and she gave a terrible cry "no slave's unlife shall murder me for i will freely die"

she cried so high thermopylae heard her and marathon and all prehuman history and finally the UN

"be quiet little hungary and do as you are bid a good kind bear is angry we fear for the quo pro quid"

uncle sam shrugs his pretty pink shoulders you know how and he twitches a liberal titty and lisps "i'm busy right now"

so rah-rah-rah democracy let's all be as thankful as hell and bury the statue of liberty (because it begins to smell) 164

164 Cummings, 95 Poems, 39.
The Hungarian revolt of 1956 has caused violent literary reaction the world over. Cummings' caustic remarks on the subject have been called by Friedman, "nothing but obscene outrage...not art." To fly in the face of one of the outstanding Cummings scholars is perhaps unwise, but it would seem that Cummings could not have said less and remained true to his convictions. Like Olaf, whatever else Cummings may be guilty of, he has never been backward about stating flatly and holding to his opinion on any subject that did not agree with his view of life.

"Thanksgiving, 1956" is one of the few satires in 95 Poems. Their number has been cut down to the point that they only comprise approximately one-tenth of this volume. They do seem a bit sharper than such earlier ones as "pity this busy monster, manunkind," however.

Any politics other than the individual and love is not acceptable to Cummings. The first stanza of this poem firmly states that the "unworld" is being swallowed by "a which that walks like a who," or in other words some mass political body that is trying to pass itself off as a benefit to the individual. Democracy to Cummings is all wrong to begin with because it is a mass action, but it comes into even greater

166 Ibid.
disfavor here because it fails in its promise to help make the little people free. Even "The UN" which also stands for mass action, and is therefore bad in Cummings' sight, is afraid to aid Hungary.

The form employed here is a regular four line stanza with alternating rhyming lines. Only "The UN" is capitalized, probably for the purpose of emphasizing Cummings' favorite symbol of non-life. (It appears in its usual use in line two - "unworld!") Not only the sonnets, then, are appearing in controlled conventional form.

As Cummings grew older he continued to explore the meaning of timelessness and death. Several poems of this variety appear in 95 Poems. "over us if(as what was dusk becomes" is one of them:

over us if(as what was dusk becomes

darkness)innumerably singular
strictly immeasurable nowhere flames
-its farthest silence nearer than each our
heartbeat-believe that love(and only love)

comprehends huger easily beyonds
than timelessly alive all glories we've agreed with nothing deeper than our minds
to call the stars. And(darling)never fear

love,when such marvels vanish,will include
-there by arriving magically here-
an everywhere which you've and i've agreed
and we've(with one last more than kiss)to call

\[167\text{ Marks, Op. Cit., 141.}\]
most the amazing miracle of all

In this poem once again elements of all four parts of Cummings' vision are to be noted. There is a concern with nature (dusk, darkness, stars) that immediately brings to mind his metaphysics. Looming large is his concern with timelessness in this particular poem. Death, that "strictly immeasurable nowhere," is conquered by love. Cummings' politics are completely conquering here. The individuals and love triumph over not only life, but death. The view is that there is nothing more powerful. The mind is relegated to a very minor role - "nothing deeper than our minds" - that of naming (not defining or knowing) the stars. The aura of transcendentalism is captured again by use of words like "beyonds" in line six.

Aesthetically the poem continues the trend in the later work of Cummings to a controlled fusion of his technique with a regular sonnet form. Like "i thank You God for most this amazing", "over us if(as what was dusk becomes" is in Shakespearean sonnet form. And like the former, this poem employs abundant coinages and half rhymes. The unconventional spacing used here is misleading. Certainly the poem does not look like a conventional sonnet on the printed page. Instead Cummings has used again the technique of the visual stanza.

168 Cummings, 95 Poems, 69.
58.

Capital letters are still appearing and disappearing at random. The first sentence of the poem does not begin with a capital letter, while the second does, for example. Punctuation is still serving to control reading rate and emotional response generally.
IV.

Thus having examined representative poems from all three periods of Cummings' writing, and having applied to these samples the elements of his transcendental vision which pertained, some conclusions can now be drawn about Cummings' overall development as a poet. In order to do this, a brief general review and synthesis of facts is necessary.

That Cummings began writing with an already set outlook is undeniable. His view of an ideal transcendental world peopled by individuals (lovers), finds very early expression in "who knows if the moon's." At the same time, however, Cummings recognizes that, unfortunate as it may be, "mostpeople" rather than "you and i" inhabit this "unworld." Therefore, he spends much of his time defining a genuine mode of living. This involves his attempt to capture spontaneity and immediacy of experience for his reader by means of his aesthetic techniques.

*Tulips and Chimneys* provides examples of every facet of Cummings' vision. Each poem, of course, depicts aesthetics. Aside from that, though, any Cummings poem has in it at least one other element of his vision and quite frequently more than one. Already extant in "the Cambridge ladies," "o sweet spontaneous," and "in Just-"
are emphases on romantic appreciation of nature and natural order, awareness of a genuine life above the pettyness of everyday society, confidence in the aliveness of children as opposed to the deadness of trained or educated adults that life is in the future rather than the present, belief in the efficacy of individualism and love, and a conceptual method of presenting all of these ideas.

His next three volumes of verse are much like Tulips and Chimneys. They all deal with love, spring, children, death, war, and time. At the end of the first period of his publication, Cummings is, then, employing his full vision. With the exception of a romantic attitude toward existence, he has developed a style peculiarly his own and hints of outside literary influences have gradually disappeared.

In the second period, the 1930's and 1940's, Cummings' work is marked by a greater emphasis on the satirical vision prompted by his dissatisfaction with mass political bodies and mass production which predominate the world scene. At the same time comes an increasing control of form and technique in the realm of aesthetics. By this time he is able to fuse effectively his conceptual language and experimental techniques with the traditional forms of poetry, particularly the sonnet. His metaphysics, epistemology and politics remain unchanged.
The poem, "anyone lived in a pretty how town," published in 1940 in *50 Poems*, is a statement of his total transcendental vision. It shows particularly well the unchanged outlook and the developing control of technique common to this period of Cummings' production. The development seems most evident when "anyone lived in a pretty how town" is put side by side with "who knows if the moon's," its closest equivalent from the representatives of the first period. The vision is more completely and concretely expressed, and the technique is more competently and effectively handled.

The final period of Cummings' work contains even further developments in poetic technique and a noticeable refinement of some aspects of his theme. Typographical experimentation for the purpose of attempting to capture impressions is on the upswing. There is much continued emphasis on description (particularly of rural scenes), proportionately fewer satires, and less emphasis on people, while at the same time greater concern with concepts and ideas. There is a trend toward symbolism in this later work as well which tends to give it more lucidity and respectability.

In conclusion, to quote Friedman once again on Cummings' work, "The development of his poetic thought, then, has been rather an unfolding than a series of climaxes and new directions; his later thought, indeed
implicit in his earlier work, simply becomes fuller and more precisely and accurately expressed." Or as Cummings himself might have put it, "he remained always and irrevocably himself."
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