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INTRODUCTION

Two days after E.E. Cummings' death, the *New York Times* carried a story about a coffee shop waitress who mourned the poet's passing and who, when questioned, turned out to own two of his books.¹ This charming, if sentimental, anecdote is a good index to Cummings' popular reputation, one matched in this century only by Robert Frost's. It is less easy to indicate Cummings' critical reputation, however, which at times seems complicated by his very popularity. In fact, a rather detailed survey of Cummings scholarship is required if the critical response to his work is to be made clear.

Critical comment on Cummings in the 1922 to 1977 period reflects a more or less continuous and intensifying scholarly interest in his work.² It also reflects a tendency for his reputation and for critical interest in him to rise and fall concurrently with developments in the history of American literary scholarship. In the twenties, Cummings published several of his important works: the autobiographical World War I novel *The Enormous Room* (1922); four collections of poems, *Tulips and Chimneys* (1923), *♣* (1925), *XLI Poems* (1925), and *is 5* (1926); and the play *Him* (1927). Not surprisingly, the Cummings criticism of the decade is dominated by reviews. Those of *The Enormous Room* typically veer to extremes of praise or condemnation, the choice seemingly determined by a given reviewer's attitude toward the literary avant-garde or toward Cummings' unconventional judgments of war, governments, and value systems. Perhaps the most important review is John Peale Bishop's, with its anticipation of later explorations of the novel's pilgrimage conversion motifs.³ Also significant is Edward Cummings' (the poet's father's) introduction to *The Enormous Room*;⁴ it reprints letters and telegrams involved in securing Cummings' release from La Ferté-Macé, the French prison setting of the novel.

The reviews of Cummings' poetry of the twenties are typically "mixed." His "eccentric" typography is the despair of some reviewers; it enchants others, but most express high praise for his themes and serious doubts about the legitimacy of his technical experiments. This ambivalence eventually led to what became for a time a cliché of Cummings

criticism (especially that by “non-specialists”), the idea that he is a profoundly traditional, even conventional, poet in spite of his modernist, experimental surfaces. Important reviews are those by Slater Brown—with whom Cummings was imprisoned in France (“B” in *The Enormous Room*)—and Edmund Wilson. Brown emphasizes the influence of painting on Cummings’ poetic techniques.⁵ Wilson charges Cummings with immaturity.⁶ Other reviewers note Cummings’ use of improvisation and of the techniques of such seventeenth-century poets as Marvell and Herrick.

Reviews of Cummings’ first play, *Him*, tend to excess: it revitalizes a moribund theatre; it is empty and boring. More temperate responses register delight in the play’s verbal and dramatic innovations and distress at its lack of concern for “produceability” and clarity of meaning. Of special interest is Gilbert Seldes’ pamphlet “*him*” and *the Critics*, a collection of excerpts from twenty-seven newspaper reviews of the Provincetown Playhouse production.⁷ In any case, it would be some time before commentary on *Him* got much beyond assertion, summary, or description.

In addition to reviews of specific works, Cummings criticism in the twenties did produce three important more general studies. The best of these is Gorham B. Munson’s “Syrinx.”⁸ Munson affords Cummings’ poetry the sort of careful analytic attention to technique that would not become typical of the scholarship for many years. His argument, that Cummings’ use of experimental methods for the expression of traditional lyric themes marries form and content rather than divorces them, represents an important repudiation of those who would separate Cummings’ techniques from his themes. Furthermore, Munson demonstrates that Cummings’ punctuation and typography are “*active instruments for literary expression*,” that their intention and achievement is the renewal of antique themes. A similar point is made in an extensive section on Cummings’ orthographic and punctuational devices in Robert Graves’ and Laura Riding’s *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*.⁹ Also of interest is Paul Rosenfeld’s observation, in his *Men Seen*, of Cummings’ connection to the “old Puritanic stem” of New England literature.¹⁰ All of these arguments and suggestions are expanded on by later scholars.

Reviews again dominate Cummings criticism in the thirties, although there is a slight increase in the number of general studies devoted to his work. Books receiving significant attention from the reviewers are Cummings’ experimental account of his journey to the Soviet Union, *Eimi* (1933), and three volumes of poetry, *ViVa* (1931), *No Thanks* (1935), and *Collected Poems* (1938). His minor works of the decade, such as the ballet scenario *Tom* or the translation of Louis Aragon’s revolutionary poem, *The Red Front*, receive perfunctory attention at most. Judgments of *Eimi* are wide-ranging; for example, it is variously described as a comic masterpiece, a work of exhibitionistic obscurantism, a witty but affected book, a radical defense of individual

and artist against the collectivist threat, a brilliant experiment in poetic prose, and a willful confusion of poetry with prose. Most intriguing are reviews by pro-Soviet avant-gardists who perceive Cummings' critique of Communist Russia as a betrayal of the revolution by an erstwhile ally; they augur the difficulties certain "liberal" critics would have from the thirties onward in dealing with Cummings' increasingly conservative political stance.

The major development in the reviews of the poetry of the thirties is the recognition of the intensified use of satire in the poems, a recognition that leads to the common division of Cummings' verse into lyric and satiric categories. The most significant reviews of *ViVa* are those by Horace Gregory and Allen Tate. Each makes a charge that, whether repeated or refuted, remains a staple of Cummings scholarship. Gregory asserts that Cummings' poetry is static, without development.¹¹ Tate charges that Cummings' work is so personal as to be private.¹² Reviews of *No Thanks* and *Collected Poems* make similar complaints or defend Cummings against them.

Of the significant essays on Cummings in the thirties, John Peale Bishop's "The Poems and Prose of E.E. Cummings" is an attempt to place him as an artist and modernist,¹³ while John Finch's "New England Prodigal"¹⁴ and Paul Rosenfeld's "The Enormous Cummings"¹⁵ relate the poet to the traditions of literary transcendentalism. The most important essay of the period, however, is R.P. Blackmur's "Notes on E.E. Cummings' Language."¹⁶ Blackmur charges that Cummings' anti-intellectual, romantic-egoistical poetry, with its private vocabulary, is imprecise, and even unintelligible. In part because of the force with which he presents it, in part because of the portion of truth it contains, Blackmur's argument has had enormous weight. For the next several decades commentators on Cummings would have, directly or indirectly, to respond to it. Yet Blackmur's damning essay contains the seeds of its own refutation in its suggestion that continued practice of Cummings' private notation might eventually "produce a set of well-ordered conventions susceptible of general use." Just such a view is taken by many later critics when they attempt to counter Blackmur's strictures, and it is the basis for Blackmur's own modification of his earlier judgment in his 1941 review of *50 Poems*.¹⁷

In the thirties, Blackmur and others established the terms of what is a continuing controversy about Cummings' artistic merit: at one pole is praise for his transcending individualism, his social criticism, his technical innovations, and his refurbishing of worn conventions; at the other pole is condemnation for uncontrolled egoism, for an anachronistic conservatism, for "false" experimentalism and anti-intellectualism, for imprecision and unintelligibility, and for a lack of thematic and technical development.

Cummings' minor works of the forties, such as the plays *Anthropos* and *Santa Claus*, received scant critical attention, but his two major

volumes, the collections *50 Poems* (1940) and *1 x 1* (1944), were reviewed by influential critics in influential publications. Cummings' work claimed serious attention. Nevertheless, that attention continued to produce complex and qualified results. Blackmur's review of *50 Poems*, mentioned above, is the major review of the decade. It presents a balanced response, admiring Cummings' immediacy and energy and decrying his too general vocabulary. Furthermore, in it Blackmur expands his suggestion that Cummings' private notation, used continuously, might attain a usable precision. The expansion results from Blackmur's attending to the poems' "use of prepositions, pronouns, and the auxiliary verbs in the guise of substances, and of words ordinarily rhetorical . . . for the things of actual experience." The approach this suggests is employed by many later critics. If Blackmur's review of *50 Poems* is a balanced one, most other contemporary reviews are rather harshly negative, often on the grounds that Cummings had failed to develop as an artist.

The reception of *1 x 1* nearly reverses that of *50 Poems*. Most of the reviews are positive, yet a major one is negative. In it, F.O. Matthiessen insists that the static quality of Cummings' themes and techniques flatly contradicts his constant concern with growth.¹⁸ Clearly, the question of Cummings' development remains crucial in the criticism of the forties.

As the stature of his reviewers indicates Cummings' own stature in the forties, so, too, does a small number of general essays and—the most important event of Cummings' criticism in the decade—the publication in 1946 of the Cummings number of the *Harvard Wake*.¹⁹ The issue contains comment on Cummings by important writers and critics, among them, Jacques Barzun, John Dos Passos, Harry Levin, Marianne Moore, Karl Shapiro, Allen Tate, Lionel Trilling, and William Carlos Williams. The special issue also has significant essays by Lloyd Frankenberg, on Cummings' thematic praise of an aristocracy based not on rank but aliveness, by Paul Rosenfeld, on *Eimi*, and by Theodore Spencer, on Cummings' techniques for replacing the time content of language with simultaneity. Also of interest is Fairfield Porter's brief comment on Cummings as a painter, an aspect of his creative life receiving little further attention until Rushworth M. Kidder's essays of the seventies.

One additional aspect of Cummings scholarship in the forties merits mention here. In 1938 the first edition of Cleanth Brooks' and Robert Penn Warren's *Understanding Poetry* had appeared, containing an explication of "Buffalo Bill's."²⁰ This exemplar of the New Critical technique of close textual analysis signaled what would become a major method of subsequent Cummings scholarship. Several explications of Cummings poems appeared in the forties. However, these were but a predictive rumble to the eruption of such criticism in the fifties and sixties. At the same time, though, the doctrines of the New Criticism would as often impede as encourage attention to Cummings' particular aesthetic virtues.

The fifties and sixties witnessed a remarkable growth in American literary scholarship; the Cummings criticism of the period reflects that growth. The number of items in the fifties considering him and his work more than doubles the number in the forties. If not quite an industry, Cummings scholarship was a thriving small business. This expanded attention to Cummings is characterized by still more extensive reviews of his major works, by more frequent and fuller considerations of him than before in literary and period "histories," by a great increase in essays offering "close readings" of individual poems, by the earliest extensive bibliographical and biographical attention to him, by the first dissertations to take him as their subject, and, most significantly, by several lengthy scholarly articles. These last continue to examine the by-then determined issues of Cummings criticism (the relationship of his techniques to his themes, his growth or lack of it), but they do so more maturely than earlier commentary, offering evidence as well as assertion; frequently they push beyond those issues.

Cummings' important works of the fifties are *Xaipe* (1950), *i: Six Nonlectures* (1953), *Poems 1923-1954* (1954), and *95 Poems* (1958). On the whole, the reviews are "respectful" and indicate that Cummings has become an established, if hardly an establishment, writer. Among the significant reviews of *Xaipe*, some continue the controversy over Cummings' development, others affirm the expressiveness of his experimental techniques and their appropriateness to the expression of his themes. Other important reviews, among them Randall Jarrell's,²¹ make a new charge against Cummings: the absence of the tragic element in his work trivializes both its lyric joy and satiric outrage. *i: Six Nonlectures* collects the talks Cummings gave while Norton Professor of Poetry at Harvard in 1952-1953. Reviews of it tend to summarize those talks or to describe their occasions, their autobiographical content, or their characteristically peculiar style. A few emphasize the concern of the "non-lectures" with the individual in a mass society, their revelation of Cummings' relationships to strains of transcendental thought, and their reflection of the poet's tendency to sentimentalism.

The publication in 1954 of the retrospective collection *Poems 1923-1954* occasioned several essay-reviews reconsidering Cummings' poetic career. Some are enthusiastic, others echo earlier complaints, but most are "mixed" and are of interest for their attempts to locate Cummings on the map of modern poetry. Perhaps of most interest is Randall Jarrell's assessment in the *New York Times Book Review*.²² He finds Cummings' collection a "formidable" one, but complains of its monotony and its too pure split between lyric affirmation and satiric negation. In this, as in his distress at Cummings' alleged lack of a tragic dimension, Jarrell reveals the New Critical bias which sometimes distorted the scholarly response to Cummings in the fifties. In contrast to the many thoughtful reviews of *Poems 1923-1954*, those of *95 Poems* are often perfunctory, is-

suing conventional praise or repeating old charges. There are exceptions, a few of which find the collection below Cummings' usual standard.

Another sign of the increased critical attention paid Cummings in the fifties is the appearance of many close analyses of individual poems, the bulk of them published in the *Explicator*. However paradoxically, these, too, are the result of New Critical emphases. They are most important for their typical insistence on and demonstration of the unity of Cummings' techniques with his themes. Related indicators of increased attention are Paul Lauter's initial work in primary and secondary bibliography²³ and the four doctoral dissertations taking Cummings as their subject. A more dramatic sign than these is the publication in the fifties of the first book on Cummings. Charles Norman's biography, *The Magic-Maker: E.E. Cummings*,²⁴ is more appreciative than it is scholarly or critical. Nevertheless, it makes available much factual, anecdotal, and "atmospheric" information on the poet's life, works, and residences, and, for whatever this is worth, it bears Cummings' imprimatur.

The most important development in Cummings criticism in the fifties, though, is the number of serious scholarly essays devoted to him, several of which appeared in some of the more influential literary journals of the period, among them, *PMLA*, *The Kenyon Review*, and *American Literature*. Summaries of the most significant essays follow. They outline the course of Cummings scholarship in the decade. In "2:1 The World and E.E. Cummings," George Haines, IV returns to what had become by the thirties a cliché of the criticism: the ease with which Cummings' poetry can be divided into and contained by lyric and satiric categories. However, Haines pushes well beyond that cliché in his attempt to resolve the paradox that Cummings loathes abstraction and expresses his loathing concretely, while his love of the concrete is often only expressed abstractly.²⁵ In "The Poetic Mask of E.E. Cummings: Character and Thought of the Speaker," Norman Friedman—who became and remains Cummings' most insightful and prolific critic—argues that the informing characteristic of Cummings' persona is the elevation of "freshness of response and accuracy in its expression" over the chief obstacle to such response and expression, submission to mass life.²⁶ Related points are made by Ralph J. Mills in "The Poetry of Innocence: Notes on E.E. Cummings"²⁷ and by Barbara Watson in "The Dangers of Security: E.E. Cummings' Revolt Against the Future."²⁸ According to Mills, Cummings uses his appraisal of being and becoming to oppose " 'civilized' scientific method." Watson places Cummings' themes in historical context by stressing his rejection of the devitalizing factors enabling the growth of mass societies.

S.V. Baum's "E.E. Cummings: The Technique of Immediacy" considers Cummings' devices of simultaneous presentation, as those devices work against the sequential nature of syntax.²⁹ In " 'Only to Grow': Change in the Poetry of E.E. Cummings," Rudolph Von Abele rebuts the

charge that Cummings' poetry lacks development by demonstrating its technical and thematic progress through three distinct periods.³⁰ Eleanor M. Sickels' "The Unworld of E.E. Cummings" alleges the degeneration of Cummings' satiric verse from effective propaganda and art into a nihilism that is the *reductio ad absurdum* of his radical individualism.³¹ Essays on Cummings' language by Norman Friedman ("Diction, Voice, and Tone: The Poetic Language of E.E. Cummings")³² and Robert E. Maurer ("Latter-Day Notes on E.E. Cummings' Language")³³ make detailed refutations of R.P. Blackmur's earlier strictures. Louis C. Rus's "Structural Ambiguity" prepares the way for later linguistics approaches to the poetry.³⁴

Cummings' drama and prose also receive attention in essays of the fifties. In "*Him* (1927)," Eric Bentley and Theodore Hoffman replace what had been mere controversy about the play with more objective analysis,³⁵ as does Robert E. Maurer in "E.E. Cummings' *Him*."³⁶ Kingsley Widmer's "Timeless Prose" gives similar serious attention to *The Enormous Room* and, more briefly, to *Eimi*.³⁷

It is clear that Cummings' critical reputation improved in the fifties. By-then conventional questions about his artistic growth and the relationship of his techniques to his themes were asked objectively and pursued analytically. They were typically answered in his favor. Nevertheless, in quantity and in level of critical approval, Cummings scholarship never reached the levels accorded such of his contemporaries as Frost, Hemingway, Eliot, Faulkner, and Stevens. (There was, for instance, still no critical book on Cummings.) In part, this is explained by the fact that many critics found—and find—Cummings' breadth and depth of subject, theme, and technique less than fully major. However, it is also in part explained by the fact that Cummings' personal, lyrical, anti-analytical, "anti-intellectual," "simple," and unallusive poetry was (or seemed) out of step with the period's literary and critical fashion for impersonal, dramatic, analytical, intellectual, complex, and allusive art. In the sixties and seventies the fashion would change and in some ways come closer to making demands Cummings' verse might meet. Cummings' reputation in the next two decades would benefit from this change, however partially or indirectly.

Reviews played a minor role in the Cummings scholarship of the sixties; only 73 *Poems* (1963) received significant notice. Not surprisingly in responses to a posthumous volume (Cummings died in 1962), the reviews are typically respectful in tone. Few of them make any critical contribution; some, even when respectful, continue to charge Cummings with insufficient development and ineffective techniques. The latter charge, although now made less often and less vigorously than in previous decades, continues to be rebutted—as it was in the fifties—by a large number (nearly twice that in the previous decade) of close analyses of individual poems. Repeatedly these studies demonstrate the unity of Cum-

mings' themes and techniques. And their weight increases as the number of poems receiving such analysis mounts. In fact, by the early sixties it was generally accepted that Cummings is a serious craftsman whose techniques, however eccentric, are integral to his thematic expression—as some critics, of course, had long insisted. These explications, as well as Cummings' continuing appearance as the subject of dissertations, indicate that the thoughtful attention which typified Cummings scholarship in the fifties was consolidated and expanded in the sixties. This is further indicated by the many major essays on Cummings—more than in any previous period, by the appearance of significant treatments of Cummings in parts of books, and by the several books taking him as their subject. These dominate the Cummings criticism of the period.

Many of the essays on Cummings published in the sixties fall into the same categories as do those of the fifties. The classification showing most growth is that including the essays employing a linguistics approach to the poems. This is not surprising; Cummings' frequent violations of the principles of conventional grammar and syntax make him a prime subject for the then developing use of the tools of linguistics for literary analysis. But although these essays are of interest as early examples of what would become an increasingly significant critical method, most of them are of little importance to Cummings scholarship, for they are more interested in using Cummings' poetry as a means to illuminate linguistics study than the reverse. An exception to this (an exception that in its inversion of those emphases will become more typical of linguistics studies of Cummings in the seventies) is Irene R. Fairley's "Syntax as Style," which discusses syntactic deviance as an expressive device in three Cummings poems.³⁸

Among the general Cummings essays of the decade, John Logan's "The Organ-Grinder and the Cockatoo" is particularly illuminating in its discussion of Cummings' thematic and technical paradigms, love and language, respectively.³⁹ The major thematic essay of the sixties is Patricia Buchanan Tal-Mason Cline's discussion of Cummings' demand for an "holistic experience of life" in her "The Whole E.E. Cummings."⁴⁰ The most significant essay of the sixties on Cummings' technique is Haskell S. Springer's "The Poetics of E.E. Cummings," with its emphasis on Cummings' frequent (and frequently concealed) use of "traditional prosodic principles."⁴¹ In other important contributions in essays, Bernard Benstock, in "All the World a Stage," discusses the elements of drama—especially of dramatic characterization—in Cummings' poems;⁴² James P. Dougherty, in "Language as a Reality in E.E. Cummings," argues that Cummings avoids the pitfalls of abstraction not by grounding his work in phenomenological particulars, as most of his contemporaries do, but by reference to the "tangibility of language itself";⁴³ and Sister Mary David Babcock, O.S.B., in "Cummings' Typography: An Ideogrammic Style," suggests that Cummings' use of typography to capture "aliveness" has connections with the Chinese ideogram.⁴⁴ Other essays of the sixties also

provide context for Cummings and his works. For instance, John Clendenning's "Cummings, Comedy, and Criticism" locates him in the American humor tradition.⁴⁵ More significant is Norman Friedman's attempt to define Cummings' place within (and without) the modernist tradition in his "E.E. Cummings and the Modernist Movement" (reprinted here with a "Post Script" written especially for this volume).⁴⁶

As in the fifties, some of Cummings' individual works also receive attention from essayists in the sixties. Three essays analyze *The Enormous Room*: David E. Smith's "*The Enormous Room* and *The Pilgrim's Progress*,"⁴⁷ Marilyn Gaull's particularly fine "Language and Identity: A Study of E.E. Cummings' *The Enormous Room*,"⁴⁸ and James P. Dougherty's "E.E. Cummings: *The Enormous Room*."⁴⁹ Two critics treat *Him*: Katherine J. Worth in her "The Poets in the American Theatre,"⁵⁰ and Manuel L. Grossman in his "*Him* and the Modern Theatre."⁵¹ In a break with the usual course of Cummings criticism, Charles Stetler devotes an entire essay to a single volume of Cummings' poems. "E.E. Cummings' 73 Poems: With Life's Eye" explores the book as an impressive final stage in Cummings' career-long growth as an artist. The essay is typical of much Cummings scholarship of the sixties in its implicit rejection of earlier accusations of non-development.⁵²

The essays summarized above fall more or less clearly into categories established in the previous decade. A few others break relatively new ground. Sister Joan Marie Lechner, O.S.U., considers Cummings as a "nature poet" in "E.E. Cummings and Mother Nature";⁵³ Fred E.H. Schroeder discusses his use of obscenity in "Obscenity and its Function in the Poetry of E.E. Cummings";⁵⁴ and Mick Gidley examines Cummings' "poempictures" in "Picture and Poem: E.E. Cummings in Perspective."⁵⁵ Richard S. Kennedy's biographical essay, "Edward Cummings, the Father of the Poet," suggests the influence of the poet's father's world view on the poet.⁵⁶

So far, this survey of work on Cummings in the sixties indicates a strongly positive response to his achievement. The indicator is accurate, but two significant essays complicate the picture. Carl Bode's "E.E. Cummings and Exploded Verse," while it admires some of the experimental love songs and the energy of Cummings' indignation and irreverence, concludes that an obsessive quest for novelty causes much of his work to fail.⁵⁷ In "An Instrument to Measure Spring With," Clive James notes that Cummings' ideas, put into practice, would bring an end to civilization.⁵⁸

In addition to the sustained importance of critical essays as a component of Cummings criticism in the sixties, treatments of Cummings in parts of books make significant contributions to the scholarship for the first time in those years. One of the most important of these is the section on Cummings from L.S. Dembo's *Conceptions of Reality in Modern American Poetry*.⁵⁹ Other significant treatments in parts of books are in David R. Weimer's *The City as Metaphor*,⁶⁰ in George Wickes' *Americans*

in *Paris*,⁶¹ and in two important surveys of the history of American poetry. In his *American Poets from the Puritans to the Present*, Hyatt H. Waggoner, through examination of Cummings' metaphysics, connects him with Emerson. They share an intuitive epistemology, an organic aesthetic, and a kind of "mystical antinomianism." Unfortunately, only a percentage of Cummings' poems successfully express his ideas; too often his techniques are unimaginative and repetitive.⁶² Roy Harvey Pearce, in *The Continuity of American Poetry*, concentrates on the personal element in the poems and finds that Cummings' redemption of language from deadening abstraction is successful but that his "self-transcendence" is often merely "self-realization."⁶³

If all of these signal Cummings' increased critical stature in the sixties, this is signaled more strongly still by the several books in the period devoted entirely to him and his works. F.W. Dupee and George Stade edited *Selected Letters of E.E. Cummings*,⁶⁴ George J. Firmage published his descriptive bibliography of primary works, *E.E. Cummings: A Bibliography*,⁶⁵ and Charles Norman brought out an updated version of his biography, entitled *E.E. Cummings: A Biography*.⁶⁶ Moreover, five critical books and one pamphlet on Cummings also appeared in the sixties. The first of these, and still the best study of Cummings' poetry, is Norman Friedman's *e.e. cummings: the art of his poetry*.⁶⁷ The book is an overview of Cummings' poetry through 95 *Poems*. Successive chapters take up, in sophisticated detail, Cummings' major themes, the stances of his speakers, his "neutral," reverential, and burlesque styles, and his technical devices. Later chapters examine Cummings' craft (through a rare glimpse of manuscript versions of a Cummings poem) and argue that although his development has not been by crisis or reversal his poetry does reveal significant growth in thought, expression, form, and technique. A second edition of the book, in 1967, adds a lengthy listing of critical responses to Cummings published from 1922 to 1965. Friedman's concern with Cummings' artistic development is more central still in his second book on the poet, *e.e. cummings: The Growth of a Writer*.⁶⁸ After laying technical and thematic groundwork, this more introductory but nonetheless illuminating study examines—in order by genre and chronologically by decade—each of Cummings' published works preceding the posthumous 73 *Poems*.

Another book on Cummings published in the sixties is S.V. Baum's *EETI: eec E.E. Cummings and the Critics*, which reprints twenty-six reviews of and essays on Cummings' work as well as primary and secondary bibliographies and a useful introductory essay tracing the development of Cummings' reputation.⁶⁹ Somewhat less significant are Robert E. Wegner's *The Poetry and Prose of E.E. Cummings*, an intelligent overview, accurately described by its author as an "appreciation,"⁷⁰ and Eve Triem's pamphlet, *E.E. Cummings*, which is necessarily brief and general but often pointed in its insights.⁷¹ More

valuable than these is Barry A. Marks' excellent *E.E. Cummings*.⁷² Especially important are its often striking analyses of a few specific poems and its detailed theoretical and analytical treatment of matters often ignored or merely noted by other critics: Cummings' "child vision"; his thematic use of sex; his relationship to characteristic aesthetic principles of his age; his relationship to formalist concepts of the poet as craftsmanlike maker and creator of order; his sharing and critique of such American traits as optimism, intensity of spirit, and millennial drive for perfection; and the religious quality of much of his writing.

The serious interpretive and research scholarship marking Cummings studies in the fifties and sixties continued and increased in the early and middle seventies. And the period maintained the more or less accepted estimate of Cummings as a kind of minor-major poet, modernist in style and traditional in theme. (Nagging doubts about the value of his experiments and about his growth as a writer also persist, despite the arguments of Friedman and others.) In any case, the major development of Cummings criticism in the early and middle seventies is not any dramatic reversal or even revision of his reputation, but an increased focusing on more and more specific subjects and critical questions. Reviews, of course, play a small role in the commentary of these years. *Selected Letters of E.E. Cummings* (1969) and *Complete Poems 1913-1962* (1972) received relatively little attention, perhaps because of their "retrospective" quality. An exception to this is Helen Vendler's major review of *Complete Poems*.⁷³ Her conclusions: that Cummings' optimism excludes too much and that he is a "great aborted talent" "abysmally short on ideas," may result in part from her New Critical bias in favor of ironic, polyvalent art with a tragic cast, but they are also the thoughtful judgments of one of our finest critical intelligences. As such, they can serve to remind us that, despite the defenses and praises of Cummings specialists, many generalists—who, after all, may have a better perspective on the matter—maintain serious reservations about the relative quality and stature of Cummings' art. To an extent, for all the scholarly work, his reputation remains unresolved.

However this may be, critical attention to Cummings in the early and middle seventies does increase. This is shown in the fourteen dissertations considering him (these, by the way, continue to appear at a rough rate of one or two a year), but more significantly in the number of major articles on Cummings. It is in these that the movement of the scholarship toward greater specificity is most evident. Nonetheless, two of the essays do take a general approach. Malcolm Cowley's "Cummings: One Man Alone" combines biographical and critical comment;⁷⁴ William Heyen's "In Consideration of Cummings" finds much of the poetry a response and resistance to "the blunt fact of death" and argues that many of the poems have more depth of irony and duplicity in them than is usually noticed.⁷⁵ The other essays of the period are more narrowly focused. Joseph W.

Mahoney's "E.E. Cummings Today" is a bibliographical survey; it finds that Cummings scholarship moves between seeing him, on the one hand, as an anti-cultural, anti-intellectual writer and seeing him, on the other, as an ingenious interpreter of his culture who makes new demands on the intellect.⁷⁶ Richard S. Kennedy's "E.E. Cummings at Harvard: Studies"⁷⁷ and "E.E. Cummings at Harvard: Verse, Friends, Rebellion"⁷⁸ explore the aspects of Cummings' life indicated by their titles. John W. Crowley's "Visual-Aural Poetry" examines Cummings' typography.⁷⁹ Linguistics approaches to Cummings continue in essays by Jan Aarts, Richard Gunter, and Tanya Reinhart.⁸⁰

More important than these are several essays extending the sixties' attention to Cummings' major prose and dramatic works, *The Enormous Room* and *Him*. James F. Smith, Jr.'s "A Stereotyped Archetype: E.E. Cummings' Jean leNègre" considers the character from *The Enormous Room* as an archetype of individual humanity confronting government inhumanity.⁸¹ Harold T. McCarthy examines Cummings' anomalous responses to the experiences recorded in the novel in terms of Cummings' American-patrician heritage in "E.E. Cummings: Eros and Cambridge, Mass."⁸² The title defines the focus of George S. Peek's "The Narrator as Artist and the Artist as Narrator: A Study of E.E. Cummings' *The Enormous Room*."⁸³ Jeffrey Walsh describes the experience of *The Enormous Room* as catalyzing Cummings' social vision.⁸⁴ Essays on *Him* are William I. Oliver's "*Him*—A Director's Note," which considers the play as a complex of surrealism, realism, and expressionism,⁸⁵ and Marjorie S.C. Smelstor's "'Damn Everything but the Circus,'" which explores *Him* in the context of the popular arts of the twenties.⁸⁶

An area of Cummings' work which had been largely ignored, his paintings and drawings, receives significant attention in the middle seventies. Rushworth M. Kidder examines and provides intellectual background for Cummings' career as a painter in "E.E. Cummings, Painter."⁸⁷ Cummings' graphics for *The Dial* are the subject of Kidder's "'Author of Pictures.'"⁸⁸ The same drawings are discussed—as complements to Cummings poems—in Robert Tucker's "E.E. Cummings as an Artist."⁸⁹

As in the sixties, some Cummings essays of the early and middle seventies place him in larger contexts. Allan A. Metcalf notes some similarities between Cummings' work and Dante's;⁹⁰ James E. Tanner compares Cummings' experimental style to William Burroughs'.⁹¹ Mary Ellen Solt notes Cummings' influence on "concrete poetry,"⁹² while Paul Fort locates him within the dialectic struggle between aestheticism and energy typical of modern American poetry,⁹³ and Renzo S. Crivelli traces Cummings' connections with movements in modern art and music.⁹⁴

Despite their increased specificity, most of the essays of the seventies summarized so far fall into categories established by the earlier criticism. However, as the decline of New Critical domination had earlier enabled

reexamination and reevaluation of Cummings' work, so the development of critical modes and approaches to replace, supplement, or complement those of the New Criticism generated some new areas of Cummings scholarship in the early and middle seventies. Of course, linguistics approaches to Cummings had begun earlier. Other new approaches are reflected in the attention to elements of popular culture in Cummings in the essay by Marjorie S.C. Smelstor mentioned above and in Patrick B. Mullen's "E.E. Cummings and Popular Culture."⁹⁵ Eleanor Hombitzer presents a structuralist interpretation of "a wind has blown the rain away and blown,"⁹⁶ and John M. Lipski uses topology, a branch of mathematics concerned with spatial properties, to examine "disconnectedness" in Cummings' poems.⁹⁷ A more traditional development is the beginning use by scholars—particularly Richard S. Kennedy and Rushworth M. Kidder—of the materials in the Cummings collection of Harvard University's Houghton Library.

Of treatments of Cummings in parts of books in the early and middle seventies only one is crucial: Dickran Tashjian's examination of Cummings' relationships to Dadaism in his *Skyscraper Primitives: Dada and the American Avant-Garde 1910–1925*.⁹⁸ Also significant is Richard S. Kennedy's introduction to George James Firmage's edition of the original manuscript of *Tulips & Chimneys*.⁹⁹ The introduction is important in its own right for its definition of Cummings' "Apollonian, Satyric, and Hephaestian" styles, and also because it inaugurates Liveright's continuing series of "typescript editions" of Cummings' works, about which more in a moment.

The books on Cummings in the early and middle seventies reflect the pattern of Cummings essays in the period. One is a general treatment; two are more narrowly focused. A fourth is a collection of essays. *E.E. Cummings: A Remembrance of Miracles*, by Bethany K. Dumas, is comprehensive, a workmanlike introduction with chapters on the life, the early poems, the later poems, the prose, and the plays.¹⁰⁰ Gary Lane's *I Am: A Study of E.E. Cummings' Poems* analyzes individual poems to demonstrate the development (over Cummings' career) from motifs to major themes of five "ideas": seduction, the individual and individualistic heroism, the transcendent unification of life and death, death-in-life, and love as the means to and end of transcendence.¹⁰¹ Still more specifically focused is Irene R. Fairley's *E.E. Cummings and Ungrammar*.¹⁰² Applying the methods of linguistics, Fairley treats Cummings' grammatical irregularities in detail, relating them to his themes. She concludes that he uses "ungrammar" not only for the creation of particular effects in individual lines, but also for the creation of larger structural patterns which become a major source of cohesiveness in his work. Fairley finds Cummings to be a "conservative revolutionary"—in his syntactic deviance as well as in his other techniques and in his themes.

In addition to these books, two pamphlets on Cummings appeared in

the years under survey. Both are by Wilton Eckley. One is a selective check-list, the other an introductory sketch.¹⁰³ They are of minor importance. Of major importance is Norman Friedman's *E.E. Cummings: A Collection of Critical Essays*.¹⁰⁴

In the years since the middle seventies, Cummings has continued to receive serious critical attention. Major contributions have been made in books and essays, as well as in one not so obviously scholarly area, exhibitions of Cummings' paintings and drawings. The most significant contribution in this period (roughly 1977 to 1982) is Richard S. Kennedy's *Dreams in the Mirror: A Biography of E.E. Cummings*.¹⁰⁵ A thoughtfully written and superbly researched life of the poet (it makes wide use of the Cummings materials at Houghton Library, at the Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas, and elsewhere), *Dreams in the Mirror* covers in detail all the important personal and artistic events of Cummings' life. Where appropriate the facts are further illuminated by sensitive literary analysis, including superb insights into the development of Cummings' innovative style. Kennedy's biography is definitive. It will be a starting point for all future work on the poet's life and art.

Second in importance only to *Dreams in the Mirror* is Rushworth M. Kidder's *E.E. Cummings: An Introduction to the Poetry*, a volume in the Columbia Introductions to Twentieth-Century Poetry series.¹⁰⁶ As its subtitle announces, the book is introductory, and it gives the expected basic information on Cummings' life, works, themes, techniques, and on the development of his art. However, the book is introductory in a rather more particular sense, and in this sense it makes an especially significant contribution to Cummings scholarship. As early as the forties, close analyses of Cummings' poems appeared rather frequently, and in the fifties and sixties their number greatly increased. Even so, however, most of these analyses were devoted to relatively few poems. Thus, they did not provide the close attention to large numbers of poems that is needed if Cummings' artistic quality is to be more precisely and convincingly evaluated, if continuing doubts about the effectiveness of his techniques, about the relationships of those techniques to his themes, and about his poetic development are to be resolved. Kidder's *E.E. Cummings* goes far toward fulfilling this need, for (combined with information on the sources, allusions, and so on of particular poems) close analyses—arranged chronologically by volume—make up the bulk of the book. Furthermore, Kidder's readings are likely to engender significant responses, refinements, and rebuttals. In any case, the appearance of Kennedy's biography, of Kidder's introduction, and of my own *E.E. Cummings: A Reference Guide*, all indicate strong continuing scholarly interest in Cummings and his work. (So, too, does Southern Illinois University Press's 1980 Arcturus paperback reissue of Friedman's *e.e. cummings: The Growth of a Writer*.)

Another such indication is the devoting to Cummings of an entire

issue of the prestigious *Journal of Modern Literature*, under the special editorship of Richard S. Kennedy.¹⁰⁷ Comments on some of the more significant entries in the issue, and a listing of the contents, appear below. *Linguistics in Literature* has also announced plans for a special Cummings number, edited by Bethany K. Dumas and Phillip J. Gibson. As of this writing, the issue has not appeared; however, its table of contents is available and reads as follows: Norman Friedman, "Recent Developments in Cummings Criticism: 1976-1980"; Linda B. Funkhouser and Daniel C. O'Connell, "Cummings Reads Cummings"; Bethany K. Dumas and Phillip J. Gibson, "Parenthetical Remarks"; William Van Peer, "Top-Down and Bottom-Up: Interpretative Strategies in the Reading of E.E. Cummings"; Irene R. Fairley, "Syntax for Seduction: A Reading of Cummings' 'since feeling is first' "; Regis L. Welch, "The Linguistic Paintings of E.E. Cummings, Painter-Poet."

Another important development of recent Cummings scholarship is the continuing appearance of volumes in Liveright's series of Cummings Typescript Editions. Inaugurated in 1976 with the edition of *Tulips & Chimneys*, the series of published and unpublished writings is based on Cummings' typed and autographed manuscripts in the Houghton Library, the Barrett Library of the University of Virginia, the Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas, and the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library of Yale University. The editor of the series is George James Firmage. Since *Tulips & Chimneys*, four additional volumes have appeared: *The Enormous Room* and *No Thanks* in 1978; *Xaïpe* and *ViVa* in 1979. The first two have introductory essays by Richard S. Kennedy; they provide biographical and interpretive background for the respective works. All four volumes have afterwords by George James Firmage which give information on manuscript sources, variants, and other matters of publication. In living up to its intention "to present the texts of the poet's works exactly as he created them, in versions that are faithful to the letter as well as the spirit of his originals," the Cummings Typescript Editions promise eventual availability of definitive editions for all of Cummings' works. In Liveright's immediate plans are *Etcetera: The Unpublished Poems of E.E. Cummings* and a companion volume, largely of juvenilia, tentatively titled *For the Record*, both edited by George James Firmage and Richard S. Kennedy. In addition, a Norton Critical Edition of *The Enormous Room*, edited by Kennedy, is planned for 1984. Independent of these projects, work on a computer-assisted concordance is underway as well.

In addition to these many signs of continuing scholarly interest in Cummings is a large number of critical essays. Two of the most important of these appear in the Cummings issue of the *Journal of Modern Literature*. They are Rushworth M. Kidder's superb and well-illustrated "Cummings and Cubism: The Influence of the Visual Arts on Cummings' Early Poetry" and Norman Friedman's "Cummings Posthumous," which