

Twentieth-Century  
Literary Criticism

TCLC 137



Volume 137

# Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Criticism of the  
Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,  
Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers  
Who Lived between 1900 and 1999,  
from the First Published Critical  
Appraisals to Current Evaluations**



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## Preface

Since its inception more than fifteen years ago, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC) has been purchased and used by nearly 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. TCLC has covered more than 500 authors, representing 58 nationalities and over 25,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as TCLC. In the words of one reviewer, “there is nothing comparable available.” TCLC “is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own.”

### Scope of the Series

TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1999 and to the most significant interpretations of these author's works. Volumes published from 1978 through 1999 included authors who died between 1900 and 1960. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of the period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, TCLC helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in TCLC presents a comprehensive survey on an author's career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of TCLC is devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

TCLC is designed as a companion series to Gale's *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, (CLC) which reprints commentary on authors who died after 1999. Because of the different time periods under consideration, there is no duplication of material between CLC and TCLC.

### Organization of the Book

A TCLC entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author's actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the original date of composition.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.

- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

## Indexes

A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by the Gale Group, including *TCLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

A **Cumulative Nationality Index** lists all authors featured in *TCLC* by nationality, followed by the number of the *TCLC* volume in which their entry appears.

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An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *TCLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale also produces an annual paperbound edition of the *TCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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# E. E. Cummings

## 1894-1962

(Full name Edward Estlin Cummings) American poet, prose writer, essayist, lecturer, and playwright.

The following entry presents criticism on Cummings's works from 1971 through 1995. For criticism published prior to 1971, see *CLC*, Volumes 1, 3, 8, 12, 15, and 68.

### INTRODUCTION

Cummings's innovative and controversial verse places him among the most popular and widely anthologized poets of the twentieth century. Cummings's work celebrates the individual, as well as erotic and familial love. Conformity, mass psychology, and snobbery were frequent targets of his humorous and sometimes scathing satires. Additionally, his fictionalized memoir of his service in World War I, *The Enormous Room* (1922), and his experimental plays, especially *Him* (1927), have earned him a reputation as a leading writer of the modernist period in American literature.

### BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Cummings grew up in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where his father was a sociology professor at Harvard and a noted Unitarian clergyman. Demonstrating a strong interest in poetry and art from an early age, Cummings enjoyed the full support and encouragement of his parents. He attended Harvard from 1911 to 1915, studying literature and writing daily. He eventually joined the editorial board of the *Harvard Monthly*, a college literary magazine, where he worked with his close friends S. Foster Damon and John Dos Passos. In his senior year he became fascinated with avant-garde art, modernism, and cubism, an interest reflected in his graduation dissertation, "The New Art." In this paper, Cummings extolled modernism as practiced by Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, Amy Lowell, and Pablo Picasso. He also began incorporating elements of these styles into his own poetry and paintings. His first published poems appeared in the anthology *Eight Harvard Poets* in 1917. These pieces feature experimental verse forms and the lowercase personal pronoun "i" (symbolizing both the humbleness and the uniqueness of the individual) that became his trademark. The copy-editor of the book, however, mistook Cummings's in-



tentions as typographical errors and made "corrections." That same year, Cummings moved to New York and was employed very briefly at a mail-order book company, and soon began working full-time on his poetry and art. With World War I raging in Europe, he volunteered for the French-based Norton-Harjes Ambulance Service. He spent time in Paris upon his arrival and was completely charmed by the city's bohemian atmosphere and abundance of art and artists. He was particularly impressed by the sketches of Pablo Picasso, whose cubist techniques later helped shape much of Cummings's work. Because of a misunderstanding, Cummings spent four months in an internment camp in Normandy on suspicion of treason, an experience documented in his prose work *The Enormous Room*. Making use of his contacts in government, Cummings's father was able to secure his son's release. Cummings was drafted shortly after he returned to New York in 1918 and spent about a year at Camp Danvers, Massachusetts. During the 1920s and 1930s he traveled widely in Europe, alternately living in Paris and New York, and developed



parallel careers as a poet and painter. Politically liberal and with leftist leanings, Cummings visited the Soviet Union in 1931 in order to find out how the system of government subsidy for art functioned there. *Eimi* (1933), an expanded version of his travel diary, expresses his profound disappointment in its indictment of the regimentation and lack of personal and artistic freedom he encountered. From that time, Cummings abandoned his liberal political views and social circle and became an embittered, reactionary conservative on social and political issues. He continued to write prolifically and received the Shelley Memorial Award for poetry in 1944, the Charles Eliot Norton Professorship at Harvard for the academic year 1952-53, and the Bollingen Prize for Poetry in 1958. Cummings reached the height of his popularity during the 1940s and 1950s, giving poetry readings to college audiences across the United States until his death in 1962.

## MAJOR WORKS

Cummings's first book, *The Enormous Room*, is a novel/memoir based on his experiences in the French internment camp; it concerns the preservation of dignity in a degrading and dehumanizing situation. This work, widely considered a classic of World War I literature, introduced themes that Cummings would pursue throughout his career: the individual against society, against government, and against all forms of authority. Cummings used both French and English to create a witty, satirical voice that lampoons the war itself as well as military bureaucracy. All of Cummings's poetry attests to the author's never-ending search for fresh metaphors and new means of expression through creative placement of words on the page, new word constructions, and unusual punctuation and capitalization. He originally intended to publish his first collection as *Tulips & Chimneys*, but was forced to publish the poems from the original manuscript as three separate volumes: *Tulips and Chimneys* (1923), *XLI Poems* (1925), and *&* (1925). The "tulips" of the first volume are free-verse lyric poems that present a nostalgic glance at his childhood. The poem "in Just—" celebrates youth in playful, imaginative and creative contractions—"mud- / luscious" and "puddle-wonderful," for example, while the poem "O sweet spontaneous" revels in nature that can only be appreciated fully through the senses rather than through science, philosophy, or religion. The "chimneys" are a sustained sonnet sequence that identifies the hypocrisy, narrow-mindedness, and stagnation Cummings saw in the society around him. The sequence includes the well-known poem "the Cambridge ladies who live in furnished souls"—women who, according to Cummings, "are unbeautiful and have comfortable minds." The poems excised from the original manuscript that were later collected in *XLI Poems* and *&* are generally more erotic in content. The thematic concerns of these first three volumes of verse are repeated in *Is* 5

(1926), in which the author also included satiric and anti-war pieces, notably "my sweet old etcetera" and "i sing of Olaf glad and big," a poem about the death of a conscientious objector. *W: ViVa* (1931) contains sonnets and other poems attacking conservative and uncreative thinking. Along with his barbs at society, Cummings also composed such lyrical poems as "somewhere I have never travelled, gladly beyond," in which he extolled love, nature, the mystery of faith, individualism, and imaginative freedom. The collection *No Thanks* (1935), written in response to his trip to the Soviet Union, treats the theme of artistic freedom in an especially powerful manner. *50 Poems* (1940) contains such popular pieces as "anyone lived in a pretty how town" and an elegy to his father, "my father moved through dooms of love." *1 x 1* (1944) solidified Cummings's reputation as one of America's premier poets. It presents a more optimistic, life-affirming viewpoint than do the poems written during Cummings's period of personal and political disaffection in the 1930s. Structured in a pattern of darkness moving toward light, the collection begins with poems that denigrate businessmen and politicians and ends with poems praising nature and love. In his late verse—*XAIPE: Seventy-One Poems* (1950), *95 Poems* (1958), and the posthumously published *73 Poems* (1963)—Cummings effected a softer, more elegiac note, recalling his early affinity for New England Transcendentalism and English Romanticism. In addition to his poetry, Cummings is also known for his play *Him* (1927), which consists of a sequence of skits drawing from burlesque, the circus, and the avant-garde, and jumps quickly from tragedy to grotesque comedy. The male character is named Him; the female character is Me. "The play begins," Harold Clurman wrote in *Nation*, "as a series of feverish images of a girl undergoing anaesthesia during an abortion. She is 'me,' who thinks of her lover as 'him.'" In the program to the play, staged at the Provincetown Playhouse, Cummings provided a warning to the audience: "Relax and give the play a chance to strut its stuff—relax, stop wondering what it's all 'about'—like many strange and familiar things, Life included, this Play isn't 'about,' it simply is. Don't try to enjoy it, let it try to enjoy you. DON'T TRY TO UNDERSTAND IT, LET IT TRY TO UNDERSTAND YOU." In 1952-53 Harvard University honored its distinguished alumnus by asking Cummings to deliver the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures. Published as *i: six nonlectures* (1953), the work is Cummings's only attempt at formal artistic autobiography. In the lectures Cummings noted that perhaps fifteen of his poems were faithful expressions of his stance as an artist and man.

## CRITICAL RECEPTION

Critical opinion of Cummings's poems is markedly divided. Beginning with *Tulips and Chimneys*, reviewers described Cummings's style as eccentric and self-indulgent, designed to call attention to itself rather than

to elucidate themes. Some critics also objected to Cummings's explicit treatment of sexuality, while others labeled his depictions of society's hypocrisy and banality elitist. When his *Collected Poems* was published in 1938, Cummings's sharp satires caused some reviewers to call him a misanthrope. His later, more conservative poetry came under attack for anti-Semitism, a charge that is still debated. Critics have noted, too, that Cummings's style did not change or develop much throughout his career. Some commentators speculate that Cummings early found a style that suited him and simply continued on with it; others, however, have faulted him for insufficient artistic growth. A group of scholars posited that Cummings's verbal pyrotechnics and idiosyncratic arrangement of text actually draw readers' attention from the poetry itself. More recently, however, literary critics have studied Cummings's poems from a structural viewpoint, considering his visual forms to be integral to the meaning of the poems.

## PRINCIPAL WORKS

*The Enormous Room* (prose) 1922  
*Tulips and Chimneys* (poetry) 1923  
 & (poetry) 1925  
*XLI Poems* (poetry) 1925  
*Is 5* (poetry) 1926  
*Him* (play) 1927  
*W: ViVa* (poetry) 1931  
*Eimi* (travel diary) 1933  
*No Thanks* (poetry) 1935  
*Collected Poems* (poetry) 1938  
*50 Poems* (poetry) 1940  
*1 x 1* (poetry) 1944  
*Santa Clause—A Morality* (play) 1946  
*XAIPE: Seventy-One Poems* (poetry) 1950  
*i: six nonlectures* (lectures) 1953  
*Poems 1923–1954* (poetry) 1954  
*95 Poems* (poetry) 1958  
*73 Poems* (poetry) 1963  
*Selected Letters of E. E. Cummings* (letters) 1969  
*The Complete Poems 1910–1912* (poetry) 1981

## CRITICISM

Patrick B. Mullen (essay date 1971)

SOURCE: Mullen, Patrick B. "E. E. Cummings and Popular Culture." In *Critical Essays on E. E. Cummings*, edited by Guy Rotella, pp. 202–14. Boston: G. K. Hall and Company, 1984.

[In the following essay, originally published in 1971, Mullen examines Cummings's interest in and writings on American popular culture, particularly the art of burlesque.]

It is generally overlooked that E. E. Cummings had an avid interest in various forms of American popular culture, especially burlesque, circuses, amusement parks, comic strips, animated cartoons, and movies. During the 1920's and 1930's, Cummings wrote many essays on mass culture which appeared in popular magazines such as *Vanity Fair* and journals of the arts such as *Stage* and *Cinema*. In these articles and in some of his other prose, Cummings reveals a great deal about his own concepts of art and poetry, and also provides some penetrating insights into American culture as manifested in popular entertainment. To Cummings, burlesque and the other popular arts were alive with a spontaneous, unrehearsed quality. He wanted to capture the same quality of spontaneity in his poetry, both in content and technique. In a limited way, Cummings wrote about popular culture of the 1920's–1930's much the same as Tom Wolfe was writing about it in the 1960's. Cummings was one of the few writers of his day to deal with mass entertainment, and his fondness for it shows through in his poetry.

Burlesque had a more direct influence on Cummings' poetry than the other popular forms. He was a devoted fan of burlesque and went many times to the Old Howard in Boston, and the National Winter Garden and Irving Place Theatre in New York. An article by Cummings about burlesque entitled "You Aren't Mad, Am I?" appeared in the December, 1925, issue of *Vanity Fair*. In it he discussed burlesque as a true art form because it was "intensely alive; whereas the productions of the conventional theatre, like academic sculpture and painting and music, are thoroughly dead." This antagonistic attitude toward high art is typical of Cummings and can be considered a part of his general anti-intellectualism. He claims that since burlesque is modern and abstract and loved by the masses, the critics who say that modern art is not for the masses are completely wrong.

In analyzing the art of burlesque Cummings emphasizes its incongruous and paradoxical qualities: "opposites occur together. For that reason, burlesque enables us to (so to speak) know around a thing, character, or situation." In ordinary painting, on the other hand, we can only know one side of a thing. As an example of "knowing around" Cummings cites his favorite burlesque comic Jack Shargel, whom he called one of the "two very great actors in America." Cummings was almost reverential when he wrote that around Shargel "there hung very loosely some authentic *commedia dell'arte*." Opposites occur together when Shargel delicately and lightly tosses a red rose to the floor. It floats downward and when it lands, a terrific ear-splitting crash is heard.

Nothing in 'the arts' . . . has moved me more, or has proved to be a more completely inextinguishable source of 'aesthetic emotion,' than this knowing around the Shargel rose; this releasing of all the unroselike and non-flowerish elements which—where 'rose' and





ing itself it performed such prodigies of innuendo as made the best belly dancer of the *Folies Bergere* entr'acte look like a statute of liberty.<sup>9</sup>

Here again is Cummings' fascination with movement; the stripper who best exemplified movement was June St. Clare.

To see June St. Clare walk the length of the Irving Place stage, or the Apollo stage, or any other stage, is to rejoice that a lost art has been revived. There have been epidemics of women who swam when they walked and of women who floated when they walked. When Miss St. Clare walks, she walks.<sup>10</sup>

Cummings transfers his love of movement to the printed page in his poetry. Cummings' poems never sit still; they move across the page in unusual typography, and the words themselves often suggest movement. Marshall McLuhan noticed this element in Cummings' poetry. "The poet at the typewriter can do Njinsky leaps or Chaplin-like shuffles and wiggles."<sup>11</sup> In one poem Cummings attempts to emulate the bumps and grinds of a stripper performing her act. He demonstrated his belief that woman could be the most beautiful expression of movement and aliveness.

sh estiff  
ystrut sal  
lif san  
dbut sth

epoutin(gWh.ono:w  
s li psh ergo  
wnd ow n,  
r  
Eve

aling 2 a  
-sprout eyelands)sin  
uously&them&twi  
tching,begins

unununun?  
butbutbut??  
tonton??  
ing???

—Out-&  
steps;which  
flipchucking  
.grins  
gRiNdS

d is app ea r in gly  
eyes grip live loop croon mime  
nakedly hurl asquirm the  
dip&giveswoop&swoon& ingly

seethe firm swirl hips whirling climb to  
GIVE  
(yoursmine mineyours yoursmine  
!  
i(t)<sup>12</sup>

The letters and words are so arranged as to suggest the mystery and "peek-a-boo," tantalizing, teasing quality of the stripper. We never see it all, but we see enough to keep us interested. When she slips her gown down she reveals two sprouting islands ("eyelands"), a very sensual image for breasts. The halting and provocative unbuttoning of her gown is suggested by the repetition of parts of the word until they all fall together, and by the question marks at the end of each line. When the stripper grinds, the words grinds ("gRiNdS"). The vicarious participation of the men in the audience almost becomes an orgasm at the end of the poem. Besides the type swooping all over the page, the words also imply movement, "struts," "slips," "twitching," "steps," "flip-chucking," "grinds," "loop," "mine," "hurl," "swoop," "swirl," "whirling," and "climb." The words and typography suggest the spontaneity of the burlesque art which the poem describes.

Another popular form of entertainment which delighted Cummings was the circus, and like burlesque it too was noted for movement. In an article in *Vanity Fair* of October, 1925, he noticed the movement which made it come alive. "Movement is the very stuff out of which this dream is made. Or we may say that movement is the content, the subject matter, of the circus-show, while bigness is its form."<sup>13</sup> The circus as an art form has something which even burlesque lacks, a sense of reality. "Within 'the big top,' as nowhere else on earth, is to be found Actuality."<sup>14</sup> There is nothing phoney when the lion tamer faces the lion and when the trapeze artist defies death. Again, there are opposites occurring together as the terror of death is juxtaposed with the antics of the clowns. "At positively every performance Death Himself lurks, glides, struts, breathes, is. Lest any agony be missing, a mob of clowns tumbles loudly in and out of that inconceivably sheer fabric of doom, whose beauty seems endangered by the spectator's least heartbeat or whisper."<sup>15</sup> The circus appealed to Cummings because it captured the spontaneity of life just as burlesque did. In comparison, the theatre was stilted, confined, and formal.

In discussing the circus, Cummings defines what art means to him:

. . . let us never be fooled into taking seriously that perfectly superficial distinction which is vulgarly drawn between the circus-show and 'art' or 'the arts.' Let us not forget that every authentic 'work of art' is in and of itself alive and that, however 'the arts' may differ among themselves, their common function is the expression of that supreme alive-ness which is known as 'beauty.'<sup>16</sup>

"Aliveness" and "beauty" seem to be the qualities which Cummings seeks in art, and if painting, fiction and drama ever lack them, then they are not art in those instances; but if mass forms of entertainment, the bur-

lesque and circus, have them, then they are appreciated as true art. One of Cummings' poems celebrates the appreciation of live beauty as opposed to intellectual pseudo-artistic concepts of beauty.

mr youse needn't be so spry  
concernin questions arty

each has his tastes but as for i  
i likes a certain party

gimme the he-man's solid bliss  
for youse ideas i'll match youse

a pretty girl who naked is  
is worth a million statues<sup>17</sup>

Cummings is saying that beauty should appeal to the emotion, not the intellect. His belief in living beauty is couched in the vulgar language of the common man for the purpose of humor in this poem, but this does not lessen the strength of his conviction. He puts these words in the mouth of an uneducated man to make them more convincing; they would not ring true if an intellectual said them. The reader laughs at the last two lines, yet he cannot help but realize that there is some truth here. The living breathing beauty of a woman is what many artists have tried to capture in paintings and sculpture, but the original model is still the most inspiring of all.

Cummings also saw beauty and aliveness in amusement parks, especially his favorite, Coney Island. "The incredible temple of pity and terror, mirth and amazement, which is popularly known as Coney Island, really constitutes a perfectly unprecedented fusion of the circus and the theatre."<sup>18</sup> Besides displaying beauty and aliveness, Coney Island performs a unique function of fusing humanity; ". . . nowhere else in all of the round world is humanity quite so much itself."<sup>19</sup> The swimmer at Coney Island swims in the populace, not the water, adding to the "spontaneous itselfness." The performance at this "circus-theatre" is joined with the audience, a fact which is significant for art. The audience participates by doing circus tricks themselves, by riding the death-defying roller coasters and loop-the-loops. To Cummings, ". . . the essence of Coney Island's 'circus-theatre' consists in *homogeneity*. THE AUDIENCE IS THE PERFORMANCE, and vice versa."<sup>20</sup> Cummings seems to have anticipated the current interest in participatory arts, widely expressed in the "living theatre" and in art which requires the viewer to enter its structure or manipulate it in some way. Having actors embrace members of the audience and using electronic media are not the only ways to involve the audience; the printed page has long been used to make the reader participate in an experience. This is what Cummings attempts to do in his poetry, to fuse the reader with the poem, to make the poem become the reader. He wants

the poem to be an emotional experience for the reader. Most of Cummings' poems could be offered as examples of this, especially his love poems and nature poems.

One example of a nature poem will suffice for illustration. Cummings attempts to draw the reader into a scene in nature by making it a transcendental emotional experience.

& sun &

sil  
e  
nce  
e

very

w  
here  
noon  
e

is exc

ep  
t  
on  
t

his

b  
oul  
der  
a

drea(chipmunk)ming<sup>21</sup>

Part of the involvement of the reader is achieved by waiting until the last line to reveal that the poem is about a chipmunk. This surprise is intensified by spreading the words down the page so that the reader has to put them together before he can understand them. The intellectual process involves the reader on one level and leads him to emotional involvement on another level. The reader must put together the key phrase of the poem, "everywhere no one is except on this boulder." At this moment nothing else exists except the chipmunk. The simple observation of the sleeping chipmunk becomes a transcendental experience for Cummings and the reader. Cummings has transcended the corporeal world of reality and reached a truer world of the imagination through the chipmunk. The reader is supposed to feel the same emotional transference by reading and comprehending the poem.

Another form of mass entertainment which Cummings analyzed was the comic strip. He wrote an article entitled "A Foreword to Krazy" which appeared in the 1946 spring number of *Sewanee Review*. Before him,

Gilbert Seldes had written of George Herriman's comic strip character Krazy Kat in *The Seven Lively Arts*. The situation between Krazy Kat, Offissa Pupp, and Ignatz Mouse is summed up by Cummings: "Dog hates mouse and worships 'cat,' mouse despises 'cat' and hates dog, 'cat' hates no one and loves mouse."<sup>22</sup> But each of the characters is symbolic, with Krazy as the central symbol. "Krazy is herself. Krazy is illimitable—she loves. She loves in the only way anyone can love: illimitably."<sup>23</sup> Her love is combined with wisdom; she recognizes their situation and loves anyway. Krazy transcends reality because of her love and wisdom. "Always (no matter what's real) Krazy is no mere reality. She is a living ideal. She is a spiritual force, inhabiting a merely real world—" <sup>24</sup> Marshall McLuhan has said of the comic strip as art, "Popular art is the clown reminding us of all the life and faculty that we have omitted from our daily routines."<sup>25</sup> Krazy Kat's love reminds us of the "spiritual force" which is missing from our lives. Cummings' poetry was not directly affected by his appreciation of comic strips, but there is a parallel between his interest in Krazy and one of the main themes of his poetry, love. Like George Herriman, Cummings uses the symbolism of a comic situation to awaken our dead sensibilities to a spiritual awareness of love.

Cummings often used the comic exuberance of youth to evoke an awareness of love in his readers.

Jimmie's got a goil  
goil  
goil,  
Jimmie

's got a goil and  
she coitnly can shimmie

when you see her shake  
shake  
shake  
when

you see her shake a  
shimmie how you wish that you was Jimmie.

Of for such a gurl  
gurl  
gurl,  
oh

for such a gurl to  
be a fellow's twistandtwhirl

talk about your Sal-  
Sal-  
Sal-,  
talk

about your Salo  
-mes but gimmie Jimmie's gal<sup>26</sup>

The earthly love described here can be a spiritual force to transcend the merely real world, just as a comic strip character can symbolize transcendent love. Some of the fast-paced, visual humor of the comic strip is captured by Cummings' use of rhythm, language, and typography. The rhythm of the poem and the repetition of "goil goil goil" suggests a child's chant of derision. Phonetic spelling, "goil," "coitnly," and "gurl," enables Cummings to approximate actual chants of the streets of New York. The visual effect of spreading the repetitious words across the page is to make the reader say them as a chant. The word fusion of "twistandtwhirl" creates the illusion of quickness and agility with which Jimmie's "goil" dances. The comic comparison between the Biblical, mythical Salome and the sexy teenager of the streets not only creates bathetic humor but also stresses Cummings' preference for real earthly sexuality over abstract concepts of beauty. Cummings celebrates the sparkling aliveness, the earthy desires, and the electric energy of youth. These qualities of youth are a part of Cummings' ideal, and he tried to retain some of them all his life. He was often accused of being an "adolescent songster," and this remark probably gave him great delight because he tried to maintain the aliveness of youth in his adult life. This may partially explain his fondness for entertainments associated with childhood and adolescence: circuses, amusement parks, comic strips, and animated cartoons.

Cummings' love for comic strips was intensified when they took on the motion of animated cartoons. In an article entitled "**Miracles and Dreams**" in the June, 1930, issue of *Cinema*, Cummings discussed the benefits of movie cartoons. His fascination with film animation lies in the fact that this is a world where nothing is impossible: animals talk, rabbits save other rabbits from being tied to railroad tracks, trains split in half, people walk on air. Miracles take place when we are in this dream world.

Given this purely miraculous condition, such trifles as impossibility don't trouble us at all; everything (even a banana) being "really" something else. Let contradictions contradict—to the pure all things are impure, but we, by heaven, understand our dream symbols. . . .<sup>27</sup>

Here again are the opposites occurring together, and a new awareness and understanding arising from it. The awareness comes about through laughter at the contradictions. At the end of the article Cummings, in addressing the reader, emphasizes the importance of laughter. "And if you—this means you—are an abnormal individual so healthy, so fearless, so rhythmic, so human, as to be capable of the miracle called 'laughter,' patronize your neighborhood wake-up-and-dreamery!"<sup>28</sup>

Cummings often created a dream world, a world where the impossible is possible, in his poems, and laughter