HUMOR IN THE POETRY OF E. E. CUMMINGS

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HUMOR IN THE POETRY OF E. E. CUMMINGS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 1923 E. E. Cummings published his first volume of poems, *Tulips and Chimneys*. Forty years later his last book of poetry, *22 Poems*, came out. Over this span of years Cummings rose in stature from an obscure experimentalist to one of America's most widely read and acclaimed poets. During this entire period, the critics have disagreed sharply on the value of Cummings' poetry. One group has steadfastly supported him as a major American poet whose poetry is significant in scope and meaning for this or any age. The other group has severely attacked him as an adolescent romantic whose poetry is usually thin and repetitious. Since his death in 1962 there has been a renewed interest in his poetry, and many new studies have been made. They reveal mainly that the controversy over his importance still rages.

Prophetically, the publication of *Tulips and Chimneys* met with varied critical reviews. Harriet Monroe, editor of *Poetry* at the time, was captured by Cummings' enthusiastic verse. "He is as agile and outrageous as a faun, and as full of delight over the beauties and monstrosities of the brilliant and grimy old planet." But another of her

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reactions was typical of Cummings' critics. "Mr. Cummings has an eccentric system of typography which ... has nothing to do with the poem, but intrudes itself irritatingly, like scratched or blurred spectacles, between it and the reader's mind."2 Edmund Wilson also attacked Cummings' experiments in typography. "Mr. Cummings's eccentric punctuation is ... a symptom of his immaturity as an artist."3

Cummings added to the literary furor by going even further with his experimentations in three successive publications of his poetry, And (1925), XLI Poems (1925), and Is 5 (1926). By this time several critics had come to the defense of Cummings' typography. Laura Riding and Robert Graves in their 1926 volume, A Survey of Modernist Poetry, justified Cummings' techniques as necessary to make readers grasp fully the meaning and sensations the poet was trying to convey. Cummings' reputation grew until he was commonly thought of as the young rebel of American literature. This reputation lasted through the 1930's. R. P. Blackmur brought a new note into the discussion of Cummings in 1931 when he criticized the poet's repetitious vocabulary. Blackmur accused him of "sentimentality, empty convention,

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2Ibid., p. 21.

and commonplace rule."\(^4\) Blackmur was the first critic of the modernist tradition to be completely adversely critical of Cummings' techniques and concepts. Many critics, such as Yvor Winters and F. O. Matthiessen, have followed Blackmur's lead and have not found much to praise in Cummings' poetry. Matthiessen was the first critic to comment on Cummings' supposed lack of growth as an artist.

Not all the criticism was adverse. Many critics and poets joined Riding and Graves to extol the virtues of his poetry. In 1938 John Peale Bishop commented on the quality of spontaneous sensation in Cummings' poems. William Carlos Williams called Cummings one of the "two most distinguished American poets of today" (1940) because he was bringing the language of the day into serious poetry.\(^5\) The first linguistic study of the poetry was made in 1944 by Joseph Axelrod. Cummings' concern with the living moment was discussed by Theodore Spencer in his 1946 article, "Technique as Joy." Another favorable critic was found in Lloyd Frankenberg, who devoted part of his book, Pleasure Dome, to a laudatory study of Cummings' poetry. Norman Friedman has devoted two books to a study of Cummings and is currently his most informed admirer. The posthumous publication of


\(^5\)Cited in Baum, Cummings and the Critics, p. xi.
Poems in 1963 met with as varied a reaction from critics as had the first volume of poems in 1923.

Part of the wide divergence of opinion on Cummings' poetry can be explained by his position in regard to the modernist tradition in poetry. Nearly all of the serious poets of the twentieth century who have received critical and scholarly attention have focused their art upon the French symbolists and the metaphysicals. Their poetry is usually deeply intellectual and symbolic. It has often been called obscure and hard to understand. The giant of this tradition is, of course, T. S. Eliot. But Cummings was never a part of this poetic "school." From the beginning Cummings looked for inspiration to poets of another tradition, the Elizabethan lyricists and the nineteenth century romantics. Cummings was always more a poet of the emotion than the intellect, but some scholars do not think this makes him a lesser poet. The critics who judge Cummings' poems with the criteria of the modernist tradition are laboring under a common fallacy of contemporary criticism. He should not be judged by their standards if he repudiates the purposes and techniques of the modernists, but even these point up another basic difference. They are both interested in the same subject matter, the "waste land" of modern life; their

6 Baum, Cummings and the Critics, p. vii.
differences lie in the way they treat this subject. While it is something of an oversimplification, it can be said that the modernist poets see it as a tragic dilemma, Cummings as an object of satire.7

Any perusal of the body of poetry of E. E. Cummings will reveal the large part that humor plays. The witticisms and general humor of Cummings have long been among the most widely appreciated aspects of his poetic talents, but only general and cursory examinations have been made of the role of humor in his poetry. The critics, in fact, seem to have been reluctant to come to grips with Cummings' humor. Any study of this nature would show that the types of humor which Cummings employs are varied in tone and technique. The present study will examine in detail the techniques and characteristics of the humor as manifested in the poems and place Cummings in proper perspective in the general tradition of American humor.

The fact is sometimes overlooked in general studies of American literature that there is present a noticeable current of the humorous. This tradition is exhibited by writers as widely diverse as Mark Twain, Artemus Ward, George Washington Harris, Joel Chandler Harris, Ring Lardner, H. L. Menken, Robert Benchley, James Thurber, William Faulkner, and Henry Miller. A dominant characteristic of American

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7Norman Friedman, "E. E. Cummings and the Modernist Tradition," Forum (Houston), III (Spring-Summer, 1962), 40.
humor is its exuberance and spontaneity. As all humor must
to some degree, it relies on the element of incongruity.
Walter Blair says that American humor is characterized by
"an emphatic 'native quality,'" a quality which comes from
both subject matter and technique.\textsuperscript{8} The subject matter is,
of course, America, from the backwoods of Mississippi to the
ghettos of New York City, from the Arizona desert to a New
England farm. The techniques are rich and varied.

It is time that Cummings was recognized as a part of
the American tradition of humor. Cummings has that "native
quality" in both subject matter and technique. The subject
matter of Cummings' poetry is America, her foibles and incon-
gruities. His humor is largely drawn from and his satire
directed at American society and social institutions. Much
of Cummings' satiric humor arises from the incongruity of
American ideals and American practices. The humor of the
poems reveals that Cummings is a keen, amused, and at times
sardonic observer of the kaleidoscope that is twentieth-
century American life.

Cummings' techniques of humor are very much in the
American tradition. In the foreword to \textit{I Is 5}, Cummings makes
a statement about his technique in which he identifies it
with the mainstream of American humor. "I can express it
[his technique] in fifteen words, by quoting the Eternal

\textsuperscript{8}Walter Blair, \textit{Native American Humor} (San Francisco,
1960), p. 3.
Question and Immortal Answer of burlesk, viz, 'Would you hit a woman with a child?—No, I'd hit her with a brick.'"\(^9\) This statement reveals Cummings' fondness for burlesque, but it also illustrates some of his major techniques: incongruity, juxtaposition of opposites, and above all the element of surprise. Says one critic, "The basis of his craft . . . is the surprise ending, the shocking detail, the double take." His purpose is to "shock, startle, and awaken the reader to an immediate perception."\(^10\) American literary humorists for generations have used these devices to provoke laughter. Cummings may be, as some critics say, outside the modernist tradition of English poetry as expounded by T. S. Eliot and R. P. Blackmur, but he is very much a part of the tradition of American humor. American humorists of the past did not use precisely the same techniques as Cummings, but they shared a common goal with him—to hit the audience with a brick.

One of the few perceptive studies of humor in Cummings' poetry is that of Norman Friedman in *E. E. Cummings, The Growth of a Writer*. His division of the humorous poems into the satires and the comedies is valid and will be used in this study. On the broadest level, these two divisions provide a realistic approach to the humor in Cummings' poems.


\(^10\)John Clendenning, "Cummings, Comedy, and Criticism," *Colorado Quarterly*, XII (Summer, 1963), 46.
poetry. Friedman uses the term satire in the usually accepted literary sense of the word. In the satires Cummings ridicules aspects of society which he finds distasteful or which diverge widely from their surface manifestations. On the other hand, the comedies are simply non-satiric humorous poems. This is a broad category, and a wide variety of poems fall into this group. In further distinguishing between the satires and the comedies Friedman notes, "There is motion, exuberance, and flamboyance here as in the satires, but here the intention is not so much scorn as it is fun."\(^{11}\) The main test for differentiation between the satires and the comedies is the purpose of the poem. If the poem is intended to ridicule, scorn or make fun of institutions or individuals, it will be considered satire. If the poem's main purpose is to amuse and make the reader laugh, then it will be considered a comedy.

As valuable as Friedman's categories are, they are not completely sufficient. Both the comedies and the satires will have to be subdivided further. The comedies can be placed in three categories, poems of whimsy, poems of pathos, and poems of exuberance, depending on the emotion Cummings is trying to create in the reader. The satires can be grouped best on the basis of subject matter: types and professions, war, the American political scene, conformity, and science and technology. Cummings' targets

can be either general or specific and personal, although most of his satires are general.

Influences on Cummings' concept and techniques of humor are hard to determine. There seem to be no specific, provable literary influences on Cummings' concept of humor. His overall style and tone suggest the poetic influence of the Elizabethan lyricists and the nineteenth century romantics, but their effect on his humor is negligible. As has already been noted, some critics believe he has been influenced by the general tradition of humor in America. This, again, is hard to pin down to specifics. Cummings never would commit himself to any group or movement in poetry, and he was just as reluctant to specify literary influences. He seems to have had a fear of being pigeonholed or stereotyped. The objections in his poetry to stereotyping any group would support this statement. Although definite influences on his comic spirit are hard to determine, certain aspects of Cummings' life have been instrumental in forming his sense of the comic.

Cummings was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1894. His father taught at Harvard and later was a Boston Unitarian minister. Cummings' sense of humor was allowed to develop early in a household filled with warmth and love. There was no bitterness or hatred in his early life, and Cummings grew into manhood with the serenity and objectivity that enabled him to laugh at the foibles of mankind. He was able to treat
even the bitterest experiences of his life with humor. The Enormous Room is an account of his incarceration during World War I in a French detention camp, and despite the horrible conditions he was in, he was able to treat certain aspects of this situation with humor. His poems about World War I are often satiric and laughable. After the war, he spent some time in Paris studying art, and this period of his life also was full of humorous reactions to the things around him. His poetry of this period reflects his amusement at Paris, Parisians, and American tourists. After Paris, Cummings returned to New York and lived there most of the remainder of his life. The urban areas where he spent most of his life had a profound influence on his concept of humor. Here he was surrounded by the comic street scenes, the comedy of different ethnic groups, the humor of children, the balloonmen, organ grinders, knife sharpeners and other clowns of the street, and, of course, the comic spirit of the burlesque theatre.

Burlesque was one of many popular American entertainment forms which affected Cummings' humorous poetry. He wrote several articles on burlesque in which he called it a true art form because it was "intensely alive." Cummings was a devoted fan of burlesque and went many times to the Old Howard in Boston, and the National Winter Garden and Irving

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Place Theatre in New York. Cummings called Jack Shargel, a leading burlesque comedian, one of the "two very great actors in America."\(^{13}\) He was almost reverential when he wrote that around Shargel "there hung very loosely some authentic commedia dell 'arte."\(^{14}\) The spontaneous surprise of burlesque comedy was enthralling to Cummings. This was a form of humor that was really alive, and he wanted to capture this same spontaneity in his poetry. Many of Cummings' humorous poems are about burlesque--the comedians, the stripteasers, and the audiences.

Another popular form of entertainment which delighted Cummings was the circus. He thinks the circus is a work of art for much the same reasons that burlesque is. "Within 'the big top,' as nowhere else on earth, is to be found Actuality."\(^{15}\) The clowns play an important role in this spectacle. "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 heart-beat or whisper."\(^{16}\) The circus appealed to him because it captured the spontaneity of life just as burlesque did. In comparison, comedy in the theatre was stilted, confined, and formal. Something of the circus clown

\(^{13}\)Ibid.
\(^{14}\)Ibid., p. 92.
\(^{15}\)Ibid., p. 42.
\(^{16}\)Ibid.
can be seen in the persona Cummings adopts in many of his humorous poems.

The circus and burlesque are joined by other mass-appeal attractions in Cummings' background of humor. The American amusement parks were a favorite type of diversion for Cummings. He considered Coney Island the perfect place to get away from the tensions of the city. It was a place that contained some of the same elements of humor as burlesque and circuses. "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."17 Comic strips and animated cartoons were also held in high regard by Cummings. Krazy Kat was Cummings' particular favorite, and he once wrote a serious article analyzing the metaphysics of this lovable comic character and her companions, Offisa Pupp and Ignatz Mouse. He wrote another essay on the benefits of movie cartoons in which he addressed an unusual person.

"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!"18 Laughter is important to Cummings, no matter whence its source. As he so ably expressed it in one of his epigrams, "only as long as we can laugh at ourselves are we nobody else."19

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17 Ibid., p. 55. 18 Ibid., p. 85. 19 Ibid., p. 3.
The only other type of cinema besides animated cartoons that Cummings cared for was the Charlie Chaplin creations. Cummings recognized the comic genius of Chaplin and was a lifelong fan of his movies. Chaplin and Jack Shargel were two comedians whom Cummings called the "two very great actors in America." Chaplin's cinematic creation, "The Tramp," is closely akin to many of the personages in Cummings' poetry—the hoboes, balloonmen, organ grinders, and other social misfits who bring joy into the lives of others. Cummings' technique of combining pathos with humor is parallel to the feeling evoked by "The Tramp." Cummings is probably the only modern American poet who can achieve to the same degree this fusion of pity and joy.

It will be noted all of the above-mentioned influences on Cummings' comic sense, from burlesque to Chaplin movies, are mass appeal forms of American entertainment. This is indicative of Cummings' anti-intellectualism. He does not mention any literary influences on his humor, although he was well-read and was formally educated at Harvard. Throughout his poetry the appeal is to the senses and to emotions not to the mind or intellect, and this holds true especially for the humorous poetry. Although he employs wit, whose appeal is mainly to the intellect, the final impact on the reader is through the emotions. His comedies, especially, make the reader laugh from the heart. His poems are not directed to a small coterie but have a wide audience appeal, and this in spite of the critics and some rather formidable verbal techniques.
CHAPTER II

HUMOROUS TECHNIQUES AND DEVICES

The mechanical and technical aspects of Cummings' poetry are the things that immediately strike the eye and mind of the reader. It is these aspects, too, that have prompted most of the critical furor over Cummings' poetry. What may seem at first glance to be verbal and poetic trickery turns out on closer scrutiny to be germane and functional. Since many of these devices and techniques are designed for deliberate humorous effect, they must be considered in greater detail. Cummings has made use of traditional devices for humor, but he has also made some interesting and startling innovations for humorous effect. The humorous devices can be divided into four categories: typographical devices, rhetorical devices, linguistic devices, and semantic devices.

Cummings is probably best known for his unusual typography since he was an experimenter in this area, and the reader first notices the unusual arrangement of the poem on the page. Experimentation in typography is used by Cummings for humorous effect, and this is one aspect of his comic technique which has broken with tradition. The important facet of the typographical device for humor is the visual
effect of the poem on the reader, the arrangement of the words, lines, and stanzas. General typographical techniques include juxtaposition of words, fragmented words, word fusions, parentheses, and capitalization. In other words, Cummings has employed the disruption of normal typography for deliberate and considered effect.

One typographical method which is more traditional than the others is the juxtaposition of words for humorous effect. The effect is usually heightened by incongruity because the words juxtaposed are not thought of as going together. This particular device can be seen in

the Cambridge ladies who live in furnished souls are unbeautiful and have comfortable minds (I:58). The juxtaposition of "furnished" and "souls" surprises the reader because he expects to see "furnished homes." Instead of "comfortable minds" he expects to see "comfortable chairs." This juxtaposition heightens the triviality and materialism of these ladies whom Cummings ridicules.

Juxtaposition puts words in proximity, but Cummings also uses an opposite device, fragmenting words. He breaks words up on the page to achieve ambiguity and to provide levels of meanings. Often the results of the ambiguity and dual meanings are humorous, as in the poem about two nuns.

\[1\text{All poems are from Poems, 1923-1954 unless otherwise indicated. The first number refers to the poem and the second to the page.}\]

\[2\text{Clendenning, "Cummings and Comedy," p. 47.}\]
The phrase "wandering in singular" is fragmented to afford two meanings and also to provide a visual effect. The line "w an d" visually suggests the two nuns walking down the street. This is in harmony with the balance of previous lines which also suggests the sameness of the two nuns. The next fragmentation suggests that the chaste nuns are "ering in sin." This heightens the contrast between the drab nun, who are so much alike, and spring, which is fresh, bright, and beautifully varied. The two nuns are in the foreground throughout the poem, but spring is the background which the poet celebrates. Spring slowly comes forth in the poem and then bursts upon us. Cummings achieves the surprise climax by the fragmentation of the word "spring." The two "s's"
come first to build up to it, and then the explosive quality of "p" in "pring" of the last line completes the surprise.3

This same poem contains an example of another Cummings' typographical device, the word fusion. In this instance the fusion, "untheknowndulous," is a delightful invention which the poet uses to suggest ironically the nuns' failure to observe spring. In all of their drabness they are oblivious to the wonders of nature which surrounds them. The suffix "-dulous" emphasizes the abundance of spring which is in direct contrast to the frigidity of the nuns.4

The typographical device of parentheses is used to good humorous effect by Cummings. The following poem makes an interesting use of parentheses:

IN)
all those who got
athlete's mouth jumping
on&off bandwaggons
(MEMORIAM (21:292).

This little satirical joke is made more effective by the use of parentheses. The phrase "IN) (MEMORIAM" is separated from the main part of the poem with the effect of delaying the satirical jab. The reader does not understand what significance "IN)" has until the last line. This delay intensifies the sharpness of the satire in the same way a well-timed punch line tops off a good joke.

3Ibid., p. 49.
4Ibid., p. 50.
Another major typographical device employed by Cummings is capitalization, or lack of it. Cummings does not capitalize words which ordinarily would be capitalized. Thus, when he does use the upper-case it intensifies the effectiveness. He does not capitalize the personal pronoun "I," the first letter of a sentence, the deity, or proper nouns unless he wishes to emphasize them. Capitalization in unexpected places brings a startling new directness to the word capitalized. For instance, the upper-case "J" of "in Just-spring" (I:21) suggests the very beginning of spring. Capitalization is used for more humorous purposes in "(ponder, darling, these busted statues" (XXX:186).

In this poem Cummings describes two tourists looking over the ruins of ancient Rome. A man is talking to a woman about the ruins when he makes the statement. Later in the poem he uses the ruins as an example of the decaying qualities of time. Then he suggests a brief sexual encounter on their part because time is slipping away. The capitalization of "Them Greediest Paws" produces ironic humor by making the man's metaphor on time seem like a headline slogan.6

5Ibid.

Cummings' use of rhetorical devices is much less strikingly original than his typographical effects. Among the rhetorical devices are such traditional techniques as punning and parody. Cummings uses the pun in varied ways, but it is always basically a play on words. Besides the traditional puns he sometimes uses punning in the rhyme, with exaggerated rhymes playing an important part. The spelling pun is often used, with scrambled names a part of this type. The punning allusion to some line in literature, the Bible, or the classics is also used. At times an entire poem will be an extended pun with a double meaning running throughout. And in tone the puns are usually witty, bizarre, and often bawdy.

The main reason for using puns is, of course, wit, and Cummings' witty puns are some of the most outlandish in the English language. Also puns are the main source of witty ridicule. He uses puns to ridicule Ernest Hemingway in "what does little Ernest croon" (26:294). The phrase "(kow dower 2 bul retoinis" is a pun on the words in "A Psalm of Life," "cow thou art to bull returnest." At times Cummings uses puns to hide his sentiment, and at other times he uses them to modify his heated indignation.

The spelling pun is a commonly used device of ridicule in Cummings' poetry. It is used in "kumrads die because

7Ibid., p. 52.
they're told)" (30:296) to ridicule the communists. By changing the spelling of "comrade" to "kumrad," Cummings belittles the entire movement and all of its beliefs. Another form of the spelling pun is the scrambled name. Cummings shows his disregard for the heroes made in history books by the spelling puns on their names.

remarked Robinson Jefferson
to Injustice Taughed
your story is so interested

but you make me laft
welates Wouldwoe Washington
to Lydia E. Mckinley (XIII:232-33)

This poem goes on with mention of those illustrious characters of history, "Clever Rusefelt," "Theodore Odysseus Graren't," and "Coolitch."

Another special area of punning is the obscene pun. This device is used extensively in Cummings' bawdy poems, but it is also found in the more innocent appearing satires. Punning obscenities are found in the satire on British lecturers.

flotsam and jetsam
are gentlemen poets
urseappeal netsam
our spinsters and coeds) (6:354-55)

The last two-line pun can be translated, "arse-appeal which nets them our lady culture-vultures." Cummings has a satire


9 Friedman, Cummings, Art of His Poetry, p. 52.
on the stereotype Jew which is a good illustration of the obscene pun. The line "it comes both prigged and canted" (46:454) has a double meaning. One is the obvious literal interpretation, and another has sexual connotations with "pricked" and "cunted" signifying the two different sexes of the stereotype Jew. In this instance, the obscene pun adds another meaning to the poem and completes Cummings' denunciation of this particular stereotype.

One extended pun is carried throughout the poem, "she being Brand," in order to accomplish a boisterous and clever double meaning.

she being Brand

-know consequently a
little stiff i was
- careful of her and(having
thoroughly oiled the universal
joint tested my gas felt of
her radiator made sure her springs were O.
K. i went right to it flooded-the-carburetor cranked her

up, slipped the
clutch(and then somehow got into reverse she
kicked what
the hell) next
minute i was back in neutral tried and
again slo-wly; bare,ly nudg. ing(my

lev-er Right-

oh and her gears being in
A l shape passed
from low through
second-in-to-high like
greasedlightning) just as we turned the corner of Divinity

avenue i touched the accelerator and give

her the juice, good
was the first ride and believe it we was happy to see how nice she acted right up to the last minute coming back down by the Public Gardens I slammed on the internal expanding & external contracting brakes Bothatonce and brought all of her trembling to a dead.

still (XIX:178-179)

The most obvious meaning is a man starting up a brand new car and trying it out, but the reader quickly becomes aware of a second and decidedly bawdy level of meaning. This is a description of a man trying out sexual intercourse with an inexperienced virgin. A poem about one topic or the other might have been humorous, but when every word is purposely intended to have a double meaning, the poem becomes an intricate extended pun.

The last type of pun which Cummings uses is the punning allusion. He uses many different sources for his allusions, the Bible, classical literature, foreign writings, and practically any works of English and American literature. A good example of the allusion pun can be found in "flotsam and jetsam" (6:354-355). Cummings goes all the way back to Latin verse to find an appropriate pun to ridicule the pompous intellectual Englishman.
(neck and senecktie
are gentlemen ppoys
even whose recktie
are covered by lloyd's

The line "neck and senecktie" is an allusion to Horace's
"labuntur anni; nec pietas noram/rugis et enstanti senectae."\(^ {10} \)

Another rhetorical device of which Cummings makes
effective use is parody. Favorite targets of Cummings'
parodies are some of the popular poets of English and American
literature. He parodies Browning's "Oh, to be in England now
that April's there" with, "what's become of Maeterlink/now
that triglyph's here)" (XXVII:183-84). Cummings has a parody
of Kipling:

(of Ever-Ever Land i speak
sweet morons gather roun'
who does not dare to stand or sit
may take it lying down)  (4:335).

The meter of Cummings' satire on Hemingway (26:294) parodies
Longfellow's familiar rhythm.

Parody of slogans, advertising claims, patriotic songs,
and political clichés are also found in some of Cummings'
poems. One particular example, "POEM, OR BEAUTY HURTS MR.
VINAL," contains most of the different types of parody.

    take it from me kiddo
    believe me
    my country, 'tis of

    you, land of the Cluett
    Shirt Boston Garter and Spearmint
    Girl With The Wrigley Eyes (of you
    land of the Arrow Ide

\(^ {10} \)Ibid.
Cummings twists the clichés slightly to make them even more ludicrous, and he piles one on top of another until they become a ridiculous hodgepodge.

One of Cummings' most effective techniques is the nursery rhyme parody. In one poem he uses two nursery rhymes as the controlling parody.

red-rag and pink-flag
blackshirt and brown
strut-mince and stink-brag
have all come to town

some like it shot
and some like it hung
and some like it in the twot
nine months young

The first stanza is based on "Hark, Hark, the Dogs Do Bark" and the second on "Pease Porridge Hot." Cummings satirizes totalitarianism by a subtle contrast between the joyful world of nursery rhymes and the hateful world of dictatorship.11

In his linguistic and semantic devices Cummings tampers with the grammar of the English language for humorous effect. He uses grammatical shifts and the addition of suffixes or prefixes to create new comic words. Words are changed from

one part of speech to another to create an unusual humorous effect. Another device associated with the grammatical shifts and additions is the unusual word order and syntactical arrangement. This is often done for satirical effect and to distribute emphasis, to create punning ambiguity, to imitate the sense through the syntax, to create movement from chaos to order, or to create rhythmic effects.\textsuperscript{12} Another category of his linguistic devices employed for humor is slang and colloquialisms. He often uses mock archaic, mock formal or latinate language for humorous effect, especially in his satires.

The grammatical shift is used for many effects, but many times it has a humorous intention. When Cummings changes one part of speech to another, he often achieves whimsy and wit. He changes verbs to nouns, as in the whimsical "he sang his didn't he danced his did" (29:370). He turns a pronoun into a noun for satiric purposes in "an it that stinks to please" (IX:394). In this poem he is satirizing the typical salesman and achieves part of the ridicule by making the salesman neuter. By making nouns of adverbs, Cummings achieves a mild fanciful humor, as in "are flowers neither why nor how" (32:447). Of course, this goes beyond fancy because of the conceptual meanings of the two adverbs used as nouns. Often adjectives are made into nouns for satiric reasons, as in

\textsuperscript{12}Friedman, Cummings, \textit{Art of His Poetry}, p. 110.
"the cult of Same" (54:314). The cult of conformity in America is being ridiculed here, but Cummings' jab is much more effective because of the use of the adjective "Same" in place of the usual noun. This has the effect of drawing the reader's attention to the word. When conjunctions become nouns, the effect is again whimsy and fancy. For instance, in "and finding only why/smashed it into because" (XXVI:404) the use of conjunctions results in ambiguity and also new meaning for the old words. Another common technique is using adverbs in place of adjectives, as in "the slowly town."\(^1^3\) In "Spring is like a perhaps hand" (III:100), "perhaps" as a noun modifier is a paradox and creates surprise and mild humor.

Another aspect of the grammatical shift is the addition of prefixes and suffixes to form new words. Cummings is especially fond of the prefixes "un--" and "non--," and he mainly uses them for satiric purposes. When Cummings refers to "unfools of unbeing," he is ridiculing the many people who, by his conception, do not live. They do not appreciate life; they do not enjoy; thus, they are "unbeings." The prefix "non--" is used in much the same way to give a negative aspect to something Cummings wishes to ridicule. The suffixes "--ness" and "--ly" are used to make words fanciful, as in "lookingly." He uses "--ness" to add a new satirical element in "a peopleshaped too many-ness" (40:380).\(^1^4\) Here he is

\(^{1^3}\)Ibid., pp. 105-106.  \(^{1^4}\)Ibid., p. 106.
again ridiculing the group of people who always conform, but he adds a dimension to the concept.

Another technique with words involves order and syntactical arrangement, as in the following poem:

```
nonsun blob a
cold to
skylessness
sticking fire

my are your
are birds our all
and one gone
away the they

leaf of ghosts some
few creep there
here or on
unearth
```

The disrupted syntax suggests the myriad unorganized things which make up this description, the sun, the sky, the birds, and the earth. This use of unusual word order adds a note of fancy to the image Cummings has created.

Cummings does not hesitate to employ slang and jargon for comic effect. Wisely, this device is rather limited because the slang of one generation might be unintelligible to the next one, and because slang is sometimes limited in use to one particular group, and those outside could not understand it. Nevertheless, Cummings employs slang when it adds to the feeling he is trying to convey.

```
meet mr universe(who clean

and jerked 300 lbs)i mean
observe his these regard his that(sh)

who made the world's best one hand snatch (47:454)
```
All of the humor in this poem comes from the slang of weightlifters and professional musclemen. The words "clean," "jerked," and "snatch" are all a part of this jargon. The words "snatch" and "make" also have common slang meanings other than in the context of weightlifting. The double meanings of the slang words create some rather bawdy humor.

Some of Cummings' play with language almost defies categorizing. He often mocks certain types of language for comic effect. He uses mock archaic, mock formal, or latinate language to enhance the humor of a comic poem.

come, gaze with me upon this dome of many coloured glass, and see his mother's pride, his father's joy, unto whom duty whispers low

"thou must!" and who replies "I can!" --yon clean upstanding well dressed boy that with his peers full oft hath quaffed the wine of life and found it sweet--

a tear within his stern blue eye, upon his firm white lips a smile, one thought alone: to do or die for God for country and for Yale above his blond determined head the sacred flag of truth unfurled, in the bright heyday of his youth the upper class American

unsullied stands, before the world: with manly heart and conscience free, upon the front steps of her home by the high minded pure young girl

much kissed, by loving relatives well fed, and fully photographed the son of man goes forth to war with trumpets clap and syphilis (VIII:195-96)
Cummings uses the mock archaic and mock formal language to build the reader up for the tonal drop of the last line. This poem employs bathos; it moves from the sublime to the ridiculous. The archaic and formal language, "thou," "yon," "quaffed," and "unsullied," keeps the reader on a sublime level. The beginning with its Shelleyan overtones is in perfect contrast to the end, which comes down from the romantic ideals to the realism of "clap and syphilis." It is not hard to determine Cummings' attitude toward this upper-class American boy going off to war.

Another Cummings' poem uses this same device for much the same effect.

o pr
  gross verily thou art m
  mentous superc
  lossal hyperpr
digious etc i kn
  w & if you d
n't why g
to yonder s
called newsreel s
called theatre & with your
wn eyes beh
l'd The
(The president The
  president of The president
  of the The)president of
the(United 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
The language is even more mocking than the previous poem, and a Latin phrase is added near the end to make the final drop even more effective. Cummings has nothing but ridicule for that great American tradition of having the President throw out the first baseball of the season.

Closely related to the linguistic devices are the devices of sound. These are also used for other purposes besides humor. One of Cummings' sound devices is phonetic spellings. He most often uses this to imitate New Yorkese vulgarisms in a poem, but he also uses it to capture other dialects, foreign and American. Rhymes are also sound devices used for humor, especially exaggerated rhymes and rhyming puns.

Cummings' phonetic spellings of New Yorkese vulgarisms are especially effective in satire. Cummings can satirize people by using their own language in a poem. A New York man speaks for himself in the following poem:

\[
yg\text{U}d\text{uh} \\
yd\text{oan} \\
y\text{unnuhstan} \\
yd\text{oan o} \\
y\text{unnuhstan dem} \\
y\text{guduh ged} \\
y\text{unnuhstan dem doidee} \\
y\text{guduh ged riduh} \\
yd\text{oan o nudn}
\]
Translated from the phonetic rendering to normal English this would read, "You've got to, you don't, you understand. You don't, of, you understand them, you've got to get. You understand them dirty, you've got to get rid of, you don't, oh nothing. Listen, bud, listen, them god-damned little yellow bastards, we're going to civilize them." The man condemns himself in an ironic self-revelation. Cummings is satirizing the American white's prejudice and arrogance toward the Oriental enemy in World War II, and the arrogant bigotry and hatred of the character comes out through his dialect. This same device can be used for other purposes than satire. It is employed for comic pathos in Cummings' description of five New York whores in "FIVE AMERICANS." (I:165-66).

The people in the poem resemble characters in a play; they speak their own words as they would really sound. By letting
the whores speak in their natural dialect and by approximating these speech patterns in phonetic spelling the whores' speech is made both dramatic and pathetic.15

Cummings also makes phonetic renderings of other dialects besides that of New York. He writes the dialect of a Negro blues singer phonetically in the following poem capturing the rhythms and sounds of a Negro blues song in poetry.

one slipslouch twi
tterstamp
coon wid a plon
kykerplung
guit
ar
(plez make me glad)dis
dumdam slamsulm slopp
idy wirl
sho am
wick
id id
ar
(now heer we kum dearie)bud

hooz
gwine ter
hate
dat hurt
fool wurl no gal no
boy(day simbully loves id)fer
ids dare
pain dares un
no
budy elses un ids
dare dare
joy
(eye kinely thank yoo) (33:372-73)

In this poem the dialect adds warmth to the image, emphasizing the Negro singer's individuality and decency.\textsuperscript{16}

The sound device of rhyming pun is used in many humorous poems. An example of this can be seen in "flotsam and jetsam" (6:354-55).

\begin{verbatim}
thoroughly bretish
they scout the inhuman
itarian fetish
that man isn't wuman
\end{verbatim}

Cummings slightly alters "British" to make it rhyme with "fetish" thereby creating a rhyming pun. "Woman" is changed to "wuman" so that it rhymes perfectly with "inhuman." The effect of this is a type of ridiculous humor that parallels the subject matter of the poem, the ridiculous British lecturer in the United States. Cummings ridicules these people, and the punning rhymes of the poem help augment the sense of incongruity which he has established. Another poem which employs the rhyming pun is "Ballad of an Intellectual."\textsuperscript{17}

\begin{verbatim}
Listen, you morons great and small
to the tale of an intellectual

But when it rains chickens we'll all catch larks
--to borrow a phrase from Karl the Marks.
\end{verbatim}

Here Cummings is satirizing the American intellectual of the 1930's. The exaggerated rhyming puns are completely non-intellectual and ridiculous which heightens the sense of ridicule in the poem.

\textsuperscript{16}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 1053. \textsuperscript{17}\textit{Firmage, editor, A Miscellany}, pp. 229-30.
It is readily apparent that Cummings uses a wide variety of devices for humor. The purposes of the devices are also greatly diversified. These elements of techniques have been isolated for purposes of study. A poem containing many of the devices can be analyzed to show exactly how Cummings utilizes and harmonizes these comic devices for an overall humorous effect.

\[
\text{go(perpe)go}
\]
\[
\text{(tu)to(al adve}
\]
\[
\text{nturin g p article}
\]
\[
\text{s of s ini sterd exte}
\]
\[
\text{ri)go to(ty)the(om nivorou salways lugbrin g ingseekfindlosin g motilities are)go to}
\]
\[
\text{the ant (al ways}
\]
\[
\text{alingwaysing) go to the ant thou go (inging)}
\]
\[
\text{to the ant, thou ant- eater}
\]

The first thing the reader might notice about this poem is the use of parentheses to separate two sentences which run
simultaneously throughout. Thus, the total effect of the poem is not established until it has been read and gone over again. "Cummings intensifies the normal effect of suspense, expectation, and surprise" by this device. The scene emerges out of chaos intensifying the meaning of the poem. There is a playful allusion to Proverbs 6:6, "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways and be wise." When the reader realizes the allusion and how Cummings has twisted it, he cannot help laughing. "And this is a part of the joke, a delightful burst of pleasure when we realize, after struggling through the maze of parentheses, syntactical distortions, coinages, and fragmented words, that Cummings is satirizing a certain kind of worldly and prudential wisdom." Cummings reduces the proverb to its simple, realistic terms, "go to the ant, thou ant-eater." He deflates the whole proverb by refusing to make the necessary metaphorical transference. He has skillfully applied his devices to shape a witty and humorous work of comic art.

Although the innovations which Cummings uses for humor are the most startling of his devices, the traditional techniques hold an equally important place in his art. They are all used effectively to ridicule, to evoke a whimsical fancy, or simply to stimulate laughter. The devices can be examined separately, but in order to see how unified they are with the

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18 Friedman, *Cummings, Art of His Poetry*, p. 118.

19 Ibid.
humorous content, the satires and comedies must be investigated for meanings and themes. Cummings uses his wide range of devices in the satires and comedies to present his own characteristic attitudes toward life.
CHAPTER III

THE COMEDIES

Cummings' non-satiric comic poems deal with the incongruities of life. These incongruities are revealed by Cummings, but he does not ridicule them. The comedies are the best examples of Cummings' buoyant sense of humor. They are not weighted with social implication as the satires are. The comedies provoke more amusement and outright laughter than the satires, and they never scorn as the satires do. The comedies seem outwardly to be lighter than the satires, yet even in the comedies Cummings combines a sense of the comic with a more serious purpose.

Cummings possesses what Norman Friedman calls a transcendental vision which is often found in combination with his sense of humor. "It has often been remarked that the transcendental vision is not commonly accompanied by a sense of humor."¹ But Cummings is one of the few who accomplishes this. His transcendental sense is unique in that it is different from other writers. Cummings sees beyond the material world in which we live and believes in a truer reality of the spirit. The spiritual world is

¹Friedman, Cummings, Growth of a Writer, pp. 47-48.
made up of a mystical unity of the mind, heart, and soul which forms Cummings' concept of love. Permeating Cummings' transcendental sense is a feeling of joy and humor. Friedman says that "... it is a distinguishing mark in Cummings that his conception of joy is somewhat less severe than some other transcendentalists, Blake, Coleridge, Carlyle, Emerson, or Thoreau], and that his love of woman and of nature is not simply strenuously dutiful." He celebrates woman and nature through mild humor, and he also employs the comic spirit to celebrate other enjoyable aspects of life. There is a certain exuberance in Cummings' comedies that other poets lack. "Who else, except for Henry Miller, can laugh with such exhilaration? The sexual joy in Lawrence is grim by comparison." Cummings' brand of humor in the bawdy poems is especially akin to Henry Miller's. In an effort to convey his exuberance, Cummings has even entitled one of his books of poems Xaipe, which in Greek means "rejoice" or "be thou gay." An entire section of Cummings' comedies can be called poems of exuberance because of their tonal quality. The other two groups are the poems of whimsy and the poems of pathos.

Cummings' non-satiric poems of exuberance rejoice in the spirit of being alive. Cummings achieves an exuberant spirit through different settings.

2Ibid., p. 48. 3Ibid.
and atmospheres—youthful reveling, childhood wonder, and sexual pleasure. Cummings' celebration of childhood attitudes is indicative of his general anti-intellectualism. Children are not encumbered by philosophical doubts and religious skepticism; they simply live and enjoy. A well-known and often anthologized poem shows exuberance in a childhood setting.

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.

Oh for such a gurl
   gurl
   gurl, oh
for such a gurl to
be a fellow's twistandtwirl
talk about your Sal-
   Sal-
   Sal-, talk
about your Salo
   -mes but gimmie Jimmie's gal.  \text{(VI:170-71)}

Cummings captures the joy of adolescence in this poem by his rhythm, language, and typography. The rhythm of the poem and the repetition of "goil goil goil" suggest a child's chant of derision. Phonetic spelling, "goil," "coitnly," and "gurl," enables Cummings to approximate actual chants
of the streets of New York. By spreading the repetitious words across the page, Cummings makes the reader say them as a chant. The word fusion of "twist and twirl" creates the illusion of quickness and agility with which Jimmie's "goil" dances. The allusion to Salome and the dance of the seven veils is the ultimate compliment for Jimmie's "goil." The last touch of humor is accomplished in the last line by the internal rhyme, "gimmie Jimmie's," which leaves the reader out of breath after doing the "shimmie" with an adolescent sex goddess.

Cummings is celebrating the sparkling aliveness of youth. They are full of earthy desires and electric energy which any adult would envy. Many great American humorists have the same spirit and youthful exuberance in their writings. Mark Twain's Huck Finn, George Washington Harris' Sut Lovingood, William Faulkner's Lucius Priest, and Henry Miller's youthful self are diverse examples of the youthful attitude in America. This youthful quality is a part of Cummings' ideal, and he tried to retain some of it all his life. He was often accused of being an "adolescent songster," and this remark probably gave him great delight because he wanted to retain something of childhood in his adult life. Jimmie's "goil" and the persona who speaks the poem are the exact opposites of the people whom Cummings' ridicules in his satires. The comedies usually celebrate joyful aspects
of life, and childhood is a precious time of life which is to be celebrated.

Another poem which employs a child-like setting for humorous effect is "0 the sun comes up-up-up in the opening" (I:73 Poems). Again, there is a feeling of exhilaration at being alive.

0 the sun comes up-up-up in the opening

sky (the all the
any merry every pretty each

bird sings birds sing
gay-be-gay because today's today)the
romp cries i and the me purrs

you and the gentle
who-horns says-does moo-woo
(the prance with the
three white its stimpstamps)

the grintgrunt wugglewiggle
champychumpchomps yes
the speckled strut begins to scratch and scratch-scrutch

and scratch (while
the no-she-yes-he fluffies tittle
tattle did-he-does-she) & the

ree ray rye roh
rowster shouts

rawr00

The poet is overcome with the wonders of nature but instead of extolling them in Wordsworthian phrases, he uses childlike sounds to imitate what he hears. The effect is mild humor rather than serious contemplation, but the feeling of exuberance is greater because of the humor. Much of the humor comes from the sounds.
Cummings' description of morning on a farm becomes a sharper image in the reader's mind because of the auditory impressions he conveys. The birds are described as "any merry every pretty each," and the sound quality of the "y" endings suggests not only the sounds of the birds but their great number and variety. The verb "romp" is changed to a noun and becomes a dog that makes the sound "i"; the pronoun "me" becomes a noun, kitten, that purrs "you." A cow in Cummings' language of children is a "gentle who-horns," and the noise it makes is "moo-woo." A horse is a "prance," and the noise it makes with its hoofs is "stimpstamps." Cummings' delightful new noun meaning pig is "grintgrunt wugglewiggles" who goes "champychumpschamps" while eating in the pig sty. The hen is, of course, a "speckled strut," and what two words could be more descriptive of a chicken? It goes all over the farm yard "to scretch and scratch-scratch and scritch." The busy-body, gossipy rabbits, "no-she-yes-he fluffies," go "tittle tattle did-he-does-she." The rooster is a "ree ray rye roh rowster" that announces the sunrise with a "rawrOO." By using childhood sounds Cummings' captures a child's wonder at farm animals, and the poem becomes enjoyable humorous for adults.

Cummings' also celebrates the appreciation of a live beauty as opposed to intellectual pseudo-artistic concepts of beauty. One poem in particular employs humor to impress this conviction on the reader.
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  (XVIII:177)

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.

For Cummings, beauty is not something merely to be looked at from a distance; one should feel it, experience it, and share it with others. He thinks that we should experience beauty through the sex act. A woman's beauty is something to be shared with a man through both spiritual and physical love. But Cummings is not reverential toward the sexual aspects of love; he celebrates the sex act with exuberance in his poetry. He jokes about sex; he makes fun of it, and he conveys an impression of enjoyment. After all, sex is another wonderful
experience of life which we should enjoy. Some of Cummings' most delightful poems of exuberance are the ones which deal with sex in an exuberant manner, the bawdy poems.

One of the bawdy poems starts out on a somber note.

annie died the other day
never was there such a lay--
whom, among her dollies, dad
first("don't tell your mother") had;
making annie slightly mad
but very wonderful in bed
---saints and satyrs, go your way

youths and maidens: let us pray  (22:73 Poems)

Humor arises in this poem over the sudden switch from the dire announcement of death to the earthy confession in the second line. The small aside, "don't tell your mother," adds another humorous element. The middle six lines are exuberant in their delight of the sex act, and the first and last lines seem almost like a funeral speech. The incongruity of these two attitudes makes for the comic effect of the poem. The middle stanza is a comment on Annie when she was alive, and no matter how pompously sad or religious the thoughts about her are after her death, the truth still remains that she was a good "lay." Cummings is saying that the way she lived is really more important than what is said about her after she is gone. Beneath the bawdy and exuberant humor of the poem is a serious point.

The sex act is described in much more detail in another of the bawdy poems of exuberance.
may i feel said he
(i'll squeal said she
just once said he)
it's fun said she

(may i touch said he
how much said she
a lot said he)
why not said she

(let's go said he
not too far said she
what's too far said he
where you are said she)

may i stay said he
(which way said she
like this said he
if you kiss said she

may i move said he
is it love said she)
if you're willing said he
(but you're killing said she

but it's life said he
but your wife said she
now said he)
ow said she

(tiptop said he
don't stop said she
oh no said he)
go slow said she

(cccome?said he
ummm said she)
you're divine!said he
(you are Mine said she) (16:288-89)

The entire process of seduction, from the first tentative explorations to the sexual climax, is described in this poem. The humor lies in the rhythm and rhyme of the poem and the surprises throughout it. The repetition of the rhythm and the internal and end rhyme parallels the seduction scene. The surprises follow one upon the other. It is obvious that
both parties are enjoying their experience and that the girl is not putting up a very strong resistance. There is an exuberance and joy in their conversation, and the humor adds to this feeling.

The bawdiness in the poems of exuberance is carried to frank and vulgar levels by Cummings. In fact, the publishers refused to print poem 44 of No Thanks (1935) because it contained four letter obscenities. According to Norman Friedman, Cummings refused to let the poem die completely. "Cummings wrote it in by hand in 12 copies of the original edition.... Some way may be devised for publishing it in print...." The poem is typical of Cummings' bawdy poetry in its exuberance and comedy.

The boys i mean are not refined
they go with girls who buck and bite
they do not give a fuck for luck
they hump them thirteen times a night

. . . . . . . . . .

they speak whatever's on their mind
they do whatever's in their pants
the boys i mean are not refined
they shake the mountains when they dance

The frank words are necessary to establish the vulgar character of the people the poet is describing. The four letter words are as much justified in the poem as they are in the writings of Henry Miller, William Burroughs, or Terry Southern. Friedman accepts the obscenities and calls the poem a

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4Letter from Norman Friedman, Associate Professor of English, Queens College, March 3, 1965.

5Ibid.
"rollicking and bawdy poem of great delight."\(^6\) Despite the vulgarity of the characters, Cummings seems to view them favorably. He does not condone all of their lewd actions, but he cannot condemn them for being alive and boisterous. They are expressive of the exuberance toward life which is Cummings' ideal. All of the humorous elements in this poem could be considered obscene. The boys are not afraid of superstitions, they have intercourse thirteen times a night. The humor is tied in with the swashbuckling cockiness of the boys in that it is the type of comedy that would appeal to their sense of humor. Thus the humor, subject matter, and language form a unity in the poem. The overall effect is bawdy exuberance.

Cummings aims for an entirely different effect in another group of the comedies. The poems of whimsy strive to achieve a whimsical response in the reader from their mild humor, which is often odd and eccentric. The poet uses wry twists, fancy, and fantasy for humor in the poems of whimsy. Part of the fantasy is achieved by creating within a poem worlds outside of known physical reality. As in the poems of exuberance, in many cases the whimsical poems employ a childhood setting and a childlike attitude to evoke humor.

One of Cummings' earlier poems is illustrative of the childlike poems of whimsy.

\(^6\)Friedman, Cummings, Growth of a Writer, p. 87.
hist whist
little ghostthings
tip-toe
twinkle-toe

little twitchy
witches and tingling
goblins
hob-a-nob hob-a-nob

little hoppy happy
toad in tweeds
tweeds
little itchy mousies

with scuttling
eyes rustle and run and
hide hide hide
whisk

whisk look out for the old woman
with the wart on her nose
what she'll do to yer
nobody knows

for she knows the devil ouch
the devil ouch
the devil
ach the great

green
dancing
devil
devil
devil
devil

wheeEEE (II:22-23)

Cummings has done more here than imitate childhood expressions.
"This is not just a poem about ghostthings, witches, goblins, toads and mice. Its form is itself a metaphor, becoming what it describes; recreating childhood."7 The sounds of childhood

are perfectly reproduced, and the sounds form a metaphorical unity with the shape and feel of the poem. A note of whimsical fancy is struck by recapturing the delights of childhood for an adult reader.

Another poem of whimsy which poetically recreates childhood is "2 little whos" (60:72 Poems).

2 little whos
(he and she)
under are this wonderful tree

smiling stand
(all realms of where and when beyond)
now and here

(far from a grown-up i&you-ful world of known)
who and who

(2 little ams and over them this aflame with dreams incredible is)

Cummings stresses that the realm of childhood is separated from the adult world. The child's world is one of fancy and imagination. Part of the fanciful effect created by Cummings is through the use of pronouns and verbs for nouns. The two children are "little whos" or "little ams," and their world is described as "(all realms of where and when beyond)." In other words, the child's world is beyond the spatial and temporal restrictions of the adult world. Time and space as such do not exist for them. Their world is described as an "incredible is" which is "aflame with dreams." For Cummings
the world of the imagination is closer to reality than the physical world. Cummings' transcendental vision comes forth strongly in the poem. In this particular instance, his transcendentalism is related in terms of fancy which creates a whimsical response in the reader.

Close to the poems about childhood are the poems of whimsy which deal with small animals, mice, chipmunks, rabbits, and even grasshoppers. Cummings observes a mouse in one poem, and the experience becomes more than just an observation.

here's a little mouse)and
what does he think about, i
wonder as over this
floor(quietly with

bright eyes)drifts(nobody
can tell because
Nobody knows, or why;
erks Here & here,
gr{oo)ving the room's Silence)this like
a littlest
poem a
(with wee ears and see?
tail frisks)

"mouse", We are not the same you and

i, since here's a little he
or is
it It
? (or was something we saw in the mirror)?

therefore we'll kiss; for maybe
what was Disappeared
into ourselves
who (look). startled

This, like "hist whist," is what Frankenberg calls a metaphor
poem. The sounds and the shape of the poem unite to suggest mouse. The reader sees its eyes peeking out, "gr(oo)ving," and it seems to scurry between the letters on the page. Then it is "(gonE)." The whimsy is produced through the metaphorical suggestion of a real mouse. There are twists and surprises in the typography just as there are twists and surprises when a mouse runs behind objects. Yet the poem is more than a simple description; Cummings identifies with the mouse. The elusiveness of the mouse is parallel with the mystery of our own existence. As Cummings expresses it, "for maybe/what was Disappeared/into ourselves." If the poet cannot even understand the existence of the mouse; how can he ever begin to comprehend his own being? The seriousness of this thought is lightened by the whimsy of the description.

A chipmunk is the subject of another poem of whimsy.

& sun &

sil
e
nce
e
very
w
here
noon
e
is exc
ep	on
t
Part of the humor 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. By putting the word "chipmunk" in the middle of the word "dreaming," Cummings fuses the image of a dreaming chipmunk. The key phrase of the poem is "everywhere no one is except on this boulder." The simple observation of the sleeping chipmunk becomes a transcendental experience for Cummings. At this moment nothing else exists except the chipmunk. Cummings has transcended the corporeal world of reality but has reached a truer world of the imagination through the chipmunk. The poem is meant to make the reader feel this same emotional transference. The feeling of unreality is intensified by the whimsical humor.

A whimsical effect is achieved in one of Cummings' most successful expressions of the transcendental vision. He has created a separate world for children, mice, and chipmunks, and now he does the same for small figurines.

this little bride & groom are standing)in a kind of crown he dressed in black candy she
veiled with candy white

little bride & little
groom in it kind of stands on

big & kinder of ring & which
kinder of stands on a
much more than very much
biggest & thickest & kindest

Frankenberg says of the poem, "This is a little world to
itself. The poem is of a size with the cake; constructed,
like it, in tiers of progressive excitement; and all frosting." 8

The whimsical humor comes from the building intensity throughout the poem. The reader is swept along by rhythms and sounds until he is almost breathless and limp by the time the climax line occurs. The climax occurs in the very last line; there is no denouement. Cummings builds the reader up tier by tier through the unreality of the cake and then hits him with a startling metaphysical statement. Our world is separated from reality just as the cake is cut off from the outside by the cellophane. We are no more real than the bride and groom figurines which stand on top of the cake. The poem is a statement of Cummings' transcendentalism. The physical world is not the ultimate reality, and we can only

8 Ibid., p. 175.
reach reality through the imagination and emotions. A serious purpose underlies this poem of fanciful whimsy, and the importance of the serious statement is emphasized by its contrast to the frivolity of the rest of the poem.

Often closely related to the poems of whimsy in tone are the poems of pathos. The effect on the reader is different in the two types, but they share many characteristics. The poem of pathos evokes a sadness along with its humor. The reader may laugh at a character in the poems of pathos, but he will also have pity for him. The characters of the poems of pathos are part of "a special group of freaks and outcasts who form a strange corps of actors in Cummings' comic drama . . . ."9 The "little lame balloonman" is an early example of a character who creates pathos.

```
    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 and isbel come dancing
    from hop-scotch and jump-rope and
```

it's
spring
and
the
goat-footed
balloonMan    whistles
far
and
wee

(I:21-22)

As in the poems of whimsy and the poems of exuberance,
Cummings employs a children's setting for his description.
The pathos of the poem is centered on the balloonman.
Cummings uses only five descriptive words to create an image
yet these four words are enough to evoke many complex feelings
in the reader. The balloonman is queer, and the children must
laugh at him. The reader laughs also because he is different.
He is goat-footed, which brings the image of a satyr to the
reader. When the background of Greek mythology, with its
wood-nymphs, fauns, and Bacchanalian feasts, enters the
reader's mind in connection with the balloonman, the result
is humorous incongruity. Despite the comic aspects of his
appearance, the reader still feels pity for the man. The
words "little" and "old" and "lame" immediately suggest some-
one to sympathize with. Cummings was aware of the response
which these words create in a person, and he used them to
good effect. Even though the description of the balloonman
is sparse, it is enough to evoke a complex set of emotions
in the reader.
But the lowly outcasts, such as the balloonman, are not the only ones Cummings creates pathos for. Even an intelligent college professor can have an aura of pathos surrounding him.

curtains part)
the peacockapparelled
prodigy of Flo's midnight
Frolic dolores

small in the head keen chassised like a Rolls Royce
swoops smoothly outward(amid

tinkling-cheering-hammering
tables)

while softly along Kirkland Street
the infantile ghost of Professor Royce rolls

remembering that it

has for
-gotten some-
thing ah

(my

necktie (III:169)

Often people laugh at the absent-minded professor, and for him to forget something as obvious as his necktie is even more laughable. Yet there is a note of sadness in this poem. Part of the sadness and humor come from the comparison between Professor Royce and the stripper, Dolores. Dolores is alive; she seems to enjoy showing her body to a responsive audience. She is "keen chassied like a Rolls Royce," but Cummings uses the inversion of this to create a pun and point up the opposite nature of Royce. The ghost of "Professor Royce rolls"
along the street. Although alive, he is a ghost because he does not feel emotion as the stripper does. "We do not need a Freudian interpretation of Professor Royce to see that, totally caught up in his own intellectual abstractions, he has forgotten the source of life as well as his necktie."\textsuperscript{10} Cummings does not ridicule Royce, though; the reader feels pity while he is laughing at this man cut off from life.

Cummings often describes whores with humor. He has collected five poems about whores, and in each description Cummings injects small bits of humor and overall feeling of pity.

III. Gert

\texttt{joggle i think will do it although the glad monosyllable jounce possible can tell better how the balloons move} 
\texttt{. . . . . . . . . . . . .}

But if her tall corpse-coloured body seat itself (with the uncouth habitual dull jerk at garters) there's no sharpest neat word for the thing.
\texttt{. . . . . . . . . . . . . . .}

V. Fran

should i entirely ask of god why  
\texttt{. . . . . . . . . . . . . . .}

...her tiniest whispered invitation  
is like a clock striking in a dark house (I:165-67)

The humor in the descriptions is a mark of the whore's humanity. Cummings has pity for them because they are "lost

ladies in league with death." He does not make fun of them because they seem to be victims of our society. Humor is achieved as the poet tries to find a word, joggle or jounce, to describe Gert's round body. Yet this same whore is described as having a "corpsecolored body." The idea of death mars the jolliness of her fleshy appearance. As long as she is moving there is at least a resemblance of life, but as soon as she sits down a pallor seems to settle over her. Fran also strikes a comic impression at first, but the same feeling of despair clouds her happy facade. Her proposition is "like a clock striking in a dark house." This image conveys all of the loneliness, emptiness, and despair that the five whores cannot possibly conceal. Again, the reader experiences a strange mixture of humor and pity at the images Cummings has created.

Joining the whores, professors, and balloonmen as characters of pathos are a whole gallery of Cummings' uncles.

my uncle
Daniel fought in the civil
war band and can play the triangle
like the devil)my

uncle Frank has done nothing for many
years but fly kites and
when the
string breaks(or something)my uncle Frank breaks into
tears. my uncle Tom

knits and is a kewpie above the ears(but

---

11Friedman, Cummings, Art of His Poetry, p. 42.
my uncle Ed
that's
dead from the neck

up is lead all over
Brattle Street by a castrated pup

(XXIV:181)

The boy persona who narrates the poem lists his uncles in descending order, with his favorite first and the lowest last. Uncle Daniel, uncle Frank, and uncle Tom are highly regarded by the boy for the feats they can perform. Daniel is the best because he can play a triangle; Frank is next because of his kite flying ability. Tom is not too bright, but he can knit. But uncle Ed cannot do anything and has to be led around by a dog. The incongruity of the boy's viewpoint causes the humor because all four of the gentlemen are obviously senile or mentally ill. The overall humorous effect of the poem is permeated with the underlying pathos of the uncles. The reader feels pity for the assorted idiots, morons, and senile old men which Cummings' describes. They are mentally crippled and thus not completely alert to the joys of living. They are not to be ridiculed because their condition is not their fault.

Another comic victim of circumstance is Cummings' famous uncle Sol.

nobody loses all the time

i had an uncle named
Sol who was a born failure and
nearly everybody said he should have gone
into vaudeville perhaps because my Uncle Sol could
sing McCann He Was A Diver on Xmas Eve like Hell Itself which
may or may not account for the fact that my Uncle
Sol indulged in that possibly most inexcusable
of all to use a highfalootin phrase
luxuries that is or to
wit farming and be
it needlessly
added

my Uncle Sol's farm
failed because the chickens
ate the vegetables so
my Uncle Sol had a
chicken farm till the
skunks ate the chickens when

my Uncle Sol
had a skunk farm but
the skunks caught cold and
died and so
my Uncle Sol imitated the
skunks in a subtle manner

or by drowning himself in the watertank
but somebody who'd given my Uncle Sol a Victor
Victrola and records while he lived presented to
him upon the auspicious occasion of his decease a
scrumptious not to mention splendid funeral with
tall boys in black gloves and flowers and everything and

i remember we all cried like the Missouri
when my Uncle Sol's coffin lurched because
somebody pressed a button
(and down went
my Uncle
Sol

and started a worm farm)  (X:173-74)

Uncle Sol's pathetic ventures become a comic series of prat-falls in a Chaplinesque vein. In this poem "pathos is closer
to comedy than to tragedy," and the character sketch is
pathetically comic.\(^{12}\) The reader laughs at Sol's misadventures,
but he sympathizes with the underdog whom the whole world seems
to be against. Part of the humor comes from the colloquial

\(^{12}\)Benstock, "Elements of Drama," p. 117.
language used in the poem. It does not seem like a poem; it sounds like someone really talking. Such phrases as "like Hell itself," "to use a highfalootin phrase," "not to mention a splendidferous funeral," and "we all cried like the Missouri" add a comic note of realism to the poem. The speed with which Cummings forces the reader to read the poem causes a build up in intensity so that the punch line is even more effective. The ironic humor of the first line, "nobody loses all the time," is not apparent until the last line when it is revealed that Uncle Sol finally met with success after death by cultivating a worm farm. The incongruity and futility of every man's life is mirrored and exaggerated in the story of Uncle Sol.

The poem about Uncle Sol is probably Cummings' best creation in the poems of pathos. It combines many of his humorous techniques, yet it is widely divergent from some of the other comedies. This divergence illustrates the variety of tone and attitude which Cummings achieves in his poems of exuberance, poems of whimsy, and poems of pathos.

The poems of exuberance evoke a hearty type of laughter that is entirely different from the poems of whimsy and poems of pathos. The humor is light and usually brings forth a smile from the reader in the poems of whimsy. The poems of pathos create a sad type of humor in which the reader feels pity as well as joy. All three categories of the comedies
contain some of Cummings' transcendental vision. The satires, on the other hand, express the negative side of Cummings' vision. He satirizes those things that are opposed to his transcendental ideal.
CHAPTER IV

THE SATIRES

Many modern critics have stated that satire is either dead or dying in our time. As Norman Friedman states it,

Satire, like comedy, is fast becoming a lost art in our age, so strong is the current critical mode in favor of meditation, soul-searching, and tragedy. In keeping with his unfashionable eccentricity on this score, Cummings is a master of wit, in the simple sense of being funny, and of the device of ridicule, in the sense of unreservedly making big things look small.¹

E. E. Cummings is one of the few effective poetic satirists of the twentieth century. The fact that he is a satirist in an age that does not respond favorably to satire partially explains the neglect of Cummings' poetry by the critics and the misreading of many of his poems.

Satire has as its main objective to comment on and correct the evils and foibles of man and his society. It does this by making fun of and ridiculing the flaws which the satirist sees. The satirist has the view that society or individual man falls short of an ideal or a stated or implicit goal. As a satirist Cummings falls into a quite ancient tradition which goes all the way back to ancient Greek times. In this tradition Cummings rarely follows or

¹Friedman, Cummings, Art of His Poetry, p. 47.
makes use of formal techniques of satire in the traditional way, but he does conform to the tradition in spirit and tone.

The satiric tradition has never been strong in America. There are not many effective satires in American literature. To speculate on the reasons for this deficiency would lead too far afield from the present study. It might have something to do with the traditional concept that Americans are notoriously thin-skinned about criticism of any sort. Mark Twain and H. L. Mencken are about the only effective satirists prior to Cummings. Cummings does follow in the limited satiric tradition of America which Twain and Mencken represent.

Cummings' satiric viewpoint is an important aspect of his satire; he asserts that the individual is better off separated from society, and any group within society, as it now stands. He believes that the moral goal in life is self-consciousness, self-reliance, and individual integrity. Society and the group tend to destroy these ideals and substitute their own goals which are stock, patterned, and conditioned. Cummings ridicules this world of abstract loyalties and sham goals which society has constructed. The outward, visible signs of moral corruption and conformity are what Cummings most often satirizes.

The only logical way to study Cummings' satires is to organize them on the basis of the major areas against which

\[\text{\textit{Ibid.}}, \, p. \, 48.\]
the satires are directed. For convenience the satires can be grouped into five general areas. One group of satires is directed against types and professions, a latter-day modification of the old medieval satire. Another major group has as its object to satirize the American political scene. The third category holds up war to ridicule. Conformity in its many aspects is one of Cummings' major targets, and the last group is the satires on progress through science and technology. Within the subject groupings there is a wide range of tonal qualities, from harsh invective to gentle ribbing. On one end of the scale Cummings' satiric invectives are sharp, biting frontal attacks which rarely employ irony. The poems involving sarcasm are taunting, sneering, cutting jibes, but they incorporate irony and are less direct in their attack than open invective. The purely ironic satires are the most numerous. Much of the sting is taken out of the ironies, but they are still critical in an indirect fashion.

There are very few specific personal attacks in the satires; most of the satires, in keeping with time-honored critical theory, criticize general targets. Some of the general satires attack particular phases of a concept, while others criticize the concept in its broadest form. For instance, Cummings attacks the entire concept of war in some poems and specific facets of war (military statues, packages from home) in others. On the whole Cummings follows the satiric tradition of satirizing the specific through the
general; he satirizes types and general areas of thought or behavior rather than individuals or institutions, though there are exceptions.

One of the general areas which Cummings satirizes often is certain types of people and professions. These types represent the antithesis of Cummings' ideal; they stand for the moral corruption which underlies all society. Such types as the Cambridge ladies, do-gooders, intellectual snobs, salesmen, and American businessmen often come under Cummings' satiric view. Cummings satirizes certain professions in much the same manner as the medieval satirists.

Cummings employs invective to ridicule a professional class of people in one particular poem.

a salesman is an it that stinks
Excuse Me whether it's president of the you were say
or a jennelman name misde finger isn't
important whether it's millions of other punks
or just a handful absolutely doesn't
matter and whether it's in lonjewray

or shrouds is immaterial it stinks
a salesman is an it that stinks to please

but whether to please itself or someone else
makes no more difference than if it sells
hate condoms education snakeoil vac
uumcleaners terror strawberries democ
ra(caveat emptor)cly superflluous hair

or Think We've Met subhuman rights Before (IX:394)

For Cummings, salesmen are concrete symbols of the hypocrisy of the corrupted society which he despises. By calling a salesman an "it" Cummings takes away all vestiges of humanity;
a salesman is neuter; it has no sex. No matter what they are selling salesmen are hypocrites because they wear masks and misrepresent themselves and whatever they are selling. They have to please in order to sell, and in order to please they have to put up a front. Cummings' dislike of salesmen is obvious in this poem because it is an open, unsubtle attack on all salesmen. In this attack Cummings includes many who are not ordinarily considered salesmen. Ones who sell democracy would be politicians, diplomats, and statesmen. Despots, dictators, and agitators could be considered sellers of hate and terror. There is a parallel between the salesmen of abstractions and emotions and the ordinary salesmen because they both use the same methods, hypocrisy and lies.

One of the types which Cummings satirizes is the literary snob and parasite. He does this in one of his few personal satires in which he names the target.

mr u will not be missed
who as an anthologist
sold the many on the few
not excluding mr u

The double meaning at the beginning (mr u or mr, you) is appropriate because the poem can justifiably be taken either way. The man referred to is Louis Untermeyer, who was highly critical of Cummings and reluctant to put his poetry in any of his many anthologies. Cummings' short reply is effectively cutting and hard to answer because Untermeyer usually included
his own poetry in his anthologies. Cummings implies that Untermeyer's reputation as a poet was built by Untermeyer the anthologist, and that Untermeyer was more a parasite than a poet.

Another profession Cummings attacks is the businessman, especially the American Babbit.

> exit a kind of unkindness exit
> little
> mr Big
> notbusy
> Busi
> ness notman

(!ye
galleon
wllts
b:
  e;n,d

i
ng
like like,like bad,like candy:& you

are dead
you captain)

Memo 1
wife in impossibly
hell Memo
l son
in improbably yale (6:282)

Cummings has nothing but contempt for this person. The poet points out the unemotional qualities of the businessman in the phrase "a kind of unkindness." The hypocrisies of "mr Big" are shown by the differences between his exterior appearance and his inward character. He is a little man in character, a "notbusy" businessman, and ultimately not even
a man at all. His material success is a facade hiding his moral degeneracy. His soul is dead, and he has no chance to live. The spiritual rewards for his corrupted life are revealed in the last stanza. His wife is in hell as far as he is concerned, and his son is starting the cycle over again in his father's alma mater. Cummings employs a slight irony to give the poem a tone of sarcasm, but his anger is only weakly disguised.

Nothing seems to raise Cummings' ire to a greater degree than the American political scene because in practice it falls so far short of its stated or imagined ideal. In his satires on this area of American life Cummings focuses his attention on chauvinism, bureaucrats and bureaucracy, reformers, presidents, politicians, and voters. His tone in the political satires ranges from irony to invective.

Cummings' personal satire on Franklin D. Roosevelt is a highly critical and splenetic invective. In fact, the poem fails because Cummings loses his objectivity, but it does not mean that the satirist cannot have, or seem to have, indignation, as in Juvenal's saeva indignatio. Cummings' satire is at its best when he maintains his ironic detachment; the few satires that fail, like the one on F. D. R., are those in which he is so emotionally involved that he cannot keep his detachment.

F is for foetus(a
punkslapping
mobsucking
gravypissing poppa but
who just couldn't help it no
matter how hard he never tried the
great pink
superme
diocri
ty of
a hyperhypocritical D
mocra
c(sing
down with the fascist beast
boom
boom) two eyes
for an eye four
teeth for a tooth
(and the wholly babble open at
blessed are the peacemuckers)
$$ $$ etc(as
the boodle's bent is the
crowd inclined it's
freedom from freedom
the common man wants)
honey swoRkey mollypants

Cummings' firey anger overcomes his sense of satire, and the
poem loses most of its wit. He lightly disguises the initials
of F D R, but the fact that they are the only capitalized
letters in the poem make them stand out. The phrase starting
in the second line, "punkslapping, mobsucking gravypissing
poppa," immediately reveals Cummings' anger. This kind of
direct attack is not characteristic of Cummings' satire, and
it is less effective because of its lack of irony or control-
ing wit. He allows his anger to spill over and spoil any
satiric wit which might have been achieved. The poem does illustrate Cummings' attitude toward Roosevelt and the United States government during World War II. He recognized the hypocrisy which existed in America's foreign relations during the war, and it is Roosevelt's hypocrisy that is the main target in this poem.

Cummings is not quite as spiteful in his attack on another American president, Warren G. Harding.

the first president to be loved by his bitterest enemies" is dead

the only man woman or child who wrote a simple declarative sentence with seven grammatical errors "is dead"
beautiful Warren Gamaliel Harding "is" dead
he's "dead"
if he wouldn't have eaten them Yapanese Craps

somebody might hardly never not have been unsorry, perhaps

Cummings' satiric spirit is aroused because an incompetent person such as Harding ever became president in the first place. The fact that Harding is dead does not lessen Cummings' satiric sense. The twisted last two lines of the poem are a subtle touch on Cummings' part. They signify the ignorance of Harding about grammar and the apathy of the public toward a drab, shallow man in the presidency. The tone here is more moderate than in the attack on Roosevelt, and the humor is much more effective. Even though the attack is direct, irony saves the poem from the churlishness of the Roosevelt poem.
One of Cummings most direct and harsh political satires arose out of the aftermath of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Cummings ironically entitled his poem on this situation "THANKSGIVING (1956)" (39:95 Poems).

THANKSGIVING (1956)

a monstering horror swallows
this unworld me by you
as the god of our fathers' 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)

Cummings was always an open critic of the existing establishment, but this is his most seering attack on the government of the United States. Many critics feel that this poem, like
the one on Roosevelt, loses its satiric wit because of the overwhelming anger, but the wrathful indignation of Cummings seems justified in this case because of the moral seriousness of the United States' lack of action in the crisis. The poem is especially effective in some of the satiric witticisms which Cummings employs for ridicule. The phrase "a which that walks like a who" perfectly describes the impersonal and inhuman characteristics of totalitarian communism. The United Nations is described as "The UN," emphasizing the negative qualities of an impotent international organization.

Although the events in Hungary rank with some of the most monumental battles for freedom in history, the United Nations and the United States refused to act. America is presented as a cowardly, effeminate homosexual, who is too busy to come to the defense in Hungary's fight for freedom. There is some wit throughout the poem, but the final stanza becomes an unwitty, open invective against America's failure to act.

When any one citizen makes a suggestion that we bury the statue of liberty because of the stench, he is usually regarded as un-American, a traitor, and a communist, but Cummings made this statement out of love for the country and for freedom. He believes that our practices in world affairs should coincide with our stated ideals, and when this is not done the only word to describe it is hypocrisy.

Politicians and the government are not the only ones to feel the sting of Cummings' satire; the electorate comes
in for its share of criticism in a well-known poem.

the way to hump a cow is not
to get yourself a stool
but draw a line around the spot
and call it beautiful

to multiply because and why
dividing thens by nows
and adding and (I understand)
is hows to hump a cows

the way to hump a cow is not
to elevate your tool
but drop a penny in the slot
and bellow like a bull

to lay a wreath from ancient greath
on insulated brows
(while tossing boms at uncle toms)
is hows to hump a cows

the way to hump a cow is not
to push and then to pull
but practicing the art of swot
to preach the golden rull

to vote for me (all decent mem
and women will allows
which if they don't to hell with them)
is hows to hump a cows (14:359-60)

The ironic symbolism has a unique double meaning. The cow is
the electorate of the country, and the person attempting to
"hump" the cow is a typical politician trying to get elected.
Cummings tongue-in-cheek advice to the politician is to "screw"
the public in a subtle manner, not in an obvious ploy. He
advises him to make diversionary moves to get the electorate's
attention away from what is really happening. Use double talk
and ambiguous phrases to fool them into thinking you know what
you are talking about. Do not let them see the instrument of
their ravishment, but pretend you are something which you are
Outwardly extol the virtues of freedom and democracy, while denying freedom to Negroes and other minorities. Instead of openly making a fool of the public, preach accepted religious sayings. This is the way to get votes from the masses, and if they don't vote for you, abandon and disregard them.

The punning obscenities of "how to hump a cow" are appropriate since the poem involves a hateful person, the cynical politician. Cummings attacks both the politician and the electorate gullible enough to fall for the methods of deceit and corruption. The obscene puns add humor to the poem, as do the exaggerated rhymes ("stool, beautifool") and the spelling puns. The change of spelling from men to "mem" and women to "wonens" shows the lack of individuality or even sexual differentiation among the mass electorate. The regulated rhythm parallels the ridiculous subject matter.

Cummings effectively satirizes a politician and the voters in a satiric irony which employs only five words.

```
applaws)
"fell
ow
sit
isn'ts"
(a paw s

(VIII:393)
```

Rearranged into normal English this would read, "Applause--fellow citizens--a pause." Cummings alters the spelling and typography to give different levels of meaning. "Fellow"

---

is divided on the page into "fell" and "ow," signifying the fallen state of the speaker and the pain which he is going to inflict on his listeners. "Citizens" is spelled "sit/isn'ts" which suggests the apathetic, static condition of the voters and their negative attitude toward the government. The last two words are written "a paw s" suggesting the animal-like complacency of the speaker and his audience. The poem is full of irony because it presents the satiric target's own words and speech notes to condemn him. It is a completely indirect attack on the body politic, which Cummings has often attacked with direct invective and sarcasm.

Cummings employs the same technique of indirect attack through irony in his satires on the concept of war. In his war satires, he satirizes generals and admirals, the military establishment in general, the policies of governments during war, the false and romantic notions of war, and the folks back home. Cummings is completely out of sympathy with war and refuses to accept it as an instrument of freedom. Of the anti-war poems one of the most effective employs a subtle irony throughout which mounts to a supreme irony in the end.

plato told
	him: he couldn't believe it (jesus

told him; he wouldn't believe it) lao
The poem has two levels of meaning. One is the hypocrisy of the United States government for selling scrap iron to the Japanese before World War II. Another, deeper and more meaningful level deals with the utter foolishness of war in general. Cummings says that all of previous philosophy, religion, politics, and even military history has condemned war, but each succeeding generation has to learn for itself. It took the actual physical impact of war to convince man all over again of the fruitlessness, futility, and heartbreak of war. The colloquial language of the poem adds to the humor which is twisted at the end to the macabre, and the irony of the tale and its end make the satiric point even more effective.

Cummings often uses satiric irony to ridicule other aspects of war. He employs a non-hero named Olaf to satirize
war and the military establishment.

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
sent 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)
their passive prey did kick and curse
until for wear their clarion
voices and boots were much the worse,
and egged the firstclassprivates on
his rectum wickedly to tease
by means of skilfully 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 yellowsonofabitch
into a dungeon, where he died
Christ(of His mercy infinite)
i pray to see; and Olaf, too

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

(XXX: 244-45)
Olaf refused to fight and stuck to his convictions no matter what the military did to him. He was human, felt love, and his feelings kept him from killing a fellow human being. The military could not begin to comprehend his attitude and used extreme methods to make him recognize the glories of war, but Olaf took this all without getting angry and refused to relent. The officers began to use physical punishment to change Olaf's mind, but again Olaf was stronger than they. Finally, the president threw Olaf into prison where he died.

Cummings practically deifies Olaf for his refusal to accept war as being right. The poet shows the final irony of the situation in saying that Olaf was braver and more human than the society which killed him. Although Cummings points the finger of guilt mainly at the military, he makes it obvious that all of our civilization is to blame for the martyrdom of Olaf.

In one poem Cummings shifts the scene from the military to the home front in order to show the warped view of war on all levels.

my sweet old etcetera
aunt lucy during the recent

war could and what
is more did tell you just
what everybody was fighting

for,
my sister

isabel created hundreds
(and
hundreds)of socks not to
mention shirts fleaproof earwarmers
etcetera wristers etcetera, my mother hoped that
i would die etcetera bravely of course my father used
to become hoarse talking about how it was
a privilege and if only he could meanwhile my
self etcetera lay quietly in the deep mud et
cetera (dreaming,
et cetera, of Your smile
eyes knees and of your Etcetera) (X:197-98)

The narrator first describes what his relatives at home think of the war. His Aunt Lucy thought she knew all of the reasons why the war was being fought, and even though Cummings does not mention her ideals, he strongly implies that they are the usual patriotic clichés. His sister uses the war as an excuse for doing good deeds and satisfying her motherly instincts. His mother subconsciously hoped that her son would become a hero, and the best way to do this was to die. His father fought the war vicariously through his son and wished that he were able to fight. After showing the false, hypocritical, and selfish concepts of war on the home front, Cummings then abruptly shifts into the mind of the soldier in combat for his view. The soldier is not dreaming of freedom, glory, bravery, or fighting but of sex, specifically the body of his girl. Cummings tears down all of the pompous hypocrisies of war by revealing what the soldier in the foxhole is thinking,
and to Cummings the thoughts of the G. I. are more human and realistic than any of the others. The clever use of "etcetera" is the central witticism upon which the satire is based.

One of the broadest but most heartfelt of the areas which Cummings satirizes is the conformity of the masses, especially in America. At times Cummings deals with the conformity of humanity in general. He uses the term "mostpeople" to show his contempt for mass grouping and to designate the mass of people who have lost their individuality, who react as one. He also ridicules conformity in more specific instances, such as the stereotyping of certain races or ethnic groups to make them conform. Cummings believes that conformity destroys the individuality which is the basic foundation of morality.

In one poem dealing with conformity, Cummings employs a common metaphor for unusual purpose.

Jehovah buried, Satan dead,
do fearers worship Much and Quick;
badness not being felt as bad,
itselv thinks goodness what is meek;
obey says toc, submit says tic,
Eternity's a Five Year Plan:
if Joy with Pain shall hang in hock
who dares to call himself a man?

go dreamless knaves on Shadows fed,
your Harry's Tom, your Tom is Dick;
while Gadgets murder squawk and add,
the cult of Same is all the chic;
by instruments, both span and spic,
are justly measured Spic and Span:
to kiss the mike if Jew turn kike
who dares to call himself a man?
loudly for Truth have liars pled,
their heels for Freedom slaves will click;
where Boobs are holy, poets mad,
illustrious punks of Progress shriek;
when Souls are outlawed, Hearts are sick,
Hearts being sick, Minds nothing can:
if Hate's a game and Love's a 
who dares to call himself a man?

King Christ, this world is all akeak;
and lifepreservers there are none:
and waves which only He may walk
Who dares to call Himself a man.  (54:314)

Cummings shocks the reader into attention at the beginning by stating that God is buried. He goes on to say that modern society is made up of "fearers," ones who ignore evil because they are afraid of it and glorify meekness and submissiveness because of fear of fighting back. The fearful, submissive people regulate their lives to a mass plan. In other words, they give up their humanity, their right to be a man. The empty, regulated victims of society's organizing hand lose all identity; they all become alike while machines of modern technology take over the thinking process. Their lives become well-ordered, mechanical, regular, and no one dares to call himself a man; "the cult of Same," conformity, is now the dominant pattern. Many redundant paradoxes exist in a world such as this. Liars claim to have truth, slaves supposedly march for freedom, idiots achieve power and are worshipped, and poets and others who seek the real truth are called mad. Feelings, emotions, and rational thought are sacrificed for material progress. Human emotions of love and hate become twisted so that the world is out of balance.
After Cummings has described the world as he sees it, he employs metaphor to suggest the only means of salvation. The biblical story of Christ walking on the water is used to parallel the means of man's salvation. A narrowly religious interpretation of this stanza can be made, but Christ can also be taken strictly as a metaphor. The world is like a sinking ship, and there are no life preservers. The only escape is to walk on the waves, and only he who dares to call himself a man can walk on water. All through the poem Cummings has denied the right of a conforming, fearful cog of society to call himself a man. But if a person refuses to lose his identity and heart by conforming, then he can dare to call himself a man. If he has faith in himself as an individual who feels, loves, and thinks, then he can walk on water while the rest of the world is floundering. This interpretation seems more valid in the context of the whole poem than a strictly religious one.⁴

Another poem which deals with conformity attacks all of humanity through the use of irony.

```
Humanity i love you
because you would rather black the boots of success than enquire whose soul dangles from his watch-chain which would be embarrassing for both parties and because you unflinchingly applaud all songs containing the words country home and mother when sung at the old howard
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⁴Cummings had a Unitarian background, and most of his poems about Christ indicate that he thinks of Him as a great teacher and prophet, but not as a divine being or a savior of mankind.
Humanity i love you because
when you're hard up you pawn your
intelligence to buy a drink and when
you're flush pride keeps
you from the pawn shop and
because you are continually committing
nuisances but more
especially in your own house

Humanity i love you because you
are perpetually putting the secret of
life in your pants and forgetting
it's there and sitting down

on it
and because you are
forever making poems in the lap
of death Humanity

i hate you

(II:151-52)

The conformity of all mankind causes the foibles which
Cummings satirizes here. The image of a man sitting down
on something he has forgotten in his backpocket is almost
slapstick in quality. The irony of the poet saying he loves
humanity when he hates it is obvious because the sarcastic
tone is maintained throughout. Humanity's search for success
sacrifices values of intelligence and emotion. The patriotism
of humanity is really a conditioned response. Humanity's
physical cravings are always placed above his intellectual
needs. Humanity is not concerned with truths, and when some
are discovered humanity destroys them, not recognizing their
value. By the time Cummings has made all of these remarks
about society, the sudden twist at the end, "Humanity/i hate
you," is no longer a surprise. Gentle irony in the first
part of the poem has given way to the straightforward
declaration with which the poem ends. The mass tendency to regiment is indicative of a corrupt society to Cummings, and he satirizes it unmercifully.

my specialty is living said
a man(who could not earn his bread
because he would not sell his head)
squads right impatiently replied
two billion public lice inside
one pair of trousers(which had died) (II:339)

The first stanza presents a man whom Cummings admires, a man who will not tailor his emotions and thinking to fit the pattern of the masses. Because he will not give up his convictions and join the conformers, he could not earn a living. Society puts economic pressure on those who will not join them in every belief. The group described in the second stanza contrasts to the individual in the first. Society is called "two billion public lice," and their conforming tendencies are emphasized by the fact that they are all inside one pair of trousers. Mass conformity kills individual initiative and self-respect. The emotions and thoughts of a person are destroyed when he molds himself after all others.

Society uses prejudice to make all others fit into the mass mold. Cummings employs a very subtle satiric irony to ridicule the bigotry of American society in two poems dealing with Negroes and Jews.

one day a nigger
caught in his hand
a little star no bigger
than not to understand
"I'll never let you go
until you've made me white"
so she did and now
stars shine at night  

(24:442)

The use of the word "nigger" is enough to turn some overly sensitive people against the poem, but it has a definite purpose here. The colloquial "nigger" has certain connotations which Cummings means to bring to the reader's mind. The word suggests a gross stereotype of a group of people, and it is this stereotype which is indicative of the place relegated to the American Negro. Cummings wants the Negro to be equal, but this does not necessarily mean that he become white. The Negro should not lose his identity by becoming white as many do-gooders and liberals wish him to do. In this poem Cummings ridicules those who would have the Negro become "respectable and middle class" in order to achieve equality. As Friedman puts it, "For if equality is an ideal, shouldn't it work both ways?" In wanting the Negro to be himself, Cummings recognizes his humanity; the Negro has a self worth being. Cummings seems to be saying in the poem that "being white" should not be the desideratum of Negro aspiration.

Cummings uses another offensive word in regard to Jews, but again there is a satiric purpose involved.

a kike is the most dangerous
machine as yet invented
by even yankee ingenu-
ity(out of a jew a few
dead dollars and some twisted laws)
it comes both prigged and canted

(46:454)

The word "kike" suggests the stereotype Jew, and this meaning is essential for the satiric attack to hit its target. Cummings is not attacking Jews but the stereotyped concept of Jews of most American society. Cummings has said about this poem, "... a jew is a human being; whereas 'a kike' is a machine ..." Cummings tries to break down stereotypes because they are indicative of a deeper moral corruption. The dehumanization of American mass society has made a "kike" out of a Jew. In general, all individuals are stereotyped to make them fit into the masses or to ridicule those outside the masses. This is the same thing that is done with the "nigger."

Satiric irony is used to good effect in Cummings' poems about the flaws in our civilization in general. He is especially against the implications of our scientific and technological-oriented society, and belittles the grandiose dreams of progress which science has inspired. Cummings satirizes man for placing science above spiritual concepts; he ridicules the discoveries of technology and man's destiny through his scientific progress.

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6Cited in Friedman, Cummings, Growth of a Writer, p. 134.
In one poem Cummings deals with the effect of science on mankind.

pity this busy monster, manunkind,

not. Progress is a comfortable disease: your victim (death and life safely beyond)

plays with the bigness of his littleness -- electrons deify one razorblade into a mountainrange; lenses extend

unwish through curving wherewhen till unwish returns on its unself.

A world of made
is not a world of born -- pity poor flesh

and trees, poor stars and stones, but never this fine specimen of hypermagical

ultraomnipotence. We doctors know

a hopeless case if -- listen: there's a hell of a good universe next door; let's go (XIV:397)

Cummings captures the essence of the problem in one word, "manunkind," which is an especially rich coinage. The "un" signifies the negative aspect; he is not human. Also "unkind" is descriptive of the lack of feeling and emotion on the part of modern man. He "plays with the bigness of his littleness;" he is overimpressed with his own inconsequential significance.

Man has used his technology to enlarge things out of their proper perspective, meanwhile making the moral truths smaller and less significant. Cummings ridicules mankind's self-made world by comparing it to the world of nature. He uses high sounding almost technical phrases, "hypermagical ultraomnipotence," to make mankind look even more ridiculous. He calls the state of mankind "a hopeless case" and then makes a sudden
shift into colloquial terms to impress on the reader the utter futility of trying to improve the world. Mankind has made such a mess of this world that we better find another. Science and technology are attacked more specifically in an often-anthologized poem.

Space being (don't forget to remember) Curved
(and that reminds me who said o yes Frost
Something there is which isn't fond of walls)

and electromagnetic (now I've lost the) Einstein expanded Newton's law preserved continuum (but we read that before)

of Course life being just a Reflex you know since Everything is Relative or
to sum it All Up god being Dead (not to mention interred)

LONG LIVE that Upwardlooking Serene Illustrious and Beatific Lord of Creation, MAN:

at a least crooking of Whose compassionate digit, earth's most terrific quadruped swoons into billiard Balls! (VII: 227)

Cummings uses pseudo-scientific double talk at the beginning of the poem to ridicule and emphasize the over-important place which technology holds in our lives. He believes that because science has been bloated, feelings, emotions, and things of the spiritual world have declined. Scientific attitudes have killed religion; God is dead, and a spiritual vacuum exists in modern man. Man has replaced God with a new glorified image of himself. Cummings shows the preposterous egomania of man in making himself a god through science. Cummings spells "god" with the lower case, but he capitalizes
man to emphasize the point. The irony of "LONG LIVE" is used to make man seem even more ridiculous and the final pin is stuck in man's overfilled balloon when his most advanced accomplishment seems to be killing elephants and making billiard balls out of their ivory.

Cummings makes a serious ironic statement about the effect of science on man's destiny in the following poem:

when god decided to invent
everything he took one
breath bigger than a circus tent
and everything began

when man determined to destroy
himself he picked the was
of shall and finding only why
smashed it into because

(XXVI:404)

The first stanza makes a rather whimsical description of the creation of the universe by God. The simplicity and straightforwardness of the creation is contrasted to the destruction in the second stanza. Man is determined to destroy himself, but he has to have complex reasons for it.

Cummings uses his conceptual vocabulary to show how man is going to bring about his own end. The "was of shall" means "the dead fact as opposed to the living possibility, the past rather than the future, the fixed versus the growing. Having settled for this, man searched into its causes, and finding only mysteries reduced them to knowledge." The dead facts of technological knowledge are not enough; the spiritual void

7Ibid.
cannot be filled by them, and man will only use his scientific discoveries to destroy himself.

Throughout his satires, Cummings ridicules a world which is opposed to his own ideal of soul, mind, and heart. The moral corruption of society underlies the five major areas which Cummings' satirizes. Certain professions and types represent the decadence and degradation of civilization. American politics is especially indicative of the hypocrisy which Cummings sees in American values. War shows the moral decay of all humanity. To Cummings conformity is so widespread that individualism is in danger of complete destruction. The idea that mankind will keep progressing through science and technology has destroyed spiritual values. Despite the flaws he sees in society, he has faith in the nobility of the human spirit. He would not be satirizing if he did not think that there was some hope left for mankind. His conviction in the freedom of the human will and the dignity of man causes his hate for the things which undermine them. But Cummings believes that it is within man's power to choose, and if he chooses wrongly out of fear, he is not to be pitied, but ridiculed. 8

8Friedman, Cummings, Art of His Poetry, p. 51.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In an age which has produced practically no noteworthy satire and very little even of a genuine comic spirit, Cummings' humorous and satiric poetry stands out as a signal achievement. This aspect of Cummings' poetry has tended to be ignored or disparaged by the critics. This neglect may be attributed, as a conjecture, to the disinclination of American critics and readers to respond with sympathy to anything that is critical of the American scene or the American dream. Americans are notoriously thin-skinned when it comes to criticism, even humorous, perhaps especially humorous criticism. In addition our moralistic Victorian background hardly allows us to tolerate humor in connection with what we imagine to be the eternal verities. A poet, we have been inclined to say, to be great must take himself seriously.

But the critical neglect of Cummings is coming to an end, and as the body of his poetry is re-examined as an aftermath of his recent death it can be seen that there is much more variety and substance to Cummings' poetry than most have been willing to admit. Nowhere is this variety and substance more apparent than in the rather large body of humorous and
satiric poetry. As we have seen a close study of Cummings' poetry in the comic vein reveals several important factors. To begin with Cummings is remarkable as a poetic innovator who does not hesitate to employ imaginative linguistic, syntactical, and typographical techniques to enhance his poetry, and as has been demonstrated in Chapter II and elsewhere in this thesis he can employ these devices for striking comic effect. Less apparent at first glance than Cummings the innovator is Cummings the traditionalist. It has been demonstrated that Cummings is writing at times in the broad satiric tradition that goes at least as far back as the Greeks, and that in doing so he employs many of the traditional rhetorical techniques and subject patterns that are traditional with poetry in general and satire in particular. It has been emphasized also that Cummings draws much of his inspiration from and borrows many of his comic techniques from the broad tradition of American humor with its emphasis on the tall tale, hyperbole, and spontaneity.

The American influence on Cummings' humorous poetry did not come mainly from literary sources, but from the atmosphere of American life as he lived it. Such traditionally American forms of entertainment as burlesque, the circus, amusement parks, comic strips, animated cartoons, and certain aspects of the cinema had a profound influence on Cummings' concept of humor. Cummings tried to capture the spontaneity and aliveness of burlesque in his poetry. The same qualities
were seen by Cummings in the circus, which he preferred to the legitimate theater. Amusement parks showed Cummings the scope and color of what he considered American life. Comic strips and animated cartoons were unique means of capturing the incongruities of life for Cummings. Charlie Chaplin's creations in the cinema were especially entertaining and alive to Cummings.

Cummings' humorous poetry, both the comedies and the satires, reveals a complex use of comic techniques, a deep transcendental vision, and an ability to see through the facades and hypocrisies of modern society. All of these characteristics are found in the humorous poetry of just one man, and the poet himself is complex in his attitudes and beliefs as revealed in his poetry. The complexity of the man comes forth in the paradoxes of the humor. As is typical with the satirist, "He makes fun of what he praises, and mocks what he reveres; he is seriously funny, comically serious . . . ."

The poetic art of Cummings is a complex and paradoxical thing because he tries to make a static piece of literature into a living, moving creation. As Friedman notes,

Art for him imitates nature; since nature is organic, art must also be organic; therefore, a work of art, in capturing the process of becoming, will become something itself, a Verb, an Is. It is not about

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1 Friedman, Cummings, Art of His Poetry, p. 62.
something; it is something; it doesn't mean anything, it exists.2

The feeling of spontaneity is characteristic of the American tradition of humor, and spontaneity is perhaps the most striking single characteristic of Cummings' humorous poetry. As Friedman indicates the spontaneity is partly a result of his attempt to capture "the process of becoming."

As has been noted, primarily in Chapter II, certain humorous techniques and devices are used by Cummings to add to the spontaneity and aliveness of the poetry. The typographical innovations force the reader to look at a poem the way Cummings wants him to, and instead of the words being perceived on the page, the poem, if successful, is a happening for the reader. The rhetorical devices create less of a spontaneous feeling than any of the other techniques, but they do possess an aliveness due to the originality of Cummings' wit. Most of the words and phrases of our poetic language have been used and re-used until they are drained of all life; Cummings' linguistic and phonetic techniques enable him to achieve a freshness and spontaneity that is especially effective in the humorous and satiric poetry.

On the whole the humorous techniques and devices add to the spontaneity of Cummings' poetry and are functional in and integral to the whole poem. Cummings disrupts normal

2Friedman, Cummings, Growth of a Writer, p. 51.
typography through juxtaposition of words, fragmented words, word fusions, parentheses, and capitalization in order to create spontaneity and add to the content of the poem. Among the rhetorical devices, punning and parody are most often used. Cummings uses rhyming puns, spelling puns, extended puns, and punning allusions as devices of wit. He parodies other poets, cliches, slogans, and nursery rhymes for the purpose of satire. The linguistic and semantic devices for humor include such techniques for spontaneity as grammatical shifts and additions and unusual word order and syntactical arrangement. Slang and colloquialisms, as well as mock archaic and mock formal language, add a lively humorous note. The sound devices, especially the phonetic spellings to capture the characteristic speech of certain people, are useful to create a spontaneous feeling. The devices are not simply ornamental tricks used to attract attention and comment. For instance, they may add to the satiric punch of the invectives or contribute to the whimsy of the comedies. Sometimes the devices are more important for making the point of a satire than the actual content is. The devices add to the humorous impact of the comedies and help reveal Cummings' transcendental vision which often comes forth in the comedies. Whether the humor be exuberant, whimsical, or pathetic, the devices contribute to the effectiveness of the comedies. The devices strengthen Cummings' poetic vision of spirituality.
In many ways the comedies are among the most appealing of Cummings' poems. Beneath the surface appeal of the comedies is a seriousness of intent that escapes the superficial reader. The most striking feature of the comedies is the depth of Cummings' transcendental vision. Cummings often uses the comedies as vehicles to reveal his beliefs concerning reality and existence. The humorous facade partially conceals the seriousness of his message, but it is there, nonetheless. Cummings' implication that spiritual qualities are superior to material things is found throughout the comedies. Although he believes in enjoying the physical pleasure of this world, he also sees a deeper meaning to life. There is a spiritual, almost mystic, belief in the presence of love as a guiding force in the world. This love is not merely a sexual, or even a romantic love, although Cummings celebrated this aspect of love throughout his life; it is a love among all mankind, a great binding force which can save the world. Cummings believes that this love is spiritual, but it does show itself in countless manifestations in daily life--the physical desire of young love, the delight of children over small things, the fascinating human qualities of animals. In order to experience love, man must live and feel everything around him. Only then can he become aware of the spiritual force which transcends this physical world.

The manifestations of love which man observes contain many elements of humor, and this is how the comedies play an
important role in Cummings' transcendental vision. The comedies are most often descriptions of something Cummings has observed in life. He is struck by the incongruity of some of the situations, but they are still physical proof for him of what he believes underlies all life. The poet tries to capture the humor and the spontaneity of the living moment in a poem. More often than not Cummings succeeds. His humorous devices, conceptual vocabulary, and witty imagination enable him to convey almost the same feeling to the reader of a poem that he has experienced himself.

Many American humorists have tried to achieve the same effect as Cummings in their works which are comparable to his comedies. They did not all share Cummings' transcendental vision nor were their attitudes the same, but they did strive for spontaneity in their humor. Mark Twain's Huck Finn is indicative of this characteristic of American humor. Huck is very much alive and spontaneous in his actions and his words. Cummings' character who desires "Jimmie's girl," and the boys who are not refined are closely akin to Huck in the way they evoke humor. George Washington Harris' Sut Lovingood is also a part of this tradition. Both Twain's Huck and Harris' Sut share a buoyant sense of exuberant humor with many of Cummings' poetic characters and personas. In more recent American literature the characteristic incongruous misadventures in James Thurber are parallel to Cummings' poems of pathos. Walter Mitty and Thurber himself
are very much like Uncle Sol and the other uncles. The bawdy humor of many rural characters in William Faulkner's novels reminds us of Cummings' bawdy poems. The same note of incongruity is found in the Ike Snopes' bestiality in The Hamlet and in "the way to hump a cow is not." The boyhood adventures of Lusius Priest in The Reivers are humorous in the same way that Cummings' poems on childhood are. The qualities of spontaneity, exuberance, and incongruity are present in nearly every humorous piece of American literature, and Cummings' poetry is no exception. In this sense he is very much a part of the tradition of American humor and is fed by the same well-springs that feed writers more obviously humorous than he.

The satires are most effective in the way they tear down the facades and hypocrisies of modern life. Cummings satirizes types and professions, conformity, science and technology, the American political scene, and war. These five general areas are satirized by Cummings because they show basic lack of something Cummings feels is necessary in life. Cummings' concept of love is missing in each of these categories. The types and professions groups which Cummings ridicules are lifeless and dull because they do not possess love. When the masses conform to one thing, love is sacrificed. The over emphasis in our society on science and technology has tended to degrade the spiritual aspects of life such as love. The hypocrites in American politics have
no real love for the people or the country. And war is a condition which is completely void of love. Hypocrites are outward signs in our society of the moral corruption which Cummings sees in modern civilization. Conformity is attacked because it sacrifices individuality. Cummings believes that when individuality is destroyed, the emotion of love is taken with it. Individual feelings become regimented and sterile.

The important place which science and technology holds in our society indicates another void in the human spirit. An empirical scientific attitude often has replaced the wonder and awe which man used to feel toward the mysteries of the universe, but it has been an inadequate replacement. Religion and God are now dismissed as superstition, and even those who cling to some belief are assailed with doubts. Cummings points out the emptiness of modern society through his satires which tear down the thin facade which man has built to hide the void.

Man's pseudo-intellectualism is another form of hypocrisy which indicates his moral degeneracy. Man pretends to know many things in order to cover his basic lack of understanding. Cummings believes that it is more important to feel, experience, and have real emotions than it is to have the answers to meaningless questions. People who are wrapped up in pursuits of the mind at the expense of their perception into the joys of living are suitable targets for Cummings' satiric wit.
In Cummings' mind, one of the worst flaws in modern man is his materialism because it obscures the realities of love and genuine feeling. When man loves material gain more than he does spiritual wealth, he becomes warped and is uprooted from the things that should sustain him. Cummings thinks that modern man has placed material progress above his spiritual contentment, which does not come necessarily from religion only but from any experiences or feelings that enrich life.

A more specific flaw in civilization which Cummings attacks is war. The ultimate folly of mankind is to commit mass murders in the name of patriotism or freedom. Cummings recognizes the basic hypocrisy of any war, and he uses various methods to reveal the truth. He ridicules the military, the false romantic concepts of war, and the diplomacy between nations.

Although Cummings' satire is international in scope, the greatest part of it deals with American foibles. Cummings should be recognized for what he is: a major figure in the rather thin tradition of American satire. The same qualities of exuberance, spontaneity, and incongruity which were found in the comedies are also found in the satires. Cummings attacks his objects of satire with relish, eager to rip down the facades which have lasted so long. The satires employ the same devices which the comedies employ to achieve a spontaneous feeling. The basic flaws which Cummings
ridicules are incongruous, and Cummings makes their incongruity even more obvious.

Cummings' satire has many characteristics in common with that of the great American satirist, Mark Twain. Twain ridiculed society in general as does Cummings. He was acutely aware of the basic flaws in civilization which Cummings so often deals with. Twain ridiculed the idea of progress through science and technology alone, especially in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. He foresaw the problems of scientific progress which became apparent to many by Cummings' time. Cummings' satire ranges from the gentle to the biting just as Twain's does. Twain and Cummings both use colloquial speech to add to satiric effect, as do Artemus Ward and Ring Lardner. Cummings' biting satire is like H. L. Mencken's severe attacks on American incongruities.

There are very few other American literary satirists of the twentieth century to compare Cummings to. Most of the satiric impulse has either been lost or sucked up into the mass media, television, radio, and the movies. Cummings is a poet unique in the twentieth century because of the prominent place which satire holds in the body of his poetry. The little satire that is being written today is usually in the form of prose essays on fiction; there is really a dearth of satiric verse, and Cummings stands almost alone as an important American satiric poet.
Because of his similarities to the American humorists of the past, Cummings must be placed in the mainstream of the American tradition of humor. Despite the fact that he is a traditionalist in spirit and tone, he is an innovator in techniques and devices. He has taken up some of the techniques and a great deal of the subject matter of the major humorists and carried the tradition forward. Not only is he a part of the tradition, but he also stands out as one of the great humorists in American literary history. His humorous poetry is important to our age because of the depth of his transcendental vision as revealed in the comedies and the truths which he makes known by destroying hypocrisies and facades of contemporary society in the satires. All of the evidence of his poetry, the uniqueness of his devices, the originality of his wit, the depth of his comedies, and the truth of his satires, supports the view that Cummings is a major American humorist and traditionalist.
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