
Bibliogr.

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PER L1037 / FL198619P
ABSTRACT

To be conditioned is to be intellectually, spiritually and artistically dead, to be an "unyou", as E. E. Cummings puts it in his memorable coinage. The agents of "deadness", as referred to here and there in Cummings's poetry, are many. Convention is a power of systematic submission, hence unquestioning submission is a form of death. Institutionalised, schooled thinking is dogma, hence it is a form of death. Inherited, established literary forms are a prescribed norm, hence they are a form of death. Conditioning ritual is a usurpation of natural reflex, hence it is a form of death. Authoritative, canonical criticism stifles marginal, un-preferred readings; it tends to be a usurpation of individual feeling and intuition, hence it is potentially a form of death. Language itself conditions; it is mostly clichés and it exerts a constant pull towards deadness, hence it is a form of creeping death. Against all such "depersonalizing" agencies, Cummings proposes self-assertion through a deliberate eccentricity and a systematic non-conformism that undermine uniformity.

It is significant to notice in this regard, how Cummings equates "Science" with "Death" and adds that, while science "is fundamentally a depersonalising leveller", "I stand for individuality or personal uniqueness" (Selected Letters (SL), 256). But most important of all, it seems to me, is his subtle distinction between 'being merely undead' (merely existing, as a counterfeit of living, "a peculiar form of sleep" ("One," XXXIII, is 5)) and 'being alive' (SL, 256). It is again significant to note at the outset an echo
between two major defenders of man's selfness in our age of sameness and standardisation: Cummings and Said; indeed, where the former excoriates "scientists" as "inhuman manipulators of becoming" (SL, 256), the latter advocates that "man is 'a choice', a struggle, a constant becoming" (Culture and Imperialism, 405). While drawing mainly on the basics of Formalism, for the major part of the present paper, I am tempted to now and then nod in favour of deconstructive insights, especially the idea of hierarchisation or prioritisation, whereby—in such pairings as coherence and incoherence, familiar and unfamiliar, order and disorder, acquiescence and questioning—, the former term of each of the pairings is given a positive value. My argument is that "aliveness" for Cummings owes much to his questioning of "the taken for granted", his challenging of such hierarchisation, as well as his cultivation, in matter of style, of a principle so dear to the Formalists, namely that of unfolding, dynamic integrity. The present paper seeks to address the two key questions: What is Cummings's survival kit? And what is the threat in the face of which he deploys it?

Being Merely Undead and Being Alive: Survival as Selfness in the Poetry of E. E. Cummings

I am tempted to begin this paper with a condensed version of the thrust of the poet-speaker's/ poet-painter's argument in E. E. Cummings's poem "if i have made, my lady, intricate"; the argument runs thus: "if i have failed" to immortalise you and capture your ineffable beauty, "let the world say 'his most wise music stole/ nothing from death'" (Complete Poems 306). The poet-speaker here poses as a failed sonneteer whose "things" are "imperfect and various", whose "songs" are weak, whose verbal 'snare' is threadbare. The "world" probably stands for the poet's detractors--the elder sonneteers and/ or contemporary critics—who will find that, having been unable to immortalise his lady's beauty according to the canon, this poet is hardly worth his salt. This in itself raises a number of "survival"-related issues, such as acknowledged predecessor vs. up-starting successor, submission to tradition vs. interaction with tradition; prevailing taste vs. innovative approach, mainstream vs. marginal; established style vs. fresh mode, and this not only in the sense of the, by now, famous Bloomian "anxiety of influence" or of the older,
and once much famous, Eliotesque "tradition and the individual talent", but also in the sense of cliché-ridden, "de-potentiated", "de-substantiated" language vs. freshly sharpened, re-empowered and revamped language. (Any reader of contemporary Arabic poetry will recall, here, the "unorthodox", angular, deliberately shocking verse of Mudhaffar an-Nawwaab as a strategy of poetic survival in an age where the surface of language has grown opaque and where the idiom of anger is no longer angry enough, sounding more like a whimper than like a bang.)

E. E. Cummings's poetry abounds in such coinages and eccentricities as "eachness", "uniqueness", "firstness"..., and "my/ self", "hes", "shes", "theys"... (which terms seek to highlight either special individuality--e.g. that of the conscientious objector in Cummings's poem "my sweet old etcetera"--, or special plurality--e.g. that of the acrobats in his poem "mortals"). The aggregation of such coinages, together with the contemptuous "unyous" (that is, conditioned individuals, or undifferentiated mass, who do not deserve the term "you"), insists on un-depersonalised individuality and personalised plurality, that is a humanity which is defiant of neutering systems, weary of stifling intellection, resistant to sameness and regimentation, and thus remaining alive in a context of overall mediocrity, modern insensitivity to the natural world, estrangement from intuition and from a life of feeling, and abandonment to excessive rationality. The two key questions asked and addressed here are: What is Cummings's survival kit? And what is the threat in the face of which he deploys it?

Survival, in Cummings's case, may be more readily approached, in the first instance, in terms of the threat he faces or which he feels he is facing: apart from the threat which we have come to call, since Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence", that of the "young citizen of poetry" (or the "ephebe")², an anxiety that is only exacerbated by Cummings's revisiting of traditional themes (such as love, *carpe diem*, religion and war) with such attendant anxieties as commonplaceness, lack of originality, and voicelessness (being dwarfed by a precursor), there is another more

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immediate threat associated with survival as an artist. The latter threat actually takes various forms: it is failing to get published (one of E. E. Cummings's poetry collections actually proposes after its title page the names of fourteen publishers that have rejected it; he had to publish it privately, entitling it derisively *No Thanks*); it is a concern arising from his having to resist the "drag of language towards deadness" (Friedman 1964, 14); it is a duel which involves wrestling with such other "emasculators" of individual experience as the indomitable "manufactures of consent" (Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 404–405), against whose threat Cummings shores his non conformist, unconventional, eccentric stance. His poetic text is, to adopt to our purposes the argument developed by Manju Jain with regard to T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, akin to Roland Barthes' 'text of bliss' as opposed to the 'text of pleasure', the text of pleasure being linked to a comfortable practice of reading, while the 'text of bliss' unsettling the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his/her tastes, values, memories and bringing to a crisis his/her relation with language (Jain 133). Cummings's survivalist strategy is, in brief, the opening of a breach in reality wherein imagination can dwell, like a plant forcing its seat in a crack in hard rock, hence his resorting to parenthetical spaces within his architecture of reality where an alternative vision seems to initially find a very small space, but which, like an inflow of water, beginning as an imperceptible seepage, ends up flooding the whole structure.

What does Cummings's survival kit consist of? It consists of subversion for a purpose, a newness that elicits a qualified response and a participatory move, an informed use and a purposeful abuse of tradition, and resistance to the temptation to act as an all-knowing guru. Cummings's strategy of survival is two-pronged: highlighting the defiance of unconditioned individuality and unregimented plurality (while reaching out for the spontaneous, unschooled child in us), on the one hand; and consistency in the experimental adventure of making it new, while refusing 'to reduce the heterogeneity of art to a single explanatory scheme', on the other hand. Cummings's survival kit consists, indeed, of the belated "authentic" poet's

(3) Cf. Peter Steiner, *Russian Formalism: A Metapoetics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1984), p. 259. Steiner quotes Boris Eikhenbaum, the Russian literary theorist and historian, as saying in 1922, "Enough of monism! We are pluralists. Life is diverse and cannot be reduced to a single principle".
resort, i.e., of full-fledged partaking of "a history of fruitful poetic influence..., a history of anxiety and self-saving caricature, of distortion, of perverse, wilful revisionism" (Bloom, Anxiety 30). It is my assumption in the present paper that the use of such Formalist key concepts as interaction of devices and functional significance, unfolding, dynamic integrity, evolution of literary forms and structures, constructive (dominant) factor, motivational theme and lexical colouring can assist towards a reading of some of E. E. Cummings's poems that would be enlightening as to how the poet deploys the two-pronged survival strategy submitted above, as well as to the achievements made thereby. E. E. Cummings's artistic survival (speaking his own voice, making it new, leaving it open) also attests—to paraphrase and qualify a statement by Paul de Man—to a conviction that no fundamental discontinuity exists between the author's act and the reader's, which both aim at full understanding; the difference being primarily temporal in kind. Indeed, Paul de Man adds, "Poetry is the foreknowledge of criticism". (In his wariness of authority—and "criticism" may be one of authority's surrogates—Cummings would have substituted "criticism" by "reading").

"Knownness" (another instance of Cummings's conceptual vocabulary, his coinage for absolute knowledge) is no less a depersonaliser, a bluntener of feeling, than ignorance itself. To this, Cummings opposes feeling. Applied to a reading of his texts, this is synonymous with responsiveness such as manifested under the form of curious inquiry and intuitive insight. If this is denied, then the critic, the dispenser of sense, the muser of texts, will eclipse


(5) Beware of the voice of acknowledged critic and the voice of authoritative mediator! The former intimidates; the latter kills initiative. This is, in substance, my message in an article entitled "The Laws of Excursionism: The Muse, the Muser, the Mused and the Musing" (Revue des Lettres et de Traduction (1999, N. 5) [Kaslik - Jounieh (Lebanon): Faculty of Letters, Université Saint-Esprit]: 385-99). It is quite significant in this regard to recall what Cummings himself wrote in a letter he sent back to a reader who had asked for an explanation of one of Cummings's poems:

not being a so-called critic, I don't expect a poem to be the same for any two people; or even for one person twice. But perhaps I can give you some notion of how the poem...you're concerned with feels to me now. (Selected Letters, 247)

The authorial voice emerges here as being more chemical than mechanical. The instructor (whom I call pejoratively a "muser") should at best act like an umpire: although he/she may
all. Thus, reading—or relative knowledge gathered experientially—becomes like the flame which is carried from runner to runner in the relay race of the Olympiads, something too much owned by every 'feeler and ponderer' type of reader to be owned by anyone. Cummings's entire body of writing bears this out, thus attesting to what we may call conjugates of reciprocity, complicity and complementarity.

E. E. Cummings seems to oppose the view that poetry should represent life. The poetic art for him is a set of techniques used not so much to represent what is known but more to present what is in process of coming to knowledge. For instance, if his poem "my sweet old etcetera" is a poem against war, this is not arrived at via a familiar recognition of or a grasp over the thrust of the poem's argument, but through an elucidation of how the speaker's survival kit is deployed, the principles of inner growth in the poem that allow for dialectical progress, for challenge and response: the battery of devices used to ridicule those who are taken in by the rhetoric of war (irony and caricature), setting the world of the conscientious objector off from that of mass society ('my/ self': free selfness torn off, by choice not by necessity, from conditioned, regimented society), and setting the world of dream (being the individual's most intimate possession) off from the world of the actual (being mostly undergone). The challenge is heated political propaganda, belligerent rhetoric and mass mobilisation; the response is cool-headed perceptiveness (seeing through war-mongering rhetoric), animadversion against conditioned mass action (by means of derisive idiom), and conscientious objection (informed withdrawal from action). The major factor deforming the subordinate factors (to adopt and qualify formalist conceptualisation) is here that of irony, a nuance that saps and undermines the system's cunning rhetoric and lays bare society's naive credulousness. On the whole the "content" is, as it were backgrounds, and it is the technique which is foregrounded. The inflection on the established formulae and the meaning of the common idiom of both war and anti-war poetry recalls the latter
idiot and subverts it. The poem here is, indeed, no political pamphlet, nor is it a pathetic, morbid description of body count intended to move. Words and phrases such as submission (blind submission to the war rhetoric, in this case), nationalism (rabid and frenzied nationalism, raised to the status of doctrine by war-mongers) and hero adulation ("my mother hoped that/ i would die etcetera/ bravely of course") are ironically revisited.

Cummings's society is seen as acting by habitualisation. The society of 'unyous' against which "my/ self" is set in "my sweet old etcetera" illustrates a process of automatisation: aunt lucy poses as versed in what the war is all about, my sister energetically knits items of clothing for the soldiers, my mother wishes I would die ("bravely of course"), my father speaks himself hoarse telling younger men to do their duty. But there is a device in the poem that undermines monolithic unity. The fly in the ointment is none other than the split ('non related') "my/ self" which claims, and actually takes, the floor. It is the phrase "meanwhile my/ self" that opposes, and takes over from assumed 'auntly', 'sisterly', 'motherly' and 'fatherly' unconscious dependence and partisanship, which the text highlights. In terms of a Formalist reading, the text begins with "my" (markedly recurrent in the body of the poem) and ends with "Etcetera)" (capitalised). The "my" has a semantic colouring that contrasts it later with "my/ self" (in split form, further reinforced by spacing), as well as with "your Etcetera", thus signalling a shift from 'my family' as a miniature society feverishly partaking--in their various ways--in the war effort, through a 'liberating move' ("my/ self") that 'de-automatises' belonging (to a family and in a reality), to an espousal of an alternative company and an alternative cause (the beloved, and conscientious objection, respectively).

The parenthetical lines concluding the poem (and which are clearly set off from the rest of it) literally reconstruct the actual world through dream. The "my/ self" of fellow-feeling is thus further isolated from the opening "my" of family affiliation. Furthermore, the fact that the poem reads as a long sentence running through to the end of the text--a sentence consisting of two clauses put together by means of a linking sentence adverbial "meanwhile"-makes "my/ self" radiate from this centre toward both the opening and the closing of the text. The shift in the poem is thus further highlighted. The breaking away from the
dominant attitude of a regimented, co-opted and conditioned society and the disengagement from the reality of war-through 'negative action' (I am tempted to say 'positive inaction'), or rather something like Rousseau's 'negative education' in a broader sense: that is the protection of man's unconditioned nature-become the central concern of the text. From a lexical point of view, this justifies the shattering of the "etcetera" of mere assumption (at the beginning of the poem) and the "etcetera(s)" serving as ironical amplifiers of nouns and verbs (within the body of the poem) into an interim, 'un-made' "et/ctera", which is subsequently 're-made' in order to reconstruct a meaningful "Etcetera", a freshly made term, as part of an attempt not only to describe an alternative reality, but also to forge a new discourse of discriminative perception, a perception that distinguishes the fully alive from the merely 'undead'.

Once the reader has identified the dynamics of "my sweet old etcetera", he/she can place it in terms of literary tradition and the continuum of discourse. The heroic ideals touted by the family recall all heroic and (so-called heroic) ideals both old and recent. They recall, indeed (though with various perceptions and justifications), the Heroic Odes, Epics and Sagas of ancient and less ancient times. They also recall cock-a-hoop cowboys and triumphant body counts, as they recall ideological warfare, the atom bomb, the mad rush to mastery of space, and the 'eagles' and 'hawks' (whether emblematic of modern nation-states or metaphorical of actual political leaders with a propensity for glorifying war). This has already been challenged by poets (of whom the most recent are Wilfred Owen, as in his bitter World War I poem "Dulce et Decorum Est", and Denise Levertov, as in her dirge-like Vietnam poem "Advent 1966"). The two attitudes are juxtaposed in the poem in the non parenthetical part and the parenthetical part, respectively. By favouring the attitude of the speaker as dreamer, and not as a "soldier... / Seeking the bubble reputation/ Even in the cannon's mouth" (Shakespeare, As You Like It, Act 2, Sc. VII), the poem is parodic of a whole tradition of indiscriminate, wholesale heroic ideology. The de-automatisation lays bare the war rhetoric, belligerent ideology and heroic idealism that the early part of the text outlines. Compared with the contagious fever and collective intoxication of the first part of the poem, withdrawal emerges as a sign of sanity (the parentheses not only 'iconically' rub the edges of the seeds of war off, but also
symbolically protect the infant world of the individual's dream as in a womb). Through the interplay of the two parts of the poem (the non parenthetical and the parenthetical) and through an underlying interplay of the poem and tradition, the dynamics of "my sweet old etcetera" re-visits, re-evaluates and re-arranges the rival claims within the text, as such, and within the motif, as part of tradition and as departure from it.

Cummings advocates the primacy of feeling, of intuition; yet, he constructs the body of his poem based on logic, based on consistent thought. Is this paradoxical? Well, apparently, this is quite paradoxical, indeed. Feeling is something, and its articulation is quite another; immediacy of perception is one thing, and informed analysis is another. To articulate feeling in a manner that preserves it as something separate from the act of feeling itself, therein lies the challenge that Cummings has to meet. For so doing, he deploys his arsenal of unusual layout (his poem "mortals"), for instance, reads not only horizontally, but also vertically and obliquely); of colour and sound (his poem "in-Just" combines the evocation of the colourful balloons with the balloonman's whistles in "far and wee"); of the "presence of absences (sic) which constructs a whole" (Cummings's speaking silences; cf. Figure 1. "A typical Cummings' worksheet", p. 5; quoted in Introduction by John Unterecker to IAM); of ellipsis (Cummings has entitled one of his poetry collections is 5--thus setting "a transcendental conception of truth as an unmeasurable mystery (2 times 2 is 5) in opposition to the empirical conception of truth as fact (2 times 2 is 4))

All such devices allow room for consideration by the reader who is not called upon to only see and analyse, but also to contemplate and complement a potential in the making. This in itself provides for a finishing of the poem, and is thus likely to grant a further lease of life to the potential that needs to be activated or complemented.

The other strategy of survival is an inter-poem strategy: a system whose components interact with one another under the form of an unfolding, incremental, "conjugating largeness". The system is, like the

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(6) Friedman, e. e. cummings: The Growth of a Writer, 49.
(7) Barry A. Marks quotes Cummings's view of art as a "magnificent conjugating largeness, an IS", in E. E. Cummings (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1964), p. 91. Although
verb, essentially dynamic: dynamic layout that mirrors process rather than arresting it, dynamic flow that subordinates to it all other fixities (of dogma, belief, attitude, ritual), dynamic rhythm that is functionally varied and that dominates and marshals the narrative element—the story in the poem—and the prosaic semantics-content as ideas—towards a particular direction (belligerent contagious fever, preparations for war and withdrawal of the conscientious objector, in the poem beginning "my sweet old etcetera"; interested groups (philosophers, scientists, men of religion) abusing "sweet spontaneous earth" in their various ways and the latter remaining faithful to her "eternal lover", in the poem beginning "O sweet spontaneous earth"; the lover trying to persuade the hesitant lady to yield to him, the process of seduction and the crowning of it, in the poem beginning "yes is a pleasant country", etc). The story, however, is a pretext to explore a counter-narrative, and the latter recalls older poems and essays on war (against an inculcated belligerent spirit, Cummings advocates the attitude of the conscientious objector who dreams of love, peace and togetherness, in "my sweet old etcetera"; to the whims of the various exploiters of nature, Cummings opposes the attitude of the believer in the need to observe nature’s own laws, in "O sweet spontaneous earth"; and to the threat of death highlighted by the traditional carpe diem motif, Cummings opposes the promise of mutual fulfilment and joy).

Motivation is a basic concept in Formalism. So as to move beyond the fact that a poem should consist merely of a "bundle of strategies interacting with one another, and apparently independent of any clear semantic meaning" (Buchbinder, 86), the Formalists had to introduce the notion of motivation by which they meant the "extraliterary... explanation of plot construction" (Steiner quoting Shklovsky, in Buchbinder, 86). Having to do with the semantic dimension, and being related to the total meaning of the literary text, motivation thus becomes part of literary history. It is thus that the apparent failure of the belated sonneteer (in "if i have made, my lady, intricate") to be fair to the beauty of the beloved/ lady/mistress, becomes a recounting of a certain theme or story (here, the carpe diem motif, and the leitmotiv of the eternising conceit). It is an act of recounting

Marks gives no reference to the original, this statement is consonant with Cummings's preference of verbs (concreteness and aliveness) to nouns (abstraction and deadness).
an old theme, while knowing that it has already undergone changes and modifications. But it is also attempting to write a new poem, when "the poets (i.e. my predecessors) have left no building stone for me to place in the edifice" (to paraphrase a line by the Pre-Islamic Arab poet 'Antarah).

There is, in Cummings's handling of the motif (carpe diem, or praise of the lady's beauty, or war and heroism) and the form (sonnet, or ballad, or eternising conceit), apart from the anxiety of influence, indeed a case of carrying literary form further, an attempt to claim and consummate a part to play in the relay race, and this is, obviously enough, a mark of survival. In more explicit terms, it is a mutant on the sonnet tradition-and on the sonneteer's attitude towards his task-that Cummings proposes in "if i have made, my lady, intricate". After saturation of the form (sonnet) and overworking of the subject (complimenting the lady's eternal beauty)-in addition to the commonplacenness of the elder poet's attitude as an artist in full control over his subject-, Cummings could only earn himself a say, a voice-let alone eachness and uniqueness-by triggering and delivering yet another mutant on tradition. In his sonnet, indeed, he adopts the attitude of a failed artist of whom fellow-sonneteers (the elders whose 'shadow' he is nonetheless trying to 'ward off', to borrow and adapt a statement by Harold Bloom on Milton and Shakespeare in The Western Canon (169)) and contemporary or later critics would say that "his most wise music stole nothing from death". The mutant questions the traditionally 'well-wrought' form (Cummings not only adds half a line to the standard fourteen, but the additional half a line credits the lady with a natural perfection by the side of which anything contrived will pale); grants the lady a lease of life in the imagination of the reader by making her the better artist that is always imitated, never equalled; and admits that she is more creator than created: "lady through whose profound and fragile lips/ the sweet small clumsy feet of April came/ into the ragged meadow of my soul". The hesitant-and most indirect-strokes of the brush of the octet here reveal, as a crowning of the sestet, the artfully crafted, yet unassuming, hybrid œuvre (of poetry and painting) of the poet-painter8. The lady's immortality is partly the sum of

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the strokes as revealing an attempted approximation of the ineffable, partly a uniqueness that defies the 'masterful', but reiterative, metaphors of the predecessors, partly the activation of the potential on the page by the reader's intuitive response, and partly the poet's tour de force which credits the lady with a more comprehensive creative power: as beloved and as mother. The artist, the painter-poet, too, comes on the artistic stage with 'small clumsy feet', begotten by the lady's inspiring powers. She breathes life not only in the "ragged meadow of his soul", but also in the barren meadow of his (he)art, as she breathes life in the otherwise barren meadow of the world.

It is this unfolding, dynamic wholeness (a major concept in Formalism) which redeems the work from the arrestedness of so-called fixed forms and predictable conclusions. The concept, however, needs to be qualified: the unfolding wholeness is, in fact, not only inter-textual but also intra-textual; it is not only poem-based, but also poetry-based. In addition, it is made all the more inviting to the investment of 'readerly' effort by its deliberate hesitation and tentativeness. Indeed, as the instances of transgression of the conventional and the established crop up in the cycle of Cummings's poetry collections, the reader finds him/herself constantly treading on unfamiliar ground, and yet gleaning from the ground already covered clues for the fresh ground being trodden. And while the unfamiliar routs the merely 'undead' reader and breeds constant alertness, the deliberate hesitation and tentativeness embolden him/her.

Emboldening the reader seems to be Cummings's revenge on mediated meaning. This is, in fact, our response to the criticism levelled at the so-called contradiction between Cummings's emancipatory motive and his elitist conception of the reader as attested by the "difficult" character of his verse. If, by "difficulty", one means unfamiliarity and unconventionality of form, the rebuttal is easy: the reader is not so much required to bring in a special equipment as to jettison old habits of approach. If, on the other hand, "difficulty" is intended to mean unfamiliarity of content, the rebuttal is easier: the same topics of love, war and the natural/ artificial and child/

(9) On the lady's influence on the poet and person, the speaker declares in Cummings's poem "here is the ocean, this is moonlight: say," (LXX, Vivax): "only by you my heart always moves". The word "moves" may be seen to cause both the heart and art to mingle.
adult worlds recur throughout the verse and are easily recognisable as
such. As to appreciation, this is, in Cummings's poetry, more a matter of
emotional responsiveness than of intellectual sophistication. To my mind,
however, the "difficulty"-if any-is one of a heightened technicality
exercised on ordinary subject-matter in such a way as to defamiliarise it
and thus elicit alertness to it and an emotional response where the intellect
is prevented from interfering until the subject-matter has been felt, or
apprehended experientially. Cummings seems to be engaged in a race
against intellectualisation; all his effort is focused on anticipating it; all his
poetry is a shortcut to feeling before it has hardened into concept.

Survival, as a reading of the poetry of E. E. Cummings reveals, is
synonymous with constant fresh departures. It is not by any means merely
doing the opposite of a precursor's achievement, for, as Harold Bloom
reminds us by approvingly quoting Lichtenberg, "[t]o do just the opposite
is also a form of imitation, and the definition of imitation ought by rights to
include both". (31) The constant fresh departures set out from inherited
forms and motifs: the carpe diem poem taking up the theme of seduction,
but subverting the threat of the "marble vault" and of the "deserts of vast
eternity" (Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress") into the promise of "a pleasant
country" and of the "april" of fulfilment ("yes is a pleasant country"); the
sonnet using and abusing the sonneteer's eternising conceit ("if i have made,
my lady, intricate"); and the anti-war poem mocking belligerent rhetoric
and the self-indulging fictions of conditioned society. The constant fresh
departures are also internal: within the same poem, as in "my sweet old
etcetera", and within the poet's poetic output, as in revisiting such themes
as childhood and adult alienation. The constant fresh departures are again
re-visits to the language in order to "blow, break, burn and make new"--to
paraphrase a line from John Donne's holy sonnet "Batter my heart three-
person'd God"). And the fresh departures are, finally, those of readerly
excursionisms (cf. Note 4 in the present paper). Therefore, survival is a
matter of interaction that grants an infinite lease of life: rendering and rearing
at once. "Mostpeople," Cummings writes in his Introduction to "New
Poems" (from Collected Poems (1938)), want "a guaranteed birthproof
safetysuit"; as to his own motto, it is "We can never be born enough". Yet,
in view of the fact that the times are bad for poetry, not least because, in the
wake of globalisation, "poetry is not of the slightest economic or political
importance [and] has no attachment to any of the powers that control the modern world", we may join Graham Hough in saying that the "isolation of the poet is his only salvation", and that, this very uncongenial situation "may set [poetry] free to do the only thing that in this age it can do—to keep some neglected parts of the human experience alive until the weather changes; as in some unforeseeable way it may do."\textsuperscript{10}

\textsuperscript{10} "The Modernist Lyric", in Modernism, p. 322.