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CRUCIFIED SHADOWS

SYRINX

BOWLS

FOUR POEMS

OLD MELODIES: LOVE AND DEATH

COMMENT

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J. B. WHEELWRIGHT.

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CRUCIFIED SHADOWS.

I remember a dune screened in rain,
Love in communion, its voluntary of tears . . .

Now my sight through a vista of years
Beholds the pattern of formalized grief .
The figure ascends the lyrical mount,
And the zenith of personal pain
(Buds not blown to the wind but slain)
Is seen as two lines, cruciform —
Pictorial balance,
Motif of blossoms strangely illumed,
Borne by a shadow up a hill.

MARK TURBYFILL.

SYRINX.

A complete study of Cummings should take penetrating account of his painting and drawing, and no estimate of his literary work can begin without noting the important fact that Cummings is a painter. It has bearings, as we shall later see, on his written works. Cummings creates perfect LYRICS, and a perfect lyric is indefinable and unanalyzable. The nearest we can come to it beyond a subjective recognition and feeling is to say, as Cummings wrote of the Mountain by Gaston Lachaise and of the personality of Jean Le Nègre, that the perfect lyric is a verb: it is an *is*. But to admit the impregnability of the lyric is not necessarily to proclaim it as the highest manifestation of art. If we say that the lyric equals *is*, we can still say that the full development of art equals a SENTENCE, and thereby indicate roughly the relation of the lyric to more ideological forms. Nor does every sentence require an *is*. The verb-quality of the lyric, however, throws criticism back upon the attributes of the *is* that Cummings creates. The most distinguishing attribute of Cummings' lyricism is its GRACE. And grace again is unanalyzable and indefinable. Even Poe, could not crystalize it. Of grace, he wrote, "perhaps the elements are a vivid fancy and a quick sense of the proportionate. Grace, however, may be most satisfactorily defined as 'a term applied, in despair, to that class of the impressions of Beauty which admit of no analysis.'"

When we attack Cummings' ORIGINALITY, we can, however, proceed further by quoting from Poe again "My first object (as usual) was originality. The extent to which this has been neglected in versification, is one of the most unaccountable things in the world. Admitting that there is little possibility of variety in mere *rhythm*, it is still clear that the possible varieties of metre and stanza are absolutely infinite — and yet, *for centuries, no man, in verse, has ever done, or ever seemed to think of doing, an original thing*. The fact is, that originality (unless in minds of very unusual force) is by no means a matter, as some suppose, of impulse or intuition. In general, to be found, it must be elaborately sought, and although a positive merit of the highest class, demands in its attainment less of invention than negation". Today, this statement still covers with all its primal pertinence the majority of poets. A minority has found in *vers libre* great possibility of variety in rhythm and of this minority, Cummings has probably accomplished more original things in rhythm, metre and stanza than any three other poets combined. And it is precisely by negation that he has attained originality. He has simply cancelled out his Education (the dignified name for an unquestioning acceptance of custom).

The result is, he sees freshly. Cummings *sees* words. As Dr. J. S. Watson noted, his words stand "erect on the page with a clean violence".

The originality of Cummings resolves into two elements. The first is the accurate choice of words. The second is the pains taken to display his accuracy ¹mistakably. The latter is, of course, much more uncommon in literature than the first. It is, an adaptation of advertising technic to literary intentions.

To display and force upon the reader his accuracy, Cummings has been obliged to reorganize punctuation and typography. *Cummings makes punctuation and typography active instruments for literary expression.* Here his painter's skill in composition aids him. Yet, in no case, does he leave the frontiers of literature for the plastic arts as did Apollinaire in *Calligrammes*. His typographical design in every example reinforces his literary content. He has perceived that the printing-press has made poetry something to be seen as well as heard: he has realized that visual notations of auditory rhythms stimulates the ears of silent readers. He is the first successful creator of calligrams. Most writers could profitably take lessons in arresting attention from American advertising experts. American advertising experts can take lessons from Cummings.

I catalog below some of the means employed by Cummings to display his accuracy and to indicate tempo.

1. Capitals are used principally for emphasis. This abolishes immediately the academic nonsense about the capitalization of the first letter in every line of poetry and the capitalization of the pronoun, I. It is then a simplification for the sake of pointing an unmistakable finger at emphatic words. E. g.,—

*to enjoy the composed sudden body atop which always
quivers the electric Distinct face hanghtily vital clinched
in a swoon of synopsis.*

2. Commas are used to indicate pauses wherever the poet decides that cadence requires them, even if it involves the separation of words never previously divided in that manner. E. g.,—

*(if you toss him a coin he will pick it cleverly from, the
air and stuff it seriously in, his minute pocket).*

3. Blank space is often used to isolate a word or words in a naked exactitude and emphasis from the rest of the poem. E. g.,—

whistles far and wee.

4. In order to indicate slow tempo, words are spread apart by hyphens or spaces or have extra letters added. E. g.,—

*gen
teel-ly
lugu-
bri ous.*

5. In order to indicate quick tempo, several words are often run together as one word. E. g.,—

and break onetwothreefourfive pigeonsjustlikethat.

6. Stanzaic divisions, line breakage and space relationships are freely varied for the display of accuracy and the indication of auditory rhythm. The cadences are emphatically not disjointed by such methods. On the contrary, Cummings's sentences often begin their meaning in one stanza and jump to the next before completing it. The parts of his poems do not run down, but continue their operation until the final line. That is why, I conceive, Dr. Watson likened them to a roller coaster on a scenic railway. *Three United States Sonnets* (*Broom*, May, 1922).

To illustrate how expressive punctuation can become in Cummings' hands, I cite from *Caritas* (*Broom*, July, 1922) a complete stanza made up solely of punctuation marks. A splendidly average citizen listening to a Salvation Army meeting is asked to increase the collection by twenty-five cents in order to make an even dollar. His mental processes are precisely and economically recorded as follows:

?
??
???
!

This, if one likes, also makes notation of a crescendo banged on the evangelical drum and reaching its final Boom! Boom! in the next stanza which is

Nix, kid.

Accuracy in itself has, esthetic quality. Although it is not necessarily elegant, but Cummings has an exquisite ear. His neat successes in hitting the bulls-eye are always accompanied by a crisp sense of verse-music. I am absolved from dilation on this by the simple expedient of quoting a stanza from *Puella Mea*. (*Dial*, January, 1921):

*In her perfectest array
my lady, moving in the day,
is a little stranger thing
in the morning wandering.*

And to double-clinch conviction, this concluding stanza 8 of a poem from the *Dial*, October, 1921:

*The flute of morning stilled in noon —
noon the implacable bassoon —
now Twilight seeks the thrill of moon,
washed with a wild and thin
despair of violin.*

Cummings avoids the pictorial excesses of Apollinaire with sureness. With equal certainty, he escapes the "musicality of literature" esthetic. His care for the word in its ideational meanings holds him to the moorings that Swinburne disastrously cut. For he remembers that if ideas are lost in pictorial, or musical qualities, then writing ceases to be literature and becomes weakly something else.

One of the essences of the pure lyric is simplicity, and simplicity requires (a) that it present an isolated idea as its base or (b) that it present a brief summary of an ideational research. As (b), it is the incomplete and uncomplicated reduction to a song of huge documents of ratiocination. As his idea-base, Cummings seems to prefer the lyrical summary.

His topics are the again-and-again-and-again handled themes of all lyricists: and what he says about these enigmas does not differ in substance from what has been reiterated. The difference lies rather in the freshness with which they are apprehended, in the novelty with which they are presented. The old result stated in new terms regains its former glamor.

Thus, the concept that life is a brevity composed of pleasure and pain emerges in an appealing new coat of varnish as

*(Do you think?) the
i do, world
is probably made
of roses & hello:
(of solongs and, ashes).*

On another occasion the concept that spring is a quickening revivifying season is conveyed by re-creating that season as a fetching sloppy ragtime mistress. Again, the statement that war is a horror which cannot drown out the magnetic life of young men and women, cannot submerge the inexorable uprush of human tides, is equally freshly conveyed. Death is seen as a faultless gentleman: death is approached in a jaunty American fashion.

*he was a handsome man
and what i want to know is
hov do you like your blueeyed boy
Mister Death.*

A particular triumph in the recreation of an old concept - that of Pan - occurs in an untitled poem. Cummings wisely places the poem in undefiled childhood. The season is "Just-spring", the world is "mud-luscious" and "puddle-wonderful", the children are playing marbles, piracies, hop-scotch and jump-rope, when a balloon man whistles, and off they run in quick response to his magical personality. The data of our childhoods immediately informs us that the balloon vendor was our authentic Pan, that his whistle blew the pure strains of the joyous god.

And now to render amends for these partial reductions of Cummings'

lyrics, I quote one of his poems entire (*Sunset, Broom*, July, 1922). Note the vowel and consonantal relationships, the color unity of the first stanza, the bell unity of the second, the dragging tempo of the last, the live transitions, the enchanting typographical display, the consummate magic. Cummings is right in declaring that Swinburne did not exhaust the lyric.

SUNSET.

*stinging
gold swarms
upon the spires
silver
 chante the litanies the
great bells are ringing with rose
the lewd fat bells
 and a tall
wind
is dragging
the sea
with
dream
-s*

*
* *

Neither of Cummings' pieces of criticism, one devoted to the sculptor, Gaston Lachaise, the other to T. S. Eliot, strikes me as achieved. The critique on Eliot is unpardonably out of key with its subject. For positive criticisms, both are overmuch concerned with the stupidities of other critics and inferior artists. Both are stalled short of developed crystallizations by a foolish disrespect for criticism, a disrespect that belongs peculiarly to the last century. To write of the Mountain by Lachaise: "Merely to contemplate its perfectly knit enormousness was to admit that analysis of, or conscious thinking on our part about, a supreme aesthetic triumph, is a very pitiful substitute for that sensation which is impossibly the equivalent of what the work itself thinks of us": is merely to exhibit an amazing confusion. For surely it is not a question of substituting analysis for the original impact, but a matter of adding a term to that impact, a business of still more enhancing our first pleasure by conscious thought about it. I do not wish to imply that Cummings cannot or does not analyze his esthetic impressions: he does and would do so publicly, doubtless, if he did not strangely regard that act as unseemly. Consequently, the contour of his criticism is impressionistic and therefore incomplete.

Cummings' criticism focuses flashlights upon his own work. He states admirably the approach which should be taken towards himself in particular

and indeed towards all primitive (technical sense) art. This art "cannot be grasped until we have accomplished the thorough destruction of the world". He notes certain accomplishments which "require of us an intelligent process of the highest order, namely the negation on our part, by thinking, of thinking". That is to say, our first process is the inducing of a relaxed sensitiveness, the opening of all our receptive pores, the complete surrender to what is before us. Afterwards, we can stiffen, we can call in our education, we can fight back. If our reception-data survive this recovery, then we have what we must admit is a personal validity.

Coming closer, we find Cummings turning on the intention of Eliot a passage from Eliot on Marlowe. We may take the same passage and turn it back on Cummings' poetry and forward on his prose. The statement is:

"...this style which secures its emphasis by always hesitating on the edge of caricature at the right moment....

...this intense and serious and indubitably great poetry, which, like some great painting and sculpture, attains its effects by something not unlike caricature".

Closer still, we discover statements on the personality of Lachaise which seem to me to encompass in a large degree the temperament of Cummings. Lachaise, he says, is "inherently naif, fearlessly intelligent, utterly sincere. It is accurate to say that his two greatest hates are the hate of insincerity and the hate of superficiality". He desires "to negate the myriad with the single, to annihilate the complicatednesses and prettinesses and trivialities of Southern civilizations with the enormous, the solitary, the fundamental". He achieves superlative esthetic victories by a "complete intelligence, or the intelligence functioning at intuitional velocity". Let us, I suggest, read the name, Cummings, for the name, Lachaise. And let us add this note on Cézanne by way of understanding why Cummings can be called naif and primitive. "Cézanne became truly naif—not by superficially contemplating and admiring the art of primitive peoples, but by carefully misbelieving and violently misunderstanding a second hand world".

(Evidently), we are now entangled in Cummings' temperament as a condition for his work. In order to define it sufficiently, we must examine the part it acts in *The Enormous Room*. (Boni and Liveright).

The subject-matter of this book consists of a brutal environment, an ignoble set of circumstances, *and* an artist countering against them. Cummings was an ambulance driver in the Norton Harjes unit during the recent bloody squabble for markets. His friend, B., in the same unit wrote some letters evincing an intelligent outlook on this mean scramble which were intercepted by the censor. Thereupon, both B. and Cummings were speedily propelled into a horrible detention camp, Ferte de la Macé, and with some three score comrades ill-treated for several months. After which edification, Cummings was released through the intervention of American authorities, and B. went on to a "regular prison" for further outrage before the incredibly

brilliant U. S. Government secured his release likewise. Circumstance and environment were therefore abnormal, bizarre, filthy, degrading and wounding. Against them Cummings countered with everything he had, and that was much more than the single blind rage of Dos Passos. For besides rage, Cummings had scorn, irony, sarcasm, courage, and a love for simple men. Especially, he had a dramatizing sense, a childlike faculty for personification and play-building. More especially, he had an undefeatable sense of humor. Most especially, he was tuned up to record in detail the slightest quiver contained in the slightest split-second of the slightest jar upon his being: that is, he was intensely and every instant *alive*. What came to him came vividly and indelibly. His triumph — the triumph of artist over hostility — is *The Enormous Room*.

On page 249 of this brilliant work, its basis is stated. « for an educated gent or lady, to create is first of all to destroy — that there is and can be no such thing as authentic art until the *bons trucs* (whereby we are taught to see and imitate on canvass and by words this so-called world) are entirely and thoroughly and perfectly annihilated by that vast and painful process of Unthinking which may result in a minute bit of purely personal Feeling. Which minute bit is Art ».

It took a high amount of Unthinking to produce such accuracies as for instance, these: « a room about sixteen feet short and four feet narrow »; « a hunk of bread and a piece of water. » But the unusual quality of Cummings' feeling resides, in two things: his painter's eye and his writer's ear. That eye is keen in noting planes, angles, textures, colors, the essential determining features: that ear is expert in reducing the visual booty to cadences. Take these as instances of their cooperation.

(1) « I had taken automatically some six or eight steps in pursuit of
 « the fleeing spectre when, right over my head, the grey stone curdled with
 « a female darkness; the hard and the angular softening in a putrescent
 « explosion of thick wriggling laughter. I started, looked up, and encountered
 « a window stuffed with four savage fragments of crowding Face: four livid,
 « shaggy disks focussing hungrily; four pair of uncouth eyes rapidly smoul-
 « dering; eight lips shaking in a toothless and viscous titter. Suddenly above
 « and behind these terrors rose a single horror — a crisp vital head, a young
 « ivory actual face, a night of firm, alive, icy hair, a white large frightful smile ».

(2) « Card table: 4 stares play banque with 2 cigarettes
 « (1 dead) & A pipe the clashing faces yanked by a
 « leanness of one candle bottle-stuck (Birth of X)
 « where sits The Clever Man who pyramids, sings
 « (mornings) 'Meet Me... »

« which specimen of telegraphic technique being interpreted, means: Judas,
 « Garibaldi, and The Holland Skipper (whom the reader will meet *de suite*) —

« Garibaldi's cigarette having gone out, so greatly is he absorbed — play *banque*
 « with four intent and highly focussed individuals who may or may not be The
 « Schoolmaster, Monsieur Auguste, The Barber, and Même; with The Clever Man
 « (as nearly always) acting as banker. The candle by whose somewhat uncor-
 « pulent illumination the various physiognomies are yanked into a ferocious
 « unity is stuck into the mouth of a bottle. The lighting of the whole, the
 « rhythmic disposition of the figures, construct a sensuous integration suggestive
 « of The Birth of Christ by one of the Old Masters. The Clever Man, having
 « had his usual morning warble, is extremely quiet. He will win, he pyramids
 « — and he pyramids because he has the cash and can afford to make every
 « play a big one. All he needs is the rake of a *croupier* to complete his disin-
 « terested and wholly nerveless poise ».

There is another duality in Cummings' feeling that increases its special quality. He is both realistic and fanciful. Without a wince, he can describe a fresh smoking turd or a brutal mauling with stove-pipes and on the next page evoke the most charming gnomes or fairies or fantastic attic toys. This combination of hardness and fancy is not often encountered.

But to get back to the passage on the minute bit of purely personal feeling which is art, does this not mean, in bald esthetic terms, that Cummings is a partisan of content-first, form-second, writing? Does it not mean that his first stimulus comes from the emotional and perceptive materials of his experiences? And afterwards, he crystallizes them into formal beauties? Certainly, that was the procedure in *The Enormous Room*. Here Cummings had a huge mass of experience whose energy demanded expression. This experience, this dynamic reality, held his major interest. It dictated word by word the problems of its presentation. Whereas a form-first, content-second, writer, although he started with this initial experience, would very soon shift his major interest to his presentation problems, would play loose and fast with his initial bits of pure feeling for the sake of his non-representative design. His pure feelings would be but helpless pawns in the grip of his intellect, whereas in *The Enormous Room* we have an intellect performing an efficient servitude to feeling. In Cummings' case, neither content nor form, neither the representative nor the non-representative, overbalance one another. There is a unique marriage there between form and content, that marriage — which we are told denotes successful art.

Let us examine this union in *The Enormous Room*. No, first let us point out several additional interesting details of that book. One is fresh adjectival juxtapositions. Again and again by a simple transposition ancient couplings are revived. Another is a hand at word coinage, a game largely discontinued by the English speaking since the days of Queen Elizabeth. Another is a repercussion from the American detective story, with its speed of narration, its exaggerated villain and hero types, its piling-up of exciting situations, all marvellously sublimated in Cummings' mind. A fourth is the awareness of the knockabout vitality, vigor, raciness, authenticity, humor, poetry and vividness

of the American language. After reading Sandburg and Cummings, one believes in the possibilities of this new tongue as one does not believe in it after reading John V. A. Weaver. Fifth, there is splendid caricature. But back to the larger successes of *The Enormous Room*!

One of its large successes is its minor organisms. Sentences, paragraphs, incidents, chapters are all carefully built up. (Unlike most of his contemporaries, Cummings can still swing a long sentence. His verbs have a remarkable kick: enough to keep a dozen adjectives on the move). As a minute specimen of minor organization, take this:

« It must have been five o'clock. Steps. A vast clattering of the exterior
« of the door — by whom? Whang opens the door. Turnkey-creature extending
« a piece of chocolate with extreme and surly caution. I say « Merci » and
« seize chocolate. Klang schut the door ».

It is a miniature, but note that its introduction creates imminence, its progression rises in a crescendo, and its final sentence closes neatly the incident.

As a more extended minor organism, consider the portrait of the little doll-like Belgian Machine-Fixer which rises to this lyrical invocation — an indirect reproach a hundred times more effective, it seems to me, than the direct, well-chewed anger of the usual protestant against inhumanity.

« And his ghastly and toylike wizened and minute arm would try to
« make a pass at their lofty lives. O *gouvernement français*, I think it was not
« very clever of you to put this terrible doll in La Ferté; I should have left
« him in Belgium with his little doll-wife if I had been You; for when Gover-
« nements are found dead there is always a little doll on top of them, pulling
« and tweaking with his little hands to get back the microscopic knife which
« sticks firmly in the quiet meat of their hearts ».

In the final chapter there is a magnificent arrangement of surprize and contrast. In an abbreviated Joycian manner, the cupboards of the disagreeable are spilled all over the page and THEN as the ship enters New York harbor comes this:

« My God what an ugly island. Hope we don't stay here long. All the
« redbloods first class much excited about land, Damned ugly, I think.

« Hullo.

« The tall, impossibly tall, incomparably tall, city shoulderingly upward
« into hard sunlight leaned a little through the octaves of its parallel edges,
« leaningly strode upward into firm hard snowy sunlight; the noises of America
« nearingly throbbed with smokes and hurrying dots which are men and which
« are women and which are things new and curious and hard ^{and} strange and
« vibrant and immense, lifting with a great ondulous stride firmly into immortal
« sunlight »

Each chapter mounts on its own crescendo, and each crescendo relates to all the others. There is then a major organization. This major, roughly modelled upon Bunyan's *Prilgrim's Progress*, must have presented great resistances to Cummings, as a glance at his plan will immediately corroborate.

The first third of his book is a chronological narrative, the following half is a timeless series of description, the final sixth is again chronological narrative, yet he has actually shifted from a narrative and time technic into a timeless and descriptive technic and back again without the slightest loss of movement. Indeed, the curve of his central crescendo keeps ascending from portrait to portrait until it seems as though its climax is certainly reached in an unforgettable eulogy of Jean Le Nègre, but even after that it moves up higher as the book changes to narrative. B. is sent by the investigating committee to Precigne. After he leaves, Cummings records:

« I went to my bed and lay down quietly in my great *pélisse*. The
« clamor and filth of the room brightened and became distant and faded. I
« heard the voice of the jolly Alsatian saying:

« ' *Courage, mon ami*, your comrade is not dead; you will see him later '
« and after that, nothing. In front of and within my eyes lived suddenly a
« violent and gentle and dark silence ».

In that silence the arc of *The Enormous Room* halts its upward progress runs level a few seconds, and then drops rapidly down for the concluding chapters.

Each page of this book is a rewarding study in mechanics; overwhelming as Cummings' subject matter was it has all been crystallized in a way to give the last jerk and whirret that inhered therein. Cummings has jabbed his pen into life, but he has also twisted it in the wound, and it is this twist of the pen that makes literature.

GORHAM B. MUNSON.

BOWLS.

on the green
 with lignum vitae balls and ivory markers,
 the pins planted in wild duck formation.
 and quickly dispersed :
 by this survival of ancient punctilio
 in the manner of Chinese lacquer carving,
 layer after layer exposed by certainty of touch and unhurried incision
 so that only so much color shall be revealed as is necessary to the picture
 I learn that we are precisians —
 not citizens of Pompeii arrested in action
 as a cross section of one's correspondence would seem to imply.
 Renouncing a policy of boorish indifference
 to everything that has been said since the days of Matilda,
 I shall purchase the Etymological Dictionary of Modern English
 that I may understand what is written
 and like the ant and the spider
 returning from time to headquarters,
 shall answer the question
 as to « why I like winter better than I like summer »
 and acknowledge that it does not make me sick
 to look modern playwrights and poets and novelists straight in the face —
 that I feel just the same ;
 and I shall write to the publisher of the magazine
 which will « appear the first day of the month
 and disappear before one has had time to buy it
 unless one takes proper precaution, »
 and make an effort to please —
 since he who gives quickly gives twice
 in nothing so much as in a letter.

MARIANNE MOORE.

FOUR POEMS.

I.

a man who had fallen among thieves
 lay by the roadside on his back
 dressed in fifteenthrate ideas
 wearing a round jeer for a hat

fate per a somewhat more than less
 emancipated evening
 had in return for consciousness
 endowed him with a changeless grin

whereon a dozen staunch and leal
 citizens did graze at pause
 then fired by hypercivic zeal
 sought newer pastures or because

swaddled with a frozen brook
 of pinkest vomit out of eyes
 which noticed nobody he looked
 as if he did not care to rise

one hand did nothing on the vest
 its wideflung friend clenched weakly dirt
 while the mute trouserfly confessed
 a button solemnly inert.

Brushing from whom the stiffened puke
 i put him all into my arms
 and staggered banged with terror through
 a million billion trillion stars

II.

poets yeggs and thirsties

since we are spanked and put to sleep by dolls let
us not be continually astonished should
from their actions and speeches
sawdust perpetually leak

rather is it between such beddings and
bumpings of ourselves to be observed
how in this fundamental respect the well
recognised regime of childhood is reversed

meantime in dreams let us investigate
thoroughly each one his optima rerum first
having taken care to lie upon our
abdomens for greater privacy and lest
punished bottoms interrupt philosophy

III.

the season' tis, my lovely lambs,
 of Sumner Volstead Christ and Co.
 the epoch of Mann's righteousness
 the age of dollars and no cents.
 Which being quite beyond dispute
 as prove from Troy (N. Y.) to Cairo
 (Egypt) the luminous dithyrambs
 of large immaculate unmute
 antibolshevistic gents
 (each manufacturing word by word
 his own unrivalled brand of pyro
 -technic blurb anent the (hic)
 hero dead that gladly (sic)
 in far lands perished of unheard
 of maladies including flu)

 my little darlings, let us now
 passionately remember how —
 braving the worst, of peril heedless,
 each braver than the other, each
 (a typewriter within his reach)
 upon his fearless derrière
 sturdily seated — Colonel Needless
 To Name and General You know who
 a string of pretty medals drew

 (while messrs jack james john and jim
 in token of their country's love
 received my dears the order of
 The Artificial Arm and Limb)

— or, since bloodshed and kindred questions
 inhibit unprepared digestions,
 come : let us mildly contemplate
 beginning with his wellfulled pants
 earth's biggest grafter, nothing less ;
 the Honorable Mr. (guess)
 who, breathing on the ear of fate,
 landed a seat in the legislat-
 ure whereas tommy so and so
 (an erring child of circumstance
 whom the bulls nabbed at 33rd)
 pulled six months for selling snow

IV.

this evangelist
 buttons with his big gollywog voice
 then kingdomofheaven up behind and crazily
 skating thither and hither in filthy sawdust
 chucks and rolls
 against the tent his thick joggling fists
 he is persuasive
 the editor cigarstinking hobgoblin swims
 upward in his swivelchair one fist dangling scandal while
 five other fingers snitch
 rapidly through mist a defunct king as
 linotypes gobblehobble
 our lightheavy twic twoc ingly attacks
 landing a onetwo
 which doubles up suddenly his bunged hinging

victim against the
giving roper amid
screams of deeply bulging thousands

i too omit one kelly

in response to howjedooze the candidates new silk
lid bounds gently from his baldness
a smile masturbates softly in the vacant
lot of his physiognomy
his scientifically pressed trousers ejaculate spats
a strikingly succulent getup

but

we knew a muffhunter and he said to us Kid.
daze nutn like it.

E. E. CUMMINGS.

OLD MELODIES.

LOVE AND DEATH

I.

There is a moment after the embrace
when happily fatigued we do not speak
when still my cheek is resting on your cheek
when hearts throb still and limbs still interlace

under the coverlet : there is a moment
somewhere existing out of time and space
somewhere

(O tired eternity of your face)
between extremes of ecstasy and torment.

There is a moment logical and white
behind the wall of flesh : it is as if
falling agreeably from some high cliff
I floated in a limitless sea of light

among impersonal forms and came to rest
within the personal limits of a night
where chair and bed loom comfortably trite
where still my heart is beating on your chest

II.

They carry him off in a one horse hack
and he won't be thinking of coming back.

They *carry* him off in a *one* horse hack
and he *won't* be thinking of coming back.

They *dump* his bones in a *six* foot hole
may *God* have mercy upon his soul.

The *dirt* clumps down and pebbles drum on his belly

(O *sed* that covers that hides the left nipple of his
breast and crumbs of frozen clay seeping seeping between
the stiff intestines of his legs) and the

Worms crawl out and the *worms crawl in*
to *build* them a dwelling *beneath* the skin.

(Naturally I am growing a little hysterical and
he is clothed in such linen as he never wore and
the new black suit he bought last week at Wana-
makers while between him and the gravel or frozen
rod there are thicknesses of glass, oak, lead. I am
a little hysterical naturally and imagine myself be-
neath the glass and oak and lead with him, clutch-
ing him perhaps by the shoulder or continuing a
desultory conversation about and about, around
and upon and about)

and *dirt* clump-clumps *against* my thighs
against ~~by~~ belly and *frozen* eyes.

Between my fingers, *between* my knees
fall shovelfull of *eternities*.

And *worms* crawl in and *worms* crawl out
and round and round and upon and about
our pointless conversation grows
and there she goes

and there she goes and
alldressedupinher *sun* daycloes

and there she goes.

COMMENT.

I.

All is not sound.

When somebody who advertises as an instructor in versification, recommending a long experience as poet scholar critic, accepted a sonnet of Hillyer's for publication only tentatively, because forsooth the last lines did not scan, it was suggested that after greater familiarity with Elizabethan or Hillyer's own work, the Alexandrine would seem strange no longer.

The only successful experimenter in English polyphonic prose berated a poem¹ of Cowley's one evening after dinner, sparing neither words breath nor time, going so far as to declare him no poet, (though being at the time a literary agent for his poems), and upon the following afternoon sent for it to be reconsidered, because forsooth 'if it should prove polyphonic prose everything would be quite different'.

Sometime later the two who were more or less responsible for No. 4, bowing humbly beneath the proud poetic ignorance of their bosses in New York, persevered in the distasteful task of printing Ashton's poems meekly to the last. Then their intelligence rebelled. Very deftly, if somewhat drastically, they cut all but the last two lines, which thus became a comment upon the preceding. The bosses in New York apologise to Ashton but the Satanists can not, their injury was intentional. The complete poem printed below, will make all readers meditate upon the kindness of the wicked, and the cruelty of the just.

THE JILTED MOON

Tonight the tide is coming very smooth,
 So on the crinkled stretch the moon
 Writes Chinese characters in every groove,
 Changing with silver speed on a long path.
 Are these love-letters, moon?

¹ *Secession* No. 3. The poem, it may be said here, is not polyphonic prose, nor anything like it. It is nothing but nonsense, and not heretical after all. Authority: Bab's *Ballads*, « *Wicked Mr. (What's his name?) Blake* ».

If so, you write too fast ;
 I cannot read their sense before they pass.
 And is your passion strung so violent
 You cannot be content
 To have me see and slowly understand,
 But must spend quickly much for all or none
 With your too brightly writing hand ?
 Then, moon, I am not your Endymion :
 Your letters are too free to everyone.
 You see, I am too low for your estate,
 Heart too monogamous, and thoughts too limited for these
 White flaming poems of your ice-cold fate.
 Your quickly-burning messages
 To me are no more than Chinese, o moon,
 Are no more than Chinese.

RICHARD ASHTON.

When No. 4 finally arrived in New York, after having lodged a month in the bureau drawers of an utter stranger in Berlin, our Founder delivering himself of the dictum (just before luncheon): « in polyphonic prose rhymes been hitherto overcrowded and staccato, » especially recommended two poems signed Ashton for attention, because forsooth their cadences were wider and their recurrent sound patterns more subtle than in any other example of the medium. The poems, which it may be said here are nothing of the sort, must be read to be enjoyed properly, but as they are appealing in their lack of grace, and as nothing lends things dignity like analysis, and as besides they were recommended for especial attention, here goes :

The first is made up of three passages of monosyllabic conversation and a conclusion of commonplace free verse, the which are preceeded *First*, by a bit of triplicate meter containing a distinct metrical achievement, to wit, a couplet of eleven monosyllables with four beats ! The sound pattern of this passage is in its completeness a a b b b a a , all occurring at the termini of the cadencies. Hence it is to be presumed, unless art's hid causes be not found, came the impression of wider polyphonics ; *Second*, by a bit of polyphonic prose whose pattern is not staccato because it is pauper, *Third*, by a sentence with one assonance, and that a naked beggar followed by a free verse cadence attogther too familiar ; *Fourth*, by another triplicate passage, all rhymes of which are not terminal to be sure, but which give no polyphonic effect whatever.

Considered as modern verse, the second poem is a fake. It is in tumbling meter throughout. A statement not satyric, but technical, for tumbling

meter¹ (which persisted from the Saxon decadence through the time of Spencer) allows four beats to a line and unaccented syllables *ad lib*; a principle of prosody whereunder Poe and Coleridge were successful and Ashton pleasant to the point of unpleasantness. His precious bit of polyphonic prose, printed more accurately, might have done service as a theme at a time where we were studying tumbling meter at Harvard, and may have been marked C—. Be this as it may, let us back to our muttons. The rhymes are swing, violin, snatch, catch, floor, curve, swirve, more, men, light, white, again, black, back, croon, saxophone, tones, tune, (in a line of two beats), door, one, run, coat, feet, following, cheek, face, speak, poise, joy, surge, proceeds, recedes. In addition as internal rhymes there are at various caesuras, lilt, wiggle, twinkle, moan, grace, urge. For full measure a litter of illegitimate Swinburne's are thrown in:

*lift and linger and lift once more
mingles and merges
following, fluttering, following again,*

also we have such gems as :

*rose-red shimmer
petal-soft cheek
half-open lips — « too tense to speak », these last.*

Helping us scan this difficult, intricate and subtle medium, we are given two italics *up* and *down*, the beats occurring on these very words! As there is no reason to suspect that anyone who cares to write tumbling meter is bothering to disguise the fact, as there is less reason why such pistache pastiche should appear in a magazine which is devoted to new forms because of its ennui with the old, not its ignorance of the good; as furthermore Ashton has had his poem set up most *modernly*, breaking his lines not merely at some of the possible caesuras, but even at many impossible ones, the poem starts off with quite a kick:

*Down
it goes
With a
lingering wing etc.*

Printing on the bias in pink or green ink would improve it, but still it is not bad, not bad. Soon the rhymes begin to come thick and fast, and

¹ Authority: Dean Briggs's Course in Versification, Grade C+.

to occur, thanks to a disoblising printer, at the beginning of every line or so of type. Then quick, just-like-a-flash, one is on to the little game of how one should write *wider* and *better* polyphonic prose. God only knows how one should read it.

The medium it would seem should be studied, even by those who write it, and nonsense verse as well; but never oh never should the leaders of literary novements study English prosody, particulary not from persons who advertise themselves as adepts in that art of pain and beauty....

II.

Poor at these numbers.

Everyone who is anyone is studying typography as musical notation in verse. Future textbooks will have chapters on the subject. Indeed it is funny that Saintsbury has not dealt with it, for:

In a review by J. C. Squire — we were hired to read him, of course — of the new Cambridge edition of Shakespeare, we were delighted to find this: « Mr. Pollard and Mr. Simpson have made it plain that the punctuation (of Shakespeare), which to the mere reader often appears absurd in its vagaries, was deliberately contrived as a guide to the proper speaking of the words. » Mr. Squire also extracts this note:

« 367, *be quick thou'st best*. Absence of punctuation denotes rapid delivery ».

We therefore ask Johnny Weaver and the other rah-rah boys who cannot forgive the freedoms of Mr. Cummings to attack first this deplorable eccentricity on the part of William Shakespeare.¹

It is not without perturbation that I enter this subject for I shall not easily forget my bepuzzlement when it came to setting a poem of Cowley's² up in type. I could not for the life of me decide whether certain passages were free verse, verse of very long cadences, or prose, all this the more so without initial capitalization. It was in vain that I compared the Ms. with the printed poem in *Secession*, in vain that I sent across the Atlantic for an exact Ms. from Cowley, in vain that I motored out to the press through several of the wildest blizzards known to the memory of the oldest

¹ Lifted from copy sent from the bosses in New York.

² « Two Swans », *Eight More Harvard Poets*. Brentano's 1923.

living inhabitant of Greater Boston, in order to ensure myself that the poem appear as it should sound. All was over. Damon and I were congratulating ourselves on our faithfulness to friendship and to the movement. A letter arrived from Cowley asking, kindly but sternly, why his poem was printed in 15 lines when it contained only 9? Now, I had done my best to print 12 lines, and I have done my best for a month in Giverny to get Cowley to teach me to count 9, but it is beyond me. I have read that poem over and over again, ever since then, counting its verses many times only to arrive each time at a different sum. To my dying day I shall be certain that it contains 2 sentences, and that it is very beautiful, but I should hate to risk anything for which I cared much by taking a chance on the number of lines it has. All this argues (not only against dilettanti compilers of anthologies containings modern verse, but also) for and against experiment in typographical metrical notation. If a poem be beautiful it matters little how it be printed, yet on the other hand a reader should be permitted to loose none of its subtle cadencies. Yet, again, is it not as wise to leave one's minor effects implicit and inherent, limiting one's hypothetical audience to men of imagination and sense? Does not Cummings miss at times a forest for the trees, displaying his minor cadencies to the prejudice of his inclusive ones?

I shall not enter the subject after all, at all! Being unlearned in these matters, I fear least anything I have to say tend to increase the prejudice of readers rather than to clarify experiment by writers; and, being unlearned, I feel keenly the need of an exact metrical notation. Robert Graves in an engaging little bore of a book of which I forget the name, seeks to dispose of « free verse » because forsooth metrical verse, like Swinburne's *Hertha*, has also no exact means of indicating its essential tempo and stress! 19th Century good usage in spelling and punctuation has deprived us of many devices free to: Milton, Blake, and Co. Old means of indicating tempo and stress are now to be recovered with more added. That is fine. There is one danger. Preoccupied with experiment, blinded by success we may, like Herrick or Herbert (who, with Josephson, not always gave their poems oral movements promised the eye) deliver poetry to the tender mercy of printers; depending upon means not literary but visual, like certain Persians who are the less worth republication or translation because their reputations rest quite as much on the beauty of their handwriting as upon the niceness of their ears or the subtlety of their minds. Impressive as are the methods of advertisement its motive is essentially unaesthetic. It is not an art at all, but rather a point of departure for an art, which begins where advertisement leaves off and may, even, not be worth beginning. What if there

be idiograms in English (as for instance the word bloody, which has drips and drops about the look of it), is there merit in the fact? ¹

If a poem is written for the ear, its typographical presentation is of second importance. Better as *Leaves of Grass* is in its early editions, it is almost as good on a double-column page. Shakespeare puts it over still though anyone who has read a Folio or Quarto knows the printers have little thanks coming to them. I wonder what future editions of Cummings are going to look like! I do not, however, decry his line of experiment for its fragility, many aesthetic effects are only to be got with a loss of durability, but one cannot improve the workmanship of a poem, as Ashton tried to do, by trick printing, and if one's poem would be much the worse for being set up badly, best better it. Violation, observance, and formation of good usage in diction, punctuation and typography, are respectable insofar as they make for permanence of aesthetic effect. That chapter of the future prosodist will commence with, *Circumambient Limitations*.

J. B. W.

¹ Do sounds have colour?

How many archangels can dance on the point of a needle?

How much wood would a wood-chuck chuck?

CORRESPONDENCE.

To *Secession*.

Every man, it is prophesied, must eventually become his own brewer. Certainly, every man must already import his own art from Central Europe. The *Dial*, as official importer, lands too many dead fish.... Portrait of Richard Strauss by Max Liebermann (geboren 1847, now President of the Berlin Academy of Arts), Richard Specht on Schnitzler, Stefan Zweig on Dickens.... we produce this sort of stuff in vast quantities on this side, too. I recommend as a counter-irritant the Hungarian activist review, MA, edited by Ludwig Kassák. MA excels in experimental typographical composition, reproduces the latest work of Moholy-Nagy, Raoul Hausmann, Jacques Lipshitz, Picabia, Van Doesburg, Mondrian, Gleizes, Léger, Tatlin, Viking Egge-ling, Man Ray, the Russian constructivists, and photographs of beautiful bridges, machines, and New York, and publishes translations from the *avant-garde* writers in Germany, France, Russia and America, the last being represented so far by Malcolm Cowley, Gorham B. Munson, and William Carlos Williams.

G. B. M.

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Secession	450	61	54	60	- 5
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