

Classic Poetry Series

Edward Estlin Cummings

- 45 poems -

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Edward Estlin Cummings (14 October 1894 - 3 September 1962)

Edward Estlin Cummings, popularly known as E. E. Cummings, with the abbreviated form of his name often written by others in all lowercase letters as e. e. cummings, was an American poet, painter, essayist, author, and playwright. His body of work encompasses approximately 2,900 poems, an autobiographical novel, four plays and several essays, as well as numerous drawings and paintings. He is remembered as a preeminent voice of 20th century poetry, as well as one of the most popular.

Birth and early years

Cummings was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on October 14, 1894 to Edward and Rebecca Haswell Clarke Cummings. He was named after his father but his family called him by his middle name. Estlin's father was a professor of sociology and political science at Harvard University and later a Unitarian minister. Cummings described his father as a hero and a person who could accomplish anything that he wanted to. He was well skilled and was always working or repairing things. He and his son were close, and Edward was one of Cummings' most ardent supporters.

His mother, Rebecca, never partook in stereotypically "womanly" things, though she loved poetry and reading to her children. Raised in a well-educated family, Cummings was a very smart boy and his mother encouraged Estlin to write more and more poetry every day. His first poem came when he was only three: "Oh little birdie oh oh oh, With your toe toe toe." His sister, Elizabeth, was born when he was six years old.

Education

In his youth, Estlin Cummings attended Cambridge Latin High School. Early stories and poems were published in the Cambridge Review, the school newspaper.

From 1911 to 1916, Cummings attended Harvard University, from which he received a B.A. degree in 1915 and a Master's degree for English and Classical Studies in 1916. While at Harvard, he befriended John Dos Passos, at one time rooming in Thayer Hall, named after the family of one of his Harvard acquaintances, Scofield Thayer, and not yet a freshman-only dormitory. Several of Cummings's poems were published in the Harvard Monthly as early as 1912. Cummings himself labored on the school newspaper alongside fellow Harvard Aesthetes Dos Passos and S. Foster Damon. In 1915, his poems were published in the Harvard Advocate.

From an early age, Cummings studied Greek and Latin. His affinity for each

manifests in his later works, such as XAIPE (Greek: "Rejoice!"; a 1950 collection of poetry), Anthropos (Greek: "human"; the title of one of his plays), and "Puella Mea" (Latin: "My Girl"; the title of his longest poem).

In his final year at Harvard, Cummings was influenced by writers such as Gertrude Stein and Ezra Pound. He graduated magna cum laude in 1916, delivering a controversial commencement address entitled "The New Art". This speech gave him his first taste of notoriety, as he managed to give the false impression that the well-liked imagist poet, Amy Lowell, whom he himself admired, was "abnormal". For this, Cummings was chastised in the newspapers. Ostracized as a result of his intellect, he turned to poetry. In 1920, Cummings's first published poems appeared in a collection of poetry entitled Eight Harvard Poets

Career

In 1917 Cummings enlisted in the Norton-Harjes Ambulance Corps, along with his college friend John Dos Passos. Due to an administrative mix-up, Cummings was not assigned to an ambulance unit for five weeks, during which time he stayed in Paris. He became enamored of the city, to which he would return throughout his life.

On September 21, 1917, just five months after his belated assignment, he and a friend, William Slater Brown, were arrested on suspicion of espionage. The two openly expressed anti-war views; Cummings spoke of his lack of hatred for the Germans. They were sent to a military detention camp, the Dépôt de Triage, in La Ferté-Macé, Orne, Normandy, where they languished for 3½ months. Cummings's experiences in the camp were later related in his novel, *The Enormous Room* about which F. Scott Fitzgerald opined, "Of all the work by young men who have sprung up since 1920 one book survives- *The Enormous Room* by e e cummings....Those few who cause books to live have not been able to endure the thought of its mortality."

He was released from the detention camp on December 19, 1917, after much intervention from his politically connected father. Cummings returned to the United States on New Year's Day 1918. Later in 1918 he was drafted into the army. He served in the 73rd Infantry Division at Camp Devens, Massachusetts, until November 1918.

Cummings returned to Paris in 1921 and remained there for two years before returning to New York. During the rest of the 1920s and 1930s he returned to Paris a number of times, and traveled throughout Europe, meeting, among others, Pablo Picasso. In 1931 Cummings traveled to the Soviet Union and recounted his experiences in *Eimi*, published two years later. During these years Cummings also traveled to Northern Africa and Mexico and worked as an essayist and portrait artist for *Vanity Fair* magazine (1924 to 1927).

Cummings' papers are held at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin.

Final years and death

Grave of E. E. CummingsIn 1952, his alma mater, Harvard, awarded Cummings an honorary seat as a guest professor. The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures he gave in 1952 and 1955 were later collected as *i: six nonlectures*.

Cummings spent the last decade of his life traveling, fulfilling speaking engagements, and spending time at his summer home, Joy Farm, in Silver Lake, New Hampshire.

He died on September 3, 1962, at the age of 67 in North Conway, New Hampshire of a stroke. His cremated remains were buried in Lot 748 Althaea Path, in Section 6, Forest Hills Cemetery and Crematory in Boston. In 1969, his third wife, Marion Morehouse Cummings, died and was buried in an adjoining plot: Lot 748, Althaea Path, Section 6.

Poetry

Despite Cummings' consanguinity with avant-garde styles, much of his work is quite traditional. Many of his poems are sonnets, albeit often with a modern twist, and he occasionally made use of the blues form and acrostics. Cummings' poetry often deals with themes of love and nature, as well as the relationship of the individual to the masses and to the world. His poems are also often rife with satire.

While his poetic forms and themes share an affinity with the romantic tradition, Cummings' work universally shows a particular idiosyncrasy of syntax, or way of arranging individual words into larger phrases and sentences. Many of his most striking poems do not involve any typographical or punctuation innovations at all, but purely syntactic ones.

As well as being influenced by notable modernists including Gertrude Stein and Ezra Pound, Cummings' early work drew upon the imagist experiments of Amy Lowell. Later, his visits to Paris exposed him to Dada and surrealism, which in turn permeated his work. He began to rely on symbolism and allegory where he once used simile and metaphor. In his later work, he rarely used comparisons that required objects that were not previously mentioned in the poem, choosing to use a symbol instead. Due to this, his later poetry is "frequently more lucid, more moving, and more profound than his earlier." Cummings also liked to incorporate imagery of nature and death into much of his poetry.

While some of his poetry is free verse (with no concern for rhyme or meter), many have a recognizable sonnet structure of 14 lines, with an intricate rhyme scheme. A number of his poems feature a typographically exuberant style, with words, parts of words, or punctuation symbols scattered across the page, often making little sense until read aloud, at which point the meaning and emotion become clear. Cummings, who was also a painter, understood the importance of presentation, and used typography to "paint a picture" with some of his poems.

The seeds of Cummings' unconventional style appear well established even in his earliest work. At age six, he wrote to his father:

FATHER DEAR. BE, YOUR FATHER-GOOD AND GOOD,
HE IS GOOD NOW, IT IS NOT GOOD TO SEE IT RAIN,
FATHER DEAR IS, IT, DEAR, NO FATHER DEAR,
LOVE, YOU DEAR,
ESTLIN.

Following his autobiographical novel *The Enormous Room*, Cummings' first published work was a collection of poems entitled *Tulips and Chimneys* (1923). This work was the public's first encounter with his characteristic eccentric use of grammar and punctuation.

Some of Cummings' most famous poems do not involve much, if any, odd typography or punctuation, but still carry his unmistakable style, particularly in unusual and impressionistic word order.

Cummings' work often does not act in accordance with the conventional combinatorial rules that generate typical English sentences (for example, "they sowed their isn't"). His readings of Stein in the early part of the century probably served as a springboard to this aspect of his artistic development. In some respects, Cummings' work is more stylistically continuous with Stein's than with any other poet or writer.

In addition, a number of Cummings' poems feature, in part or in whole, intentional misspellings, and several incorporate phonetic spellings intended to represent particular dialects. Cummings also made use of inventive formations of compound words, as in "in Just" which features words such as "mud-luscious", "puddle-wonderful", and "eddieandbill." This poem is part of a sequence of poems entitled *Chansons Innocentes*; it has many references comparing the "balloonman" to Pan, the mythical creature that is half-goat and half-man. Literary critic R.P. Blackmur has commented that this usage of

language is "frequently unintelligible because he disregards the historical accumulation of meaning in words in favour of merely private and personal associations."

Many of Cummings' poems are satirical and address social issues but have an equal or even stronger bias toward romanticism: time and again his poems celebrate love, sex, and the season of rebirth.

Cummings also wrote children's books and novels. A notable example of his versatility is an introduction he wrote for a collection of the comic strip Krazy Kat.

Controversy

Cummings is also known for controversial subject matter, as he has a large collection of erotic poetry. In his 1950 collection *Xaïpe: Seventy-One Poems*, Cummings published two poems containing words that caused an outrage in some quarters.

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.
and
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

Cummings biographer Catherine Reef notes of the incident:

Friends begged Cummings to reconsider publishing these poems, and the book's editor pleaded with him to withdraw them, but he insisted that they stay. All the fuss perplexed him. The poems were commenting on prejudice, he pointed out, and not condoning it. He intended to show how derogatory words cause people to see others in terms of stereotypes rather than as individuals. "America(which turns Hungarian into 'hunky' & Irishman into 'mick' and Norwegian into 'square-head')is to blame for 'kike,'" he said.

But readers were still hurt, despite his commentary. Jews, living in the painful aftermath of the Holocaust, felt his very words were antisemitic, in spite of their purpose. William Carlos Williams spoke out in his defence.

Plays

During his lifetime, Cummings published four plays. *HIM*, a three-act play, was first produced in 1928 by the Provincetown Players in New York City. The production was directed by James Light. The play's main characters are "Him", a playwright, and "Me", his girlfriend. Cummings said of the unorthodox play:

Relax and give the play a chance to strut its stuff—relax, stop wondering what it is all 'about'—like many strange and familiar things, Life included, this play isn't 'about,' it simply is. . . . Don't try to enjoy it, let it try to enjoy you. DON'T TRY TO UNDERSTAND IT, LET IT TRY TO UNDERSTAND YOU."

Anthropos, or the Future of Art is a short, one-act play that Cummings contributed to the anthology *Whither, Whither or After Sex, What? A Symposium to End Symposium*. The play consists of dialogue between Man, the main character, and three "infrahumans", or inferior beings. The word *anthropos* is the Greek word for "man", in the sense of "mankind".

Tom, A Ballet is a ballet based on Uncle Tom's Cabin. The ballet is detailed in a "synopsis" as well as descriptions of four "episodes", which were published by Cummings in 1935. It has never been performed.

Santa Claus: A Morality was probably Cummings' most successful play. It is an allegorical Christmas fantasy presented in one act of five scenes. The play was inspired by his daughter Nancy, with whom he was reunited in 1946. It was first published in the Harvard College magazine the Wake. The play's main characters are Santa Claus, his family (Woman and Child), Death, and Mob. At the outset of the play, Santa Claus' family has disintegrated due to their lust for knowledge (Science). After a series of events, however, Santa Claus' faith in love and his rejection of the materialism and disappointment he associates with Science are reaffirmed, and he is reunited with Woman and Child.

Names and Capitalization

Cummings's publishers and others have sometimes echoed the unconventional orthography in his poetry by writing his name in lowercase and without periods, but normal orthography (uppercase and periods) is supported by scholarship, and preferred by publishers today. Cummings himself used both the lowercase and capitalized versions, though he most often signed his name with capitals.

The use of lowercase for his initials was popularized in part by the title of some books, particularly in the 1960s, printing his name in lower case on the cover and spine. In the preface to *E. E. Cummings: the growth of a writer* critic Harry T. Moore notes " He [Cummings] had his name put legally into lower case, and in his later books the titles and his name were always in lower case." According to his widow, this is incorrect, She wrote of Friedman "you should not have allowed H. Moore to make such a stupid & childish statement about Cummings & his signature." On 27 February 1951, Cummings wrote to his French translator D. Jon Grossman that he preferred the use of upper case for the particular edition they were working on. One Cummings scholar believes that on the rare occasions that Cummings signed his name in all lowercase, he may have intended it as a gesture of humility, not as an indication that it was the preferred orthography for others to use.

Critic Edmund Wilson commented "Mr. Cummings's eccentric punctuation is, also, I believe, a symptom of his immaturity as an artist. It is not merely a question of an unconventional usage: unconventional punctuation may very well gain its effect... the really serious case against Mr. Cummings's punctuation is that the results which it yields are ugly. His poems on the page are hideous."

Works:

Books

The Enormous Room (1922)
Tulips and Chimneys (1923) & (1925) (self-published)
XLI Poems (1925)
is 5 (1926)
HIM (1927) (a play)
ViVa (1931)
EIMI (1933) (Soviet travelogue)
No Thanks (1935)
Collected Poems (1960)
50 Poems (1940)
1 × 1 (1944)
XAIPE: Seventy-One Poems (1950)
i—six nonlectures (1953) Harvard University Press
Poems, 1923-1954 (1954)
95 Poems (1958)
73 Poems (1963) (posthumous)
Fairy Tales (1965) (posthumous)

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Edward Estlin Cummings

all in green

All in green went my love riding
on a great horse of gold
into the silver dawn.

Four lean hounds crouched low and smiling
the merry deer ran before.

Fleeter be they than dappled dreams
the swift red deer
the red rare deer.

Four red roebuck at a white water
the cruel bugle sang before.

Horn at hip went my love riding
riding the echo down
into the silver dawn.

Four lean hounds crouched low and smiling
the level meadows ran before.

Softer be they than slippered sleep
the lean lithe deer
the fleet flown deer.

Four fleet does at a gold valley
the famished arrow sang before.

Bow at belt went my love riding
riding the mountain down
into the silver dawn.

Four lean hounds crouched low and smiling
the sheer peaks ran before.

Paler be they than daunting death
the sleek slim deer
the tall tense deer.

Four tall stags at the green mountain
the lucky hunter sang before.

All in green went my love riding
on a great horse of gold
into the silver dawn.

Four lean hounds crouched low and smiling
my heart fell dead before.

Edward Estlin Cummings

anyone lived in a pretty how town

anyone lived in a pretty how town
(with up so floating many bells down)
spring summer autumn winter
he sang his didn't he danced his did.

Women and men (both little and small)
cared for anyone not at all
they sowed their isn't they reaped their same
sun moon stars rain

children guessed (but only a few
and down they forgot as up they grew
autumn winter spring summer)
that noone loved him more by more

when by now and tree by leaf
she laughed his joy she cried his grief
bird by snow and stir by still
anyone's any was all to her

someones married their everyones
laughed their cryings and did their dance
(sleep wake hope and then)they
said their nevers they slept their dream

stars rain sun moon
(and only the snow can begin to explain
how children are apt to forget to remember
with up so floating many bells down)

one day anyone died i guess
(and noone stooped to kiss his face)
busy folk buried them side by side
little by little and was by was

all by all and deep by deep
and more by more they dream their sleep
noone and anyone earth by april
with by spirit and if by yes.

Women and men (both dong and ding)
summer autumn winter spring
reaped their sowing and went their came
sun moon stars rain

Edward Estlin Cummings

Ballad of the Scholar's Lament

When I have struggled through three hundred years
of Roman history, and hastened o'er
Some French play-(though I have my private fears
Of flunking sorely when I take the floor
In class),-when I have steeped my soul in gore
And Greek, and figured over half a ream
With Algebra, which I do (not) adore,
How shall I manage to compose a theme?

It's well enough to talk of poor and peers,
And munch the golden apples' shiny core,
And lay a lot of heroes on their biers;-
While the great Alec, knocking down a score,
Takes out his handkerchief, boohoo-ing, "More!"-
But harshly I awaken from my dream,
To find a new,-er,-privilege,-in store:
How shall I manage to compose a theme?

After I've swallowed prophecies of seers,
And trailed Aeneas from the Trojan shore,
Learned how Achilles, after many jeers,
On piggy Agamemnon got to sore,
And heard how Hercules, Esq., tore
Around, and swept and dusted with a stream,
There's one last duty,-let's not call it bore,-
How shall I manage to compose a theme?

Envoi

Of what avail is all my mighty lore?
I beat my breast, I tear my hair, I scream:
"Behold, I have a Herculean chore.
How shall I manage to compose a theme?"

Edward Estlin Cummings

Fame Speaks

Stand forth, John Keats! On earth thou knew'st me not;
Steadfast through all the storms of passion, thou,
True to thy muse, and virgin to thy vow;
Resigned, if name with ashes were forgot,
So thou one arrow in the gold had'st shot!
I never placed my laurel on thy brow,
But on thy name I come to lay it now,
When thy bones wither in the earthly plot.
Fame is my name. I dwell among the clouds,
Being immortal, and the wreath I bring
Itself is Immortality. The sweets
Of earth I know not, more the pains, but wing
In mine own ether, with the crownéd crowds
Born of the centuries. - Stand forth, John Keats!

Edward Estlin Cummings

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Edward Estlin Cummings

i carry your heart with me

i carry your heart with me(i carry it in
my heart)i am never without it(anywhere
i go you go,my dear; and whatever is done
by only me is your doing,my darling)
i fear

no fate(for you are my fate,my sweet)i want
no world(for beautiful you are my world,my true)
and it's you are whatever a moon has always meant
and whatever a sun will always sing is you

here is the deepest secret nobody knows
(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud
and the sky of the sky of a tree called life;which grows
higher than the soul can hope or mind can hide)
and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart

i carry your heart(i carry it in my heart)

Edward Estlin Cummings

i have found what you are like

i have found what you are like
the rain

(Who feathers frightened fields
with the superior dust-of-sleep. wields

easily the pale club of the wind
and swirled justly souls of flower strike

the air in utterable coolness

deeds of green thrilling light
newfragile yellows with thinned

--in the woods lurch and press

which

stutter

and

sing

And the coolness of your smile is
stirringofbirds between my arms;but
i should rather than anything
have(almost when hugeness will shut
quietly)almost,
your kiss

Edward Estlin Cummings

i like my body when it is with your

i like my body when it is with your
body. It is so quite new a thing.
Muscles better and nerves more.
i like your body. i like what it does,
i like its hows. i like to feel the spine
of your body and its bones, and the trembling
-firm-smooth ness and which i will
again and again and again
kiss, i like kissing this and that of you,
i like, slowly stroking the, shocking fuzz
of your electric fur, and what-is-it comes
over parting flesh ... And eyes big love-crumbs,

and possibly i like the thrill

of under me you so quite new

Edward Estlin Cummings

i sing of Olaf glad and big

i sing of Olaf glad and big
whose warmest heart recoiled at war:
a conscientious object-or

his wellbelovéd 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
anent 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 fucking flag"

straightaway 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 skillfully applied
bayonets roasted hot with heat-
Olaf (upon what were once knees)
does almost ceaselessly repeat
"there is some shit 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 lie he was
more brave than me: more blond than you

Edward Estlin Cummings

If

If freckles were lovely, and day was night,
And measles were nice and a lie warn't a lie,
 Life would be delight,-
 But things couldn't go right
 For in such a sad plight
I wouldn't be I.

If earth was heaven, and now was hence,
And past was present, and false was true,
 There might be some sense
 But I'd be in suspense
 For on such a pretense
You wouldn't be you.

If fear was plucky, and globes were square,
And dirt was cleanly and tears were glee
 Things would seem fair,-
 Yet they'd all despair,
 For if here was there
We wouldn't be we.

Edward Estlin Cummings

if everything happens that can't be done

if everything happens that can't be done
(and anything's righter
than books
could plan)
the stupidest teacher will almost guess
(with a run
skip
around we go yes)
there's nothing as something as one

one hasn't a why or because or although
(and buds know better
than books
don't grow)
one's anything old being everything new
(with a what
which
around we come who)
one's everyanything so

so world is a leaf so tree is a bough
(and birds sing sweeter
than books
tell how)
so here is away and so your is a my
(with a down
up
around again fly)
forever was never till now

now i love you and you love me
(and books are shutter
than books
can be)
and deep in the high that does nothing but fall
(with a shout
each
around we go all)
there's somebody calling who's we

we're anything brighter than even the sun
(we're everything greater
than books
might mean)
we're everanything more than believe
(with a spin
leap
alive we're alive)
we're wonderful one times one

Edward Estlin Cummings

if i

if i

or anybody don't
know where it her his

my next meal's coming from
i say to hell with that
that doesn't matter (and if

he she it or everybody gets a
bellyful without
lifting my finger i say to hell
with that i

say that doesn't matter) but
if somebody
or you are beautiful or
deep or generous what
i say is

whistle that
sing that yell that spell
that out big (bigger than cosmic
rays war earthquakes famine or the ex

prince of whoses diving into
a whateses to rescue miss nobody's
probably handbag) because i say that's not

swell (get me) babe not (understand me) lousy
kid that's something else my sweet (i feel that's
true)

Edward Estlin Cummings

If I have made, my lady, intricate

If I have made, my lady, intricate
imperfect various things chiefly which wrong
your eyes (frailer than most deep dreams are frail)
songs less firm than your body's whitest song
upon my mind - if I have failed to snare
the glance too shy - if through my singing slips
the very skillful strangeness of your smile
the keen primeval silence of your hair

- let the world say "his most wise music stole
nothing from death" -

 you will only create
(who are so perfectly alive) my shame:
lady whose profound and fragile lips
the sweet small clumsy feet of April came

into the ragged meadow of my soul.

Edward Estlin Cummings

if I should sleep with a lady called death... (III)

if I should sleep with a lady called death
get another man with firmer lips
to take your new mouth in his teeth
(hips pumping pleasure into hips).

Seeing how the limp huddling string
of your smile over his body squirms
kissingly, I will bring you every spring
handfuls of little normal worms.

Dress deftly your flesh in stupid stuffs,
phrase the immense weapon of your hair.
Understanding why his eye laughs,
I will bring you every year

something which is worth the whole,
an inch of nothing for your soul.

Edward Estlin Cummings

in just-

in Just-
spring when the world is mud-
luscious the little
lame balloonman
whistles far and wee

and eddieandbill 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 bettyandisbel come dancing
from hop-scotch and jump-rope and

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

Edward Estlin Cummings

in spite of everything...

in spite of everything
which breathes and moves,since Doom
(with white longest hands
neatening each crease)
will smooth entirely our minds
-before leaving my room
i turn,and(stooping
through the morning)kiss
this pillow,dear
where our heads lived and were.

Edward Estlin Cummings

in time of daffodils(who know

in time of daffodils(who know
the goal of living is to grow)
forgetting why,remember how

in time of lilacs who proclaim
the aim of waking is to dream,
remember so(forgetting seem)

in time of roses(who amaze
our now and here with paradise)
forgetting if,remember yes

in time of all sweet things beyond
whatever mind may comprehend,
remember seek(forgetting find)

and in a mystery to be
(when time from time shall set us free)
forgetting me,remember me

Edward Estlin Cummings

it is at moments after I have dreamed

it is at moments after i have dreamed
of the rare entertainment of your eyes,
when (being fool to fancy) i have deemed

with your peculiar mouth my heart made wise;
at moments when the glassy darkness holds

the genuine apparition of your smile
(it was through tears always) and silence moulds
such strangeness as was mine a little while;

moments when my once more illustrious arms
are filled with fascination, when my breast
wears the intolerant brightness of your charms:

one pierced moment whiter than the rest

-turning from the tremendous lie of sleep
i watch the roses of the day grow deep.

Edward Estlin Cummings

it may not always be so

it may not always be so; and i say
that if your lips, which i have loved, should touch
another's, and your dear strong fingers clutch
his heart, as mine in time not far away;
if on another's face your sweet hair lay
in such a silence as i know, or such
great writhing words as, uttering overmuch,
stand helplessly before the spirit at bay;

if this should be, i say if this should be --
you of my heart, send me a little word;
that i may go unto him, and take his hands,
saying, Accept all happiness from me.
Then shall i turn my face, and hear one bird
sing terribly afar in the lost lands.

Edward Estlin Cummings

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Edward Estlin Cummings

maggie and milly and molly and may

maggie and milly and molly and may
went down to the beach (to play one day)

and maggie discovered a shell that sang
so sweetly she couldn't remember her troubles, and

milly befriended a stranded star
whose rays five languid fingers were;

and molly was chased by a horrible thing
which raced sideways while blowing bubbles: and

may came home with a smooth round stone
as small as a world and as large as alone.

For whatever we lose (like a you or a me)
it's always ourselves we find in the sea

Edward Estlin Cummings

May I Feel Said He

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)

Edward Estlin Cummings

my father moved through dooms of love

my father moved through dooms of love
through same of am through have of give,
singing each morning out of each night
my father moved through depths of height

this motionless forgetful where
turned at his glance to shining here;
that if(so timid air is firm)
under his eyes would stir and squirm

newly as from unburied which
floats the first who, his april touch
drove sleeping selves to swarm their fates
woke dreamers to their ghostly roots

and should some why completely weep
my father's fingers brought her sleep:
vainly no smallest voice might cry
for he could feel the mountains grow.

Lifting the valleys of the sea
my father moved through griefs of joy;
praising a forehead called the moon
singing desire into begin

joy was his song and joy so pure
a heart of star by him could steer
and pure so now and now so yes
the wrists of twilight would rejoice

keen as midsummer's keen beyond
conceiving mind of sun will stand,
so strictly(over utmost him
so hugely)stood my father's dream

his flesh was flesh his blood was blood:
no hungry man but wished him food;
no cripple wouldn't creep one mile
uphill to only see him smile.

Scorning the pomp of must and shall
my father moved through dooms of feel;
his anger was as right as rain
his pity was as green as grain

septembering arms of year extend
less humbly wealth to foe and friend
than he to foolish and to wise
offered immeasurable is

proudly and(by octobering flame
beckoned)as earth will downward climb,

so naked for immortal work
his shoulders marched against the dark

his sorrow was as true as bread:
no liar looked him in the head;
if every friend became his foe
he'd laugh and build a world with snow.

My father moved through theys of we,
singing each new leaf out of each tree
(and every child was sure that spring
danced when she heard my father sing)

then let men kill which cannot share,
let blood and flesh be mud and mire,
scheming imagine, passion willed,
freedom a drug that's bought and sold

giving to steal and cruel kind,
a heart to fear, to doubt a mind,
to differ a disease of same,
conform the pinnacle of am

though dull were all we taste as bright,
bitter all utterly things sweet,
maggoty minus and dumb death
all we inherit, all bequeath

and nothing quite so least as truth
-i say though hate were why men breathe-
because my father lived his soul
love is the whole and more than all

Edward Estlin Cummings

my love

my love
thy hair is one kingdom
the king whereof is darkness
thy forehead is a flight of flowers
thy head is a quick forest
filled with sleeping birds
thy breasts are swarms of white bees
upon the bough of thy body
thy body to me is April
in those armpits is the approach of spring
thy thighs are white horses yoked to a chariot
of kings
they are the striking of a good minstrel
between them is always a pleasant song
my love
thy head is a casket
of the cool jewel of thy mind
the hair of thy head is one warrior
innocent of defeat
thy hair upon thy shoulders is an army
with victory and with trumpets
thy legs are the trees of dreaming
whose fruit is the very eatage of forgetfulness
thy lips are satraps in scarlet
in whose kiss is the combinings of kings
thy wrists
are holy
which are the keepers of the keys of thy blood
thy feet upon thy ankles are flowers in vases
of silver
in thy beauty is the dilemma of flutes
thy eyes are the betrayal
of bells comprehended through incense

Edward Estlin Cummings

my sweet old etcetera

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 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)

Edward Estlin Cummings

next to of course god america i

"next to of course god america i
love you land of the pilgrims' and so forth oh
say can you see by the dawn's early my
country 'tis of centuries come and go
and are no more what of it we should worry
in every language even deafanddumb
thy sons acclaim your glorious name by gorry
by jingo by gee by gosh by gum
why talk of beauty what could be more beaut-
iful than these heroic happy dead
who rushed like lions to the roaring slaughter
they did not stop to think they died instead
then shall the voice of liberty be mute?"

He spoke. And drank rapidly a glass of water

Edward Estlin Cummings

nobody loses all the time (X)

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 so
my Uncle Sol imitated the
skunks in a subtle manner

or by drowning himself in the watertank
but somebody who'd given my Unde Sol a Victor
Victrola and records while he lived presented to
him upon the auspicious occasion of his decease a
scrumptious not to mention splendiferous 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)

Edward Estlin Cummings

o sweet spontaneous

o sweet spontaneous
earth how often have
the
doting

 fingers of
prurient philosophers pinched
and
poked

thee
, has the naughty thumb
of science prodded
thy

 beauty . how
often have religions taken
thee upon their scraggy knees
squeezing and

buffeting thee that thou mightest conceive
gods
 (but
true

to the incomparable
couch of death thy
rhythmic
lover

 thou answerest

them only with

 spring)

Edward Estlin Cummings

of Ever-Ever Land i speak

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

down with the human soul
and anything else uncanned
for everyone carries canopeners
in Ever-Ever Land

(for Ever-Ever Land is a place
that's as simple as simple can be
and was built that way on purpose
by simple people like we)

down with hell and heaven
and all the religious fuss
infinity pleased our parents
one inch looks good to us

(and Ever-Ever Land is a place
that's measured and safe and known
where it's lucky to be unlucky
and the hitler lies down with the cohn)

down above all with love
and everything perverse
or which makes some feel more better
when all ought to feel less worse

(but only sameness is normal
in Ever-Ever Land
for a bad cigar is a woman
but a gland is only a gland)

Edward Estlin Cummings

pity this busy monster, manunkind

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

Edward Estlin Cummings

Poem 42

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Edward Estlin Cummings

since feeling is first

since feeling is first
who pays any attention
to the syntax of things
will never wholly kiss you;

wholly to be a fool
while Spring is in the world

my blood approves,
and kisses are a better fate
than wisdom
lady i swear by all the flowers. Don't cry
- the best gesture of my brain is less than
your eyelids' flutter which says

we are for each other: then
laugh, leaning back in my arms
for life's not a paragraph

and death i think is no parenthesis

Edward Estlin Cummings

Sometimes I Am Alive Because With

sometimes i am alive because with
me her alert treelike body sleeps
which i will feel slowly sharpening
becoming distinct with love slowly,
who in my shoulder sinks sweetly teeth
until we shall attain the Springsmelling
intense large togethercoloured instant

the moment pleasantly frightful

when, her mouth suddenly rising, wholly
begins with mine fiercely to fool
(and from my thighs which shrug and pant
a murdering rain leapingly reaches the upward singular deepest flower which she
carries in a gesture of her hips)

Edward Estlin Cummings

somewhere i have never travelled

somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond
any experience, your eyes have their silence:
in your most frail gesture are things which enclose me,
or which i cannot touch because they are too near

your slightest look easily will unclose me
though i have closed myself as fingers,
you open always petal by petal myself as Spring opens
(touching skilfully, mysteriously) her first rose

or if your wish be to close me, i and
my life will shut very beautifully, suddenly,
as when the heart of this flower imagines
the snow carefully everywhere descending;

nothing which we are to perceive in this world equals
the power of your intense fragility: whose texture
compels me with the color of its countries,
rendering death and forever with each breathing

(i do not know what it is about you that closes
and opens; only something in me understands
the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses)
nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands

Edward Estlin Cummings

Spring is like a perhaps hand

Spring is like a perhaps hand
(which comes carefully
out of Nowhere)arranging
a window,into which people look(while
people stare
arranging and changing placing
carefully there a strange
thing and a known thing here)and

changing everything carefully

spring is like a perhaps
Hand in a window
(carefully to
and fro moving New and
Old things,while
people stare carefully
moving a perhaps
fraction of flower here placing
an inch of air there)and

without breaking anything.

Edward Estlin Cummings

there are so many tictoc...

there are so many tictoc
clocks everywhere telling people
what toctic time it is for
tictic instance five toc minutes toc
past six tic

Spring is not regulated and does
not get out of order nor do
its hands a little jerking move
over numbers slowly

we do not
wind it up it has no weights
springs wheels inside of
its slender self no indeed dear
nothing of the kind.

(So,when kiss Spring comes
we'll kiss each kiss other on kiss the kiss
lips because tic clocks toc don't make
a toctic difference
to kisskiss you and to
kiss me)

Edward Estlin Cummings

this(let's remember)day died again and...

this(let's remember)day died again and
again;whose golden,crimson dooms conceive

an oceaning abyss of orange dream

larger than sky times earth:a flame beyond
soul immemorially forevering am-
and as collapsing that grey mind by wave
doom disappeared,out of perhaps(who knows?)

eternity floated a blossoming

(while anyone might slowly count to soon)
rose-did you see her?darling,did you(kiss
me)quickly count to never?you were wrong

-then all the way from perfect nowhere came

(as easily as we forget something)
livingest the imaginable moon

Edward Estlin Cummings

what if a much of a which of a wind

what if a much of a which of a wind
gives the truth to summer's lie;
bloodies with dizzying leaves the sun
and yanks immortal stars awry?
Blow king to beggar and queen to seem
(blow friend to fiend: blow space to time)
-when skies are hanged and oceans drowned,
the single secret will still be man

what if a keen of a lean wind flays
screaming hills with sleet and snow:
strangles valleys by ropes of thing
and stifles forests in white ago?
Blow hope to terror; blow seeing to blind
(blow pity to envy and soul to mind)
-whose hearts are mountains, roots are trees,
it's they shall cry hello to the spring

what if a dawn of a doom of a dream
bites this universe in two,
peels forever out of his grave
and sprinkles nowhere with me and you?
Blow soon to never and never to twice
(blow life to isn't:blow death to was)
-all nothing's only our hugest home;
the most who die, the more we live

Edward Estlin Cummings

when serpents bargain

when serpents bargain for the right to squirm
and the sun strikes to gain a living wage -
when thorns regard their roses with alarm
and rainbows are insured against old age

when every thrush may sing no new moon in
if all screech-owls have not okayed his voice
- and any wave signs on the dotted line
or else an ocean is compelled to close

when the oak begs permission of the birch
to make an acorn - valleys accuse their
mountains of having altitude - and march
denounces april as a saboteur

then we'll believe in that incredible
unanimal mankind (and not until)

Edward Estlin Cummings

Where's Madge then,

Where's Madge then,
Madge and her men?
buried with
Alice in her hair,
(but if you ask the rain
he'll not tell where.)

beauty makes terms
with time and his worms,
when loveliness
says sweetly Yes
to wind and cold;
and how much earth
is Madge worth?
Inquire of the flower that sways in the autumn
she will never guess.
but i know

my heart fell dead before.

Edward Estlin Cummings

ygUDuh

ygUDuh

ydoan
yunnuhstan

ydoan o
yunnuhstand dem
yguduh ged

yunnuhstan dem doidee
yguduh ged riduh
ydoan o nudn

LISN bud LISN

dem
gud
am

lidl yelluh bas
tuds weer goin

duhSIVILEYEzum

Edward Estlin Cummings

Young Woman of Cambridge,

"Gay" is the captivating cognomen of a Young Woman of Cambridge,
Mass.

to whom nobody seems to have mentioned ye olde Freudian wish;
when I contemplate her uneyes safely ensconced in thick glass
you try if we are a gentleman not to think of (sh)

the world renowned investigator of paper sailors--argonauta argo
harmoniously being with his probably most brilliant pupil mated,
let us not deem it miraculous if their (so to speak) offspring has that large
appearance of somebody who was hectocotyliferously propagated

when Miss G touched N.Y. our skeleton stepped from his cupboard
gallantly offering to demonstrate the biggest best busiest city
and presently found himself rattling for that well known suburb
the Bronx (enlivening an otherwise dead silence with harmless quips, out
of Briggs by Kitty)

arriving in an exhausted condition, I purchased two bags of lukewarm
peanuts
with the dime which her mama had generously provided (despite courte-
ous protestations)
and offering Miss Gay one (which she politely refused) set out gaily for
the hyenas
suppressing my frank qualms in deference to her not inobvious perturba-
tions

unhappily, the denizens of the zoo were that day inclined to be uncouthly
erotic
more particularly the primates--from which with dignity square feet
turned abruptly Miss Gay away:
"on the whole" (if you will permit a metaphor savouring slightly of the
demotic)
Miss Gay had nothing to say to the animals and the animals had nothing
to say to Miss Gay

during our return voyage, my pensive companion dimly remarked some-
thing about "stuffed
fauna" being "very interesting" . . . we also discussed the possibility of
rain. . .

E distant proximity to a Y.W.C.A. she suddenly luffed
--thanking me; and (stating that she hoped we might "meet again
sometime") vanished, gunwale awash. I thereupon loosened my collar
and dove for the nearest I; surreptitiously cogitating
the dictum of a New England sculptor (well on in life) re the Helen Moller
dancers, whom he considered "elevating--that is, if dancing CAN be ele-
vating"

Miss (believe it or) Gay is a certain Young Woman unacquainted with the
libido
and pursuing a course of instruction at Radcliffe College, Cambridge, Mass.
I try if you are a gentleman not to sense something un poco putrido
when we contemplate her uneyes safely ensconced in thick glass

Edward Estlin Cummings