

Introduction / About the Cover

Michael Webster

Our cover shows a studio portrait photo of S. Foster Damon (1893-1971) and E. E. Cummings, taken probably in 1914. Though only a year and a half older than Cummings, Damon was very much a mentor to the poet. Damon introduced Cummings to much that was new in the arts, lending him copies of *Poetry* magazine and taking him to see the Boston version of the Armory Show in 1913. Much later, Cummings said to Charles Norman: “Practically everything I know about painting and poetry came to me though Damon” (38). Damon was interested in all that was modern in the arts, and wrote poetry as well. (With Cummings and Dos Passos, Damon was among the group published in *Eight Harvard Poets*.) He became a scholar of William Blake, teaching for many years at Brown University. Cummings owned two of Damon’s books: *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols* (1924) and a pamphlet on James Joyce’s *Ulysses* called *The Odyssey in Dublin* (1929). Explaining the architecture of his books to Francis Steegmuller in 1959, Cummings quoted from Damon’s book on Blake, saying that the seasonal metaphors of his “booksofpoems” refer to what Damon called “the secret which every mystic tries to tell” (*Letters* 261).

Just as Cummings read criticism to explain art and his selves to himself and others, so, too, did Norman Friedman discover in Cummings’ poems his own self-finding. (The circle is completed when we realize that Cummings also owned a copy of Norman’s *E. E. Cummings, the Art of His Poetry*.) In this issue in which we remember Norman, we reprint one of his articles from the old series of *Spring*, “The Influence of Cummings on My Poetry or My Enormous Room,” written on the occasion of the publication of Norman’s first book of poems, *The Magic Badge* (1984). While this essay does briefly discuss the influence of Cummings’ poetry on Norman’s own, it quickly turns to Cummings’ influence on Norman’s psychological struggle to become a fully integrated self, which is seen in counterpoint and parallel to Cummings’ similar struggles. Norman writes: “He gave me permission to be my self, and I ran away with the bit.”

In our section remembering Norman Friedman, we also reprint his poem, “Time, the Heartless Runner,” as well as offering tributes to Norman and a bibliography of his writings on Cummings, education, fiction studies,

literary theory, Gestalt psychology, as well as Victorian, modernist, and contemporary poetry. Following the bibliography are memorials to five dedicated Cummings Society members who were influenced by Cummings in their lives as musicians, poets, and translators. They are: Stephen Scotti (1935-2013), Dinu Pătulea (1947-2013), T. P. Perrin (1934-2014), Bob Grumman (1941-2015), and Christopher Mulrooney (1956-2015). This section is capped off by poems by Zelda Friedman, Bob Grumman, and Christopher Mulrooney.

In 1997, *Spring* published “Our Trip to Silver Lake,” a brief account (with many good photos) of the Cummings Society’s 1996 trip to Cummings’ summer home, Joy Farm. In this issue, the article “Silver Lake Revisited” chronicles a return visit nineteen years later by an entirely new group of Cummings society members. This time, besides visiting Joy Farm, we were able to stroll around the outside of the impressive three story structure that is the Cummings cottage on Silver Lake, as well as visiting the Madison Historical Society, Ruth Shackford’s house, old Mr. Lyman’s barn, and Sam Ward’s house. An attempt to reach the end of Hurricane Point was foiled by a mass of poison ivy that lined the path.

Our first section of academic papers explores the theme of Cummings’ visual representation of self. Max Owens’ “Falling into Spring: Transcendence, Being, and Ambivalent Typography in “l(a)” and *95 Poems*” shows how Cummings’ techniques of visual and linguistic fragmentation subvert rationality and structure, while at the same time invoking “the rational-temporal order [as] a very real, tangible, and forceful presence.” Examining a similar paradox in her article “‘well)here’s looking at ourselves’: Fragmented Visual Identity in the Poetry of E. E. Cummings,” Jennifer N. Kurdyla argues that “the fragmentary nature” of Cummings’ poetry “provides a model for experiential wholeness . . . the formula for creating and understanding the self.” In “The ‘small eye poet’ from Imagism to ‘not numerable whom’,” Michael Webster shows how Cummings’ poetry “merges the visual and verbal eye and i to depict the (e)mergence and realization of a multiple self at one with the natural, actual world.” Jacques Demarcq’s afterword to his translation of *I x I*, “‘beauty is more now than dying’s when’,” continues the theme of Cummings’ selves, outlining in great detail the ways in which *I x I* represents “the multiplied individualism of Cummings.”

The strikingly diverse group of poems that follows shows that Cummings’ influence was (and is) “multiplied.” Carl Boon writes of love and

parentheses; Michael Harmon gives us a love poem; Jim Asher offers clever parodies; Noel Sloboda reimagines “The Drowning of Rex” (Cummings’ childhood pet); Gerald Locklin presents sardonic views of the pastoral and the damned; E. M. Schorb speaks of a “Flower Cure” for love; Abriana Jetté reminds us that “Persephone Is a Poet”; George Held finds himself musing on human extinction; and Guy R. Beining dreams of Mr. Death, and rewords the letters in “Cummings” (as well as the pixels of a photo of some scholars on a porch).

Two articles grouped under the rubric “Cummings and Others” explore some of the poet’s connections to writers not usually associated with him—Etienne Terblanche’s “‘The plum survives its poems:’ Meditative Space in the Poetry of E. E. Cummings and Wallace Stevens” and Rai Peterson’s “*The Young and Evil*: Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler, E. E. Cummings’ Sassy Gay Friends.” We round out the issue with three sections, “Readings,” “Reviews,” and “News, Notes, & Correspondence.” The “Readings” section features five mini-essays on a specific aspect of Cummings’ poetry or painting, ending with a historical investigation of Cummings’ activities 100 years ago. Aaron Moe reads “! // o(rounD)moon, how” (CP 722) in thirteen ways, while Gillian Huang-Tiller discovers that the famous Cambridge ladies repress not only their sexual natures, but a scarlet letter as well. Michael Webster explores the implications of Cummings’ cryptic note on the ampersand; David Sider finds a hidden silent classical allusion in the title of Cummings’ 1931 art book *CIOPW*, and Steven Katz offers an art historical reading of one of Cummings’ more startling portraits of his second wife Anne Barton Cummings. The “Readings” section ends with a new installment of “Cummings Centennials,” detailing the poet’s activities in 1914-1915 as he neared the end of his Harvard career and prepared for his life as a writer.

The four reviews that follow are also quite varied. Gillian Huang-Tiller shows how Susan Cheever’s *E. E. Cummings: A Life* aims at a popular audience, while trying (and largely failing) to present a cultural biography of Cummings’ New England and modernist milieu. Sarah Bay-Cheng’s review of *The Theatre of E. E. Cummings* considers the plays (and one ballet) as examples of “high lowbrow” drama, while making a case that Cummings’ theatre works are “not only essential to American modernism, but also rightfully place him among the most exciting American playwrights today.” Alison Rosenblitt reviews *The Tortured Life of Scofield Thayer*, James Dempsey’s biography of the Cummings mentor who was

possibly even more influential in the poet's development than S. Foster Damon. We round out our review section with Etienne Terblanche's consideration of Aaron Moe's *Zoopoetics: Animals and the Making of Poetry*.

Our "News, Notes, & Correspondence" section includes the usual news from poets and scholars, as well as news of Cummings' artworks and announcements of two new web presences, the *EEC Society Blog* and the Cummings listserv. A new edition of the *Complete Poems* is announced and new articles on Marion Morehouse and Joe Gould are discussed, along with John Ordeman's bequest of Cummings memorabilia and ephemera.

This issue ends with a coda from Norman Friedman, a poem that Zelda found among his papers after his death: "That Ancient Father."

— *Grand Valley State University, Allendale, Michigan*

Works Cited

- Cummings, E. E. *Selected Letters of E. E. Cummings*. Ed. F.W. Dupee and George Stade. New York: HBJ, 1969.
- Damon, S. Foster. "The Odyssey in Dublin." *The Hound & Horn* 3.1 (Fall 1929): 7-44. Rpt. as *The Odyssey in Dublin*. Cambridge: [*Hound & Horn*], 1929. Offprint.
- . *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1924.
- Friedman, Norman, and David V. Forrest. "Our Trip to Silver Lake." *Spring: The Journal of the E. E. Cummings Society* 6 (1997): 9-17. Print and Web.