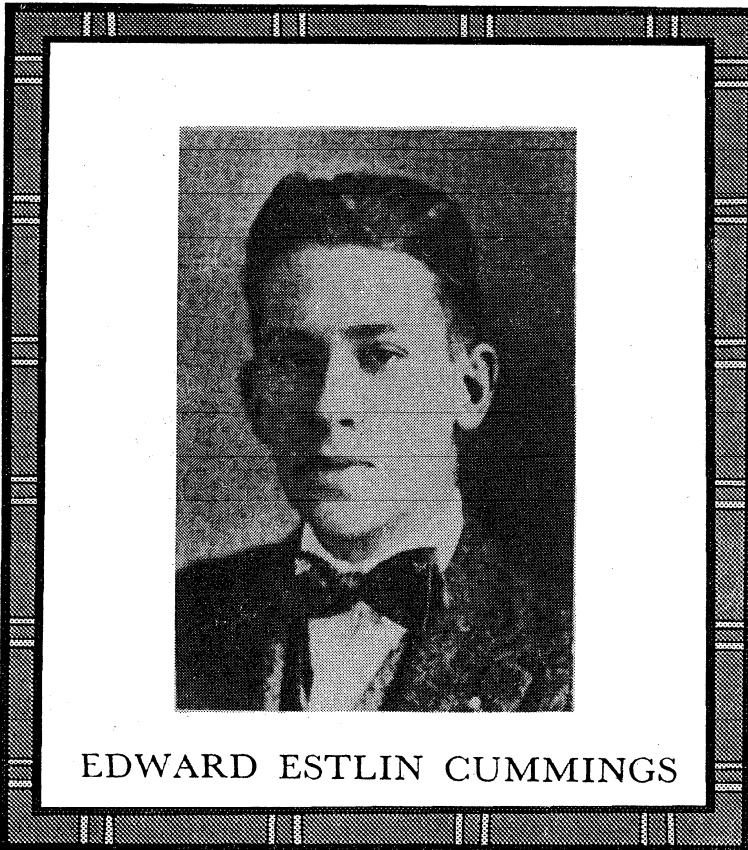


# SPRING

The Journal of The  
E.E. Cummings Society



New Series Number 3 : \$15

Centennial Issue

## SPRING

The Journal of the E. E. Cummings Society

New Series Number 3

October 1994

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Layout and typeset by Miriam McDade.

Printed and bound by Jiffy Jenie Printing Center, Centereach, Long Island.

Published annually: Subscriptions \$15, \$10 for students, \$20 for Libraries.

Distributor to Bookstores: Bernard DeBoer, Inc., 113 E. Centre Street,  
Nutley, NJ 07110, (201) 667-9300

**THE NEW YORKER, KRAZY KAT, CUMMINGS,  
AND JOHN UPDIKE**

1) In the June 21, 1993 issue of *The New Yorker*, page 6, appears a cartoon by Mort Gerberg picturing two businessmen carrying briefcases in a "Krazy Kat" landscape, with the nation's capitol in the background, watching Ignatz Mouse bouncing the customary brick off of Krazy's head, and they're saying, "No matter who's in office, the political lanscape stays the same." We cherish, of course, Cummings' essay on "Krazy Kat," and we plan in some future issue to do a piece on George Herriman and his classic strip.

2) In the January 17, 1994 issue appeared a story by Allegra Goodman, "Sarah," pages 74-80, about a creative-writing teacher and her class, where Cummings is mentioned in relation to his use of the lower case.

3) In the February 21, 1994 issue is a story by Updike, "Grandparenting," pages 92-97, in which there is substantial mention of Cummings. We believe it is of sufficient interest to reproduce the relevant portions here.

The situation involves a divorced couple, Richard and Joan, going to the hospital on the occasion of their grown daughter's having a baby. Each has been re-married for some time to someone else, and their meeting at this time is somewhat awkward. She reassures him that their son-in-law is being very helpful to their daughter, and she says:

"He brought her favorite book of poems, E. E. Cummings, to read to her as a distraction if she needs it."

"How do you read E. E. Cummings, aloud? All those staggered letters and open spaces."

"We heard him himself do it, don't you remember? The year he gave the Norton Lectures."

Cummings had been a small, quite bald man in a tuxedo, very precise in manner, reading everything—Wordsworth, Dante, his own prose and poetry—in a fluting voice that never faltered or slipped, up there on the cavernous stage of Sanders Theatre. Richard and Joan

"Grandparenting" reprinted by permission: © 1994 John Updike. Originally in *The New Yorker*.

had stood together in line in the Cambridge winter to get into the theatre, whose great Neo-Gothic space was murmurous and steaming with student excitement. For an instant it seemed that now he and this plump elderly woman beside him were like a pair of worn binoculars focussed on that animated bright-headed homunculus lodged deep in the transparent mass of lost time. He was jointly and privately theirs, fluting Wordsworth's "Immortality" Ode, stanza after stanza, while the student audience around them grew restless, waddled in place with hundreds of overcoats.

Later, after she's been to see their daughter and he went to the cafeteria for a minute, she returns to the waiting room and says to him:

"Where *were* you? Judy's pace has picked up and she's gone into the labor room." His former wife's cheeks bore a hectic, spotty flush; with her wiggly gray hair and waistless figure she was looking like one of those art-loving Cambridge Ladies Cummings had written about and who had showed up at his reading, decades ago, among the hot-bodied undergraduates.

One assumes that the story takes place in the present, and, since the Norton Lectures occurred during 1952-1953, we can see that the memory goes back 40 years or more and represents, via their shared experience of Cummings at that time, an aspect of their broken relationship which has not been entirely lost. And it is especially significant that Cummings remains their daughter's favorite poet, even now in her labor.

For those of you who may be interested in the story as a whole, we recommend the relevant issue of *The New Yorker* to you, but we will say that it involves a serio-comic scene between the two husbands of the new grandmother, another more moving scene between father and daughter, and concludes with this unbearably beautiful moment when the nurse offers the newborn babe to the grandfather to hold. Richard is talking with his post-partum daughter:

Richard laughed. "It's going to be hard to keep up with your mother, in the grandparenting business."

"Yeah. You should see *her* hold the baby. *She* knew which end was up."

To him, too, it seemed clear, when a nurse brought his grandson to the window, that this reddish grapefruit, with its frowning, closed eyes and its few licks of silky hair, pale like its father's, was a human head, and that the tiny lavender appendages on the other, unswaddled end were toes. "Want to hold him?" the nurse, who was young and black, asked him through the glass.

"Do I dare?"

"You're the grandpap, aren't you? Grandpaps are special people around here."

And the child's miniature body did adhere to his chest and arms, though more weakly than the infants he had presumed to call his own. Nobody belongs to us, except in memory.



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From the program cover of  
The Chicago Cummings Centennial Festival