

## The Enormous Room: A Dada of One's Own

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“Not real ; doll. Actual” (*EIMI* 397)

During World War I, a disparate group of international refugees and outsiders, some of them probably deserters, are gathered in large room. Almost all of them are frustrated with the madness and killing of war and alienated from social authority, propriety, regimentation, bourgeois jingoism, and the hypocritical, pompous discourse of officialdom. They defy authority by singing nonsense songs, playing childish games, exalting the primal and the “primitive,” and reviling the architects of the war in terms both nonsensical and natural. Some of them draw and some make abstract, biomorphic assemblages of colored planes out of whatever material is at hand. These words might well describe the activities of the Zurich dadaists at the Cabaret Voltaire in 1916, but they could also describe the activities of some occupants of the Enormous Room in 1917.

Of course, there were many differences in the two situations. The dadaists were a self-conscious group (and later a “movement”) of intellectuals disgusted with the art and society of their time, while the inmates of the Enormous Room were forcibly incarcerated, and most did not consciously engage in artistic and social experimentation. In the relative safety and freedom of neutral Switzerland the dadaists were able to launch a very public and noisy campaign of provocation and self-promotion, whereas the prisoners of the Enormous Room could not engage in propaganda campaigns, even if they had been interested in them, which they were not. While the Zurich dadaists were all “educated” artists striving to access a primitive dada individualism, many in the Enormous Room (especially the characters Cummings calls the Delectable Mountains) were natural artists and individuals, already dadaist masters and adepts without knowing it. In addition, the more consciously artistic dadaist experiments released “demonic” energies that at least one of them, Hugo Ball, found troubling (cf. *Flight* 60, 73-75). Cummings for the most part, locates the demonic outside the artist characters in the book, placing it instead in the coercion exercised by the French government and the Directeur of the internment camp.

Since “dadaism” is a complex phenomenon, for the purposes of

this paper I will limit my discussion to the Zurich dada of the Cabaret Voltaire of 1916. In addition, I will not investigate possible links between Cummings and dadaism, even though he was friendly with at least one genuine dadaist (Aragon) and refers to the movement at least twice in his writings.<sup>1</sup> Rather than an influence, dada is better understood as an analogue to Cummings' experience and aesthetic. As John Elderfield wrote, the dadaists' "ambitions were not unique in [their] generation: a wave of irrational feeling and concern for wholeness had swept Europe in reaction to nineteenth-century scientism and materialism, and was intensified by World War I" (xxvi). To this I would add that in dada, as well as in certain forms of cubism and symbolism, this irrationalism and search for wholeness is exemplified by an interest in puppets, dolls, and masks. This went along with the desire to experience a renewal of childlike openness, to appropriate "primitive," folk, and popular cultures, and to create various abstract and non-realistic forms of art and performance. Before going to the front in WW I, Cummings had seen two such avant-garde performances in the same evening at the *Ballets Russes*.

Though he was passionately interested in all forms of the new modernist art, in the fall of 1917, when he was incarcerated in the Enormous Room, it is unlikely that E. E. Cummings had ever heard of the term "dadaism."<sup>2</sup> As the dada movement was forming in Zurich, Switzerland in 1916, Cummings was finishing his studies at Harvard and later living at home in Cambridge, MA. In January 1917, he moved to New York City, and in April, like many young American intellectuals, he volunteered as an ambulance driver, soon embarking for France. On the ship over Cummings met William Slater Brown, another ambulance corps recruit and fellow-refugee from stuffy New England. Through a series of misadventures, the two became separated from their unit and thus spent 5 weeks (from May 8 to June 12) immersed in the culture of wartime Paris. Richard S. Kennedy's biography of the poet tells us that the two new friends attended Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes* where they "saw Stravinsky's *Petrouchka* more than once." On May 18, at the end of a bill that featured *Petrushka* and two other ballets, "they saw the premiere of Erik Satie's *Parade* with Cubist sets by Picasso. When the audience booed Satie's ballet, Cummings got angry and shouted abuse at the crowd" (Kennedy 140).<sup>3</sup> Though as an American and a devotee of the circus and burlesque theatres, Cummings was well-prepared to appreciate the high-low fusion of *Parade*, it is the symbolist *Petrushka* that is mentioned three times in *The Enormous Room* (18, 20, 227), not the

cubist ballet. While the failure of the performers of *Parade* (a Chinese conjurer, an American girl, and two acrobats) to attract an audience may remind readers of the Delectable Mountains, whose numerous virtues are disregarded and mocked by society at large, the cubist ballet presents far fewer parallels to the situation in the Enormous Room than its symbolist predecessor *Petrushka*. It is as if the people and events in the Enormous Room present us with the “interior spectacle” that the audience for *Parade* never sees. Though Cummings refers to cubism only once in *The Enormous Room*, when he describes a print depicting Robinson Crusoe as featuring a “somewhat cubist wilderness” (17), cubism may well have provided a model for some of the distancing and defamiliarizing techniques of the verbal portraits of inmates presented in the book.

Of all the avant-garde techniques, Cummings seems to have been impressed most by what Guillaume Apollinaire in his introduction to *Parade* called “a kind of super-realism” [*sur-réalisme*]” (quoted in Rothchild 267, Steegmuller 513)—this Cummings called the “actual” (as opposed to the real). We shall see how Cummings’ concept of a non-linear, timeless actuality corresponds with Dadaist notions of expressing direct “primitive” emotion in art, while also reflecting symbolist ideas of art as magic, bringing a doll or puppet to life. Dada and other wartime forms of avant-garde art-making illuminate Cummings’ art in other ways as well. In particular, they help us understand the equivocal and paradoxical aesthetic theory that Cummings exemplifies and outlines in *The Enormous Room*. Like his book, Cummings’ theory is both serious and playful, simultaneously for and against art, for and against representation, seeing art as both alive and a thing made, as manipulative puppetry and magical invention, as timebound form and timeless actual emotion.

In some ways, the two ballets that Cummings saw in Paris present opposite themes: in *Petrushka*, a magician brings three puppets to life (art becomes a living being); in *Parade*, three variety show performers attempt to entice an audience into the main show, the *spectacle intérieur* (art as life selling a hidden art, or a lively but low art enlivens a moribund high art). Both adapt folk and popular art to the high art of ballet. While Cummings ranked both *Parade* and *Petrushka* very high among modern “vital musical gestures” (Kennedy 179; Antretter 186), he chose *Petrushka* as one of the “mythic” models for *The Enormous Room*, in part because its theme of the imprisonment of nearly-human puppets resonated so well with his own experience of incarceration. In the ballet, a magician brings three puppets

to life before an admiring crowd of fairgoers. Subsequent acts show the puppets held captive in their rooms (or cells). The puppet Petrushka falls in love with the Ballerina puppet, but his affection ends unhappily when he is killed by his rival the Moor. At the end of the ballet, Petrushka's ghost appears to curse the evil Magician. Though *Petrushka* is by no means a dadaist work, the ballet offered a model for Cummings' developing aesthetic of artworks as the alive expression of individual, primal feeling, an aesthetic that constitutes Cummings' own personal dada.

In *The Enormous Room* Cummings' education in this aesthetic begins with arrest and incarceration: the narrative begins shortly before B and C (as Brown and Cummings are called in the book) are arrested for espionage.<sup>4</sup> After leaving "the putrescent banalities of an official non-existence" in the ambulance corps, C now experiences a "thrilling joy" to be "going somewhere and nowhere . . . into a high and clear adventure" (6). He is "excited and proud" to be called a criminal—"Well,well,thank God that settled one question for good and all" (7). In his first night in a holding cell he feels an "uncontrollable joy . . . after three months of humiliation,of being bossed and herded and bullied and insulted. I was myself and my own master" (17). This reaction to being arrested and imprisoned has stuck some as rather juvenile, but it would be closer to the mark to say that it exhibits an instinctive individualism or dadaism. During the performances at the Cabaret Voltaire, Hugo Ball wrote in his dada diary:

Our cabaret is a gesture. Every word that is spoken and sung here says at least this one thing: that this humiliating age has not succeeded in winning our respect. What could be respectable and impressive about it? Its cannons? Our big drum drowns them. Its idealism? That has long been a laughingstock, in its popular and its academic edition. The grandiose slaughters and cannibalistic exploits? Our spontaneous foolishness and our enthusiasm for illusion will destroy them. (61; entry for 14 April 1916)

Indeed, *The Enormous Room* is filled with examples of art-making and imaginative "primitive" nonsense-displays as gestures of joy, suffering, and defiance. In his first holding cell he whistles tunes from *Petrushka* (18, 20), appreciates the primitive drawings on the cell walls (17-18), and vows to make some of his own; in his second cell, Cummings loudly and defiantly sings popular tunes (27). On the train to his second cell, he draws portraits of his captors in order to distract them from stealing a fellow prisoner's

waterproof blanket cover (24-25). Though the state tries to humiliate and erase them, the selves in the book respond with art-making and nonsense.

As C continues his journey, the artworks he encounters become increasingly less static and more living, gestural, and actual. On his night journey to La Ferté-Macé, C stumbles upon a work of art that is described as if it were another alive human being: "I half-straightened my no longer obedient body;and jumped: face to face with a little wooden man hanging all by itself in a grove of low trees" (38). This encounter with the wooden man, or roadside crucifix (called a *calvaire* in France), has been much discussed, but I want to emphasize two aspects here. First, Cummings describes the crucifix not as a devotional object, but as an alive being that is nevertheless a doll-like and "complete" work of art. As an alive being, the body is paradoxically agonized, yet playful: it is "clumsy with pain", yet has "funny writhing toes." As an artwork, it is a primitive aesthetic success: "There was in this complete silent doll a gruesome truth of instinct,a success of uncanny poignancy,an unearthly ferocity of rectangular emotion." Cummings' reaction to the primitive emotion and angular artistry of the crucifix reminds readers of his earlier description of a woodcut depicting Crusoe's astonishment before Friday's footprint—something human and actual at last, in a "somewhat cubist wilderness" (17). The crucifix is an aesthetic version of Crusoe's human footprint. Second, this crucifix, or "man," is described as if he were a unique individual whom C is struggling to recognize:

Who was this wooden man? Like a sharp black mechanical cry in the spongy organism of gloom stood the coarse and sudden sculpture of his torment;the big mouth of night carefully spurted the angular actual language of his martyred body. I had seen him before in the dream of some mediaeval saint,with a thief sagging at either side,surrounded by crisp angels. Tonight he was alone;save for myself,and the moon's minute flower pushing between slabs of fractured cloud.

We might say that in his fatigue, C has temporarily lost all memory of any social or religious associations inherent in the crucifix. But certainly C the minister's son knows who this wooden man is meant to represent. C's question serves to convey the shocking actuality and immediacy of this experience, which is representative of his coming initiation into the mysteries of the Enormous Room. There, suffering will be transformed into art; art will be embodied in living personalities; these personalities will be

“mutilated” (192, 228, 230), yet will somehow flourish; and the most advanced avant-garde art will be equated with a childlike feeling purged of the handicaps of education and cultural preconceptions. In addition, the wooden man prefigures how suffering will create a doll-like individuality that simultaneously submits “to an amputation of the world” (83), and yet ultimately triumphs against the efforts of the state to humiliate and extirpate the self. This wooden artwork, a “complete silent doll” (38), prefigures characters like the “old doll” (85) called *The Schoolmaster*, or the “terrible doll” (103) known as the *Machine-Fixer*, or even the “deadly doll-like hands” (54) of *Ree-shar the bather*.

The wooden man warns C that the freedom and self-possession he felt in his initial captivity will be tested by a more severe spiritual, artistic, and human captivity adventure in the *Enormous Room*. The government will attempt to reduce his self to degree zero, and in some ways it will succeed. As several commentators have pointed out, C’s journey to *La Ferté-Macé* is replete with examples of officials misconstruing or erasing C’s previous identity, and of the larger world of officialdom seeking to condemn human beings to various forms of non-existence. The state forbids hours, abolishes time, and with little justification, imprisons those it labels mutineers, foreigners, misfits, criminals, traitors, or those who overstayed their leave by missing a non-existent train (29, 34). C’s response is a sardonic, dadaist laughter—“Everything was blague” (34) he writes. Everything was a joke.

When he arrives at the *Enormous Room*, time really does stop. The only punctuations of “kinetic” actuality into the world of “otherwise merely real Nonexistence” (129) are the arrivals and departures of inmates, and the moments of being shared with alive individuals, of whom the *Delectable Mountains* are the most outstanding examples. Because the “temporal dimension” of prison is “always unchanging,” Cummings says that he will describe his characters “as individualities distinct from Time itself.” This timelessness “is like a vast grey box in which are laid helter-skelter a great many toys” (82). To “do justice to timelessness,” the narrator tells us, he “shall . . . lift from their grey box at random certain . . . more or less astonishing toys . . . whose colours and shapes and textures are part of the actual Present” (83). Both children and prisoners exist in the “actual Present” because both are amputated from the so-called real “world” (83). Like a child in a timeless world of play, Cummings’ narrator picks charac-

ters (his toys) out of their box and with his memory and imagination, animates each of them into word-portraits.

This method presents odd parallels and contrasts with the plot of the ballet *Petrushka*. In the ballet, a demonic Magician animates (or brings to life) three puppets, a Ballerina, a Moor, and the Pierrot-like figure of *Petrushka*. By looking at Alexandre Benois' drawings for the original set, as well as the original production photographs, we can see that the puppets first appear in the ballet as captives in a box (the fairground stage), which in turn is framed on three sides by box-like blue buildings connected with a kind of false proscenium arch. In the second scene of the ballet, *Petrushka* dashes from wall to wall of his room or cell, frightened by the devils painted on his double doors and, above all, by a portrait of his jailer, the Magician. Though *Petrushka* is powerless to break out of his cell, the walls painted with a crescent moon and stars and the ceiling of clouds suggest a limitless freedom. Cummings develops these motifs in complex ways in *The Enormous Room*. For example, he regards the new moon as one of his friends in his first cell (20-21), but when he arrives late at night in La Ferté-Macé, the moon partakes of the "unique unreality" of the town, seeming "but a painting of a moon" (39). Cummings also comments on a portrait which depicts the Surveillant as a fencer with a certain "spirit and verve"—two qualities noticeably lacking in that official.

The figure in *The Enormous Room* closest to the Magician in *Petrushka* is clearly the Directeur, whom C names Apollyon, "a very definite fiend. . . . a Satan whose word is dreadful not because it is painstakingly unjust but because it is incomprehensibly omnipotent" (107). Like the Magician, the Directeur controls his puppets through fear, and like the Magician, who places the ballerina in *Petrushka*'s room, the Directeur attempts to use women to manipulate and control the men.

However, Cummings also alters, complicates, and inverts his model *Petrushka*. For example, the defiant prostitute Celina Tek is a complex inversion of *Petrushka*'s virginal ballerina-puppet. Cummings also transforms a colorful fairground stage into the "vast grey box" of the Enormous Room. But Cummings also inverts and alters the paradoxical symbolism of puppets who come alive and break free of the control of their diabolical master. In *The Enormous Room*, it is the human beings who are turned into puppets and dolls, not the other way around. In addition, it is not only the French government and the Directeur who control the dolls in

the detention camp, but the author as well: Cummings pulls them out of their box and re-animates them when he writes. Even so, some characters escape being turned into toys or dolls: none of the most alive individuals, the Delectable Mountains, are ever called “dolls” or referred to as “toylike.”<sup>5</sup> After the departure of B, even C becomes “at last, a doll” (232). And similar to the characters in *Petrushka*, Cummings’ doll-characters sometimes escape the Directeur’s control through defiant assertions of individuality and humanity. While they are described as “candidates for disintegration” (107) in a “machine of decomposition” (108), they remain delightfully defiant, though “mutilated” (192) individuals.

In other words, their actual Present defeats the Directeur’s future and past. For example, though the literally maimed “terrible doll” known as the Machine-Fixer is driven almost to madness by his indignation at the horrors of the Enormous Room, after watching the four incorrigible prostitutes’ heroic resistance to the machine of decomposition, he completely alters his excessively moralistic ideas about them (122-125). If the shock of repression does not turn one into a rabbit, mole, or hyena (100), it makes one into an actual doll, or a human being. For Cummings, then, a “doll” is double: both a reduced, decomposed self and a self that boldly and crazily asserts its own actuality. In addition, this actuality exists on two planes, in both life and art. These character-dolls are not merely prosaic dead reality, but what Cummings called moving alive “actuality.” As he wrote in *EIMI*: “Not real ; doll. Actual” (397). For Cummings, the merely real was a flat collection of facts, while what he called the Actual conveyed feeling and emotion, the now moments of life. *The Enormous Room*, then, is not a realist memoir—it is a book that attempts to portray an “actual Present” (83), not past reality. These dolls or toys can either be manipulated by the state or, much more benignly, the “truth of instinct” and the “unearthly ferocity” (38) of their emotions can be brought to life by the imagination of a creator. Like the wooden man, their suffering and joy can come alive as art, though not necessarily as realism.

The dadaist use of masks parallels and contrasts with Cummings’ paradoxical notion of the doll. The dada masks were double as well, since they decomposed and altered the personality; they demanded, Ball says, “a quite definite passionate gesture bordering on madness,” requiring “that their wearers start to move in a tragic-absurd dance” (64). Like “primitive” and childlike actions of the characters in *The Enormous Room*, Ball’s dance is both tragic and absurd. But this eclipse of normal personality produced

another that was “larger than life. The horror of our time, the paralyzing background of events, is made visible” (64). Cummings’ dolls differ from dadaist masks in that they prefer to express the “yes, yes” side of nonsense more than they do its horror. For example, who can forget Monsieur Auguste’s marvelously idiotic and joyful song of the quacking duck (85)?

However, the nonsense of *The Enormous Room* extends beyond the quacking duck to encompass a critique of accepted language usage and art making. C pointedly refrains from calling the human beings he prizes the most “dolls” or “toys.” It is as if the Delectable Mountains’ individuality was so powerful that it could not be bent and controlled into a doll-like non-existence. Each of these characters exhibits a profound indifference or inability to communicate in spoken and written language. The Wanderer cannot read (165); the Zulu speaks almost exclusively in nonsense monosyllables like “Mang” (139); Surplice is illiterate and “utterly ignorant” (188); and Jean le Nègre, who cannot write, famously “reads” the *Daily Mail* upside-down, speaks French while claiming to be English, and often vocalizes words mostly for their sounds, “more or less disdaining their meaning” (198-199). Each of them openly displays an un-self-conscious emotional vulnerability or mastery. The Wanderer weeps for his horse; the Zulu maintains an a Taoist equanimity in the face of provocation and violence (remember his Mandarin mustache); Surplice’s absurd” (188) religious intensity allows him to suffer and then to recover from daily humiliation as the local scapegoat; and Jean’s childlike emotions are always on display, even when he is depressed and shunned (207). Each of them is in some way “unknowable” (168, 171, 186) or has some connection to “mystery” (162, 176). No fewer than three of the four are compared to an exiled “king” (161, 189, 196, 209).

Despite difficulties with official languages, at least three of the Delectable Mountains display a profound, almost occult mastery of a non-verbal art. The Zulu tells the entire story of his arrest and journey to La Ferté-Macé not by words or sign language, but by an “innate and unlearnable control over all which one can only describe as the homogeneously tactile” (174). Surplice proves to be a musician who can play anything, even a harmonica that no one else can play. Jean is the master of *play* and nonsense, improvising childish games of army, telephone, and name repetition. Cummings writes: “he was never perfectly happy unless exercising his inexhaustible imagination” (205).

In many ways, this sort of primal and playful ur-communication resembles dadaist sound-poetry. Though Hugo Ball's sound poetry performances and intentions were much more serious than those of the Zulu and Jean, his desire to access a primal form of communication, free of "the language that journalism has abused and corrupted" (71), is clear: "We have loaded the word with strengths and energies that helped us rediscover the evangelical concept of the 'word' (logos) as a magical complex image" (68). Ball's performances were much more literary and self-conscious than the more natural and actually more dadaist communications of the Delectable Mountains. Both were religious in intent, however. As Ball points out in his description of his performance, sound poetry really stems from the primal words of sacred songs, which are often deliberately unintelligible and ritualized meditations, with their roots in magical and shamanistic practices (cf. Snyder 182-183).

The corruption of official discourse and the example of the Delectable Mountains spur C to develop a new aesthetic practice and theory. Towards the end of their stay in the Enormous Room, B and C assemble an abstract collage from leaves, cloth, "cigarette boxes chocolate-wrappers labels of various sorts and even postage stamps" (224). This activity puzzles even the remaining Delectables, the Zulu and Jean, but everyone helps them bring some color to the grey box. C calls it "a study of colour itself," but it is also one way for an educated person to imitate in another medium the Delectable Mountains' dadaist mastery of a non-verbal and irrational art of Feeling. The dadaist Hans Arp did almost the same thing, only he confined himself to one material per collage, usually paper or wood (for examples see "Tableau en papier" and "Forest," both 1916). Cummings notes that because of their "defunct ideals and ideas," the "Great American Public" could never appreciate the aesthetic of such a collage. But unlike C's friends at La Ferté, and like the dadaists and B and C, The Great American Public is handicapped by their education. According to C authentic art can only be created from "purely personal Feeling," and for those with an education, this means a "vast and painful process of Unthinking" (224), which sounds to me like an excellent description of what one might call the dada catharsis.

Dadaist texts hint at how a disgust with official discourse and art can lead to this process of cultivating an Unthinking direct natural feeling. Such an aesthetic theory is profoundly equivocal and paradoxical, since it advocates making a non-representational, instinctive, and even "primitive"

art that is still “complete” and whole like the wooden man. But when Cummings says that Art is that “minute bit of purely personal Feeling” that results from the “vast and painful process of Unthinking,” he is not that far from Hans Arp saying that “Dada ist der Urgrund aller Kunst” (*Unsern* 50). [In English: “Dada is the primal ground for all art” (Motherwell 223).] Cummings says that art begins in childish play, nonsense, and a primal sense of being or self that he called an IS. Cummings describes the Zulu like this:

There are certain things in which one is unable to believe for the simple reason that he never ceases to feel them. Things of this sort—things which are always inside us and in fact are us and which consequently will not be pushed off or away where we can begin thinking about them—are no longer things; they, and the us which they are, equals A Verb; an IS. The Zulu, then, I must perforce call an IS. (*Enormous Room* 168; quoted in *six* 63).

Art may end in a finished and complete whole, but it begins in a dada of one’s own.

Without the handicap of education, Cummings’ Delectable Mountains need no “Unthinking”—they are already masters, more dada than the real dadaists. They instruct C in the practice of IS, but the French government also helps C in his painful project of Unthinking. He thanks the Commission for giving him the opportunity “to see and hear and smell and touch the things which inhabited La Ferté-Macé, Orne, France.” This declaration is of course, double edged, both ironic and serious, in the manner of dada irony. C calls it “shov[ing] my shovel-shaped imagination under the refuse of their intellects” (219). After B leaves for the harsher environment of Précigné, C undergoes what he calls a “mental catastrophe” and suffers his own “mutilations” (230). The positive example of his illiterate friends and the negative pressure of the state turn him “at last,” into “a doll” (232). Having been reduced to his primal self, C watches the snow fall as if it were a new experience: “Snow was falling, gradually and wonderfully falling, silently falling through the thick soundless autumn” (232). Reduced to the beginnings of art, C begins a poem for the first time since he came to the Enormous Room: “a poem about the snow, a poem in French, beginning *Il tombe de la neige, Noël, Noël*” (232). Inspired by the snow, and the Garde Champêtre’s cry of “Noël!”, the poem is written in a new language to signify his new, more global, self. Much later, he wrote how Paris and the war affected him: “Now, finally and first, I was myself: a temporal citizen of

eternity; one with all human beings born and unborn” (*six* 53). We discover that Cummings’ concept of the doll is equivocal in at least one more way: human dolls may be actors in other’s creations, but when inspired by nature, they can create as well. C says that the snow “touched the soundless country of my mind as a child touches a toy it loves” (233).

Learning that he must go see the Directeur, and hearing a rumor that the Commission has decided to classify him as a suspect, C hurriedly cleans up for his interview (233). The Directeur is typically ferocious and menacing, but he indeed confirms that C may go to Oloron as a “suspect.” His mind still “disordered” (236), C tries to read Shakespeare, but he gives up. He wallows in “a perfect luxury of dirt, . . . protesting . . . against all that was neat and tidy and bigoted and solemn and founded upon the anguish of my fine friends” (236). The summit of C’s dadaist dirtiness occurs on December 21, the winter solstice—his disintegration and alienation is complete, soon to turn, however, into rebirth.

He is not prepared for the shock of his second interview with the Directeur, when he is informed that he is to be released and “report immediately to the American Embassy,Paris” (237). This time the Directeur’s demeanor is almost civilized, and Cummings registers C’s shock with a stream of consciousness interior monologue: “Who the devil is myself? Where in Hell am I? What is Paris—a place,a somewhere,a city,life,to live:infinite” (237). These questions should remind the reader of C’s first shocked response to the crucifix: “Who was this wooden man?” (38). A new self may experience and create life and art anew, like a doll, or a child, or a Delectable Mountain. Like the light of the sun, C slowly grows and renews, and at the turning of the year, he “turned into Edward E. Cummings, turned into what was dead and is now alive,I turned into a city,I turned into a dream” (238). Cummings tells the remainder of the story from inside C’s head, in a stream of consciousness. For the first and last time in the book, we see inside the consciousness of the narrator—or to put it another way, the narrator and C become one and the same at last. The doll is awakening into a human, a social being, someone called Edward E. Cummings, who nevertheless has learned the value of the primitive and childish. “No,it is not I who is saying goodbye. It is in fact somebody else,possibly myself” (238). Having been reduced to his primal self, C is now ready to go out into the world and practice a dada of his own.

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## Notes

1. For a much different view of Cummings as an American Dadaist, see Tashjian, *Skyscraper Primitives* (165-187).
2. Before he enlisted in the ambulance corps, Cummings visited the Armory show and had read Arthur Jerome Eddy's *Cubists and Post-Impressionism*, Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*, and the little magazine *Others* and *Blast II*. (See Kennedy 73-132.) An indication of the breadth of his early interest in avant-garde music, poetry, and painting may be seen in his 1915 Harvard commencement essay, "The New Art" (*Miscellany* 5-11).
3. Since Parade seems to have been presented for 11-12 days, May 18-29 (cf. Weiss 186), Cummings and Brown may have seen Parade more than once as well. The program at the Théâtre du Châtelet on May 18 was as follows: *Pètrouchka*, *Les Sylphides*, *Le Soleil de nuit*, *Parade* (Rothschild 30).
4. They were arrested for three reasons: 1) they were perceived as trouble-makers by their superior, an "oafish sergeant" (Kennedy 145); 2) Brown had written letters home about the low morale of the French troops; and 3) by associating with the *poilus*, both had learned of the recent mutinies in the French army.
5. In the Delectable Mountains chapters, the word "toy" is used only once (214), and the words "doll" and "nonexistence" are not used at all.

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