

# Spring: The Journal of the E. E. Cummings Society

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## About the Cover / Introduction

Michael Webster

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## About the Cover / Introduction

Michael Webster

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This issue of *Spring* has been delayed for many reasons, not the least of which is that the editor has been preoccupied with his own reading and writing about Cummings and with his teaching duties at Grand Valley State University, which were increased during the pandemic. Paradoxically, since editing requires a great deal of time sitting alone with a computer and its electronic files, the coronavirus pandemic became the spur to finish this issue of *Spring*.

The photo on the cover was taken in 1939 by James Angleton, who, with his fellow Yale undergraduate Reed Whittemore, was co-editor of *Furioso*, a little magazine that published poems by (among others) William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound, and E. E. Cummings. Richard S. Kennedy writes that Cummings sent them “flotsam and jetsam” for the first issue in 1939, “and continued to contribute up to 1943” (*Dreams* 396). Kennedy further notes that Angleton visited Cummings at Patchin Place where the photo was taken.

In the photo, the 44 year-old Cummings leans on the mantel of the fireplace. Behind his forearm we see one of his portraits of Marion, and by his elbow are his pipe and one of his elephant totems. Two roses of unknown color bend towards the portrait of Marion. Clearly, the roses, elephant, pipe, and painting are meant to reflect Cummings’ personality and preoccupations, including his love for nature, art, and Marion.

This issue of *Spring* begins with two articles by Richard Cureton, one on par rhyme in the “Sonnets—Realities” section of *Tulips & Chimneys*, and the other on psychological genres in Cummings’ poetry. Cureton expands the usual definition of par rhyme as “varying vowels between repeated consonants (e.g., *slip-sloop*),” to include “varying consonants around repeating vowels (e.g., *hope-note*)” and strings of par rhymes featuring “consonants that are not shared, either in the syllabic onset (*cellar-squalor*) or syllabic coda (*souls-soil*), or both (*schools-smell*).” In his second article, Cureton charts where the poems in *Tulips & Chimneys* fall within the several psychological genres that occur through various combinations of the four temporal poetic modes of his theory of temporal poetics. Millie Kidd’s article “Cummings and Sound” makes a connection between the visual and verbal aspects of Cummings’ poems, arguing that “the close attentive reading demanded by Cummings’ visually challenging texts enhances the faculty of hearing until the text speaks itself.” After an interlude offered by poems by Zelda Friedman, Gillian Huang-Tiler and Michael Casey, the next two essays explore the challenges of reading the avant-

garde Cummings: Rubén Abella examines the “Dadaist Anti-Fiction” of Cummings’ *EIMI* and of that book without a title that we call [*No Title*], while Gillian Huang-Tiller analyzes the complexities of what critic R. P. Blackmur slightly referred to as Cummings’ “baby-talk.”

After another section of poems by poets both well-known and new to *Spring* subscribers, we present a short selection from Richard Kostelanetz’s “Kosti’s Ramón,” translations and imitations of the *greguerías*, or aphorisms, of Cummings’ near-contemporary, Spanish writer Ramón Gómez de la Serna (1888-1963). Two quite different (and hitherto unpublished) essays by Cummings himself follow. The first is an account of a 1926 boxing match that defends the integrity and “nobility” of African American boxer Harry Wills (1889–1958), who was fighting contender Jack Sharkey in an effort to gain a title bout with the then-reigning heavyweight champion, Jack Dempsey. The second Cummings contribution, an essay on classic Chinese and Japanese poetry titled “The Poetry of Silence,” was written during the poet’s final undergraduate semester at Harvard (1915). This essay is followed by your editor’s “Afterword,” which explores how Cummings’ encounter with East Asian poetry compares to that of his fellow modernist Ezra Pound. The second part of the afterword examines a few of the reverberations of this essay in the poet’s later career.

Next, reviewers Etienne Terblanche, Taimi Olsen, and Eva Gómez-Jiménez consider, respectively, the merits of three relatively new books of interest to Cummings scholars and readers: J. Alison Rosenblitt’s, *E. E. Cummings’ Modernism and the Classics: Each Imperishable Stanza* (2016), Michael Tisserand’s *Krazy: George Herriman, a Life in Black and White* (2016), and Zénó Vernyik’s *Cities of Saviors. Urban Space in E. E. Cummings’ Complete Poems, 1904-1962 and Peter Ackroyd’s Hawksmoor* (2015). This long-delayed issue concludes with the “News, Notes & Correspondence” section, which is much more lengthy than usual because, well, news accumulates over the years. Highlights of this section include reports on the new Norton Critical Edition, *E. E. Cummings: Selected Works*, on an electronic version of *Complete Poems* that gives the words, but not the visual spacing of the originals, and on proposed or actual online Cummings projects, among them an online concordance to the *Complete Poems*, a “Cummings Archive” reproducing selected poem drafts, and the “E. E. Cummings Free Poetry Archive,” which reproduces the poems as they enter the public domain. Newspaper publications of two early (circa 1914) Cummings poems are discussed, and translations of Cummings into Korean, Bulgarian, French, Portuguese, Braille, and Spanish are noted.

The reader of the online edition of “News, Notes & Correspondence” will notice that quite a few links have been created throughout the text of

this section and especially among the bibliographic entries at the end. These links reflect the laudable fact that quite a bit of writing and scholarship about Cummings is now freely available online.

Among the links are two that point to new musical settings of Cummings' poems, another to the "Joy Farm Writer's Retreat," and a third to the Cummings articles at Brain Pickings.org. Also linked: a Maxwell Bodenheim poem (circa 1937) criticizing Cummings, and a link to a PDF copy of the pamphlet *him AND the CRITICS: a collection of opinions on e. e. cummings' play at the provincetown playhouse* (1928).

Other news in this section includes a note about a review of the opening night of the *Him*, written by R. Dana Skinner, a former Harvard classmate of Cummings. (This review was not reprinted in *him AND the CRITICS*—or in future compilations—probably because it appeared in a venue that is often left out of scholarly searches for literary reviews, *The Wall Street Journal*.) Another note points the reader to Nelson Neal's pioneering work on African American actor, singer, dancer, and choreographer Hemsley Winfield, who played four roles in the first production of *Him*. The section concludes with news of the work of scholars, translators, and poets, as well as the usual list of "Books and Publications by Society Members and Others," along with a list of recent conference presentations by E. E. Cummings Society members.

That's it—except for one last reminder:

"Always the beautiful answer who asks a more beautiful question"

—E. E. Cummings