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Introduction

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Introduction

Michael Webster

We begin this issue with thoughts on our visit to 104 Irving Street and beyond—a short stroll to Norton’s Woods and a long journey to the wilds of New Hampshire, represented by Aaron Moe’s “Thoughts on Norton’s Woods” and Etienne Terblanche’s “Difference and Similarity at Mt. Chocorua: Notes on a Brief Odyssey.”

Our first section considers a wide range of Cummings’ contacts, influences, and/or parallels with five other “makers”: Edmund Spenser, S. A. Jacobs, Luciano Berio, John L. Sweeney, and Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. Now in his ninth decade, William Blissett is emeritus professor at the University of Toronto and a distinguished scholar of Edmund Spenser and T. S. Eliot. As a young scholar in 1954 he sent out letters to a number of modernist poets, “asking them if they still read and admired Spenser.” Sixty years later, we are lucky at *Spring* to read Blissett’s analysis of the letter he received from Cummings in response to his question. Walker Rumble is a typesetter and printer who has been interested for a long time in S. A. Jacobs’ contribution to twentieth century printing and book design, so it was inevitable that one day he would consider Jacobs’ role as personal typesetter to E. E. Cummings. In “The Persian Typesetter,” Rumble shows how valuable Jacobs was to Cummings, and examines how difficult it was to translate Cummings’ poems from typewriter language into “linotype-ese.” Cummings’ shorter and more formal relations with Luciano Berio were of a different sort. Charles Stratford’s article “‘Stinging’ in Circles” shows how Berio translated three of Cummings’ visual poems into music for soprano and percussion. Kevin Kiely’s “Cummings, Sweeney and the Controversy over ‘Thanksgiving (1956)’” deals more with negotiation than translation, showing how John L. Sweeney’s friendship and patronage helped Cummings deal with the Boston Arts Festival Committee’s skittishness about designating “Thanksgiving (1956)” —Cummings’ poem condemning U. S. inaction after the Soviet invasion of Hungary—as an official Festival poem. Rai Peterson investigates another sort of politics in her “Low Rank, High Brow: The ‘Adolescent’ War Writing of E. E. Cummings and Kurt Vonnegut.” She assesses the similarities in literary reputation that occur when a writer is labeled “adolescent,” despite dealing with subject matter that is common-

ly considered “adult”—violence and war.

Some short, playful, and epigrammatic poems by Guy R. Beining, Gerard Sarnat, and Lewis Turco follow, making an appropriate transition, we trust, to three essays on a monumentally playful poem, Cummings’ “r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r” (CP 396), universally known as “the grasshopper poem.” Vakrilen Kilyovski’s “The Nude, the Grasshopper, and the Poet-Painter” places the poem in the modernist context of Marcel Duchamp’s infamous *Nude Descending a Staircase*, a painting that Cummings saw first when the Armory Show came to Boston in 1913, and one in which he discerned (in his Harvard graduation essay) “traces of realism” (“New Art” 10). As part of Gillian Huang-Tiller’s contribution, “One Art: Intuition and Typography,” we publish for the first time Cummings’ typescript “analysis” of the poem, originally sent to S. A. Jacobs in 1934 or 1935. Gillian shows how this “analysis” greatly increases our knowledge of how Cummings conceived the final form of the poem, with a right and left margin and a precise zigzag movement of words and letters within that frame. Michael Webster’s “Plotting the Evolution of a Grasshopper” wraps up this section by tracing the evolution of these ordered patterns of the poem, from their genesis in penciled manuscripts to their typewritten and then linotyped forms.

The multitalented Kevin Kiely sends us three poems that carry quite a bit of the “voacality of the locality” of his homeland, Ireland. (See also Kiely’s essay in this issue.) Next, in “Foregrounding in Two E. E. Cummings Poems: Its Implications for Teaching Poetry,” Azam Esmaeili applies the linguistic concept of foregrounding to unlock the mysteries of two Cummings poems. This issue of *Spring* concludes with a review of Etienne Terblanche’s groundbreaking book *E. E. Cummings: Poetry and Ecology* (2012), and with our usual roundup of News, Notes & Correspondence—which this time features a new section called “Cummings Centennials” that discusses what our non-hero was doing one hundred years ago.

Work Cited

Cummings, E. E. “The New Art.” *Harvard Advocate* (June 1915). Rpt. in *E. E. Cummings: A Miscellany Revised*. Ed. George J. Firmage. New York: October House, 1965. 5-11.