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About the Cover Introduction

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Introduction / About the Cover

The Editors

A Special Norman Friedman Issue

This issue of *Spring* marks the last in which Norman Friedman participates as editor. The new editor and the Editorial Board have decided to mark the change by dedicating the next issue of *Spring* to Norman Friedman, in honor of his invaluable contributions to the E. E. Cummings Society, the journal *Spring*, and the study of E. E. Cummings. Though he has retired from editing the journal and coordinating the day-to-day activities of the society, Norman remains active in the study of Cummings. He also continues to work in his practice as a Gestalt therapist. Norman knows that we will be honoring him—if you'd like to contact him, simply send an e-mail to EECSRINGNF@aol.com.

For the special issue, we propose that members of the society create a short (maximum 3 pages typed double-spaced) work (poem, play, essay, letter, sentence, concrete poem, haiku, drawing, photomontage, interactive flash program, etc.) on the subject “What Norman Friedman (the man or his writings) means to me and my feelings for/about the life and work of E. E. Cummings.” Or: “What I owe to Norman.” We would like as many members of the society to participate as possible—hence the necessity for short contributions. Also, given space limitations, there's a possibility that your contribution may be edited in some way. (However, Norman will see the complete text of each contribution.)

We have very few guidelines to offer. We suggest that contributors might think of what we “owe” Norman in the spirit of the last “item” listed in “sonnet entitled how to run the world”: “I item i immaculately owe / dying one life and will my rest to these / children building this rainman out of snow” (CP 390). Warm, wry, humorous anecdotes may be preferred to stuffy, scholarly footnoted mini-essays. (If you do cite Norman's work, however, please give page numbers in standard MLA format. We'll take care of the Works Cited list.) The plan is simply to present each person's response under his/her name. Remember, page space will be limited, so try to keep your contributions short. We are also on a tight schedule. Please send your contribution your contribution to Michael Webster (websterm@gvsu.edu—e-mail attachments are OK) within one month, at the latest.

Masks

When poets write of themselves—as Cummings so often did—they inevitably present a *persona*, a mask or image of the self. (Even if one is attempting to be sincere, one presents a mask of sincerity.) Even though only our first two essays appear under

the heading “Masks,” many of the other contributions in this issue might be said to explore various ways in which a poet’s self may be presented to the public—or perceived by that public. Glen McLeod’s article shows how Cummings and Wallace Stevens presented various images of themselves to each other through their poems, letters, and public appearances. The articles of Paul Headrick and Etienne Terblanche both attempt to view the poet’s mask (his poetry) through the different critical lenses of pragmatism and ecocriticism, while Norman Friedman’s introduction to the forthcoming new edition of *EIMI* shows how the self and the masks of the self may be distorted and even destroyed by political ideology. Todd Martin shows us how Cummings shaped the narrative of his time in the French prison camp at La Ferté Macé by presenting his self’s experience through the timeless model of Puritan spiritual autobiography.

We should take Cummings at his word when he says in *i: six nonlectures* that after “a certain wholly mysterious moment which signifies selfdiscovery . . . the question ‘who am I?’ is answered by what I write—in other words, I become my writing” (4). The articles by Bob Grumman, Michael Webster, and Jacques Demarcq in the section called “Technique(s) & Meaning(s)” all discuss the myriad ways in which Cummings’ usual and unusual writing techniques function as masks for and images of his unique self. If Cummings’ writing *is* his self, then his techniques certainly form a large part of that self. The two reviews of Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno’s *E. E. Cummings: A Biography* both discuss ways in which biography investigates, selects, and re-presents the various kinds of writing (notes, letters, poems) that now make up the self of the poet.

The photo on our cover is one of the images that illustrates Millie Kidd’s essay on Cummings as a performer. Taken around 1925 by James Sibley Watson, the photo shows Cummings posed against a blank wall, his body turned sideways to the camera, his face turned at a three-quarters angle. His head, with its shock of blond hair, looks a great deal like Gaston Lachaise’s bronze portrait bust, and his back is absolutely straight. Millie describes the effect of Cummings’ expression as “slightly arrogant,” yet “somewhat softened by the hint of a smile.” And she detects in this somewhat mischievous smile “a shy introvert behind the mask.”

Sibley Watson was probably Cummings’ best friend. Though the two men were the same age, Watson often played the role of patron and mentor, giving the poet lifelong literary, medical, emotional, financial, and spiritual support. With Scofield Thayer, Watson made *The Dial* into the premier arts journal of the 1920s, offering Cummings one of his first and best venues for publication. It was Watson and his wife Hildegard who welcomed Cummings in New York after his ordeal at La Ferté Macé, and it was Watson who provided Cummings with his working space, the third floor studio room at 4 Patchin Place (Kennedy 159, 260). After *The Dial* folded in 1929, Watson produced and directed two fine avant-garde films, *The Fall of the House*

of *Usher* (1929) and *Lot in Sodom* (1933). Watson's interest in photography extended to his professional career as an MD: he specialized as a research radiologist.

Jacques Demarcq's essay quotes Cummings' own "implacably negative definition of poetry"—"whatever cannot be translated!" (*EIMI* 137-138). New poems in particular seem resistant to critical idioms—the clumsy instruments of reason must have time to catch up and attempt to capture the fugitive lines of poetry. Therefore we will not attempt to "translate" any of the poems published here. New poems especially must speak for themselves.

Works Cited

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