Painting with Words

*Three Visual Poems by E. E. Cummings*

B.A. Essay

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Abstract

The experiments of fusing poetry and painting were trademarks of the controversial multimedia poet Edward Eastlin Cummings (1894-1962). This essay provides a brief overview on his life and growth, both in his paintings and poetry, until the time when he had perfected his unique style. It describes his joyfulness and effectual qualities as well as shortly looking at his work in connection with the progressing changes in typography and poetic style. It also looks at how this exposure to the avant garde experimentation that prevailed among expatriate artists and Writers in Paris around the First World War confirmed him as one of the most productive and yet controversial poet in American History. Cummings played with language and joined art forms in the installment of his poetry and diverged from tradition both in his typography and poesy. Thus he gave his readers a visual representation and added new dimension of possibilities for the reader to interpret and experience than was traditional in poetry. For brief comparison, his paintings and their changes in style from the early days until perfection are briefly considered, as well as how his experience with painting enriches his poetry.

To demonstrate his methods, this essay examines three poems to show how the visual and auditory manner of E. E Cummings’ special typography works as a resource in combining the two otherwise different art forms. The poems “in Just-”, “she being Brand” and “there are so many tictoc” are analyzed, and thereby exhibit how Cummings manages to project and emphasize the visual aspect towards the reader. This is shown through exploration of themes of each of the poems, the difference from traditional typography is regarded and the poems audial and visual aspects are discussed.
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Introduction

Only the true masters of literature are able to bridge the gap between different forms of artistic interpretation. Edward Eastlin Cummings was a master of poetry quite like he was a meticulous writer and a painter. Among his life’s work one is able to find miscellaneous artwork that in extraordinary way travels between boundaries of art forms. His development from a novice to master of poesy must be seen in context with his studies, his experiments, his paintings, and the changes the world was going through in his lifetime. To fully comprehend his artistic singularity it is necessary to draw upon the view of his critics. After reading his vivid poetry, images are painted in the reader’s mind, visual poems made with words. The poems are both visual upon the pages and easily become visual in our minds as well. To read a poem by E. E Cummings is like reading either a painted picture or moving pictures.

The three examples selected for this essay are more than desolate words or single letters with strange typography on a page. Cummings was able to breathe life into the words and letters, reviving them and thereby provide the reader with something more than only the experience of reading. His picturesque use of typography, his ability to give even single letters ambiguity and the unique way of using punctuations these are his trademarks. Because of Cummings’ unusual manner of writing, both the atypical spelling and unusual sentence structure, he was able to compose poems that were a unique mixture of poetry and picture. All the three poems show something more than just the poem, they are specially developed to be able to travel between boundaries and show as well as tell. The unique form of Cummings’ writing visualizes the images he present. Their dynamic perspective of childhood, time and speed lingers like short pictures in the mind.
1. Art and Life

Edward Estlin Cummings was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts on October 14 1894. His liberal Unitarian parents supported their son to find his own way in life. He went to Harvard and received his B.A and his M.A degrees in classical languages (Frazee). At Harvard he enjoyed the company of many of the period’s greatest thinkers, writers, painters and visionaries, people who were on their way to change the literature scene and people’s perspectives forever with their way of artistic expressions. Cummings became a co-editor in the literary magazine in Harvard, The Harvard Monthly, where poetry, paintings, music and literature was debated and discussed. (Kirsch, the readers). Cummings revelled in this companionship and many echoes of the great artists the magazine featured can be seen in his works (Hamilton). Cummings was against warfare, yet volunteered for the ambulance corps in France in the First World War. He travelled to France and on his way there he got to know William Slater Brown who was also pacifist. Brow wrote a letter to one of his friends containing views of treasonous ingredient and the letter was confiscated by the French government. This letter led to imprisonment of both men (Mills, 434). They were charged with spying and then incarcerated in French prison camps for some months. The imprisonment that followed, affected Cummings’ work and his world immensely. Cummings published the book *The Enormous Room* in 1922 about their experience. The novel was the stepping stone towards his growing popularity (Hamilton). Before he joined the ambulance corps he stayed for a month in Paris and there he fell in love with the beautiful city; this affection was the reason for his return to Paris shortly after the war. He did not let the action from the French authorities during the war spoil the feelings he had for the city. He lived in Paris for a few years in the early 1920s (Frazee). When Cummings returned from Paris to the USA in 1924 he was a celebrity. The poetry books and novels that he had published were a massive hit. *The Enormous Room* was published in 1922, and then came *Tulips and Chimneys*. The later was his first collection of poetry and was published in 1923. Both books were well received. Hamilton states that Cummings’ writing was clearly influenced by his contemporaries, like Gertrude Stein’s syntactical tries and Amy Lowell’s imagistic experiments (Hamilton). Cummings has been connected to the influence of the Cubist movement and critics often classify his work as avant-garde.
Although Cummings never connected himself with either of movement, influence of the methods of European artists is visible in his paintings. He evolved those approaches and used further in his own work.

Prior to moving to Paris he exhibited two series of abstract paintings entitled Noises and Sounds. The titles of these oil paintings of extremely bright colours, abstract forms and their special names indicate that already there, at the end of the First World War, he had started to experiment with the idea of appealing to more than one of our senses to understand art.

1.2. Not an Ordinary Painter

Ken Lopez notes that Cummings’ paintings merit comparison with his poetry, because of his use of bold inventive language and form “in the service of a modern sensibility and aesthetic that is essentially individualistic, traditional and even romantic” (Lopez, outro). His early paintings were almost only abstract work or “organisations of colour and life” according to Rushworth M. Kidder (Kidder, 344). He also states that Cummings’ work was a bridge between painting, literature and music and that Cummings “challenged himself to adapt into literature the principles of other arts” (Kidder, 344). Cummings’ attempted to transfer his picturesque style to his poetry and his typographical or to his paintings. The use of colour and form in these early paintings show a sophisticated and technically complex development, progress that became increasingly greater with time (Lopez, intro). In the early paintings he attempts to combine the senses of sound and sight, the visual and audial, as he later did in his poems.

Visual poetry uses paper like substrate, like canvas, to arrange words in a typographical way to convey the envisioned meaning, visually arranging the words or letters in different forms and shape for different translations. In Cox’s opinion he manipulates words, twists them and crafts into pictorial onto the page (Cox, 8). Cummings used his knowledge and skills in painting and transferred it freely between his paintwork and poetry. He used oil paint on what surface was available, he even used carton and
burlap. His paintwork was meticulous like in his writing, and Cummings wrote down many guidelines for colour use and how to interpret the human form with paint. His later work was mostly representational, his models both landscape and humans (Lopez, intro). All of his work, both the paintings and the poetry, show how much Cummings revelled in the joys of life, they radiate energy and joy to the spectator. Ken Lopes states that the air of aesthetic sensualist becomes a larger part of Cummings’ later representational work (Lopez, intro). It seems that his artwork has not received the same recognition as his poetry; nevertheless it also received its share of criticism. However, he never changed his art for the opinion of others but kept pursuing his own artistic concerns with integrity (Lopez, outro). Through the years he was thought by critics to move from experimental innovator to a more private painter (Lopez, intro). He did not try to copy any contemporary work or fashion and pursued his own style and his own methods. Cummings did not allow other people’s opinions to affect his work, both poetry and pictures were made without compromise.

1.3. Not an Ordinary Poet

In most of the poems that Cummings wrote, the words do not glide without effort from the page to the reader’s mind but have to be translated or thoroughly examined by the reader, to fully realise the meaning. How Cummings saw the world, the individual versus collectivism, and spontaneity versus square thought makes his poems and paintings joyful and yet intelligent tone. He was constantly playing games with his poems and his paintings. He wrote about love, sex, nature, but also satirical squibs and murkier poetry. Few of his work contain criticism of modern society and the decadence of humanity. Cummings can be classified as a lyrical poet and a love poet rather that critical or satirical despite being equally able to compose in all forms. It is Rushworth M. Kidder’s opinion of Cummings’ poetry that it can not only be understood in exclusive linguistic statements (Kidder, 353).

Despite of the confusion often experienced when reading Cummings’ poetry and difficulty to analyse in only one way, Cummings knew what he was doing in both visual
and literary media and wanted his poems to be treated as pictures (Kidder, 354). The beauty of Cummings’ poems lies therefore also in his ability to reproduce shapes and simulate movement and this combined encourages deeper understanding of the poetry and its meaning. In Cummings’ art we see more complex relations between the two art forms and a mere translation of one aspect of the two parts can only lead to the reader’s lack of complete experience. In an almost magical way he was able to minimise the difference between the two forms of art; always challenging the receiver’s senses. Cummings’ later poetry composition followed no traditional form for writing. His poems were picture poems, collages of letters tied together without following any rules for rhyme, lines divided at his own need and punctuations distributed by his own rules (Tulinius, 19).

His visual poems tend to be short and often the calligrams are contained to one page and therefore easily seen in a single glance (Kidder, 368). Perhaps Cummings could not only think and hear his poems but visualize them also before he transferred them to the page. Those short poems, which did not follow the trend of the period, could have contributed to the critics’ presumption of him as a naïve poet. He divided lines without taking notice of rhyme or where in the line the break was located. Irregular change in line structure of the poems was also innovative and unusual in the age period. Cummings goes beyond visual description, articulating ideas in his poems that are outside the reach of the painter (Kidder, 356). Kidder also finds that Cummings’ poems present sequences of images that are suffused with extra visual attributes (Kidder, 357). He opened new ways of interpretation by combining graphical representation and linguistic meaning and hanged the relationship between the letter itself and its voice. Provided, to both the reader and other poets, the possibility to describe or understand a practice or image in all its semiotic density and fruitfulness.

Munson gave Cummings’ form of poetry a new name. He called it Oculoonomatopoeia (Munson, Studio verse, 113). A combined word from the poetic term Onomatopoeia which is described: “A figure of speech in which words are used to imitate sounds” (Vocabulary online) and oculo which “relates to the eye or sense of vision” (Vocabulary online). Oculoonomatopoeia could therefore be described as visible sounds, sounds that you can see or visualize. This is where Cummings is the master interpreter, he uses typography as his paintbrush, changes how fast we read by making the gap between
words wider or narrower, and he also changes our experience of rhythm and sound. By changing how fast we read, Cumming’s also creates a space for silence in his work, a recurring subject from his paintings and their names (Kidder, 358). He uses silence in his work as he would use colours or shapes in his paintings. In the words of Rushworth M. Kidder: “motion that arises not so much in the meaning of the words as in their punctum, spacing, tmesis and so forth” (Kidder, 358). How he achieves the visualisation of silences in the poems or helps the reader to feel the change in pace is extraordinary. Cummings uses his painting skill to recognize where emphatic impressions could be employed by using capitalization. He realised that the look of the poem and the look of the letter was inseparable from the meaning of the poem and used that realisation in his work. Realising this and being able to use for his advantage made sure that his way of painting the imagery or idea he had into the readers mind is difficult to imitate. Cummings’ work can therefore not only be translated through one media, we have to try to see it from both so that full comprehension can be obtained (Kidder, 368). Cummings’ poetry is not all of the same kind, some poems have lyrical qualities and have even been transferred to songs. Not all of his work is feasible for reading out loud due to their semiotic peculiarities. He experimented with the poetic form in his early days before finding his special form for poem paintings and during that time wrote many different forms of poetry.

The reader is given more than one way of reading and understanding Cummings’ poems, some have words that are scattered around the page and the meaning changes with the readers approach. Some are like reading a puzzle, a maze. If the eye goes from left to right the meaning is one thing but by reading it up and down or right to left, there meaning is completely different. The reader can take the letters and rearrange them many times and the meaning is never the same.” Capital letters compose additional appearance, assembling materials out of which the reader can construct by rearrangement, the words” (Kidder, 366). It is necessary to bear in mind that when Cummings was writing his poetry, the traditions in poetry and writing in general were rather old-fashioned, though subject of change. The usual tradition consisted of capital letter in the start of a poem, even spacing and punctuations used after spelling rules. The poems were usually in verse form, either rhymed or not, but they followed techniques that were recognized and approved (Edwards, 436). Writers had become bolder and tried to loosen up the set form of poesy. Many writers and
poets practiced the departure from the acknowledged techniques of poetic explanations and did so despite of the opinions of others. They practiced their own direction with typography and poetry until the assumed nature of the poet had emerged. Only then could they indicate something that was beyond their art, strive of stylistic perfection completed. In Woolworth’s time the first daring experiments of omitting capitals at the head of each poetic line were attempted by himself and others (Edwards, 436). The blank verses that was without rhyme made their entrance and some poets abandoned literary allusions (Edwards, 437). Then the discussion of capital letters emerged. It was argued that capital letters could not be heard and why then write them? Capital letters and the consistency of their use had been changing slowly since the 17th century. From being the start of every noun in the text, to being only used to signify proper names and where meaning needed to be empathised. This also led to change in the names of courtly establishments or titles and many thought that by lowering the case, the title had also been lowered. In Edwards meaning the height of the letter on the paper is both seen as literal and metaphoric height of the capitalised (Edwards, 438). In Cummings’ case the special way he writes I could in this context be the diminution of the self, lowering I to i. Additionally the argument for that lower case at the start of the poem made it more like prose and that with lower case the author and speaker of the poems became more detached and dissociated from each other (Edwards, 437). It could also be argued that with the lowering of the I Cummings was trying to lessen this gap and make the poet equal to the reader. Pages of poetry are designed to be looked at and stylistic relationship between the letters on the page and the poems can be seen as part of the picturesque. The Cubists and the artist connected to avant-garde, addressed the matter with vigour and supplemented their work with the new way of typography (Edwards, 437). Hence the abolition of Capital letters (Edwards, 436).

Cummings’ use of the case was purely his own invention, he abandons traditional grammatical rules altogether and makes and applies his own rules or non-rules. In his case it is clear that sometimes a breach of grammatical agreements can be put to effective use. Cummings’ poems do not follow the traditional rules and generally poems written at his later years have no rhyme, nor are they subject to common allusions or allegories. His poems do not rhyme, and they do not start with a capital letters nor have they any regular rhythm. Never the less Cummings had shown that he had the ability to create poetry that
was guided by traditional rules. So his new method did not emerge because of his deficiency in conventional poetry skill. The collective rules of literatures grammatical correctness that were still a major thing in the work of others in Cummings’ time, are almost absent from those three poems that are the subject of this paper. Cummings emphasizes instead the visual aspect of writing. “His paintings present images and his poems present and sequence the images that are immersed with those extra visual attributes” (Kidder, 357). This aids in making Cummings’ poetry unique and we can not separate one aspect from the other. We are not able to separate the visual aspect that he creates with hyphen, commas, silences, punctum’s and brackets from the actual words or letters. His use of the visual assists in uniting those two different art forms, they come together in one harmony in Cummings’ spectacular work. Kidder claims that “he confuses us with this merging and makes it difficult to analyse in only one way” (Kidder, 354). Kidder feels that we as readers try to search for the convenient solution and only appreciate the visual design and therefore a full apprehension of the work is unexploited (Kidder, 354). Kidder also states: “We sit politely by while he indulges in his hyperbolic talk, patiently waiting for him to stop the nonsense and resume the real business of being a poet” (Kidder, 353). The attitude that Kidder describes could apply to all readers of poetry or literature in general, when the effect is beyond our aptitude or education.

Only a few critics liked the different style of Cummings’ poetry, regardless of the steady growth of followers and admirers. Positive critics often saw a “dedicated artist striving for fresh means of expression with which to replace worn out prosody” (Lopez, intro). Those who gave negative criticism did not seem to change their opinion much through the years, despite of Cummings’ growing popularity. They resented his experimentations, disliked the new approach to poetry that he offered. His work was seen as naïve, his deviation from spelling rules seen as an obscenity and heavily frowned upon. Ian Hamilton wrote in Cummings’ bibliography, “his supporters, however, find value not only in its verbal and visual inventiveness but also in its mystical and anarchistic beliefs” (Hamilton). Somehow Cummings showed us the new way but it is very hard to follow his example, the road is rocky path and filled with capital letters.
2. in Just-

in Just-
spring when the world is mud-
luscious the little
lame balloonman

whistles far and wee

and eddieandbill come
running from marbles and
piracies and it’s
spring

when the world is puddle-wonderful

the queer
old balloonman whistles
far and wee
and bettyandisbel come dancing

from hop-scotch and jump-rope and

it’s
spring
and

the

goat-footed

balloonMan whistles
far
and
wee
“in Just-” is from the collection of poems in *Tulips and Chimneys*, from the first section that is called Chansons Innocentes and was published in 1923. This poem has hidden sides, to be able to understand it fully one has to do more than just read it, it is necessary to dive into the picture that Cummings has made of spring and revel in its feeling. Through his words we are able to “see” a scene in the park and watch the children interact with the baloonman. We can almost hear them and the poem runs like a short film in our minds. Cummings uses his special way of writing to amplify our visual and audial notion.

*Tulips and Chimneys* is arranged in a continuous manner; the reading of the poems the book contains is meant to be in context with each other. They are constructed as the changing of the months over the calendar year (Buck, 136). “In Just-” is the fifth of twelve titles and is placed as the first poem in the month of May (Buck, 137). Admiration and love for the seasons, growth and rebirth are always present in Cummings’ poetry. The “in-Just” is a good example of this recurring aspect. The direct translation of the title of the chapter in which it appears, “innocent songs”, captures the feeling of the poem: those innocent yet accessible memories of our childhood. How we as children indulged us in play with our best friend whom we were so close to that we almost were one and the same. The games that were played, hopscotch, pirates, marble and jump-ropes are played outside, in the park.

Buck states that the French chansons open the idea of spontaneity and artfulness in the erotic and because they are children’s songs they take us into a world of less splendor, secluded and innocent. The world that children themselves comprehend (Buck, 148).

Despite the poem’s modern look there is a connection in the title to the chansons songs of the French language, lyrical songs of love that Cummings had been acquainted with through his studies. Although Cummings does not follow the fixed poetic form of the French chanson, any more than he usually does, this poem has a musical quality and has been transformed to songs, by the composer John Duke among others (Duke, 2002). In R.A. Buck’s opinion, “it is the eventual freeing up of all punctuation that allows Cummings to create the amazingly rich syntactic structural ambiguities which end up producing a rich musical texture” (Buck, 143). Kayleen Cox’s research supports this analysis, her essay describing how three different song composers interpret the poem. They do so with different outcome, yet all use Cummings’ poem as their lyrics. The poem does not only have a lyrical but the musical notion that “in Just-” holds, and its openness to interpretation
diversity that people can find in the poem (Cox, 1-109). Mills also mentions this as a “subtle musical gift” that found its way into the Tulips and Chimneys volume (Mills, 435).

In spring the park is wet and muddy but that only adds to the deliciousness for the young children. In the park the ballonman is visible though sometimes in the distance. How the children think about him variates, sometimes he is strange, sometimes he is lame and sometimes goat-footed. Yet he is always there as much a part of the scene as the children and the mud. The ballonman whistles in the background in all the stanzas, however in the last one something has changed, the spelling is different. The change from “lame/old balloonman” changes to the “balloonMan” with a capital letter inserted. This change could indicate that they see him as a man, a grown up and not just a background person. It is Xinmei Wang’s opinion that the capitalisation of Man implies compassionate feelings. She also believes that the lower case makes the capitalization stand out and this form shows the visualization of Cummings’ painting skills (Wang, 2651). Buck also points out that the poems “subordinate structures are lower level dependent grammatical structures, that Cummings uses the notion of subordination to propel the energy of phrases in different ways: either to build or to diminish intensity” (Buck, 145).

Nevertheless this change in case could also express another opinion, that the children see him less like a man and more like an animal. The word “wee” can be understood in an onomatopoetic manner. In Dictionary of the Scots Language one meaning of the word “wee” is either to squeal or neigh. Perhaps the whistle of the balloonman is not a proper one but one more animalistic. In the last stanza the balloonman is labelled goat-footed, it could be that his strange whistle he makes has effect on the children and they see him more and more like an animal. It could also be a reference to the Goat God Pan, the Goat God who was in ancient times a symbol of spring, praising the coming of spring with his flute. The allegory is thereby linked in Greek mythology (Roberts, 156). It is also plausible that the Man with the whistle is Pan Piper or the Rat-Catcher of Hamelin who lured children as well as rats, with his flute’s magical music. He lured the rats to their deaths and perhaps children away from their innocence. Pan the Goat God is likewise associated with sexuality as he played his flute for the nymphs in hope of sexual favours. This poem is also very much a reminiscence; memories of life before the inevitable revelation of adult sensuality.
Despite of the balloon man’s presence the spring is wet, muddy with puddles and just spring. Wang states that the youth and the joyfulness of the poem make it mobile, it does not “just lie on the page. The poem dances itself out” over the page (Wang, 2652). A similar interpretation may be seen from R.A. Buck, when he notes that the poems in the “Chancons Innocentes” chapter “form a larger structural unit that show artistic progression in musical, thematic, aesthetic, poetic, and visual ways” (Buck, 153).

What does a line that only contains one word look when it’s next to lines full of text? As we realize, the way a poem looks can affect the way we hear it, as well. How does blank space sound? Do we pause whenever we get to a line break? Cummings teases his readers into thinking through formal problems that are quite a bit more complex than they might first appear. (Wang, 2652)

Let us look closer at the first stanza. The very first line shows Cummings’ special features. He capitalizes “in Just-” and uses a hyphen to divide a word he made up, “just:spring”. This word can mean many things here. Without the hyphen it can indicate that these particular events only happen in springtime. It could also be interpreted as “Just” or an unbiased, pure feeling of youth. The blank space in the second stanza between “spring” and the closer description of the surroundings makes the eye stop a while and perhaps “spring” from spring to the mud-luscious ground. The balloonman seems to be very close here, we almost jump on him. Of cause the closeness makes him lame, disturbing the mud jumping. “whistles far and wee” (l. 13) like a chorus at this point in the poem, and the blank spaces make the eye slow down and that could point to the slow pace of the balloonman. His whistling catches the attention of the union of “eddieandbill” (l. 6) and they leave their game of marbles and piracies to come running to see him or the balloons. In Cox’s opinion the colliding of the two names could indicates the rush that characterizes the language of young children: how they say the words so fast that they glide into each other and form a cluster or a lump of expression (Cox, 14). Like “Iwantone” or “goodmorning” or “giveittome”, a whole sentence that becomes one word. Cox also points out that this form of clustering “increases the tempo of the poem and builds excitement” (Cox, 14)
The second stanza starts fast by “eddieandbill” running away from their games but the space between “spring” and the “puddle-wonderful” world and the “queer balloonman’s” whistles is different from the closeness of the “mud-luscious” jump from before. This display of length can show us the distance to the other union of the dancing” bettyandisbel” (l.14) from the boys and the balloon man. It is Mills’s opinion that the distance that Cummings’ produces with this maenuver evokes an adverbial sense of distance in space and time (Mills, 157). The girls are also playing and the span from their place of play is also presented with a blank space. At this point in the poem something remarkable happens. Cummings now deports completely from anything that could be likened to ordinary poesy, here the visual part of the poem picture takes over. He uses both blank spaces and isolated, single words to draw a picture. It could be as Xinmei Wang’s suggests, that the image of the words on the paper are a visual metaphor of seedlings sprouting from the ground (Wang, 2654). Likewise it could “show us the sound” of the balloonman disappearing behind this visual curve that the words make. Additionally the curve that the single words make could be translated as the image of the goat-feat of the balloonMan, the goat-feat of Pan the deliverer of spring. As in other poetry by Cummings’ the possibilities for interpretation is continuous and each reader can imagine or visualize the poems in their own way and usually in more than one way.
3. she being Brand

she being Brand

-new;and you
know consequently a
little stiff I was
careful of her and (having
thoroughly oiled the universal
joint tested my gas felt of
her radiator made sure her springs were O.
K.)i went right to it flooded-the-carburetor cranked her
up,slipped the
clutch (and then somehow got into reverse she
kicked what
the hell) next
minute i was back in neutral tried and
again slo-wly;bare,ly nudg. ing(my
lev-er Right-
oh and her gears being in
A 1 shape passed
from low through
second-in-to-high like
greasedlightning) just as we turned the corner of Divinity

avenue i touched the accelerator and give
her the juice,good

(it
was the first ride and believe I we was
happy to see how nice and acted right up to
the last minute coming back down by the Public
Gardens I slammed on
the

internaexpanding
&
e externalcontracting
breaks Bothatonce and
brought allofher tremB
-ling
to a:dead.
stand-
;Still)”
The poem “she being Brand” was originally published in 1926 in “is 5” and republished in 1954 in “100 Selected Poems”. In both versions the syntax of the poem is the same: the picturesque speed undulates down the page. Even if one does not read the lines or words one can visualise the speed. This poem is like “in Just-” and even in an extended manner, uses Cummings’ special typographical formations to paint a visual image.

When starting to read the poem the first thing that comes to one’s mind is likewise speed. Just by looking at it and its construction the reader can visualize how it intensifies. The first three lines are only three words each but then the lines grow up to nine and ten words. This could represent an upward motion. Then the lines become short again and the words crammed together which further implies the haste of the poem, until it hitches and the speeding stops. The real visual image on the paper is first of elevation: four, five seven eight and then countdown: four, three, two, standstill. The poem contains two major images, both the one of the new car and the one of the new girl. The main theme of the poem on the other hand is the swiftness, speed, starting slow and careful then gradually accelerating by each verse, despite of small glitches or hiccups, and then ending in a mutual release, a standstill, full brake. In the mind’s eye the drive “runs” like a short film, then parallel the author manages to run the other short film of the sexual act with the girl. It is like watching two simultaneously run videos, sometime interacting with each other and sometimes not. Those two videos or films link for an example when the clutch problem is over and they are back in neutral. The image that the words carry is very visual:

    minute i was back in neutral tried and
    again slo-wly;bare,ly nudg. ing(my (ll.14-15)

It is easy to see the hitch, the stop, and then see how it is smoothed out and things are running fine again. Cummings uses commas and hyphen to show us the hesitation. The connection is towards the sexual, the girl has literally kicked him, possibly due to the small space in the car but it could also be because of the fact that the lovemaking speed was at that point rapidly increasing, “clutch (and then somehow got into reverse)” (l. 11). Perhaps the driver lost some control of himself and forgot to think about the girl/car, over flooding the carburettor, perhaps he got over exited. He then slows down again and both the girl and
care are ready to continue. In Karel Alkalay-Gut’s point of view there is a patriarchal connection between driving and sexual activity in this poem (Alkalay-Gut, 254). In her opinion the words for technical groundwork of automobiles have double meaning both of the obvious kind and also sexual kind. She also praises Cummings for his innovative quality of combining driving and sex (Alkalay-Gut, 255). The driver, the car and the girl go by the “corner of Divinity” together, the experience changes from alright to divine. Car is running smoothly, the girl is also in the right mood. Then speed increases again, the driver touches the accelerator and gives it gas. Or touches the girl in the right way and her excitement grows, “give her the juice, good” (1.22-23). Then by Public Gardens everything ends, the mutual release “Bothatonce” (1.34) and brakes on full and everything to a trembling halt. By slamming on the brakes the car has stopped dead and the lovemaking reaches its end. The feeling of double satisfaction of the driver, both with the new car and the new girl still lingers though not said directly. Alkalay-Gut suggests that the word “Dead” not only serves to combine sexual or automotive metaphors but also connects it to the Elizabethan allusion of orgasm (Alkalay-Gut, 255). The use of the typography is Cummings’ speciality. The methods he used are visual here like in the other three poems but here the differences from traditional poem writing stand out. The contrast starts at the very beginning:

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    she being Brand
- new; and you (ll.1-2)
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There is not a capital letter in the opening of the poem but instead in “Brand”. “Brand-new” is also divided between two lines, and can then mean both that she is pristine and untouched but also that she is a Brand of some sorts. This indicates the car side of the poem, the car has a brand name. Cummings uses the same device in lines eight to nine:

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    her radiator made sure her springs were O.
    K.)i went right to it flooded-the-carburetor cranked her (ll.8-9)
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Cummings divides ok in to two words and thereby changes the meaning of the abbreviation. The single O here has the meaning of exclamation, firstly the drivers excitement and speed of the car building fast and secondly the rapidity of the lovemaking becoming too much. The K is delayed with the deviation and there distance that the eye has
to travel between them indicates silence. Therefore this deviation of OK also shows the hitch, the near halt of the car when the carburettor overflows. The steady building of the poem slows down and we are now in the first bend on the upward slope of the poem, where the lines start to extend.

    minute i was back in neutral tried and
    again slo-wly; bare, ly nudg. ing(my
    lev-er Right-
    oh and her gears being in
    A 1 shape passed (ll.14-18)

Cummings’ use of commas, colon and punctum here demonstrates the softness, he visualises a short slowing down before the final run towards the divinity of mutual release. His usage of punctuation is both to make the eye slow down and to show the change in rapidity.

    A 1 shape passed
    from low through
    second-in-to-high like (ll.18-20)

The changing of the gears is the clearest sign of acceleration in the poem. The driver changes gears on the car from low to high. Both the car and the girl are accelerating in speed, the girl getting increasingly exited and the car gaining speed down the road.

    internalexpanding
    &
    externalcontracting
    breaks Bothatonce and
    brought allother tremB
    -ling
    to a:dead.stand-
    ;Still) (ll. 30-38)

In this example Cummings clams words together, bothatonce, allother. Those words are sentences but when crammed together become words of haste, of unity. Word glued together to make them seem like a whole. Cummings mixes this unity and his way of making punctuations and hyphen and comma’s to help the reader visualize the last minute
of intercourse and the minute when you bring a car to a complete stop after a fast trip. To cut trembling in two half’s and ending the first half of the word with a capital B symbolizes the shiver of both girl and car, they halt, and the car brakes with intervals until completely stopped. The distinction between the human part and the automobile is no longer clear, the images have glided into each other at this final point in the poem.

All parts of the poem are simultaneously driver and car, this form could add a comical aspect to the poem and used for inter metaphor claims Alkalay-Gut. She also argues that it is only when you have both a car and a driver that driving can be done and if the driver is sensitive to the mechanical responses both the rider and the ridden will perform their best which leads to maximum service and pleasure (Alkalay-Gut, 257). Perhaps her interpretation of the counter-message of humanization of machines and mechanization of human relations and their part in dehumanizing relations and values could be valuable contribution in the discussion of Cummings’ poetry (Alkalay-Gut, 257).
4. there are so many tic-toc

tic-toc clocks everywhere telling people
what time it is for
tic-tic instance five tic minutes tic
past six tic

Spring is not regulated and does
not get out of order nor do
its hands a little jerking move
over numbers slowly

we do not
wind it up it has no weights
springs wheels inside of
its slender self no indeed dear
nothing of the kind.

(So, when kiss Spring comes
we’ll kiss each kiss other on kiss the kiss
lips because tic clocks toc don’t make
a toctic difference
to kiss kiss you and to
kiss me)
Of the three poems here discussed this poem is the most typographically regular. Nevertheless it is not the simplest of the three. The visual imagery is slightly more hidden so the reader needs to unfold it in order to grasp the picture. The connection to sexuality is also subtle, concealed in parentheses. The picturesque does not lie on the surface as in the other two examples but underneath the surface. Yet the picture is there and comes to light when the readers immerse themselves. It is rather conventional at first glance and it could be said that in this poem, Cummings follows the traditional formation of poetry closer than in the other poems covered in this paper. The poem was first published in 1920 in Cummings’ *Complete Poems collection* but republished in 2010 in a collection of his sensual poetry was published and simply called *Erotic Poems*. (Cummings; “Erotic poems”). Though not the most sexual of his poems it contains a subtle undertone, the sex is not obvious like in “she being Brand”. The *Erotic Poems* publication is illustrated and the drawings are simple, black and white, displaying the sensuality of the poems. Naked bodies entwined with each other or lost in the foreplay or aftermath of intimacy (The Daily Beast; *Erotic Poems*).

Like with “she being Brand” the poem “there are so many ticktock” has a theme. Cummings has chosen time as the theme, the feeling of the clock ticking whirls in the mind while reading. Still not in the centre of attention, spring has the supporting role. Time and its passing is the essence of the poem. Time cannot be manipulated, we humans cannot control it, and we cannot turn it at our needs. Neither are we able to control the changing of seasons though we would want to. The poem has four stanzas all of different or growing length. Stanza one consists of five lines, stanza two of four, stanza three has five, then five lines and six. Perhaps the almost regular length in the stanzas can be seen as the steady ticking of a clock and the last stanza differentiates both in subject and in appearance, the rhythm is broken.

In the first stanza the aspect of time and the importance of time to us humans is the subject. Cummings looks at how time tends to controls us and how everything in the human world revolves around it. In the second stanza spring is personified or likened to humans and distanced from machines. Spring does not follow the clock, it arrives when it wants to and its arrival has nothing to do with the passing of time. Spring cannot know how important time is to us, it is irrelevant to the fact. The third stanza shows that we cannot
wind spring up like it is a clock. Spring is personified as slender, and the language that is used in its name indicates its posh/aristocratic roots. In the fourth stanza Cummings taps into the feeling of Spring, how we humans feel lighter, how we are more amours in springtime. How tend to forget about everything when spring is upon us, how we can forget about passing of time and lose ourselves in spring. Spring’s arrival awakens lust and the feeling of love in humans, we come out of our winter hive and cover each other with kisses.

Cummings’ uses auditory imagery in this poem, the ticking of the clock is the red line throughout the first and third stanza. It could also be argued that the whole poem is designed to be the sound of the clock ticking. The ticking of the clock twines with both first and third stanza, breaking the discourse with its ticking. The sound of the clock disturbs the talk and if we imagine the poem as an actual sound track it would have been recorded with the clock closer to the microphone and the speaker further away. The speaker seems to be slightly irritated over the ticking of the clock, irritated of not having the control of it, nevertheless dependent of the time it tells.

there are so many tictoc

clocks everywhere telling people

what toctic time it is for

tictic instance five toc minutes toc

past six tic (ll.1-5)

If the clock ticking would be eliminated from the stanza it would create a legible paragraph: “there are so many clocks everywhere telling people what time it is for instance five minutes past six”. During this discourse, time has been ticking: tictoc toctic totic toc totic. In the second stanza however the imagery is of a visual nature, spring is not the hands of the clock, its hands do not point at the time. Cummings is creating a distance between Spring and clockwork, drawing on the differences between them.

Spring is not regulated and does
not get out of order nor do
its hands a little jerking move
The hands of the clock pass slowly over the dial, and with that the wait for spring is prolonged. Spring is not likened to the dials of the clock, it is set apart from them and from the human creation that time is. Cummings changes the word order in this stanza so that the full emphasis is on the last word, slowly. By doing that he intensifies the slowness and brings emphasis to the word. Traditional word order is reversed and thereby the meaning changes. When word order is reversed to change the focus in a line in poetry the poetic term for that is anastrophe.

we do not
wind it up it has no weights
springs wheels inside of
its slender self no indeed dear
nothing of the kind (ll. 10-14)

Cummings is still drawing up the differences between time and spring. He is describing Spring as slender and weightless and compares time to the inner machinery of the clock. The “no indeed dear nothing of the kind” lines have the feeling of someone that is talking, chatting on private terms and the tone, though not unfriendly it is with a negative undertone. In my mind the image of an elderly lady who thinks highly of herself and a cup of tea appears. A dame that is always ready to put others in their place. In mind comes some of the characters in Downtown Abbey, Pride and Prejudice or similar films or shows. The posh lady is aware of time passing, maybe she feels that time passes too fast and resents the changes that it brings.

(So, when kiss Spring comes
we’ll kiss each kiss other on kiss the kiss
lips because tic clocks toc don’t make
a toctic difference
to kisskiss you and to
kiss me) (ll. 15-20)
The last of the stanzas is all in parenthesis. That could indicate the secrecy of the kisses, they are hidden, concealed from onlookers. It could also indicate that the kissing has ended and exists just in the minds of the kissing people. The parenthesis could be equivalent to the thought bubble we see in animated drawings. This verse holds the feeling of the rejuvenation we humans get when spring is upon us, the sensation of life re-emerging from the sleep of winter months. Feeling of lust, the liberating thinking that time does not matter, it is just you and your loved one together, kissing. Still we humans are incapable to forget time is hard to eliminate and its presence inevitably intertwined with our lust. In addition the tic totic is blended with the kisses. The feeling of our imminent death hovers, because time stops for no one.
Conclusion

Without a doubt Edward Estlin Cummings was one of the modern age’s most experimental artist. His artwork, both poetry and paintings, are of exceptional quality, special and unique. They reflect his experiences, experiments and passion without in any way compromising his integrity. His unique style of spelling and use of typography transform his poems to pictures. Cummings did not let critics affect him nor did he try to change his special style for anyone. During Cummings’ life he kept on trying to make the readers and viewers of his art feel how the boundaries between the art forms can be bent or broken. According to Kidder, Cummings’ poetry and paintings “exhibit individual habit of style throughout a lifetime and across different media” (Kidder, 354). He used both media to demonstrate and assist readers to look beyond the traditional interpretations and see the world of Cummings. He strived through his life to show us that arts can be viewed with more than one of our senses; he made us see that our traditional form of enjoying art can always be broadened and expanded.
Works Cited


