

e.e. cummings¹ as an Expressionist poet

Susan Coetzee-Van Rooy & Annette L. Combrink
Department of English
Potchefstroom University for CHE
POTCHEFSTROOM

Abstract

This study investigates the poetry of e.e. cummings from what is considered a novel but productive point of view: it holds that in order to categorize cummings as an Expressionist poet (an enterprise which, it is maintained, will provide the reader with a useful frame for grappling with certain troubling aspects of cummings' poetry) it is necessary to develop a reading strategy based on a method derived from the social sciences and the study of linguistics to make the categorization both feasible and responsible. Using techniques of choice suggested by critics, and developing further techniques of randomizing developed in accordance with the social sciences and linguistics, it was possible to arrive at a representative corpus of poetry, which could then be tested against criteria of Expressionism developed from a comprehensive literature study involving both poetry and the fine arts. This modus operandi has enabled the authors to assert that cummings could most fruitfully be read as an Expressionist poet. It is also suggested that this method could be most fruitfully extrapolated to similar studies involving other 'schools' and styles and other poets.

1. Introduction

It would seem, from a study of the relevant literature, that it still remains problematic for critics to come to terms in any comprehensive way with the poetic

1 c.e. cummings' name should be written without capitals – it is a convention that he created and insisted on. He took the spelling of his name seriously enough to have it changed legally to lower case letters only (Anon, 1975:293). Where cummings' name is not printed in the lower case in this discussion, it is because a quotation or bibliographical detail is being used from a source in which cummings' name was printed with capitals.

style of e.e. cummings. In the introduction to his comprehensive collection of critical essays on cummings, Rotella concludes that

It will be a major task of future Cummings scholarship [among other things] ... to locate him as precisely as possible within modern, national, and other literary traditions

cummings criticism can be divided into basically two types: those critics who have exploited cummings' poetry as a rich mine of *linguistic* peculiarities, and then those who have tried to situate him in some way within the sphere of the *Modern* movement. Examples of the former are studies undertaken by Fairley (1975) and Cureton (1980, 1981a, 1981b, 1985, 1986). Friedman (1984, 1985) is an important example of critics who have tried to situate cummings in the Modern movement.

A number of other critics have specifically linked cummings with an '-ism' or 'isms'. Pagnini (1985) has tried to prove that cummings would fall within the purview of the *Futurist* movement, and Haines (1972) has stated that cummings is an *Expressionist*. Several critics regard cummings to be, among other things, a *Transcendentalist* (Mullen, 1984:211; Triem, 1969:5; Kazin, 1972:170 & Rotella, 1984:283); a *Platonist* (Tal-Mason Cline, 1972:61); a *Post-Impressionist* (Bishop, 1984:129; Kidder, 1984:246); an artist with an *Apollonian* style (Kennedy, 1980:125); an *anti-intellectualist* (Friedman, 1964:17; Wegner, 1965:6; Blackmur, 1954:317-318; Horton & Mangan, 1984:67; Vendler, 1984:103; Logan, 1984:87; DeVries, 1984:73); an *individualist* (Heyen, 1984:240; Baum, 1972:105; Wegner, 1965:15; Gerber, 1988:180; Sutton, 1965:190-191); a *primitivist* (Dembo, 1984:176; Dougherty, 1984:185); a *romantic* (Blackmur, 1954:319; Tal-Mason Cline, 1972:62; Fairley, 1975:4; Friedman, 1964:12; Friedman, 1984:172; Bishop, 1984:126; Jones, 1965:131); an *Imagist* (Jones, 1965:125; Dougherty, 1984:185); a *Cubist* (Kennedy, 1980:180; Logan, 1984:89; Triem, 1969:21); a *Dadaist* (Watson, 1972:42); a *Surrealist* (Maurer, 1972:136); a *Symbolist* (Preston, 1984:54); an *Anarchist* (Matthiessen, 1984:77; Cowley, 1984:232; Hood, 1984:93-94) and a *concrete poet* (Dougherty, 1984:184).

Friedman states that cummings' stance as "nonconformist, one whose policy it is to disregard fads, fashions and reviewers" (Friedman, 1984:160) considerably complicates the task of categorizing his poetic style. Before going on to answer this, one might, indeed should, ask: why attempt to categorize at all? Especially if the artist himself vigorously resisted categories?

2. Central theoretical postulate

It is argued in this article that reading cummings as an Expressionist poet provides one with a way into the poetry, which results, ultimately, in a fuller understanding and appreciation of his poetic style. Reading cummings as an Expressionist also offers new insights into the body of cummings criticism in general. The wide and sometimes confusing plethora of critical opinion centring on a description of cummings' poetic style can be reinterpreted and an attempt at clarification made.

In order to provide persuasive evidence for the postulation that cummings can be regarded as an Expressionist poet, two primary questions have to be answered, viz.

- * What does Expressionism in poetry entail; and
- * could cummings' oeuvre, in the light of such a 'definition', be regarded as being Expressionist?

The latter question of necessity would involve the problem as to which poems should be involved in such a study, in order for the results to be generalized to the complete oeuvre of cummings' poetry.

3. Method

In order to provide a reasoned response to the above questions, the method outlined below was employed. An Expressionist model was compiled in which the characteristics of Expressionism as manifested in poetry were identified. Secondly, an in-depth study was undertaken of cummings' poetic oeuvre: a responsible number of poems have had to be selected and these analysed with the aid of the Expressionist model. The selection of poems for analysis, it was realized, had also to enable one to generalize the results to cummings' complete oeuvre in order to determine whether one can regard him as an Expressionist poet. In this discussion, only one full analysis of a poem will be provided, by way of exemplar, but the results of a more thorough study (Coetzee, 1993), will be presented and discussed. The method used here is based partly (but with major adjustments and additions) on a study done by Van den Bergh (1973) on the poetic oeuvre of Roland Holst.

4. The Expressionist model

It is not the aim of this article to argue in detail the compilation of the Expressionist model employed, but in line with what Willet (1970:6) states, "Anybody rash enough to open a book about an artistic or literary -Ism needs to make some reservations" it is necessary to provide a broad outline of the argument leading up to the definition of Expressionism in literature, and the compilation of the Expressionist model employed is presented briefly. A full account of the development of the model can be found in Coetzee (1993:12-122).

Defining any artistic or literary -Ism remains problematic. This is also true of Expressionism. Weisstein (1973:15) states that "The exact definition of Expressionism ... has always been a touchy and highly problematic issue" (1973:15). Several other critics support this view, including Furness (1973:1), Willet (1970:8-9), Kellner (1983:4) and Perkins (1974:123). The basic problem is that the term Expressionism has several different meanings and applications, as witness Weisstein's (1973:15) proviso: "should European Expressionism be regarded as a movement in its own right ... is it a trend dominating or at least characteristic of, a certain period, or must it be viewed as a universal current or tendency surfacing periodically throughout history?" (1973:15). According to Furness, it is difficult to define Expressionism because (1) it has a general and specific meaning; (2) it overlaps with what is generally called Modernism and (3) it has precursors in "Baroque dynamism and Gothic distortion" (Furness, 1973:1).

We regard this to be the main problem in any attempt to define Expressionism: should one refer and study only the generally known German phenomenon of Expressionism, and what about Expressionism in painting? I feel that Willet (1970:9) answers the questions appropriately: "For expressionism is above all else that particular element which the different senses of the term have in common". In order to arrive at a workable definition and description of the characteristics of Expressionism, one would therefore have to take as many as possible senses of the term into account.

The most prominent applications of the term Expressionism include: German Expressionism, Expressionism in painting, Expressionism vs. Impressionism, Apollonian vs. Dionysian art and the Expressionist method of literary and art criticism. The Expressionist model employed in this study has been derived from studies of all the above-mentioned senses of Expressionism. The relationship between Modernism and Expressionism, Expressionism in the Anglo-Saxon world, Expressionism in literature and a study of some of the poetry of two acknowledged and renowned Expressionist poets, viz. Gottfried Benn and Paul

van Ostaïjen, have also been included in the compilation of the Expressionist model (Coetzee, 1993:12-122). In general, the model is also the result of what Cuddon (1977:253) suggests: the different senses of the term Expressionism have been applied 'judiciously' to literature, in other words, different elements of Expressionism have been 'translated' in order to make it possible to apply them to Expressionism in poetry.

The Expressionist model compiled for the purposes of this discussion shows the elements a poem has to contain in order for it to be described as an Expressionist poem. This model entails two groups of characteristics, viz. *structural* and *thematic*.

Structural characteristics of Expressionist poetry entail the elements in a poem such as syntax, typography, form and language use. Six structural characteristics of Expressionist poetry could be determined.

The use of *typographical and grammatical idiosyncrasies* is the first structural element of Expressionist poetry. Weisstein (1973:267) refers to this characteristic as the element of "disjoined syntax" and Joseph (1984:81) calls it the "ungrammar" of Expressionist literature. Expressionist poetry employs mainly *free verse*. This is as a result of the Expressionist passion for creating new forms of artistic expression, because poets felt that "they could not express their experiences and visions in traditional artistic forms" (Kellner, 1983:16). It is also a specific feature derived from German Expressionism. Willet (1970:241-242) states that, just as visual reality was distorted, "Verse forms were manhandled for expressive ends ... free verse accordingly was the rule".

Unity of content and form is the third structural element of Expressionist poetry. Perkins (1974:98) maintains that

Art, in the theory of Expressionism, was considered to have a higher task than simply to imitate nature ... In the eyes of the theoreticians of Expressionism ... the 'expressionist situation' had to lead automatically to an expressionist art form.

Cuddon (1977:253) also supports this statement; he states that, in the Expressionist realm, "expression determines form, and therefore punctuation, syntax and so forth ... can be bent or disjoined for the purpose".

The language in Expressionist poetry gains an element which Donkersloot *et al.* and Willet refer to as *chopped language*. Willet (1970:241) describes this element of Expressionist language in terms of "the actual sentences [being] chopped up". Donkersloot *et al.* (1954:21) relates this "staccato" element in Expressionist language to the Expressionist desire to simplify. Generally, Expressionist poets

are prone to a *limited use of adjectives*. According to Donkersloot *et al.* (1954: 11), the Expressionists rather call things by their names, than mincing around with adjectives.

Finally, the Expressionist poem structurally reveals a vivid *experimental verve*. In other words, the general sense of the structural elements in Expressionist poetry is one of innovative use of language (Donkersloot *et al.*, 1954:11,22; Furness, 1973:96; Abrams, 1988:59).

Fifteen *thematic characteristics* of Expressionist poetry could be distilled from the survey of relevant literature. The thematic characteristics refer to the content of the poetry: for example, theme, the specific use of colour words, the presentation of modern anxiety, a negative obsession with the city and recognition of the apocalypse.

Distortion of reality is a major thematic characteristic of Expressionist poetry. Willet (1970:241) states that German Expressionism in the visual arts was concerned with “deliberate distortion” first of all. Muller (1973:5) and Hadermann (1973:130) also regard the distortion of reality to be of great importance in Expressionist poetry. The distortion of reality generally results in the *obscurity of imagery* so evident in Expressionist poetry. Haines (1972:28-29) states that

The burden of the expressionist is to adapt a symbol system already fitted to conceptual usage for dealing with the *phenomenal* realm to the needs of a formal expression adequate for revealing insights relative to the realm of the *noumenal* (authors’ italics).

Together with the Expressionist desire for individual or subjective art, one can easily see that imagery can turn obscure. The Expressionist poem also expresses a sense of the *anxiety of the Modern situation*. Kellner (1983:16) states that “they [the Expressionists] also articulate the unease, anxiety, and pent-up hostility felt by many in the expanding industrial society”.

One of the fundamental thematic characteristics of Expressionist poetry is the desire to make the *invisible visible*. Hart (1986:127) defines Expressionism as an “aesthetic movement in which the artist expresses the inner experience through the free representation of objective facts”. Also Beckson and Ganz (1961:65) state that Expressionism “refers to a movement ... [that] rejected the imitation of external reality in order to try and express the inner self or some essential vision of the world”. Many critics state that Expressionism is intensely *individual and subjective* art. According to Kellner (1983:28), one can refer to Expressionism as “the cult of the self”. Bradby (1991:457) also states that Expressionist writing is “characterized by its intensely subjective expression of the writer’s deepest feelings”. The *obsession with the city* as theme in Expressionist art is a contri-

bution from the German Expressionist movement as well (Willet, 1970:241). Hadermann (1973:131) also includes this as an element of Expressionist art.

The use of *colour as an autonomous quality* is an Expressionist element of art as well. Willet (1970:241) argues that the arbitrary use of colour is part of the general Expressionist desire to distort reality. Hadermann (1973:130) also includes the “arbitrary use of colors” as part of Expressionist art.

Expressionist literature, by its very subjective and intense nature, also expresses *intense emotion*. Several critics regard this as one of the major characteristics of Expressionist art. Willet states that, ultimately “we are brought back to the question of *emotion*, which in any expressionist work has got to emerge as the ruling force, spontaneously dictating any formal distortion” (Willet, 1970:242) and “distortion is not expressionist unless it is directed above all, consciously or not, to the communication of some intense emotion” (Willet, 1970:242). Hadermann (1973:111-112) also supports the inclusion of this element. This has the concomitant that *elements of the grotesque* are also regarded to be an element of Expressionist art – a feature which is linked to the Expressionist desire to distort reality and to express intense emotion. The element of the grotesque is the result of the conjoining of these two Expressionist desires. The element of the grotesque in Expressionist art differs from the context of the grotesque in general in that it does not want to make “the reader’s or spectator’s flesh creep” (Willet, 1970:243) – it is, rather, a result of the elements of intensity and distortion needing to express “the emotional tensions within the artist” (Willet, 1970:243).

This has led critics, including Kellner (1983:31), to agree that an *element of intensity* is also part of Expressionist art. In an attempt to clarify the special relationship between Modernism and Expressionism in general, one can state that Expressionism is more important (than, for example, the Futurists, Cubists, Surrealists, Dadaists ...) in one respect: the passion and intensity with which they posed their questions embodied the general aura of the Modern era. The Expressionists also wanted to simplify by means of their art, and this relates to a type of abstraction present in Expressionist art. Furness (1973:15) argues that some of the features of Expressionism in art are intense expression and a revolt against mimetic notions in art, that result in abstraction. The element of *primitivism* in Expressionist art is primarily a result of distortion (Willet, 1970:242). Hadermann (1973:133) also adds primitivism to the list of features typical of Expressionist art.

In line with this, the Expressionist stance of *anti-intellectualism* or *irrationalism* is a result of the Expressionist desire for revolt against the traditional (Furness, 1973:21). This element is closely related to the *anarchistic* attitude towards the

traditional. Hadernmann (1973:130), for example, states that Expressionist art in general supports the “rejection of old traditions”.

Searching for the New Society is, in line with the view above about the negative obsession with the city, also regarded as an Expressionist element. Kellner (1983:16) states that “many Expressionists saw themselves as the bearers of new values, which would ‘renew humanity’ while creating a New Man and New Society”.

The Expressionist model applied in the analysis of cummings’ poetry therefore comprises these twenty-one characteristics. The working definition of Expression adopted for purposes of these analyses then is:

Expressionism is a method of creating literature used by any writer at any period. It entails an expression on the part of the poet of intense emotion or feeling that results in the distortion of reality. The form of the artefact that is created is dictated by an inner compulsion leading to the expression. The Expressionist artist wants to express an inner reality, in other words, make visible or audible the invisible and inaudible inner self.

5. cummings’ oeuvre: how many and which poems to analyse

770 poems are contained in *Complete Poems 1913-1962* (Cummings, 1972), having been published in twelve volumes (Cowley, 1984:231, and a personal count of the *Complete Poems 1913-1962*). If one wants to make a study of the complete oeuvre of a poet, and if one intends to generalize one’s results to the rest of the poet’s oeuvre or to a larger body of poetry, one has one’s work cut out if the oeuvre is even nearly as large as cummings’. Van den Bergh (1973:823), in his own enterprise, ruefully acknowledged the vastness of such an undertaking, calling it “een oeverloze taak”. Therefore, a way has to be devised that will allow one to study a reasonable, manageable, but representative number of poems so as to enable one to generalize the result to the rest of cummings’ oeuvre responsibly and acceptably.

In a similar study done by Van den Bergh (studying A. Roland Holst as a Symbolist), he suggests two solutions for the problem of selection from a large oeuvre: (1) study certain volumes of poetry only (1973:823), or (2) identify the most obvious Symbolist poems and study them (1973:823). Neither of these options appeals particularly, especially if one wants to generalize to the rest of the oeuvre. The first option allows generalization of results to the volumes studied only, and the second one seems ‘irresponsible’, because of the manipulation of the material studied, so that it ‘has’ to yield the results one might want it to yield.

Van den Bergh ultimately decided to study Holst's volume *In Ballingschap*, because the volume was compiled by Holst himself as a selected volume, into which he gathered 120 poems which he himself regarded as reflecting his oeuvre most fully (Van den Bergh, 1973:824). He regards, for example, *In Ballingschap* as being representative enough of Holst's oeuvre because Holst did not, according to critical opinion, 'develop' radically (in other words, his poetic style can be said to have remained consistent throughout his life as a poet), and because Holst himself made the selection of poems for *In Ballingschap* (Van den Bergh, 1993:824). This method, we feel, does not guarantee one a 'representative' body of poems for a generalizable oeuvre at all. It might well be that certain volumes of poetry are not represented fairly or at all, or that the poet subjectively chose poems that he favoured, which again might compromise the 'representativeness' of the sample.

The feasibility of regarding either the *e.e. cummings: Selected Poems 1923-1958* (1990) or the *Collected Poems* (1957) as representative of cummings' oeuvre remains problematic. As Van den Bergh stated (1973:823), the problem with any 'selected' volume of poetry is that it is entirely possible for it to be highly prejudiced. In their consideration of the *Collected Poems* (1957), Horton and Mangan (1984) devote special attention to the shortcomings evident in the *Collected Poems* (1957). They state that the book is "not a complete collection, nor is it by any conceivably acceptable standards a selection" (Horton & Mangan, 1984:64). According to them, "it includes most, but not all and sometimes not even the best, of poetry from *Tulips and Chimneys*, & *XLI Poems*, *is5*, *ViVa* and *No Thanks*, as well as a score of new poems" (Horton & Mangan, 1984:64-65). Bishop also criticizes the *Collected Poems* (1957) for the "scattered quality of the volume, which did not preserve the order in which the poems originally appeared and which also omitted certain poems.

It is felt that *e.e. cummings: Selected Poems 1923-1958* (1990) signally omits the more experimental poems concerned with typographical innovations. None of the famous, typographically daring poems, like "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r" (cummings, 1972:673) are included. In a survey of 68 sources of cummings criticism, "lCa" (cummings, 1972:673) was the eighteenth most popular poem in terms of references to and discussions by critics, and "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r" (cummings, 1972:396) the twenty-fourth most popular one. These poems are therefore clearly important in terms of what critics might regard as being typically 'cummingsian'. The omission of these 'types' of poems therefore disqualifies the 'selected' volume as being representative of cummings' oeuvre, and the simple fact that several volumes of poetry appeared after the publication of the 'Collected' volume also disqualifies the latter.

The modus operandi of this study therefore required some more innovative and therefore responsible suggestions. Two problems remained and the solutions to both had to guarantee one sufficient empirical back-up to generalize the results of the survey to cummings' complete oeuvre: how many poems and which poems need to be studied?

Van den Bergh (1973) studied 120 of Holst's poems. Statistically speaking, his sample is definitely big enough, as ± 40 is generally regarded in the social sciences to be a big enough sample (given the overall corpus size). It was therefore decided that a study of 130 poems (a sample of 16,88%) would be sufficient.

Together with a big enough sample, an 'objective' manner of selecting one's sample is essential. During the period of research on cummings' poetry, 68 sources were consulted. Each poem discussed or referred to in these 68 sources was counted and at the end of the survey, ten poems were found to have been cited most often in studies of cummings' work. This was taken as a useful criterion for 'critical importance', as these 10 poems had also most often been anthologized and would therefore, by logical extension, be most often read. They could thus be taken as representing an important portion of cummings' oeuvre. (Any claim of 'objectivity' would be problematic, as critics do not make choices for anthologizing objectively, but a claim to representativeness is made in this instance on the basis that the sample has not been manipulated in any way to include only [the ten] poems preconceived of as being most strongly Expressionist.)

The rest of the sample was chosen by means of the application of a table of random numbers (Steyn, 1991). The alphabetical index of the *Complete Poems 1913-1962* (1972:849-866) was numbered and the numbers extrapolated from the table of random numbers were matched in order to determine which 120 poems would be added as part of the sample. (This is an acceptable method of randomizing used in the social sciences and in linguistic research.)

As part of the bigger study, 130 cummings poems were therefore analysed and tested against the Expressionist model determined earlier. The results of this study are presented and discussed in this discussion. However, in order to render a clearer picture of how these analyses were conducted, and to show this interpretative method in action, one exemplary analysis is presented next.

6. Exemplary analysis

During the survey of cummings criticism, the poem “if everything happens that can’t be done” (cummings, 1972:594), was cited enough times to gain sixth place in the overall survey of poems anthologized most. It could therefore be regarded as a responsible choice for an analysis by way of example.

The entire structure of this poem is proof of cummings’ inclination towards the utilization of *grammatical and typographical idiosyncrasies*. The poem is, typographically speaking, divided into three discourses. The first discourse involves the words that are part of no parenthesis: S1:L1², 5, 9; S2:L10, 14, 18; S3:L19, 23, 27; S4:28, 32, 36; S5:L37, 41, 45. The second discourse involves the words that are part of the second parenthesis in each stanza: S1:L6-8; S2:L15-17; S3:L24-26; S4:L33-35; S5:L42-44. The poem is written in *free verse*: the lines are irregular and no ordinary rhyme scheme is involved. *Grammatical neologisms* like “everyanything” (L18, 41) also attest to the penchant for grammatical idiosyncrasy.

No obvious manifestation of *abstraction* can be found in the poem. However, the mathematical image in the last line of the poem, ‘we’re wonderful one times one’ (L45) implies a ‘translation’ of the metaphysical notion that the integration of one and one is ‘wonderful’. This can be read as an abstraction. The humorous consideration “that if ‘we’ are not the production of division, then we must be that of multiplication” (Cotton, 1980:282) also serves to illustrate this kind of abstraction.

According to Kidder (1979:173), this poem shows the “Natural process whereby things simply ‘happen’, asserts itself over the human ‘doing of things’”. Although this is no overt assertion of a longing for a *primitive* state, it evokes the primitive state, not worried or aware of anything other than the natural progression of events.

Cotton (1980:274) is specifically interested in cummings’ “skill in combining constituent parts into an elaborate whole”. Cotton applies Levin’s concept of coupling³ and concludes that “such coupling [which results in *unity of content and form* in a poem abounds in Cummings’ poem: ‘If everything happens that

2 S = stanza; L = line.

3 Which Levin defines as “naturally equivalent forms – semantic and/or phonologic – occurring in equivalent positions, unifying the poem and making it memorable” (Cotton, 1980:274).

can't be done ... ” (Cotton, 1980:283). Unity of content and form therefore prevails on more than one level in this poem.

The Expressionist penchant for *chopped language* is once more evident in this poem, and on more than two levels. Apart from the fact that cummings does not write full sentences at all, and the language therefore does appear ‘chopped’, the arguments in the poem are ‘chopped’ up as well. The main argument is presented without any form of parenthesis: S1:L1, 5, 9; S2:L10, 14, 18; S3:L19, 23, 27; S4:28, 32, 36; S5:L37, 41, 45. The second argument involves the words that are part of the first parenthesis in each stanza: S1:L2-4; S2:11-13, S3:L20-22; S4:L29-31; S5:38-40 and the third argument as presented as part of the second parenthesis of each stanza: S1:L6-8; S2:L15-17; S3:L24-26, S4:L33-35; S5L42-44. In other words, even the arguments or discourses in the poem are fragmented or ‘chopped up’. Once again, there is no abundant or non-functional use of *adjectives* in the poem, as only one adjective usually qualifies each noun in the poem, such as “stupidest teacher”.

The *experimental verve* in this poem can be attributed to several characteristics. There is, for example, the completely unconventional rhyme scheme of the poem, as well as the clearly experimental typography and fragmentation of the argument. This also ties in beautifully with the *anarchistic* attitude towards poetic conventions. Should one disregard the fact that the images referred to in the poem allude to the juxtaposition of the rational and the irrational, these images might well remain totally obscure. Once there is a sense that the idea of “everything happens that can't be done” (L1) is juxtaposed with intellectual virtues found, for example, in books (L3, 12, 21, 30, 34), one realizes that the images remain obscure only if the whole pattern is not discerned. The almost idiosyncratic *individuality* of cummings' poetry is well illustrated here.

Distortion of reality is a vital part of the poem. Line one already suggests the distortion of reality where “everything happens that can't be done” (L1). The fact that the “world is a leaf so tree is a bough” (L19) is also a distortion of a reality where the world is made the smaller of the two things mentioned.

This poem also attempts to communicate the *invisible and the inaudible*. Kidder states that this is the “last poem before the book quits. Having come through poems of autumn, winter, and spring, through satires, meditations and lyrics, the poet closes the book and sings the praises of the world beyond books, the summer itself where life is not for reading but for living” (Kidder, 1979:173-174). Maurer (1972:98) also supports this notion, as he states that

This progression from the external to the personal, from the outer world of ‘mostpeople’ to the inner world of ‘us’, finds its expression, sometimes

quietly, sometimes with childish innocence, sometimes with a dauntless courage, in poem after poem in the volume *l x l*. Cummings concludes the book with ... LIV.

Both Maurer and Kidder therefore recognize in this poem the Expressionist characteristic of an attempt to present the inaudible and the invisible.

There are several tenuous allusions to *colour* in the poem. The mention of *buds* (L11) indirectly suggests colour, and the references to *tree* and *leaf* suggest green, but the only use of *colour as an autonomous concept* is found in line 37, where “we’re anything brighter than even the sun” (L37). *Being brighter than the sun* suggests images of blinding white and yellow light, but the concept linked to the use of these words has nothing to do as such with the colours involved but rather with feelings experienced when confronted by “we” than with the colour radiated by “we”. Here colour as an autonomous concept is therefore indirectly but discernibly present. Cummings’ passion for ‘movement’ in poetry would also seem to be amenable to interpretation in terms of the Expressionist desire for *intensity of expression*. There are several ‘movements’ in the poem – Kidder (1979:156) underlines the movement “from addition to multiplication”, and Cotton (1980:279) recognizes the “vitality and unity ... suggested in the grammatical subjects” in the themes of the second and third stanzas. He also recognizes “the movement from general to specific, abstract to concrete, indefinite to definite, inanimate to animate, human to superhuman, youth to age, and, overall, from mystery to clarity” (Cotton, 1980:283). The individual nature of all Cummings’ poetry enhances the sense of intensity of emotion in his poetry, and in this poem Cummings is again giving expression to one of the central beliefs of his ‘meta-physic’: that the rational is overshadowed by love, which means everything.

This poem does not provide an overt statement of the quest for the *New Society*, but one can infer something of this in the criticism that is levelled about the society in which only the rational rules – for it does mean that there can be a different society filled with love, which might then be the ‘New’ society as desired by Cummings.

It is in its declaration of the *primacy of love over reason* that this poem is most eloquently Expressionist. Heyen (1984:236) summarizes that with “If everything happens that can’t be done” Cummings wants to tell us “that the supreme facts of existence are that scientists and thinkers are bad guys ... [therefore] Cummings has to emphasize feeling as opposed to thought”. According to Haines (1972: 27), this poem expresses the failure of those who, as scholars, seek reality in the “lonely sterility of books”. Friedman (1964:188) also states that this poem “is the concluding title-poem celebrating the mystical oneness of love”. In other words, all three these critics recognize the Expressionist element of *anti-intellectualism*

in his poetry. Cotton proposes an even more sophisticated argument in this respect. He states that the primary argument in the poem is that “Love is an all-important natural happening which unifies disparate into a harmonious whole and provides vitality, growth, enlightenment, and power” (Cotton, 1980:275). The second argument of this poem, according to Cotton, is that “Logic is an unimportant cerebral entity which analyzes into parts and produces sterility, stupidity and ineffectiveness” (Cotton, 1980:275). It is clear that in this poem the products of love are depicted as elements of vitality and vibrancy, while the products of logic are rather summarily denigrated.

Both Cotton and DeVries concede that cummings’ effort at belittling the results of the rational, scientific and the intellectual is conducted in a very rational and well-structured manner. Cotton (1980:286) states that “One may even be amused that a poem inveighing against logic be so logically developed”. DeVries (1984: 76) recognizes this phenomenon as well and comments more generally, considering “the unfortunate cleavage posed between science and poetry to be somewhat exaggerated”.

The Expressionist elements that do not occur overtly in this poem are an obsession with the city, an expression of the anxiety of Modern society, and the element of the grotesque. It is possible to make out an argument, though, for the fact that a world in which the rational rules (to which cummings is vehemently opposed) might be the modern world – and this would allow one to infer something of an anxiety with the modern situation by the depiction of its rational ugliness and impersonal truths. This modern society would be an urban one, so that even that trait can be extrapolated. This would mean that in this poem in reality only the trait of the grotesque is fully absent.

Although other cummings critics recognized many of the qualities of this poem pinpointed above, the value of reading the poem as an Expressionist poem resides in the combination of all the elements into a coherent whole. It is argued that, to only recognise the, for example, anti-intellectual themes in the poem, is not enough. If one interprets them within the Expressionist ‘frame’, it is a part of a much more intricate system that embellishes the richness of this poem.

7. Presentation of results

Following similar analyses of 130 poems by cummings, with the emphasis on testing the poems against the Expressionist model developed for purposes of the study, the following results were obtained (see Table, Appendix 1).

8. Discussion of results

The results presented in the Table indicate that the 21 Expressionist characteristics tested for appear in 77,32% of the 16,88% (130 out of 770) poems analysed. Van den Bergh based his postulation that Holst can be considered a Symbolist on the fact that 31 of the 38 characteristics of Symbolism appear in more than 10% (12 poems) of the 120 poems tested. The results of this survey indicate that in more than 10% of the 130 poems tested, all 21 Expressionist characteristics manifested themselves. Seventeen of the 21 characteristics appear in more than 50% of the poems, and thirteen of the 21 characteristics occur in more than 90% of the 130 poems tested. In other words, it is possible to generalize and extrapolate from these and maintain that Cummings is then an Expressionist poet because, on average, 77,32% of all the Expressionist characteristics appear in every Cummings poem tested.

The *modus operandi* employed in the selection of the poems would seem to substantiate the results of the survey even further. The 130 poems analysed were chosen in accordance with reliable criteria – firstly by using a broad spectrum of Cummings critics to indicate the ten most cited (thus conceivably ten very often read) poems. In addition, the 120 poems randomly chosen with the aid of statistical chance tables ‘objectively’ validate the generalization to the complete oeuvre of Cummings, and the model proposed in accordance with these procedures would seem to make possible extrapolation to similar studies involving other ‘schools’ or styles and other poets.

9. Conclusion

The results of the test reveal persuasively that one can state that Cummings can be conceived of as an Expressionist poet. The value emanating from a reading strategy postulating that Cummings is an Expressionist is considerable. It makes a more coherent and comprehensive grasp of Cummings’ work possible, especially when compared to some other efforts by critics within certain ‘-isms’. It became increasingly clear that if one does an Expressionist reading of Cummings’ all the mentioned ‘-isms’ can be explained with reference to one artistic framework, viz. Expressionism.

For example, Transcendentalists tried to go “beyond the range or domain or grasp of” (Sykes, 1982:1137) the objective reality. This can be translated in Expressionist terms as the desire of the Expressionist to grasp the essence of things, usually then resulting in intensely personal art. The element of intensity and subjectivity in Expressionist art was also favoured by the Transcendentalists (Sykes, 1982:1137). Descriptions of Cummings’ poetry as being akin to the “transcendent

vision" (Mullen, 1984:211) and cummings having "the personification of the old transcendentalist passion for abstract ideals" (Kazin, 1972:170) can now be reinterpreted as being part of the frame of his Expressionist style, for the Expressionist characteristic defined as an attempt to *make the invisible or inaudible, visible and audible, in other words, to lay bare the essence of the object*, is what earlier critics referred to as cummings' Transcendentalist features. In the poem "somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond" (cummings, 1972:366), both Kidder (1979:173-174) and Maurer (1972:98) vaguely point to this Expressionist element. Maurer refers to "The progression from the external to the personal ..." (1972:98), suggesting the element of transcendence.

Similarly, descriptions of cummings as a Platonist could be regarded as an extended version of a readings of cummings as a Transcendentalist (and hence, rather an Expressionist). Also, critics calling cummings a Post Impressionist were also in reality placing him as an Expressionist, because "Expressionism is a better term than Post Impressionism" (Hind, 1969:3). Kennedy's (1980) notion of cummings as writing in an Apollonian style is also indirectly a partial sense of cummings as an Expressionist in view of the link that had been established between Expressionism and Nietzsche's notion of the Apollonian-Dionysian dichotomy (Nietzsche, 1965:548).

Critics concentrating on the idea that cummings was an anti-intellectualist have in fact concentrated on one of the most important Expressionist features of his poetry. Blackmur's constant and merciless diatribes against cummings' poetry as being "a sentimental denial of intelligence and deliberate assertion that the unintelligible is the only object of significant experience" (Blackmur, 1954:317-318) can now be placed in perspective, because viewed in the wider framework of cummings as an Expressionist, the anti-intellectualist stance can be seen as part of a coherent view of reality, and not be dismissed as simply a petty rejection of part of reality. The element of individualism that several critics have decried in cummings' poetry could by the same token now be seen as part of an encompassing poetic practice emanating from intense personal emotion, and not as being a whim of "the vanguard of modernist revolt ..." (Sutton, 1965:190-191). His primitivism then, too, can be explained as part of the peculiarly Expressionist desire to penetrate to the essence of the event or the object.

In an evaluation of views of cummings expressed by a variety of critics applying '-isms' to cummings, it has thus emerged that most of the scattered statements can be gathered to make a case for cummings to be regarded as an Expressionist poet (Coetzee, 1993:144-151). References to cummings' perceived adherence to other '-isms' inevitably turned out to be inadequate descriptions of his Expressionist style, and it is therefore maintained that the approach described here

makes it possible for the reader to access Cummings' poetry more coherently and ultimately satisfyingly by reading him as an Expressionist poet, using this newly-established 'horizon of expectation' as a way into his poetry – yielding at one and the same time more immediate gratification in the reading (decoding more adequately, within the frame of Expressionist theory certain allusive structures in the poetry) and promising more long-term usefulness in terms of the possibility of extrapolating from this method to other poets and oeuvres.

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Appendix 1: TABLE 1

Expressionist	Count out	Percentage
1	130	100
2	128	98,46
3	130	100
4	127	97,69
5	124	95,38
6	130	100
7	121	93,07
8	84	64,61
9	129	99,23
10	128	98,46
11	31	23,84
12	40	30,76
13	129	99,23
14	108	83,07
15	45	34,61
16	129	99,23
17	55	42,30
18	129	99,23
19	69	53,07
20	17	13,07
21	128	98,46
Total	2111	77,32

Table 1: Number and percentage of Expressionist characteristics that occurred in 130 poems by cummings

TABLE A: RANDOMIZING FIGURES

Column		1	6	11	16	21	26	31	36	41	46
Row 1	1	96599	17254	79613	49389	48696	13681	34540	40189	16811	32634
	6	37448	66591	15245	93980	66180	66044	07011	80010	07648	27767
	11	90991	10947	48809	06495	92135	42009	35928	77561	04471	04664
	16	59414	88211	79005	89424	36918	74964	62960	86512	74207	30840
	21	78962	21439	60317	35608	79728	85580	00459	95014	57831	76394
6	1	19039	92425	93768	41135	32150	96483	02777	56370	54715	91915
	6	51152	89964	42799	31897	24577	50193	43360	19276	70618	29906
	11	57094	11763	73613	70448	36806	52527	99711	81517	19512	33791
	16	06185	45653	16006	83645	96676	71886	32685	66603	08210	05456
	21	62655	69496	39577	39926	11283	52652	60848	95458	99667	89407
11	1	73175	23619	43100	38097	81880	33601	21050	60649	09718	25953
	6	96005	19235	98451	20102	07082	70593	19972	20968	33457	06508
	11	70937	66156	86211	05002	74871	08204	29146	98369	36513	74832
	16	25055	59249	87167	45735	25390	43299	31612	47785	09611	97139
	21	57865	50454	99544	27384	22997	77714	31656	97634	30839	81584
16	1	77179	88169	54607	04163	19554	43721	54582	13600	53685	93085
	6	69983	44029	92981	04014	29197	62583	52538	78229	43454	40106
	11	04485	54710	07802	69298	31904	60309	52819	59429	89129	27742
	16	37487	85270	65582	87876	53610	36090	39023	90127	57637	88822
	21	25313	99476	40024	75040	92010	81193	36118	76131	62243	66531
21	1	26190	61417	83611	40810	91724	62001	61046	84782	22917	49826
	6	08677	03887	37216	97680	11853	66831	98450	59965	93588	42322
	11	55335	60469	46055	38535	63374	58225	70825	82743	65798	17216
	16	11905	48348	64242	55467	68734	78536	78421	96397	98725	10680
	21	32150	30136	09976	44908	70793	94247	45451	18955	41324	58051
26	1	15687	77052	59763	61628	11691	59043	94514	60930	22651	10596
	6	30006	77545	27974	93533	38354	51349	50677	03875	79033	98452
	11	68565	54181	16213	82275	31083	47107	73314	86482	93825	56868
	16	46305	86721	66222	73016	01205	55400	10127	52648	94722	45225
	21	15772	74659	94155	47295	45752	40384	96897	93380	95635	56529
31	1	59096	79102	19590	69888	96478	19811	97656	25090	65219	80583
	6	58310	59494	50582	19687	76812	72644	77600	87497	69616	93800
	11	62373	70502	66241	39674	42320	26338	67330	26947	18245	88740
	16	35986	60742	95916	60801	55848	63304	27409	53771	78838	21701
	21	76128	42949	74536	70783	02812	35962	95424	13672	07939	05557
36	1	94843	38474	28362	54758	97740	50391	16935	49238	08911	67491
	6	17351	76628	59531	51798	94433	96912	12707	43257	11076	49062
	11	26230	76969	11537	59690	89298	03889	35225	73312	89235	45509
	16	60800	94818	87992	88946	31368	01183	60597	32285	33695	08093
	21	05294	68485	39982	21071	14945	24902	31431	26713	44465	99867

