This Man's Heart: Masculinity in the Poetry of E.E. Cummings

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THIS MAN'S HEART

MASCULINITY IN THE POETRY OF E.E. CUMMINGS
(TITLE)

BY

WILLIS JOHN WHITESELL, III

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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Abstract

"This Man’s Heart: Masculinity in the Poetry of E.E. Cummings" explores changing masculinity in the life and poetry of E.E. Cummings. The relationship between Cummings and his father, his first male role model, became strained when Cummings was a teenager finding his own male identity. As he rebelled against his father, a Unitarian minister, he began writing poetry in a modernist style under the direction of a new mentor, Ezra Pound.

Cummings’ early modernist poems criticize conventional male roles and configurations of masculinity as outdated. As Cummings continued to grow as a man and writer, he confronted new realities which force a changing view of masculinity in his life and in his poems. The beginning of the Cold War, and his relationship with Marion Morehouse, contributed to a shift in configurations of masculinity.

While Cummings’ early poems like “the boys i mean are not refined” and “Buffalo Bill’s” point out the ineffectiveness of conventional male roles, his later poems present a new vision of masculinity as a man at peace in nature. Cummings began asserting a new pantheistic model of masculinity in poems such as “this man’s heart / is true to his / earth:” which attempts to present a positive model of masculinity. Theories that focus on men and masculinity give insight into how and why Cummings made this ideological shift in his poetry, based on the poems themselves and on Cummings’ own life experiences.
Dedication

For my greatest mentor and role model, my father, Willis John "Skip" Whitesell, Jr.

Though the unexpected death of your Dad left you fatherless at age 10, you still grew to be a man of honor and courage who instilled in me a strong sense of values.

I rely on your example daily as I raise my own children.

To quote Neil Young, "Old Man, look at my life. I'm a lot like you were."
Acknowledgments

I would first like to acknowledge and thank my wife, Jennifer and our children Ethan, Elaina and Hannibal for giving me love and support as we continue on our life journey together.

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Masculinity studies emerged as a class of literary criticism only in the past few years, though the Men's movement and masculinity studies overall took root fifteen to twenty years ago. A revolutionary, gender-based class of literary criticism now demands a further exploration of masculinity in literature. Indeed, this essential companion to feminist criticism is long overdue. As the roles of women in literature have changed, so too have the roles of men. Feminist criticism broke the flood gates and forced a re-examination of gender, but masculinity studies can help more fully explore the changing roles and feelings of men.

Modern literature offers a plethora of depictions of masculinity which merit closer examination and evaluation. While a few critics began to explore masculinity in the works of master modernists like Eliot, and Hemingway, and others have explored masculinity in more recent writers like Mamet and Hwang, little if any criticism has been written of masculinity in the poems of E.E. Cummings, a writer who bridges these two literary eras or movements. Cummings' work relies heavily on configurations of masculinity, for much of his poetry deals directly with issues of changing male roles and the necessary elimination of out-moded configurations of masculinity.

Even the way to write Cummings' name is a subject for debate which reflects changing views of masculinity. Though many writers and critics are inclined to write Cummings'
name in all lower case, a well-supported argument by Norman Friedman asserts that we are bound by conventional rules of English, while Cummings as a poet was free to move beyond these restrictions (Friedman 114). Cummings most often signed his name in letters and contracts with capitals, and his use of lower case in his name is most often used when he is referring to himself as poet (Friedman 114). His refusal to follow the normal patriarchal structure with the use of capital letters is one of many reflections of his own self-image and feelings about his father and traditional male roles.

Images of men and masculinity dominate Cummings' early poetry and present conventional male roles as obsolete as illustrated in the 1950s "when Cummings went to Bennington College in Vermont to give a reading [and] the entire audience of girls rose as he mounted the platform and chanted 'Buffalo Bill's/defunct' in unison" (Norman 6). Cummings' poems evolve and later begin to offer a positive configuration or role model of a man at peace through a spiritual connection with nature, as in "this man's heart."

Before a complete study of masculinity in the poetry of E.E. Cummings can be successfully undertaken, the background of masculinity studies and modernism must be discussed. While feminist studies were first to examine masculinity in literature, masculinity studies initially gained momentum as a separate field of study in psychology. The portrayals of men in pop culture show an obvious negative slant,² as men
in movies, literature, and drama reflect the real-life feelings of twentieth century men, who became increasingly despondent. Many of these feelings of despondency, inadequacy, and discontent can be attributed to the lack of male role models and mentors in twentieth-century industrial society. In his book *Iron John: A Book About Men*, Robert Bly writes,

> The traditional way of raising sons, which lasted for thousands and thousands of years, amounted to fathers and sons living in close - murderously close - proximity, while the father taught the son a trade: perhaps farming or carpentry or blacksmithing or tailoring. As I've suggested elsewhere, the love unit most damaged by the Industrial Revolution has been the father-son bond.

> There's no sense in idealizing preindustrial culture, yet we know that today many fathers now work thirty or fifty miles from the house, and by the time they return at night the children are often in bed, and they themselves are too tired to do active fathering.

> The Industrial Revolution, in its need for office and factory workers,
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pulled fathers away from their sons and, moreover, placed the sons in compulsory schools where the teachers are mostly women. D.H. Lawrence described what this was like in his essay "Men Must Work and Women as Well." (19)

Bly's explanation of the destructive effect of the industrial revolution on sons who need their absent fathers and mentors builds a whole new field of study.

One writer who further examines these strained relationships is Guy Corneau in his book *Absent Fathers, Lost Sons: The Search For Masculine Identity*. Corneau describes a presentation by Dr. Wallot to a parliamentary commission in Quebec, in which he "notes that four times as many men suffer from alcoholism and drug addiction as do women; they also outnumber women three to one in the areas of suicide and high risk behavior" (2). He also finds that schizophrenia more frequently develops in men than in women, and asserts that "the frequent absence of the father or of masculine models for young male children seems to explain certain behavioral difficulties connected with men's affirmation of their sexual identity" (2). This lack of foundation for young men almost surely leads to another generation of absent fathers and lost sons as the degenerative process proliferates.

Bly's quote only indirectly recognizes the emotional effects of industrial society on adult males. These men who
grew up lacking positive male role models, fathers, or mentors seem doomed to live the same absent life of the men who came before them. This condition is arguably psychological and economic. Society ingrains the idea in the psyche of young men that their fathers suffer the hardship of labor and separation from their families in order to provide for them. Being separated from the family appears to them as a noble sacrifice all men must make for their families in an industrial society.

Being doomed to live this same life of absence precipitates the feelings of despondency. A husband and father who feels obligated to be absent from home in order to provide income not only misses the opportunity to give love and guidance to his sons (and daughters for that matter), but he also suffers a painful separation from his wife. Bly identifies what he calls an abundance of "feminine energy" in the homes of young men with absent fathers, causing resentment to grow. Years of this frustration, later coupled with his frustration as a husband and father from being separated from his wife, too often explodes into frequent cases of wife battering. A man victimized by ruthless industrial employers comes home to a wife who resents his absence. She appears to be the same woman as his mother when he exploded as a young man. The anger and frustration of a world that victimizes him turns him into a victimizer.
While Bly's explanations of male behavior show insight and provoke further thought on the subject of masculine development, his desire to explore obscure myths in order to understand and redefine masculinity seems opaque at times, and readers often misinterpret and resent his outlook. Peter Murphy writes,

More recent material on masculinity, especially that published in the United States, emerges out of pop psychology and relies on, at best, a liberal analysis of men's social and sexual roles. Robert Bly's bestseller, *Iron John* (1990), exemplifies this perspective, although his hostility to women and his reliance on such classic primitivist metaphors for masculinity as king, soldier, and warrior presents a more poignantly reactionary position than did his precursors. (3)

Murphy correctly identifies Bly's use of traditionally masculine myth, but he misinterprets Bly's intentions as "liberal" at best, and misconstrues his writing as hostile to women. Bly himself writes, "There is male initiation, female initiation, and human initiation. I am talking about male initiation only" (X). Bly writes to men in a language familiar to them so they can understand. Murphy attempts to stay within the bounds of political correctness by claiming
any traditionally masculine roles as destructive. Room
enough exists for the opinions of these two writers, and
many more, as conceptions of masculinity continue to be
explored.

As studies of masculinity by Bly and others continued,
many groups and organizations began to take form in order to
face, identify, and correct improper and destructive male
roles. “The men's movement” began by providing retreats,
mentors, and role models for young men (Kivel 9). The
reactions to the men's movement vary greatly. Many men may
feel no need to participate in such activities. If they do,
they may feel it to be somehow emasculating. Still others
may feel the men's movement saved their lives.

Reactions among women also vary greatly. The 1992 book
Women Respond to the Men's Movement, edited by Kay Leigh
Hagan, expresses the diversity of opinions even within the
feminist community. [H]attie gossett, in her personal "talk
back" style, displays a deep distrust and anger for anything
resembling a men's movement:

what? a mins movement? what you mean a
mins movement? aint they still runnin
the world? what they need a movement
for? what? is this some kind of joke
about laxatives or something? basking?
oh - bashing? theyre trying to heal the
cruel wounds of mins bashing? wait a
minute - did i miss something? do they
have to wear breast implants false
fingernails get paid less money have no
power & get whistled at? do they? huh?
  huh? (20-21)

Gossett's understandable anger stems from her feeling that
she must stand up for women who have been victimized by men
throughout history. However, she fails to understand that
the men's movement works to identify and correct these
problems within a male group.

Starhawk shows a clearer understanding of the men's
movement in her article in the same book entitled "A Men's
Movement I Can Trust":

Like most feminists of my
acquaintance, I've responded to the
growth of the men's movement with a
mixture of approbation and trepidation.
On the one hand, we've noticed for a
long time that something is wrong with
men, and the prospect of men getting
together to fix it themselves is a happy
one. On the other hand, our history
with men doesn't generate much trust
that, left to themselves, they will
actually get it right.

Of course, the men's movement is no
more a single monolith than is the
feminist movement. There are ten, a
dozen, fifty different men's movements. Some of them make me break into a cold sweat. Others involve and move the men I most deeply love and respect. How can we tell whom to trust? (27)

She poignantly and clearly states a well-developed view of the men's movement, one of cautious optimism. A history of barbaric warfare and industrial growth victimizes everyone but affects women more severely. "Rosie the Riveter," the famous WWII character, captures the depth of confusion and destruction brought on by war and marks the beginning of masses of women being separated from their families in western culture. Through the exploration of masculinity and the effects of separation of men from their families for industrial or military reasons, we can begin to understand how the movement of women into the workplace over the past 50 years is causing an even more fractured, dysfunctional family unit. Women now run the risk of experiencing the same feelings of isolation and depression as men.

Though many may not feel men deserve any sympathy because they appear to be the perpetrators of victimization, men have also been victimized. A noticeable trend developed as the industrial revolution pulled the father from the home in order to put him to work in a factory where he became part of the machinery. His emotions seemed to lack validity, so he bottled them up to protect himself and his family from pain, humiliation, and anger.
One psychologist, Marvin Allen, reports in his book *In The Company Of Men: A New Approach to Healing for Husbands, Fathers, and Friends* that "it took [men] months to display the same openness that most women revealed in their first few sessions." When Allen pursued with two different men the issue of why men are so repressed, one responded, "'I've been mad, scared, or numb since the day I was born.'" The other man made a similar reply, "'I've been lonely and isolated all my life'" (5). This isolation and anger often develops into depression and aggressive and self-destructive behavior.

All of these characteristics make up the prevailing depictions of American men in the twentieth century. As the earlier quote by Peter F. Murphy reveals, most of these angry and depressed feelings of twentieth-century American men turn up as a standard configuration in the arts and pop culture. Indeed, modern literature overflows with angry and depressed men, who bottle up their emotions and display aggressive and self-destructive behavior.

In contrast to the separation of fathers from their families, the mentorship of a father or a father-figure plays an essential role in combatting feelings of isolation and depression in young men and helps them to be confident in their manhood. A wonderful example of the importance of mentors can be found in the life of E.E. Cummings.

Richard Kennedy's biography of Cummings expresses the major influence Cummings's father, Edward, had on E.E.
Kennedy explains that Edward Cummings left a prominent position as a Harvard professor of sociology to become the "Unitarian Minister of the South Congregational Church" in Boston. He possessed an "authoritative voice," an "athletic constitution," and "physical muscularity," though remaining a "sensitive intellectual, a striver, a leader, a fighter" (9). Kennedy adds, "He was gay, informal, and kindly but forcefully masculine in manner" (9). Cummings was given his father’s name, but his middle name (which was commonly used by his family and friends) was Estlin, after Professor Estlin Carpenter at Oxford (Norton 13). His nickname was "Chub," short for "cherub," which was the pattern on his wallpaper in his childhood bedroom (Kennedy 100). However, Estlin missed inheriting his father’s physical build and showed no tendencies toward aggression. Kennedy asserts,

Because of this basic difference in temperament, there was bound to be more conflict than usual between father and son when the boy reached his teens.

(10-11)

Indeed, as a teen, Estlin began writing poetry and echoing the themes of current writers, which led him to rebel against his Unitarian upbringing and follow the example of Ezra Pound. This rebellion toward one’s father or father-figure marks a common developmental period in a young man’s life as he struggles to find his own, independent identity.
Nonetheless, Edward Cummings proved an effective father and role model for Estlin as a boy. Edward not only wrote and published articles on labor issues and "social problems of the industrial revolution" (a hot topic of masculinity today), but as a minister, he "saw more of his children than most fathers do, for he was in and out of the house all day" (Kennedy 14):

His impact on his son's development was forceful. He provided an example of power and success and excellence in his own life. He created and colored strongly an atmosphere in which Estlin's unique and valuable personality emerged. (14)

In addition to providing the security of a mentor of the greatest caliber, Edward also affected Cummings' poetic style profoundly. Edward "loved wordplay" in his sermons, and surely Estlin heard all of them, perhaps several times each. He used "puns" and "mottos and slogans, linguistic ways to attract or surprise the minds of parishioners" (Kennedy 14). Even his sermon titles seem eerily similar to Cummings' poems:

"The Picture Puzzle of the Universe,"
"Mud Pies," "Spiritual Perennials,"
"Invisible Barriers or the Bird in the Window," and "The Elevator or the Ups and Downs of Life." (15)
Kennedy quotes E.E. as saying, "'no father on this earth ever loved or will love his son more profoundly'" (15). Edward gave his son a "happy childhood," but as a teenager, Estlin rebelled against his father and began to resent his father still calling him "Chub" (Kennedy 100). His rebellion against his father was compounded when in the military he was called "Eddie" by his barrack-mates (Kennedy 173). He developed a view of himself as smaller and less proud than his father, which contributed to his choice of lower case "i" as his poetic identity (Kennedy 110) and often resulted in the use of all lower case letters and initials in his poetic name, e.e. cummings, as a way of distancing himself from outmoded constructs of masculinity, his father and his Godfather, Estil Carpenter (Kennedy 15).

Later, in typical middle-age fashion, E.E. rediscovered the depth of his father's love. Though Edward and Edward Estlin were similar in many ways, E.E. naturally desired to branch out into new experiences to build upon his early childhood experiences.

From nearly the time that he began to walk, Estlin wished to attend Harvard, like his father. Though he attended Harvard, he drifted into literature, more specifically poetry, when he met Theodore A. Miller, who "became the first of a series of mentors who would act as father-surrogates for Cummings during the next dozen years" (Kennedy 54). As Cummings fell away from his father's influence, he found a mentor in Miller, who changed his life
by introducing him to Keats’ poetry. E.E.’s movement away from his father proved necessary to finding his own voice as a writer. However, a man naturally has a movement back to his father as a role model around the age of fifty (Bly 25). This movement in E.E. Cummings resulted in a stylistic change in his writing, which reflected changing constructions of masculinity. Before we can fully explore this change in Cummings’ poetry, we must first gain a thorough understanding of how Cummings first found his poetic place in Modernism, and the masculine configuration in Modernism.
II

Modernist literature in no way created the modernist masculine persona. At most, it simply identified and dramatized, even glamorized, the despondency of modern men. The very heart of modernism recognized the changes the industrial revolution thrust upon men and their families. Modernism sought to make a fresh break with any previous literary traditions in order to capture the soul of industrial society. As Malcom Bradbury explains in his collection of essays entitled Possibilities, modernism's beginning marked a widespread realization of the impact of the industrial revolution, and it solidly took hold as a literary movement around the time that the automobile became widely available to the American public in 1908 (81).

Modernism captured and publicized the emotionally desolate and mechanized industrial world in which men dwelled. Bradbury asserts that Lawrence's novel Lady Chatterley's Lover expresses typical modern themes and feelings, such as, impending cataclysm, emotional void, class conflict reaching toward extremity, increasing mechanism and materialism in all classes, [and] the growing triumph of an egoism urging man deeper into cold will. (87)

In a similar way, Robert Bly presents D.H. Lawrence's work "Men Must Work and Women as Well" as exemplifying of how an
absent working father affects the life and feelings of his son:

Lawrence recalls that his father, who had never heard this theory, worked daily in the mines, enjoyed the camaraderie with the other men, came home in good spirits, and took his bath in the kitchen. But around that time the new school teachers arrived from London to teach Lawrence and his classmates that physical labor is low and unworthy and that men and women should strive to move upward to a more "spiritual" level—higher work, mental work. The children of his generation deduced that their fathers had been doing something wrong all along, that men's physical work is wrong and that those sensitive mothers who prefer white curtains and an elevated life are right and always have been. (20)

Lawrence presents a situation where the absence of the father leaves the boy with no positive male role model. His confusion allows for the gulf between father and son to become wider, and the boy grows to be an even more absent father. The office job that he elects to fill creates even more distance between father and son in the next generation.
When the alienation and depression of the modern American industrial society continues to dominate a family, despondency grows progressively worse with each generation. The chaos and harshly realistic elements comprising Modernism in literature break from literary traditions in order to more accurately capture the modern world with a tiny glimmer of hope. Perhaps Willy Lowman's suicide in *Death of a Salesman* will ultimately benefit his sons. They may not receive the insurance money Willy had hoped they would, but they may gain something more valuable. Their father reflected how the pursuit of monetary wealth and separation from the family for work leads to emotional desolation and destroys the family.

While themes of isolation, desolation, and the destruction of the family define modernism to a great degree, innovative styles and techniques remain essential elements of modernism in literature. As Linda Wagner discusses in her book *American Modern: Essays in Fiction and Poetry*, technique provided the necessary vehicle for modernism to flourish:

> The obsession with innovation and technique was, consequently, much more important philosophically than it might first appear. The reason an entire generation of writers turned to a religion of art, believed so compulsively in their work as both
promise and reward, was that nothing else that was left to them seemed valuable. Sherwood Anderson describes modernism as "an attempt on the part of the workman to get back into his own hands some control over the tools and materials of his craft." (6)

According to Wagner, the very style and chaotic technique of modern poetry captured the writer's feeling in the industrial community in a way which nothing that came before could.

Cummings felt quite drawn to this means of expression. S. Foster Damon, an enthusiast of modernism and another friend and mentor, introduced Cummings to the poetry of Ezra Pound. Kennedy points out that Pound's poem "The Return" affected Cummings, as he connected with the "linguistic expressiveness" (106), which undoubtedly reminded Cummings of his own father's wordplay. The uncapsulated lines in the middle of the poem impressed Cummings as he witnessed the power of space:

For Cummings this freedom of spacing represented a release from formal bonds, and he saw, as he sat at the family typewriter trying out visual arrangements, that there were immense possibilities for expressiveness in the combinations and the separations of the
words on the page. Beyond this, he had for some time recognized the needlessness of capitalizing the first letter of each new line of verse: he had seen that the Greeks capitalized on the first letter of the first word in a poem and sometimes not even that. At the same time, he had noticed in reading the comic strips, especially his favorite Krazy Kat, that capitals were used for emphasis. As for punctuation, the purpose of which is to guide and clarify meaning for a reader, he realized that its absence could create significant ambiguities and complexities. (Kennedy 107)

Pound's use of space and lack of capitalization encouraged Cummings to use questions and "wordplay" as his father had, all different kinds of linguistic rules. He also attempted to "follow Pound's injunction against superfluous words" (122) by keeping his poems as sparse as possible.

Cummings finally met Pound in Paris in 1921, and the two "took to each other immediately, especially because of Pound's inborn sense of chivalry" (Kennedy 230). They spoke for several hours after being introduced by Scofield Thayer, and then Cummings, "stunned with hero-worship," strolled
back alone. "It was the beginning of a life-long friendship" (Kennedy 231).

Ezra Pound's call to those writers that he mentored (Joyce, Cummings and others) insisted that they "make it new" (Wagner 6). His popular catch-phrase embodied the feeling of the day. The world of 1920 was radically different from the world of fifty years earlier. Pound's call to other writers also gave a direction for the newness and subtlety conveyed that only newness could adequately capture the rapidly changing roles of men in the modern era. Wagner asserts,

As propagandized by Pound, and called "impressionism" by Ford Madox Ford, [imagistic writing] brought to modern prose as well as poetry the use of concrete scenes and images; concision; clear and generally simple language; and a form germane to what was being written. (7)

Cummings followed the advice of his mentor and as a result, flourished as a modern poet.

In addition to Pound, another of Cummings' great contemporaries was Ernest Hemingway. Wagner points out Hemingway's "importance as stylist and craftsman" and asserts that "his influence on the modern skill of writing is indisputable" (8). Hemingway is quoted saying,
"What amateurs call a style is usually only the unavoidable awkwardness in first trying to make something that has not heretofore been made. Almost no new classics resemble other previous classics. At first people can see only the awkwardness." (98)

Wagner continues, "Innovation in modern American literature" is simply trying to create something never before created, "Style: the individual and single verbal reality" of each writer, and "the word arrangement that best, and truly, reflects his or her world view; i.e., voice" (98). In the case of Cummings, his unique style and voice can be seen as molding stylistic elements of his father and Ezra Pound into something new.

Hemingway helped define and make popular the style, technique, and ethic of modernism in literature by writing in sparse, revealing jabs, and by creating pathetic, emotionally spent characters like "Jake Barnes, Brett Ashley, Pilar, Robert Jordan - any one might have been a compelling study of twentieth century bereavement" (8).

Hemingway's status as one of the greatest modern writers carried with it serious drawbacks. He became an American icon, a fascinating story in and of himself. In his book, On Men and Manhood, Leonard Kriegel writes, In no other writer of our country, perhaps in no other man, had America
embedded the actual presence of manhood as it had in Ernest Hemingway. That alone should have told us that we would eventually have to un-make the man, to pull him apart like a discarded rag doll. (94)

Hemingway actually embodied the traits of a modern character, even to the point of committing suicide. But the list of modern writers that followed the call to "make it new" included many other great writers.

T.S. Eliot's Waste Land and "The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock," his most famous poems, both present a dark, desolate world that disallows the hopes and dreams of men. Likewise, James Joyce's historic novel Ulysses presents Leopold Bloom as a pathetic, emotionally void character who finds a surrogate son in Steven Dedalus for one day in an attempt to replace his dead son, Rudy. Stephen, in his unknowing search for a father figure or mentor, stumbles upon Bloom. The break-down of Bloom's marriage (or his willingness to allow his wife to have an affair) combines with the strange relationship between Bloom and Stephen and highlights the importance of the relationship between father, or mentor, and son.

Quite a different flavor than Joyce, Eliot or Hemingway shines through in the poems of William Carlos Williams, another of Cummings' contemporaries. This family doctor wrote poems with a rhythmic construction that captured "word
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of mouth language, not classical English" (Wagner 115). His style relied on his contact with everyday people, as did his attempts to "make it new." Similarly, Cummings built upon his own experiences in attempts to heed Joyce's call.

Cummings, in his own poems, toyed with language as it sounds when spoken, but he also relied heavily on his background as a painter in creating a poem that presents a visual experience. Though Cummings stylistically fit well into the movement of modernism and gained strength from it, his content remains unique and individual. His presentation of masculinity appears extremely complex and developed. Though he often presents desolate modern characters in his poetry, he also often criticizes outmoded conceptions of masculinity, and his presentation of masculinity evolves over his poetic career.

Cummings' earlier poems align closely with the configuration of masculinity in the work of his fellow modernists Pound, Eliot, Hemingway, Joyce, and others, as these poems frequently present alienated, isolated men living in industrial cities. Perhaps Cummings' two mentors (his father and Ezra Pound) nurtured in him the strength and freedom to write poems which bring to light conventional male roles and conceptions of masculinity as ineffective.

Early in his writing career, Cummings already criticized conventional male roles by serving as "the pacifist warrior" (Kennedy 133) during World War I. At first, he opposed the war, but later he supported the war
effort by driving an ambulance. His critical view of the war forced him to find an intelligent and peaceful way he could contribute to ending the hostilities and aiding the wounded.

As the War came to an end, popular conceptions of masculinity changed, as did Cumming’s presentation of masculinity in his poems. Indeed, Cummings again proves to be a trend-setter as he begins writing after World War I about a construction of masculinity not identified until years later as "the Fifties Male."

Robert Bly first identified "the Fifties male," who much resembles the modern man of the twenties:

He got to work early, labored responsibly, supported his wife and children, and admired discipline. This sort of man didn’t see women’s souls well, but he appreciated their bodies; and his view of culture and America’s part in it was boyish and optimistic.

(1)

Though the Fifties male embodied some positive and strong qualities, Bly points out that behind the mask of charm remained "isolation, deprivation, and passivity." Bly further profiles the Fifties male:

[He] was supposed to like football, be aggressive, stick up for the United States, never cry, and always provide.
But receptive space or intimate space was missing in this image of a man. The personality lacked some sense of flow. The psyche lacked compassion. (2)

Though his isolation and the "one-sidedness of his vision" appear ominous, he possessed a "clear vision of what a man was, and what male responsibilities were" (2).

The Sixties brought about a new kind of man. Bly explains that "the waste and violence of the Vietnam War made men question whether they knew what an adult male really was." These men exhibited the courage to avoid or accept the war. At the same time, men were forced to look at women differently in light of the feminist movement, and these men became "conscious of concerns and sufferings that the Fifties male labored to avoid." These men observed their "feminine side" (2) for the first time, which allowed them to become more nurturing and closer to the earth.

Cummings promoted and maybe even helped make possible many of these changes in American men. Though the men of the twenties and the men of the fifties appear similar, the men of the twenties were perhaps more harsh and rigid. The men of the fifties were often portrayed in popular culture as more compassionate family men who more actively participated in fathering and mentoring, if only part-time, than were men of the twenties. The twenties men achieved great wealth by asserting America internationally as a nation for the first time in World War I. The West
prospered as Germany was forced to pay a war debt, and the United States had asserted itself as World Power (Burns 246). The men of the twenties buried the pain and destruction of the war behind their masks, because their families benefited so greatly from the wealth and freedom secured by the war.

Cummings felt the feelings of these men of the twenties and expressed them in his poetry, as did most modernists. However, Cummings' configuration of masculinity continued to evolve throughout his writing career, and his early pacifism, exemplified in his position as ambulance driver, helped pave the way for the evolution of American men into the men of the sixties. Cummings toured several prominent American universities in the late fifties reading his later poems, which promote a construction of masculinity in tune with nature, his feminine side, and pacifism. These beliefs largely defined the changes in men in the sixties, and Cummings, one of America's most popular living poets at the time, surely influenced this change.

As Cummings continued to grow as a poet, his poems began to address masculinity in a different way. They criticize conventional constructions of masculinity all along, and even encourage androgyny as we find in his poem "Cleopatra built." However, the philosophy of his poetry shifts radically in his book of poems *Xaips*, as does the configuration of masculinity. "[M]y father moved through dooms of love" foreshadows this philosophical shift and
presents Cummings' father, one of his male role models, in a positive light. Nearly ten years later, Cummings' poems show a real change. Shortly before this thematic or philosophical shift, his mother died, and World War II ended with the dropping of the atomic bomb. Both of these events influenced Cummings' poetry. Also, as Cummings scholar Richard Kennedy points out, Cummings' love for Marion Morehouse, his third wife, grew more intense, as did his respect for her Catholic faith, which encouraged him to look back at his own childhood faith, Unitarianism. His Unitarian upbringing and elements of Marion's Catholic faith combine into a pantheistic type of philosophy presented in his later poems.

This philosophical shift offers a new construct of masculinity. His poems no longer present the bleak industrial view of a world where men bottle up their emotions to become mechanized and destructive of themselves, their families, and the world. Instead, his poems express a hope in the ability for a man to change. A man can return to the peace of pre-industrial farm life exists through a spiritual link to nature. Soon after World War II, the escalating number of atomic weapons sparked the Cold War, and soon nations possessed the power to destroy the world. Cummings realized the need to quit stressing in his poems what men were doing wrong and instead present a means by which they can turn into a kind of ambulance driver.
Cummings' poems illuminate masculinity as desperately needing to be redefined. Indeed, they evolve through a period of great literary transition. He writes poems that deal with masculinity during and after World War I, and continues to do so until after World War II and well into the Cold War. Cummings' pacifism in a century full of devastating wars resulted in poems that eagerly attempt to confront and redefine masculinity. His poems battled the convention which classified pacifism as not masculine. Poems like "Buffalo Bill's/ defunct" attempt to transform masculinity to include pacifism and a respect for nature. Masculinity appears an essential ingredient of Cummings' poetry that must be looked at more closely.

Indeed, a great deal of Cummings' poetry deals with America's ever-changing perceptions of masculinity and usually challenges the convention. While his later poetry settles comfortably into a construct of the man of the sixties, his earlier poems rather exclusively present the desolation and isolation of modern men and conventional male roles as outdated and ineffective. In order to fully understand the evolution of masculinity in his poetry, we must first examine these earlier poems.

One of Cummings' earliest poems captures, in true modernist fashion, the despondency of a man in an industrial society. Originally written in 1914 during his senior year at Harvard and then revised just after he served in World War I, "[T]he hours rise up putting off stars and it is"
conveys a harshly honest view of an American period most often remembered for vast wealth and conspicuous consumption:

the hours rise up putting off stars and it is
dawn
into the street of the sky light walks scattering poems
on earth a candle is
extinguished the city
with a song upon her
mouth having death in her eyes

and it is dawn
the world
goes forth to murder dreams....

i see in the street where strong
men are digging bread
and i see the brutal faces of
people contented hideous hopeless cruel happy

and it is day,

in the mirror
i see a frail
man
dreaming
dreams
dreams in the mirror

and it
is dusk on earth

a candle is lighted
and it is dark.
the people are in their houses
the frail man is in his bed
the city

sleeps with death upon her mouth having a song in her eyes
the hours descend,
putting on stars....

in the street of the sky night walks scattering poems

In this poem, a candle provides the necessary light, which carries religious overtones (indeed, the original version of
this poem contained several religious themes), perhaps of a funeral. One must also remember a candle provided light in the agrarian world before the industrial revolution. The extinguished candle burns again in the end, but still "it is dark."

When the city awakens, it looks dead behind the front it puts up, and the world murders the dreams of men. Strong men earn their keep by "digging bread." Bread symbolizes life, and digging symbolizes death, as they attempt to sustain life by laboring over something dead, the city. The people remain happy in their misery; day provides more hope than night, though little hope exists.

In the mirror, the poet sees a weak, beaten-down man, who only keeps dreaming in the world of reflection, the world of his poems. At night, he relights the candle, which symbolizes his creative energy and poverty as poems are involuntarily scattered to him. When the people go home, he goes to bed. Death still lingers in the city as silence unfolds, and the truth shines to the poet. The hours descend and bury the poet with stars. His dreams, as a poet, emerge from death and sleep.

Indeed, this poem grows more emblematic and self-reflective over time as Cummings' poetry stylistically becomes more and more scattered upon the page over his writing life. The speaker, or involuntary poet, only sees death and struggle in the industrial city, which murders dreams. The strong men dig bread, but the speaker/poet
appears frail and dreams. He separates himself from the strong men and lives at peace with death. Jack Balswick’s book, The Inexpressive Male, sheds further light on the speaker’s division from other men:

The traditional definition of manhood includes not only what "real" men should do, but also what a real man should not do. Inexpressiveness is a male characteristic that traditionally has been defined in negative terms. Simply put, an expressive male is one who has feelings and verbally expresses them, while an inexpressive male is one who does not verbally express his feelings. While some inexpressive males do not believe they have feelings to express, more typically, men are verbally inexpressive of their feelings because they believe it is the way men should be. Given the current redefinition of gender roles, an increasing number of men may want to express their feelings, but because of past restrictive socialization, are unable to do so. (1)

As a poet, Cummings displays great courage and insight by honestly writing of how the self-reflective speaker/poet
feels distant from the rest of society. This distance proves necessary because traditionally American men remain inexpressive and work hard, and the speaker shows feeling and humility by admitting that he lacks the strength of the average working city man. His lack of inexpressive strength allows for the creation of this poem. He remains at peace with the night that the strong men fear, for his strength derives from his ability to express his feelings in poems. This new configuration and expressiveness continues to grow in his poetry as he follows the lead of Pound, his new mentor.

The influence of Ezra Pound on Cumming's poetry and configurations of masculinity appears essential in what is likely Cumming's most well-known poem. "Buffalo Bill's/defunct" voices (in Cummings' stark, modernist style) the need for new American male roles, as the existing constructions of masculinity and male roles appear to be ineffective and out-dated:

Buffalo Bill's
defunct
  who used to
  ride a watersmooth-silver
  stallion
  and break one two three four five pigeons just like that
  Jesus
he was a handsome man
  and what i want to know is
how do you like your blueeyed boy
Mister Death

This poem from *Tulips and Chimneys* reflects Cummings at just shy of twenty-two, an aspiring poet in New York, pulling
away from his father as mentor and mimicking his new mentor, Ezra Pound. Indeed, Cummings' realization of the power of line-breaks while reading Pound's "The Return" occurred not long before writing "Buffalo Bill's." The stylistic similarities look obvious, though Cummings took the line-break to a stylistic extreme. Cummings pushed Pound's radical style even further and established his own unique poetic voice at a time when Cummings needed to assert his strength and manhood. Kennedy explains that after reading a headline of the New York Sun on January 11, 1917 while working a slow desk job, Cummings wrote "Buffalo Bill's" (Kennedy 45).

In his book The Poetry and Prose of E.E. Cummings, Robert E. Wegner asserts,

in the poem, we have, tightly juxtaposed, the adult perspective with the child's adulation of the hero. In the eyes of the child, Buffalo Bill exists as all that he has ever been purported to be by legend. At this point the underlying ambiguity of the poem has been established. (96)

Prior to this assertion, Wegner points out that most of the legends surrounding Buffalo Bill turned out to be fraudulent, and most adults knew this, while children continued to idolize him. Thus Cummings displays his awareness that this male hero is not what he is made out to
be. Buffalo Bill in some ways exemplifies the model American hero, everything a man should be, whom most American boys praise only to discover as a fake and a phony. Indeed, Buffalo Bill represents Cummings' father, his childhood idol, whom he had to pull away from. The modern world of World War I proved to be too violent, brutal, and destructive for Cummings to live the lifestyle of his father as a Unitarian minister.

"Jesus" also holds a prominent place in the poem, implying a parallel between "he" and Buffalo Bill. In fact, because "Jesus" stands on a separate line (Pound's stylistic trick which Cummings used avidly), the following lines remain ambiguous as to who is with "Mister Death." Both Wild Bill and Jesus emerge as two childhood heroes America has to struggle to come to terms with. Were they really fakes? If so, Cummings' father, the Unitarian minister, was also possibly a fake. "Jesus's defunct" echoes Nietzsche's famous statement "God is dead." Cummings strived to be a poet and here followed the stylistic example of his new mentor, Ezra Pound.

This poem provided the perfect forum for Cummings to critique traditional American male roles and constructions of masculinity. As modernism attempted to break history in order to capture a new industrial world, traditional American male roles needed to be redefined. The modern, industrial world called for a new kind of man. The construct of manhood which Buffalo Bill represents died with
the Wild West and was obsolete in the industrial cities of the twentieth century. Also, the poem suggests that the passivity of Jesus only brings death in the uncaring industrial world. Cummings offers no new role model in this poem; he only points out the ineffectiveness of conventional male roles and the need for new mentors and role models.

"[A]t the ferocious phenomenon of 5 o'clock," another early poem from *Tulips and Chimneys*, also captures the desolation of modern man and contains many noticeable similarities to the original version of "the hours rise up putting off stars and it is." In "at the ferocious phenomenon," the city, New York, appears as a large mouth devouring the "digestible millions." The buildings of industry, like Woolworth's, feed off the people on the street during rush hour and block out all but a "singular ribbon of common sunset," which "is hanging." When the sun hangs, it is dying. The poem concludes with the harsh line "snow speaks slowly," which suggests that cold nature will continue to thrive and cover the city people of rush hour.

Again, the speaker of this poem humbles himself by referring to himself as simply a "morsel." Also, again the theme of sundown conveys an end to the day and the death of the people who find themselves used, exploited, and chewed up by the ruthlessness of industry.

The speaker of these two poems perceives himself as separate from other men because he holds to different masculine values; he feels the need to express himself. But
Cummings begins a long tradition of pacifism in his poems with "look at this)." Cummings' conviction shines through in this poem as the speaker presents his buddy, a casualty of war:

look at this)
a 75 done
this nobody would
have believed
would they no
kidding this was my particular

collect

The subject matter of this poem undoubtedly stems from Cummings' experience as an ambulance driver. The speaker of the poem appears to be genuinely concerned and shocked at the loss of a buddy, and he requests that his body be handled carefully. Clearly, the dead soldier's mother suffers the loss. Her son was killed, and the cost of shipping him home will be billed to her, though probably emotionally, not monetarily. The use of shipping tags like
“fragile” and “this side up” creates a stark and sarcastic vision of this dead soldier as a type of gift from the military to the fallen soldier’s mother.

Written in the mid 1920s, this poem and a whole series of others from is5 express Cummings’ unique blend of modernism and pacifism, which later evolved into his presentation of masculinity and the sixties male. The poem conveys the senseless slaughter of young men in war and then shows the callousness of those in charge. Sam Keen, in his book Fire In The Belly: On Being A Man, provides a construct of masculinity in the military which may help explain the tough nature of this poem and the emotional savagery of the mother:

Induction into the army or, if you are one of the lucky "few" into the marines, involves the same process of systematic destruction of individuality that accompanied initiation in primitive tribes. The shaved head, the uniform, the abusive drill instructors, the physical and emotional ordeal of boot camp, are meant to destroy the individual's will and teach the dogface that the primary virtue of a man is not to think for himself but to obey his superiors, not to listen to his conscience but to follow orders. Like
the rites of all warrior societies it teaches men to value what is tough and
to despise what is "feminine" and
tenderhearted. Nowhere so clearly as in
the military do we learn the primitive
maxim that the individual must sacrifice
himself to the will of the group as it
is represented by the authorities. (37)

After "look at this)," several consecutive poems
express Cummings' pacifism and his critical view of the
military. As Rushworth Kidder points out, these poems
"develop themes of war and its manipulation by politicians"
(71).

Prior to the war, Cummings participated in a few
anti-war rallies with other Harvard students⁵, but the day
after the formal declaration of war by the Unites States,
Cummings enlisted in the "Norton-Harjes Ambulance Service, a
Red Cross unit serving with the French Army." Kenney
writes,

The choice of the ambulance service
by young intellectuals and especially by
young literary men is quite
understandable. They usually were
pacifist by inclination and this was
noncombatant duty. They were classed as
officers, yet did not have to bear the
burdens of command or the
responsibilities of giving orders to others. The ambulance service carried all the prestige of dangerous military duty with a minimum of risk. (137)

Other modernist writers who chose to become ambulance drivers included Dos Passos and Hemingway. Kennedy explains that ambulance drivers only needed to serve for six months, instead of two to six years. Driving provided a means by which these writers could participate in the war and be in the middle of the event of a lifetime without compromising their conviction of pacifism (137). Indeed, these experiences provided fodder for many of Cummings' poems.

Written years later, "the boys I mean are not refined" builds upon configurations of masculinity and male behavior in times of war and harshly criticizes brute and idiotic camaraderie.

the boys i mean are not refined
they go with girls who buck and bite
they do not give a fuck for luck
they hump them thirteen times a night
one hangs a hat upon her tit
one carves a cross in her behind
they do not give a shit for wit
the boys i mean are not refined
they come with girls who bite and buck
who cannot read and cannot write
who laugh like they would fall apart
and masturbate with dynamite
the boys i mean are not refined
they cannot chat of that and this
they do not give a fart for art
they kill like you would take a piss
Brilliantly, Cummings rolls together in this poem nearly everything wrong with masculinity and conventional male roles in this century. In order to understand these layers upon layers of masculinity, defining "refined" proves crucial. Webster's New World Dictionary asserts its meaning as "made free from other matter, or from impurities; purified; elegant; free from vulgarity or coarseness" (1221). Being made free from other matter coincides perfectly with these statements about violence by Sam Keen:

*Men have all been culturally designed with conquest, killing, or dying in mind. Even sissies. Early in life a boy learns that he must be prepared to fight or be called a sissy, a girl. Many of the creative men I know were sissies. They were too sensitive, perhaps too compassionate to fight. And most of them grew up feeling they were somehow inferior and had flunked the manhood test. I suspect that many writers are still showing the bullies on the block that the pen is mightier than the sword. (38)*
Could this be what Cummings is doing? The "frail man" encountered in the earlier poem who separates himself from the "strong men" may be lashing back here with a pen. After all, the boys "do not give a fart for art." Or is this only Keen's personal experience? His statements do capture the essence of this poem, as do other sections of Keen's book where he discusses locker-room talk. He explains how "scoring, or how many times one has done it with how many girls" occurs in the "locker-room school of sexuality," and that many men stay "caught in the adolescent philosophy that reduces women to objects with desirable parts to be used and abused by men" (74).

"[T]he boys I mean are not refined" criticizes this mind-set. While the poem conjures up images of a rowdy USO dance, most likely, the boys who "shake the mountains when they dance" and go with girls that "masturbate with dynamite" represent soldiers who get off on power, and their dance is war.

The contrasting of these boys with "refined" boys has confused some critics in the past as to what Cummings wished to convey. In the poem, we find a underlying dichotomy that critiques high society for patronization and for accepting war but not the lifestyle of warriors. This parody of high society and brutal revelers again positions Cummings outside either category. Helen Vendler, in her "Review of Complete Poems 1913-1962," displays a deep misunderstanding of
Cummings' intentions in this poem because of his critical presentation of "the boys" and of the "refined";

The admiration for boys who can "shake the mountains when they dance" (and who can hump their girl thirteen times a night) because they hate art and wit is a measure of cummings' self-hatred, and the measure of self-hatred is the measure of sentimentality. (Rotella 105)

Though Cummings appears to situate himself outside the category of "typical male" or one who aspires to traditional conceptions of masculinity, he can hardly be accused of self-hatred. Rushworth Kidder clarifies any confusion when he informs readers,

The apparent celebration of those who "do not give a fart for art" and who "kill like you would take a piss" comes, it must be remembered, from a man whose entire life was given to art and whose central theme was love. The poem is, after, not so much a panegyric as a highly literate and skillful parody of outhouse verse. (118)

Indeed, Kidder's outhouse appears strikingly similar to Keen's locker-room. But if Cummings intends to parody the rugged boys and to criticize this configuration of
masculinity, then his vanguard stance on masculinity could not be fully understood and appreciated until very recently.

Kidder points out that the frankness of the poem "in its obscenities" resulted in its appearance in only "nine copies of the holograph issue of the book, where Cummings inscribed it himself on a page left blank for the purpose" (117). Since the poem had only recently been "republished," Helen Vendler, in her 1973 article, lacked the necessary resources to fully understand and appreciate the intense layers of masculinity issues within the poem. At that time, this poem lacked any critical attention, and literary criticism very rarely included masculinity issues.

As in "the boys i mean are not refined," another early poem which points out the difficulty for men in an industrial society to hold meaningful relationships and treat women with respect in Cummings' earlier poems is "between the breasts":

```
between the breasts
of bestial
Marj lie large
men who praise

Marj's cleancornered strokable
body these men's
fingers toss trunks
shuffle sacks spin kegs they

curl
loving
around
beers

the world has
these men's hands but their
bodies big and boozing
```
belong to
Marj
the greenslim purse of whose
face opens
on a fatgold
grin
hooray
hoorah for the large
men who lie

between the breasts
of bestial Marj
for the strong men
who

sleep between the legs of Lil

The men in this poem appear to be overweight laborers who spend their nights drinking and sleeping with prostitutes, like Marj holding a "greenslim purse" and a "fatgold/ grin." These men, affected by the industrial revolution, display an inability or a lack of desire for meaningful relationships with women. They spend their days working and their nights playing without connecting with a woman in any meaningful way. As with "the boys i mean are not refined," masculinity issues seem to have been overlooked in the past as scholars discuss the poetry of Cummings.

Instead, most literary criticism on Cummings' work dealt with his typically modernist poems such as "anyone lived in a pretty how town." In this poem, "anyone" and "noone" represent what all people can be but instead miss in their busy adult lives. Children understand the peaceful joy of "anyone" and "noone," but they forget as they grow older and become responsible adults. "Anyone" and "noone"
appear to be an essential part of the natural flow of season. They live and die, and though their death at first appears mournful, they rest together side by side. They live, but the others in the poem (with the exception of the children) fail to live.

While this poem sticks to traditional modernist themes of a town or country of people that "reaped their sowing and went their came," and worked, consumed and died, a hope persists throughout the poem. "[A]nyone" and "noone" represent people who in fact do not exist; however, the hope remains of living a peaceful lifestyle with the cycles of nature. The "natural" lifestyle, or lifestyle in tune with nature presented in this poem as a possible solution or way out of society's vicious cycle of produce-consume-die foreshadows the major shift in Cummings' later poetry. His stance as a masculine outsider, or even as anti-masculine in terms of traditional conceptions of masculinity, coincides with his emotional and creative function as a passive, analytical poet. This same outsider lifestyle permits him the time, peace, and reflective intelligence necessary to connect with nature beyond the confines of the hustle and bustle of modern-city life.

Rushworth Kidder points out a subtlety in the poem which brings Cummings even further into the poem:

Far more than a needed slant-rhyme for the word "face," the phrase "i guess" presents narrator as raconteur.
Suddenly deciding that the tale he is spinning needs to be drawn to a close, he emphasizes thereby its purely fictional, and therefore allegorical, character. (145)

Indeed, asserting the fictionality of the poem forces the question of "why is he telling this story?" and "what does it mean?" There must be a moral to this story. Perhaps he wishes to express the hazard of wasting one's life on "vain" pursuits, which only "anyone" and "noone" seem to capable of doing. Herein lies the deviation from his later nature poems. The modernist bleakness reflected by the name of the only man, or fictional man, escaping the vain pursuits of modern-city life, indeed evolves into Cummings' later poems, and his sarcastic hopelessness becomes genuine hope.

Richard Kennedy affirms the modernist configuration of masculinity and the bleak anti-hero in this poem:

This poem contains the central myth of Cummings' life: "anyone," like the nonhero "i," represents the child within the man. He is powerless and neglected by others, yet happy in whatever he does: "he sang his didn't he danced his did." He is alienated from other people whom he considers negative in their activities and standardized in their behavior: "they sowed their isn't they
reaped their same." As the story goes on, his beloved "noone" joins him in his response to life no matter whether good or bad events befall: "she laughed his joy she cried his grief." Her name allows Cummings to express both the isolation that anyone feels and the love that she offers: "noone loved him more by more." This same doubleness (with a touch of paranoia) applies to the response to the death of anyone: "noone stooped to kiss his face." (109-110) "Anyone"'s inability to accept the love that "noone" offers illustrates "anyone"'s psychological condition as an "inexpressive male." As Jack Balswick points out in his book The Inexpressive Male, a 1978 study done by R. Phillips found that the "traditional socialization of males" in American culture restrains the "development of basic characteristics and skills" and necessary elements of a man's capability for forming and maintaining "intimate and family relationships." Phillips labeled those men unable to be intimate with others as "dysfunctional in intimacy" (2).

Balswick points to another study by J. Harrison which presents some rather unsettling findings:

Harrison warned that the male sex role may endanger health and concluded, "a critical reading of presently available
evidence confirms that male role
socialization contributes to the higher
mortality of men." (3)

Indeed, Cummings must have also made this observation, since
"anyone" died before "noone," leaving her alone in typical
modernist literary fashion. Peter Murphy points out how
modern literature repeatedly presents men as anti-heroes.
He appears at a loss as to why male authors constantly
create male characters so deficient. Murphy subtly
expresses concern that men lead to their own destruction
(3). Murphy may be confusing literature as one of the means
by which men become misled, instead of the means by which
the emotional and social problems of twentieth-century men
can be exposed to the masses.

Modern literature probably deserves a round of applause
for presenting this social problem often enough so that the
public finally understands the need to re-examine
conventional male roles and conceptions of masculinity.
Murphy writes,

[P]hysical impotence and spiritual
failure characterize many men in
American Fiction. Men as cowards with a
lack of moral firmness, stupid men and
alcoholics, and men who die when most
needed are the men who victimize women
in American literature. Such are the
roles American literature provides.
What remains most baffling is "why men, too, should have accepted this travesty on their nature and role in life; but they did, in fact, accept it, even repeating [it] in their own books" (Fiedler). (3)

Indeed, Cummings understands this, as "anyone" lacks moral firmness and dies before "noone." He victimizes her by being unable to accept her love while alive and unable to feel her kiss after dying. However, as Rushworth Kidder points out, Cummings added those two simple words, "i guess," which change the entire poem. Here, Cummings stresses the fact that this is a fiction with a lesson for modern men: "don't follow the masses; be an individual at peace with yourself and nature."

This subtle realization continues to build toward a new configuration of masculinity as Cummings shows signs in his poetry of a mid-life re-evaluation ("mid-life crisis" seems too severe). The poem "tw" develops these feelings and presents a stark glimpse into the life of two elderly men who lived difficult lives as men in the twentieth-century, "digging bread" as social norms expected them to do as "strong men." Time eventually insists that they reflect and "dream" much like the poet in "the hours rise up putting off stars and it is." In this poem two old buddies (possibly on a park bench feeding pigeons, as we find in other of Cummings' poems) sit together and watch the actions
of others, dreaming of their own lives, to them, now over. The two men's stories and feelings are indistinguishable, and they appear to almost be one person. The traditional conceptions of masculinity again come under fire as these men seem spent and used up. They worked their lives away like the people surrounding "anyone and noone." The men only feel loneliness and a longing for their unrealized dreams as their lives are now spent. By presenting two modern anti-heroes, Cummings displays these feelings and this phenomenon as not isolated, but commonplace:

```
tw
00
ld
0
nce upo
n
a(n
0 mo
re )time
me
n
sit(l
00
k)dre
am
```

This poems appears in Cummings' book Xaipe, (the Greek title means rejoice	extsuperscript{8}, pronounced Kyereh, almost rhyming with 'fiery'), written in the late forties, around the time
Cummings hit his mid-fifties. Kidder explains this poem, as well as many from this book, as portraits which warn the reader "against reducing men, as poor portraits sometimes do, to simple categories" (179). This interpretation presents a withdrawal by Cummings from his characteristic presentation of modern "anti-hero" poetic portraits (he also painted avidly). Though the men may be spent or used up by the society that "murders dreams" as Cummings previously wrote, they now have the opportunity to dream again and to share their experience. "[T]w" also may reflect Cummings and Pound as two "dreamers" or modernist poets and old friends who are now unable to effectively write anything of value. By facing his ineffectiveness as a poet, Cummings is forcing himself to work toward a new construct of masculinity.

As his poetry approaches a shift from presenting visions of despondent modern men into visions of pantheistic sixties males, Cummings delves once more into the depths of modernism in order to make his poetic transition more dramatic:

```
the of an it ignoblest he
to nowhere from arrive
human the most catastrophe
april might make alive

filthy some past imagining
whwhich of mad rags strode
everth ignoranty blossoming
a scarecrow demongod

countless in hatred pity fear
each more exactly than
```
the other un good people stare
for it or he is one

No critical work deals with this poem. Perhaps the poem's inexactness and open-endedness as to who the "scarecrow demongod" represents leaves commentators feeling this poem to be of no consequence, or poorly written. The collective depiction of the "un good people" coincides with the "it or he" that is "one." Indeed, the "scarecrow demongod" most likely represents mankind, or possibly Hitler's Germany. If "human the most catastrophe" refers to the Holocaust, then this poem voices a stark contrast to Pound's well-known anti-Semitic beliefs during World War II and reflects Cumming's need to break from Pound.

Regardless of who or what the demongod represents, the bleak, modernist view of the world, and of the human catastrophe, dominates the poem to a degree that seems to lack any hope. He encompasses many characteristics of the anti-hero, as he appears poor, mad, and ignoble. Even the earth seems to be "ignorant" as it blossoms, and the people look "un good". This poem presents a scathing critique of mankind, and most likely of the use of violence, murder and war as a means to achieve objectives. Though the critique of war and violence smacks of common ideals of the sixties male, the themes are presented in pure modernist style with only critique and no positive alternative offered.
Though the most dramatic shift in Cummings' poetry regarding masculinity occurs in Xiape from poem 64 to 65, Cummings had shown earlier signs of this shift as more of a personal tribute to his father than a potential new poetic direction.

Cummings' long and specific veneration of his father in "my father moved through dooms of love" largely overshadows his brief complimentary poem to his mother "if there are any heavens my mother will (all by herself) have." Though his love and admiration for his mother was genuine (Norman 15), the poem he created in her honor lacks literary explicitness and appears more a gift to her. Indeed, his father's actions of reverence to his mother are the focus of a large segment of the poem:

\[
\text{my father will be (deep like a rose} \\
\text{tall like a rose)} \\
\text{standing near my} \\
\text{(swaying over her} \\
\text{silent)} \\
\text{with eyes which are really petals and see}
\]

Cummings spoke of his mother, Rebecca Haswell (Clarke) Cummings and acknowledged that she inherited her Unitarianism, where his father "created" his (Norman 15). In one speech, the source of his parents' Unitarianism accompanies firm praise of his mother as "joyous," forgiving, generous and healthy in body and mind (Norman 15). However, the volume and quality of Cummings' poem for
his father expresses a deeper admiration for his father's finding or "creating" his faith instead of having it given to him.

A movement back in the direction of one's own father as a male role model occurs naturally around mid-life, according to Robert Bly in *Iron John*:

Somewhere around forty or forty-five a movement toward the father takes place naturally — a desire to see him more clearly and to draw closer to him. This happens unexplainably, almost as if on a biological timetable. (25)

Indeed, Cummings showed a movement back toward his father at the age of 44 to 46 when, he wrote, "my father moved through dooms of love," a poem which foreshadowed the later philosophical shift in his poetry. This poem displays the poet's intense desire to move closer to his father in order to "see him more clearly" (Bly 25). Cummings said of his father, "'I loved him: first as a child, with the love which is worship; then, as a youth, with the love that gives battle; last, as a man with love which understands'" (Kennedy 111). In this quote, Cummings displays a natural understanding and peace with masculinity and his relationship to his father.

The shift in configurations of masculinity found in this poem only fully developed later as he began writing nature poems. He apparently needed this new construct in
order to respond to the years of poetry he had written, criticizing conventional concepts of masculinity as obsolete.

In his biography of Cummings, Kennedy argues,

The writing of this poem represents a real psychological break-through for Cummings. He seems to have removed some restriction from his deepest self, a release which then allowed him to identify himself with his father, for he even transfers to duty-filled Edward Cummings his own self-directed philosophy of life. (385)

Cummings himself admits that this began a "new poetic period for him," which employs a "more responsible, more morally concerned voice" (Kennedy 386). However, Kennedy supports the assertion that this poem only foreshadows the real shift in his poetry:

Cummings in his reminiscence is a little premature, this development did not take place as early as 1939 [when this poem was written]. But it is worth noting that he saw the origin of it in this creative act of reconciliation with his father. (Kennedy 386)

Rushworth Kidder accurately asserts that Cummings presents his father in this poem as a man "one with nature [who]
redeems the meek while deflating the proud." Kidder also notes how this poem blends modernism in a way which allows for some greater meaning to be associated with his father, breaking from the stark realities found in modernist literature:

A story of creation, the first stanzas parallel Genesis while overturing The Waste Land. Assembling a number of words echoing the first six lines of Eliot's poem ("forgetful," "stir," "april," "roots," "unburied," and "sleeping"), Cummings reverses the thrust of Eliot's despair and restores April to its more traditional place.

(Kennedy 149)

This turn against the despair of modernism which Cummings reveled in for so many years marks a stylistic change linked to his changing mentors. About the time Cummings wrote this poem and felt a need to be closer to his father, to better understand him and re-affirm him as a mentor, Ezra Pound came back into Cummings' life. His opinion of Pound appeared quite contrary to his earlier hero worship:

"You may be surprised to learn that the recently endowed...Patchin Institute has been studying Ezra. We don't know if he's a spy or merely schizo, but we do feel he's incredibly lonesome. Gargling
anti-Semitism from morning till morning
doesn't (apparently) help a human throat
to sing. He continually tackles
dummies, while uttering ferocious
poopyawps & screechburps, as though he
suspected some vast invisible
football game audience were surrounding
bad-guy Titan-him." (Kennedy 387)

While the two remained good friends, Cummings evidently no
longer felt Pound to be an adequate mentor.

Though the timing of this poem reflects Cumming's own
developing personal shift in poetic and life philosophy, it
also shows the direction of his future poetry and proudly
admits his reclamation of his father as his mentor. Indeed,
the poem overflows with positive configurations of
masculinity.

In the poem, Cummings humbles himself as "forgetful"
and one how would "squirm" under his father's stare, and he
shows great respect, love and admiration for his father, who
shines as a selfless, intelligent, loving and creative man
with a strict dream hanging over him. As the poem reads,
"Scorning the pomp of must and shall/ my father moved
through dooms of feel;/ his anger was as right as rain,"
Cumming's father (a minister) never preached of what you
must do, but instead of emotions. Cummings even approved of
the way his father expressed anger.
Finally, the poem acknowledges that the father's philosophy defeats the bleak picture of modernism: "- i say though hate were why men breath -/ because my father lived his soul/ love is the whole and more than all." Ending the poem by displaying an awareness of the desolation of modern industrial society, and how men "kill," "steal," "fear," and "lie," the poem glorifies Cumming's holistic Unitarian outlook and link to nature, which his father instilled in him. This philosophy transcends the problems of the man-made world and offers a new construct of masculinity. Though this poem contrasts the stark and critical configurations of masculinity found in the poetry of Cummings, it only briefly previews the shift which dramatically occurs beginning with poem 65 of Xiape.
The modernist themes in poem 64 stand in stark contrast to
the next poem in Xiape, poem 65:

i thank You God for most this amazing
day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
and a blue true dream of sky;and for everything
which is natural which is infinite which is yes

(i who have died am alive again today,
and this is the sun's birthday;this is the birth
day of life and of love and wings:and of the gay
great happening illimitably earth)

how should tasting touching hearing seeing
breathing any-lifted from the no
of all nothing-human merely being
doubt unimaginable You?

(now the ears of my ears awake and
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)

The revelation conveyed in this poem marks a religious
awakening and a turn philosophically in Cummings' poetry
which bears deep significance for his status as a modernist
and begins a new chapter of men and masculinity in his
poems. In nature, the speaker experiences a spirituality
which he lacked. In this poem, the speaker is especially
associated with Cummings; as Kennedy points out,

The sign of [his] private self was the
lowercase "i" which he used to refer to
the speaker in many of his poems. It
stood for a vulnerable, sensitive
antihero, wide-eyed with wonder before
the world and readily assertive of his
natural feelings, a figure corresponding
to such characters as Pierrot,
Petrouchka, and Charlie Chaplin's role
of "the little tramp." (5)
The "i" of Cummings' "private self" stands in direct
contrast to Cummings' rare use of capital letters in "God."
His fluctuating spirituality during different periods of his
life reflects his relationships with his two greatest
mentors, his father and Ezra Pound. Indeed, this poem, or
at least this book of poems, marks the point in Cummings'
life when he discontinues following the example of Ezra
Pound because he has exhausted the use of modernism in his
poetry. Instead, he begins following the example of his
first and greatest mentor, his father. His poem "i thank
You God for most this amazing" seems almost a poetic
synopsis of one of his father's sermons.

After years of developing and then maximizing his
modern style and writing to Pound regularly, Cummings
settled into Joy Farm, a property deeded to him by his
mother. In reaching his middle fifties and the peace of Joy
Farm, experiencing the death of both of his parents and the
dropping of the atomic bomb, Cummings was pushed to the
realization that the bleak modernist subject matter of his
poems no longer seemed appropriate. No one needed him to
continue to point out what was wrong with the world and with
traditional conceptions of masculinity. The world needed
hope.
His new wife, Marion Morehouse, displayed a devotion to her Catholic faith, and Cummings admired this, often wandering into her church during his "daily walks." On one occasion, he "prayed to the full moon ('I became a pagan')" (Kennedy 128). Indeed, Cummings experienced a kind of religious revival around the time he wrote *Xaipe*, which forced his return to his now deceased father (the Unitarian Minister) as a mentor.

Kennedy mentions in his book *E.E. Cummings Revisited* that Cummings remarked, "'Yes, T.S. Eliot & Toynbee are right: the times call for an organized religion'" (Kennedy 129):

> His basic religious feelings were more in tune with his Unitarian upbringing. His concept of God was that of a comprehensive Oneness together with a sense of the presence of this Oneness in nature. In *Xaipe* he expressed this belief most clearly in a sonnet that combined both prayer and an awareness of Divinity in the natural world. (Kennedy 129)

Kennedy feels that "'i thank You God for most this amazing" embodies Cummings' Unitarian upbringing and his new-found peace in the natural surrounding of Joy Farm (Kennedy 129) which he inherited from his mother (Norman 10). In order to express this return to a Unitarian philosophy in his poetry,
Cummings consciously pulled away from the bleak modern philosophy which had dominated his poetry for so many years.

The change of philosophy in Cummings' poems and his change of mentors appears clearly in "this man's heart" from Xaipe, especially when compared to "Buffalo Bill's" from his early work in Tulips and Chimneys. The new philosophy of "this man's heart" grows from Cummings' early spiritual life. Kennedy describes a verse Cummings wrote as a twelve-year-old which captured his Unitarian philosophy:

This linking of religious feeling and emotional response to the natural world, a common form of Unitarian religiosity, was to become more fully developed during his high school and college years. (38)

Cummings developed this philosophy but abandoned it when he followed Pound's example and began writing in a modern style, with bleakly modern philosophies and images. However, earlier philosophy formed the basis of Cummings' most recent poetry.

this man's heart
is true to his
earth; so
anyone's world
does
-n't interest him(by the
look
feel taste smell
& sound
of a silence who can
guess
exactly
what life
will do
loves
nothing
as much as
how (first
the arri
-v-

in
-g)a snowflake twi-
sts
,on
its way to now

-here

The speaker of this poem displays a devotion to living a
life free from imposed expectations. He controls his
destiny; however, the cut-off lines defy predictability and
resolve into something unexpected and often contradictory.
Indeed, life usually defies prediction. He identifies with
the snowflake and appreciates its unpredictability; it
appears to be going one way and instead goes another on its
way to "now/-here," and nowhere, much like people on their
way to death.

While this poem thematically follows the bleak,
death-centered modern style of Cummings' earlier poems, the
link to nature allows for a sense of peace and spirituality.
The pantheistic, Unitarian-like speaker presents a new model
of masculinity, a man finding peace through nature. Indeed,
the speaker exemplifies a way for the desolate modern man to find peace by becoming a "sixties male," though this poem was written a decade earlier. Cummings again prepared a model for the coming decade.

The recent men's movement preaches the need for men to escape together into the woods. *Wingspan: Inside the Men's Movement*, a book published in 1992, lists various men's publications and organizations. Writers tell stories of retreats to the woods with other men in order to better understand and shape their own masculinity and their lives as fathers, sons, husbands, friends, warriors, and lovers. The natural surroundings are believed to be critical for men to find peace and serenity, allowing for self-examination. "[T]his man's heart" reveals the speaker's dedication to nature, to himself, and to life. The natural setting of Joy Farm provided the retreat that men later would find in the woods. Men find a connection to nature which allows for a peaceful understanding of the life cycle, as expressed in "this man's heart."

"[B]ut also dying" echoes the natural life cycles found in "this man's heart," but in the context of a relationship, expanding the depth of the new construct of masculinity:

    but also dying
    (as well as
to cry and sing,
    my love
    and wonder)is something

    you have and i
've been
doing as long as to
(yes)forget(and longer
dear)our
birth's the because of a
why but our doom is
to grow(remember
this my sweet)not
only
wherever the sun and the stars and
the
moon
are we're;but
also

nowhere

This poem encompasses the feelings and style presented in "this man's heart" in terms of a couple. They find a sense of peace and equality and experience life and emotions together. The male speaker appears much more androgynous and at ease with his love. In "but also dying," gender lacks drastic distinctions in comparison to Cummings' earlier poems which deal with male/female relationships.

Also notable is the change of presentation of "nowhere" in contrast to "this man’s heart." Indeed, this poem appears to be a kind of response to or even recantation of the ending of "this man’s heart." By not breaking up "nowhere," the poem stresses their togetherness in eternity. "[B]ut also dying" and other relationship poems which came after Cummings' philosophical shift provide a positive,
alternative male role, while his earlier poems present the ineffective and destructive actions of men in relationships,

Cummings' relationship with Marion Morehouse helped lead him toward re-establishing his father as a mentor and thus affected the way his poems portray men in relationships. His love and respect for her encouraged him to respect her Catholic faith and prompted a desire to discover, or re-discover, his own Unitarian faith. His return to Unitarianism led him back to his father, a Unitarian minister who had also "discovered" Unitarianism for himself (Norman 15). Dysfunctional men no longer dominate his poems, as in "between the breasts." Instead, his poems concentrate on how men form and nurture loving and meaningful relationships, as in "but also dying."

Images of men and masculinity dominate Cummings' early poetry and attack conventional male roles and conceptions of masculinity as obsolete, but his poems undergo a philosophical shift and later begin to offer a positive construction of men at peace through a spiritual connection with nature. Cummings achieved a tremendous amount of excellent work by "logging" his own psychological developments through his poetry. His greatest mentors, his father and Ezra Pound, stylistically and philosophically influenced his personal and artistic development. His successful marriage and the positive impact of Marion Morehouse proved to be essential in Cummings' finding peace and confidence in his masculinity. These three individuals
affected his development philosophically and artistically, and his ability to present positive configurations of masculinity resulted from his desire to connect with them. As in the poetry and life of E.E. Cummings, how men define themselves depends almost entirely on their roles. The evaluation of attitudes toward masculinity in the life and poems of E.E. Cummings can help readers better understand and evaluate their own responses to masculinity.
Endnotes

1 In *Fictions of Masculinity*, Peter Murphy asserts, "Writings by men on masculinity go back at least fifteen years and, in the case of literary criticism, over three decades to the publication of Leslie Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960)" (2).

2 Again, as he summarizes Fiedler's book, Peter Murphy clarifies the tradition of men in pop culture presented as "cowards with a lack of moral firmness, stupid men and alcoholics, and men who die when most needed" (2).


4 For a thorough comparison of the first draft of this poem to the published version, see Richard Kennedy's biography of Cummings, *Dreams In The Mirror*, page 123.


7 J. Harrison's study "Warning: the male sex role may be

8 Robert E. Wegner, in his book *The Poetry and Prose of E.E. Cummings*, points out the meaning of "Xaipe" as "rejoice" in Greek. (15) Richard Kennedy explains that Xaipe, pronounced Kyereh, "almost rhymes with 'fiery'" (431).
Works Cited


Whitesell 72


Wipf, Douglas M. "An Unofficial E. E. Cummings Starting Point."