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卡明斯的陌生化世界
----试析卡明斯的诗歌艺术

Cumming's Defamiliarized World
--- An Interpretation of Cummings's Poetic Craftsmanship

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**Cumming's Defamiliarized World
--- An Interpretation of Cummings's Poetic Craftsmanship**

by
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A Thesis

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摘要

E. E. 卡明斯是二十世纪美国文学史上最具前卫意识因而也最具争议的现代主义诗人之一。卡明斯的诗歌创作实践对西方两千余年的诗歌创作理论传统做出了革命性的全面颠覆。他的诗作打破常规，取得了陌生化的审美效果。本文立足于文本分析，从陌生化角度出发，试图探索并论证卡明斯诗歌中所达到的陌生化审美效果。

论文包含五个部分，首先简介了作家的生平背景，以及作为诗人和画家双重身份对他的诗歌创作的影响以及所取得的成就。

第一章阐述了本论文所涉及的“陌生化”理论背景，依据相关理论，进一步分析卡明斯通过运用各种艺术技巧来制造陌生、进行大胆创新的诗歌实验的历程。此外还探讨了音乐、绘画和语言技巧对卡明斯诗歌实验的影响和渗透。

第二章集中分别从句法、语义、语音和排版的角度论述了卡明斯所运用的各种语言技巧，为读者设置了障碍，达到陌生化境界。依据什克洛夫斯基所提出的陌生化理论来具体分析卡明斯诗歌所运用的语言学要素和所具有的独特文学性。通过大量引用诗歌中新颖的意象、形象的排版以及鲜明的对照来挖掘作品中所蕴含的魅力，分析卡明斯如何成功地达到陌生化效果，并营造出新的和谐。

第三章进一步探索了除了运用语言和文学技巧外卡明斯的诗歌所呈现的创新性。首先将卡氏的诗歌实验理论与传统的诗歌体系进行比较，进而从视觉艺术、诗歌的动态性和对传统诗歌的颠覆三个角度阐释了卡明斯诗歌美学体系的独创性及其意义。

通过大量的文本分析，本论文最后得出的结论是卡明斯通过各种技巧的使用，使陌生化效果更为凸显，为读者带来惊奇和新颖的冲击，激发其对诗歌全新的体验，使读者的审美体验更为长远和深刻，成功地实现了传统诗歌理念的颠覆，并营造出新的和谐，从而彰显了诗歌的独特魅力和不同凡响的活力。

美国诗人卡明斯的诗歌创作思想和手法一直是批评家们指涉的焦点，他的作品也正因如此而极具文学批评价值。通过“陌生化”角度来欣赏卡明斯的诗歌语言无疑是在进行一场新的审美体验，从中窥探到某种颇似中国古代道家“天人合一”的率真与和谐。

关键词：E·E·卡明斯；陌生化；实验；诗歌美学；创新

分类号：

E. E. Cummings (1894 - 1962) is one of the greatest modernist poets in the first half of 20th century American literature. His innovationality throughout his works makes the content and form of his poetry seem very unfamiliar. His experimentation with form and language places him among the most innovative of twentieth-century poets. Based on textual analysis, this thesis intends to explore how the aesthetic effect through defamiliarization has been achieved in Cummings' poetry.

The main body of the thesis that consists of five parts:

The thesis begins with an introduction of the background of e. e. cummings, including Cummings' achievements as a poet and a painter, and the influence of painting upon his poetry creation.

Chapter One firstly give the introduction to the framework of defamiliarization as an overview. The second part discusses the poet's choice of poetic experimentation in terms of evoking a level of strangeness. The context of Cummings' experimentation is referred to in the third part. Music and linguistic devices are employed by Cummings to make his poems vivid and dynamic, which can be embodied in his experiment of poetry.

Based on the theory of defamiliarization in Chapter One, in this chapter the author analyzes the linguistic techniques Cummings employs in his works from four aspects: the semantic level, syntactic level, phonological level and typographical level. In this chapter I select lots of typical examples from Cummings' works to support my idea, meanwhile offers a detailed analysis of his making strange by using various linguistic techniques.

Chapter Three further explores the innovation of Cummings' poetry besides his use of linguistic devices and techniques. The author first discusses the relationship between Cummings innovation and the literary convention. Then comes to the innovationality of Cummings' poetic aesthetics and its value mainly from three perspectives: the visual art, the dynamics and the subversion of convention.

Through careful studies and analysis, the paper arrives at the conclusion that Cummings has managed to make things new and created an intelligent new effect of defamiliarization through various literary devices. By means of his poetic creation,

human being can approach to the purity of nature and gain a harmony between man and man, man and nature, and within man himself.

Key Words: E. E. Cummings; defamiliarization; poetic aesthetics experimentation innovation

CLASS NO.:

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Introduction

E. E. Cummings as a Poet

“Cummings was alive beyond the unalive herd mentality. His gift to us consisted of sublime cues to look beyond how we were taught to look at things... to look holistically without cloned images. He was probably keener in insight than Einstein; he was extremely sagacious and penetrating. He is undervalued by society.”

Comment by Tom P. -- January 16th, 2008 11:03 pm

Edward Estlin Cummings (10.14.1894 – 9.3.1962) is remembered as a preeminent voice of 20th century poetry and one of the most popular poet. His experimentation with form and language places him among the most innovative of twentieth-century poets. E. E. Cummings occupies an anomalous position in the modern poetry. His innovationality throughout his works makes the content and form of his poetry seem very unfamiliar. In this way, he was on the cutting edge of the modernist, experimental movement in verse. He gave a striking redefinition to the tradition of New England individualism, helped invent what has since been termed “pop art,” and engaged in a wondrously playful imagination in the creation of ingenious poetic forms.

Cummings' poetry has been widely hailed for its experimental form, typography, grammar, and word coinages, as well as for the subtlety and sensitivity of its perceptions and feeling. His nonfiction prose has been praised for its bitter wit and for the clarity and forcefulness of its expression, revealing Cummings as an intelligent, critical observer and chronicler of the modern, who, bound to no school of writing, expresses himself as an idiosyncratic individualist. His highly developed sense of the aesthetic was married to a deep skepticism toward that which was fashionable but uninformed by critical intelligence and the warmth of the human heart. Ezra Pound went so far as to place Cummings' *EIMI* as the second most important book of the 20th century, ahead of James Joyce's *Ulysses* and second only to Wyndham Lewis's *The Apes of God*.

Throughout his literary career, Cummings produced a large volume of quite individualistic lyrics and exercised an exciting and probably a lasting influence on readers and other poets. He had a special talent for converting linguistic play into unique poetic structures and a style that was entirely new to poetry. According to

Shklovsky, the Russian formalist, "The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar, to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged."¹ Cummings achieved this request by making his poems free from the bondage of tradition and convention as the following said,

"Gertrude Stein who had been much impressed by The Enormous Room said that Cummings did not copy, he was the natural heir of the New England tradition with its aridity and its sterility, but also with its individuality."

---The Autobiography of Alice B.Toklas, p.208.

Cummings' style is an eternal adolescent, as fresh and often as winning but as half-baked as boyhood. A poet with a genuine gift for language, for a melting music a little like Shelley's which sighs and rhapsodizes in soft light vowels disembarrassed of their baggage of consonants, he strikes often on aesthetic measures of a singular purity and charm---his best poems seem to dissolve on the mind like the flakes of a lyric dew; but he seems never to know when his writing badly and when he is writing well. He has apparently no faculty for self-criticism. Cummings holds the theory that punctuation marks, capitalization and arrangements on the page should be used not as mere conventional indications of structure which make it easier for the reader to pay attention to the meaning conveyed by the words themselves but as independent instruments of expressions susceptible of infinite variation.

"Art is a mystery" is a point that Cummings has made in his poetry and painting and anyone with a yardstick is thought to be a fool and a public enemy. He has so convincingly hated the "why or because or although" of rational scrutiny in so many of his books. He wants man to be pure and he celebrates man's deep identity and the beautiful mystery. *To be* is such a poem that demonstrates his statement:

such a sky and such a sun
i never knew and neither did you
and everybody never breathed
quite so many kinds of yes

¹ Shklovsky: Art as a Technique, quoted from "Literature Theory of Twentieth Century", P.427

Love, which he so constantly sings, is not an illusion, but the intense form of aliveness of being. Cummings' poetry with its celebration of the individual human identity is particularly nourishing and reassuring today when that identity is either destroyed by mass violence or submerged in the mass disciplines that shall save it. He remains a pure voice to hear, and he embodies a healing faith; at his best level he is himself like that sunbeam of his which is always truthful. He has his one bird and his ten thousand stars, and we know the bird will still always teach him how to sing, and none teach the stars how not to dance. His counsel runs clear as a stream that old counsel of his which is really so simple and yet as innocent as Relax to eat flowers and not to be afraid.

His lyrical heritage is the line of the sixteenth and seventeenth century Courtly Makers. One of his miracles is to make their music youthful and pure again, a recreation in a new language. In the American tradition, his position is no less singular, some critics find a New England affinity to the poems of Emily Dickinson. His gift was as masculine as hers was feminine: it is in the sharpened metaphors both draw from nature, in the mastery of a highly selective, yet flawlessly keyed vocabulary, in the dramatic use of aphorisms, in the creation of strict conventions in which their style is so memorably defined, in the transcendental quality of their visions.

No American poet since Emily Dickinson has written a brief fable with greater clarity, wit, and vividness: and this is still another reason why Cummings' poetry continues to be read and enjoyed by so many. Instinctive as that response may be, and however strange some few of his typographical arrangements may have seemed forty years ago, the sense that his poetry is poetry in its ancient meaning is strongly felt. Cummings songs and sonnets treating of love and death, of immortality, and of spring are among the classics of modern poetry. And his achievement is unique in our time: a lyrical integration of satire, religious feeling and art.

His literary productions from the first incredulous glimpse of the typography to the last indignant discovery of his meaning, are nicely calculated to shock the conventional minds and his experimentation with form and language places him among the most innovative of the twentieth-century poets. Cummings has a fine talent for using familiar, even almost dead words, in such a context as to make them suddenly impervious to every ordinary sense; they become unable to speak, but with a great air of being bustling with something very important and precise to say. "The bigness of cannon is skillful...enormous rhythm of absurdity...slimness of evenslicing eyes are

chisels...electric District face haughtily vital *clinched* in a swoon of *synopsis*...my friend's being continually whittles *keen* careful futile *flowers*,² etc. With the possible exception of the compound *evenslicing* the italicized words are all ordinary words: all in normal contexts have a variety of meanings both connotative and denotative; the particular meaning, to establish precisely a feeling, a sensation or a relation. His contexts are employed to an opposite purpose in so far as they wipe out altogether the history of the word, its past associations and general character.

In this way, there is only the free and uninstructed intuition to seize Cummings' meaning. The warrant for the belief is in the almost violent isolation into which the words are thrown. The reality, the event, the feeling, which we will allow Cummings has in mind, is not sensibly in the word. It is one thing for meaning to be difficult or abstruse---hidden in its heart, there is mystery inside the words. In Cummings' words the mystery flies in the face is on the surface. There is no realm of possibility of essence. It is indubitable that the words are alive: they jostle, even overturn, the reader in the assurance of their vitality. But the notion of their true vitality is remains Cummings' very own. Cummings is Cummings himself.

0.2 E.E.Cummings as a Painter

In a mock Q&A in the catalogue of a 1945 exhibition of his canvases and drawings, Cummings put it this way:

Why do you paint? / For exactly the same reason I breathe ...

And how long have your written? / As long as I can remember.

I mean poetry. / So do I.

Tell me, doesn't your painting interfere with your writing? / Quite the contrary: they love each other dearly ...

They're very different. / Very: one is painting and one is writing.

But your poems are rather hard to understand, whereas your paintings are so easy. / Easy?

Of course — you paint flowers and girls and sunsets; things that everybody understands. / I never met him.

Who? / Everybody.

² Breit, Harvey. *The Writer Observed*. New York:World, 1956.

As a poet, E. E. Cummings has enjoyed tremendous popularity throughout the 20th century, and great critical acclaim from many different literary circles. Few people ever know he is also a great painter.

However, Cummings really painted, according to his contemporaries, more than wrote, and he painted with a wholesale devotion. His first serious ventures reflect the impact of the 1913 Armory Show, where Cummings, still an undergraduate at Harvard, drank his first deep draught of the modern painters. Solidifying his impressions of their work with careful readings of such books as Arthur Jerome Eddy's *Cubists and Post-Impressionism* (1914) and Willard Huntington Wright's *Modern Painting: Its Tendency and Meaning* (1915), Cummings soon forged his own alloy of Cubism, Fauvism, and Futurism. By 1918- with Harvard, the war, and the experiences which would produce *The Enormous Room* all behind him-he wrote to his mother: "I have been working very hard indeed on a picture, embodying certain elements of color and motion which I picked up a week or so ago at Coney Island." Then, apparently in answer to her question about the kind of painting he was doing, he replied: "They are organizations of color and line. Figures often are taken in design and more often machineries elements. There are some types."³ No mere amateur, he entered his pieces in exhibitions as early as 1919, and continued throughout his career to hold one-man shows in New York, Rochester, and elsewhere. Long viewed as a poet, the paintings have recently begun to receive some recognition in their own right. Since his death in 1962 there have been several modest retrospectives in New York. A traveling collection of thirty-seven paintings and drawings circulated to various colleges and universities in the New England area in 1975-1976. Most recently, the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, D.C., mounted a well-documented exhibition consisting largely of his drawings.

These exhibitions, along with an increasing number of scholarly and journalistic pieces on his art, have made several things clear. First, Cummings was entirely self-taught: though he enjoyed the close friendship of the sculptor Gaston Lachaise, the assistance of the painter Walter Pach, he never studied with them or with anyone else. Second, he treated his art as profession rather than avocation: he set himself, especially in his early years, to solve problems of composition and color in his canvases, he regularly sought opportunity to exhibit, and he earned some much-needed funds by selling work to *The Dial*. Third, he was drawn to theorize extensively, in his private and

³ Elliott(ed): *Columbia Literary History of the United States*", P.858

largely unpublished notes, on the practice and the aesthetics of the visual arts, ranging in his studies from detailed self instruction in human anatomy to investigations into color relationships. Fourth, he constantly probed into the parallels among painting, literature, and music, challenging himself to adapt into literature the principles of the other arts.

While Cummings achieved substantial acclaim as an American cubist and abstract, avant-garde painter in the years between the wars, he later viewed the artistic establishment as hopelessly anti-intellectual and dropped out of the New York gallery scene, devoting the remainder of his life to painting representational work: landscapes, nudes, still lives, and portraits. In these works Cummings continued to explore the issues and elaborate the principles that had impelled his early abstract paintings, and he brought them to bear in his later, more personal, representational work. Indeed, he deliberately shunned avant-garde circles and the critics who validated them in favor of a more domestic or private environment in which to pursue his art and his continued inquiries into color form, and feeling. Many of the paintings in this collection, while recognizable subjects display a wild, exuberant, and sometimes nearly fantastic use of color. As such, they merit comparison with his poetry, the greatest accomplishment of which has long been considered his bold, inventive use of language and form in the service of a modern sensibility and aesthetic that is essentially individualistic, traditional, and even romantic.

Critics have tended to divide Cummings' painterly career roughly into two stylistically differing chronological phases. The first phase, more or less from 1915-1928, covers his widely-acclaimed large-scale abstractions and his immensely popular drawings and caricatures published throughout the 1920s in the leading modernist journal, *The Dial*. The second phase, covering the period from 1928 until his death in 1962, consists primarily of representational works: still lives, landscapes, nudes, and portraits. This dichotomy of avant-garde vs. representational in Cummings' visual work has its parallel in a public vs. private dichotomy: above and beyond the popular Cummings-as-experimental-innovator of the first period, there is in the second phase the very much more private Cummings-as-aesthetic-sensualist, strikingly revealed in the wild explosions of color that are found in his landscapes and in the physical intensity of his erotic work. While the representational works are more traditional and accessible than his earlier abstracts, their use of color and form reveal a sophistication and development of technique fully as complex as the earlier work, if not more so.

When Cummings died in 1962, he left to his estate a large number of visual art, including oil paintings, watercolors, and drawings. The current collection comprises the bulk of the material he left at his death--a large number of pieces representing the width and breadth of Cummings' visual output. Included are drawings dating back to his childhood, abstract oil paintings, circus drawings, burlesque sketches, visionary landscapes in oil and watercolor, erotic art, sensuous nudes, figure drawings, portraits of friends and family, as well as rare ink drawings documenting his travels abroad in the 1920s and 1930s, a critical point in his development as a visual artist.

0.3 Twin Obsessions of Cummings's Poetry

"For more than half a hundred years," wrote E.E.Cummings in 1954, "the over-signed twin obsessions have been painting and writing."⁴ In the article in which this statement appeared, he took some satisfaction in pointing out that his painting, as well as his more experimental poetry, prose, and drama, had been misapprehended, scorned, or ignored by the public. A quarter-century later, the public knows Cummings primarily as a lyric poet. Few have ventured into his other literary modes.

Less well-known are Cummings' achievements as a visual artist and the extent to which they express in an entirely different medium the same aesthetic principles and rigorous artistic intelligence that inform his poetry. In fact, Cummings viewed himself as much a painter as a poet, as evidenced by the enormous amount of time and energy he devoted to this lesser-known half of his "twin obsession." Not only did Cummings spend a greater portion of his time painting than writing, he also produced thousands of pages of carefully thought-out notes concerning his own aesthetics of painting.

He had an inclination for arts and literature from an early age. While in the Harvard, he became intensely interested in the new movement in arts and began to experiment with free verse and to develop as a self-taught cubist painter. He wrote poems to celebrate nature, natural spontaneous power, the individual, as well as love. He was such a radical Modernist artist and poet that conformity, mass psychology, and snobbery were frequent targets of his humorous and sometimes scathing satires. His knowledge of the visual arts led him to experiment with versification and exerts gigantic influence toward his poetic experimentation.

His labors during the early twenties resulted largely in abstractions while towards

⁴ Kenndy: E.E.C.: "Dreams in the Mirror, P.4

the end of the twenties, Cummings' predilections turned away from abstractions and towards the more "preventative." From the early thirties onward he did a number of portraits and self-portraits and a number of landscapes. Some of them indulge in a colorful representation that lapse into sentimentality and cliché. They engage his earlier interest in abstract structures of color and line, and allow him to bring to bear on the trees and moon of his favorite New Hampshire settings a curiously expressionistic vision.

For Cummings, it seems that the readers should not only think and hear his poems but also see them as well. The designs of his poems grow up out of his concern for the relationships of the printed words to the spaces around them. His best short poems tend to be short, of a length readily contained on a single page and easily "seen" in a single glance. In dealing with publishers, he sometimes referred to his work in visual terms, on one occasion writing his editor that "what I care indefinitely is that each poem picture should remain intact. Why? Possibly because, with a few exceptions, my poems are essentially pictures."(Quoted by Noman p238-239)

In his 5, section Four (1926), the poet, interestingly enough, gives an account of his poetic painting activity in these words:

some ask praise of their fellows

but i being otherwise

made compose curves

and yellows, angles or silences

to a less erring end)

myself is sculptor of

your body's idiom:

the musician of your wrists;

the poet who is afraid

only to mistranslate

a rhythm in your hair,

(your fingertips

the way you move)

the

painter of your voice—
beyond these elements

remarkably nothing is....

(CP 292)

[end page 36]

The poem is a composition of silences among such other different things as "yellows," "curves," and "angles." E. E. Cummings was partly a modernist poet and a painter. Just as he was a modernist painter in Kandinsky's and Picasso's wake, silence is poetic matter in his poetry as colors or shapes in his painting. More than just a poetic means, silence is a poetic end, may be even "a less erring end" as the poet ironically remarks. It is taken for granted that Cummings did not devise the notion but to some extent discovered or rediscovered it as Christopher Columbus did not invent America either. And indeed silence is this long-ignored and new-found land, the impossible and engulfed continent the poet reaches. It is just as if Cummings' poetry took up a lost and forlorn object in Western poetry. Now why had silence been silenced? If the poet-to-be did not give the answer, at least he raised the question and came to the conclusion that Western poetry—especially the romantic poets whom Cummings admired and to whom he owed his early inspiration and more—had overinvested the voice to the detriment of silence.

Now why does color involve silence? The reason is that colors are unspeakable. Language is unable to convey the chromatic emotion. Color is beyond the realm of articulation and words. For colors are neither signs nor symbols; they do not represent, do not mean anything. And yet colors speak to the senses, the mind, and the body altogether. But this language cannot be formalized, for its syntax is not systematic. And because you do not recognize a color, you cannot name it. Silence is consequently derived from the impossibility of color to be properly voiced. Color is sheer emotion. And as Cummings' poetry and painting constantly demonstrate, emotion lasts only as long as recognition can be postponed. Color is, according to Cummings, what is edgeless: "Colors . . . are exempt from the taxation of recognition" (Houghton 1892.7 [68]). An edge is indeed what makes a sign or a shape distinct and likely to be recognized. It is with painting just the way it is with language. As soon as words or forms are perceived, then emotion originating in the unknown, what Cummings calls "the invisible", has lapsed. That is why Cummings' painting and poetry attempt to delay

as much as they can the conditions and the time of recognition.

Silence and color are to be devoured, for they cannot be articulated. Sigmund Freud, whom Cummings had read extensively, remarks that the same organ is meant for two antagonistic activities: eating and speaking. Oral satisfaction is the end of painting and may be the end of poetry too. Whenever words cannot be spoken or read, they are likely to be visually devoured.

So when Cummings says, again and again, he is both a poet and a painter, and when he makes it plain that he wants his poems to be treated as pictures, we probably ought to listen. He is indeed an exceptional poet and a masterful painter. There are distinct stylistic relationships between Cummings' paintings and his poetry, and an understanding of them can help us to a sounder sense of his work. His status of both a painter and a poet supplies the basis for his well application of the defamiliarization literary theory.

1 Defamiliarization: An Overview

1.1 The Definition of Defamiliarization

"Defamiliarization" is the core concept of Russian Formalism. "Defamiliarization" is the theoretical basis of Russian formalism, which has a wide and profound effect on the literature study of 20th century. It emphasizes that people should use a whole new way to look closely at and feel the things that they are familiar with. They should extricate people from the restriction of patterning so as to gain the distillation of cognito and the emancipation of Poetic sentiment.

In 1916, Victor Shklovsky advocated the theory of "Defamiliarization" and tried to use it as a method of summarizing complicated feelings and expressing phenomena. From the viewpoint of Formalist, the art means to become strange and art makes itself more difficult to be understood so that the time used for tasting is prolonged.

The basic meaning of Defamiliarization is: in poem or literature, all expressive forms are not strict copies of reality; on the contrary, they are intentional violations. In literature, Defamiliarization is mostly represented by three artistic arts, including the handicap of poetic language, creative distortion and the delay of configuration.

Defamiliarization is the essential character of literature. The intent of literature is to make the expressed object strange. As a ubiquitous artistic principle, Defamiliarization has firm psychologic bases. It has unique aesthetic characters and profound aesthetic value. Russian Formalist uses it to study poem, novel and literary history, which brings their unique literary theory. It can be said that Defamiliarization is the sticking point of Russian Formalism.

"Defamiliarization" immediately "ran all over the world like a dog with a broken tail" after it was brought forward. It has been a source of many western theories of literature and art. Such as "Constructionism", "Deconstructionism", "Symbolism Phenomena", "Acceptance Aesthetics" and "Acceptance Theory", they all take Defamiliarization as their theoretical basis. "Defamiliarization" is actually one of the general laws of literature.

Russian Formalist critics who pioneered literary theory in the early years of the twentieth century held that it was an essential part of the art-work to defamiliarize the conventions used in making previous art, in order to make the reader (or viewer or hearer) more conscious of the artistic processes involved, and hence to refresh our

perception of the world. This was crucially the argument of Viktor Shklovsky in his seminal essay “Art as Technique” where he famously argued that “art exists so that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important.” The Formalist appreciation of defamiliarization in part reflects their bias towards works whose formal nature is to the fore, and in part is expressive of the general tendency of twentieth-century art to align itself in avant-garde groups which make formal innovation a conscious strategy. But the realization that defamiliarization is a crucial part of aesthetic processes also illuminates the way in which such canonized artists as Shakespeare and Ibsen (and one could add Mozart, Beethoven, Stravinsky, Mahler) were in their time remarkable innovators, and indeed were often seen as perturbing, even as incomprehensible.

1.2 Defamiliarization as a Poetic Experimentation

Cummings attracts notice in an age of literary experimentation for his eccentric punctuation and phrasing. Having to express what is equally inexpressible, Cummings is equally experimental. His typographic poems develop out of this sense that a written word is a set of printed characters that can be pried apart to reveal new words and distributed on the page so as to coerce the eye and the mind into special rhythms of comprehension. In his work, Cummings experimented radically with form, punctuation, spelling and syntax, abandoning traditional techniques and structures to create a new, highly idiosyncratic means of poetic expression. Cummings' moods were alternately satirical and tough or tender and whimsical. He frequently used the language of the streets and material from burlesque and the circus. His erotic poetry and love lyrics had a childlike candor and freshness.

In Cummings' poetry, the reader may see a particular drive toward the strangeness and away from the familiarity in its lineation of words and its choice of languages. Undoubtedly, Cummings' poetry is so creative and fresh that calling attention to itself as difficult. A literary text, especially one involving poetry, has not only one meaning but plural meanings, and its meanings vary with the different codes and strategies applied by different readers or by the same reader at different times of reading. The reader's individual experience and knowledge also have influences on his perception. With reference to the poet, rather than speak in his own person, he creates a poetry in which

the reader supplies the voice, the argument and meanings as meanings come together in the echo chambers of the reader's mind. Plural meanings find their place in the text not as an independent unit, but in the relationship of the reader to the text. The meaningful existence of the literary work depends on the involvement of the reader. A reader completes and actualizes its meaning by reading it, decodes its meaning by applying codes and strategies. The new concept of writing poem attracts the attention of readers. In this way, Cummings successfully makes use of defamiliarization as a kind of poetic experimentation.

For example, in Cummings' "One Times One" volume which signifies the unity and wholeness of the transcendental vision portrays a bare autumn scene, a sea-moon-street scene, a twilight scene, the emergence of a star and a bird in the tree. Cummings' concern with spring and fall, twilight and star-rise, moon and bird should be evidently governed by his fascination with process, movement and nature's dynamic moments. For these are dynamic images and his portrays of them represent the varieties of transition. Although typographical experimentation drops to a new low in this volume, two of the half dozen or so poems which notably disrupt the page belong to this group. The first begins (a407):

a-
float on some
?
i call twilight you

And the second (a414):

how

tinily
of

squir(two be
tween sto
nes)ming a gr...

The function of this disarrangement is to capture the feel of a visual impression. His means and devices are appropriate as ways of creating the freshness and motion and

vitality which his vision calls for. If we ask a poet that he not merely achieve his goal but also that he achieves it in an original and unexpected way, then Cummings fills the bill. There is nothing tame, nothing passive, and nothing easy about his solution of his artistic problems. He is an innovator, an experimenter, a questioner. In the transcendental view, a poet can never rest the essence of content upon any formulation of life for long. And Cummings successfully avoids any formulation.

Later in his career, he was often criticized for settling into his signature style and not pressing his work towards further evolution. Nevertheless, he attained great popularity, especially among young readers, for the simplicity of his language, his playful mode and his attention to subjects such as war and sex. Cummings experimented with form and meaning up until the very end, producing two final volumes within his lifetime: *A Miscellany*, a collection of short prose pieces and *95 Poems*, a book of fresh poetry from the creative veteran. At the time of his death in 1962, he was the second most widely read poet in the United States, after Robert Frost. Defamiliarization plays an important role in his poetic experimentation from countless aspects and achieved great success for his influence upon the literary development.

1.3 The Context of Cummings' Poetic Experimentation

No poem is altogether self-existent. In a sense, every poem creates a world from which it derives. Often it is important---and sometimes it is crucial---for us to recognize context, the circumstances that surrender the making of the poem. In the case of Cummings' poetry, a large number of his experimental poems are very much influenced by the times and circumstances in which they were written. As we mentioned earlier, there are two very distinctive historical and cultural factors which marked the unique characteristics of Cummings' poetry: one is the modernist painting, particularly the cubism, and the other is the modernist music, especially jazz.

As Cummings was himself a painter, his artistic stance is effectively expressed in relation to the ideological and aesthetic values of his time. He became a craftsman of his work, carefully constructing each word and line to perform double duty as verbal expression and art. He was a master who knew how to make use of lines, colors, light, angles, etc.:

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(Tulips: Impressions No.6)

What we have here is a spectacular picture: the light of the sky, the colors of the clouds, the dark locomotive spouting violet smokes, and the plants on the ground. The tenth line “greens coo l choc” acts as the horizon dividing the sky and the earth. Above is the drifting cloud, scattering here and there. Below is the whirling smoke from the locomotive, curling up into the sky. Taking it as a picture, we enjoy much a wider range

of interpretation of this poem and what has been freed if our feeling and imaginations. If we compare this poem with a cubist painting we will find that they share something in common. First, there is a penetration beyond surface appearances and single vision. Second, the depiction is conducted from varying angles both simultaneously and three-dimensionally.

As the second factor which helped shape another important feature of Cummings' poetry, jazz became the most popular music form in the early 1920s in the United States. One of the most noticeable elements of Harlem Renaissance writing was its use of dialect and folklore and its identification with the spirit of Jazz. "Jazz was the symbol of the age," W.E. bigsby writes, "because of its spontaneity, its creation of a cooperative method, and its assumption an empathetic community."⁵ It authorized a distrust of rationalism; a celebration of sensuality, separateness from conventional society, and a belief in improvisation and authenticity of feeling that were becoming the ideology not only of blacks but also of whites in this period that Fitzgerald made famous as the Jazz Age. While reading Cummings' poetry, we just cannot help feeling the strong "spirit of Jazz", the free syncopated rhythms, and the spontaneous flow of sounds, hovering, vibrating, creeping, and rolling around us:

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⁵ Genette, G: "Figures", p. 258

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(73 Poems: No.42)

This example is quite typical of jazz rhythms: ××× | ××× | ..., almost one stressed sound (a vowel) is followed by one unstressed sound (a consonant or cluster of consonants). Just as jazz is characterized by improvisation, the poem, too, possess an improvisational style with the syncopated rhythms which are well balanced.

One of the characteristics of jazz is its contrapuntal ensemble playing with such instruments as a trumpet, a piano, a bass and an oboe. For a better understanding of jazz effect in Cummings' poetry, we will have a detailed analysis of the following example.

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(50 poems: No.1)

In this poem, there are four four-line stanzas and four one-line stanzas. In each four-line stanza, except the last one, there is a punctuation mark: the exclamation mark “!” suggests a pitch usually represented by a trumpet; the question mark “?” suggests a mile sound signified by an oboe; and the comma “,” suggests a pause on behalf of a piano or a bass. In the third one-line stanza, there are two marks: one colon “:” and semicolon “;”, the former suggests an introduction or a shift of a sound, and the latter a half rest. In the fourth one-line stanza, the mark is a full stop, which apparently indicates the end of the music.

Now let us have a look at the sound pattern of this poem. All the one-line stanzas, except the last one, contain at least one vowel sound. In each four-line stanza there are two lines with a vowel sound, and two with a consonant sound. Among the vowel sounds /æ/, /ai/ are loud ones, suggesting the trumpet effect; /i/ and /i:/ are sounds with penetrating quality and suggest the piano effect; /əu/ and /ə:/ are sounds which suggest the oboe effect and /ə/, /e/ are sounds suggesting the effect of a bass. As for the consonant sounds, the plosives /k/, /t/, /d/ suggest the strikes on the key board of piano; the liquid sound /l/ and /r/ suggest the sound flow of the oboe.

In the light of the above consideration, we can trace the social and cultural background in which Cummings engaged in his poetic experimentation and it is demonstrated that Cummings is really a master of the synthetic art.

2 Defamiliarization in Action

2.1 Semantic Defamiliarization

At the semantic level, our focuses are directed to the meaning of Cummings' poetry and the optional way of interpretations. First, an example will be presented to illustrate the semantic features.

Love is more thicker than forget

More thinner than recall

More seldom than a wave is wet

More frequent than to fail

It is most mad and moonly

And less it shall unbe

Than all the sea which only

Is deeper than the sea

Love is less always than to win

Less never than alive

Less bigger than the least begin

Less littler than forgive

It is most sane and sunly

And more it cannot die

Than all the sky which only

Is higher than the sky

W.B.Yeats thought that an irrational element was present in all great poetry. This is the characteristic of poetry we have under focus when we take into consideration the semantic features of Cummings' poetry. The meaning of this poem is wrapped hard in the shell of superficial absurdity of constitute by comparisons. A careful but emotional description of love is given by the poet through a group of metaphors. The symmetry of the poem is built most obviously by the use of rhyme and meter to create four quatrains. The next device is the corresponding alternation in phrasing: the first stanza is built on the "love is more" phrase, and the third is built on the "love is less" phrase. Almost every word falls into place according to this design: how "forget" balances "most sane and sunny", and so on. The parallel are working to create a set of apparent resemblances which turn out on close inspection to be contradictions. And the contradictions are working to build the paradox which is at the heart of the poem, that love is transcendent and ineffable, yet real and tangible. In other words, love exists somewhere between forgetting and remembering. What the music accomplishes here, is to wind up the metronome of these paradoxes and set them dancing.

"Flower" is Cummings' most favoured word. In *Tulips and Chimneys* the word "flower" turns up for forty-eight times: smile like a flower; riverly as a flower; steeped in burning flowers; last flowers; lopping flowers; more silently than a flower; snow flower; world flower; softer than flowers; forehead a flight of flowers; feet are flowers in vases; air is deep with flowers; slow supple flower of beauty; flower-terrible; flower of thy mouth; stars and flowers; mouth a new flower; flower of silence; god's flowers; flowers of reminding; dissonant flowers; flower-stricken air; Sunday flower; tremendous flower; speaking flower; flowers of kiss; futile flowers, etc., etc. Besides the general term there is a quantity of lilies and roses, and a good assortment of daisies, pansies, buttercups, violets, and chrysanthemums. There are also many examples of such associated words as "petals" and "blooms" and "blossoms", which can be taken as alternative to flowers. The word has become an idea and in the process has been deprived of its history, its qualities, and its meaning. An idea, the intellectual pin upon which a thought is hung is not transmissible in poetry as an important element in the poem and ought only to be employed to pass over the area of the uninteresting. In his poem, the chief intent is the notation of character and requires a descriptive setting. The poet can well use the word for the description such vague words as space and time, but could not use such words as goodness or nobleness without the risk of flatness. However, in Cummings' poetry we find the contrary. The word "flower" becomes an

idea and is used to represent the most interesting and most important aspect of his poem because of its originality. In this way, the centre of the poem is permanently abstract and unknowable for the reader and remains without qualification and concreteness. It is not the mere frequency of use that deadens the word flower into an idea; it is the kind of thought which each use illustrates in common. It finally negotiates the miracle of meaning between the poet and the poem, the poem and the reader.

There is a stratagem which a Cummings most usually employs: not to avoid the cliché, but to conceal it. Perception is not renewed; it is counterfeited. The carefully calculated anarchism of style and attitude, where not simply flat, becomes frequently a little ridiculous, like an urchin sticking out his tongue to razz his adults as in these stanzas from Cummings' embarrassing little poem on the Hungarian revolt, "Thanksgiving (1956)":

uncle sam shrugs his pretty
pink shoulders you know how
and he twitchenes a liberal titty
and lisps "i'm busy right now"
so rah-rah-rah democracy
let's all be thankful as hell
and bury the statue of liberty
(because it begins to smell)
(Poem 39)

It is just this sort of raucous roguery-Cummings in knee-britches, playing the little monster—that leads to the gratuitous shocks of syntax, the exploration of "thrill" effects, which finally deaden so much of the language thus brutalized as the useless inversion of "living" dulls rather than sharpening the impact of these two lines:

A total stranger one black day
Knocked living the hell out of me
(Poem 58)

This is a poem that begins with loneliness and ends in celebrations of love with the disquieting sense that neither experience has been made real. The brittle glitter of the

nervousness and strain betrays the vacuum of thought and feeling within. If the image is reminiscent of Cole Porter or the Great Gatsby, then it should reveal Cummings in a very characteristic posture: the aging but incorrigible Child of the Twenties.

2.2 Syntactic Defamiliarization

At the syntactic level what we present is the Cummingsian principles in the organization of word ordering and the interrelationship between elements in sentence structures. The syntax of poetry is in general different from that of prose as the creation of poetry requires more freedom in the use of language. In the case of E.E.Cummings, the syntactical features displayed in his poetry are very conspicuous, and there are large quantities of examples to demonstrate his manipulation of his poetic syntax so that he could achieve the semantic effect as he desired. The follow poem is one of them:

Me up at does

out of the floor

quietly stare

a poisoned mouse

still who alive

is asking what

have i done that

You wouldn't have

(73 Poems: No.12)

Syntactically, the poem should be read first from the fourth and fifth line in the middle, then return backwards from line three to line one, and finally jumped down to

line six, seven and eight. This type of word orders is very common in Cummings's poems as either a sense of musical structure or a visual effect requires a distortion of phrases and words. Carefully observed, this poem reveals at least two categories of the similarities to jazz music: the arrangement of the lines of his poem resembles the syncopated rhythms of jazz, and the repetition of this arrangement again produced a counterpunctal effect.

Cummings, a man who admires the paradox enough to utilize it constantly in his work, has a knack for unconsciously exemplifying it himself. Although his language is intricate and difficult, what he asks of his reader is always the frank approach of a child. He used childish language to avoid the ugliness of the adult world. He divested himself of the literate adult's prejudices against such things as double negatives, redundant superlatives and comparatives and non-dictionary words.

As we know, a child will construct his language by means of analogy, forming the past tense of irregular verbs by adding the -ed suffix and forming all comparatives or superlatives by adding the normal -er or -est, or stepping up the power of a word such as *last*, which is already superlative, and saying *latest*. Intent on making his point clear and only half certain of the niceties of grammar, a child will repeat negatives or superlatives in triple measure, and so will Cummings. A line from one of his poems, "somebody might hardly never not have been unsorry, perhaps" (from *ViVa*, XXVII: 242) He likes to use his childish technique of word forming and creates a world of simplest subjects. In the following fragment from *IxI*, he matches the child who is determined to make his admiration amply known:

which is the very
(in sad this havingest
world) most merry
most fair most rare
---the livingest givingest
girl in this whirlingest
earth?
Why you're

by far the darlingest

(From *IxI*, L: 420)

His creation of *havingest*, *livingest*, *givingest*, and *whirlingest* carries the child's habit of adding -est to all adjectives one step further: he has added the suffix to words which are rarely if ever used as adjectives at all - *having* and *giving* --- not only creating a non-dictionary superlative but changing the part of speech of his base word. *Living* and *whirling* are often used as adjectives out of the word that is normally a noun or a verb. He exercises his habit of assuming that the cubbyholes into which words are put are flexible. By doing so he is enabled to express concisely an idea which in English has no one-word equivalent. The same kind of part-of-speech derangement may be seen in his use of *wonderful* in this passage:

And if somebody hears

what i say---let him be pitiful:

because i've travelled all alone

through the forest of wonderful

(From *Xli Poems*, "Sonnets," XII: 158)

Here he is giving unusual weight to a normally overused and colorless word by changing its grammatical classification. The "forest of wonderful" he speaks of is the beauty of his loved one: the line might have read "through the forest of her wonderful beauty," in which case the figure would have been the same but the surprise of language would have escaped. Similarly, he combines the "childish" technique of using redundant comparatives with the highly sophisticated element of paradox in the following lines:

Love is more thicker than forget

More thinner than recall

(From 50 poems, 42:381)

Sometimes, in the simplest of his word coinages, he merely creates a new word by analogy as a child would without adding any shade of meaning other than that inherent in the prefix or suffix he utilizes, as in the words *unstrength* and *untimid*, which appeared in his first book. The chief advantage of the coined words in such cases is that they add a bit of freshness to a poem. In his later book, Cummings took the same prefix un- to add to a word in such a way as to form a pun, such as *manunkind*. Here attention is focused on what is not present, as it was in *unstrength*, but by placing un- in the middle of the word he in effect changed the suffix kind to the adjective kind and ended with the quite normal adjective unkind modifying man. The result is not merely a coined word but a new idea which happens to be an apt and concise expression of one of Cummings' convictions.

Cummings' words used as nouns and verbs is to make things sound much simpler than they are, for the one outstanding characteristic of his mature style is his disrespect for the parts of speech. It was hard to find any one of his later poems which does not utilize a word in a sense other than its usual one. "Yes" is used as a noun to represent all that is positive and therefore admirable. "If" is to stand for all that is hesitating, uncertain, incomplete. The style thus becomes spare. His later books contain many poems written in extremely short lines, which utilize the simplest words to say a great deal. For instance, the fragments from I x I:

yes is a pleasant country:

if's wintry

(my lovely)

let's open the year

(from XXXVIII: 412)

who younger than

begin

are, the worlds move

in your

(and rest, my love)

honor

(From XXXV: 410)

Such words as “yes” and “if” take on a historical meaning within the body of the poetry, a meaning not divorced from their traditional ones but infinitely larger: “yes” conventionally is used in a particular situation; as Cummings use it, “yes” represents the sum of all the situations in which it might be used. And such a technique as “who younger than begin are” is not too complicated to be used by some practitioners of the art of writing for mass consumption.

In short, his technique in creating new uses for such words *as if, why, because, which, how, must, same, have, and they* on the one hand and *now, am, yes, is, we, give, and here* on the other is to accumulate meanings for each of them that total up to the same kind of positive and negative oppositions that are set against each other throughout his work as he put some titles of poem like: *beauty and ugliness; love and hate; the one and the many*. He makes each of these words self-subsistent in the context and makes the words metonymical reductions for a whole set of concepts by varying the meanings in each usage. The success of this system depends on the degree that the poet objectifies and clarifies his conception of the world and the effects of freshness and vitality his language produces.

She laughed his joy she cried his grief

Bird by snow and stir by still

Anyone's any was all to her

(From 50 Poems, 29:370)

Using a traditional rhetorical pattern in the second line, he superimposes a metonymies structure: “bird” and “snow” are reductions of summer and winter; “stir” and “still” are that of all manner of activities. The net result of such a line is a new and

delightful sense of linguistic invention, precise and vigorous. Cummings is successful in objectifying his conception of the world and in achieving a freshness and vitality of language.

In the process of working out the totality of Cummings' poetic syntax, we are definitely going through an aesthetic experience---an exploration, an adventure full of intellectual challenges and excitement in the poetic kingdom reigned by E.E.Cummings.

2.3 Phonological Defamiliarization

At the phonological level we are to observe the "sound pattern" of Cummings' poetic language: phonemes, stress, rhythm, intonation, and pronunciation.

Sound in the poetry must be not only taken as sound in poetry but also as the creator of meaning. Sound patterns are important cues in understanding the meaning of poems. Many of Cummings's poems are well-patterned and have the prosodic beauty.

Snow) says! Says

Over un

Graves

Der, speaking

(says. Word

Less) ly (goes

...

In the above few lines we have a group of aspirate sounds /s/ and /z/, which are soft and suggest the sound of snow falling. And the two "says" /sez/ in the first line is the imitation of the faint noise of the hails falling on the ground.

Chiming is also a very useful technique in Cummings' poetry, which refers to the device of connecting "two words by similarity of sound so that you are made to think of their possible connections." The following is an example making good use of chiming:

anyone lived in a pretty how town

(with up so floating many bells down)

spring summer autumn winter

he sang his didn't he danced his did

women and men (both little and small)

cared for anyone not at all

they sowed their isn't they reaped their same

sun moon stars rain

children guessed (but only a few

and down they forgot as up they grew

autumn winter spring summer)

that noone loved him more and more

when by now and tree by leaf

she laughed his joy she cried his grief

bird by snow and stir by still

anyone's any was all to her

someones married their everything a consonant soundness

laughed their cryings and did their dance

(sleep wake hope and then) they

said their nerves they slept their dream

stars rain sun moon

(any only the snow can begin to explain

how children are apt to forget to remember

with up so floating many bells down)

one day anyone died I guess

(and no one stopped to kiss his face)

busy folk buried them side by side

little by little and was by was

all by all and deep by deep

and more by more they dream their sleep
noone and anyone earth by april
wish by spirit and if by yes.

women and men (both dong and ding)
summer autumn winter spring
reaped their sowings and went their came
sun moon stars rain

(50 Poems, No.29, 1940)

It has five stanzas. In each stanza, the first two lines have the same rhyme. In addition to this, alliteration, assonance and consonance are heavily adopted by the poet, didn't, danced, did; guessed, forget, grew; snow, stir, still; busy, buried, by; are alliterations. Assonances are lived, pretty, spring, winter, didn't, did; both, sowed; but, forgot, up, summer, noone, loved; everyone, then, said, never, slept; rain, sun, moon; apt, forget; guess, kiss, face; dong, ding. Another very important feature which creates musicalness in the poem is the verbal repetition and refrains. In the seventh stanza, we have "side by side", "little by little", "was by was". The lines "spring, summer, autumn, winter" and "sun, moon, star, rain" both appear three times throughout the poem. Though each time they are in a different order of arrangement, they do produce echoing effect of a refrain as in a song.

2.4 Typographical Defamiliarization

The typographical deviation in Cummings's poetry can be grouped into 5 categories: 1) the absence of capital letters in most cases; 2) the jamming together of a group of words; 3) the dismantlement of words into unpronounceable opponents; 4) the unconventional use of punctuation; 5) the spacing of words in a line. Look at the following example:

Swi(

Across! Gold's

rowNdly

) ftblac

Kl(ness)y

a-motion-upo-motio-n

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(against

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)Swi

Mming

(w-a)s

Blr

d,

This poem is made of two parts: one outside the parentheses, and the other inside. The first is the noun-adjective part, while the second is the verb-adverb part: “swift blackly, a motion upon motionless, the swimming bird” tells us what, while “across gold’s roundliness, against is-was” tells us where. We can see this bird is moving, moving simultaneously across the sun (space) and against is-was (time), and hence for the speaker represents a living moment of perception, an instant of motion. The key to understand this poem is to catch the instant without freezing it in a static frame, to fix and print as it were a motion picture without losing the motion. This is done by breaking words, interlacing phrases, punctuating at odd points, capitalizing in the midst of words and coining words. Each separate little collection of words is for an image and an abstraction in a keen and lively mind for something precise and concrete. The words seem like a painter’s notes. Strange typography raises countless questions and offers

open texts with plural meanings.

As we know, Cummings had an avid interest in various forms of American popular culture and he was one of the few writers of his day to deal with mass entertainment. Burlesque had a more direct influence on Cummings' poetry than the other popular forms. The antagonistic attitude toward high art is typical of Cummings and can be considered a part of his general anti-intellectualism. Science and technology represent the dead world of nonfeeling and nonloving, and Cummings satires them mercilessly. But burlesque was a part of the lively world which he celebrated in many of his poems and articles. He has the fascination with movement. He transfers his love of movement to the printed page in his poetry and transfers the juxtaposition of opposites in burlesque into one of his favourite poetic techniques. His poems never sit still; they move across the page in unusual typography, and the words themselves often suggest movement. "The poet at the typewriter can do Nijinsky leaps or Chaplin-like shuffles and wiggles." (Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964, p. 230) in one poem Cummings attempts to emulate the bumps and grinds of a stripper performing her act. He demonstrated his belief that woman could be the most beautiful expression of movement and aliveness.

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flipchucking

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gRiNdS

d is app ea r in gly

eyes grip live loop croon mime

nakedly hurl asquirm the

dip&giveswoop&swoon&ingly

seethe firm swirl hips whirling climb to

GIVE

(yoursmine mineyours yoursmine

!

i()t)

Poems. P.320

The letters and words are so arranged as to suggest the mystery and “peek-a-boo,” tantalizing, teasing quality of the stripper. We never see it all, but we see enough to keep us interested. When she slips her gown down, she reveals two sprouting islands (“eyelands”), a very sensual image for breasts. The halting and provocative unbuttoning of her gown is suggested by the repetition of parts of the word until they all fall together, and by the question marks at the end of each line. When the stripper grinds, the words grinds (“gRiNdS”). The vicarious participation of the men in the audience almost becomes an orgasm at the end of the poem. Besides the type swooping all over the page, the words also imply movement, “struts”, “slips”, “twitching”, “steps”, “flipchucking”, “grinds”, “loop”, “mine”, “hurl”, “swoop”, “swirl”, “whirling”, and “climb”. The words and typography suggest the spontaneity of the burlesque art which Cummings’ poems describe.

3 Defamiliarization as a Literary Innovation

When we discuss the aesthetic values of E.E.Cummings' poetry, we must bear in mind the influence at the turn of the last century and this century. Among the genres of the art forms, painting and sculpture and music are no doubt what influenced Cummings most. He became enthralled by Cezanne and aware of the revolution in painting which he had brought about. Through the writings of Pound he became acquainted with the sculpture of Herri Gaudier Brzeska, and he set down notes from his theorizing about lines and planes. In his writing, he began to push further the visually directive ways of handling verse, and he attempted to impose form onto material which had not usually been treated in poetry. Poets, he asserted, "with the exception of some few geniuses (like Shakespeare) have felt it necessary, in order to give stability to their efforts, to avoid the language (which means the life) of everyday, and cultivate a hothouse style suitable to the elevation of well-preserved thoughts which they dare express."⁶ My paper in the following part discusses the defamiliarization as a literary innovation of Cummings' poetic aesthetics by anatomizing his works mainly from three dimensions: poetry as a visual art, poetry as a dynamics, and the subversion of convention, aiming to find Cummings' own perception of nature, human beings and society beneath the ungrammaticness and disorderliness of language.

3.1 Cummings and Tradition

Cummings is a poet that he knows and reveres the traditions of his art even he is violating them. If Cummings says "welcome the future", he also says "honor the past" (b,no.60). He knows there is nothing which is merely new. He knows and understands more about language and its responsibilities than the critics who have complained of his whimsicality and arbitrariness. He has a serious vision of life and his art are firmly rooted in tradition. No artistic experimenter can be significant who is not so rooted. Cummings' poem is a function of its rarity in twentieth-century poetry.

Cummings is so determined to fresh language by flouting its conventions that he ends by destroying convention, language, and perception itself. Linguistically, public contexts and traditions of usage form conventions, and it is from these that Cummings

⁶ Robert E. Wegner. *The Poetry and Prose of E. E. Cummings*, p187

tries to escape. Language and perception are made possible only by society, by convention, just as only they make society possible: “the complete consort, dancing together.” But Cummings cannot play upon and extend convention; he must smash it, escape society and the public tradition, and be individual to the point of anarchy. Thus his language tends to isolation and privacy. Its only vital context is his own mind, which remains permanently unknowable. *Non Serviam!*

crazy jay blue)

demon laughshriek

ing at me

your scorn of easily

hatred of timid

& loathing for (dull all

regular righteous

comfortable) unworlds

thief crook cynic

(swimfloatdrifting

fragment of heaven)

trickstervillain

raucous rogue &

vivid voltaire

you beautiful anarchist

(i salut thee

(Poem 5)

In this poem, Cummings becomes sufficiently detached partially to see his posture of Romantic envy of “free” nature as childish, as diabolism or anarchism. There is a kind of facile ingenuity in the paradoxes. Chaos is not freedom; isolation is not escape. Destroying the syntax and conventions of language partially free the readers’ mind. Moreover, the deliberate unconventionality of surface assures the reader of the difficulty, the tough-witted modernity, the complexity, which he has been taught to look for, so

that when he has unscrambled and mastered the poem's surface and seized the vague cliché and worn-out mood which the surface conceals, by indulging that very conventionality and sentiment at the center of the poem, he can congratulate himself on having made a difficult, rare and enhanced discovery.

From Cummings' point of view, from the assumptions and visions of his life and life's work, poems do not inevitably raise critical considerations. Poems are poems, and they are to be taken for what they are or are to be left alone. He appeared as a young and romantic poet. But he was one unmistakably of his time. That he derived from Keats and had been instructed by the poets of the last century was obvious. But even in the earliest poems, where their trace is most strong, the movement of his verse is already his own. His charm is his rapidity. The influence of the romantic tradition was soon left behind; but not the romantic attitude. That was authentic and not taught by the English poets. He defied every principle which Ezra Pound had taught us was right for poetry and there was none of us who had not listened with attention to Pound. He had the sensibilities that none of the others had and the wit of a poet. Cummings has his own punctuation, his own typography, his own speech and his own grammar. What he has aimed to do is to set down all that his mind, prompted by the sensations of the body, inevitably and spontaneously knows. His art is personal.

Behind his innovative form of poetry lies the conventional emotion. His poetry constitutes an expression and for the most part a charming expression of a kind very rare in America. It is the record of a temperament which loves and enjoys, which responds readily with mockery or tenderness, entirely without the inhibitions from which so much of American writing is merely the anguish to escape. He is one of the only American authors who is not reacting against something. And for this example of the good life, he is a poet at a time when there is a great deal of writing of verse and very little poetic feeling. Therefore, he deserves well of the public.

3.2 Poetry as a Visual Art

One key to Cummings' unique creations is the fact that he was a painter as well as a poet: "... in the beginning was the Eye (not the mind)," he declared⁷. He had drawn and painted ever since childhood and became a self-taught artist both in oils and watercolors by the time he left college. He was always busy with a pencil. Not only did

⁷ Rushworth M. Kidder. *E. E. Cummings: An Introduction to the Poetry*, p42

this habit of his trained his acute observation of life, but his visual orientation combined with his word play to produce unusual special arrangements of words in his poems and to allow the development of a personal style that was one of the most important contribution to the literary revolution of the twentieth-century.

In many poems created by Cummings, the form of a poem carries something much profounder than the poem itself. It not only means to shock and exhilarate his readers, but also presents a visual picture which awakens them to their authentic selfhood as individuals and to a transformed world whose models are the process of birth and growth in nature, and the process of “making” in the arts. Appearing in 95 Poems is:

n

ot eth

eold almos

tladyf eebly

hurling

cr u

mb

son ebyo

neatt wothe

efourfi ve&six

engli shsp

arr ow

s

The first glance at this poem certainly bewilders the readers as the poet makes his illiterate by arranging the lines and words in a distorted manner. However, if we “read” the poem as a painting, we definitely enjoy the freedom in the process of interpretation: the “picture” resembles two breasts of a lady from a side view, of a cubic style. It also looks like two handful crumbs of bread or two of the English sparrows with their wings stretching. Matter-of-factly, the two breasts which stands for “the old almost lady” are wittingly related to the flapping birds without a head. Superficially, we have a picture of

tranquility; an old lady feeding a crowd of birds, but the multifold visual images created by the structures of the poem suggests the feebleness and loneliness of the old age.

Another example which best illustrates Cummings' mastery of meaning and visuality is his "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r":

r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r
who
a)s w(e loo)k
upnowgath
PPEGORHRASS
Eringint (o-
aThe): l
eA
! p:
S a
(r
rlvlnG .gRrEaPsPhOs)
rea(be)rran(com)gi(e)ngly
,grasshopper;
(No Thanks: No.13)

In this poem there are only sixteen words: grasshopper, who, as, we, look, up, now, gathering, into, a, the, leaps, arrive, to, rearrangingly, become. As the focus of the pictures, the grasshopper appears four times, and each time with a seemingly different look: r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r---ppegorhrass---gRrEaPsPhOs--- grasshopper. Here a process of observation and recognition is presented: as the grasshopper jumps or flies very quickly, our first look gives us an impression of something absolutely alien. And when it appears for the second time in our vision, we still baffle the identity of the insect. Then it comes into our vision for the third time: it half hides itself in the grass and we can only assume there is something---some insect. Finally, we find out that this something is a grasshopper! Learning to observe an active grasshopper contains all the philosophy of the human actively. Apparently, the grasshopper in this poem becomes a symbol of the Mother nature, and the four different forms of its spelling represent four different stages

or status of the relationship between human beings and nature: the first form, r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r, spelt with hyphens between letters, reflects the prolonged process of human's perception of the natural world on the one hand, and the fair distance between man and nature on the other. The second, spelt in capital letters which, more often than not, when occurring in Cummings' poems with something unknown and the horror aroused from the ignorance of the nature. The third, with part of the word recognizable reveals a lukewarm relationship, and the forth symbolizes the harmony between man and nature. And this kind of harmony is what Cummings had been trying to achieve through his artistic creation.

The unreadable-aloud poems are Cummings' most original and charming contribution to English verse. Though he may have learned the technique from the French, still he immortalized it in English, proving once and for all that rhythm and meter, and even sound, are not indispensable in poetry. Cummings' iconoclastic mind must have revealed in his avant-garde visual arrangements, while his painter's eye sensed their satisfying punning contours.

3.3 Poetry as a Dynamic

As to different poetic devices, Cummings found his devices chiefly in magic of the word itself. Concerned less with the interplay of ambiguities than with the vitalizing of movement, he has coined a vocabulary in which nouns are made out of verbs and preserving sense while at the same time creating motion. The knifegrinder who "sharpens say to sing" (Xaipe: No.26) is also a poet who puts a keen edge on words. By means of this grammatical shift, the word has a noun husk but a verb kernel---what is needed is a noun, but what is meant is a verb. Not merely is there an aesthetic pleasure here in recognizing old friends in new disguises; there is also a significant insight produced as the reader makes the connection in his mind between meaning and function, between content and form. And this insight lies that the mind can only grasp the truth of what is being said by means of motion. As the mind moves back and forth between the recognition that this is a noun and the discovery that it was once a verb, somewhere along the arc of insight it perceives this because it has been asked to participate in the very process of transformation itself. This must be what Cummings means when he says that art is not of something, but rather is something.

His poetry imitates nature and the reader becomes not a passive spectator but an

active protagonist. The grammatical shift imitates the meaning and in the resultant interplay something like a metaphor is produced except that the two terms are not tenor and vehicle but rather noun-function and verb meaning. Nouns are made out of prefixes, interrogative pronouns, conjunctions, and so on. Similarly, coinages are created by analogy by adding adverbial suffixes where the readers least expect them, adjectives suffixes and noun-endings. These are Cummings' true trademarks, the devices the critics, imitators and parodists are bound to miss in their anxiety to fasten upon the more obvious typographical pyrotechnics. Also more characteristic are his distortions of syntax. He is more interested in experiencing life rather than in theorizing about it. Cummings' poems are precious because nature is always being born. He is interested in what is alive and growing in what is therefore immeasurable and mysterious.

Cummings takes poem as a dynamic art carrier and believes that he can create a world of motion where images are germinating, walking, running, flying and shooting. He makes his does doing and grinds his says singing. When we observe E.E.Cummings' poetry, we can't fail to escape the invitation of the movement:

...

and break onetwothreefourfive pigeonsjustlikethat

...

(Tulips: Portraits: No.21)

Here we are brought into an encounter with the skills of Buffalo Bill, a very well-known American game shooter at the end of last century. By jamming the numerals one, two, three, four and five together, Cummings makes the reader not only "read", but also "feel" the breath-taking swiftness of the shooting.

Now let us have another example:

Swi(

Across! Gold's

rowNdly

) ftblac

Kl(ness)y

a-motion-upo-motio-n

less?

thE

(against

Is

)Swi

Mming

(w-a)s

Blr

d,

This poem is made of two parts: one outside the parentheses, and the other inside. The first is the noun-adjective part, while the second is the verb-adverb part: “swift blackly, a motion upon motionless, the swimming bird” tells us what, while “across gold’s roundliness, against is-was” tells us where. We can see this bird is moving, moving simultaneously across the sun (space) and against is-was (time), and hence for the speaker represents a living moment of perception, an instant of motion. The key to understand this poem is to catch the instant without freezing it in a static frame, to fix and print as it were a motion picture without losing the motion. This technique greatly widens the perception of readers’ mind.

As a beholder, the poet in Cummings’ world is like the objectivist, the man who apprehends and recreates the true nature of the object. The true nature here is being “growth”, “vitality”, and “rhythm”. The poet can say,

myself is sculptor of
your body's idiom:
the musician of your wrists;
the poet who is afraid
only to mistranslate
a rhythm in your hair

(p.209)

But in empathizing with his subject as an objectivist, the poet also involves himself with it as mystic; in the lines the speaker is lover as well as poet. "Art is a mystery," says Cummings, "all mysteries have their source in a mystery-of-mysteries who is love: and if lovers may reach eternity directly through love herself, their mystery remains essentially that of the loving artist whose way must lie through his art, and of the loving worshipper whose aim is oneness with his god."(i: six nonlectures, p.65) And in another poem, we find,

" to be, being, that i am alive
this absurd fraction in its lowest terms
with everything cancelled
but shadows
-what does it all come down to? love? Love."

(p.212)

If poetry is a form of love, what characterizes love characterizes poetry, and as the "mystery-of-mysteries" love is the quintessential awareness of being "alive", the poem becomes the ultimate form of "self-transcendence." The poet as aesthetics responds to the Lady's beauty:

nothing which we are to perceive in this world equals
the power of your intense fragility...

As lover, he is transfigured:

whose texture
compels me with the color of its countries,
rendering death and forever with each breathing

(p.263)

The kind of death the Lady renders (the “dooms of love”) is the death from time into eternity, both sexually and spiritually:

And then all her beauty is a vise
whose stilling lips murder suddenly me,
but of my corpse the tool her smile makes something
suddenly luminous and precise
---and then we are I and She...
what is that the hurdy-gurdy's playing

(p.116)

In Cummings' realism, the passivity of the lover before the beauty of the Lady is analogous to the receptivity of the man before the power of existence. Just as the object determines consciousness, so the Lady determines the lover's being:

create
me gradually (or as these emerging now
hills invent the air)
breathe simply my each how

my trembling where my still invisible when.

(p.267)

The poet's role in this mystical experience is solely to express his feeling without conception and without evaluation for it is only the thought born of dream and the feeling survives wish and world.

Since we have been talking about natural objects as existents and phenomena as process, we can recall Sartre's exposition of the problem in *What Is Literature?*: "Each of our perceptions is accompanied by the consciousness that human reality is a 'revealer', it is through human reality that there is being, or to put it differently, that man is the means by which things are manifested. It is our presence in the world which multiplies relations." (Jean-Paul Sartre, *Literature and Existentialism* (New York: Citadel, 1949, p.38.) this formulation implies that human consciousness encompasses reality while by the means of expressing reality. By this means, the poem's soul could vibrate in perfect accord with nature. Cummings never failed to appreciate the nature of growth and it is upon such appreciation that his world depends.

3.4 Poetry as a Subversion

Liberating was the novelty of Cummings's verification. He employed an accentual measure of great flexibility, free from the traditional bondage of syllable counting. His literary productions from the first incredulous glimpse of the typography to the last indignant discovery of his meaning, are nicely calculated to shock the conventional minds and his experimentation with form and language places him among the most innovative of the twentieth-century poets. There are mainly two kinds of innovation in Cummings' creation : one is the innovation of poetic text, the other is the innovation of poetic grammar.

First, let's read a poetry which exemplifies the former :

Floatfloaflf

Lloloa

Tatoatloatf loat fl oat

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Nv.eda :Nci ;ddaanncciinn

A

Nda

n-saint

dance ! Dan

sai ntd anc

The central object of the poem is “dance”. From the traditional point of view, this type of poem is neither very poetic nor verbal enough due to the poet’s untraditional treatment of language. However, it is a poem. It has the lineation, divided into 11 stanzas and an internal rhythm and sound pattern. Actually the poetic text is just more than

verbal: with the support of all the non-verbal elements which have much more expressiveness, the activity of dancing becomes a true-to-life movie show which is deliberately conducted by poet-director. These non-verbal innovation gives birth to a positive expansion of text.

Then, let's analyze the innovation of Cummings' poetic grammar.

As a creative artist, Cummings found his poetic devices chiefly in the magic of the word itself. Connected less with the interplay of ambiguities than with the vitalizing of movement, he has coined a vocabulary in which nouns are made out of verbs, thus preserving sense while at the same time creating motion:

Who sharpens every dull

Here comes the only man

Reminding with his bell

To disappear a sun

And out of houses pour

Maids mothers widows wives

Bringing this visitor

Their very oldest lives

One pays him with a smile

Another with a tear

Some cannot pay at all

He never seem to care

He sharpens is to am

He sharpens say to sing

You'd almost cut your thumb

So right he sharpens wrong

And when their lives are keen

He throws the world a kiss

And slings his wheel upon

His back and off he goes

But we can bear him still
If now our sun is gone
Reminding with the bell
To reappear a moon

(Xaipe: No.26)

The knifegrinder who “sharpens say to sing” is also a poet who puts a keen edge on word. By means of this grammatical shift, the word has a noun husk but a verb kernel. ---what is needed is a noun, but what is meant is a verb. Not merely is there an aesthetic pleasure here in recognizing old friends, in new disguises; there is also a significant insight produced as the reader makes the connection in his mind between meaning and function, between content and form. And this insight is that the mind can only grasp the truth of what is being said by means of motion. As the mind moves back and forth between the recognition that this is a noun and the discovery that it was once a verb, somewhere along the arc of insight it perceives the truth of what is being said: that the knifegrinder achieves a mystery of transformation in turning prose into poetry---he “sharpens say to sing”.

After reading the above two poems, we can see that Cummings' revolution in poetic text and grammar is of the aesthetic and philosophic significance: he was widened our horizon in the interpretation of literary creation and therefore enabled us to develop the potentiality innated in language and to view poetry as a synthetic art. Now it is much self-evident that E.E.Cummings' poetic glamour does existed and glitter as well. What Cummings does subvert is not the language itself but the bondage of convention. The subversion is innovationality in the use of poetic means to create a harmony between man and man, man and nature, and within his inner self.

4 Conclusion

More than sixty years ago, E. E. Cummings wrote: "Art is a mystery.....Art is every mystery of Nature." More than 2,000 years ago, Socrates said, "Poetry is mimesis." In this paper the innovativeness of Cummings' poetic aesthetics was discussed mainly from defamiliarization perspectives to explore the value of e. e. cummings' poetry.

To explain the meaning of Cummings' work and to show the relationship between his devices and the vision they serve are in a sense to meet one charge regarding its significance. For it is not uncommonly said that there is no meaning here and that therefore there is no significance. But his poems were to be finally recognized by all those who are concerned with modern poetry: that Cummings' experiments, his love poems, and his satires all play a functional role in a serious view of life or a view of life for its seriousness must be discussed separately. No one can honestly read his books and say that Cummings' poetry has no meaning. Although some of his early poetry is wild with typographical distortions and some of his middle and later poetry is clogged with his own peculiarly twisted diction and syntax, it is not true that he doesn't grow and develop. Sometimes he repeats himself, sometimes his devices fall into place with a mechanical regularity, and sometimes his oddness is tiresome. But any experimenter by definition takes more chances than the ordinary writer. So long as he wins more often than he loses, his failures are worthwhile. This Cummings has done and more. When he wins, he wins like no one else. His best poems are of such a miraculous purity, so precise a feeling, so fresh a vision, that he can be forgiven his losses. His growth represents not so much the perfection and abandonment of one device after another as the gradual discovery and mastery of a group of devices.

To break lines and words on the page, to use capitals and lower case letters where they don't belong to, to insert parentheses anywhere and everywhere, to scatter punctuation marks apparently at random---what uses can these serve? Typography may not be pronounceable but it does affect the way we read. Pause and emphasis are supported by these devices; the meaning of words and lines is underscored; but most important of all, meanings are created as the reader's mind is slowed in its progress through the poem and forced to go back and forth, thereby becoming aware of the meanings in an immediate moment of perception. This is what any good poem asks of a

reader and Cummings is simply extending this request by making it explicit.

Cummings's revolution in poetic form is of the aesthetic and philosophic significance. The devices of defamiliarization widen reader's horizon in the interpretation of literary creation and therefore enabled us to develop the potentiality innate in language and to view poetry as a synthetic art.

From the discussions above, we can arrive at the following conclusion:

- 1) Defamiliarization doesn't outrage the language itself but the conventions and orthodoxies which smoothed the development and enrichment of the expressive of literature and arts. By defamiliarized practice, the readers can enjoy a much wider range of interpretation of poems. What Cummings intends to do is to liberate the reader's imagination.
- 2) Defamiliarization is characterized by the use of untraditional means of expression and it helps create a world of motion in Cummings's poetry where images are generating, walking, running, flying and shooting.
- 3) The defamiliarization is innovativeness in the use of poetic means to create a harmony between man and man, man and nature, and within his inner self.

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