**Cummings, E. E (1894-1962)**

Edward Estlin Cummings was a prolific and iconoclastic figure in American poetry of the mid-twentieth century. He experimented with unconventional verse forms, often playfully disrupting syntax, punctuation and typography, creating a more flexible, visually active kind of poetry, which yet retained surprising lyric power. He was also a painter and dramatist.

Born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Cummings was educated at Harvard University. In 1917, he contributed to *Eight Harvard Poets,* and the same year enlisted as an ambulance driver at the Western Front. Arrested on suspicion of anti-French activities, Cummings spent three months in a detention centre, an experience recounted in his powerful and innovative war text *The Enormous Room* (1922).

Based in New York, Cummings wrote a series of collections of poetry, for which he often struggled to find publishers because of his non-standard forms and sometimes openly sexual content. His first solo volume *Tulips and Chimneys* (1923) was dramatically cut to secure a publisher, but was reprinted in full in 1937. The volume *No Thanks* (1935) was so titled in defiance of the fourteen publishing firms who turned it down. Nevertheless, Cummings attracted a large and loyal readership, and in the 1950s drew packed houses as a lecturer. In 1931, he travelled to Soviet Russia, where he became profoundly disillusioned with Socialism, responding with a travel book entitled *Eimi* (1933), from the Greek for ‘I am’. His later work shows a strong sense of individualism and a distaste for politics, while maintaining its focus on the themes of love and nature. After two short, troubled marriages in the 1920s, he lived with the model and photographer Marion Morehouse.

**List of Works**

Poetry

*Tulips and Chimneys* (1923)

*Puella Mea* (1923)

*XLI Poems* (1925)

*&* (1925)

*Is 5* (1926)

*Christmas Tree* (1928)

*VV (Viva: Seventy New Poems)* (1931)

*No Thanks* (1935)

*1/20* (1936)

*Collected Poems* (1938)

*Fifty Poems* (1940)

*1 x 1* (1944)

*Xaipe* (1950)

*Poems 1923-1954* (1954)

*95 Poems* (1958)

Plays

*Him* (1927)

*Tom: A Ballet* (1935)

*Anthropos: The Future of Art* (1944)

*Santa Claus: A Morality* (1946)

Autobiography

*The Enormous Room* (1922)

*Eimi* (1933)

Other

[No Title] (1930) (Short stories)

*CIOPW* (1931) (Visual art)

*Cummings: A Miscellany*, edited by George Firmage (1958) (Newspaper and magazine articles)

*Adventures in Value,* with Marion Morehouse (1962) (Photography)

* *Fairy Tales*, Harcourt, 1965.
* *Three Plays and a Ballet*, edited by Firmage, October House, 1967.
* *Selected Letters of E. E. Cummings*, edited by F. W. Dupee and George Stade, Harcourt, 1969.
* *E. E. Cummings Reads His Collected Poetry, 1943-1958* (recording), Caedmon, 1977.
* *Little Tree* (juvenile), Crown, 1987
* *Fairy Tales*, Harcourt, 1965.
* *Three Plays and a Ballet*, edited by Firmage, October House, 1967.
* *Selected Letters of E. E. Cummings*, edited by F. W. Dupee and George Stade, Harcourt, 1969.
* *E. E. Cummings Reads His Collected Poetry, 1943-1958* (recording), Caedmon, 1977.
* *Little Tree* (juvenile), Crown, 1987
* *Fairy Tales*, Harcourt, 1965.
* *Three Plays and a Ballet*, edited by Firmage, October House, 1967.
* *Selected Letters of E. E. Cummings*, edited by F. W. Dupee and George Stade, Harcourt, 1969.
* *E. E. Cummings Reads His Collected Poetry, 1943-1958* (recording), Caedmon, 1977.
* *Little Tree* (juvenile), Crown, 1987.

*Fairy Tales* (1965)

Recording

*E. E. Cummings Reads his Selected Poetry* (Caedmon, 1977)

**References and Further Reading**

Cummings, E. E., et al. *Eight Harvard Poets.* New York, Laurence Gomme, 1917.

Cummings, E. E. *Complete Poems 1904-1962*. Ed. George Firmage. New York: Liveright, 1994.

Friedman, Norman, *Cummings: The Growth of a Writer.* Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1964.

Kennedy, Richard S. *Dreams in the Mirror: A Biography of E. E. Cummings.* New York: Liveright, 1980.

Sawyer-Lauçanno, Christopher. *E. E. Cummings: A Biography.* Naperville: Sourcebooks, 2004.

Firmage, George. *E. E. Cummings: A Bibliography*. Middletown, Wesleyan University Press, 1960.

**Hazel Hutchison, University of Aberdeen**