The Architecture of FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

What is architecture anyway? Is it the vast collection of the various buildings which have been built to please the varying tastes of the various lords of mankind? I think not. No, I know that architecture is life; or at least it is life itself taking form and therefore it is the truest record of life as it was lived in the world yesterday, as it is lived today or ever will be lived...So, architecture I know to be a Great Spirit.

— Frank Lloyd Wright

Listen To Mr Wright:

Born just two years after the end of the American Civil War, Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959) was witness to the extraordinary changes that swept the world from the leisurely pace of the nineteenth-century horse and carriage to the remarkable speed of the twentieth-century rocket ship. Unlike many of his contemporaries, who accepted such changes with reluctance, Wright welcomed and embraced the social and technological changes made possible by the Industrial Revolution and enthusiastically initiated his own architectural revolution. Inspired by the democratic spirit of America and the opportunities it afforded, he set out to design buildings worthy of such a democracy. Dismissing the masquerade of imported, historic European styles most Americans favored, his goal was to create an architecture that addressed the individual physical, social, and spiritual needs of the modern American citizen.

To Wright, architecture was not just about buildings, it was about nourishing the lives of those sheltered within them. What were needed were environments to inspire and offer repose to the inhabitants. He called his architecture “organic” and described it as that “great living creative spirit which from
generation to generation, from age to age, proceeds, persists, creates, according to the nature of man and his circumstances as they both change.”

During a lifetime that covered nearly a century, Wright took full advantage of the material opportunities presented by the unprecedented scientific and technological advances of the twentieth century without losing the nineteenth-century spiritual and romantic values with which he had grown up. In the process, he transformed the way we live.

Wright’s anchor and muse was Nature, which he spelled with a capital “N.” This was not the outward aspect of nature, but the omnipresent spiritual dimension. He wrote:

Using this word Nature…I do not of course mean that outward aspect which strikes the eye as a visual image of a scene strikes the ground glass of a camera, but that inner harmony which penetrates the outward form…and is its determining character; that quality in the thing that is its significance and it’s Life for us,—what Plato called (with reason, we see, psychological if not metaphysical) the “eternal idea of the thing.”

Wright himself grew up close to the land and in touch with its creative processes and it gave him constant inspiration for his architecture. He believed architecture must stand as a unified whole, grow from and be a blessing to the landscape, all parts relating and contributing to the final unity, whether furnishings, plantings, or works of art. To materially realize such a result, he created environments of carefully composed plans and elevations based on a consistent geometric grammar, while skillfully implementing the integration of the building with the site through the compatibility of materials, form, and method of construction. Through simplification of form, line, and color, and through the “rhythmic play of parts, the poise and balance, the respect the forms pay to the materials, and the repose these qualities attain to,” Wright created plastic, fluent, and coherent spaces that complement the changing physical and spiritual lives of the people who live in them.

In 1991, the American Institute of Architects named Frank Lloyd Wright the greatest American architect of all time and Architectural Record published a list of the one hundred most important buildings of the previous century that included twelve Wright structures. Twenty-five Wright projects (including the recently named Florida Southern College campus) have been designated National Historic Landmarks, and ten have been named to the tentative World Heritage Site list. Such recognition—in addition to the international honors he received during his lifetime, the dozens of major exhibitions that have been mounted, and the multitude of books and articles that have been written about his life and work—confirms Wright’s critical contribution to architectural history and the architectural profession at the same time that we draw upon the same legacy to find direction for the future.

The Early Years
Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959) was born in Richland Center, Wisconsin, on June 8, 1867, the son of William Carey Wright, a preacher and a musician, and Anna Lloyd Jones, a teacher whose large Welsh family had settled the valley area of Spring Green, Wisconsin. His early childhood was nomadic as his father traveled from one ministry position to another in Rhode Island, Iowa, and Massachusetts, before settling in Madison, Wisconsin in 1878.

Wright’s parents divorced in 1885, making already difficult financial circumstances even more challenging. To help support the family, eighteen-year-old Frank Lloyd Wright worked for the dean of the University of Wisconsin’s department of engineering while also studying at the university. But he wanted to be an architect and in 1887 he left Madison for Chicago, where he found work with two different firms before being hired by the prestigious partnership of Adler and Sullivan, working directly under Louis Sullivan for six years.

Chicago and the Prairie Style
In 1889, at age twenty-two, Wright married Catherine Lee Tobin. Anxious to build his own home, he negotiated a five-year contract with Sullivan in exchange for the loan of the necessary money. He purchased a wooded corner lot in the Chicago suburb of Oak Park and built his first house, a modest residence reminiscent of the East Coast shingle style with its prominent roof gable, but reflecting Wright’s ingenuity as he experimented with geometric shapes and volumes in the studio and playroom he later added for his ever-growing family of six children. Remembered by the children as a lively household, filled with beautiful things Wright found it hard to go without, it was not long before escalating expenses tempted him into accepting independent residential commissions. Although he did these on his own time, when Sullivan became aware of them in 1893, he charged Wright with breach of contract. It is not clear whether Wright quit or was fired, but his departure was definitely acrimonious, creating a rift between the two men that was not repaired for
nearly two decades. The split, however, presented the opportunity Wright needed to go out on his own. He opened an office and began his quest to design homes that he believed would truly belong on the American prairie.

The William H. Winslow House was Wright’s first independent commission. While conservative in comparison to work of a few years later, with its broad sheltering roof and simple elegance, it nonetheless attracted local attention. Determined to create an indigenous American architecture, over the next sixteen years he set the standards for what became known as the Prairie Style. These houses reflected the long, low horizontal prairie on which they sat with low-pitched roofs, deep overhangs, no attics or basements, and generally long rows of casement windows that further emphasized the horizontal theme. Some of Wright’s most important residential works of the time are the Darwin D. Martin House in Buffalo (1903); the Avery Coonley House in Riverside, Illinois (1907); and the Frederick C. Robie House in Chicago (1908). Important public commissions included the Larkin Company Administration Building in Buffalo (1903, demolished 1950) and Unity Temple in Oak Park (1905).

Europe and Japan
Creatively exhausted and emotionally restless, late in 1909 Wright left his family for an extended stay in Europe with Mamah Borthwick Cheney, a client with whom he had been in love for several years. Wright hoped he could escape the weariness and discontent that now governed both his professional and domestic life. During this European hiatus Wright worked on two publications of his work, published by Ernst Wasmuth, one of drawings known as the Wasmuth Portfolio, Ausgeführte Bauten und Entwürfe von Frank Lloyd Wright, and one of photographs, Ausgeführte Bauten, both released in 1911. These publications brought international recognition to his work and greatly influenced other architects. The same year, Wright and Mamah returned to the States and, unwelcome in Chicago social circles, began construction of Taliesin near Spring Green as their home and refuge. There he also resumed his architectural practice and over the next several years received two important public commissions: the first in 1913 for an entertainment center called Midway Gardens in Chicago; the second, in 1916, for the new Imperial Hotel in Tokyo, Japan.

In August 1914, Wright’s life with Mamah was tragically closed: while Wright was in Chicago working on Midway Gardens, an insane servant set fire to the living quarters of Taliesin, and murdered Mamah Cheney, her two children, and four others. Emotionally and spiritually devastated by the tragedy, Wright was able to find solace only in work and he began to rebuild Taliesin in Mamah’s memory. Once completed, he then effectively abandoned it for nearly a decade as he pursued major work in Tokyo with the Imperial Hotel (demolished 1968), and in Los Angeles, California, for oil heiress Aline Barnsdall (Hollyhock House and Olive Hill).

The Lean Years
The years between 1922 and 1934 were both architecturally creative and fiscally catastrophic. Wright had established an office in Los Angeles, but following his return from Japan in 1922 commissions were scarce, with the exception of the four textile block houses of 1923–1924 (Millard, Storer, Freeman and Ennis). He soon abandoned the West Coast and returned to Taliesin. While only a few projects went into construction, this decade was one of great design innovation for Wright. Among the unbuilt commissions were the National Life Insurance Building (Chicago, 1924), the Gordon Strong Automobile Objective (Sugarloaf Mountain, Maryland, 1925), San Marcos-in-the-Desert resort (Chandler, Arizona, 1928), and St. Mark’s-in-the-Bowery apartment towers (New York City, 1928).

In 1928, Wright married Olga Lazovich (known as Olgivanna), daughter of a Chief Justice of Montenegro, whom he had met a few years earlier in Chicago. She proved to be the partner and stabilizing influence he needed in order to refocus on “the cause of architecture” he had begun decades earlier.

With few architectural commissions coming his way, Wright turned to writing and lecturing which introduced him to a larger national audience. Two important publications came out in 1932: An Autobiography and The Disappearing City. The first received widespread critical acclaim and would continue to inspire generations of young architects; the second introduced Wright’s scheme for Broadacre City, a utopian vision for decentralization that moved the city into the country. Although it received little serious consideration at the time, it would influence community development in unforeseen ways in the decades to come. At about this same time, Wright and Olgivanna founded an architectural school at Taliesin, the “Taliesin Fellowship,” an apprenticeship program to provide a total learning environment, integrating not only architecture and construction, but also farming, gardening, and cooking, and the study of nature, music, art, and dance.
Remarkable Return
With this larger community to take care of, and Wisconsin winters brutal, the winter of 1934 found the Wrights and the Fellowship in rented quarters in the warmer air of Arizona where they worked on the Broadacre City model, which would debut in Rockefeller Center in 1935. Wright was by this time still considered a great architect, but one whose time had come and gone. In 1936, Wright proved this sentiment wrong as he staged a remarkable comeback with several important commissions, including the S.C. Johnson and Son Company Administration Building in Racine, Wisconsin; Fallingwater, the country house for Edgar Kaufmann in rural Pennsylvania; and the Herbert Jacobs House (the first executed “Usonian” house) in Madison, Wisconsin.

At this same time, Wright decided he wanted a more permanent winter residence in Arizona, and he acquired some unwanted acreage of raw, rugged desert in the foothills of the McDowell Mountains in Scottsdale. Here he and the Taliesin Fellowship began the construction of Taliesin West as a winter camp, a bold new endeavor for desert living where he tested design innovations, structural ideas, and building details that responded to the dramatic desert setting. Wright and the Fellowship established migration patterns between Wisconsin and Arizona, which the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture continues to this day.

Acknowledging Wright’s stunning reentry into the architectural spotlight, the Museum of Modern Art in New York staged a comprehensive retrospective exhibition that opened in 1940. In June 1943, undeterred by a world at war, Wright received a letter that initiated the most important, and most challenging commission of his late career. Baroness Hilla von Rebay wrote asking him to design a building to house the Solomon R. Guggenheim collection of non-objective paintings. Wright responded enthusiastically, never anticipating the tremendous amount of time and energy this project would consume before its completion sixteen years later.

The Last Decades
With the end of the war in 1945, many apprentices returned and work again flowed into the studio. Completed public projects over the next decade included the Research Tower for the SC Johnson Company, a Unitarian meeting house in Madison, a skyscraper in Oklahoma, and several buildings for Florida Southern College. Other, ultimately unbuilt, projects included a hotel for Dallas, Texas, two large civic commissions for Pittsburgh, a sports club for Hollywood, a mile-high tower for Chicago, a department store for Ahmedabad, India, and a plan for Greater Baghdad.

Wright opened his last decade with work on a large exhibition, Frank Lloyd Wright: Sixty Years of Living Architecture, which was soon on an international tour traveling to Florence, Paris, Zurich, Munich, Rotterdam, and Mexico City, before returning to the United States for additional venues. Impressively energetic for man in his eighties, he continued to travel extensively, lecture widely, and write prolifically. He was still actively involved with all aspects of work including frequent trips to New York to oversee construction of the Guggenheim Museum when, in April of 1959, he was suddenly stricken by an illness which forced his hospitalization. He died April 9, two months shy of his ninety-second birthday.

Legacy
During his seventy-year career, Wright created over 1,100 designs nearly half
of which were realized. These included commercial buildings, apartment
towers, recreational complexes, museums, religious houses, residences for the
wealthy and those of more modest income, furniture, lighting features, textiles,
and art glass. In creating what he called an “architecture for democracy,” he
redefined our concept of space, offering everyone the opportunity to live and
grow in nourishing environments, connected physically and spiritually to the
natural world.

In 1991, the American Institute of Architects named Wright the greatest
American architect of all time and Architectural Record published a list of the
one hundred most important buildings of the previous century. Twelve Frank
Lloyd Wright buildings appeared in this list, including Fallingwater, the Robie
House, the Johnson Administration Building, the Guggenheim, Taliesin, and
Taliesin West. In 2000, the A.I.A. selected their top ten favorite buildings of the
twentieth century: Fallingwater topped this list, with the Robie House, the
Guggenheim Museum, and the Johnson Administration Building also among
the select few.

In a 1908 article for Architectural Record, Wright prophesied about his legacy:

As for the future—the work shall grow more truly simple; more expressive with
fewer lines, fewer forms; more articulate with less labor; more plastic; more
fluent, although more coherent; more organic. It shall grow not only to fit more
perfectly the methods and processes that are called upon to produce it, but
shall further find whatever is lovely or of good repute in method or process,
and idealize it with the cleanest, most virile stroke I can imagine. As
understanding and appreciation of life matures and deepens, this work shall
prophesy and idealize the character of the individual it is fashioned to serve
more intimately, no matter how inexpensive the result must finally be. It shall
become in its atmosphere as pure and elevating in its humble way as the trees
and flowers are in their perfectly appointed way, for only so can architecture be
worthy its high rank as a fine art, or the architect discharge the obligation he
assumes to the public—imposed upon him by the nature of his own profession.

On Mountains and Rivers

By RAM Chandrakausika रामच 51
On Mountains and Rivers

Listen to legendary poet Gary Snyder as he reads from Mountains and Rivers without End, his epic celebration of nature and humanity that encompasses Asian artistic traditions, Native American storytelling, and Zen Buddhist philosophy. Learn how Dr. Snyder wrote the narrative, and discover how landscape paintings from the Freer Gallery of Art inspired his work. This program took place in the Freer Gallery’s Meyer Auditorium on July 12, 2008 to complement the Sackler exhibition.

American Poets
Vol 01

By RAM Chandrakausika राम च 51

E. E. CUMMINGS
1894–1962
"Among the most innovative of twentieth-century poets," according to Jenny Penberthy in the Dictionary of Literary Biography, E. E. Cummings experimented with poetic form and language to create a distinct personal style. A Cummings poem is spare and precise, employing a few key words eccentrically placed on the page. Some of these words were invented by Cummings, often by combining two common words into a new synthesis. He also revised grammatical and linguistic rules to suit his own purposes, using such words as "if," "am," and "because" as nouns, for example, or assigning his own private meanings to words. Despite their nontraditional form, Cummings' poems came to be popular with many readers. "No one else," Randall Jarrell claimed in his The Third Book of Criticism, "has ever made avant-garde, experimental poems so attractive to the general and the special reader." By the time of his death in 1962 Cummings held a prominent position in twentieth-century poetry. John Logan in Modern American Poetry: Essays in Criticism called him "one of the greatest lyric poets in our language." Stanley Edgar Hyman wrote in Standards: A Chronicle of Books for Our Time: "Cummings has written at least a dozen poems that seem to me matchless. Three are among the great love poems of our time or any time." Malcolm Cowley admitted in the Yale Review that Cummings "suffers from comparison with those [poets] who built on a larger scale—Eliot, Aiken, Crane, Auden among others—but still he is unsurpassed in his special field, one of the masters."

Cummings decided to become a poet when he was still a child. Between the ages of eight and twenty-two, he wrote a poem a day, exploring many traditional poetic forms. By the time he was in Harvard in 1916, modern poetry had caught his interest. He began to write avant-garde poems in which conventional punctuation and syntax were ignored in favor of a dynamic use of language. Cummings also experimented with poems as visual objects on the page. These early efforts were included in Eight Harvard Poets, a collection of poems by members of the Harvard Poetry Society.

After graduating from Harvard, Cummings spent a month working for a mail order book dealer. He left the job because of the tedium. In April of 1917, with the First World War raging in Europe and the United States not yet involved, he volunteered for the Norton-Harjes Ambulance Service in France. Ambulance work was a popular choice with those who, like Cummings, considered themselves to be pacifists. He was soon stationed on the French-German border with fellow American William Slater Brown, and the two young men became fast friends. To relieve the boredom of their assignment, they inserted veiled and provocative comments into their letters back home, trying to outwit and baffle the French censors. They also befriended soldiers in nearby units. Such activities led in September of 1917 to their being held on suspicion of treason and sent to an internment camp in Normandy for questioning. Cummings and Brown were housed in a large, one-room holding area along with other suspicious foreigners. Only outraged protests from his father finally secured Cummings' release in December of 1917; Brown was not released until April of the following year. In July of 1918, with the United States entering the war, Cummings was drafted into the U.S. Army and spent some six months at a training camp in Massachusetts.

Upon leaving the army in January of 1919, Cummings resumed his affair with Elaine Thayer, the wife of his friend Schofield Thayer. Thayer knew and approved of the relationship. In December of 1919 Elaine gave birth to Cummings' daughter, Nancy, and Thayer gave the child his name. Cummings was not to marry Elaine until 1924, after she and Thayer divorced. He adopted Nancy at this time; she was not to know that Cummings was her real father until 1948. This first marriage did not last long. Two months after their wedding, Elaine left for Europe to settle her late sister's estate. She met another man during the Atlantic crossing and fell in love with him. She divorced Cummings in 1925.

The early twenties were an extremely productive time for Cummings. In 1922 he published his first book, The Enormous Room, a fictionalized account of his French captivity. Critical reaction was overwhelmingly positive, although Cummings' account of his imprisonment was oddly cheerful in tone and freewheeling in style. He depicted his internment camp stay as a period of inner growth. As David E. Smith wrote in Twentieth Century Literature, The Enormous Room's emphasis "is upon what the initiate has learned from his journey. In this instance, the maimed hero can never again regard the outer world (i.e., 'civilization') without irony. But the spiritual lesson he learned from his sojourn with a community of brothers will be repeated in his subsequent writings both as an ironical dismissal of the values of his contemporary world, and as a sensitive, almost mystical celebration of the quality of Christian love."
John Dos Passos, in a review of the book for Dial, claimed that "in a style infinitely swift and crisply flexible, an individual not ashamed of his loves and hates, great or trivial, has expressed a bit of the underside of History with indelible vividness." Writing of the book in 1938, John Peale Bishop claimed in the Southern Review: "The Enormous Room has the effect of making all but a very few comparable books that came out of the War look shoddy and worn."

Cummings' first collection of poems, Tulips and Chimneys, appeared in 1923. His eccentric use of grammar and punctuation are evident in the volume, though many of the poems are written in conventional language. "The language of Tulips and Chimneys, ... like the imagery, the verse forms, the subject matter, and the thought, is sometimes good, sometimes bad," wrote Robert E. Maurer in the Bucknell Review. "But the book is so obviously the work of a talented young man who is striking off in new directions, groping for original and yet precise expression, experimenting in public, that it seems uncharitable to dwell too long on its shortcomings."

The original manuscript for Tulips and Chimneys was cut down by the publisher. These deleted poems were published in 1925 as &, so titled because Cummings wanted the original book to be titled Tulips & Chimneys but was overruled. Another collection quickly followed: XLI Poems, also in 1925. In a review of XLI Poems for Nation, Mark Van Doren defined Cummings as a poet with "a richly sensuous mind; his verse is distinguished by fluidity and weight; he is equipped to range lustily and long among the major passions." At the end of 1925 Dial magazine chose Cummings for their annual award of $2,000, a sum equalling a full year's income for the writer. The following year a new collection, Is 5, was published, for which Cummings wrote an introduction meant to explain his approach to poetry. In the introduction he argued forcefully for poetry as a "process" rather than a "product."

It was with these collections of the 1920s that Cummings established his reputation as an avant-garde poet conducting daring experiments with language. Speaking of these language experiments, M. L. Rosenthal wrote in The Modern Poets: A Critical Introduction: "The chief effect of Cummings' jugglery with syntax, grammar, and diction was to blow open otherwise trite and bathetic motifs through a dynamic rediscovery of the energies sealed up in conventional usage. ... He succeeded masterfully in splitting the atom of the cute commonplace." "Cummings," Richard P. Blackmur wrote in The Double Agent: Essays in Craft and Elucidation, "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 bursting with something very important and precise to say." Bethany K. Dumas wrote in her E. E. Cummings: A Remembrance of Miracles that "more important than the specific devices used by Cummings is the use to which he puts the devices. That is a complex matter; irregular spacing ... allows both amplification and retardation. Further, spacing of key words allows puns which would otherwise be impossible. Some devices, such as the use of lowercase letters at the beginnings of lines ... allow a kind of distortion that often re-enforces that of the syntax.... All these devices have the effect of jarring the reader, of forcing him to examine experience with fresh eyes." S. I. Hayakawa also remarked on this quality in Cummings' poetry. "No modern poet to my knowledge," Hayakawa wrote in Poetry, "has such a clear, childlike perception as E. E. Cummings—a way of coming smack against things with unaffected delight and wonder. This candor ... results in breath-takingly clean vision." Norman Friedman explained in his E. E. Cummings: The Growth of a Writer that Cummings' innovations "are best understood as various ways of stripping the film of familiarity from language in order to strip the film of familiarity from the world. Transform the word, he seems to have felt, and you are on the way to transforming the world."
Other critics focused on the subjects of Cummings’ poetry. Though his poetic language was uniquely his own, Cummings’ poems were unusual because they unabashedly focused on such traditional and somewhat passe poetic themes as love, childhood, and flowers. What Cummings did with such subjects, according to Stephen E. Whicher in Twelve American Poets, was, “by verbal ingenuity, without the irony with which another modern poet would treat such a topic, create a sophisticated modern facsimile of the ‘naive’ lyricism of Campion or Blake.” This resulted in what Whicher termed “the renewal of the cliche.” Penberthy detected in Cummings a “nineteenth-century romantic reverence for natural order over man-made order, for intuition and imagination over routine-grounded perception. His exalted vision of life and love is served well by his linguistic agility. He was an unabashed lyricist, a modern cavalier love poet. But alongside his lyrical celebrations of nature, love, and the imagination are his satirical denouncements of tawdry, defiling, flat-footed, urban and political life—open terrain for invective and verbal inventiveness.”

This satirical aspect to Cummings’ work drew both praise and criticism. His attacks on the mass mind, conventional patterns of thought, and society’s restrictions on free expression, were born of his strong commitment to the individual. In the “nonlectures” he delivered at Harvard University Cummings explained his position: “So far as I am concerned, poetry and every other art was, is, and forever will be strictly and distinctly a question of individuality.” As Penberthy noted, Cummings’ consistent attitude in all of his work was “condemning mankind while idealizing the individual.” “Cummings’ lifelong belief,” Bernard Dekle stated in Profiles of Modern American Authors, “was a simple faith in the miracle of man’s individuality. Much of his literary effort was directed against what he considered the principal enemies of this individuality—mass thought, group conformity, and commercialism.” For this reason, Cummings satirized what he called “mostpeople,” that is, the herd mentality found in modern society. “At heart,” Logan explained, “the quarrels of Cummings are a resistance to the small minds of every kind, political, scientific, philosophical, and literary, who insist on limiting the real and the true to what they think they know or can respond to. As a preventive to this kind of limitation, Cummings is directly opposed to letting us rest in what we believe we know; and this is the key to the rhetorical function of his famous language.”

Cummings was also ranked among the best love poets of his time. “Love always was … Cummings’ chief subject of interest,” Friedman wrote in his E. E. Cummings: The Art of His Poetry. “The traditional lyric situation, representing the lover speaking of love to his lady, has been given in our time a special flavor and emphasis by Cummings. Not only the lover and his lady, but love itself—its quality, its value, its feel, its meaning—is a subject of continuing concern to our speaker.” "Love was, in Cummings' poems, equated to such other concepts as joy and growth, a relationship which "had its source," wrote Robert E. Wegner in The Poetry and Prose of E. E. Cummings, "in Cummings' experience as a child; he grew up in an aura of love.... Love is the propelling force behind a great body of his poetry." Friedman noted that Cummings was “in the habit of associating love, as a subject, with the
Cummings’ early love poems were frankly erotic and were meant to shock the Puritanical sensibilities of the 1920s. Penberthy noted that the poet’s first wife, Elaine, inspired “scores of Cummings’s best erotic poems.” But, as Wegner wrote, “In time he came to see love and the dignity of the human being as inseparable.” Maurer also commented on this change in Cummings’ outlook; there was, Maurer wrote, a “fundamental change of attitude which manifested itself in his growing reverence and dedication to lasting love.” Hyatt H. Waggoner, writing in American Poets from the Puritans to the Present, noted that “the love poems are generally, after the 1920s, religious in tone and implication, and the religious poems very often take off from the clue provided by a pair of lovers, so that often the two subjects are hardly, if at all, separable.” Rushworth M. Kidder also noted this development in the love poems, and he traced the evolution of Cummings’ thoughts on the subject. Writing in his E. E. Cummings: An Introduction to the Poetry, Kidder reported that in the early poems, love is depicted as “an echo of popularly romantic notions, and it grows in early volumes to a sometimes amorphous phenomenon seasoned by a not entirely unselfish lust. By [his] last poems, however, it has come to be a purified and radiant idea, unentangled with flesh and worlds, the agent of the highest transcendence. It is not far, as poem after poem has hinted, from the Christian conception of love as God.” Waggoner concluded that Cummings “wrote some of the finest celebrations of sexual love and of the religious experience of awe and natural piety produced in our century, precisely at a time when it was most unfashionable to write such poems.”

In addition to his poetry, Cummings was also known for his play, Him, and for the travel diary, Eimi. Him consisted of a sequence of skits drawing from burlesque, the circus, and the avant-garde, and jumping quickly from tragedy to grotesque comedy. The male character is named Him; the female character is Me. “The play begins,” Harold Clurman wrote in Nation, “as a series of feverish images of a girl undergoing anaesthesia during an abortion. She is ‘me,’ who thinks of her lover as ‘him.’” In the program to the play, staged at the Provincetown Playhouse, Cummings provided a warning to the audience: “Relax and give the play a chance to strut its stuff—relax, stop wondering what it’s all ‘about’—like many strange and familiar things, Life included, this Play isn’t ‘about,’ it simply is. Don’t try to enjoy it, let it try to enjoy you. DON’T TRY TO UNDERSTAND IT, LET IT TRY TO UNDERSTAND YOU.” Clurman believed that “the play’s purest element is contained in duos of love. They are the most sensitive and touching in American playwriting. Their intimacy and passion, conveyed in an odd exquisiteness of writing, are implied rather than declared. We realize that no matter how much ‘him’ wishes to express his closeness to ‘me,’ he is frustrated not only by the fullness of his feeling but by his inability to credit his emotion in a world as obscenely chaotic as the one in which he is lost.”

In 1931 Cummings traveled to the Soviet Union. Like many other writers and artists of the time, he was hopeful that the communist revolution had created a better society. After a short time in the country, however, it became clear to Cummings that the Soviet Union was a dictatorship in which the individual was severely regimented by the state. His diary of the visit, in which he bitterly attacked the Soviet regime for its dehumanizing policies, was published in 1933 as Eimi, the Greek word for “I am.” In it, he described the Soviet Union as an “uncircus of noncreatures.” Lenin’s tomb, in which the late dictator’s preserved body is on display, especially revolted Cummings and inspired him to create the most impassioned writing in the book. “The style which Cummings began in poetry,” Bishop wrote, “reaches its most complete development in the prose of Eimi. Indeed, one might almost say that, without knowing it, Cummings had been acquiring a certain skill over the years, in order that, when occasion arose, he might set down in words the full horror of Lenin’s tomb.” In tracing the course of his thirty-five day trip through the Soviet Union, Cummings made frequent allusion to Dante’s Inferno and its story of a descent into Hell, equating the two journeys. It is only after crossing back into Europe at book’s end that “it is once more possible for [Cummings] to assume the full responsibility of being a man…,” Bishop wrote. “Now he knows there is but one freedom…, the freedom of the will, responsive and responsible, and that from it all other freedoms take their course.” Kidder called Eimi “a report of the grim inhumanities of the Soviet system, of repression, apathy, priggishness, kitsch, and enervating suspicion.” For some time after publication of Eimi, Kidder reported, Cummings had a difficult time getting his poetry published. The overwhelmingly left-wing publishers of the time refused to accept his work. Cummings had to resort to self-publishing several volumes of his work during the later 1930s.
In 1952, Cummings was invited to give the Charles Eliot Norton lectures in poetry at Harvard University. His lectures, later published as *six nonlectures*, were highly personal accounts of his life and work, "autobiographical rambles," as Penberthy described them. The first two lectures reminisce about his childhood and parents; the third lecture tells of his schooldays at Harvard, his years in New York, and his stay in Paris during the 1920s. The last three lectures present his own ideas about writing. In his conclusion to the lecture series Cummings summed up his thoughts with these words, quoting his own poetry where appropriate: "I am someone who proudly and humbly affirms that love is the mystery-of-mysteries, and that nothing measurable matters 'a very good God damn'; that 'an artist, a man, a failure' is no mere whenfully accreting mechanism, but a givingly eternal complexity—neither some soulless and heartless ultrapredatory infra-animal nor any understandingly knowing and believing and thinking automaton, but a naturally and miraculously whole human being—a feelingly illimitable individual; whose only happiness is to transcend himself, whose every agony is to grow."

Critics of Cummings’ work were divided into two camps as to the importance of his career. His detractors called his failure to develop as a writer a major weakness; Cummings’ work changed little from the 1920s to the 1950s. Others saw him as merely clever but with little lasting value beyond a few technical innovations. Still others questioned the ideas in his poetry, or seeming lack of them. George Stade in the New York Times Book Review claimed that "intellectually speaking, Cummings was a case of arrested development. He was a brilliant 20-year-old, but he remained merely precocious to the end of his life. That may be one source of his appeal." James G. Southworth, writing in *Some Modern American Poets*, argued that Cummings "is too much out of the stream of life for his work to have significance." Southworth went on to say that "the reader must not mistake Mr. Cummings for an intellectual poet."

But Cummings’ supporters acclaimed his achievement. In a 1959 essay reprinted in his collection *Babel to Byzantium*, James Dickey proclaimed: "I think that Cummings is a daringly original poet, with more vitality and more sheer, uncompromising talent than any other living American writer." Although admitting that Cummings’ work was not faultless, Dickey stated that he felt "ashamed and even a little guilty in picking out flaws" in the poems, a process he likened to calling attention to "the aesthetic defects in a rose. It is better to say what must finally be said about Cummings: that he has helped to give life to the language." In similar terms, Rosenthal explained that "Cummings’s great forte is the manipulation of traditional forms and attitudes in an original way. In his best work he has the swift sureness of ear and idiom of a Catullus, and the same way of bringing together a racy colloquialism and the richer tones of high poetic style." Maurer believed that Cummings’ best work exhibited "a new and delightful sense of linguistic invention, precise and vigorous." Penberthy concluded that "Cummings’s achievement deserves acclaim. He established the poem as a visual object . . . ; he revealed, by his x-ray probings, the faceted possibilities of the single word; and like such prose writers as Vladimir Nabokov and Tom Stoppard, he promoted sheer playfulness with language. Despite a growing abundance of second-rate imitations, his poems continue to amuse, delight, and provoke."
Career
Poet, painter, novelist, and playwright. Charles Eliot Norton Professor of
Poetry, Harvard University, 1952-53. One-man exhibitions at American British

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The American poet E. E. Cummings wrote verse that presented romantic attitudes in an experimental style. Cummings’s poems are not only ideas but crafted physical objects that show a fresh way of looking at reality.

Youth and education

Edward Estlin Cummings was born to a well-known family in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on October 14, 1894. His father, Edward, was a professor at Harvard University and later the nationally known minister of Old South Church in Boston, Massachusetts. His mother, Rebecca, who loved to spend time with her children, played games with Cummings and his sister, Elizabeth. It was Cummings’s mother who introduced him to the joys of writing. Cummings wrote poems and also drew as a child, and he often played outdoors with the many other children who lived in his neighborhood. He also grew up in the company of such family friends as the philosophers William James (1842–1910) and Josiah Royce (1855–1916). He graduated from Harvard University in 1915 and then received an advanced degree from Harvard in 1916.

Early career

After graduating, Cummings became an ambulance driver in France just before America entered World War I (1914–1918; a war involving most European countries and, later, the United States). He was imprisoned for three months on suspicion of holding views critical of the French war effort, and this experience provided the material for his first book, The Enormous Room (1922).

Cummings’s romantic transcendentalism (which stressed the individual human being and his or her emotional experiences, the worship of nature, and the “spiritual”—or nonmaterial—basis of reality) resulted in the early rejection of his work, for it was not popular at the time. For several decades he had to pay for the publication of his work, and reviewers revealed very little understanding of his aims. His first volume of poems, Tulips and Chimneys (1923), was followed by a second volume two years later. Though Cummings received the Dial Award for poetry in 1925, he continued to have difficulty in finding a publisher.

In the ten years following 1925 only two volumes of Cummings’s poems were published, both at his own expense: i is 5 (1926) and W (ViVi; 1931). In that decade Cummings also arranged for the publication of an experimental play, Him (1927), and a diarylike account of a trip to the Soviet Union, Eimi (1933). With his characteristic harsh wit, Cummings named the fourteen publishers who had rejected the manuscript of No Thanks (1935) in the book itself and said “Thanks” to his mother, who had paid for its publication.

Poetic methods and achievement

Despite his dedication to growth and movement, and in contrast to his reputation as an experimenter in verse forms, Cummings actually tended to lack fresh invention. Especially in the 1930s, when he felt separated from his culture and his fellow poets, he repeated himself endlessly, writing many versions of essentially the same poem. Many of Cummings’s devices, such as the visual “shaping” of poems, often seem like substitutes for original
inspiration. However, Cummings’s most characteristic devices—the unique, personal grammar and the breaking up and putting back together of words into different forms—were more than just another trick when they operated within the context of a poem’s meaning.

The love poems and religious poems represent Cummings’s greatest achievements. For example, “somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond” is one of the finest love poems in the English language, and Cummings’s poem on the death of his beloved father, “my father moved through dooms of love,” is a profoundly moving tribute. Cummings wrote some of the finest celebrations of sexual love and the religious experience of awe produced in the twentieth century, precisely at a time when it was not at all popular to write such poems.

Early in his career Cummings had divided his time between New York City and Paris, France, where he studied painting. Later in his career he divided his time between New York City and the family home in North Conway, New Hampshire. He was always interested in the visual arts, and his paintings and drawings were exhibited in several one-man shows in the 1940s and 1950s. Ripening into honor

After 1945 a new generation of poets in rebellion against the poets of the previous generation began to find in Cummings an echo of their own ideas about poetry, and Cummings began to receive the recognition that had escaped him for so long. In 1950 the Academy of American Poets awarded Cummings, a self-described “failure,” a fellowship for “great achievement,” and his collection Poems, 1923–1954 (1954) won praise from people who had earlier tended to criticize Cummings for his romanticism.

Harvard University honored its distinguished graduate by asking Cummings to deliver the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures in 1952–1953, his only attempt at formal artistic autobiography (a person’s own telling of his or her life story). It was later published as i: six nonlectures (1953). In the lectures Cummings said that perhaps fifteen poems were faithful expressions of his thoughts as an artist and human. The total number of truly memorable short poems is certainly higher than this small figure, but is still only a fraction of the nearly one thousand poems published in his lifetime.

Late works

Cummings did not “develop” as a poet either in terms of ideas or of characteristic style. However, between the publication of his first volume and his final, called 73 Poems (1963), his work does show a deepening awareness and mastery of his special gift as poet of the mysteries of “death and forever with each breathing.” His finest single volume is often said to be 95 Poems (1958). Cummings’s Collected Poems was published in 1960.

In addition to the works mentioned, Cummings published several other experimental plays, a ballet, and some fifteen volumes of verse. Shortly before his death at North Conway, New Hampshire, on September 3, 1962, Cummings wrote the text to accompany photographs taken by his third wife, Marion Morehouse. Titled Adventures in Value (1962), this work is a good example of his lifelong effort to see intensely and deeply enough to confront the miracles of nature. If only a tenth of his poems should be thought worthwhile, Cummings will have been established as one of the more lasting poets America has produced.

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ROBERT FROST

By RAM Chandrakausika राम च 51
Robert Frost

Robert Lee Frost was an American poet. He is highly regarded for his realistic depictions of rural life and his command of American colloquial speech. His work frequently employed settings from rural life in New England in the early twentieth century, using them to examine complex social and philosophical themes. A popular and often-quoted poet, Frost was honored frequently during his lifetime, receiving four Pulitzer Prizes for Poetry.

Early years

Robert Frost was born in San Francisco, California, to journalist William Prescott Frost, Jr., and Isabelle Moodie. His mother was of Scottish descent, and his father descended from Nicholas Frost of Tiverton, Devon, England, who had sailed to New Hampshire in 1634 on the Wolfrana. Frost's father was a teacher and later an editor of the San Francisco Evening Bulletin (which afterwards merged into the San Francisco Examiner), and an unsuccessful candidate for city tax collector. After his father's death in May 5, 1885, in due time the family moved across the country to Lawrence, Massachusetts under the patronage of (Robert's grandfather) William Frost, Sr., who was an overseer at a New England mill. Frost graduated from Lawrence High School in 1892. Frost's mother joined the Swedenborgian church and had him baptized in it, but he left it as an adult. Despite his later association with rural life, Frost grew up in the city, and published his first poem in his high school's magazine. He attended Dartmouth College long enough to be accepted into the Theta Delta Chi fraternity. Frost returned home to teach and to work at various jobs including delivering newspapers and factory labor. He did not enjoy these jobs at all, feeling his true calling as a poet.

Adult years

In 1894 he sold his first poem, "My Butterfly: An Elegy" (published in the November 8, 1894 edition of the New York Independent) for fifteen dollars. Proud of this accomplishment he proposed marriage to Elinor Miriam White, but she demurred, wanting to finish college (at St. Lawrence University) before they married. Frost then went on an excursion to the Great Dismal Swamp in Virginia, and asked Elinor again upon his return. Having graduated she agreed, and they were married at Harvard University[citation needed], where he attended liberal arts studies for two years.

He did well at Harvard, but left to support his growing family. Grandfather Frost had, shortly before his death, purchased a farm for the young couple in Derry, New Hampshire; and Robert worked the farm for nine years, while writing early in the mornings and producing many of the poems that would later become famous. Ultimately his farming proved unsuccessful and he returned to education as an English teacher, at Pinkerton Academy from 1906 to 1911, then at the New Hampshire Normal School (now Plymouth State University) in Plymouth, New Hampshire.

In 1912 Frost sailed with his family to Great Britain, living first in Glasgow before settling in Beaconsfield outside London. His first book of poetry, A Boy's Will, was published the next year. In England he made some important acquaintances, including Edward Thomas (a member of the group known as the Dymock Poets), T.E. Hulme, and Ezra Pound. Pound would become the first American to write a (favorable) review of Frost's work. Surrounded by his peers, Frost wrote some of his best work while in England.

As World War I began, Frost returned to America in 1915. He bought a farm in Franconia, New Hampshire, where he launched a career of writing, teaching, and lecturing. This family homestead served as the Frosts' summer home until 1938, and is maintained today as 'The Frost Place', a museum and poetry conference site at Franconia. During the years 1916–20, 1923–24, and 1927–1938, Frost taught English at Amherst College, Massachusetts, notably encouraging his students to account for the sounds of the human voice in their writing.

For forty-two years, from 1921 to 1963, Frost spent almost every summer and fall teaching at the Bread Loaf School of English of Middlebury College, at the mountain campus at Ripton, Vermont. He is credited as a major influence upon the development of the school and its writing programs; the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference gained renown during Frost's tenure there.[citation needed] The college now owns and maintains his former Ripton farmstead as a national historic site near the Bread Loaf campus. In 1921 Frost accepted a fellowship teaching post at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, where he resided until 1927; while there he was awarded a lifetime appointment at the University as a Fellow in Letters. The Robert Frost Ann Arbor home is now
situated at The Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan. Frost returned to Amherst in 1927. In 1940 he bought a 5-acre (2.0 ha) plot in South Miami, Florida, naming it Pencil Pines; he spent his winters there for the rest of his life.

Harvard’s 1965 alumni directory indicates Frost received an honorary degree there. He also received honorary degrees from Bates College and from Oxford and Cambridge universities; and he was the first person to receive two honorary degrees from Dartmouth College. During his lifetime the Robert Frost Middle School in Fairfax, Virginia, and the main library of Amherst College were named after him.

Frost was 86 when he spoke and performed a reading of his poetry at the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy on January 20, 1961. Some two years later, on January 29, 1963, he died, in Boston, of complications from prostate surgery. He was buried at the Old Bennington Cemetery in Bennington, Vermont. His epitaph reads, “I had a lover’s quarrel with the world.”

Frost’s poems are critiqued in the “Anthology of Modern American Poetry”, Oxford University Press, where it is mentioned that behind a sometimes charmingly familiar and rural façade, Frost’s poetry frequently presents pessimistic and menacing undertones which often are not recognized nor analyzed.

One of the original collections of Frost materials, to which he himself contributed, is found in the Special Collections department of the Jones Library in Amherst, Massachusetts. The collection consists of approximately twelve thousand items, including original manuscript poems and letters, correspondence, and photographs, as well as audio and visual recordings.
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