

"the most
wasted
of all days
is one
without
laughter."

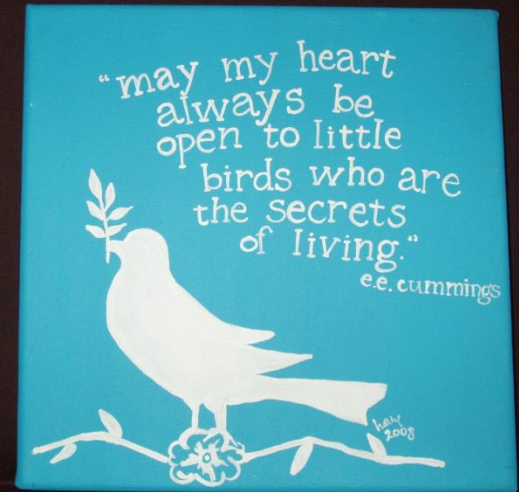
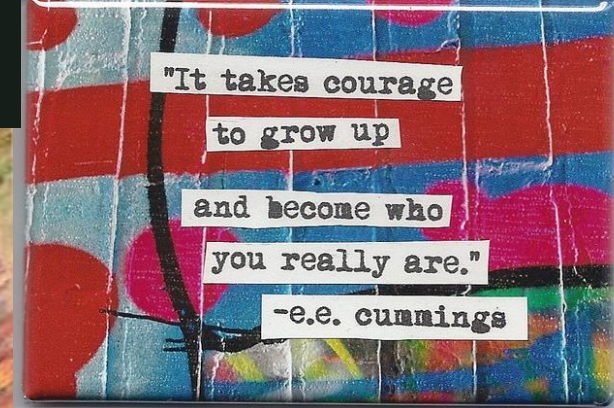
- e.e. cummings

"**words** are art"



E.E

Cummings



**"To destroy
is always the
first step in
any creation."**

E.E. Cummings



Edward Estlin Cummings

1894-1962

- ▶ 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.
- ▶ First poem published in 1920 in a collection titled *Eight Harvard Poets*
- ▶ Graduated from Harvard
- ▶ In April of 1917 volunteered for Ambulance Service in France
- ▶ September of 1917 held on suspicion of treason and sent to an internment camp in Normandy for questioning after inserting provocative comments in letters he was censoring.
- ▶ Cummings' first collection of poems, *Tulips and Chimneys*, appeared in 1923.
- ▶ Very famous during his time
- ▶ Was a poet, painter, novelist.
- ▶ One of the most widely read modern poets



Style

- ▶ Influenced by modernist painters and artists (Picasso)
- ▶ Challenged the conventions of syntax (the rules for the formation of sentences)
- ▶ Made **typography** (the general character or appearance of printed matter) and the division of words part of the shape and meaning of the poem
 - ▶ **Concrete poetry**: poetry in which the typographical arrangement of words is as important in conveying the intended effect as the conventional elements of the poem
- ▶ Unconventional punctuation, capitalization, and spelling
- ▶ Jubilant lyricism, celebration of individuality

Themes

Cummings had a strong belief in individuality, “his poems are constantly exhorting us [the reader] to be original, independent, self-reliant. And he is scornful of everyone who takes refuge in received ideas and conventional standards” (Kirsch, Adam).

- ▶ Celebrated individualism
- ▶ Attacked the mass mind:
 - ▶ conventional patterns of thought
 - ▶ society's restrictions on free expression
 - ▶ Consumerism
- ▶ "So far as I am concerned, poetry and every other art was, is, and forever will be strictly and distinctly a question of individuality." – e.e. cummings
- ▶ Cummings' consistent attitude was "condemning mankind while idealizing the individual." – Pemberley

Modern Poetry



1. Bold experimentation in style and form
 - ▶ Imagists—poem based on a single image
 - ▶ Symbolist—presents idea based on symbols for reader to interpret
 - ▶ Impressionist—presents unrefined first impression
2. Poems had no fixed single meaning; often they had multiples themes to interpret, it was up to the individual reader to determine

“in Just-”

cummings never titled his poems...sorta like Emily Dickinson ☺

in Just-
spring when the world is mud-
luscious the little
lame balloonman

whistles far and wee

and eddieandbill come
running from marbles and
piracies and it's
spring

when the world is puddle-
wonderful
the queer
old balloonman whistles
far and wee
and bettyandisabel come dancing

from hop-scotch and jump-rope and

it's
spring
and
 the

 goat-footed
balloonMan
 whistles

far
and
wee

“the hills”

the hills
like poets put on
purple thought against
the
magnificent clamor of

tortured
in gold, which presently

crumpled
collapses
exhaling a red soul into the dark

so
duneyed master
enter
the sweet gates

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