

MARVELOUS WHIRLINGS

E.E. CUMMINGS *EIMI*, LOUIS ARAGON, EZRA POUND, & *KRAZY KAT*

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1. Introduction

On Sunday, May 10, 1931, E.E. Cummings was on a train leaving Paris bound for Moscow; he was unsure what to expect. Cummings had heard conflicting reports about the USSR. On one hand, as Richard Kennedy in his biography of Cummings, *Dreams in a Mirror*, recounts, “The new [Soviet] experiment in social planning fascinated European and American intellectuals, especially those like Cummings’ New York friends, who, during the 1920’s had professed socialist ideals” (306-307). Additionally, Cummings had certainly heard the glowing reports of social progress, burgeoning state-sanctioned cultural programs, and general successes of the Five-Year Plan, which filtered out from both Russia and the Communist Party of the United States (Kennedy *Dreams* 307). Beyond which reports, came panegyric reviews from fellow artist and poets like Langston Hughes, who wrote unequivocally that the USSR in the 1930s represented “The dream of all the poor and oppressed...come true” (“Moscow and Me” 55). More importantly, for Cummings, many of his friends supported the USSR. John Dos Passos, for one, visited Cummings in October of 1930 full of praise for the Soviet State. Yet, on the other hand, Morrie Werner, with whom Cummings had originally planned to visit Russia a year earlier, returned from Moscow decrying “the dismal and barbaric conditions that he had seen in the Soviet Union” (Kennedy *Dreams* 307). Further, to a committed individualist like Cummings, the reports of Soviet collectivist triumphs may have seemed too good to be true.

Luckily for the curious Cummings, the opportunity to travel to Russia and sate his curiosity presented itself when he found himself in Paris through the winter and early spring of 1931 (Kennedy *Dreams* 307-308). After over a month of preparation—

arranging for a visa, taking Russian lessons, and setting up connections in Moscow—Cummings was ready to depart (*Dreams* 308-309). Unfortunately, all too soon his initial curiosity would be forgotten.

What Cummings found in the USSR amounted to the direct antithesis of the values he held most dear: those of individuality and free artistic expression. Cummings discovered that the “communist superstate” nullified the individual and enslaved artistic expression for the purpose of propaganda (Sketch xv). Thus, by the time he composed the account of his five week Russian journey,¹ Cummings had adopted a definitively anti-Soviet stance, envisioning the USSR as an enormous prison of a country (Cummings Introduction viii).

The book Cummings produced out of his experiences in the USSR, *Eimi*, was initially published in March of 1933. In *Eimi*, Cummings, like other artists of this period, attempts to come to terms with the place of art and the individual amidst the rather desperate socio-political realities of the interbellum years. To this end, steeped in modernist poetics and plump to bursting with experimental prose, *Eimi* positions itself against the totalitarian power of the USSR. Yet, though, as befits his reputation as a fervent individualist, Cummings makes plain in *Eimi* his belief in the supremacy of the individual artist in comparison to forces of the state that attempt to control him, his examination of the meeting of modernist poetics with totalitarian politics is anything but simple. Instead, Cummings both complicates and clarifies his glorification of the individual by rooting *Eimi* in conversation with the avant-garde poetics of Louis Aragon and Ezra Pound. Engaging with these sources Cummings is able to fine-tune his position in regard to championing the individual artist against the totalitarian state. Striving to

avoid and reject both Aragon's leftist reactions, and Pound's rightist ones, Cummings eventually latched on to a rather unlikely source: George Herriman's *Krazy Kat*.

Herriman's *Krazy* offered Cummings a fitting metaphor for a democratic society where the individual, though in constant tension with the state, is allowed to see fulfilled the ideals of love, joy, and transformation. The relationship of Aragon, Pound, and *Krazy* to *Eimi* will each be examined in further detail below. However first, to foreground these discussions, a bit about *Eimi*'s overall critical reception and context will be useful.

Eimi met with a mixed and generally less than enthusiastic response (Kennedy *Dreams* 328). Norman Friedman, in his Afterword to the fourth edition of *Eimi*, notes that of the nearly fifty reviews of *Eimi* that appeared in 1933 most were negative. The book was attacked by "anti-modernists" for its "difficult experimental style," while at the same time facing scorn for its "clear anti-Soviet position" from many on the left who believed "that socialism offered a viable alternative to the evident failure of capitalism" (Friedman 458).² Speaking to the difficulty of Cummings' style in general, reviewer Kenneth Burke commented, "...alive to the discordant clutter about us, Cummings tends to be jumpy, shifty, look-for-me-here-and-you'll-find-me-there. (After reading him for an hour or so, I show the tetanic symptoms of a cocaine addict.)" (61). A reviewer from the *Boston Transcript* heaped on a similar criticism of *Eimi*'s style quipping, "[I]t is to be hoped that somebody will have the courage to make the attempt to read [*Eimi*] to the very end" (qtd. in Cohen 94). William Troy in his 1933 review, "Cummings's Non-Land of Un-," goes even further claiming that Cummings' idiosyncratic style throughout the book grows tiresome contributing to the reader feeling *Eimi* is "Not a book...but an unbook" (413). Troy also speaks to the political criticisms of *Eimi*, stating that in the book

Cummings displays a “distinct unfair-mindedness [towards the USSR] from the moment he crosses the border” (413). In *Beleaguered Poets and Leftist Critics*, Milton A. Cohen goes so far as to claim that *Eimi* represented nothing less than Cummings’ final, firm artistic break with leftist critics and artists, many of whom were his friends (95-96). In total, the general opinion of those on the left was that Cummings was both an egoist and a terrible investigator of the actual Soviet situation (Cohen 96). In terms of *Eimi*, this discord resulted in many on the left siding with opinions similar to William Troy’s accusation of complete “unfair-mindedness” throughout the text, opinions which tended to dismiss Cummings’ political analysis as no more than overt bias against the USSR (and by association left-leaning political views).

Several reviewers praised the work, however. S. Foster Damon exulted in Cummings’ ability to capture individual personalities writing the “people he encounters form a whole gallery of brilliant portraits” (qtd. in Friedman 458). Paul Rosenfield declared, “*Eimi* of all his works alone expresses a self-consciousness, a clear intellectual possession and absolute certainty of the divinity which all along has been at work in him” (qtd. in Friedman 458). John Peale Bishop praised *Eimi* as the work in which Cummings’ style, begun in his poetry, “reaches its most complete development,” especially in its ability to capture sensation (133). Further, Bishop wrote that *Eimi* demonstrates Cummings’ keen insight into the fact that “the despair of the individual may become the enthusiasm of the masses. For what else is propaganda for?” (134). And (as will be discussed further) Marianne Moore commented on the fittingness of Cummings’ typographical and poetic expression in *Eimi* (Friedman 458).

Overall these critical reactions demonstrate the ways in which *Eimi* proved divisive both politically and stylistically. Notably the totality of negative responses proved paradoxical, with critics at once declaring *Eimi* unintelligible and deeply offensive to their sensibilities. This paradox resolves itself in the fact that despite its elusive form and stylistic excesses *Eimi*'s overall political message is plain: it is forcefully anti-Marxist and anti-USSR. This blending of modernist experimental form and style with a clear political message highlights the essential tensions that exist between the poet and the reformer, the individual and the state. John Peale Bishop writes of these tensions in relationship to *Eimi*, "The poet works with form as his end. The reformer starts with a formula. The distance between them is as great as the distance between life and nonexistence, between life of the spirit and the suicide of the soul known as dialectical materialism" (Bishop 135). Yet, Bishop fails to notice that *Eimi* explicitly incorporates both form and formula. Yes, Cummings favors a highly stylized and unique form of modernist poetics throughout *Eimi*. But, for all its stylistic and formal complexity, *Eimi* is no less grounded in rather formulaic frameworks.

First and foremost, Cummings couches *Eimi* within the mythic framework of Dante's *La Divina Commedia*, and though "not striv[ing] to duplicate the complexity of allegorical points in Dante's poem" drew out comparisons whenever possible (Kennedy *Dreams* 328-329). Like Dante, Cummings, at 36, found himself in the middle of his journey of life, "wandering in search of some answers" (329). Cummings refers to his Russian guides throughout *Eimi* by the Dantean names of Virgil and Beatrice. Further, Cummings' visit to Lenin's tomb mirrors Dante's "view of Satan," and his travels roughly correspond to Dante's, with the USSR representing Hell, Turkey representing

Purgatory, and Paris representing Paradise, while the overall narrative is divided into nine parts (Kennedy 329, and Cummings Preface xv-xvi).³ Finally, Cummings plays with the expectations of the epic, portraying himself as an “unhero” in the “unworld” on a sort of Odyssean journey homeward (or at least out of the USSR).

This mythic framework, though inexactly applied throughout, proves essential to *Eimi*, providing the book with a sense of structure and narrative arc. Working within this structure, Cummings playfully recreates for the reader his experiences of the social, political, and interpersonal landscapes of the USSR. And, by aligning himself with the rich and varied tradition of adapting and recounting spiritual and allegorical journeys within the modernist mode (the *Divine Comedy* here but Cummings used the *Pilgrim's Progress* as model for *The Enormous Room*), Cummings makes clear his intent in *Eimi* is not to parade through the pages as some sort of anarchist experimental poet willy-nilly poo-pooing the political realities of his day. Rather, the adaptation of these epic and mythic formulizations, grant Cummings the structural underpinnings necessary to catalogue the various conflicts that result from modernist poetics coming into direct contact with totalitarian politics. In the midst of these clashes, Cummings emerges announcing the possibility of an alternative, artistic method of being and becoming, both for individuals and the societies they create.

Within this mythic and epic framing, Cummings draws frequently upon the tension between “is” (or “I am”) and openness on one hand, and “was: and “shutness” on the other. In this vein, *Eimi* opens with the words, “SHUT seems to be The Verb” (1). Immediately this opening phrase establishes a dialectic wherein “The Verb,” SHUT—representative of the Soviet System, communism, and totalitarian government control—

is placed in opposition to the verbal phrase, I Am (denoted by the title)—representative of individuals in community, individual expression, and the artistic impulse (Moe). Importantly, by referring to “SHUT” as “The Verb” Cummings upends his usual association of “The Verb” as the present tense of the “to be” verb: it is or I am. In fact by the time he published *Eimi* in 1933, Cummings had developed quite an obsession with the present tense “to be” verb.⁴ Yet, in a work literary titled with the name of “The Verb,” Cummings immediately negates his divine notions of “to be” by claiming “SHUT seems to be The Verb” (*Eimi* 1). And so the stage is set for *Eimi* and its endless permutations of “I am” trying to assert itself, attempting to bloom and open out into a world of “SHUT” and “seem,” a hellish world of “un” and “was” (“Sketch” xvi).

Essentially Cummings’ concepts of openness and “ineluctable preoccupation” with the present tense “to be” verb represent tenets of modernist poetics he held dear: those of free expression, and art for art sake. Threatened by stifling totalitarian collectivism in the form of the USSR, Cummings attempts to assert the vitality of these concepts in spite of the harsh realities of the 1930s. To this end, *Eimi*’s formal and stylistic elements are vital, as they create “an experience for the reader—one which approximates his [Cummings’] five kaleidoscopic weeks in Russia” (Kennedy *Dreams* 332). And, within these created experiences, Cummings’ thesis is clear: “The regimented life of the Communist state crushes the individual and thus life.” Against which regimented life Cummings parades his opposition in the form of “celebrations of ‘Is,’ declarations of ‘I am,’ and assertions of being ‘alive’ (332). In “E. E. Cummings: Intourist In The Unworld,” David Farley speaks to this parading of opposition to the Communist State when he labels *Eimi* “as both a stylistically innovative work of

modernist literature, in which Cummings delights in linguistic play, and as a book that needs to be read as politically engaged work of art that is very much concerned with the world out there, the audience back home, and the authority of firsthand vision” (61). According to Farley, the mix of stylistic innovation and political engagement—similar to the conflict between individual and the state in Kennedy’s terms—results in an “uneasy tension often coming into conflict” within the pages of *Eimi* (61). Friedman, attesting to a similar tension between style and politics, writes, “...the style in *Eimi* answers to the need to record more accurately the disruptions he [Cummings] experienced in the disjointed and incongruous Alice-in-Wonderland world of the Soviet Union, so shiny in its professed idealism, so shabby in its manifestations” (Afterword 456). In his review of the 2007 (fourth edition) reissue of *Eimi*, Tom F. Wright notes how this tension of style and political content meshes with the overall experience Cummings tries to convey: “Cummings’s travelogue presents a daunting reading experience, as oppressive and dense as the airless world it depicts. Stylistically, it is a tour de force, by turns exhilarating, shocking and impenetrable” (34).

The central tension Kennedy, Farley, Friedman, and Wright all see operating within *Eimi*—a tension between style and politics, individual expression and collective repression—is most fully a tension between modernist poetics and totalitarian politics. In its entirety, *Eimi* poses questions concerning what happens when individual artistic ideals come into conflict with political realities, more specifically when the self-sustaining poetics of modernism are brought into conflict with collectivist ideology. Thus, as Cummings is certainly not alone in navigating this tension, and *Eimi* gains a great deal from being placed in conversation with other modernist works, it is time to begin the

promised explication of this text in relationship to the three sources mentioned above: Louis Aragon, Ezra Pound, and George Herriman's *Krazy Kat*.

2. Dadaist Differentiation

2.1 *Telemachus*

In the 2014 essay, "*Eimi* and Louis Aragon's *The Adventures Of Telemachus*," Rajeev Kumar Kinra argues for Cummings as a "modern-epic poet" who—though aligned "with that segment of the avant-garde which sought to incorporate Classic texts and 'make them new,' as per Pound's dictum... actually incorporates a more "direct stylistic link" with the French Surrealist poet, Louis Aragon (122). As far as direct links to Aragon, Kinra relates how Cummings wrote that Aragon was a "lively if occasional pal" of his in "the goodolddays of Paris" (122). Further, within the pages of *Eimi* Cummings describes his visit to Aragon's sister-in-law, Madame Potiphar, for which visit Aragon provided Cummings with a letter of introduction (123). Finally, Cummings in *Eimi* mentions several times his "translatory labours" in regards to Aragon's poem, "Le Front Rouge." Yet, in Kinra's analysis, it is a different Aragon work entirely that seems to have most influenced the style of *Eimi*: Aragon's pseudo-novel, *The Adventures of Telemachus* (1922) (124-125).

According to Kinra, Cummings would have been familiar with *The Adventures of Telemachus* and likely, an admirer of "its innovative, playful, and at times self-consciously childish style" (125). After all, in *Eimi* Cummings takes several opportunities to propound upon his "own childish decree[s]" (125). Kinra argues that *Telemachus* provided Cummings with a "playful" and "inebriated" example of the modern epic

(similar to higher profile works like *Ulysses* or *The Waste Land*), and that *The Adventures of Telemachus* as a satire of Fenelon's work of the same title (itself a retelling of Homer and Virgil) "provide[d Cummings] a precedent for the dismantling and eventual reshaping of epic conventions[,] which [would] be the primary aesthetic devise in *Eimi* " (Kinra 125).

Leaping off from Kinra's analysis, I would agree that *Eimi* follows closely in the epic-poetic mode of Aragon's *Telemachus*. The blend of doubt, faith, fracture, paradox, profundity, verbal disruption, satire, allusion, wit, punning, and general nonsense are similar in both texts. Further, both often display meaning as secondary to poetic motion, ideology as secondary to experience, and logic as secondary to nonsense. Yet, in moving beyond Kinra's analysis, essential differences in the works deserve explication. First of all, while *Eimi* ultimately affirms the individual fully expressed, *The Adventures of Telemachus* finally upholds only chaos. As the translators write in their introduction to the English edition of *The Adventures of Telemachus*, "Aragon exploits doubt and contradiction, alternating between intense enthusiasm and dadaist derision.

...Throughout, the dadaist unprompted changes and reversals emerge and multiply as though to discourage all assertions of identity in relation to God, ancestors, and society" (xii). On the whole then, *The Adventures of Telemachus* presents a dark dada-surrealist type nihilism that directly elides identity, ending with the primary antagonist leaping from a cliff for the mundane purpose of winning an argument and escaping his mentor's (aptly name Mentor) jesting: "Telemachus stood on the edge of the cliff; his clothing dropped; the naked body, young and healthy, suddenly dashed into the void, whirled, a mortal winged projectile, whirled before it crashed, a bag of broken bones, on the rocks,

in front of the waves that did not even sob” (Aragon 100). As if the fatalistic absurdity of this act were not enough, Telemachus’ violent death is followed by a speech by Mentor, wherein he proclaims over the shattered body, “With Telemachus chance has perished. Now begins the reign of wisdom” (Aragon 101). No sooner has Mentor spoken then, completely by chance, “a tottering rock broke from the top of the slope and crushed, like an ordinary mortal, the goddess Minerva [who is in disguise as Mentor]” (Aragon 101). Beyond this, Aragon’s dada-finale pushes further on to a final crescendo that ends with one bum of a universal apocalypse and a maniacally ludicrous laughing God:

The firmament was constellated with genitals of lights. The vault of days and nights became flesh; and those people who had survived the upheaval died of desire before the lewd rump suspended above their heads. The desert sand, changing into a snake, opened its eyes, a jolt of lightning, to the shudder of nocturnal pollutions. Nebulae prowled among smiling landscapes. Distaffs danced while shedding their silvery locks. Great rotary presses copulated on the pebbled beaches. Jackhammers strolled prettily in the squares, and while metals, howling in the plains of pleasure, petted one another, the Lord our God astride his steeds of tenderness burst into wild guffaws. (101-102)

And so is dadaistic chaos ultimately upheld in *Telemachus*. Yet despite this, and additional stylistic differences between the two works (Aragon works much more sparingly with more micro-level elements of experimental prose, such as garbled syntax, modified punctuation, word creation, etc.), the chaotic accumulation of plot points here—especially scenes involving the bodily interactions of men and nature and the symbolic—

that romp towards a general celestial declaration is similar to numerous occasions in *Eimi*.

An example of just such a similar scene unfolds relatively early during Cummings' time in Moscow (Wednesday May 18). Cummings visits a "pseudonightclub" with Virgil where his "tirade against collectivity attracts GPUs" (Russian political police) ("Sketch" xviii). The setting Cummings describes as a "Largeness;welllighted,clean" wherein, Cummings, prodded by the best "peevoh" (beer) he's had since entering Russia, begins to let loose, releasing "10,000 copiously embroidered oathprayers times circa 50,000,000 stumbling pocketthunderbolts" (*Eimi* 47-48). Here, in the spirit of Telemachus, Cummings metaphorically leaps out into the abyss of a fraught and potentially hazardous rhetorical situation (the GPU, or political police are listening). Despite Virgil's (a.k.a. mentor) objections Cummings declares:

I'm saying:by God Christ and Ghost,by prick in the rose,by three(by cheers
YouEsAy blind mice Gay-Pay-Oo [GPU] and speeds forward)—
never,never,never,has that(immaculately goosed by a moonbeam)unmitigated
rectum The Socalled Human Mind conceived quite so centrifugally
superconstipated a calamity as poisons with what hyperlugubrious(I Ask
You)logic the airless air we(quotes)breathe. I'm saying:by Es Es Are,by
four(finite but unbounded)—if-and-unless I go loonier than any young sixfingered
thimble,may god help it,I'll beg borrow steal and convey—even to innocently
absolute immensity to wit a small sheet of paper—each speck and each spot of
sadistic nonsubstance which secretly is,or is otherwise,harboured by ineradicably
this distinctly unimpeachable system of meretricious murderfully(Allow

Me)masochism. Get it? Long live Is! Up—in the holy name of uncommon NonSense! Viva!’ (*Eimi* 48)

From this point a back and forth between Cummings and Virgil proceeds, with Cummings arguing for the supreme peculiarity of the artist while trumpeting the free expression of the individual above all opposing factions of collectivism, and Virgil taking the side of the USSR, questioning Cummings’ sanity, and encouraging Cummings to try to more fully understand the system before he passes judgment (*Eimi* 48-49). With a rather noticeable nod to both dada and a prolific expression of death—elements that are both prevalent in *The Adventures of Telemachus*—one portion of Cummings’ and Virgil’s conversation has Virgil asking, “da [“yes” in Russian] (if I may interrupt)but what has this tirade to do with our present circumstance,” and Cummings replying, “dada. Nothing—or the unthing which everyone(except impossibly the artist)must become nearly by going to sleep” (*Eimi* 48).

This scene, like Aragon’s, also ends with a great deal of laughter. However, it is Cummings as a sort of Telemachus figure, not some crazed nihilistic God, doing the laughing when he realizes that the GPU actually would follow him around, just as a friend in Paris had warned him (*Eimi* 50). In the very last moments of this scene, a laughing Cummings is accused of being “a philosophical anarchist” and the GPU man suddenly and supernaturally disappears out of frame.

As in *The Adventures of Telemachus*, forces of chaos and fracture, and threat to life and the individual are apparent here and elsewhere in *Eimi*. And, as in this scene, throughout the text, Cummings “I” is presented as fractured and disillusioned, while being constantly threatened in the expression of his individuality by the “unworld” of

Soviet Russia. Yet, for all the similarities, *Eimi* diverges noticeably from *The Adventures of Telemachus*. In *Eimi*, Cummings—“tovarich(comrade)peesahel y hoodozhnik(writer & painter)Kem-min-kz(Russian for Cummings)alias I or C or K,alias Poietes(Greek...=maker=poet)”—the individual is never fully overcome (Cummings “Sketch” xvi). For example, immediately following the scene described above, Cummings once again wakes up in his bed to the hope of another day (*Eimi* 51). More importantly, *Eimi* is, at last, for all its disorder and nonsense, darkness and despair, dark humor and sometimes vitriol, a hopeful work, a triumphant one, one where, simply put, the good of free individual expression finally and forcefully triumphs—a fact attested to by no less than the very existence of *Eimi*, an odd, confusing, and completely individual book.

Cummings and Aragon also diverge in their responses to the politics of the day. Aragon’s acceptance of dada-istic principles of art in correspondence to the chaos and randomness of the universe is eventually translated into his belief in the redemptive power of the communist revolution. Cummings, in contrast, while similarly acknowledging the chaos and randomness of the universe, locates his central hope in individuality realized through art (*Eimi*, as a work of art, manifests as an example of such hope). *Eimi* in answer to *Telemachus* presents itself as a monument to the individual ability to assert himself over and against both the concept of a meaningless universe, and the oppressive political systems that attempt to manufacture meaning in the midst of this universe. Importantly, the motive force of this assertion for Cummings is rooted in his faithfulness to the very elements of modernist poetics that Aragon came to reject in his “conversion” to communism: free individual expression, and art for art’s sake (the self-

sufficiency of art). Thus, in defiance of both existential angst and collective idealism, Cummings shouts out his divine, "I am," *eimi*.

This essential contrast between Aragon's and Cummings' ideals of art and the individual in relation to society and the universe becomes clear in *Eimi*'s outright derision of Aragon's 1931 poem, "Le Front Rouge."

2.2 "The Red Front"

The Modernist poet Marianne Moore begins her 1933 review of E.E. Cummings' *Eimi* writing:

Out of "plain downright honest curiosity: that very greatest of all the virtues", a penguin-Dante visits Moscow—"panacea Negation haven of all (in life's name) Deathworshippers"—and has written a droll book. In his "enormous dream" about the proletarian fable, the main proficiency is the sly-slow suave quaintly-toddling selfsufficient imperviousness to weather. "Eros wins; always: . . . ecstasy, triumph, immeasurable yes and beautiful explosion. . . ." That is to say the book is a large poem. "The whole thing marvelously whirls and this total supreme whirl is made of subsidiary, differently timed yet perfectly intermeshing, whirlings."

Here Moore quotes directly from the text of *Eimi*, in order to use Cummings' own language to declare the book "a large poem"—a marvelously whirling one at that. This declaration immediately strikes a reader of *Eimi* as apt due to the fact that the attentiveness and verbal analysis required to decode the text rings truer to what one would naturally expect of verse poetry rather than a prose novel (as some have

characterized *Eimi*). Further, if *Eimi* is to be considered one large poem, it is fitting that Moore's review of the book appeared in none other than *Poetry* magazine (August, 1933). And it is, likewise, fitting that Moore's review of Cummings' "poem" was immediately followed by a review of another Cummings' "poem" in the very same August, 1933 edition of *Poetry*. This review, by Horace Gregory, comments on Cummings' English translation of Louis Aragon's "Le Front Rouge" ("The Red Front"). While the appearance of these two reviews together might at first seem fitting given the shared authorship of the reviewed material, even the most cursory comparison of the two quickly demonstrates a fascinating incongruity: in short, nothing less than diametrically opposed political/ideological orientations are attributed to works of the same poet in back-to-back reviews (perhaps an inch of white space separates the end of Moore's review from the beginning of Gregory's).

Of course the texts in question are quite different. *Eimi* is a 450 plus page prose (poem?) "novelistic travelogue" (back-cover blurb *Eimi*), providing what Madison Smart Bell in the Preface to the 2007 Liveright edition calls "a language completely unfettered, romping through episodes of fair and faithful figuration, cubistic fracturing of the episode and scene, flights of pidgin Russian and utterly unorthodox French, phonetic renditions of dialect that would spin the head of Mark Twain—and more" (xiii). By contrast, "Le Front Rouge" is a 350 plus line free verse poem exalting the glories of the USSR, the Five Year Plan, and the world wide workers' revolution. It is a poem that Horace Gregory termed a "performance" that possesses all "the quality of a good show to be seen, heard, or read once and then never to be reenacted" (281), a poem Cummings himself called a

“hyper2fisted supergoetting ultraredblooded certificate of [Aragon’s] conversion [to Marxism]” (*Eimi* 140).

If it is not already clear, *Eimi* and “Le Front Rouge” present opposing opinions of Soviet Russia. In his Preface to *Eimi* Cummings refers to the USSR as “‘a world of Was’—the subhuman communist superstate, where men are shadows & women are nonmen; the preindividual Marxist unworld. This unworld is Hell” (xv). In contrast, “Le Front Rouge” terms the USSR “the train of the red star,” which “nothing shall stop,” and which represents “the song of man and his laughter,” “a laughing child” indicative of “new life” (*Complete Poems* 889 and 897). Perhaps most importantly, *Eimi* stands out unapologetically as individually-styled musings regarding the experiences, thoughts, and artistic endeavors of one E.E. Cummings, while “Le Front Rouge” parades conspicuously as a propaganda-laced call towards collective revolution; what artistry or individual personality that exists wilts in the shadow of a time-stamped political-collective imperative. Or as Gregory puts it, “Taken at its best, its values are transitory; it is an affair of the moment, and already that moment is behind us. Perhaps this is the utmost that we can expect from such a poem; perhaps its failures as a permanent work of art (and incidentally as propaganda) are inherent in the nature of its purpose, which is a celebration of the Five Year Plan” (281).

In relation to this characteristic difference in the two texts, one between individual personality and collectivist propaganda, Gregory’s analysis of “Le Front Rouge” proves further illuminating. He accuses Aragon and Cummings (as translator) of “veering over into the class of well-written advertising copy or journalism. No deep emotional roots are struck and the poet fails (I think) to make the necessary association between the

emotional life of his readers and the slogan he employs” (283). In contrast to this, Gregory maintains that, to attain artistic permanence, socially relevant poetry must possess both “personality” and links to “the tradition of English verse.” For, as Gregory asserts, these elements, individual personality and working with established verse tradition, allow a text to “continue to be interesting and to carry revolutionary content long after the immediate occasion is lost in the files of the daily newspaper” (284). Of course Gregory did not likely mean to apply these words to *Eimi*. Nonetheless, given his review’s proximity to Moore’s of *Eimi*, they fortuitously fit Cummings’ work. No one could sensibly argue that *Eimi* lacks personality. In fact the work is Cummings’ most stylistically mature and formally nuanced. As far as working within “the tradition of English verse,” the entire structure and narrative arc of the text are loosely based on Dante’s *Divine Comedy* (granted, originally an Italian verse work, but nonetheless influential in English), and the work is chock full of allusions to other works of literature (both historical and contemporary, both in verse and other forms).

As if the external pairings and comparisons of the works are not enough, Cummings discusses his ongoing translation of “Le Front Rouge” at multiple points within the pages of *Eimi*. One of these points in the narrative occurs just after Cummings has left his first de facto guide, “Virgil”, and the Hotel Metropole and gone to live with the Turkess and Turk (Jack London’s daughter and her husband). Cummings—or K or “Kem-min-kz” as he refers to his Russian traveling self in the narrative—has just broken off a conversation with the Turkess about her father (Jack London) in order to attend to his job of translating Louis Aragon’s poem, “Le Front Rouge,” into English (*Eimi* 145). Rather than actual translation, it is Cummings’ transcription of his thought processes

while translating that take center stage in *Eimi*. Thus the text progresses with Cummings reflecting on particular passages of “Le Front Rouge” as he (ostensibly) is in the very act of translating them. Yet this relatively simple process—translation of French poem to English with corresponding stream of consciousness Cummings in counterpoint—takes on a great deal more complexity when one considers the broader context surrounding the translation.

First of all, though Cummings is in Moscow translating a poem in praise of the Five Year Plan, he personally is opposed to, what he sees as, the totalitarian, individual-destroying Soviet State. He, thus, records his act of translating “Le Front Rouge” within the text of his own work *Eimi*, a work condescendingly critical of the Soviet Union and its policies. In fact within *Eimi* in the two days leading up to his discussion of translating “Le Front Rouge,” Cummings records two relatively lengthy conversations discussing the failings of the Soviet system. In the first, Turk comments on the erosion of privacy, familial loyalty, and individual rights—especially the freedom of speech— within Russia at the time (*Eimi* 127-129). In the second, a belligerent, drunken A.P. man (Victor Eubank, the bureau chief of the Associated Press (Webster Notes)) lambasts the Russian system, and in a conversation with Turk and Cummings it is all but concluded that the Five Year Plan has no practical redeeming features, and is in fact “more disastrous to Russia than was the tyranny of Peter the Great” (141-142).

Second, Cummings composes his translation from within the safe confines of the Turk and Turkess’ dwelling. In this setting the Turk’s job as foreign correspondent translating the Russian happenings as appropriate censored news for the Western World seems to mirror Cummings’ own act of translation. Rather than news, Cummings is in the

process of translating a French anthem of the glories of the USSR into an appropriate English facsimile for English-speaking contingencies. Similarly, Cummings' forthright disagreement with the whole process corresponds to the Turk's distaste for censorship and what he sees as a failed Russian experiment.

Third, the urgency and proletarian propaganda in the poem take on a starkly ironic context within Cummings' framework. He, Cummings, is obvious about his disdain for the poem, even going so far as to imply he doesn't think it is a work of art: "And let's hope he [the laughing child in Aragon's poem] also knows that all the microtelescopically rhetorical optipessimism of any premeditatedly Un(or possible)world may not catalyze 1 spontaneously singular impossibility or(shall we say)workofart" (*Eimi* 146). Meanwhile Aragon is off in Paris, far removed from the immediate Soviet context. Thus in the narrative of Cummings' translation of "Le Front Rouge" we are met with, a poem hyperbolically laudatory towards the Soviet Union in its rhetoric, which lacks any corresponding physical embodiment of said rhetoric. Instead we have a Soviet-critic in Cummings lounging in a distinctly anti-Five Year Plan home, writing literal Soviet panegyric and mocking it all the while.

Fourth and final, in light of the conversations regarding Russian politics that have just appeared in the text, the irony of the poem's Soviet praise takes on even greater significance. In the Turk's discourse on Soviet policy two days before (May 19) Cummings records him stating:

But here's the point: not all these millions can tell you a single god damned thing, because they're Russians. Do you understand? Russians. All of them are inside communism; not outside it, as you are. All of them are actually living (or

rather dying)an unprecedented experiment,not merely observing it with an analytic eye;far less dreaming about it with a sentimental brain[...]what I tell you,I tell you because I can do what all those millions of human beings can't—speak.[...]Russians in Russia must suffer and shut up. (*Eimi* 128)

Aragon and Cummings along with him demonstrate the tendency here spoken of by the Turk, and patently rejected throughout *Eimi*: the tendency of well-meaning individuals to lend their voices toward the oppression of other individuals through organized socio-political systems that refuse to account for enigmatic mathematics of individual expression and individual suffering, the tendency of the speaking entities to ignore the best interests of the voiceless. Cummings, in recollecting his act of translating “Le Front Rouge” within *Eimi*, implicates both Aragon, and by association himself, in the act of failing to accurately represent the experience of the masses of Russian individuals: a failure mirrored by the poem’s translation from French into English within an overwhelmingly Russian context. The poem may be well-intentioned, it may be supremely heartfelt, but it rings false for its basic inability to communicate in the language of the very people it ostensibly represents. Cummings very inclusion of “The Red Front” within *Eimi* seeks to correct what he sees as the imbalance and falseness of Aragon’s poem. Where Aragon privileges the collective and imperatives of specific communist ideologies, Cummings celebrates the individual and modernist poetics freely expressed. In this way, Cummings’ discussion of “The Red Front” within his own sprawling work of modernist prose becomes a way of reclaiming his translation of the poem. If the initial process of translating Aragon’s poem can be further translated into the pages of *Eimi*, the poem becomes re-contextualized. Thus, to the reader, “The Red Front”

presents itself not as a triumphant glorification of the USSR, but yet another barb thrust in the side of the “communist superstate.”

All this complexity of translation and representation are not lost upon Cummings in his telling of the translation process in *Eimi*, as he weaves together bits of “Le Front Rouge” with his own personal reflections. After a sort of epigraph, “HE PUTS ON A STARCHED COLLAR,” he begins by agreeing with the early parts of the poem, which decry the “Machinemade ‘civilization” that “isolates every human being from experience(that is,from himself),” an isolation so complete that there even exist “‘cigaretteholders between cigarette and man”” (*Eimi* 145). Cummings goes on to further agree with Aragon’s decrual of “advertising” that has created a “modern man” who “equals a defenceless literate bombarded with slogans mottoes pictures and whatever else will tend to unmake him;i.e. make him need something unnecessary” (145).

Swiftly, however, Cummings’ concord with the translated poem ends; he quite literally calls “bullshit” on the line “how sweet is the groan which comes from ruins” (qu’il est doux qu’il doux le gémissement qui sort des ruines) (*Eimi* 145, *CP* 888-889). After which he questions how much “gaiety” is actually added to the landscape by “the bursting of gunfire” for those who are within range of that gunfire (*Eimi* 145). And to the absolutely uncompromising “Front Rouge” line, “hail to materialist dialectic and its incarnation,the red army,” Cummings takes an openly dismissive stance, referencing the Latin maxim “De gustibus non est disputandum” (in matters of taste there can be no dispute), and quoting the literary critic and Harvard professor, Bliss Perry, “‘it’s all right if you like it”” (*Eimi* 146).

In this way, in a matter of a few sentences, Cummings navigates his way from open agreement with “Le Front Rouge,” to open dissent, to general dismissiveness; the poem is calling for worldwide, no-holds-barred revolution! and Cummings’ answer is, well, if you’re into that kind of thing. Cummings goes on to recount the rest of the translation process in a similar, dismissive, tongue-in-cheek manner: after the line “dressesz-vous contre vos mères” (stand up against your mother), Cummings writes, “See, complex, Oedipus”; after the lines “the most beautiful structure isn’t worth the splendid and chaotic heap which is easily produced by a church and some dynamite,” he claims, “Untrue. Dynamite, however, is an easier vocation than poetry”; after the line “history led on leash by the third international,” Cummings adds, “Also, muzzled”; and he simply labels the “red train” that is the USSR steaming towards progress the “bandwagon” (*Eimi* 146).

Cummings ends what he refers to as his “translatory labours” with a corresponding all caps phrase, “P.S.—HE GOT THE JOB” (*Eimi* 146). Together the two all capitalized phrases seem to bookend the translation passage with a sarcastic remark about the seriousness of Cummings’ work to translate “Le Front Rouge.” Additionally, these phrases could point to the fact that, though Cummings clearly was not a supporter of Aragon’s poem, there is no evidence that his actual translation work is anything but professional. In spite of his multifarious protestations, he seems to have translated the work in all seriousness. And despite his mockery of “Le Front Rouge” within *Eimi*, Cummings either thought enough of the work, or at least felt obligation enough to Aragon as a friend, to pass his “translatory labours” on to Ezra Pound (Kinra 124).⁵ Further, in 1956 in answer to an inquiry about how he had come to translate Aragon’s

poem in the first place, Cummings chalks it up to a “chivalrous gesture” in response to Aragon’s generosity in providing a letter of introduction to certain parties in Moscow (“Madame Potiphar” and co.) (*Eimi* 61-73) (*Selected Letters* 226).

Returning to Cummings’ transcription of his translation of “Le Front Rouge” in *Eimi*, the reader finds Cummings’ “translatory labors” cut short by Turk interrupting to introduce his Russian secretary, a character who amounts to a symbolic embodiment of the difficulty of translating discrepant cultures through the medium of the individual. Despite her ability to communicate almost flawlessly in both Russian and English, the secretary’s position as a Russian citizen working for an American correspondent is so full of nervous tension that Cummings refers to her throughout *Eimi* as Tic-Toc, due to her nervous habits (146). In this way Cummings, as he does throughout *Eimi*, employs interpersonal interactions to both complicate and comment upon his and others’ ideological musings.

Late in *Eimi* as Cummings travels back towards the “paradise” of Paris on the Orient Express, he turns to mocking “Le Front Rouge.” Mimicking “Le Front Rouge’s” repetition of the letters “USSR” and Aragon’s metaphorical embodiment of the USSR as a train chugging with unstoppable momentum towards worldwide revolution (e.g. “whistle whistle SSSR SSSR patience / won’t wait forever SSSR SSSR SSSR” & “The red train starts and nothing shall stop it / UR / SS / UR / SS...” (*Complete Poems* 887, 895), Cummings writes:

“USSR a USSR a night- USSR a nightmare USSR home of the panacea Negation haven of all(in life’s name)Deathworshippers hopper of hate’s Because maching(U for un- & S for self S for science and R for -reality)how it shrivels:how it dwindles withers;how it wilts diminishes wanes,how it crumble evaporates collapses disappears—verily consubstantial cauchemar [nightmare in French] of premediated NYET” (432)

A few pages later, Cummings again seems to mock the train-chugging repetition of Aragon's poem with a dizzying back and forth meant to mark the stark contrast between the "there" and "then" of Soviet Russia and the far superior "here" and "now" of the train towards Paris allowing for Cummings' return to himself as a whole individual:

then thenow thennowthen thennowthennow noW no N
NOWT NOWTH NOWTHE nowTHENthenNOWing it
there therehere thereherethere thereheretherehere here her he H
HERET HERETH HERETHE HERETHER hereTHERE-there
HEREing it wel
comes
my(
 marveling wholly
)self (437)

So, similarities to the spirit of *Telemachus* aside, in *Eimi* Cummings forcefully rejects Aragon's communist ideological answer to existential meaninglessness and Aragon himself as a political poet, affirming instead his own ideal of meaning, the individual seeking to become "wholly" himself through artistic expression. In this way, Aragon acts as a sort of alter-ego for Cummings. Though both entered the political crucible of the late 1920s and early 30s with starkly similar relationships to modernist art (including Dadaist roots and avant-garde tendencies), they diverge sharply in this period. In Cummings' mind, this divergence is characterized by Aragon's acceptance of a political ideal over the primacy of artistic expression, resulting in poetry that is debased by propaganda. Against this politicization, Cummings seeks to affirm his ideals of modernist poetics over and above totalitarian politics. Notably, one of his methods for accomplishing this is to directly contrast his work with Aragon's "hyper2fisted supergoetting ultraredblooded certificate of conversion," "Le Front Rouge" (*Eimi* 140).

Of course, Cummings cannot escape ideology all together. Nor can he escape politics. In the end both Aragon and Cummings' avant-garde individuality must answer to the ideological and political realities of their day, specifically those realities represented by the Soviet Union. Yet, importantly, Cummings answer to the Soviet Union is primarily concerned with preserving and refining his modernist aesthetic, while Aragon, in "Le Front Rouge," demonstrates his willingness to abandon his artistic ideals in favor of Marxist ideology. Here, in his efforts to preserve modernist poetics against totalitarian politics, Cummings also parallels the reaction of a third modernist poet: Ezra Pound.

3. Pound and Cummings

3.1 *The Cantos*

Pound's *The Cantos* (specifically cantos I-XXX) provide an essential interpretive lens for comprehending Cummings' affirmation of modernist poetics in reaction to the USSR. To begin with, *The Cantos* and *Eimi* share several key similarities. Both texts partake of Dante's *Divine Comedy* to cast various individuals in movement through various stages of hell, purgatory, and paradise. Cummings explicitly frames his narrative in terms of Dante's *Divine Comedy* within his "Sketch for a Preface." Pound's overall Dantean framework remains more implicit. However, the frequent Italian setting of the poems, combined with direct references to Dante (e.g. Cantos XIV-XV) indicate the fitness of viewing *The Cantos* as a whole through the lens of Dante. Regarding this in *A Companion to the Cantos of Ezra Pound*, Carroll Terrell argues that, like Dante's *Divine Comedy*, *The Cantos* "is a great religious poem...an account of man's progress from the

darkness of hell to the light of paradise” (Preface viii). More broadly, on a fundamental level, *The Cantos* encapsulates “the central conflicts and tensions of...all other great epics, prose or poetry, of the past: the eternal struggle of the forces of good against the forces of evil” (Terrell Preface viii). Similarly, *Eimi* also makes use of the epic, drawing heavily upon the epic’s “eternal struggle” of good vs. evil: Cummings the individual (“I am”) pitted against the totalitarian regime of Soviet Russia (the unworld, hell, the land of un-).

Beyond these general Dantean and epic similarities, both texts prove remarkably cohesive in their general dynamic: both are long, magnum opuses written by modernist-era poets. Both are avant-garde in nature and difficult to read. Both are heavily referential partaking in a staggering variety of contemporary and historical discourses (This referential style is far more prevalent in *The Cantos* but still proves important, if not vital, in *Eimi*). And both engage directly and fundamentally with contemporary political systems.

The general similarities in Pound’s and Cummings’ literary output in *The Cantos* and *Eimi* may in part explain their friendship. Cummings was first introduced to Ezra Pound in Paris in 1921 by their mutual friend Scofield Thayer (Kennedy 230). Thayer was editor of the *Dial*, which at the time was the “most influential of the avant-garde little magazines in the United States (Ahearn 1). Both Pound and Cummings had published in the *Dial*, and the two “took to each other immediately” thus beginning a life-long friendship (Ahearn 1 & Kennedy 230-231). Soon after the meeting Cummings wrote to his parents describing Pound as “Altogether,for me,a gymnastic personality. Or in other words somebody,and intricate” (Selected Letters 79). Years later in 1957,

Cummings would write of this first meeting to Pound-biographer Charles Norman, “During our whole promenade Ezra was more than wonderfully entertaining:he was magically gentle,as only a great can be toward some shyest child” (259). And, writing again to Charles Norman in November 1957, Cummings further clarifies his great admiration for Pound, “&please let me make something oncesforeall clear:from my standpoint,not EEC (E.E. Cummings) but EP [Ezra Pound] is the authentic ‘innovator’;the true trailblazer of an epoch;’this selfstyled world’s greatest and most generous literary figure’—nor shall I ever forget the thrill I experienced on first reading ‘The Return’” (254).

Moving from the biographical context to *Eimi*, Cummings directly mentions or refers to Pound and/or his work at least four times within the text. First, Cummings quotes “comfortingly” to himself—“And they talk of Swinburne’s women”—from the poem “Shop Girl” (*Lustra* 1916) when he first arrives at the Hotel Metropole and witnesses a “prodigiously pompous,quite supernaturally unlovely,infratrollop with far(far)too golden locks” coming down the marble staircase (Webster Notes to *Eimi* 15). Second, when he recalls a conversation where he is told by the president of Moscow’s Writers’ Club that he is one of two poets that were “about to be translated except that ‘something happened,’” Cummings likely means Pound by his referral to the second poet as “the mysterious other being ‘a monosyllable’” (*Eimi* 57 & Webster Notes). Third, at a dinner party with some Russian acquaintances (Jill, a.k.a. fat, and her husband, Jack, a.k.a. cadaverous) Cummings, noticing a volume of Joyce’s *Ulysses*, asks his host (cadaverous) if “he knows of comrade Pound” (*Eimi* 84). Upon cadaverous’ reply that he has heard of Pound, Cummings tells him to read *The Cantos* (*Eimi* 84). Cummings then

briefly recalls a scene from a meeting with Pound in Paris a month or so previous. In this Paris flashback, Pound, in response to Cummings' inquiry—"have you any greeting for the Kremlin?"—replies "thoughtfully(more than)glancing(very)keenly past himself into a luminous Everywhere of nowhere" and rather simply "tell them to read cantos" (*Eimi* 84). Fourth, in a conversation with Turk wherein Turk states he believes "socialism... will come to America as a series of more or less gradual modifications," Cummings replies, "That would please Ezra, the son of Homer. Or any man with roots. And that would displease all uprooted and rootless unmen and 'radicals'" (*Eimi* 192 & Webster Notes).

In addition to these direct references, there are specific scenes within *Eimi* that Cummings frames in the context of Pound's *Cantos*, specifically Cantos XIV-XVI. To begin with, once again, both "The Hell Cantos" and *Eimi* use Dante's *Inferno* as a framing device. Pound's Cantos XIV-XVI are comprised of "The Hell Cantos" (XIV-XV) and a sort of exiting hell/purgatory Canto (XVI). Pound frames "The Hell Cantos" within a Dantean movement through specific sections ("bolge") of hell (65). Of course Pound repurposes Dante in "The Hell Cantos" in order to gaze upon a hellish, but distinctly non-Italian landscape. Pound explains that the "The Hell Cantos" are a "portrait of contemporary England, or at least Eng. as she wuz when I left her" and "the hell cantos are specifically LONDON, the state of English mind in 1919 and 1920" and "I intended Cantos XIV and XV to give an accurate picture of the spiritual state of England in the years 1919 and following" (qtd. in Terrel 61). In this way, "The Hell Cantos" represent a metaphorical evisceration and condemnation of 1920 English society and thought

In parallel to Cantos XIV-XVI, the day of June 6th in *Eimi* finds Cummings and two friends on their way to the famous mud baths of Odessa. Cummings' friends consist of a certain "Noinglunder" (a.k.a. Noo, or mentor, or Virgil the second) and a certain stranded Italian engineer (a.k.a. stunned) who often accompany him during his time in Odessa. As they arrive at the baths, Cummings calls for Dante's aid, presumably either to withstand the horrors of the scene or to record them or both: "Dante, O comrade poet; aid me now" (341). Corresponding to Pound's own repurposed Dante, this mud bath scene focuses on a strange Russian cultural experience undertaken by two dispossessed Americans being witness by a dispossessed Italian, Cummings refers to as "stunned." And, similar to The Hell Cantos' attack on English society, *Eimi* (and these mud-bath scenes particular) represent an evisceration and condemnation of 1930s Russian society and thought. Here Cummings both affirms and differs from the Poundian model: yes, corrupt political states are hellish, but hell isn't London in the 1920s; it's the USSR in the 1930s.

Aside from these initial similarities, the mud bath scenes and Cantos XIV-XVI are flush with additional interactions. Cummings' mud bath scene begins with "sunsunsun" and moves "(in Sun)worn un(Sun)path winding through(Sun)low ground" calling to mind "The Hell Cantos" "Helios Helios / blind with the sunlight" (340, 345 *Eimi*; Pound 67). In both cases, the sun represents, first, an intensification of hellishness of the scene by casting light upon it and thus heightening the visibility of depravity, and, second, a symbol of celestial transcendence and light conquering darkness. Further, Carroll Terrell in *A Companion to The Cantos* comments that the end of Canto XV "seems to express a nightmarelike state of struggle: the kind of dream where the hero

runs without progress, tries to get out of quicksand with nothing to cling to, tries to follow the directions of someone on the sidelines who cannot really help. The struggle is agonized and the scene is highly dramatic, but the hero survives the nightmare and awakes into sunlight” (67). Cummings’ record of the mud baths recalls a similar nightmarelike wandering and struggle, punctuated by sun where the hero eventually escapes. He writes, “beyond that wire(moveunmoving)seem not beings but items,unearthly integers,shapeless corruptions,baleful unobjects;not creatures not things but grotesquely how hideous entities(or such foul monstrosities as might arrive only with the disintegration of a universe behind life’s final sunset,awfully vomited out of the depthless nightmare” (341).

Additionally, Both texts portray a similar dehumanization and objectification of individuals. Of first arriving at the baths, Cummings writes “now my eyes celebrate the transposing of man and of woman(and of their natures flesh spirit or proportions)into such fathomless vocabularies of unrecognition as must dwell beyond any dream or darkness” (342) And Cummings marks his entrance into the bathing area with the exclamation “ShutShutShut” (342). Recall, the word “shut” represents oppressive forces and the constriction of the individual throughout *Eimi*. Similarly in Canto XIV Pound describes people twisted beyond recognition, “melting like dirty wax, / decayed candles, the bums sinking lower, / faces submerged under hams...” and individuals bound to (or shut up within) their own bodies, “their wrists bound to / their ankles” (62). In Canto XV, Pound renders his own mud, “One’s feet sunk, / the welsh of mud gripped one, no hand-rail, / the bog-suck like a whirl-pool,” after which the poem’s guide orders, “Close the pores of your feet!” (66). This admonition to close the very pores of the feet off from the

muck, becomes grotesquely if humorously embodied in Cummings' mud-bath scene when comrade Kem-min-kz almost steps on a pair of women in the mud:

a drooling female vast naked unfirm continent, a flabbily mountaining irregularly progression of every-which-way swooning balloons: a 250 pound bellyup—almost I stepped on it—nonman: sprawled utterly over (and 2/3 ensconced in) sand; with... neatly, even coyly, between colossal unlegs laid... possibly 1 square inch of rags.

And How cautiously turning now the uncorner of that hugely slopped bosom, next K avoids this (placidly slumbering bellydown) poodful Juno: whose very listless rumplet rises somewhat higher than my quaking knees. (342-343)

Added to this, there exists the overwhelming sense of the corruption of ideals the reader finds in each text. Just before entering the mud Noo tells Cummings:

'this mud' solemnly (not to say pompously) our guide intones "is thih vury bes mud there is. Absolutely! Heals anything that ails yoo, frum roomuhtism tuh syphilis: uh positively shooer kewer fur kunsumtion lumbago headcoles puralulosis livurtrouble indeyegestion flatfeet un evurythin. No kiddin. Eye mean id.—Weye in thih ole days people come frum all our thih woyl chus tuh get uh crack ut this mud (idsimplywunnerful)." (*Eimi* 342)

Yet Cummings' actual experience of the mud-baths reads as an enormous anti-climax.

After a good deal more than a page of build up to entering the baths, including an extensive arrival scene, almost trampling two fellow bathers, and a solid long paragraph of pre-bath undressing and preparation, the actual moment of entering into and experiencing "thih vury bes mud there is" passes in a snap and doesn't even directly depict Cummings in the mud: "then comes the moment: / ... 'hay!' mentor splutters (emerging from duckplunge) 'yoor tallurn mee—reach mee sumuh thad mud! Naw' disgustedly 'thad's chus clay.' / And now from cureall exiting most reluctantly" (343). Here I want to point out how Cummings punctuates the anti-climactic nature of this scene in several ways. First he simply elides his physical entrance into the mud, "then comes the moment: /" Second, despite the indication that the two, Noo and

Cummings, are in the mud, ostensibly surrounded/buried in mud, they fail to actually find any mud, “reach mee sumuh thad mud! Naw’ disgustedly ‘thad’s chus clay.’” Finally, Cummings drives home the clearly disappointing nature of the experience with the sarcastic hyperbole, “And now from cureall exiting *most reluctantly*” (emphasis mine). In comparison, “The Hell Cantos” are all about the hellish punishment faced by individuals involved in corruption and perverting of ideals: “the perverts, the perverters of language, / the perverts” (61); a list of corrupt politicians and leaders including “Captain H. the chief torturer” who Terrell notes was based on English Captain J. Bowen-Colthurts, known for killing political prisoners in cold blood during WWI, and John C. Calvin, who Terrell recounts “in Pound’s view helped destroy the Mysteries of the Church and substituted fear and penance for celebration and rejoicing” (*Cantos* 62 & Terrell 66).

Of course, it should be noted Cummings’ somewhat whimsical, typographically jaunty nod to Pound’s Hell Cantos differentiates itself by its overtly humorous tone. Pound explicitly wrote of the hell depicted in Cantos XIV and XV, “[this] section of Hell precisely has *not* any dignity. Neither had Dante’s fahrting devils. Hell is not amusing. Not a joke. And when you get further along you find individuals, not abstracts” (qtd. in Terrel 65). This statement does not eliminate the potential for humor in Pound’s Hell Cantos; it simply proves that Pound did not intend these Cantos to be humorous. And, though the overall tenor of “The Hell Cantos” certainly remains rather grim and grotesque, Pound most definitely includes moments of the darkly comic and humorous. After all it would be very strange indeed to take the lines, “Staring bare bum, / Faces smeared on their rumps, / wide eye on flat buttock, / Bush hanging for beard, / Addressing crowds through their arse-holes” or “And with them r, / a scrupulously

clean table-napkin / Tucked under his penis” (lines that just as well could have been directly quoted out of some Shakespearean-surrealist take on a high school locker room as from a pre-eminent, Modernist poet) with a straight face. Yet overall, the reader is obliged to agree, “The Hell Cantos” are not a joke, and not meant to be amusing. In contrast, Cummings’ mud-bath scenes are. It would take an unearthly stern reader indeed not to recognize the absurd humor laced throughout comrade Kem-min-kz journey to the baths. From Noo’s hyperbolic praise of the mud, to the strangeness of Noo’s New England diction, in both English and French, contrasting to the Russian setting, to the presence of the bedraggled Italian, stunned, who is charged with guarding Noo and Cummings’ clothes, to Cummings almost stepping on two large women, to the punch line of finding “chus clay” in a sea of mud, these scenes are meant to be comedic. This is not to say they are not also meant to bare serious social commentary, as these scenes do rather brilliantly work to further reinforce Cummings’ insistence upon the USSR as a hellish “unworld” that erases its citizens’ individuality, while promising grand ideals, and failing to deliver. What does however, differentiate the mud-bath scenes from “The Hell Cantos” (and more generally *Eimi* from *The Cantos*) is the primacy of humor and absurdity within these scenes: Cummings privileges the comedic/absurd and, in so doing, moves into more serious themes and socio-political commentary, whereas Pound privileges serious socio-political issues and, in so doing, employs the comedic. Thus, in correspondence with one another, the two call to mind the Marxian “History repeats itself, the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.”

Moving on from Cantos XIV and XV, Canto XVI proves important for situating Cummings’ mud-bath scenes in relation to “The Hell Cantos” in terms of their relative

narrative placement within their respective wholes. Such a comparison demonstrates how Cummings' scenes from Odessa's mud baths and Pound's Hell Cantos are aligned in their placement within their respective Dantean structures; both are positioned at the "mouth" of hell, so to speak. In *Eimi*, the mud baths occur on one of Cummings' final days in Odessa and thus precede his departure from the hell of the USSR and entrance into the "purgatory" of Istanbul. In *The Cantos*, "The Hell Cantos" are followed by Canto XVI, which begins with a reference to Dante's exiting hell and entering into Purgatory (68 & Terrell 69).

Interestingly, Pound makes use of his "purgatory" Canto in order to describe scenes from the beginning of the Russian Revolution, ending the Canto indeterminately with the revolution newly underway yet undecided (74-75 & Terrell 72). This mention of the Russian Revolution, frequent in *Eimi*, represents the first major discussion of Russia in *The Cantos*, and marks a distinct departure for Pound as at this point *The Cantos* have been mostly concerned with matters Italian and English. And, though the fact of discussing Russian politics presents a general similarity to *Eimi*, Canto XVI by itself represents a departure from Cummings' overtly critical attitude toward the Soviet Union. Where Canto XVI displays the Russian Revolution within the moral ambiguity of purgatory, simply reporting the story of the revolution without explicit judgment on its import, *Eimi* is plain about USSR representing hell, a fact that Cummings reiterates well over a dozen times throughout the text (Friedman *Growth* 114-115)). However, reading a ways beyond Canto XVI into Canto XXVII, one discovers Pound much more nearly in agreement with Cummings' assessment of the results of the Russian Revolution.

In Canto XXVII, Pound moves from an indeterminate stance on Russia (apparent in Canto XVI) to one that highlights the USSR's inability to build a system of lasting value. In a move similar to Cummings' throughout *Eimi*, Pound also contrasts the futility of man's failed systems and actions with the fecundity and beauty of nature. After commenting extensively on the failure of the "tovarisch" as a representative of the USSR, Pound ends Canto XXVII with the stanza, "'The air burst into leaf.' / 'Hung there flowered acanthus, / 'Can you tell the down from the up?'" (132). A similar movement from the failure of the Russian system—as represented by the "tovarisch" in Canto XXVII—to the fecundity and vitality of nature—as represented by the air "burst[ing] into leaf"—occurs in *Eimi* after Cummings has just visited a Russian prison with Turk and Turkess (among others) (Pound 132). In this scene, Cummings marks the group's exit from prison with the words "air— / Sweet!world!" and recounts how the Turkess "mistake[s] merely greensward [an open field?] for freedom" (*Eimi* 161).

Beyond this mutual idealization of the vital forces of nature, *The Cantos* and *Eimi* also develop comparable concepts of the idealized individual in direct contrast to the failure of the Russian Revolution and other corrupted socio-political forces. The last five stanzas of Canto XXVII embody this contrast between ideal individual and failed collective force. Pound highlights the final impotence of the Russian Revolution by pairing the "tovarisch" (comrade) figure again and again with statements of ineffectuality despite ideal conditions existing for growth:

And Tovarisch lay in the wind

And the sun lay over the wind,
And three forms became in the air
And hovered about him
[...]

And the waves like a forest
Where the wind is weightless in the leaves
But moving,
 so that the sound runs upon the sound.
 Xarites born of Venus and wine.

Carved stone upon stone.
But in sleep, in the waking dream,
Petal'd the air;
 twig where but wind-streak had been;
Moving bough without root,

by Helios.

So that the Xarites bent over tovarisch.
And these are the labours of tovarisch,
That tovarisch lay in the earth,
And rose, and wrecked the house of the tyrants,
And that tovarisch then lay in the earth
 And the Xarites bent over tovarisch.

These are the labours of tovarisch,
That tovarisch wrecked the house of the tyrants,
And rose, and talked folly on folly,
and walked forth and lay in the earth
 And Xarites bent over tovarisch.

And that tovarisch cursed and blessed without aim,
 These are the labours of tovarisch [...] (131-132)

Though wind, air, sun, water, and the mythic force of the Xarites (charities) are all present, the tovarisch fails to move beyond simple destruction (“wreck[ing] the house of the tyrants”) to growth and creation. Instead in this passage, the tovarisch is left talking “folly on folly,” “curs[ing] and bless[ing] without aim.” Further, immediately following these stanzas, Pound repeatedly contrasts the tovarisch against the Theban hero Cadmus: whereas Cadmus builds Thebes out of nothing more than serpent’s teeth, the tovarisch remains unable to simply lift “stone above stone” or set “stone upon stone” (132). Thus, as Terrell points out, Cadmus’ vital power in successfully planting the roots of a civilization contrasts with the tovarisch’s “regret over failure” (111). Finally, Pound ends

Canto XXVII with an insistence upon the vitality of nature in spite of human failings, which are, again, specifically identified with the “tovarisch” as representative of the Russian Revolution and the USSR:

“Baked and eaten tovarisch!
Baked and eaten, tovarish, my boy,
“That is your [tovarisch] story. And up again,
“Up at ’em. Laid never stone upon stone.”

“The air burst into leaf.”
“Hung there flowered acanthus,
“Can you tell the down from the up?”” (Pound *The Cantos* 131-132)

In the sense of being an explicit rejection of the USSR as representing a futile and failed human experiment, Canto XXVII resonates with the totality of *Eimi*. On a more specific level, Canto XXVII speaks directly to a passage in *Eimi*, which Cummings titles in his “Sketch for a Preface” “*We of who Is partakes*” (italics are Cummings’). Fittingly this definitive ideological declaration from Cummings happens directly after one of the few moments where he overtly references Pound in *Eimi*: the moment when Cummings is in conversation with Turk, Turk states he believes “socialism...will come to America as a series of more or less gradual modifications,” and Cummings replies, “That would please Ezra, the son of Homer. Or any man with roots. And that would displease all uprooted and rootless unmen and ‘radicals’” (*Eimi* 192 & Webster Notes). Almost directly following this, Cummings gives a sweeping three paragraph celebration of the “to be” verb, the “is,” and its vital creative force in contrast to the impotency and essential negation of the “unworld” of Soviet Russia, a world filled with Pound’s failed tovarishes. Here, similar to Cantos XXVII, Cummings’ initial proclamation—“We of whom Is partakes, only to whom our deaths are births—savagely makers[...]we conceive dreaming and impossibly freedom: opening and mind’s agony of first joy”—evokes the

central themes of the Cadmus myth: birth out of death and the savage, painful yet ultimately triumphant origins of creation (*Eimi* 192). Additionally, as this passage moves forward Cummings employs a similar construction metaphor to Pound, speaking of “lovers of to Be” building a house in comparison to Pound’s lifting of “stone upon stone” (*Eimi* 193 *The Cantos* 132).

In the midst of these initial similarities, I would like to point out the similar overall relationship both passages bear towards the USSR. First, both texts depict a sort of motive force urging individuals towards creation and freedom. In Canto XXVII this force is the Xarites (Charites, “the Graces”) while in *Eimi* it is “Is,” the “to be” verb (Terrell 111). Second, in both passages, the influence of the supreme motive force is thwarted by the tovarisch’s folly and inability to move beyond simple labors—puppet like repetitions—toward creation. Pound’s repeated “the Xarites bent over Tovarisch” corresponds to Cummings’ “We of whom Is partakes” and “minds agony of first joy,” even as the tovarisch’s failure to move beyond “folly on folly” or beyond simply getting “...up again, / ‘Up at ’em” to Lay ‘stone above stone”” corresponds to Cummings’ “arithmetic of unwish!die on,measure with your nonexistence” and “Unplay,very O most trivial marionettes,unplay—so solemnly—that gameless game.” Pound laments the lack of the tovarisch’s ability to participate in even the most rudimentary form of creation (stacking stones), while Cummings decries the citizens of the unworld as participants in the futility of a game that is not even a game: the ultimate futility of play, an action where the stakes are by definition low, without even the slightest hint of joy or fun—the redeeming faculties of a game and of play in the first place. Thus, finally, both passages attribute to the Russian Revolution and the USSR a similar central failing: the inability to

truly support meaningful creation by the individual. To Pound the tovarisch's essential lack of roots ("moving bough without root") and insensitivity to the moving of the Xarites (the Graces) necessitates the final futility of all his actions. Notably the importance of rootedness to Pound is spoken to by Cummings just before he introduces the "*We of whom is partakes*" passage when he refers to Pound as "Ezra the son of Homer [...] [a] man with roots" in contrast to the "uprooted and rootless unmen and 'radicals'" (*Eimi* 192) Further, in comparison to Pound, Cummings sees the essential failure of Soviet Russia being its negation of true individuality that is represented by the "lovers of To Be!" the foundational "I am" (*Eimi* 193). And, since the individual is thwarted in his ability to be, society itself remains a sad shadow, a world of "un," a "gameless game."

However, it would be foolish to imply that Cummings' and Pounds' treatment of the Soviet Union in these texts are in complete cohesion. Pound, though critical of the Russian experiment in Canto XXVII, falls far short of the wholesale rejection of Soviet collectivism offered by *Eimi*. In Canto XXVII, Pound depicts the Soviet Union of having utterly failed to live up to the hopes of the masses. The USSR, represented by the tovarisch, becomes something of a tragic figure because it cannot attain to the mythic potential of "Cadmian" expectations. In contrast, writing several years after Pound and provided with the direct experience of traveling through the USSR, Cummings' Russia is portrayed primarily not as a tragic figure but a farcical one: a specter so totally and absurdly negated it is the unworld, the land of "un," a literal hell on earth, where the inhabitants have not so much failed in building the ideal mythic society out of the rubble of conquest, as they have succeeded in building a worthless monstrosity so enormously

evil its laughable. In short, Pound scolds the USSR with the mythic force of the Xarites and Cadmus, while Cummings mocks the unworld with the full force of his most freewheeling and absurd modernist poetics.

3.2 The Politics of Pound and Cummings

Given *Eimi's* sympathetic identification with Pound and *The Cantos*, it is little wonder that Pound's reading of *Eimi* led directly to an intensification of the relationship between Cummings and himself.⁶ Despite Cummings' absolute admiration for Pound, Pound initially viewed Cummings as just one of many talented younger artists, and seemed to be in no hurry to continue their relationship after the two first met in 1921. In fact, the first surviving correspondence between the pair does not appear until the year 1926, five years after their first meeting (Ahearn 2). And even then their communication was at best "spasmodic," mostly tied to specific requests from Pound for Cummings to submit work for various projects (Ahearn 3). This generally intermittent correspondence is marked by a total of eight letters (five from Pound, three from Cummings) being shared by the two between Nov. 1926 and Feb. 1933 (roughly a letter a year). In comparison, from April 1933-end of 1939 (a similar 6-7 year time frame) the two shared 82 letters (45 from Pound, 37 from Cummings), more than a ten-fold increase (*Pound/Cummings*). Barry Ahearn in the Introduction to *Pound/Cummings*, a collection of their correspondences, directly credits *Eimi* for this intensification in the relationship between Pound and Cummings. Ahearn notes:

In 1933, however, Pound read *Eimi*. Thereafter his typewriter went into high gear and he wrote Cummings quite frequently. *Eimi* proved that Cummings—so far as Pound was concerned—was the man who could and would plumb the depths of

twentieth-century political folly and knavery. In short, Pound saw in Cummings someone who had the talent to join in his crusade for a better world. (3)

Ahearn's analysis would appear correct. Only *Eimi* satisfactorily explains the rather sudden intensification of Pound and Cummings' correspondences. *Eimi* was published in March of 1933, and Pound reflects directly upon his reading and opinions of *Eimi* in several letters to Cummings during the years 1933 and 1934. A letter dated 6 April [1933] contains Pound's initial reaction to *Eimi*, which includes both uncertainty and typographical suggestions:

I dunno whether I rank as them wot finds it painful to read....and if I said anything about obscurity it wd. far ridere polli [laughing chickens?], in view of recent pubctns ... Also I don't think *Eimi* is obscure, or not very // BUT, the longer a work is the more and longer shd. be the passages that are perfectly clear and simple to read. // matter of scale, matter of how long you can cause the reader to stay immobile or nearly so on a given number of pages...a page two, or three, or two and one half centimetres narrower, at least a column of type that much narrower might solve all the difficulties" (24).

Despite this critique, Pound insists "At any rate damn glad to have the book and shall presumably continue taken er chaw now here n naow there" and ends the letter with the praise "OH w ell Whell hell itza great woik. Me complimenks" (25).

Pound certainly seems to have taken his sweet time reading *Eimi*. In a letter dated 25 Oct[ober] [1934] (a full year and a half after his first mention of reading the text), he writes to Cummings, "[I am] again greatly enjoying *Eimi* now that the copy borrowed by the woplomat's wife has been replaced...[and will] even go so far as to say: 'It makes

SENSE if you read it carefully enough’(this disparages of Jhames Jheezus’ [James Joyce’s] hiz later flounderings. and thass thaatt” (29). Later in the same letter Pound states that “Eimi was worth writin’.” This of course doesn’t sound like high praise until Pound follows it up with an admonition for Cummings to produce a sequel in the form of “a noo Deal vollum” critiquing the American political system (30).

Returning to a portion of Ahearn’s above analysis—“Cummings...was the man who could and would plumb the depths of twentieth-century political folly and knavery... Pound saw in Cummings someone who had the talent to join in his crusade for a better world”—it should be noted, as Ahearn himself points out, that Pound was only partially correct in his assessment of Cummings. Yes, Cummings did absolutely denounce the “totalitarian tendencies [he saw] dominating the world” in the fullness of their “political folly and knavery” (3). Yet, Cummings, unlike Pound, had absolutely no interest in aligning himself with any alternative political leader or movement that proposed to make the world safer for “individual liberty.” He believed such “schemes” for a better world “were at best ridiculous” and at worst led to inhuman negations of the individual, beliefs he trumpets loud and clear throughout *Eimi* and his other works (Ahearn 3).

Still Pound’s hope and repeated encouragement that Cummings would turn his considerable talent upon what Pound saw as the impossibly broken United States political system is more understandable when one recognizes the high regard with which Pound came to consider *Eimi*. To him *Eimi* was no less than one part of a triad of essential modernist literature, indispensable for its “diagnoses of the interwar years” (Farley 50). Pound wrote in “Augment of the Novel” (1941), “The ‘Apes of God,’ along with ‘Eimi’ and ‘Ulysses,’ [are] three books that any serious reader in 1960 will most certainly have

to read if he wants to get any sort of idea of what happened in Europe between one of our large wars and another” (qtd. in Farley 50). Yet, Pound assigned *Eimi* a unique place even within this elite triad because he was able to garner from *Eimi* a depiction of Soviet Society that confirmed his biases and allowed him to more fully reject the Russian Experiment. The accuracy and intensity of Cummings’ depiction, as Pound saw it, allowed Pound to feel as if “he had traveled [to Russia] himself” (Farley 53).

The full force of this vicarious travel, cherished by Pound, may be best captured by a discussion of a specific scene from *Eimi*, which demonstrate Cummings’ ability to provide political commentary while attempting to remain true to the formal and artistic rigors of modernist poetics in communicating his experience to the reader. This particular scene is notably framed by a conversation Cummings has with Turk on the day he, Cummings, leaves Moscow. During the course of this conversation, Turk remarks to Cummings, “‘the tragedy of life always hasn’t been and’ (he added quietly) ‘isn’t that some people are poor and others rich some hungry and others not hungry, some weak and others strong. The tragedy is and always will be that most people are unable to express themselves’” (259). The import of this statement looms large throughout *Eimi*, and Cummings, specifically in his travel out of Russia, hearkens back constantly to this notion of tragedy derived from lack of self-expression. In this context, the proceeding scene provides a lucid multi-valiant critique of the USSR as a political entity.

Immediately after Cummings leaves Moscow traveling toward Kiev, *Eimi* jumps to a scene of Cummings meeting a Ukrainian writer from New York, the “very gentle Jew” or just “gentle” (264-265). The two are still orienting themselves to the nuances of their train car and its lack of amenities, when the train passes through a “particular

village” full of “particular dark crowds” and a “thumping screaming band” (265). Gentle and Cummings discover that the festivities have to do with the men of the village leaving “for 3 months” (265). What at first appears to be a celebratory scene takes on a distinctly ominous attitude of despair when Gentle jokingly asks two boys whether they would like to come to Odessa with him. Cummings records the scene that unfolds:

Soldiers(barks bigger briefly)
Our men are going for 3 months(smaller cries)
Want to come to Odessa with me(gentle yells gaily)
“DA”(both)
Why?
“zdyes plokoh” [bad here] (barks bigger. Smaller nods)
Why?(no answer)why?(shrugging:wry faces:then)
Nothing to eat(smaller disappearing bawls)
we pass darkness
night (265)

Cummings employs a host of poetic techniques within this passage in order to reinforce the primary emotional undertones of despair, and a scathing critique of the USSR. For example, the consonance of “barks bigger briefly” paralleled with the consonance and chiming rhyme of “Want to come to Odessa with me(gentle yells gaily)” falls directly into the spondaic thudding of “DA”(both),” a progression that reinforces the final startling discovery of everyday hunger and desperation, “zdyes plokoh...nothing to eat.” And the semantic tension Cummings both evokes and captures within these lines by his use of the one small phonetic Russian phrase, “zdyes plokoh” (translated “bad here”), reinforces the startling unexpectedness of this passage. The reader moves from an everyday, naïvely inconsiderate question—“Want to come Odessa with me”—to a blunt but indistinguishable answer (at least for your non-Russian speaking readers), to the simple unescapable clarity of “Nothing to eat”—a sequence only intensified by the ever increasing desperation and discomfort of Gentle’s three times repeated “Why?”

Overall, though this passage describes an extremely brief and fleeting moment, the veil surrounding the Soviet propaganda of prosperity and contentment for all is perhaps nowhere more fully withdrawn in *Eimi*. In fact the indication here of extreme hunger, unrest, the dissolution of the family unit, despair, and general restlessness points to the viciously dark underbelly of Soviet political practice during the period: specifically the brutal, and abjectly unethical forced modernization of rural elements throughout the USSR (Riasanovsky 496-499; Conquest 3-5).⁷ Notably, though Cummings is harshly critical of the USSR throughout *Eimi*, he seems to make what may amount to one of his most pressing and vital critique of Soviet politics somewhat unaware of having done so. This “stumbling” into a desperate historical reality, though accidental, remains consistent with Cummings’ intentions in *Eimi*: namely to expose Soviet Russia as a hellish land of “un.” Furthermore, in the essay “The Dangers of Security: E.E. Cummings’ Revolt Against the Future,” Barbara Watson seems to be referring to just such moment as the train scene above—a moment where Cummings arrives at a significant, though unintended truth—when she claims that Cummings takes on something of the role of the prophet, rebelling against the roots of many of the negative social movements of the century before they came to fruition (37). Watson elaborates on this prophetic role claiming that Cummings is unique in his place among modernist writers for his concern with “not the removed future of any utopian ideal, but the future now arriving” and for his rejection of “the future that is present,” the future presenting itself in each moment (31). Thus, whether expressly or by accident, Cummings’ willingness to employ the full force of his poetics towards the recording and rejecting of the “future now arriving” allows the bald-faced realities he witnessed in this scene to speak for themselves. And

this allowance results in one of the most devastating and socially engaged critiques found within *Eimi*.

Scenes similar to the one above—where Cummings employs poetic device and form in order to provide an implicit critique—are numerous throughout *Eimi*. In Pound’s mind at least, the collective force of these scenes is such that they enable careful readers of the text to completely reject the USSR as a viable political alternative. Of course, encouraging such rejections was in part Cummings’ intent in writing *Eimi*. However, Cummings certainly did not intend for such rejections to be accompanied by a corresponding affirmation of a competing totalitarian political system, as was the case for Pound, who, in rejecting the USSR, only “cleave[d] closer to his own belief in the saving ideology of fascism” (Farley 53). Importantly, in this regard, no matter how harmonized their artistic ideals or close their friendship, Pound and Cummings diverge politically in their reactions to the agreed upon failings of the Soviet State. Whereas Pound came to advocate Italian fascism under Mussolini as a sort of return to the glory days of the Medici’s, Cummings refused all overt political allegiances.⁸ In this way, Pound proves a political counterbalance to Aragon’s communist conversion, tending toward “rightest” (fascist) political shallow in direct contrast to Aragon’s “leftist” (communist) puddle plodding. In contrast to them both, Cummings attempts to inhabit what he envisions as the depths, depths which take the form of a complete commitment to radical, individual expression. On this front, Cummings’ most recent biographer, Susan Cheever, argues that Cummings proves the “only [truly] modern poet” who unswervingly stuck to the glorification of the individual, art, youth and love in the face of oppressive governmental and totalitarian forces at work in the modern world. Writing in the Spring 1946 *Harvard*

Wake issue dedicated to Cummings, Allen Tate makes a similar claim stating, "...in looking back over the war years I see only one American poet who kept his humanity and his poetry, and that man is Estlin [E.E.] Cummings.... Among the men of our age some kept their humanity, some their poetry; but none, I think, both" (qtd. in Watson 31). Oddly, as it turns out, Cummings' ability to succeed in keeping both his humanity and his art— meeting the totalitarian political forces of his day not so much with an opposed political ideology, but rather comically alive modernist artistic ideals— draws from a rather unlikely source.

4. *Krazy Kat*

4.1 *Krazy* and Cummings' Foreword

So far we have explored the place of Cummings' *Eimi* alongside several high modernist works of prose and verse. Yet a continuing discussion of *Eimi*'s modernist poetics leads out of the realms of the explicitly literary into the daily funny's page to Cummings' favorite comic strip, *Krazy Kat* by George Herriman, a strip which ran from 1910-1944 (a large portion of Cummings' adult life) (Shannon 209). In terms of *Eimi*, Cummings parallels the style of *Krazy Kat* and grounds his central tension between the individual and society within the relational metaphor of the strip's main characters. Overall, Cummings' *Eimi* and its distinct modernist poetics are arguably more influenced by Herriman's *Krazy Kat* than any other modernist work.

Cummings was not the only modernist writer to admire and draw inspiration from *Krazy Kat*. in the introduction to *Arguing Comics*, Jeet Heer and Kent Worcester point out that during the first half of the twentieth century *Krazy Kat* developed a large

following of “artists and intellectuals,” many of whom considered Herriman a fine artist (xii). Further, they note that the strip has garnered “the lion’s share of favorable, early-to-mid-twentieth-century comics’ commentary” (xii). An early exemplar of this favorable commentary came in the form of Gilbert Seldes’ 1924 essay, “The Krazy Kat that Walks by Himself.” Seldes wrote: “Krazy Kat, the daily comic strip of George Herriman is, to me, the most amusing and fantastic and satisfactory work of art produced in America today” (22). He goes on to praise Herriman as a master of irony and fantasy, who deserves full credit as an artist and concludes that *Krazy Kat* is a “work which America can pride itself on having produced, and can hastily set about to appreciate. It is rich with something we have too little of—fantasy. It is wise with pitying irony; it has delicacy, sensitiveness, and an unearthly beauty” (29).

For all its artistry, the general concept of *Krazy Kat* is relatively simple: set within the “krazy kountenance” of Coconino County, a host of minor characters make occasional appearances alongside the strip’s three principal agents: Krazy Kat, Offissa Bull Pupp, and Ignatz Mouse (Herriman 10; Seldes 23). Seldes summarizes the general dynamics between these characters writing:

The plot is that Krazy (androgynous, but according to his creator willing to be either) is in love with Ignatz Mouse; Ignatz, who is married, but vagrant, despises the Kat, and his one joy in life is to ‘Krease the Kat’s bean with a brick’ from the brickyard of Kolin Kelly. The fatuous Kat (Stark Young has found the perfect word for him: he is crack-brained) takes the brick, by a logic and a cosmic memory presently to be explained, as a symbol of love; he cannot, therefore,

appreciate the efforts of Offisa B. Pupp to guard him and to entrammel the activities of Ignatz Mouse. (24)

This is of course the inverse of the stereotypical dog and cat and mouse dynamic (something like a mixed up *Tom and Jerry*): here the mouse hunts the cat, the dog attempts to protect the *cat* from the bullying of the *mouse*, while the cat—far from being antagonistic or fearful towards the mouse—actively loves him with a foolish simplicity that boggles standard logic. Within these relational dynamics, Herriman created endless permutations of the central plot: mouse antagonizing cat, cat loving mouse, dog protecting cat. In the essay ““That we may mis-unda-stend each other,”” Edward Shannon phrases it thus, “Once he established the strip’s structural parameters, Herriman wrote essentially the same story every day for 34 years” (212).

Like Seldes, Cummings explicitly and publicly admired *Krazy Kat*. He mentions the strip multiple times in his correspondences over the years and often thanks others who sent him selections of the strip while he was in Europe (*Selected Letters* 81,90, 256, 257). Further, the influence of *Krazy Kat* upon Cummings’ work is quite clear. Kennedy traces Cummings’ use of capital letters for emphasis to the influence of *Krazy Kat* (107). Heer and Worcester note that “Cummings found a kindred spirit in George Herriman, whose *Krazy Kat* comic strip was also a riot of language. As the critic Guy Davenport once suggested, we can ‘appreciate a lot of Cummings by remembering that at any moment in his poems he is likely to be ventriloquizing the elated *Krazy*’” (Intro 3). And, though Cummings’ ventriloquizing of *Krazy* is at times indecipherable from his other frequent distortions of diction, there are a few cases where the connection becomes clear, such as the poem “why are all these pipples taking their hets off?,” which appeared in

Cummings' 1926 collection, *Is 5* (Webster Notes to *Complete Poems*; Complete Poems 243).

Overall, Cummings and Herriman prove kindred spirits in their whimsical use of language. In both “there is a real sense of the color of words and a high imagination [...] there is the rhythm of wonder and excitement” (Seldes 27-28). Like Cummings’ poetry and prose, the frames of *Krazy Kat* are filled with puns, linguistic and poetic play, and lyrical playfulness. For example in the February 15th, 1931 edition of *Krazy Kat*, Krazy, “full of flair to find out why,” is told by a fortune teller, “Your palm portends no potential pretense to posterity, your lines limn a lulled love lit by the lesser lumina” (14). The fortune teller goes on to tell Krazy, “You must sow your ‘wild oats,’ you must sow them before the yearning years yield you to the four yawning yugas” (14). Thus Krazy embarks on “the search of the century” to find “wile oat.” Once Krazy has triumphantly located some “wile oat,” she proclaims, “Oy, for a niddil, & tread, oy, for a niddil, & tread.” Ignatz Mouse hearing this asks what the needle and thread are for. Krazy replies, “To sew this ‘wile oat’ with” (Herriman 14). And in the December 27, 1931 edition of *Krazy Kat* the phrase “Softly the ‘coo coo’ is singing” sung by Ignatz Mouse is repeated and punned upon throughout. Krazy, approaching Ignatz, points out this statement isn’t ‘gremmtical” because there are two “coo’s” singing, thus it should be the coo coo “are singing” not “is singing.” (Herriman 50). The opening subtext also appears strikingly reminiscent to Cummings, “Ignatz Mouse alilt with song—a bellow with mellow melody—trills thrillfully.” As Cummings is wont to do, this passage employs an invented adverb, “thrillfully,” and rather nontraditional syntax and adjective assignment, “Ignatz

mouse alilt with song.” Of course, the general cadence and playful lilt of the words also strikes as Cummings-esque.

Eventually Cummings’ love of *Krazy Kat* culminated in his composing the Foreword to the 1946 collection *Krazy Kat*, an essay on which he worked for much of the summer of 1945 (Kennedy 396). This foreword makes explicit general thematic connections between *EIMI* and *Krazy Kat*. Within this Foreword, Cummings sets out some of his primary beliefs about the relationship between the individual and society, love and democracy. To Cummings *Krazy*, *Ignatz*, and *Offissa Pupp* provide a metaphor for democratic society:

Yet the truth of truths lies here and nowhere else. Always (no matter what’s real) *Krazy* is no mere reality. She is a living ideal. She is a spiritual force, inhabiting a merely real world—and the realer a merely real world happens to be, the more this living ideal becomes herself. Hence—needless to add—the brick. Only if, and whenever, that kind reality (cruelly wielded by our heroic villain, *Ignatz Mouse*, in despite of our villainous hero, *Offissa Pupp*) smites *Krazy*—fairly and squarely—does the joyous symbol of Love Fulfilled appear above our triumphantly unknowledgeable heroine. And now do we understand the meaning of democracy? If we don’t, a poet-painter called George Herriman most certainly cannot be blamed. Democracy, he tells us again and again and again, isn’t some ultraprogressive myth of a superbenevolent World As Should Be. The meteoric burlesk melodrama of democracy is a struggle between society (*Offissa Pupp*) and the individual (*Ignatz Mouse*) over an ideal (our heroine)—a struggle from which, again and again and again, emerges one stupendous fact; namely, that the ideal of

democracy fulfills herself only if, and whenever, society fails to suppress the individual. (32)

Thus Offissa Pupp, representation of “the will of so-called society,” and Ignatz, representation of “free-will,” meet in conflict over control of Krazy, a representation of “Joy” and “unknowledgeable wisdom” and the transformative power of love (32).

Importantly Ignatz and Offissa are constrained by the “sensible laws of this world [that state] *might makes right*,” while Krazy operates by the “the nonsensical law” of “*love conquers all*” (italics are Cummings’)(Foreword 31).

The democratic operative trinity of Krazy, Ignatz, and Officer Pupp, which Cummings here describes, appears plainly throughout *Krazy Kat*. For example, in the April 26th, 1931 *Krazy Kat* (Herriman 22). The strip begins with Krazy searching for and finding a three-leaf clover. The ecstatic Krazy then skips up to Ignatz and Offissa Pupp declaring, “All ova ever’where I looked, an’ soitched for it, an at lest I finded it—it’s a l’il klova bush” (Herriman 22). Krazy then explains to Pupp and Ignatz, “One lif is Ignatz, one lif is Offissa Pupp, an’ one lif is me—tree in one, a singular kowincidence in pluralness—aint it movillis?” This comparison to the clover evokes a traditional explanation of the Christian trinity, a connection that continues through the final frame of the comic where Krazy dreams a clover stem with the three characters’ heads growing out of it as the individual leaves. And, in this final frame, as Krazy sleeps, both Ignatz Mouse and Officer Pupp crouch behind potted plants planning to pluck away the leaf corresponding to the other (Ignatz to rid the trinity of Pupp, and Pupp to rid the trinity of Ignatz). Thus the reader sees the ideal democratic trinity of dog, mouse, and crazy cat in full bloom: both the dog and mouse (societal pressure and the individual free will) in

contest over control of the cat (ideals of joy, wisdom, and love). It is notable that Herriman implicitly compares the mysterious relationship between his three primary characters to the mystery of the Christian Trinity. This comparison implies an overt concern with how his characters interact both as individuals (distinctly three) and in relationship to one another (and also, somehow, one).

Naturally, considering his evisceration of the USSR in *Eimi* and general distaste of government control, Cummings goes on to aim the “truth” of his democratic metaphor against totalitarian distortions of democracy (both communist and otherwise). He contends that the intent of “those red-brown-andblackshirted Puritans who want us all to scrap democracy and adopt their modernized version of follow the leader” is to end “the exciting democratic game of cat loves mouse” in favor of a “ultraprogressive and super-benevolent affair” wherein Offissa Pupp (societal control) liquidates Ignatz Mouse (individual free will) (Foreword 32). In Cummings’ view this game is essential, and without play, love, joy, and wisdom could not be fulfilled as they are in the dynamics of *Krazy*’s relationship to Ignatz (the individual) and Offissa Pup (society).

Yet, to Cummings, as in *Eimi*, the final champion of the “meteoric burlesk melodrama” is clear. He writes, “*Krazy Kat*—who, with every mangled word and murdered gesture, translates a mangling and murdering world into Peace And Good Will—is the only original and authentic revolutionary protagonist. All blood-and-thunder Worlds As Should Be cannot comprise this immeasurably generous heroine of the strictly unmitigated future. She has no fear—even of a mouse” (Foreword 33). And here the most important connection between *Eimi* and *Krazy Kat* emerges: the fact that both texts celebrate the final triumph of love and joy—rooted in modernist ideals of free play and

the primacy of art—over the anarchy of purely individual action and the totalitarian forces of society.

Thus, in the end, Cummings' ideal metaphor for Democracy is rooted in the relational dynamics of Ignatz, Offissa, and Krazy. Within this metaphor the individual, Ignatz, and the state, Offissa Pupp, co-exist in a continuous state of tension. For Cummings this tension creates fertile ground for the development of ideal art (Krazy) marked by love, joy, authenticity, originality, and continuous transformation. Here Cummings' radical individualism is tempered by the allowance of state intervention. Of course, importantly, state intervention, in Cummings' model, must fall short of actually restricting the free expression of the individual, or artistic ideals remain unattainable. Only when Ignatz brick hits Krazy, is Krazy fulfilled as the ideal revolutionary protagonist, as the embodiment of artistic actualization; and, likewise, only when "society fails to suppress the individual" is democracy fulfilled. Cummings makes clear that such fulfillment of democracy represents a counterpoint to totalitarian politics, which embody the "ultraprogressive myth of a superbenevolent World As Should Be." In Cummings' conceptualization of "Demo*Krazy*" (if you will), the state has a place: it may govern, and may even arrest and attempt to thwart the individual, but, unlike the communist and fascist states of his day, the truly democratic state must itself remain forever one step behind the individual (as Offissa Pupp is always one step behind Ignatz), forever falling short of actually suppressing individual expression (as Ignatz forever succeeds in beaming Krazy). If and only if the state fails to protect the ideals of art and life represented by Krazy from the individual, are these ideals able to be fulfilled.

Notably, Cummings repeatedly frames *Krazy Kat*'s triumph of love and joy within the context of burlesque (referring to the strip as a "meteoric burlesk melodrama" multiple times throughout his Foreword). This framing calls to mind Cummings' introduction to his third collection *is 5* (1926) in which he explains, "On the assumption that my technique is either complicated or original or both, the publishers have politely requested me to write an introduction to this book" (*CP* 221). Cummings' answer to this request is brief; he writes, "At least my theory of technique, if I have one, is very far from original; nor is it complicated. I can express it in fifteen words, by quoting The Eternal Question And Immortal Answer of burlesk, viz. 'Would you hit a woman with a child?—No, I'd hit her with a brick.' Like the burlesk comedian, I am abnormally fond of the precision which creates movement" (*CP* 221). Of course one of the major plot points (the major plot point?) of *Krazy Kat* is Krazy, the "heroine," getting beamed with a brick. Thus Cummings' association of *Krazy Kat* with burlesque is rather explicit: Krazy and Ignatz are in fact acting out, over and over, the question and immortal answer of burlesque. And, to Cummings it is the precise moment when the brick hurled by Ignatz hits Krazy—the moment when the "meteoric burlesk melodrama" corresponds most closely to the immortal question and answer—that love is fulfilled, that Krazy is most herself, and that *Krazy Kat* as a work of art obtains its most fundamental ideal ("Only if, and whenever, that kind reality [the brick] (...) smites Krazy (...) does the joyous symbol of Love Fulfilled appear above our triumphantly unknowledgeable heroine.") (Foreword 32).

This notion of "the joyous symbol of Love Fulfilled" materializing only when the brick strikes Krazy is exemplified repeatedly in *Krazy Kat*. Often when Krazy is struck

by the brick, hearts appear around her head: for example February 22nd, 1931; March 22nd, 1932; January 24th, 1932 (Herriman 15, 19, 55). Other times at the moment of the bricks impact or even just in the presence of a brick thrown by Ignatz, Krazy sees visions of Ignatz with angel's wings (Herriman 38, 95). And at times Krazy even wishes or eagerly awaits a brick, as in the opening frame on September 27th, 1931 where Krazy sits upon a rock face cradled in her hand and says to herself, "Oy for a 'brick'—oy wot a wish I'm wishing for a 'brick'—ooy" (Herriman 39). Further, certain individual strips embody Cummings' paradoxical conception of Ignatz brick hitting Krazy being the fulfillment of ideal love. The December 18, 1932 issue of *Krazy Kat* provides a fitting example. This strip depicts Ignatz Mouse criticizing the work of Kolin Kelly his bespectacled, canine brick supplier. Ignatz remarks to Kolin, "You have baked better, blither, bolder, buxomer and more brilliant bricks" (Herriman 95). After further critique, Ignatz leaves the brickyard only to happen upon the very same brick he has just dismissed as inferior, the brick that Kolin, due to Ignatz's criticism, has thrown out. Ignatz, decides the brick will do, and the second to last panel of this comic shows Ignatz, in typical fashion, having just hurled a brick at Krazy declaring, "However, [this brick is] plenty good enough to smack a 'Kat' with." At the very moment the brick plows into the back of Krazy's head, she pictures Ignatz in the form of an angel within a heart-shaped bubble and recites, "No madda where, no madda how, his great love will fine me out. L'il ainjil" (Herriman 95). All of this occurring in a single frame muddles the cause and effect relationship of the scene. Does the brick hitting Krazy trigger her adoration of Ignatz? Or do the brick striking her head and these thoughts simply occur simultaneously? In either

case, the concept of ideal (universal and unconquerable) love and Krazy getting hit in the head with a brick are directly and simultaneously related.

Naturally, Krazy's acceptance and even outright enjoyment of Ignatz essentially abusive behavior is troubling as it presents a dynamic wherein the feminine (Krazy, at least in Cummings' analysis is a "she") is repeatedly violated by the masculine (Ignatz) and reacts with not only tolerance but acceptance. This is of course (at least on the surface) an extremely disempowering dynamic. Yet it should be noted that Cummings is adamant in his stance that *Krazy* does not reflect some sort of prototypical romantic heroine simply accepting violent masculine domination and learning to like it. Further, Krazy is not some fawning, fainting, masochistic, love-in-spite-of-the-violence-and-degradation-of-the-masculine-presence type. She is also not the "garden variety," "puppet" ideal feminine in need of rescue by the masculine Offissa Pupp. Rather she is an embodiment of ideal love, illimitable joy, and the mysterious art of life. Within his Foreword Cummings explains:

Let's make no mistake about Krazy. A lot of people "love" because, and a lot of people "love" although, and a few individuals love [...] Krazy, however, is not a lot of people. Krazy is herself. Krazy is illimitable—she loves. She loves in the only way anyone can love: illimitably. She isn't morbid and she isn't longsuffering; she doesn't "love" someone because he hurts her and she doesn't "love" someone although he hurts her. She doesn't, moreover, "love" someone who hurts her. Quite the contrary: she loves someone who gives her unmitigated joy. (31)

A few pages later, Cummings continues:

[...]our illimitably affectionate Krazy has no connection with the oldfashioned heroine of common or garden melodrama. That prosaically “virtuous” puppet couldn’t bat a decorously “innocent” eyelash without immediately provoking some utterly estimable Mr. Right to liquidate some perfectly wicked Mr. Wrongo. In her hyperspineless puritanical simplicity, she desired nothing quite so much as an ultraprogressive and superbenevolent substitute for human nature. Democracy’s merciful leading lady, on the other hand, is a fundamentally complex being who demands the whole mystery of life. Krazy Kat—who, with every mangled word and murdered gesture, translates a mangling and murdering world into Peace And Good Will—is the only original and authentic revolutionary protagonist. (33-34)

Thus what appears superficially a simple matter of masculine dominance and feminine submission, of masculine violence given and feminine love returned, becomes in Cummings’ estimation the exemplification of transcendence unto “unmitigated joy,” the ideal of illimitable love, the translation of a “mangling and murdering world into Peace and Good Will,” the “fundamentally complex who demands the whole mystery of life,” and the “only original and authentic revolutionary protagonist.” All of which Cummings locates explicitly within Krazy, the heroine and leading lady of the strip.

Further, Herriman’s own character constructions paired with Cummings’ above paradigms seem to reiterate the actual power of the feminine despite its apparent lack of power, and the actual vulnerability and inadequacy of the masculine despite its apparent power. Krazy is a cat after all, and Ignatz a mouse. In Herriman’s muddling of the traditional cat and mouse (and dog) dynamics, he lays the foundation for the central

narrative ironies of *Krazy Kat*: it is the mouse that hunts and psychotically attempts to destroy the cat; it is the cat who—instead of a simple inversion wherein she flees the mouse—actively loves and seeks out the mouse; and it is the dog (Offissa Pupp) who seeks to protect the cat from the mouse. So we have in *Krazy*, finally, a feline heroine who in accepting the obviously inferior masculine violence of Ignatz mouse overcomes it, while at the same time rejecting the necessity of the masculine rescuer trope as represented by Offissa Pupp. Throughout the strip *Krazy*'s identity is neither destroyed by the violence of Ignatz nor elided by the attempted rescuing dominance of Offissa Pupp. As the two forces of opposed masculine violence and romantic dominance battle each other to a constant stale mate—Ignatz forever in and out of the county jail for his assaults of *Krazy*, Offissa Pupp in his Sisyphean labor to constantly arrest Ignatz and protect *Krazy*—*Krazy* alone is fulfilled as a character, transcending either extreme as “the only original and authentic revolutionary protagonist” (Cummings, Foreword 33).

It should be noted that to Cummings the symbolic vitality of the brick hitting *Krazy* as “the joyous symbol of Love Fulfilled” persists even if the central ironies present in the inverted relationship between mouse, cat, and dog are disturbed. Cummings explains:

And let's be perfectly sure about something else. Even if Offissa Pupp should go crazy and start chasing *Krazy*, and even if *Krazy* should go crazy and start chasing Ignatz, and even if crazy *Krazy* should swallow crazy Ignatz and crazy Offissa Pupp should swallow crazy *Krazy* and it was the millennium— there'd still be the brick. And (having nothing else to swallow) Offissa Pupp would then

swallow the brick. Whereupon, as the brick hit Krazy, Krazy would be happy.

(33)

This durability of the brick as a symbol of love and joy and individual fulfillment is essential to *Eimi*. For in *Eimi*, Cummings gives a similar appraisal of the individual ability to be fulfilled even in a mad, politically-distorted world. According to Cummings, the USSR amounts to an “unworld” where idealism (Krazy) has turned against and swallowed the individual (Ignatz), and in turn been swallowed by the will of society (Offissa Pupp). Yet along with these distortions, the agitating agent of individual expression (the brick) still persists, is swallowed, and manages to find fulfillment in the artist’s journey and movement through the bowels of the unworld as represented by Cummings’ own entrance in, movement through, and exit from the USSR (i.e. the brick still hits Krazy square on the head). Thus, even in a world that is not democratic and free, it remains possible for individuality to be expressed and eventually fulfilled in the ideals of love and joy. In this way, even within the distorted unworld of the USSR, Cummings’ is able to align the modernist principles of free expression, and the self-sufficiency of art with the ideals of democracy embodied by Krazy.

4.2 Krazy’s Poet

Along with the important stylistic and metaphoric connections between *Krazy Kat* and *Eimi*, *Krazy* features prominently in certain specific scenes throughout *Eimi*. First, Cummings directly mentions *Krazy Kat* once. In a scene mentioned earlier, he and Virgil (the first) are chatting at a Russian nightclub of sorts. Cummings is in the midst of wild proclamations in favor of the individual, and nonsense and “dada” when Virgil begins to

urge him to change the subject, and Cummings notices that two men, one in uniform, appear to be listening in on his and Virgil's conversation. Cummings recounts:

...hadn't that recently upmoving comrade formerly been chattering in some farthest corner with a uniformed friend? Where(I wonder)is now this friend? And as,dissatisfied with the present view,I squirm a little sideways—my elbow touches an elbow.—Of course! Quickly which instructive discovery hands all my proud comrade spine a telegram of anger:then,mercifully,up(out of memory)lifts the immortal dictum of untime's most ignorant how wise daemon:It's What's Behind Me That I Am. Blessing upon thee,Krazy Kat;may thy poet prosper until eternity!
(50)

Cummings then laughs at the ludicrousness of the situation, explaining to Virgil:

Because again and again an anticommunist teacher of Russianless Russian assured me that,wherever I went in all this vast land,I'd be followed:and again and again I blushingly refused the compliment. Because again and again an anticommunist painter of beneficent devils warned me that to open the prizepackage of Marxism was to find a joyless experiment in force and fear:and again and again I merrily smiled”

Here Cummings rather plainly associates *Krazy Kat* with the ideal of joyous individual expression in the face of totalitarian force and fear. He further identifies himself with the ideal of being *Krazy Kat*'s poet or at least a poet in the spirit of *Krazy Kat*: “Blessing upon thee, *Krazy Kat*;may thy poet prosper until eternity!” It is, further, *Krazy Kat*'s immortal dictum—It's What's Behind Me That I Am—that allows Cummings to “mercifully” move beyond his initial reaction of instinctual anger to a place of acceptance

and even transcendence of totalitarian fear and force. Of course, what exactly Cummings finds so liberating about “It’s What’s Behind Me That I Am” remains a mystery.

There is, of course, the literal interpretation, in which case Cummings identifies himself with the GPU agent who sits surveilling directly behind him. In this sense, Cummings’ use of the dictum is quite clearly a joke. Cummings does not wish simply to identify himself with the GPU, and the literal suggestion of such identification is meant to strike the reader as profoundly ludicrous in light of Cummings’ overt opposition to all forces Soviet throughout *Eimi*.

Beyond the literal, Cummings’ use of the dictum aligns this scene with the democratic metaphor he interprets *Krazy Kat* through. Here, we have Cummings the individual in the role of Ignatz mouse, hurling his bricks and very best mischief against Soviet Society, a.k.a. Offissa Pupp. When the GPU, as representatives of Soviet Society and Offissa Pupp, encroach upon Cummings, Ignatz Mouse, his original reaction is a wave of anger. Only when Krazy Kat—the true democratically ideal Krazy, not any Soviet perversion—enters the picture, metonymically embodied by the repetition of her immortal dictum, does Cummings’ (Ignatz) and the Soviet Society’s (Offissa Pupp) struggle end in Cummings’ identification with the joyous poetic ideals represented by Krazy. Thus is “every effort to limit” Krazy’s love transformed into “illimitability” (Cummings Foreword 31). And thus does Cummings’ limited individual self enter into transcendence by inclusion, a new ideal artistic-poetic selfhood. If the GPU agent, and the corresponding threat he represents, can simply be relegated to the status of an absurd burlesque bogeyman within Cummings’ individual space he need not be angry, as he at

first is, or fearful, as is Virgil's reaction, but, instead, is free to respond with laughter and joy, much as Krazy herself would.

Additionally, Cummings' use of Krazy's dictum points to overall similarities between the style and form of *Eimi* and that of *Krazy Kat*. Seldes speaking of this very same dictum writes, "In one of his most metaphysical pictures Herriman presents Krazy as saying to Ignatz: 'I ain't a Kat . . . and I ain't Krazy' [...] 'it's wot's behind me that I am . . . it's the idea behind me, 'Ignatz' and that's wot I am'" (24). Seldes points out that Krazy's statement seems to reference the ever changing surrealistic background of Herriman's strip, full of shifting imagery and fractured spatial relationships (e.g. In the March 2nd, 1930 strip, fourteen unique backgrounds appear behind Krazy, who does not appear to move from her original spot.). Something of a similar explanation might also be applied to *Eimi*. Just like *Krazy Kat*, the immediate setting of *Eimi* constantly shifts. As Cummings jumps from relating one episode to relating the next, the reader often has to scramble to connect the new context with what has come before, thus achieving hermeneutic consistency. In this way, "it's wot's behind me that I am" indicates a similar alignment of individual identity with the artistry of the scene: for Cummings identification with his own particular brand of modernist style and form as he presents them in various embodiments throughout *Eimi*; for Krazy identification with the chaotic, surrealistic, shifting backgrounds against which Herriman casts her.

The framing of *Eimi* also parallels *Krazy Kat*. Similar to *Krazy Kat*, which appears in daily installments with a collection of individually boxed in scenes combining to construct the overall strip, Cummings arranges the content of *Eimi* into individual days (diary entries) with a collection of separate scenes, divided by white space (e.g. "& out of

inn of ye dead” to “gotta have a lotta people poor first’(revolution?’ is set off by two full lines of white space on either end), combined to account for the day as a whole (*Eimi* 192). Speaking specifically to this episodic quality in *Eimi*, Richard Kennedy argues that *Eimi* is not a novel but “a fictional thesaurus, a genre defined as a long literary narrative made up of shorter units in prose or verse in which the parts are joined together by chronology or association of ideas rather than by probable and necessary development” (*Cummings Revisited* 92). Kennedy goes on to relate the characteristic qualities of this genre: “a mixture of style s and variations in mood but, taken together, presents a coherent thematic statement or view on life. It achieves some unity through the actions of a single character or the voice of a single narrator” (*Cummings Revisited* 92). Of course, the defining characteristics of *Eimi* which qualify it, in Kennedy’s terms, as a “fictional thesaurus” are shared by *Krazy Kat* and many other comics for that matter. Thus, though unwittingly, no less than Cummings’ most authoritative biographer argues for the essential “comicity” of *Eimi* as represented by its form and narrative style.⁹

As an additional note on the overall similarities between *Eimi* and *Krazy Kat* indicated by the dictum, “it's wot's behind me that I am,” it should be pointed out that, just like in *Krazy Kat*, while the background context constantly shifts—from the mundane to wild surrealistic whirls of motion—the central character in *Eimi* remains fixed. This fact proves vitally important for in *Eimi* the contrast of an ever shifting setting with the steadfastness of the “I” (i.e. Cummings) highlights the central tension of the work: that between individual expression (e.g. “Eimi”) paired with modernist poetics verse the various forces of oppression (e.g. the USSR).

Finally, and most importantly, Cummings' use of Krazy's dictum indicates his direct identification as a poet of the present tense, a poet obsessed with the individual in the current moment. Cummings' obsession with the present tense "to be" verb (discussed above), once again, crops up here. Notice in the dictum the use of the present tense third person, "it's" ("it is"), in conjunction with a repetition of the third person present, wot's ("what is"), combined with the first person present tense, "I am." Thus the present is triply asserted in Krazy's eight word declaration. Correspondingly, the individual is doubly asserted, "me" and "I am." From here, if we take "wot's behind me" as a general declaration encompassing the entire surrounding environment (the complete present tense setting) this dictum becomes quite simply (and rather profoundly) a way for both Cummings and Krazy to claim the present moment as their identity. In this way, the individual can claim ownership of her context and freely express herself within it. This is a conceptualization of the individual which resonates with Cummings' claims about the "illimitably" of Krazy Kat in her response to the actions Ignatz Mouse and Offissa Pupp. It is also a concept that begins to make sense of Cummings' claim elsewhere in *Eimi* that, "Actually, the world is a part of me. And—I'll egocentrically tell the world—a very small part" (219).

The episode where Cummings makes the above claims provides a more indirect, but still noticeable connection to *Krazy Kat*. This episode takes place during a rather wild party at "god's" house on Wednesday, May 27. Towards the end of the party, Cummings meets a journalist from his favorite "yellow journal," *The New York Evening Journal*, which held the place as Cummings' favorite precisely because it carried the comic strip *Krazy Kat* (*EIMI* 217; Webster Notes). Cummings rather upsets this journalist with his

derision of their mutual hometown of Cambridge, Massachusetts. So much so, in fact, that the journalist (“upwrithingly”) “sobs”, “but...you[...]you’re just like A Little Boy!” (*Eimi* 218) To which Cummings replies that he isn’t “just like” a little boy, but “I Am a little boy” (*Eimi* 219). Cummings goes on to say “that,being a child(and not ashamed)I actually feel these people(actually who are children)directly,entirely;and not as per theories” (219).

While Cummings does not explicitly comment on, or even mention *Krazy Kat* in this passage, he does indirectly align himself with the indomitable cat. To begin with, the mention of his “favorite yellow journal” and its implicit ties to *Krazy Kat* primes the careful reader to make connections to the comic strip. Then Cummings layers throughout his conversation with the journalistic bits of chaos, distorted diction, and slap-stick humor reminiscent of the funnies page: a man suddenly appears stating “EYE play TENNIS [...] do YOU play TENNIS?” and just as suddenly disappears; at one point the exasperated journalist stutters “b-b-b-b-BU-BUT!” to which Cummings counters “take off those machineguns;” and two men engage in a “titanic squabble” over who owns a certain “rushn Hat” (*Eimi* 218-219). Finally, Cummings’ identification of himself as a child, not “just like” a child, calls to mind the innocence and childlike spirit of *Krazy* herself as well as the stereotypical more childlike nature of the comic’s medium. And Cummings’ position as a child, which at first lends itself to the outright derision of the journalist and a sense of immaturity, is eventually employed to trumpet Cummings’ superiority over those around him. Cummings, in claiming himself as a child, proposes to transcend the actual children around him, who are all playing at being adults with their petty “theories.” More importantly, Cummings asserts he can fully comprehend the people of Russia in a

way inaccessible to mature, “thinking” parties like the journalist: “I actually feel these people (actually who are children) directly, entirely; and not as per theories” (219).

This transcendence through childlike simplicity mimics that which occurs again and again for Krazy in her relationship to both Ignatz and Offissa Pupp. Seldes explains, “There is a drastic simplicity about Krazy’s movements; he [or she, as Cummings styles her] is childlike, regarding with grave eyes the efforts of older people to be solemn, to pretend that things are what they seem; and like children he frightens us because none of our pretensions escapes him” (26). In contrast, Seldes points out, Ignatz mouse is a “realist” who “has not time for foolishness” and Offissa Pupp is slave to his obsession over guarding Krazy from Ignatz (24-25). Or, as Cummings himself describes it, Ignatz is a “cynical brick-throwing mouse,” Offissa Pupp is “a sentimental policeman-dog, and Krazy is “a humbly poetic, gently clownlike, supremely innocent, and illimitably affectionate creature (slightly resembling a child’s drawing of a cat, but gifted with the secret grace and obvious clumsiness of a penguin on terra firma)” (Foreword to *Krazy* 30).¹⁰ And though Ignatz constantly succeeds in slamming Krazy with bricks, and Offissa constantly succeeds in arresting Ignatz, and Krazy constantly bumbles through the frames getting walloped with bricks, it is Krazy finally who remains the most successful, most fulfilled character. Cummings himself explains this in his Foreword to *Krazy Kat*:

Ignatz Mouse and Offissa Pupp (each completely convinced that his own particular brand of might makes right) are simple-minded—Krazy isn’t—therefore, to Offisa Pupp and Ignatz Mouse, Krazy is. But if both our hero and our villain don’t and can’t understand our heroine, each of them can and each of them does misunderstand her differently. To our softheaded altruist [Offissa Pupp], she

is the adorably helpless incarnation of saintliness. To our hardhearted egoist [Ignatz Mouse], she is the puzzlingly indestructible embodiment of idiocy. The benevolent overdog sees her as an inspired weakling. The malevolent undermouse views her as a born target. Meanwhile Krazy Kat, through this double misunderstanding, fulfills her joyous destiny. (31)

Returning to the May 27th party scene in *Eimi*, we have the poet of Krazy (Cummings) triumphing in the spirit of Krazy—the saintly, “puzzlingly indestructible embodiment of idiocy—over similar forces of “softhead altruism” (represented by the journalist, Cambridge culture, and the communistic milieu of Soviet Russia) and “hardhearted ego[ism]” (the men fighting over a “rushn Hat,” and the journalist’s pride in her privileged Cambridge roots) in order to reach the “joyous destiny” of boyish understanding and transcendence over the unworld (*EIMI* 218-219).

Third, within *Eimi* Cummings’ own most momentous, Krazy-like triumph over forces of both individual violence and societal repression occurs at the very end of his journey as he makes his way from Istanbul to Paris on the Orient Express. These final train scenes take place from the evening of June 12 (Friday)-June 14 (Sunday). Throughout these closing scenes Cummings celebrates his return to himself as a fully expressed individual free from the constraints of the oppressive Soviet State, thus indicating the possibility of the individual (Cummings) and his corresponding modernist poetics emerging victorious over the forces of totalitarian politics. To accomplish this, Cummings engages a great deal with memory in these sections. In Turkey he recalls scenes from the circus indicative of the triumph of imagination, and life restored:

And after Buffalo Bill(a graveyard ‘New York’ &)what fireflies among such gravestones(afterwards mai and les chevaux de bois & death)we have arisen,who

were dead;having died we are as only Animal Emperors of the imagination shall be(and as only poets arise:again possibly to die,impossibly again & even out of hell ascending who shall keep our circus hearts against all fear). (430)

Cummings' feelings of returning to himself are further expressed by the fact that "all the [train's] windows are open" as the train passes through unflinchingly beautiful natural scenery: poppies and a sunset while "we are all going toward night moving all toward darkness" (*Eimi*,430-431). And rising again out of night the journey continues, passing through fields of flowers, byways populated by waving individuals, fields with shepherds, heat and snow and rain, and generally a topography with its own unique and individual character, a land that is "Somebody's world" rather than an "unworld" (436). Importantly, these scenes point to the possibility of reconciling both individual transcendence and political engagement within one self, fully expressed in modernist poetics.

Then, traveling toward Paris (representative of Paradise) on the train, Cummings recalls scenes from Russia as a sort of "recapitulation" and movement towards resurrection (440-449). He contrasts the now and here of the train against the then and there of Russia (437). Further, he contrasts recollections of Odessa's ghostly garden of "un" full of "ghostlife" and "unme's" and "unwe's" and "unus's" with the actuality of the train moving through the night with "its own shadows,its own lights" and its actual individuals: I's and me's and men and women (*Eimi* 439-441).

Next Cummings moves in his "recapitulation" towards a rather systematic summation of his journey in and out of Russia.¹¹ Aside from its summative poetic function, the presence of this recapitulation reminds the reader of Krazy's immortal dictum (quoted by Cummings earlier in *Eimi*): "It's What's Behind Me That I Am" (50).

In fact, Cummings goes so far as to model this dictum in the structure of the text as the final day of his epic journey closes with him moving from a whirlwind recollection of his travels—what’s quite literary behind him—into the text’s most complete declaration of selfhood (443-452). Additionally, the breaking of chronological order within this recapitulation points toward a state of timelessness, or, perhaps more accurately, out-of-time-ness (“untime[ness]”), that evokes the surreal anti-time of *Krazy Kat*, where characters interact and move without any notion of aging or an overarching progressive chronology. This achronology embodies for Cummings his long awaited escape from the slow drumming of time ticking away in the “unworld” of the USSR. Free at long last from the unworld of the USSR, he can now look back from a point of individual and artistic transcendence on all that has transpired during his journey. In this spirit, his telling moves from being on the train through Turkey and Syria, to a time before leaving the hotel in Odessa, back to being on the train, and, once again, back over an achronological summary of his experiences in Russia.

Overall within these final train scenes, as Cummings physically approaches Paris (his representation of Paradise) he begins to embody the very ideals he symbolically associates with *Krazy* in his 1946 Foreword. Cummings parallels *Krazy*’s transcendence unto “unmitigated joy” with “Strutcringing inexistence!through you I greet all cruelly enslaving deities of perfection. And I tell them of a totally adventuring Is Who breathes,not hope and not despair,but timeless deep unspace” (*Eimi* 437). He matches *Krazy*’s illimitable/unconquerable love with “Cordially myself,a lover who completely feels—savagely a maker and to whom his deaths are births—joyously one citizen of the miraculous Verb,challenges [...]equally every purveyor of impotence and likeness to

mankind” (438). And Cummings as maker declares “his deaths are births” just as Krazy feels renewal of herself every time Ignatz’s brick smacks her in the head.

In Cummings’ final declaration of self, “Eimi ,” I am, to close the book, he demonstrates within his poetic structuring a Krazy-esque translation of a “mangling and murdering world into Peace and Good Will”:

seems
to be
shutun)through which
peering or (shut)myself
(ness)partially which through I

am that unfeeling eachotherishly multitude of impotent timidities of numerable
items of guilty particles which
are not dead are not alive are
in time in space are in
denying trying fearing of(which
itfully And haltingly How possibly undreaming are that not shining called
real picture monotonously moveunmoving
of seem)unseems to be
through not which(or
myselfless)beautifully into
everywhere and
always (451)

Corresponding to Krazy as a “fundamentally complex [character] who demands the whole mystery of life,” Cummings writes:

leaning I am this hurling inexhaustibly from june huge rushing
upon august until whirlingly with
harvest huger happens bloodily prodigious October
(golden supremely hugest daemon glittering with abundance
with fulfilment gleaming creature magnificent complete brutal intense
miraculously and)
finally
(and what
stars)descendingly assuming
only shutting gradually this
perfection(and I am)becoming (451-452)

And, here at the end of *Eimi* in answer to Krazy as the “only original and authentic revolutionary protagonist,” Cummings gives us himself, recording the move of the individual “I am” from silence to voice to final revolutionary openness:

perfection(and I am)becoming
silently
 made
 of
 silent.
 &

silence is made of
 (behind perfectly or
 final rising
 humbly
 more dark
 most luminous proudly
 whereless fragrant whenlessly erect
 a sudden the!entirely blossoming)

Voice
 (Who:
 Loves;
 Creates,
 Imagines)
OPENS (452)

Within the context of *Eimi*, this final “OPENS” speaks in one word as simply and clearly as possible the revolutionary potential of a single modernist poet leveraging their voice against the dehumanizing reality of the USSR, a hellish space embodying a confluence of societal repression, individual violence, and bastardized ideals. Because the USSR is the land of shut, a land of “un-,” a land Cummings begins his journey into with the word “SHUT” (the first word of the *Eimi*), this final OPENS—more specifically “Voice...OPENS”—speaks to the durability of a Krazy-esque “original and authentic revolutionary protagonist” despite all the negating forces of the unworld and its totalitarian politics.

5. Conclusion

In the present study, I hope to have provided a glimpse into what occurred when the modernist poetics of E.E. Cummings came into direct contact with the politics of Soviet Russia. To this end I have set *Eimi* in conversation with several other texts from the 1920s and 30s. Yet, there remains a great deal left to say. *Eimi* is a generous work, spiraling ever outward in both its associative scope and implications regarding the convergence of artistic and political ideals and realities. Specifically, *Eimi* offers great insight into the adaptation of modernist poetics in the context of the political realities of the 1930s. Generally, *Eimi* indicates the complex and troubled nature of the individual artist's relationship to politics in any age, and gestures towards the necessity of artists to engage consciously in political discourse, while striving continuously to maintain the integrity of their artistic identity as primary.

Thus, though there remains much more to be said for *Eimi*, as for the current study, this much is clear: in the unworld of the USSR, Cummings, Comrade Kemminkz, Peesahtel (writer), Hoodozhnik (painter) becomes finally, not a dadaist or communist bed-fellow of Aragon, nor a Poundian incarnation, but Krazy's poet through and through. Like Krazy he stumbles through every brick that strikes him, both distortions of the individual and society, to reaffirm in some of the most daring of modernist poetics, "I am." So Cummings' account of his travels in Soviet Russia—his record of what he saw, and heard, and smelled, and experienced—finds itself most fully and simply in Krazy's mysterious dictum, "It's What's Behind Me That I Am." Or, as Cummings abbreviates it in the title, *Eimi*.

End Notes

1. The verb “composed” here deserves some explication. While *Eimi* was based on the diary Cummings kept during his travels through the USSR, Cummings undoubtedly put in a great deal of work expanding and revising the initial text after his return. In the past, some have asserted *Eimi* amounts to nothing more than an exact transcription of Cummings’ original Russian travel diaries. Though Cummings himself seems to be guilty of originally propounding this mythology, it proves no less ludicrous for, in fact, the final published version of *Eimi* is at least 10 times longer than Cummings’ travel diaries (Kennedy *Dreams* 327). Additionally, come on! Even Cummings couldn’t, as it were, free write such exquisitely intricate and stylized experimental prose.

2. It should be noted that Cummings fully acknowledged these capitalistic failings. He simply takes issue with the idea of communism as a viable alternative. Further, for any tempted to point to *Eimi* as evidence that Cummings, later in his life, became some sort of American Capitalist lapdog, it should be mentioned that the text itself directly refutes this notion. There are numerous examples of this, but probably the most direct and simple is when Cummings bluntly tells a Muscovite shopkeeper, “no artist ever is a capitalist” (*Eimi* 233).

3. The nine parts are as follows: 1. Paris to Moscow by train 2. Time spent in Moscow 3. Train from Moscow to Kiev 4. Time spent in Kiev 5. Train from Kiev to Odessa 6. Time spent in Odessa 7. Steamer from Odessa-Istanbul 8. Time spent in Istanbul 9. Train from Istanbul to Paris.

4. As far back as his first full-length published work, *The Enormous Room* (1921), Cummings begins to unpack this obsession. In his introduction of the wholly unique individual of The Zulu, Cummings associates the essential essence of The Zulu with “A Verb; an IS” (*The Enormous Room* 231). Later, in the Foreword to his third poetry collection, the aptly named *is 5* (1926), he remarks, “Ineluctable preoccupation with The Verb [“to be” or “it is”] gives a poet one priceless advantage: whereas nonmakers must content themselves with the merely undeniable fact that two times two is four, he rejoices in a purely irresistible truth (to be found, in abbreviated costume, upon the title page of the present volume [*is 5*])” (CP 222). By the time he wrote *Eimi*, Cummings had put aside puns and simply titled his work *eimi*, Greek for “am” (“I am”) (“Sketch” xvi).

5. Indeed, Pound and Cummings shared letters regarding Cummings’ translation, and Pound seems to have held a great respect for the poem as he eventually included Cummings’ translation in his *Active Anthology* (an anthology that also included excerpts from *Eimi*) (Faber 1933) (*Pound/Cummings* 22). Additionally, despite his non-sympathetic political relationship to “Le Front Rouge,” Pound wrote of the poem to Cummings, “Aragon has written probably the best lyric poem in favour of a political movement that has appeared since Burns’s ‘A Man’s a Man for a’ That’” (*Pound/Cummings* 23). Cummings, for his part, did not actively disagree with Pound’s assessment in their correspondences.

6. *Eimi* certainly appears directly responsible for a precipitous increase in Pound and Cummings’ correspondences: in the little over a year from the October 1934 letter through the end of 1935—a period kicked off by Pound giving his fullest commendation

to *Eimi*, even urging Cummings to write a sequel—Pound and Cummings shared thirty-five written correspondences (twenty from Pound, fifteen from Cummings), on average more than a letter every two weeks, and nearly five times more than the first twelve years of their acquaintance combined (*Pound/Cummings*).

7. The existence of such brutal Soviet oppression, specifically against the rural elements of Ukraine, forms the subject of Robert Conquest's 1986 historical investigation, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine*. Conquest recounts that due to Soviet policies and practices between the years 1929-1933 (which coincides with Cummings' time in Russia and composition of *Eimi*) a full "quarter of the rural population [in Ukraine], men, women, and children, lay dead or dying." Conquest explains:

In 1929-1932 the Soviet Communist Party under Stalin's leadership...struck a double blow at the peasantry of the USSR as a whole: dekulakization and collectivization. Dekulakization meant the killing, or deportation to the Arctic with their families, of millions of peasants, in principle the better-off, in practice the most influential and the most recalcitrant to the Party's plans. Collectivization meant the effective abolition of private property in land, and the concentration of the remaining peasantry in 'collective' farms under Party control. These two measures resulted in millions of deaths...

Then in 1932-3 came what may be described as a terror-famine inflicted on the collectivized peasants of the Ukraine and largely Ukrainian Kuban...by the methods of setting for them grain quotas far above the possible, removing every

handful of food, and preventing help from outside...from reaching the starving. This action, even more destructive of life than those of 1929-1932, was accompanied by a wide-ranging attack on all Ukrainian cultural and intellectual centres and leaders...

In this period [1929-1933], of about the same length as the First World War, a struggle on the same scale took place in the Soviet countryside. Though confined to a single state, the number dying in Stalin's war against the peasants was higher than the total deaths for all countries in World War I. (4).

Thus, in light of Conquest's work to "register in the public consciousness" the deaths of millions of Ukrainian peasants, even Cummings' absolute and unflinching rejection of the USSR within the pages of *Eimi* seems abundantly lenient (5). Further, given what Conquest calls "the ability of Stalin and the Soviet authorities to conceal or confuse the facts" of these atrocities from those in the West, *Eimi*—in its outright condemnation of the Soviet State long before it was the literary or even journalistic norm, and despite all its stylistic and formal obscurity—clearly presents itself as the most truthful accounting of the reality of the Stalin's Russia amidst Western literary outlets of the 1930s. Naturally, the relative obscurity of *Eimi* makes this fact rather surprising to us today. Nonetheless, history, and the 452 pages of *Eimi* are relentless in their witness to this truth.

8. This refusal of political allegiance is attested to throughout Cummings post-*Eimi* satiric verse, notably in the *50 Poems*' (1940) poem "red-rag and pink-flag," which eviscerates the ideologies of both communism ("red-rag and pink-flag") and fascism

(“blackshirt and brown”) and Cummings’ 1956 poem “Thanksgiving (1956)” where he lambasts the United State foreign policy in regards to Hungary (*Complete Poems* 497, 711)

9. By “comicity” I mean “the quality of being like a comic” (corresponding to the adjective “comicitous”). I’m indebted to comics’ scholar Colin Beineke of the University of Missouri for this term. As I understand it, there is some debate as to what term best describes as a noun a things “being like a comic.” Being a complete novice in the field of comics’ studies, I don’t have much of a dog in this fight. However, “cominess” doesn’t hold the same ring as “comicity” to my ear. Further, as my desk in the English graduate student-offices of the University of Missouri happens to neighbor Mr. Beineke’s, I’m inclined to agree with his indubitably well-coined phraseology.

10. Here Cummings may be intentionally aligning himself with Marianne Moore’s 1933 review of *Eimi* where she refers to Cummings as a “penguin-Dante.”

11. About this “recapitulation,” Michael Webster comments:

[There are] sections in this last chapter (each beginning with "oga" or "ago" and each representing one week) comprise what Cummings called a ‘recapitulation’ (a kind of collage of scenes, memories, and phrases). The five recapitulation sections proceed from the end of the book to the beginning, from week five to week one. The three sections (weeks 5, 3, and 1) beginning with "oga" ["oga" (443-44/423-424), "ogA" (447-449/427-428) and "O/G/A" (450-451/430)] go [move]

backward in time, while the two sections (weeks 4 and 2) beginning with "ago" (444-445/424-425 and 449/428-429) go [move] forward in time. (Notes to *Eimi*)

General Note: MLA style has been used throughout, except where in opposition to the formatting standards of the University of Missouri thesis submission guidelines.

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