When Syntax Leads a Rondo with a Paintbrush: The Aesthetics of E. E. Cummings' "in Just-" Revisited

R. A. Buck

E. E. Cummings' poem, "in Just-" (CP 27), which appears in George Firmage's 1994 edition of *E. E. Cummings: Complete Poems 1904-1962*, has a complicated publishing and creative history. Its earliest version, "In just– Spring," in many ways simply a poetic schema of what was to follow, was written in the spring of 1916 while Cummings was a student at Harvard College (Kennedy, *Revisited* 27). Cummings carefully selected and organized a manuscript of assembled poems in 1919, *Tulips & Chimneys*, but was unable to publish it. Three years later, he tried again with 152 poems packaged together, the outcome of which this time was bittersweet success, for only 66 poems were selected from the group; so *Tulips and Chimneys* (no ampersand in the title, much to Cummings' dismay) became a published reality but not in the form or shape that Cummings had initially intended (Kennedy, *Revisited* 53). Not until Firmage's 1976 edition of *Tulips & Chimneys* did Cummings' readers actually see what the whole reconstructed 1922 version included and how the poems were organized (Kennedy, "Introduction" xiii).

Unfortunately for Cummings, most critical discussions of "in Just-" treat it as an isolated poem, divorced from its larger discourse context within the structure of the overall manuscript. Yet, as Milton Cohen convincingly argues, there is much evidence from Cummings' copious collection of letters, papers, and notebooks that he was a serious intellectual—"a poet of surprising intellectual rigour," as David Gunn emphasizes (89)—who spent considerable thought and energy formulating a systematic philosophy of aesthetics for his work, one that continually explored intersections and tensions between painting, music, and language. E. E. Cummings' poetry has been for many decades a mainstay of the American twentieth-century canonical tradition, yet most non-specialists are unaware that Cummings considered himself to be a serious painter as well as a poet (Cohen 13). Cummings painted his whole life, exhibited his works, hobnobbed with other painters, and studied extensively the history of art and painting, all the while recording theoretical notes and writing critical commentary that reveals a working out, a working through, of his own intellec-

tual plan. At his death, more than 1,600 of his paintings were left as part of his estate, proof of his incontestable necessity to express himself through the visual arts (Cohen 13).

During his early years (prior to 1926), Cummings was also fascinated by music and sound: he mentions this intellectual engagement and activity specifically in his correspondence in 1917 (Cohen 20), and his notebooks reveal that he was attempting in these early years to sort out the difference between music and noise (Cohen 22, 39). In 1920, Cummings exhibited a whole collection of abstract paintings titled *Sounds and Noises* (Cohen 50). While at Harvard, Cummings met S. Foster Damon, "a musician, president of the Harvard Music Society, and editor of the *Harvard Music Review*" (Kennedy, *Dreams* 78). It is clear from both Norman and Kennedy's biographies that Cummings learned and developed intellectually during his Harvard years as much from his network of friends as from his teachers. Damon's friendship would last a lifetime and proved to have considerable influence on Cummings' artistic development. He introduced Cummings to the work of different composers and taught Cummings how to play the piano and how to compose his own music, and the two had extended conversations about experimentation that was occurring in modern music at the time (Kennedy, *Dreams* 78). In her analysis of one of Cummings' poems, Cathy LeBlanc observes that the language of that poem should be read "like a score for a piano or an orchestra in which several melodies can be played at the same time" (73).

While at Harvard, Cummings had already formally written about his emerging comprehensive theoretical aesthetic views: at his graduation ceremony in June 1915, he delivered a speech titled "The New Art" which baffled but thoroughly entertained his audience, and in 1916 Cummings wrote a more elaborate version in a paper, "The Poetry of a New Era" (Kennedy, *Dreams* 94). As Wasserman states, Cummings viewed his aesthetics in terms of largesse of scope: it was "a wide-spread and inclusive phenomenon, stretching across painting, sculpture, architecture, the stage, literature, and music" (156). Cohen explains Cummings' aesthetics as one that views a sense of wholeness among the arts as central, a theory that, rather than viewing boundaries that separate the arts, seeks instead to explore their interconnectedness, their fluidities of motion (71).

So with this in mind, I would like to address two points: first, that Cummings, as Kennedy tells us, "took great pains to arrange his collections of poems in orderly patterns" (*Revisited* 75) and that the TULIPS section of

Tulips & Chimneys, especially in light of "in Just-" as one poem among many within that collection, should be studied as an interconnected group rather than as simply a collection of isolated poems; and second, that Norman Freidman's question "Why French?" in reference to the heading "Chansons Innocentes" is important to Cummings' overall aesthetics (*Revisited* 39).

"in Just-" is one of five little poems grouped together under the heading "Chansons Innocentes," the fifth of twelve titles appearing in the TULIPS section. The "Chansons Innocentes" follow "Epithalamion," "Of Nicolette," "Songs" (of which there are nine), and "Puella Mea." Following the "Chansons Innocentes" are "Orientale" (6 poems), "Amores" (11 poems), "La Guerre" (5 poems), "Impressions" (10 poems), "Portraits" (29 poems), and "Post Impressions" (11 poems). The headings reveal a particular arrangement that moves from a musical interest in the beginning to a visually artistic interest in the last three ("Impressions," "Portraits," and "Post Impressions"). The five poems within "Chansons Innocentes" echo this movement. The first in a five-poem sequence, "in Just-", is the most musical of the five; the last, "Tumbling-hair," is a *tableau*, words serving as paint on a canvas, depicting a very popular *en plein air* subject among painters, especially the Impressionists and Pre-Raphaelites: a young girl with beautifully flowing hair, picking flowers in a field or garden.

Among the twelve titles appearing in TULIPS, all are noun phrases or contain noun phrases. The grammatical category of the heading in the middle, the sixth heading, "Orientale," is ambiguous: in French, it can mean as an adjective "of the East or of the Orient"; as a noun it means "one who is of the East or of the Orient." So the grammatical category at this point slightly disrupts the established grammatical pattern (as adjective), but because of its grammatical ambiguity at the same time allows it to continue (as noun phrase), so the headings move forward. It seems no accident, given TULIPS' fascination with time, seasons, timelessness and the cyclical character of the natural world (Kennedy, *Revisited* 4), that Cummings' twelve headings here and there evoke the twelve months of the year: the fifth heading, "Chansons Innocentes," evokes the fifth month of the year, May, and contains a poem, the first one, "in Just-", which starts a rondo about spring. The sixth heading, "Orientale," is directional: of the east, we shift to face the direction in which sunrise occurs, thus recognizing the beginning cycle of a new day. But the words "here and there" should be emphasized: Cummings only here and there reminds us of his overall plan, as

if only splashing a bit of paint here and there to keep calling us back to it while he delves into new, more complicated ideas within that structure.

The twelve headings in TULIPS also evoke and characterize a range of languages: Greek, Latin, French, and English. Albert C. Labriola and others rightfully tie the heading "Chansons Innocentes" to William Blake's *Songs of Innocence*, but the fact that the heading "Chansons Innocentes" (Innocent Songs) is in French is important to Cummings' larger aesthetics, for it also places "in Just-" within a larger tradition of the French *chanson* that is purposefully evoked in the TULIPS manuscript.

Cummings begins the collection of TULIPS with a lengthy, lyric poem "Epithalamion," the title of which is a word which contains the Greek root, *epithalamos*, meaning "at the bridal chamber." Rushworth M. Kidder calls this Cummings' grand "overture" for the collection (8). An epithalamium is a wedding song, written specifically in honor of the bride and bridegroom to be performed on the day of their marriage. Cummings begins his collection, then, by taking us back to a much older classical musical and poetic tradition. The poem creates song and festive celebration, using classical imagery, for this most joyous occasion. E. E. Cummings wrote the poem in the spring of 1916, a work commissioned by his friend Scofield Thayer for Thayer's wedding ceremony with his bride, Elaine Orr (Kennedy, *Dreams* 111). Even though the event was personal to Cummings, the poem does not make specific reference to personal characteristics or details that identify his friends. Rather, the song-poem is about our wedding, all weddings, weddings that came long before us and weddings that will continue after we are buried; Cummings' interest is to celebrate in song the timelessness of this fertility ritual which sings the act of procreation at its core.

"Of Nicolette" evokes another "spring song celebrating May" (Kidder 20) and another wedding of poetry and song, for the title recalls the French medieval *roman courtois* (courtly-love narrative), *Aucassin et Nicolette*, which was written in the early thirteenth century in the form of a *chante-fable* (song-story). It was Cummings' reading of *Aucassin et Nicolette* while he was an undergraduate at Harvard that inspired him to begin reading Medieval poetry (Sawyer-Lauçanno 60). Throughout TULIPS, Cummings keeps recalling the tradition of the *troubadours* (from the south of France) and the *trouvères* (from northern France), poet-musicians who sang and performed their music and poetry in French courts during the Middle Ages. These court poets sang of many things, mostly courtly love, but they sang also of war—many about the Crusades—and of moral virtues. The

love that was praised was ideal love, perfect love, with a focus on unattainable desire. The headings "Orientale" and "La Guerre" recall for us the interests of the *troubadours* and the subjects they sang about: with an interest in the Crusades, the songs of the *troubadours* looked to the east, the Orient, because the warriors returning from battle had stories to tell of a new culture unfamiliar to those who remained at home, and so the *troubadours* recounted and recreated these stories. Even though full of allusions to classical Roman and Greek mythology, the poems in "Songs," Cummings' third heading in TULIPS, function to evoke specifically English poetic and musical—mostly Medieval and Renaissance—traditions. So we see that Cummings evokes older established traditions from Greece, Rome, France, and England to place himself and his work within these larger contexts but also to break away from them; he shows continuity with the past but also breaks past traditions. He is the modern American poet-musician who is now singing in very different ways and recounting new, timeless stories that simply continue the ceaseless motion of artistic creation. "Puella Mea" emphasizes that all the ladies idealized by poet-musicians throughout literary history across time and space are all dead while the beauty of his lady is now very much alive. The heading of the seventh title in TULIPS, "Amores," recalls Ovid's *Amores*, poems that speak of love and war (as Cummings does in several poems in "La Guerre") and also characterize the erotic attraction between the poet and his *puella*.

The little poem, "in Just-", then, one of Cummings' most popular, most loved, and most anthologized poems, is found in the almost-middle of the TULIPS section, immersed within these musical and poetic references, following already much mention of love, the seasons, and cyclic timelessness. The treatment of love recalled so far has been in conventional, formal, courtly, respectable, stylized artistic vehicles. It is important to note, though, that many of the songs of the *troubadours* and *trouvères* were openly sensual (Grout 60-61). The French *chanson*, which appeared later in France in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and blossomed in the sixteenth century, continued this secular song tradition. Important musical centers developed in Burgundy at the courts of the Dukes of Burgundy and in Paris at the courts of the Kings of France, and the *chanson* became a favored genre of the period (Machlis and Forney 108). In fact, the French *chansons* were every popular (Grout and Palisca 165). Like the *troubadours* and *trouvères* of the late thirteenth century, these poet-musicians performed courtly love poems that were set to music in a variety of fixed

forms, the structures of which became freer in the sixteenth century, allowing for more altering and rearranging of instruments (Machlis and Forney 108; Grout and Palisca 165). But the French *chanson* tradition offered something a little different that Cummings, by invoking it at this point in the manuscript, plays around with. For even though the *chansons* are cloaked in courtly respectability, the poet-musicians of the time had fun with their songs: we find a wide selection of moods among the songs, but often they are naughty, even lusty and erotic, sometimes irreverent, sometimes filled with sensuous longing, in addition to being simply (and innocently) amorous (Boyden 155).

More specifically, the French *chanson* of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was a musical setting of a French secular poem that was often written in any one of a variety of fixed poetic forms, such as a *ballade* or *virelai* or *rondeau*. The musical setting of the *rondeau*, a popular example of a *forme fixe*, involved a refrain with a repetition scheme of two distinct musical phrases (Grout and Palisca 135). A very simple early *rondeau* form might have an ABaAabAB structure, where the capital letters represent two distinct musical phrases of a textual refrain, each repeating at various points in the song with the identical corresponding text of the refrain. The lower case letters represent a repeated musical phrase but with different words (Davison and Apel 17). The later French *chanson* of the sixteenth-century broke away from the constraints of the fixed forms and attempted to create new shapes rather than just imitate traditional structures (Grout and Palisca 17).

By the time he was a student at Harvard, Cummings was already very familiar with the poetic verse forms used by French poets. In 1909, he had received a gift from his uncle, *The Rhymester: or, The Rules of Rhyme* by Tom Hood, which Cummings studied carefully: he soon started to practice its principles by creating his own little rondeaus, ballades, villanelles, triolets, and other French lyrical forms (Kennedy, *Dreams* 44). While a student at Harvard during his sophomore year, he extended this practice in a lyric poetry course with the help of the textbook, *English Verse: Specimens Illustrating Its Principles and History* by Raymond Macdonald Alden (Kennedy, *Dreams* 64).

But even though Cummings' heading, "Chansons Innocentes," recalls for us this earlier musical tradition of the French *chanson*, in typical Cummings fashion, he does not give us what we might expect: one of these verse forms in the first poem we encounter under the heading. Instead, we

get a poem, "in Just-", that strikes us as extremely musical, with repetition of elements at every turn, and with an apparent refrain that hints ever-so-slightly of a possible rondeau, but a poem that clearly is not a rondeau. The poem has more than thirteen lines, does not have a rigidly fixed ordering of only two rhymes, and even the placement of the refrain is not quite right. When we first read the poem, we are struck by its simplicity—in lexical items, in grammatical structures, in its enjoyment of spring. But a detailed structural analysis of the poem actually reveals Cummings' genius in his overall conception of the interaction between syntactic form and musical form, a complexity in texture that we feel intuitively is part of the piece but is not at first glance readily discernible.

"In just-Spring," the earliest draft of the poem (found in Kennedy, *Revisited* 27), shows the younger poet not yet fully aware of the grammatical structural and typographical ambiguities available to him that he soon afterwards would explore and implement, particularly in relation to capitalization and punctuation. The five commas and the two periods in the earliest version change everything for the poem, for they keep the poem at a superficial level without grammatical ambiguity or structural texture. In the final version, Cummings releases and frees up all capitalization except for in one word, "Just-"—in the first version, twenty-three words are capitalized. It is the eventual freeing up of all punctuation in the final version that allows him to create the amazingly rich syntactic structural ambiguities which end up producing a rich musical texture.

So rather than providing us with a fixed French medieval verse form, Cummings, as Lane suggests (28), produces a musical rondo form in structure instead. The heading, "Chansons Innocentes," evokes a far-in-the-past *chanson* tradition, but Cummings then moves us forward and brings us rather to a poem that more closely resembles a later instrumental musical development. The rondo was developed by French composers during the Classical period, beginning in the seventeenth century, and was an instrumental reflection of an interest in a refrain (repeated statements) with alternating digressive material. Wallace Berry points out a "clear analogy between the rondo . . . and that type of song which alternates between stanza and refrain" (106).

A simple classical rondo form normally has a refrain that begins the rondo and reappears two more times after contrasting passages called "episodes" (Green 150). A rondo is typically light, gay, and dance-like in character, and the refrain is melodious and tune-like (Green 130). Unlike

the older rondeau, the classical rondo form included transitional material that allowed for continuity between units so that the episodes could lead smoothly back to the recurring statement (the refrain) (Green 153). There are a number of different designs a rondo form can take, but a simple rondo scheme might have the following form: ABACAB, where A is the refrain, B are digressive episodes built of the same material that repeat, and C is further contrasting episodic material (Green 153; 159).

Gary Lane identifies a five-section ABABA musical rondo scheme based on the thematic material of "in Just-": the A section, the rondo theme, evokes spring, the world, and the balloonman, while the B episodes feature the contrasting "tumble of children" (28). This paper changes Lane's identifying line numbers (he does not account for lines 23 and 24 of the poem), changes section boundaries, and develops his ideas further.

Extending Lane's ABABA general rondo scheme, this paper proposes the following more detailed five-section musical form: ABA´B´A´´. In this notation, a letter followed by the prime symbol (´) indicates repetition with some variation. The phrases within each of the sections have the following musical form, explained below:

A	abc
B	
A´	a´b´c´
B´	
A´´	a´c´´.

In a musical sense, section A (lines 1-5, 8 end-13, and 16-24), consists of tones (lexical items) which exist in relation to musical phrases (grammatical constituents), and in relation to a melody (thematic material). The tonal center or tonic of the A sections is noticeable in the phrase "far and wee." If we understand "far and wee" as musically in the tonic key, we can explain why it feels like the place where we relax slightly each time it occurs, the place where we come home to each time the section is repeated. The way that the melody moves, proceeds, progresses, and arrives toward the tonic is called the cadence.

A (Lines 1-5)

A, the rondo theme, begins with the first musical phrase (a), "in Just- / spring," which evokes spring, another musical phrase (b) which evokes the world (as "mud- / luscious"), and a third phrase (c) about the balloonman

(he is "little" and "lame"). The last phrase (c) ends on the tonic ("far and wee") but a transitional form in line 6 ("and") quickly leads us to the contrasting episode.

B (Lines 6-8)

B, the first episode, is a contrasting idea to A because it is about running children (their names, that they are running, and what they are running from). A transitional form in line 8 ("and") takes us back to the rondo theme.

A´ (Lines 8-end to 13)

The end of line 8 begins the restatement of the rondo theme. The first musical phrase in this repeated section is (a´) rather than (a) because the phrases are not identical—some of the words have changed (i.e., "Just-" and "in" are omitted; other words are new). The next musical phrase is a (b´) because if also shows a slight variation from b ("puddle-wonderful"). The same thing happens in (c) which is now (c´); the balloonman is "queer" and "old"). At the end of c´ we arrive once again in the tonic key in the restated little, "far and wee." A transitional form ("and") in line 14 leads us to the next episode.

B´ (Lines 14-15)

The B´ episode carries the same thematic material as B, but there is a variation in the lexical forms while the grammatical forms remain the same: the names of the children are different, the children are dancing instead of running, and the games they dance from are different. A transitional form ("and") in line 15 leads us back to the rondo theme.

A´´ (Lines 16-24)

We return for the third time to the statement of the rondo theme, but the first musical phrase is now (a´) rather than (a) because the phrase is identical to the first phrase in section 2 but different from the first phrase in section 1. This section is A´´ because now there are only two rather than three musical phrases within it. The second musical phrase (b) is not restated here; its omission is replaced by a phrase extension ("and") which smoothes over the missing phrase and so facilitates (a´)'s movement to c´´ (the balloonMan who is "goat-footed"). The A´´ section (and thus the whole rondo) ends on the tonic with the little restated phrase "far and wee."

Much has been said (especially by Cohen) of Cummings' placement of words on the page and how these visual aspects create musical effects in this poem, so I will not reiterate those elements here. But we do, of course, note that the five sections above are not neatly divided by verse line but

rather run into each other and cross over line boundaries, thus creating even more interesting visual and musical effects. So Cummings exploits and develops a variety of structural levels within his poems: visual and organizational (how words appear on the page); thematic (what the words say); musical (how language is patterned thematically); and finally, syntactic (how grammatical choices are made to create musical effects).

Before moving to the large syntactic infrastructure of the overall poem, we can notice that simply at the small local lexical level, the poem shows much repetition. The poem repeats exactly the same words mostly in the (b) and (c) phrases of the A sections: in (b), out of six words, only two are different; in (c), out of 8 words, six repeat. The same number of words appear in (a) in all three A sections and are identical words in the last two A sections. I am counting elements of a compound structure separately, so B shows a slight increase of words (by 2) in the second episode; if compounds are considered one element, they show an identical number of words. In B, function words are identical, and lexical categories are exactly the same, but the words that fill in the lexical categories are different. In spite of all this repetition at the lexical level, only two grammatical constituents are identical in their lexical repetition: "it's spring" twice in the refrain and "far and wee" all three times in the tonic). In addition, it is what Cummings does visually with constituent structure that often refuses to allow repetition to be exact repetition. Grammatical constituents are divided up on the poetic line, in other words, in different places, or exist in relation to other constituents on the same line in different ways, thus creating different rhythmic effects. For example, the "balloonman" phrase in section A is a noun phrase ("the little / lame balloonman") distributed over two lines but exists in relation to the preceding musical tone from the preceding constituent structure, "luscious." In A′, the same constituent is distributed over two lines but this time in relation to the subsequent constituent, "whistles." In A′′, the noun phrase is distributed over three lines, the headword ("balloonMan") separated from its modifying determiner ("the") and adjective ("goat-footed") and is separated in distance on line 21 from the subsequent constituent.

But Cummings' little poem here is musically even more complex than this when we examine the way larger syntactic structures and rondo form interact and collide with each other. If we chart out the syntactic structure of the poem we can see that, by way of analogy, the syntax provides a counterpoint and that a textural process occurs with the thematic rondo

form (textures moving against one another) so that each texture is heard as separate and distinct yet as one thing all at the same time. Just as the musical rondo is all about stating, ending, digressing, and then stating again, the syntax is creating its own beginnings and ends, leading us in artful syntactic cadences that at some points avoid being cadences and thus pick up all over again. These textures are at times occurring at cross-rhythm with each other.

The syntactic structure of Cummings' poem is primarily developed around the simple concepts of coordination and subordination. Cummings uses the connective form, the coordinating conjunction "and," to function musically in a variety of ways. There are twelve occurrences of the word "and" in the poem. Cummings uses it to join small phrasal categories: noun phrases ("eddieandbill;" "marbles and / piracies;" "bettyandisbel" "hop-scotch and jump-rope") and an adverbial phrase ("far and wee"; "far and wee"; "far / and / wee"). As we have seen in the rondo section, "and" also functions as a transitional form to move smoothly and continuously from one clause to another, for the coordinating conjunction also connects the sentence as phrasal unit, so when one clause ends, instead of punctuating it with a period or some other terminal marker, Cummings adds an "and" to keep the coordination rule going, thereby initiating a new sentence. This happens at the beginning of line 6, in lines 8, 14, 15, and 18.

If we look at the overall design of the poem's syntactic structure, we notice right away that it is ambiguous, for there are two possible structural schemas. The first, which I will call Syntactic Structure I (SSI) is consistent with that found in Cummings' first version of the poem. In the final version, Cummings removed all punctuation, but it is still possible to grammatically conceive of a full stop at the end of line 9, for the structure is grammatically well-formed (I normalize all typography here for clarity):

> In just spring, when the world is mud-luscious, the little lame balloonman whistles far and wee, and eddie and bill come running from marbles and piracies, and it's spring.

The second part of the structure is also grammatically well-formed:

> When the world is puddle-wonderful, the queer old balloon-man whistles far and wee, and betty and isbel come dancing from hop-scotch and jump-rope, and it's spring, and the goat -footed balloonman whistles far and wee.

So SSI consists of two large syntactic structures, the first containing one subordinate clause and three independent clauses, and the second containing one subordinate clause and four independent clauses. SSI is conceptually designed as two parts with two distinct units: even though no period is visible, the syntax grammatically breaks up the poem so that a full stop is present though not represented typographically.

But since the overall structural design of the poem is ambiguous, SSI competes with another structural schema, which I will call Syntactic Structure II (SSII). Here we notice that the structural design of the poem grammatically permits that the poem also be read as one long complicated but very well-formed grammatical sentence (instead of two distinct units) that never stops grammatically until the end, for Cummings' use of "and" continuously generates new clauses:

> In just spring, when the world is mud-luscious, the little lame balloonman whistles far and wee, and eddie and bill come running from marbles and piracies, and it's spring when the world is puddle-wonderful, the queer old balloonman whistles far and wee, and betty and isbel come dancing from hop-scotch and jump-rope, and it's spring, and the goat-footed balloonman whistles far and wee.

The poem (and thus the entire sentence) in SSII has a very different overall syntactic structure, for it consists of four subordinate clauses and five independent clauses. Subordination, in other words, plays a much larger role in SSII.

So structurally, three schematic designs interact with each other: the rondo scheme that has five distinct units, SSI that has two distinct units, and SSII that is all one unit. For clarification, the appendix of this paper charts out the structural designs discussed.

Since subordinate structures are lower level dependent grammatical structures, Cummings uses the notion of subordination to propel the energy of phrases in different ways: either to build or to diminish intensity. Cummings surprises us a little by starting the rondo theme in the A section with a variant syntactic structure than the one he uses in the restatements. (The first musical phrase of a rondo typically remains identical in the restatements in a musical composition). Cummings' poem starts with a little unassuming prepositional phrase (a), but its syntactic structure here is important because it propels the energy toward the main clause coming up. The fact

that the prepositional phrase is followed by a subordinate marker ("when") (b) again propels the energy upward and forward (because a subordinate clause is not terminal) toward the main clause that finally arrives with "the little / lame balloonman" as its subject (c), and so the end of (c) therefore finally marks the end of the A section in the rondo scheme. The B episode then begins on line 6 and ends on line 8. But this is not the end of SSI. The restatement of the rondo theme (A´), "it's spring" in lines 8 and 9, has already started while SSI is just ending with its last independent clause ("it's spring'). At this point SSI ends. But while these others are ending, it is also at this point that Cummings, in SSII, diminishes but sustains the energy by changing the position of the subordinate structures.

The A´ section begins differently; unlike A, because a´ is restated now in the form of an independent clause ("it's spring" rather than "in just spring"), a´ is perceived right away as potentially terminal, but in SSII the subordinating conjunction following signals the beginning of another unit and actually functions as the musical consequent of a´. This energy now descends to a lower grammatical level, progressing forward (because seeking completion) through three subordinate clauses: (b´), (c´) and surprisingly, B gets taken along, too. So the syntactic structure here propels competing tension and progression against the structure of the musical rondo and against SSI, and the coordinating conjunction "and" at the beginning of line 14 is actually doing a pretty big job by connecting three rather thematically-busy subordinate clauses. The subordinate clauses progress, then, toward the end of B, "jump-rope", which marks the completion now of the A´ and B sections, which have merged syntactically.

Like the musical rondo scheme, B and B´ in SSII show variation with each other: syntactically, B is an independent clause while B´ is a subordinate clause, but the function of the units as contrastive with the rondo refrain is based on their position and interrelatedness to surrounding units. B is contrastive syntactically because it marks the beginning of a new unit after a terminal clause. (B´) marks the final of three conjoined subordinate clauses, thus ending the section, but more importantly it is contrastive because it is a terminal marker right before the restatement of the rondo theme (A´´), the first musical phrase of which is an independent clause.

But the intensity picks up again in A´´ because of the syntactic structures Cummings chooses. In both SSI and SSII, Cummings gets rid of subordination all together in this final section (b is not restated). Rather, (a´) begins the restatement again with the force of an independent clause, and

the coordinating conjunction this time connects the first musical phrase with another independent clause at exactly the same level of grammar (c´´) and so this sustains the intensity. Grammatically the two independent clauses, because they are coordinated, sing together side by side, their voices trailing off into the distance with "far and wee." Cummings juxtaposes two contrasting images here to do this: it is spring, the natural season of youth and rebirth, that at the end of the poem syntactically holds hands with the old, lecherous balloonMan.

Cummings actually has the most fun in this poem syntactically with the phrase "far and wee." As already noted, "far and wee" appears on the page visually in the poem three different ways. But before examining the syntactic ambiguity of the phrase, we should first consider that it is also semantically ambiguous. Even though we would never say such a phrase, nor have we ever heard it before reading Cummings' poem, the little complex form here is meaningful to us because the phrase "far and wide" is an example of a semantic collocation. In other words, the combination of the words in the phrase "far and wide" have a certain mutual expectancy. If we were to ask subjects to fill in a word after the words "far and ____," they would right away come up with "wide" because the words simply occur together. So even though Cummings replaces "wide" with the form "wee," the little phrase evokes for us anyway an adverbial sense of distance in space and time, with the idea of "widely" or "everywhere."

But the fact that Cummings replaces "wide" with "wee" opens up all kinds of fun semantic possibilities. If we want it to evoke "far and wide," in A the rondo theme resolves into a very nice cadence because an adverbial phrase at the end of an independent clause is exactly where we would expect it to be; that is one of its most typical grammatical positions (subject + verb + (object) + adverbial). In A, "far and wee" also nicely rounds off the introductory phrase (a), because the opening prepositional phrase is adverbial in function: it tells us time about the verb while "far and wide" tells us space and distance. But Cummings didn't put "wide" here, as we would expect. The form "wee" suggests other things: first, it can mean "very little," especially in child's speech. It evokes as well the pronoun "we," a nominative case personal pronoun. In a playful way, it evokes the pronoun "we" that is extended, made longer, and made more of since it has an additional "e." So Cummings uses all of the above, not just one of them.

By keeping the syntax ambiguous, Cummings allows for even more multiple structural possibilities. For in addition to a possible cadence

evoked by "far and wide," Cummings opens up the possibility that the phrase could also at the same time be split up because the coordinating conjunction within the phrase can potentially connect two clauses there instead of just two adverbs. The reason why we are able to get an ambiguous reading is because "we" is a nominative case pronoun and therefore now can serve as the first subject of the new clause (rather than eddieandbill). So "the little / lame balloonman / whistles far" is another possible cadence, "and" becomes transitional, and "wee / and eddieandbill come / running" starts a new clause (the "and" at the beginning of line 6 shifting to the job of connecting noun phrases rather than clauses). Semantically and syntactically, structurally and perceptually, these possibilities add yet another dimension to Cummings' creation, for "wee," because it means "little" and because it is extended with an extra "e" (suggesting many or more of an "e") evokes the meaning of you and me and the little voice of the poet and all of us little folk running along together with eddieandbill. Labriola rightfully observes the "authorial imprint" of the poet's name, "eddie," in the poem and argues that the form "wee" implies "the ultimate bond, the one between author and reader" (43). The spacing of "far and wee" in A also distances "and wee" from "far," suggesting a possible cadence after "far" and thus propelling new energy beginning with "and." The fact that "wee" has an extra "e" also suggests continued extension (and thus movement) toward "eddieandbill." So "wee" is simultaneously the end of one phrase and the beginning of another (See the Appendix, SSII, version II).

This syntactic splitting and dual cadence is possible in A´ as well. In SSII, the first subordinate clause in line 10 is marked by the subordinating conjunction "when," but the subsequent subordinate clauses do not repeat this optional marker. There is an implicit "when" understood at the beginning of line 11 and again at the beginning of line 14—that is, if we choose to see "far and wee" as the end of "the queer / old balloonman" clause. But, along the same principles, it is possible to see "wee" as a nominative case subject pronoun already beginning a new subordinate clause ("when wee and bettyandisbel") instead of at line 14 ("and when bettyandisbel"), so the optional "when" could potentially be implicit before "wee" in line 13. And we notice that this time, Cummings makes room for it: there is empty space now between "and" and "wee" ("far and wee") that is potentially filled up by "when." So the empty spaces here reflect that "far," "and," and "wee" may all potentially function as individual units: "far" is a terminal point; "and" is transitional; and "wee" begins a new clause.

In the last section, A´´, "far and wee" has only one grammatical possibility, as an adverbial, meaning "far and wide," and the visual layout of the phrase on lines 22-24 with one word per line nicely visually evokes elongation in time and space. It is a real cadence, as we would expect to find in a musical rondo. But even here, the fact that we end the rondo with a nominative case pronoun, "we" that is extended, leaves open the idea that we can always at least think about the beginning of a new phrase as we can the beginning of a new season.

A multi-movement classical musical composition often ended with a rondo (Machlis and Forney 188); Cummings does something different: he uses the rondo form to begin rather than end his multi-poem sequence, "Chansons Innocentes." As we have seen, the headings and titles of TULIPS up to this point show an interest in the veiled respectability of sex and love, artistic traditions that present courtly behavior in elegant, formal, and conventional ways, with the sixteenth-century French *chanson* opening up the idea of spontaneity and artfulness in the erotic. The "Chansons Innocentes," because they are children's songs, take us into a world that is less grand, wonderfully secular, and innocent—the world of children—and more precisely, the way children view their world. The seasons, the natural cycles of life, are reflected in each of the poems in the sequence: I is about spring; II recalls fall, specifically All Hallow's Eve or All Soul's Day; III is a Christmas poem; IV recalls spring once again; and V paints a picture of summer flowers in bloom. So "in Just-", because it is a rondo, begins the energy of this natural cycle of life, and thus begins the idea of movement of one poem toward another. It is not a rondo exactly like a musical rondo; it is rather Cummings' creation of a rondo where language, music, and the visual arts express themselves together in song, in one unified, but texturally stratified, voice.

Cummings' "Chansons Innocentes" are not really little songs for children as much as they are little songs that remind us of what it is to be like a child in a world where sexual energy is veiled, energy which the child feels but doesn't yet know how to analyze. As Lane suggests, the figure of "the goat-footed balloonMan" in "in Just-" evokes Pan, the lecherous "satyr-god" from classical mythology, while the image of the balloonMan "epitomizes fertility" (28). Kidder explains the balloonMan as calling the children "toward a world of complex adult interrelationships" (24). Cummings uses concrete visual images in sensual ways; they are the symbols of veiled sexuality that we experience in the imaginary world of our dreams.

The balloonman in the first two sections of the poem is a simple, innocent figure from childhood, but the man in "balloonMan" becomes capitalized in the third section. The adult, vertically upright image of the Man is phallic and erect (Landles 37), pointing upward toward the female roundedness of the balloons. These concrete images echo those found in the title of the manuscript, *Tulips & Chimneys*. "Tulips" is a linguistic pun on the concrete image of "two lips," female sexual parts of the body, while the concrete image of the chimney suggests the phallic shape and activity of the male sexual body. In terms of their concreteness, one (tulips) is a natural object, the other (chimneys) man-made (Cohen 133), reminding us of our human connection and contribution to the cycles of the natural world. We feel this connection, this movement toward sexual contribution, early on as children even though we don't recognize it or understand it.

The name of one of the children in the poem, Betty, actually recalls a little childhood friend of Cummings, and from Sawyer-Lauçanno's biography we learn that Cummings wrote this poem in reminiscence of childhood sexual play that took place between Betty and him in Norton Woods, a beautiful wooded area, full of lilac bushes, not far from the poet's house. Cummings writes of this little innocent exploration of each other's anatomy in his private notebooks many years later (Sawyer-Lauçanno 17).

Poem III in the five-poem sequence of "Chansons Innocentes," "little tree," is innocently framed within a little Christmas scene of tree-trimming with the speaker's little sister. But the voice of the speaker and the personification of the tree give way to other, much more subtle ideas the poet is developing. The tree is "so little," "like a flower," and smells "so sweetly." The voice speaking to the tree is the voice of a person talking to another smaller, littler person, one with "little arms" and fingers. The voice speaking kisses the tree's "cool bark" and hugs the tree so it will be safe; the voice speaking tells the little tree not to be afraid. This diction and imagery suggest veiled sensuality: if poem I is about the child finding him or herself in the midst of a world full of sexual vitality and movement, poem III depicts what it feels like during a young person's very first sexual experience when one is a little afraid to surrender, to give up one's body to another. The little tree has been "found" in the green [ingenuous] forest and the little tree might feel a little sorry to have been chosen because the first experience is always a little scary; the little tree is dressed in phallic and other sexual imagery ("the spangles" and "the balls" and "the fluffy threads") and the little tree is asked to "put up your little arms" as if it is quite naked

and is being "quite dressed" in sexuality by the speaker. The speaker innocently depicts the literal scene of a tree trimming, but the language of the scene depicts what actually awaits these little children, what they will have to do: they will each, at some point, have to surrender themselves sexually, become the little tree themselves, see themselves changed and transformed so that even other people will notice ("and how they'll stare!"). The poem ends with the words " 'Noel Noel' " which we think of as Christmas day, but more to the point, the etymology of the word is French, meaning "(*jour*) *de naissance*," from Latin *natalis* (*dies*), meaning "day of birth." So we find embedded within a religious frame of Christ's birth a suggestion of all our initial innocent first sexual encounters, the reference to the Christian tradition a reminder that sexual behavior is sinful and cloaked in the discourse of guilt and shame (so the little tree feels simultaneously and ambivalently "proud" but also much like being in a straight jacket, "the chains red" constraining it). This is what the children will have to look forward to: "dreaming of being taken out and allowed to shine." This use of French here nicely contrasts with the use of French in the heading, "Chansons Innocentes," which reminds us of the formality of the French *chanson* tradition rather than the naturalness, spontaneity, and artlessness of this poem.

Poem IV, "why did you go," is blatant, but veiled, eroticism. "fourpaws" in line 2 is a pun on fore play and fore (before) pause—before a pause in sexual foreplay. The poem is about sexual impotence, sexual energy briefly suspended. The poem depicts a young lover experiencing the sexual act for the first time, and lacking self-confidence (and is precisely what, in Poem I, the old, lecherous balloonMan fears). "little kittens who / are called spring" remind us of birth, fertility and reproduction and thus sexual activity of the season. The "little kittens" in the second stanza provide a concrete veiled image of the female sexual body, with "leaves" opening up, much like the image of the tulip leaves in the title of the manuscript. The speaker questions where and why the sexual energy has gone, thinking back on what it was like before the pause. The "four" in "fourpaws" reminds us that this is the fourth poem in the sequence; in the midst of all this surrounding, larger contextual fluidity of motion, this sexual energy related to the cycles of seasonal rebirth, this fourth poem takes a little pause, a little musical rest, preparing us for the stillness of Poem V.

Poem II, "hist whist," foreshadows a bit the movement of the five-poem sequence in "Chansons Innocentes" toward Poem V, "Tumbling-

hair." Poem II celebrates country folk superstitions of All Hallow's Eve or All Soul's Day, when "witches and tingling / goblins," "little ghostthings," and other spirits of the dead make their appearance. The poem is written as a child feels in the midst of these ideas, stories, and legends of old age, death, and the supernatural; much of the diction is in child language. Instead of "bettyandisbel" dancing, little creatures from another world are "scuttling," running, and hiding, creatures that are strange and fearful to a child, yet also described as childlike in character. It is the "old woman / with the wart on her nose" who contrasts sharply with youth and with the young woman with tumbling hair in Poem V. The old woman is what we fear women will become: old, ugly, unpredictable, mean, mischievous, friendly with the devil. (The balloonMan in Poem I is what we fear old men will become: queer, lecherous.) But Cummings does not let us dwell too long on this idea of old age and death; he keeps the mood light and fun. The rondo spirit of Poem I moves into the energy of dancing, dancing with "the great / green / dancing / devil." Cummings never lets us feel too sad about death. The suggestion is that we should do as children do: feel old age and death in our midst for only a brief moment, and then go back to playing. Cummings reaffirms the joy of life that is always in process, and even imagines the spirits of the dead continuing this fun, the way a child might imagine it, for, after all, it is a green, innocent devil that is depicted dancing.

So Cummings in "Chansons Innocentes" once again reminds us that sex and love lead to reproduction but that these beginnings also lead to death, which for Cummings and for the natural cycle of life, is not an end. "Tumbling-hair," which appeared in an earlier form in *Eight Harvard Poets* with the title "EPITAPH" (10), is a *tableau*, a painting of words in which the energy seems now somewhat stilled. The placement of words on the page outline the young woman's long flowing hair, falling down to "the field wonderful," the ground beneath her feet. The syntax of the poem is mostly made up of phrases, fragments; there is only one short sentence in the poem, the last one. It is terminal: "Another comes / also picking flowers" (CP 31). Cummings' painting-poem takes us to the earth, where we are ultimately buried, and where flowers will grow in the field over us. But youth and sensuality will carry on, for there will always be "Another" to come along to pick the flower of maidenhead from one "with eyes a little sorry" (Kennedy, *Revisited* 22). As Kennedy argues, the image recalls the figure of Persephone just before her abduction (*Dreams* 108). Like the

"little tree," this young girl who is about to lose her innocence is a bit sorry because, for Cummings, this loss of sexual innocence always means losing a part of ourselves that will never be regained. But only a little part, and only a little sorry; Cummings' poems do not sit for long or dwell on the notion of loss: the "Chansons Innocentes" rather simply celebrate this inevitable cycle of life.

The five poems, then, in "Chansons Innocentes," form a larger structural unit that show artistic progression in musical, thematic, aesthetic, poetic, and visual ways. The poems take us back to how it felt to be sexually innocent, but the fascination of the five-poem sequence is with that time in our lives when we are just on the brink of losing our virginity. This paper has been an attempt to develop Kennedy's idea that Cummings' poems "comment on each other, and the accumulative experience teaches us how to read them . . ." ("Introduction," xviii).

—Eastern Illinois University
rabuck@eiu.edu

Works Cited

Berry, Wallace. *Form in Music*. 2nd ed. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1986.

Boyden, David D. *An Introduction to Music*. London: Faber and Faber, 1975.

Cohen, Milton. *PoetandPainter: The Aesthetics of E. E. Cummings's Early Work*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1987.

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

—. *Tulips & Chimneys*. Introduction by Richard S. Kennedy. New York: Liveright, 1996.

Cummings, E. Estlin, S. Foster Damon, J. R. Dos Passos, Robert Hillyer, R. S. Mitchell, William A. Norris, Dudley Poore, and Cuthbert Wright. *Eight Harvard Poets*. New York: Laurence J. Gomme, 1917.

Davison, Archibald T. and Willi Apel. *Historical Anthology of Music: Oriental, Medieval and Renaissance*. Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1972.

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

Green, Douglass M. *Form in Tonal Music: An Introduction to Analysis*.

New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965.

Grout, Donald Jay and Claude V. Palisca. *A History of Western Music*. 6th ed. New York: Norton, 2001.

Gunn, David. " 'The actual crisp organic squirm—the IS': Cummings and the Rigours of Feeling." *Spring* 11 (2002): 89-106.

Kennedy, Richard S. *Dreams in the Mirror: A Biography of E. E. Cummings.* 2nd ed. New York: Liveright, 1994.

—. *E. E. Cummings Revisited*. New York: Twayne, 1994.

—. "Introduction." *Tulips & Chimneys.* New York: Liveright, 1996. xiii-xviii.

Kidder, Rushworth M. *E. E. Cummings: An Introduction to the Poetry*. New York: Columbia UP, 1979.

Labriola, Albert C. "Reader Response Criticism and the Poetry of E. E. Cummings: 'Buffalo Bill 's defunct' and 'in Just-' ". *Spring* 31 (1992): 38-44).

Landles, Iain. "An Analysis of Two Poems by E. E. Cummings." *Spring: Journal of the E. E. Cummings Society* 10 (2001): 31-43.

Lane, Gary. *I Am: A Study of E. E. Cummings' Poems*. Lawrence; UP of Kansas, 1976.

LeBlanc, Cathy. "Cummings Rhymes with Playing: Linguistics and Literature, a Syntactic Inquiry." *Spring* 12 (2003): 72-81.

Machlis, Joseph and Kristine Forney. *The Enjoyment of Music*. 9th ed. New York: Norton, 2003.

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

Wasserman, Sarah. "E. E. Cummings and 'The New Art.' " *Spring* 16 (2007): 156-162.

Appendix

I. Rondo Scheme

A
a In just spring
b when the world is mud-luscious
c the little lame balloonman whistles far and wee
and
B
eddieandbill come running from marbles and piracies
and
A´
a´ it's spring
b´ when the world is puddle-wonderful
c´ the queer old balloonman whistles far and wee
and
B´
bettyandisbel come dancing from hop-scotch and jump-rope
and
A´´
a´ it's spring
and
c´´ the goat-footed balloonMan whistles far and wee

II. Syntactic Structure I interacting with Rondo Scheme

A
a In just spring
b when the world is mud-luscious
c the little lame balloonman whistles far and wee
and
B
eddieandbill come running from marbles and piracies
and
A´
a´ it's spring
----

b´ When the world is puddle-wonderful
c´ the queer old balloonman whistles far and wee
and
B´
bettyandisbel come dancing from hop-scotch and jump-rope
and
A´´
a´ it's spring
and
c´´ the goat-footed balloonMan whistles far and wee

III. Syntactic Structure II interacting with Rondo Scheme (version I)

A
a In just spring
b when the world is mud-luscious
c the little lame balloonman whistles far and wee
and
B
eddieandbill come running from marbles and piracies
and
A´
a´ it's spring
b´ when the world is puddle-wonderful
c´ [when] the queer old balloonman whistles far and wee
and
B´ [when] bettyandisbel come dancing from hop-scotch and jump-rope
and
A´´
a´ it's spring
and
c´´ the goat-footed balloonMan whistles far and wee

IV. Syntactic Structure II (version II in regular) interacting with Rondo Scheme

A

a In just spring

b when the world is mud-luscious

c the little lame balloonman whistles far and wee

and

c the little lame balloonman whistles far

and

B eddieandbill come running from marbles and piracies

B wee and eddieandbill come running from marbles and piracies

and

A´

a´ it's spring

b´ when the world is puddle-wonderful

c´ [when] the queer old balloonman whistles far and wee

and

B´ [when] bettyandisbel come dancing from hop-scotch and jump-rope

c´ [when] the queer old balloonman whistles far

and

B´ [when] wee and bettyandisbel come dancing from hop-scotch and jump -rope

and

A´´

a´ it's spring

and

c´´ the goat-footed balloonMan whistles far and wee

V. Syntactic Structure II (version II in regular) interacting with Rondo Scheme and SSI (SSI differences foregrounded in italics)

A

a In just spring

b when the world is mud-luscious

c the little lame balloonman whistles far and wee

and

c the little lame balloonman whistles far

and

B eddieandbill come running from marbles and piracies

B wee and eddieandbill come running from marbles and piracies

and

A´

a´ *it's spring*

b´ When the world is puddle-wonderful **a´it's spring**

c´ the queer old balloonman whistles far and wee **b´when the world is puddle-wonderful**

and **c´[when] the queer old balloonman whistles far and wee**

B´ bettyandisbel come dancing from hop-scotch and jump-rope **and**

B´ [when] bettyandisbel come dancing from hop-scotch and jump-rope

c´ [when] the queer old balloonman whistles far

and

B´ [when] wee and bettyandisbel come dancing from hop-scotch and jump -rope

and

A´´

a´ it's spring

and

c´´ the goat-footed balloonMan whistles far and wee