PREFACE

Twentieth-century semiotics has had a number of different kinds of influence on literary studies. The function of literary semiotics is to unfold various structures of signification of the literary artefacts. Every literary text, whatever its genre may be, is considered as a sign-complex which exhibits a harmonious confluence of lingua-aesthetic signs. Recent developments in semiotic theory underscore the fact that language is not merely the incidental medium of literature; it is also the most significant component of the conceptual foundation of the literary discourse. The starting-point for the semiotic investigation lies in the fundamental claim that a literary text is grounded in and through language. In contrast to the romantic prejudice that literary artefacts are resistant to theorising, the semiotic methodology is based on the underlying assumption that the literary text as a semiotic object is amenable to systematic explanation. The main goal of contemporary semiotics is to take critical theory beyond the narrow confines of formalism, an inadequate approach based solely upon the text, and to move it toward a much broader phenomenological approach, a more holistic perspective based upon the dynamic interaction between text and the human interlocutor. It is claimed, and indeed widely accepted,
that the semiotic theory purports to offer approaches to literature that are both methodologically more rigorous and socially more relevant than those of conventional critical modes.

In the process of offering an explicit, consistent, and hermeneutically useful methodology to investigate the ways and means of literary signification, the current theoretical postulation in semiotics suggests that the aesthetics of reading is a crucial part of the literary enterprise. In this new paradigm, which has a distinct focus on reader epistemology, the text is recognized as a multi-levelled, multi-layered entity with fuzzy edges and without a fixed centre of meaning. In other words, the semiotician endeavours to avoid reductionism in the study of literature and the practice of criticism, by positioning the text in the real world of discourse which is determined by and dependent upon various pragmatic factors. Thus the significance of modern literary semiotics lies in its four fundamental criteria: discoursal perspective, theoretical comprehensiveness, analytical rigour, and practical applicability.

Here we intend to analyse, interpret, and evaluate the poetic texts of e. e. cummings by adopting the semiolinguistic approach to poetic
discourse - the approach which aims at describing the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic structures of poetic signification as explicitly as possible.