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 that precision which creates movement.

e.e. cummings (in his foreword to is 5)
VISUAL & SONIC DESIGNS

Understanding of the formal design of a literary work-of-art is the initial requirement for any semiotic exploration. This understanding is required to be based on the careful scrutiny of all the perceptible and palpable structures operating at the micro-inscriptional level of the text, where one can encounter various artistic devices and techniques, employed by the author, for making the text aesthetically significant. The literary text, by virtue of its iconic character, is less conventionalized and thus shows a highly complex and hierarchized system of relations between signs within itself. The nature of the originality of a given literary work can be discovered to a considerable extent by identifying various structures at the formal inscriptive domain.

During his lifetime, Cummings, both as a poet and as a painter, has caused a plethora of controversy; his multifaceted genius has baffled and enthralled readers, spectators and critics ever since. Meanwhile several volumes of critical writing on Cummings have appeared with their characteristic leanings and antipathies but most of the estimates of him tend to be exaggerated, one way or the other. Cummings is one of the most innovative poets of his time. His poetry is noted for its
skillfully crafted *deviant structures*. What follows is an exposition of various stylistic devices in Cummings’ poetry, which would offer cues to explain Cummings’ poetic oeuvre. We shall begin with a detailed analysis of a short poem by Cummings which will give enough hints about his innovative way of handling the language material through the graphic mode.

The following poem (No.1, *95 Poems*) can be cited as a striking example of concrete poetry. It is remarkable for its fastidious subtlety of form and is a unique testimony to Cummings’ technical skill and unorthodox poetic style.

```
(a
le
af
fa
ll
s)
one
l
iness
```

This poem, though short in its texture and seemingly simple, acquires its potency and eloquence through a complex interplay of
linguistic deviations, graphemic manipulation and spatial organization.

Like the introductory pieces in *50 Poems* (1940) and *1 X 1* (1944), it also evokes an autumnal image. By a mere surface scanning, all that the poem reveals is that 'a leaf falls : loneliness' - but a close scrutiny of the salient design of its texture will reveal much more about its aesthetic import. It must be noted that the poem asks for several readings. In the initial or 'heuristic' reading, the reader, decoding the linguistic signs in a denotative manner, finds that the poem contains only four words spreading over nine lines. The use of parentheses results in the blocking (by *hyperbaton*) of the word 'loneliness' after the initial consonantal segment and the insertion (by *tmesis*) of the sentence 'a leaf falls' into it.

On further reflection, one realizes that Cummings uses brackets to split his poetic representations into two distinct parts - concrete vs. abstract, physical vs. psychic, perceptual vs. cognitive etc. - which run simultaneously throughout the poem. Here the poet meticulously employs various permutative operations, making the best use of his linguistic props, to create an exquisite visual effect. The typographical design of the sentence within the brackets displays a significant visual pattern: the first line begins with one grapheme, the next four lines carry two graphemes each and the last line again carries only one grapheme - (*a/le/af/fa/ll/s*). The overall pattern vividly portrays the downward
drifting of a leaf from a tree - fluttering, turning sides, moving slowly earthward and finally dropping straight on the ground.

The inscription outside the parentheses is an abstract noun (loneliness). Its graphomorphological arrangement, spreading over four lines, produces textual anomalies and suggests a graphomorphological pun:

```
  1
  one
  1
  iness
```

As the English alphabetical grapheme <l> is similar to the English numerical grapheme for 'one' and as the English alphabetical grapheme <i> is an equivalent of Latin numeral 'one', some critics could read the word 'loneliness' as 'oneoneoneiness' or 'oneoneoneoneness'. This sort of hermeneutic reading, of course, ingeniously explores the semantic gamut of the word 'loneliness'. According to R.M.Kidder (1979:200), even the number '1' which precedes the poem deserves special attention. He further observes that 'the overall shape of the poem is that of a tall figure 1 resting on a flat base'.

In spite of its shortness, the poem carries considerable repetitive devices at various levels. The sound [l] occurs four times; [f], [n], [s], and [l] twice each. The alphabetical grapheme <l> occurs five times; <a>,

56
<s> and <e> three times each; and <f> and <n> twice each. These repetitions aptly contribute to the auditory and visual effects of the poem. Having considered the space-bars interpolated between lines, one finds a systematic order at the strophic level - 1:3:1:3:1 relation in the distribution of lines. Another important feature of this poetic composition is that the expression inside the parentheses (a leaf falls: ðli:f f o:lz) and the one outside (loneliness: lɔ:nlinis) have some structural similarities: (i) each one has three syllables (ii) each is a combination of ten letters and (iii) each one ends with an alveolar sibilant.

Through a pragmasemantic interpretation, a conclusion can be drawn that the poem is more than a mere imagist output. It conveys a host of specific but interrelated meanings. Cummings' central concern here is to imply an analogy between an external phenomenon and an inner feeling. The way the word 'loneliness' is spaced in the poem, it seems to contain the concepts - oneness, oneliness and iness - which curiously constitute the typical Cummingsian cognitive universe. 'Loneliness', evoked through an autumnal metaphor (falling of a single leaf), may mean both physical and spiritual estrangement. The semantics of the verb 'to fall' implies the lack of volition on the part of its agent or subject. Hence the use of the verb 'fall' evokes at one level the image of human fate and at another level the mythological 'fall of Adam'. By the
rigorous process of 'retroactive reading', the reader may be persuaded to stand at the threshold of the mystic realization concerning the 'indwelling-self' the sublime celestial self and may tend to proclaim that there is only one Self, everything else is a grand illusion.

The analysis of this short poem reveals one of the most radically experimented devices of Cummings' poetry - the spatial distortion of typographical elements. Cummings is best known for his experimentation with typography, punctuation, unconventional use of parentheses, capital and lower case letters, the separation of the parts of a word or words (tmesis) or the interlacing of several words. His selections of these devices are carefully planned out rather than merely idiosyncratic or frivolous as some critics have supposed. The function of these typographical devices is essentially figurative and is suggestive of the fact that Cummings, the poet and Cummings, the painter always work in collaboration to give clarity and precision to the creative output on several aesthetic grounds.

**Typographical Technique:**

Most of Cummings' poetry attests to his continual revolt against the conservatism, that is the conformist tendency, in poetic expression. His devices and techniques quite often transcend the limits of the
language material to explore and communicate new areas of experience. The liberties he has taken with the linguistic resources have been of immense variety. His novel experiments with the visual patterning in poetry call for serious attention because through these visual devices, the poet seeks vividness, immediacy, directness, precision, simultaneity and subtlety. These are the traits he has cherished all through his poetic career and they aptly determine the mechanics of his style of verse composition.

Cummings' frequent use of typographic displacement is to some extent comparable with the visual devices used by George Herbert and Guillaume Apollinaire in accordance with the pictorial function theory. In Cummings' verse, what one encounters, are primarily 'visual equivalents that are analogous rather than equal to things, actions, feelings or ideas', presented by the poet. It has often been mentioned that Cummings, sometimes, attempts to do in verse what cubist painters do on canvas; that is, take the elements of an experience, fragment them (creating what Picasso calls "destructions") and then rearrange them in a meaningful new synthesis. In this sense, he is compared with the writers like Gertrude Stein, Kenneth Rexroth and John Ashbery who have been classified as cubists. The proponents of concrete poetry (or pattern poems) talk of Cummings as one of its celebrated practitioners, pointing
at his artistic exploitation of the graphic, visual aspects of writing; a specialized application of what Aristotle has called 'opsis' (spectacle) and Pound 'phanopoeia'. But it can be observed in case of many poems that Cummings' visual devices are not always primarily visual in function, but rather figurative in their aesthetic implications.

Take, for example, the famous poem Grasshopper (No. 13, No Thanks) which is an intriguing experiment in spatial distortion of typographical units. The poem figuratively suggests the idea that the grasshopper gathers itself for a hop, suddenly leaps into the air, changes its shape into unrecognizable dimensions in the process and comes down again.

r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r
who
a)s w(e loo)k
upnowgath
PPEGORHRASS eringint(o-)
aThe):l
eA
!p:
S
(r
r1vlnG .gRrEaPsPhOs) to
rea(be)rran(com)gi(e)ngly
.grasshopper,
The 'grasshopper' is represented in the poem by three different 'cryptogrammic rearrangements' of the letters in the word 'grasshopper': first r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r, then PPEGORHRASS, then as it lands gRtEaPsPhOs and finally grasshopper again. After a couple of readings, as one tries to decode the distribution of parentheses and punctuation marks, the use of capital and lower case letters, the joining, splitting and spacing of words, one recreates in the mind the very effect of a grasshopper hopping. The poem then seems to be fairly straightforward and it reads:

```
grasshopper who as we look up, now gathering into (a the) itself, leaps, arriving to become rearrangingly grasshopper.
```

However the primary intent of the poem is not merely visual, rather metaphoric and aesthetic. The hopping of the grasshopper symbolizes the trials and tribulations of human life in which the individual self most often oscillates between stability and instability.

Due to the spatial distortion of typographical units, the reader may find some of the Cummings' poems unpronounceable. Being apparently obscure, the lines on the page do not directly correspond to any phonological reality as in vers libre. For their decipherment, one
needs the sort of skill which is used in solving cross-word puzzles or anagrams. By these devices, the poet intends not only to regulate and monitor the speed with which the reader comprehends the words and sentences in a poem, but also to 'withhold the climax', to create suspense and to produce maximum aesthetic impact. Cummings manipulates 'spacing' and 'lettering' as excellent visual props to indicate where pauses and emphases should be given in the reading of a poem. Sometimes visual devices are effectively used to reinforce or amplify the rhythmical structure of the poems. Here each of these devices will be taken up in turn to show its range of poetic functions.

Use of Capital and Lower-case Letters:

In his poems, Cummings scarcely starts every line with a capital, nor does he start every proper noun or sentence with a capital. He treats the capital and lower-case letters as iconic signs, which serve as important ingredients of the total message in a poem. Even his habitual rendering of his own name in lower-case letters represents a visual attempt at 'effacement of an intrusive ego'. With his usual penchant for deviant uses, Cummings deliberately drops the capitals where they are normally expected and uses lower-case letters to produce special effects; on the other hand, he capitalizes words or even parts of words, where
one does not normally expect them, to achieve figurative effects. Some critics may opine that these visual devices are mere 'external gimmicks' with no poetic relevance; but one can also argue that the visual dimension of modern poetry has serious implications when Cummings' poetic genius is at work. Friedman points out that 'in "tWeny, fǐngers", for example, which describes the appearance of the two pairs of hands of two old ladies sitting in the sunlight, the unconventional capitalizing provides a visual equivalent of the actual physical look of their gnarled fingers moving restlessly on their laps. But it is not pictorial imitation: the outlines of the letters on the page in no way literally resemble the twenty gnarled fingers'. The treatment of lower-case and capital letters in Cummings poetry has two important objectives: (a) it helps to produce or delay pauses and emphases and (b) it figuratively provides the visual equivalents of the thing or the idea spoken of. In the following poem (No.42, 73 Poems), the poet creates a mysterious aura, by using the capital and lower-case letters and joining and splitting the words in an unusual way:

n
OthI
n
g can
s
urPas
s

63
The poem carries only one sentence which reads: 'nothing can surpass the mystery of stillness'.

Puzzling Punctuation:

Cummings' unconventional uses of punctuation marks continue to amuse, delight and provoke the readers. A poem or a line may begin with a punctuation mark and another may end with no punctuation at all. The first poem in his volume, *50 Poems* begins with a punctuation mark '!'.
Commenting on the initial '!', Cummings suggests that 'it might be called an emphatic (= very)'.

For the purpose of paraphrasing, when the reader rearranges various elements in the poem, it reads: 'black against white sky; trees from which a dropped leaf goes whirling'. By brilliant typographical manipulations, the poem has been stretched vertically down the page to stress the image of the falling of a leaf; but beyond this, the visual design does not suggest any exceptional meaning.

At times, the poet uses punctuation marks between the words of a single phrase or clause, and even between the letters of a single word. For example, the poem (No.48, 73 Poems) begins with a word, in which each letter is separated from the other by a 'graduated series of punctuation marks' -t,h;r:u;s,h:e:s. By a careful reading, the reader can easily perceive the balanced pattern in which punctuation marks are always arranged in Cummings' poetry. For the poet, the punctuation
may serve a number of purposes. As Friedman (1960:114) points out, through the devices of punctuation, Cummings tries 'to control the lightness and rapidity, the heaviness and slowness, of the reading; or even, in a figurative way, to give a visual sense of progression and development as an equivalent of meaning'.

The use of interrogative marks in the penultimate poem of the volume, *No Thanks*, figuratively suggests the appearance of a mysterious star and its unusual brightness. The poem 'bright' (No.70, *No Thanks*) exemplifies Cummings' command over inventive imagery and unusual skill in verbal play. It is a sort of gnomic monologue in which the encounter with the Divine is gradually evoked. Cummings is not a religious poet in a strict theological sense but he is conscious of and interested in the enigma of God's presence in the familiar features of the natural world.

```
bright

bRight s?? big
(soft)

Soft near calm
(Bright)
calm s?? holy

(soft bright deep)
yeS near sta? calm star big yeS
alone
(wHo
```
This poem carries only eleven words but no verb. Each word has been repeated as many times as there are letters in the word - so that the six-letter word 'bright' has been repeated six times; 'alone' five times; 'star', 'soft', 'near', 'calm', 'holy' and 'deep' four times; 'yes', 'big' and 'who' three times. The lexical repetitions contribute fairly to the general symphony of the phonological schemes of the poem. As the words repeat, Cummings organizes the progression of capital letters. Another remarkable aspect of this composition is that Cummings has gradually increased the number of lines in succeeding strophes - so that the first strophe has only one line where as the fifth strophe has five lines. By inserting the interrogative marks in case of two words (star & bright), the poet suggests the gradual appearance of the mysterious star and the gradual fading effect of its unusual brightness. As one gropes along the lines and ponders over the numinous qualities of the star, one realises that the poem figuratively refers to the 'Star of Bethlehem'. The words like 'bright', 'holy', and 'calm' indicate an allusion to the Christmas hymn 'Silent night, holy night, / All is calm, all is bright'.

67
When Cummings employs punctuation between words, he often omits the space that conventionally follows the mark before the next word begins. The poet frequently takes recourse to this device in order to speed up the pause, as in "iS Slapped:with;liGhtninG" (xxxviii, ViVa). In another context, the words may be combined together by the use of different punctuation marks to serve a special stylistic function: "a,strut:do;colours;are:m,ove" (No.60, No Thanks). Here the punctuation marks are used in a balanced manner "-, ; ; ;" - in order to slow down the reading as well as to stress the intended aesthetic dimension.

In the following poem (No,45,Xaipe) the poet expects the reader to respond to the punctuation marks not visually but orally and aurally; these marks are meant to be pronounced as full words to maintain the metre and rhyme scheme of the poem:

when your honest redskin toma hawked and scalped his victim ,

not to save a world for stalin was he aiming ;

spare the child and spoil the rod quoth the palmist .
Parenthetical Devices:

Cummings is well known for his use of parenthetical brackets to split or combine expressions for various purposes. For him, parentheses become powerful expressive devices which are generally used for lowering of the voice for an interpolated comment, as in the following two examples:

(i) love is a place
& through this place of
love move
(with brightness of peace)
all places

(No.58, *No Thanks*)

(ii) with a you and a me
and an every (who's any who's some) one who's we

(No.95, *95 Poems*)

Another common use of parenthetical brackets is meant to combine or separate words or parts of words for producing various artistic effects:

(im) c-a-t (mo)
b;i;le
FallleA
pslfl
OattumblI
sh?dr
IftwhirlF
(ul) (lY)
&&&
This poem is an ingeniously carved out portrait of a barn cat. Many readers of this poem have found it difficult to understand; one such reader is surprisingly William Carlos Williams. Here the poet is looking at an immobile cat. Suddenly, for no apparent reason, the animal executes a series of acrobatic antics - "fall-leaps, float-tumblish, drift-whirlfully" - and then wanders away, looking exactly as if nothing had ever happened; whereas for the poet, in his own words, 'the whole universe has turned upside-down in a few moments'. This poem, as some critics may assume, is not an exercise in gratuitous typographical tricks, but one of Cummings' most felicitous experiments, it effectively captures both the agile, playful antics so typical of cats and the unpredictable quality of the natural world.

Sometimes, the parentheses are also used to keep parallel two sentences or two different expressions, one inside and the other outside the brackets which run simultaneously throughout the poem. The famous 'ant eater' poem (No.20, No Thanks) illustrates this case.
Everything within parentheses describes ants: perpetual adventuring particles of sinister dexterity, omnivorous always bringing seeking loosening motilities, are always inging, while the words outside the brackets address the ant-eater: go to the ant, thou ant-eater. After unraveling the linguistic intricacies of the poem, the reader realizes that here the poet, in a parody of the proverb - "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways and be wise" - expresses his deep-seated disdain for the 'convention of approving compulsive diligence as an end in itself'. Due to the allusive nature of the poem and its surface-level oddities, the reader may find this poem initially obscure but through a careful analysis of all the details in the poem, one can grasp its aesthetic essence. It is this allusive quality, extremely elliptical, that makes Cummings' poems unintelligible sometimes. Many of his poems, in their matter and manner, refer to other poems, popular songs, slogans, proverbs, paintings, people, advertisements or topical events and hence most often the reader needs to reconstruct the poetic message by placing the text in its proper extra-textual context.

Graphological Schemes:

Cummings' great forte is the manipulation of the graphic mode in an original way to concretize the poetic experience on the printed page.
as vividly as possible. He has an avid interest in the iconic aspects of linguistic signs. His well-wrought ideograms and inscriptions always arrest the eyes of the reader. His poetic inscription is the transcription of the world and this transcription is not reduplication but reenactment and in consequence a soothing metamorphosis.

Cummings' visual designs are not confined only to the sentence, line, clause, and phrase. He is equally conscious of the significance of letters, syllables within a word, the lineation and spacing of the linguistic elements on a page. What he does with the larger linguistic constituents he does the same with the word. By his technique of 'the telescopic build-up', he manipulates different parts of a single word, to give a figurative equivalent for an action as in "ccocoucgcoughcoughi/ng" (No.2, 50 Poems). The 'star' poem, discussed earlier, also makes use of the similar technique.

The two principal devices which Cummings' uses quite often in his poems are: (i) calligram - or picture writing and (ii) cryptogram - or word-scramble. He carries these devices to extremes in his 1931 volume ViVa. The use of these devices has been discussed by critics more than once, hence we do not propose to resume the discussion here. However, it should be noted that when Cummings' combines calligram
with cryptogram, as he sometimes does in *ViVa*, the uninitiated reader finds them difficult to decipher. Words are also joined by interlacing their syllables into one word, as in "alingwaysing" for "always inging", in the ant-eater poem or into a complex mixed sequence of syllables, as in "con ter fusion ror" for "confusion terror". By this method, no new blends or portmanteau words are constructed; only the syllables of one or more words are rearranged and combined to get the effect of simultaneity and/or emphasis. The employment of these devices compels the reader to put in some extra-effort to disentangle and reconstruct the jumbled linguistic elements.

In Cummings' verse, words are combined, split or combined and split, with varying consequences. Consider the poem (No.1, *95 Poems*) - discussed earlier - in which the four words, "a", "leaf", "falls" and "loneliness" have been split to convey a host of meanings, covering both physical and mental spheres. Sometimes he even splits letters in single words by using punctuation marks for suggesting objects or ideas, for supporting meanings figuratively, or for distributing emphases; as in the following examples:

(i)  e; n, d

(ii) n, o ; w:
Another interesting unconventional technique, though used rarely by Cummings, is the elision of graphemes in a key expression. Consider these lines from a poem (No.28, *No Thanks*) satirizing the lapses and lacunae in the world of 'the famous fatheads':

```
what's right about the g. o. world
what's wrong with (between me and we)
the g- -d -ld w. isn't that it
can't exist (and is that the
  g.o.w. is full of) delete
```

This kind of graphemic omission does not cause any problem to the reader. The poem itself offers enough cues intratextually for the reader to discover the missing forms. Here the expression in which the letters are deleted, can be easily interpreted as 'the good old world'.

There is no fixed infallible rule for interpreting the graphologically deviant structures in Cummings' poetry. Each poem sets its own pace, and each deviant structure has its own aesthetic import in the over all qualitative complex of a poem. The poet, with his highly developed sense of the 'look and feel of words on a page', makes use of spacing as
a device in his poems in a highly original fashion. In combination with other devices, the use of spacing plays a significant supporting role. In the following poem (No. 24, *95 Poems*), the poet employs both the device of spacing and parallelism to depict an autumn shower:

```
.. a
  utumn & t
  he rai

   n
  th
 e
 raintherain
```

The heaviness of the downpour is suggested by the triple repetition of the two words "the" and "rain". Here one can notice the intensity of phrasing as well as the unique distribution of 'letter-syllable-word groups' which reinforce the meaning of the poem both rhetorically and typographically.

Another graphomorphological device which Cummings uses, is the 'spelling distortion'. Most often he plays with the spelling of words in order to produce an onomatopoeic effect or to give the graphological equivalent for a given spoken expression or to evoke a sense of pun and satire. The following examples would prove the point:
(i) "ree ray rye roh rowster shouts rawrOO" (No.1, 73 Poems)

(ii) "yas buy gad" (yes by god) (No.42, Xaipe)

(iii) "goo-dmore-ning" (good morning) (No.20, Xaipe)

(iv) "comma" for coma "sic" for sick (No.13, 50 Poems)

All these deviations can be given a rational and constructive interpretation. As a deviation brings about disruption in the normal process of communication; 'it leaves a gap, as it were, in one's comprehension of the text.' The gap can be filled, the incongruity can be resolved, and the deviation can be rendered significant; but only when the reader, by his hermeneutic skills, perseveres to find a subtle connection between the deviant structures at the micro-inscriptional level and the connotative essence at the macro-discoursal level.

It should be emphasized in connection with the typographical innovations of the poet that Cummings is a more competent experimenter than most poets of his time with rhythm, meter and cadence. Here is an extraordinarily painstaking craftsman, who
frequently uses his own spontaneous sense of emphasis, pause and speed in his exclusively personal free verse style. Now we need to examine the sonic design in Cummings' verse which is substantially different from the prosodic design, found in the traditional verse composition.

Sonic Design:

The meter in conventional English poetry is generally characterized by its rhythmic parallelism, i.e. a patterning of the succession of stressed and unstressed syllables with greater regularity than is necessary for normal spoken English. But in modern poetry, especially in the free-verse mode, the rhythmic units are irregular; and there is no apparent dominant metrical convention which the poet is expected to follow. In case of Cummings' poetry, one finds an exceptional blend of regular and irregular rhythmic units. The employment of the regular stanza is a salient feature of many of his poems. However it is important to note that there are several instances where one can observe the regular stanzas being spaced irregularly. It is also easily noticeable that the free verse and free verse stanzaic poems outnumber the regular stanzaic ones, more so, in the earlier phase of his poetic career. The term 'free verse stanza', as used by Friedman (1960:}
97), suggests a type of composition which combines both the regular and irregular units without using strictly any rhyme or meter, but it 'creates the visual effect of a regular stanza, in that it is broken up into groups of regularly matching lines':

Beautiful

is the unmeaning of(silently)falling

Ling(ever
yw
here)s

Now (No.41, *95 Poems*)

This poem, which describes the 'snow-fall', is composed in a free verse stanzaic pattern. The groups of lines alternate back and forth displaying a regular pattern - 1:4:1:4:1. The overall sonic effect is somewhere between the regular rhythmic units of meter and rhyme and the irregular units of free verse. The use of a free verse stanzaic pattern in this poem, allows the poet not only to create or reinforce partial rhythmic effects (as in "unmeaning" and "falling"), but also to produce a series of significant puns - by transforming "everywhere" into "here" and "snow" into "now".
Cummings' poems are built upon three major types of rhythmic units: (i) the regular type in which variations occur on the basis of measurable patterns of rhyme and meter, (ii) the irregular type (or the free verse type), in which the basis of variations is considered in less apparent terms, and (iii) the 'free verse stanzaic type', in which the visual effect of a regular stanza is created by splitting the words and phrases into groups of regularly matching lines. The important questions that arise then are: what principle the poet uses to willfully choose a particular type among the available alternatives; and thus what he accomplishes by using a particular device for a particular composition. These are extremely complicated questions which cannot be answered in a narrow, stereotypical, standardized fashion. However, the poems offer enough evidence to show that the employment of these devices is a well calculated move on the part of the poet. For example, when the poet exercises his choice to employ the free verse stanzaic mode, his aim is to produce generally a more delicate rhythm than the regular stanza can achieve, combined with a more unified and integrated balance than the irregular free verse can accomplish. In this mode, his technique is actually too subtle to suggest any rigid taxonomy for it. However a few generalizations can be made regarding the variations in the patterning of 'line-groups' as dictated by the needs of the individual poem. The
grouping and separation of lines on the page, as pointed out by Friedman (1960:100), show at least six different basic variations in their patterning: (a) each stanza may contain an equal number of lines; or (b) the line-groups may alternate back and forth, as in the above cited poem; or (c) each line-group may have one more or one less line than the preceding one, as 1:2:3:4:3:2:1; or (d) there may be a parenthetical bracket pattern, as 1:4:4:1, or a partial bracket, as 4:4:4:1 or 1:4:4:4; or (e) there may be an alternating increment, as in 1:2:1:3:1:4; or (f) there may be an alternating increment and also a bracket, as 1:2:3:2:4:2:5:1. When we closely scrutinize Cummings' free verse stanza, we immediately realise that his grouping of lines, does not follow any pre-existing procedure or method but is rather conditioned and determined by the rhetorical and aesthetic requirements of the individual poem. Therefore, it is often observed that his lines may vary in length anywhere from a single letter to a full sentence. Cummings originality lies in his unique technique of blending stanzaic patterns with free verse.

His creative handling of the 'regular stanza' is equally note-worthy. Many of his poems use rhyme and meter, but with a characteristic deviation from the traditional mode. Though the free verse and the free-verse stanzaic poems have outnumbered the regular stanzaic ones, the pattern of regular stanza has gained greater
prominence in his later poetry. During his long writing career, spanning over almost five decades, Cummings has experimented with a large variety of rhyme schemes. Among his rhymed poems, the sonnets and the quatrains are the most popular ones. In addition to these two forms, he has occasionally tried composing couplets, tercets and stanzas with more lines. He has also composed a few ballads. There are several poems in which one finds irregular rhyme schemes. As one critic notes, Cummings 'takes masculine rhyme, feminine rhyme, internal rhyme, and assonance and mixes them all together. His rhyme effects are sometimes vivid, sometimes not, but they are never restrained'. The last clause of this statement can be easily refuted, when one analyses the rhyme schemes in many of his poems, by taking into account various intrinsic dictates of the poems. Cummings is one of the finest experimenters with the sonnet form. In the sonnets published in his first volume, Tulips and Chimneys, he has brought about several variations in the standard rhyme schemes for which he has been disparaged quite vehemently by many 'academic' critics. But in his later phase, his sonnets are found to be more regular in meter, rhyming and typographical spacing. Here is one of the Cummings' most elegantly composed sonnets:
life is more true than reason will deceive
(more secret or than madness did reveal)
deeper is life than lose:higher than have
-but beauty is more each then living's all
multiplied with infinity sans if
the mightiest meditations of mankind
cancelled are by one merely opening leaf
(beyond whose nearness there is no beyond)
or does some littler bird than eyes can learn
look up to silence and completely sing?
futures are obsolete;pasts are unborn
(here less than nothing's more than everything)
death, as men call him,ends what they call men
-but beauty is more now than dying's when

(LII, I x I)

The rhyme scheme in this sonnet, in which the speaker celebrates
"life' and 'beauty' is the traditional Shakespearian one : abab cdcd efef gg.
Unlike the sonnets of his earlier period, this one contains quite a regular
metrical pattern; even the substitutions and variations are very much
within the standard paradigm. The typographical and syntactic
arrangements reveal uniform patterning within the quatrains and the
concluding couplet. It is important to note that the half rhymes
outnumber the full-rhymes in this sonnet: half-rhymes are
"deceive-have", "reveal - all", "mankind - beyond", "if-leaf", "learn -
born"; full-rhymes are found only in the third quatrain and the
concluding couplet: "sing-thing" and "men-when" respectively. The delicate rhyming scheme in this sonnet bears testimony not only to Cummings' matured stylistic device but also to his highly developed poetic vision.

This sort of delicate rhyming scheme is also found in other metrical patterns:

red-rag and pink-flag
blackshirt and brown
strut-mince and stink-brag
have all come to town

(No.11, 50 Poems)

Here the poet has followed the metrical scheme in the manner of a nursery rhyme to produce an excellent 'political invective'. Vilifying the communists (red rag), socialists (pink flag) and fascists (Italian Black shirts and Nazi Brown shirts), the poet mocks at the 'strut-mince' of fascists and the 'stink - brag' of the communists, which symbolically refer to the abominable elitistic and proletarian profiles of these people respectively. The rhythm of this poem matches wonderfully with its underlying satirical theme.
Cummings uses rhyme and echoing patterns of sound to control the emotional content of the poem and also to draw the attention of the reader towards the sonic dexterity of the composition. The use of 'shoulder rhymes' (rhymed or assonant words that are next to one another) offers a vibrant lyrical quality to a poem as in the following lines (XLVI, ViVa):

i met a man under the moon
on Sunday
by way of saying
nothing ..... 

In the first two lines, five of the syllables end in [n], and in the second and third lines, three of the words end in a diphthong [ei]: man/un/moon/on/sun/day/way/say. In the process, the poem acquires exquisite rhythmic texture.

Cummings even, sometimes, breaks a word at the end of a line for the sake of a rhyme. The novelty and disruption of this rare compositional device have limited its use largely to various kinds of comic verse. Instances of such use are found in John Donne's satires and also in the poems of G.M. Hopkins. Cummings has employed broken rhyme a great deal in his poems - for example, he uses two broken words to achieve consonance in a rhyme slot: the 'vac' of 'vacuum' and the 'democ' of 'democracy', as in (IX, IXI). Always
aiming at rhetorical precision and vividness, he handles with utmost care all that he uses in his poems. As a matter of fact nothing seems to be more characteristic of his style than its variety and range.

Like Aloysius Bertrand, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Oscar Wilde, Amy Lowell, Peter Redgrove and David Weyl, Cummings has also attempted a couple of prose poems with a very ornate and rhythmical language during his early phase: for example, "my eyes are fond of the east side..." or "gee i like to think of dead..." in his volume &. These poems, being freed from the shackles of rigid metrical structure, acquire rhythms and melodies of their own, capturing the sights and sounds of their poetic subject in great detail. Within the tradition of English prosody, Cummings has experimented freely but meticulously with given forms; it has been observed by many readers that 'he has molded the traditional forms to new uses more often than he has simply invented new ones.' In his employment of rhythm and meter, he seems to have been influenced by Swinburne's metrics.12

What makes many of his poems memorable is the peculiarly Cummingsesque combination of startling visual images and elaborately contrived rhythms. In his cryptic ideograms, the combination of visual and auditory elements must be viewed, suggests R.E. Wegner (1965:143),
‘in much the same way as an intaglio’. With a keen sense for smallest details, Cummings intelligently synthesizes the visual and the sonic components, to intensify the imaginative impact of the poetic expression. One of his early poems (No. IX, in the portrait section of *Tulips and Chimneys*) would amply illustrate this technique:

```
| ta |
| ppin |
| g |
| toe |
| hip |
| popot |
| amus Back |
| gen |
| teel-ly |
| fugu-bri ous |
| LOOPTHELOOP |
| as |
| fathandsbangrag |
| eyes |
```

Here the poet has created a brilliant portrait of a pianist who is playing rag. The first stanza itself, excellently captures the dislocations in jazz. Kidder (1979:51) observes that ‘just as jazz syncopates rhythms by carrying phrases across the normal divisions of measures and beats, so here the accent on “ppin” comes a little ahead of its expected place in the syllable “pping” and the phrase carries over into the next measure before it ends.’ The next stanza describes the obese, portly appearance
of the pianist from the rear. By his usual technique - breaking the word *hippopotamus* and capitalizing the first letter of the word *Back* - the poet builds up the image of the pianist by gradually moving from toe, through the hip, to the eyes, which are genteel (i.e. polite, refined) and lugubrious (i.e. exaggeratedly gloomy or mournful). When one reconstructs the poem by joining all its fractured elements, it reads: `tapping toe - hippopotamus Back - genteelly lugubrious eyes, LOOP-THE-LOOP as fat hands bang rag'. The poet finds that the pianist, in his stereotypical manner, makes his eyes roll; the phrase `loop-the loop' has been used to describe the theatrical eye-movements on the part of the pianist. The aesthetic effect of this poem is more in its graphic and phonic execution than in its thematic substance.

Another important sonic device, which Cummings uses quite often in his satirical venture, is punning rhyme. In the following poem (No. 60, *50 Poems*), Cummings has employed `phonetically spelled' linguistic items to achieve the punning effect, which in general is his chief source of witty ridicule:

*floatsam and jetsam*
*are gentlemen poeds*
*urseappeal netsam*
*our spinsters and coeds*)
thoroughly bretish
they scout the inhuman
itarian fetish
that man isn’t wuman

... ...

(neck and senecktie
are gentlemen ppoyds
even whose recktie
are covered by lloyd’s

In a disdainful tone, this poem comments on two homosexual British poets, with leftist leanings, called ‘floatsam and jetsam’. With their ideological pronouncements, their primly British accent (in which the word “poets” sounds like “ppoyds”) and their highly formal attire and behaviour (“senecktie”), they capture the hearts of the “spinsters and coeds”. Here there is a punning allusion - the words “neck and senecktie” have been borrowed from Horace’s ode on death. The use of slangs (like “urseappeal netsam/ our spinsters and coeds”, i.e. arse-appeal which nets them, our spinsters and coeds) in this poem, is suggestive of the scornful attitude of Cummings toward the homosexuals especially of the literary sort. The punning rhyme and the punning allusion enhance the satirical effect of this composition.
In Cummings’ verse, one can find the use of different kinds of verbal parallelism which go hand in hand with the poet’s tendency to orchestrate his poetry with various types of phonological echo-alliteration, consonance, assonance etc. There are certain features in the verbal ‘schemes’ of verse composition which belong to poetry of all ages. Clive James (1980:72) comments that ‘Cummings’ true technical triumphs were all sonic’. His sonnets, various kinds of satirical poems and rhymed and metrical quatrains bear testimony to his superb command over the English prosodic schemes. It is not, always, the typographical technique of the poet that seizes the reader’s attention; it is also the lyrical intensity, achieved through verbal parallelism, which imparts a sense of exuberance and prolixity. The following extracts form Cummings’ poetry would illustrate some parallelistic devices which are successfully employed to achieve the rhythmic flow and the rhetorical swing in the composition:

“sweet spring is your
  time is my time is our
time for springtime is lovetime
  and viva sweet love”

(all the merry little birds are
  flying in the floating in the
very spirits singing in
  are winging in the blossoming)

(LI, IXI)
Through phonological and lexical parallelism, this poem has acquired its rhythmic ambiance. The delicate rhyming pattern produces a wonderfully pleasing effect in this poem in which the speaker is praising the 'lovers' and celebrating 'the spring'. Wegner points out that both in rhythm and subject, this poem bears affinities to Nashe's "spring, the sweet spring, is the years pleasant king".

There are many poems in which Cummings deliberately mixes up the metrical schemes and produces unusual rhythmic pattern. One such poem is "if seventy were young" (No. 26, 73 Poems):

```
if seventy were young  
and death uncommon  
(forgiving not divine,  
to err inhuman)  
or any thine a mine  
-dingdong:dongding -  
to say would be to sing
```
```
if broken hearts were whole  
and cowards heroes  
(the popular the wise,  
a weed a tearose  
and every minus plus  
- fare ill:fare well -  
a frown would be a smile
```

Each stanza, in this poem, carries three feminine pentameter phrases which have been divided into trimeter and dimeter lines, and which are followed by a single trimeter line with a masculine rhyme. Yet at the same time within and around these unusual metrical devices,
there is pulsing regularity caused by the ingenious verbal design of the composition. Here, the reader finds a series of paradoxical proclamations which can be considered as a characteristic mark of Cummings' style.

In the overall scheme of Cummings' verse, metrical patterns operate within a wide range but pentameter is found to be the most frequent one due to the large proportion of sonnets. However, in many poems, one can discover mixed and irregular meters. Though the poet also uses dimeter, trimeter and tetrameter, they are considered to be relatively minor. Poems, which are composed upon syllabic count, also represent a relatively minor type. Cummings' preference for irregular free verse is easily noticeable in his earlier volumes but as he grows more, he tilts more towards the use of free verse stanzaic mode, perhaps due to the intervention of his painterly self. His typographical innovations and acute visual responsiveness give him immense compositional prowess to handle the free verse stanzaic patterns with greater success.