Chapter III

VERBAL & FIGURATIVE DESIGNS

I'd rather learn from one bird how to sing than teach ten thousand stars how not to dance

c. c. cummings (New Poems, 22)
VERBAL & FIGURATIVE DESIGNS

A poem, by its very special lingua-aesthetic presence, demands understanding and interpretation of all the expressive devices or artistic operations which constitute its texture. To recognize something as a poetic text, is to bring literary semiosis into play. One of the major underlying assumptions of semiotic methodology is that there are intrinsic connections between the verbal design of a poem at the manifest level, and its thematic configuration at the immanent level. Here the aim is to demonstrate that a close examination of the verbal texture of a poem - where the lexico-grammatical and syntactic units, representing a text, occur cohesively - leads to a greater understanding of its meaning and value: i.e. to a greater appreciation of it as a work of art.

It seems quite irrefutable that a poetic text as a semiotic event is located in a socio-historical context whose essential mode of unfolding is linguistic in origin. To claim that a text is always situated in a socio-historical context is not particularly a very novel postulation; the major focus should be on how various ideological perspectives and voices come into contact and interanimate one another within the fabric of a text, or as Bakhtin would suggest, how ‘different semantic and axiological conceptual systems’ intersect and define one another. In the
reading of a text, the correlations can be established between various contextual domains and the formal characteristics of the linguistic units, as they are employed in a text. The term, ‘verbal design’ here suggests the property of a verbal text (either through the phonic medium or through the graphic medium), that it expresses a set of states of affairs of a specific configuration, using language material of a specific constitution. In what follows, we propose to analyse various linguistic operations and their corresponding rhetorical functions in Cummings' poetry by taking into consideration the lexico-grammatical and syntactic components of language.

The linguistic operations in a poetic text are most often governed by two rhetorico-stylistic criteria: by the first criterion, the poetic language violates the rules of the primary norms of linguistic expression, in other words, the poet exercises poetic/rhetorical licenses; and by the second criterion, the linguistic operations enforce the primary norms. The first type of operation produces ‘ungrammatical forms’, whereas the second type produces ‘syngrammatical forms’. Heinrich F. Plett (1985:62) notes that ‘the rule-violating operations are formed by the addition, subtraction, substitution, and permutation of language signs; and the rule-enforcing operations mainly affect their repetition.’ Our
object in this chapter is to illustrate and discuss different kinds of poetic license which Cummings has exercised, in order to bring about technical innovations in his poetry.

**Lexical Innovations:**

In addition to his typographical extravaganzas, Cummings has made his vogue out of a good deal of lexical experiments. Like his symbolist predecessors and modernist contemporaries, Cummings has innovated a considerable amount of lexical items which typically constitute the major part of his conceptual vocabulary. Most of his coinages are derived by analogical processes from the set of already existing lexical forms and the morphological rules in the language. The main purpose is to bring into prominence 'the peripheral or buried possibilities'\(^2\) of these lexical items and their referents. Cummings, often, indulges in constructing new words by changing parts of speech or by adding prefixes and suffixes to already existing words. Other neologistic devices, like compounding and blending, are also important aspects of Cummings' style but they constitute limited section of his poetic lexicon. In this respect, it can be said that what Dos Passos, Faulkner, and Joyce have done in their prose writings, Cummings has done that with superb artistic effect in his verse.
Two major processes of word-formation, i.e. affixation and grammatical conversion or shift, have been so common in Cummings' poetry that they cause little surprise in the reader and they are easily perceived as routine licenses, characterizing the poet's technique. By employing these devices, the poet not only achieves stylistic compression and economy at the expressive level, but also succeeds in encapsulating the newly formulated ideas which form significant parts of his poetic message.

Coinages by affixation:

Cummings adds a familiar affix to a familiar word, but produces an unfamiliar combination which forces the reader to reflect on and to get familiar with the poet's artistic vision. Let us take some examples of Cummings' use of negative terms - especially those coined by the prefixes "un-", "im-" and "non-" and the suffix "-less" - to imply several special shades of meaning. The poet is in the habit of making an "unthing" out of a "thing", for instance in the poem (XLII, ViVa), he describes an "upward deep most invincible unthing". This expression figuratively hints at the spiritual essence in the context of the overall scheme of the poem. In another poem (No, 56, No Thanks), Cummings
has used the prefix "un-" in abundance to create an effective piece of satire:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{this mind made war} \\
\text{being generous} \\
\text{this heart could dare) unhearts can less} \\
\text{unminds must fear} \\
\text{because and why} \\
\text{what filth is here unlives do cry} \\
\text{daring to dare} \\
\text{for joy of joy} \\
\text{what stink is here unpoets do cry} \\
\text{unfools unfree} \\
\text{undeaths who live nor shall they be} \\
\text{and must they have}
\end{align*}
\]

This poem is about the poet who eloquently denounces conformism. Composed in the style of a self-portrait, it admires the poet who can revolt on the right occasion, for a right cause, through his satirical exposition. Since the publication of ViVa (1931), one finds a host of such coinages, more so in Cummings' later volumes, where the poet uses the positive root and the negative prefix, instead of the negative root itself: as in "till unwish returns on its unself", "an undream of anaesthetized impersons", "a notalive undead too-
nearishness”, etc. It is quite evident, from these illustrations, that Cummings intends to create vivid impressions by using forms like “unserious”, “unbold” or “unclever” instead of their corresponding negative root-forms like “trivial”, “timid” or “stupid”. By using this device, the poet gets the opportunity to manipulate the semantic range of both the derivational affix and the lexical morpheme, so as to produce the desired conceptual emphasis. For Cummings, these prefixes have so much semantic value that he can simply use one as a noun by itself, as in “scream, all ye screamers, till your if is up / and vanish under prodigies of un”. The largest portion of coinages in his poetry, is formed by adding suffixes as “-ness”, “-ly”, “-ish”, “-ful”, “-est” etc., to the already existing words. Here are few examples:

(a) Use of “-ness”: thelessness, deeplynness, manyness, almostness, roundlynness, skylessness, muchness, bothness etc.

(b) Use of “-ly”: howlessly, sayingly, nowly, fasterishly, wellbeishfully, sunly, songly, collapsingly, liftingly etc.

(c) Use of “-ish”: nothingish, howish, nearish, thingish, neverish, somewhereish, etc.
(d) **Use of "-ful":** whichful, oneful, usful, itful, deathful, mostful, etc.

(e) **Use of "-est":** givingest, nowest, beingest, girlest, growingest etc.

(f) **Use of "-ing":** whying, manying; wisdoming, inging, onlying, softlying etc.

(g) **Use of "-less":** whyless, foreverless, thingless etc.

**Grammatical Conversion:**

The largest group of Cummings' lexical innovations is characterized by grammatical conversion. These innovations, most often, highlight the ethical and metaphysical overtones of the poetic discourse. Sometimes, these devices are aimed at producing "aesthetically rhythmic and rhetorically ambiguous effect".³ In Cummings' innovative design, any part of speech can be transformed into any other. Verbs, adjectives, pronouns, even some adverbs and conjunctions can be converted into nouns, as in the following examples:

(a) **Verbs become nouns:**

(i) "he sang his didn't he danced his did"  
(No. 29, *50 Poems*)
(ii) "himself he picked the was / of shall and finding only why"

(No. XXVI, IxI)

(b) Pronouns become nouns:

(i) "true lovers in each happening of their hearts
live longer than all which and every who"

(No. XXXVI, IxI)

(ii) "a salesman is an it that stinks to please"

(No. IX, IxI)

c) Adjectives become nouns:

"the cult of Same is all the chic;
by instruments, both span and spic,"

(No. 54, No Thanks)

d) Adverbs become nouns:

".turn sheer despairing to most perfect gay,
nowhere to here, never to beautiful
a little innocence creates a day"

(No. 51, Xaipe)

e) Conjunctions become nouns:

"smashed it into because"

(No. XXVI, IxI)
There are several instances where nouns become verbs, as in “but if a look should april me”; or they become adverbs by adding “-ly”, or more interestingly they become adjectives in the superlative by adding “-est”, as in “beingest” or “girlest”. Cummings, often, converts adjectives, adverbs, and conjunctions into participles by adding “-ing”, as in “manying”, “onlying”, “whying” etc; he also converts participles into adverbs by adding “-ly”, as in “collapsingly”, “thinkingly”, “lookingly”, “sayingly” etc. The most interesting case of conversion is found in the famous ‘ant-eater’ poem (No. 20, No Thanks). In this poem, Cummings uses the suffix “-ing” as a verb - as in “always inging”- implying that the ants are always in motion. Another important stylistic feature with Cummings is that he uses an adverb in the place of an adjective modifying a noun: “your suddenly smile”, “loosely voices”, “the slowly tour” or “exactly cubes”. Such expressions quite often result in structural ambiguities. Furthermore, in Cummings’ novel diction, adverbs become nouns, as in ‘withins’; adjectives also become nouns, as in “boths” or “neithers”; adjectives even become verbs, as in “to frail”. As Friedman (1960:107) remarks: ‘here is an effect of vitality, of inventiveness, of flexibility; an effect of language growing, developing, and becoming more precise’. Cummings’ device of grammatical conversion is unique in balancing the tone of poetry by means of
juxtaposing sentiment with surprise. For example, by converting adjectives, verbs and nouns into adverbs, Cummings, in the following lines, talks of eternity with lyrical grace:

“little by little and was by was
all by all and deep by deep
and more by more they dream their sleep”

Cummings’ lexical innovations do not merely serve conceptual ends, but they also serve to portray the poet’s reflections in a condensed, vivid and novel manner. His neologistic devices are fashioned not only to discover a new aesthetic in the familiar things; they are invaluable revelation of his personal musings. The poet, by his very nature, ventures into various ethical and metaphysical domains of his consciousness through these lexical abstractions. At the surface level, the deviant lexical forms may seem to be impervious; but these radical innovations, under close scrutiny, would reveal that they have astonishing power to offer an insight otherwise impossible. Unusual collocations abound in Cummings’ verse; often they achieve a commendable union of poignant lyricism and rich humour, as in “luminous tendril of celestial wish”, “the world is mud-luscious…… puddle-wonderful”. These collocational techniques are consciously
employed, sometimes, to produce paradoxical effects. There are occasions, when the poet uses strings of adjectives of mutually contradictory type, which the reader finds quite puzzling to evaluate, as in "obscure and obvious hands", "a sodden fastidious normal explosion", "evident invisibles", "grim ecstasy", "large minute hips", "the noise of petals falling silently" etc. Whether or not successful in every instance, these elliptical expressions with verbal excess, in his early poetry, do forecast the poet's mature philosophical style, to be noticed in his later volumes. These attempts at reconciling opposites are quite symptomatic of Cummings' poetic vision.

Cummings poetic lexicon displays peculiar combinations of vocabulary which are judiciously monitored by the poet to enable his poetic persona to accomplish things in the most dramatic and rhetorical manner. The poet reveals an enormous talent in juxtaposing the sweet and soft romantic vocabulary with the plain and cool vocabulary associated with classical or metaphysical verse - in consequence, the texture of his poetic composition acquires astounding vitality. The philosophical view of life that the poet espouses, which is 'transcendental, romantic, prelapsarian, organicist, and individualistic', is well reflected in his style and diction. M.L Rosenthal has rightly
remarked that 'the chief effect of Cummings’ jugglery with syntax, grammar, and diction was to blow open otherwise trite and bathetic motifs through a dynamic rediscovery of the energies sealed up in conventional usage'. The readers of Cummings’ verse encounter a great deal of verbal fancy-work, ranging from archaic or formal to burlesque. The diverse components of his stylistic technique provide the evidence for the poet’s inherent quality to ‘transform the world’ by ‘transforming the words’. Cummings is celebrated after all for the unconventionality of his verbal design by which his verse achieves the qualities of musicality on the one hand, and on the other, its exquisite significative power.

Use of New Yorkese Variety:

Through the burlesque style, Cummings has offered spectacular dramatic rendition of scorn, wit and ridicule in his verse. This style has sharpened significantly the satirical edge of many of his poems. One of the important elements of Cumming’s burlesque style is the use of New Yorkese variety. New Yorkese elements, being combined with standard English, sometimes produce the effect of comic pathos as in the following poem (No. II, is 5):

the words drizzle untidily from released cheeks
“I'll tell duh woid; some noive alright
Aint much on looks but how dat baby ached.”
In this poem, the speaker or narrator uses standard English, whereas “Mame”, one of the characters of Cummings’ demimonde, a whore, uses her own dialect. By juxtaposing the standard variety and the New Yorkese dialect, the poet gives the dramatic impression of the characters in his poem, with a tinge of realism.

The second poem in his volume *ViVa*, is composed fully in New Yorkese variety. This poem narrates a few scraps of conversation among the members of a poker-playing group - aptly evoking their linguistic background and cultural milieu:

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oil tel duh woil doi sez
dooyuh unners tanmih eesez pullih nizmus tash
dough un giv uh shid oi sez....
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After transliteration, these lines would read; “I’ll tell the world,” I says. “Do you understand me?” he says, pulling his mustache. I don’t give a shit,” I says.... Here the slang variety has been used by the poet to produce comically ludicrous effect. Since the publication of *is 5*, the New Yorkese aspect of Cummings’ style has received the critical attention of many commentators. The use of New Yorkese serves various artistic purposes; in some poems, it arouses ‘pity or laughter or both’ and in
some other, it arouses 'ridicule and hatred'. Consider, for example, another poem (No. 26, No. Thanks):

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what does little Ernest croon
in his death at afternoon?
(kow dow r 2 bul retoinis
wus de woids uf lil Oinis
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Here the poet skillfully combines subtle mockery with punning parody to create a brilliant piece of satire. Cummings' famous contemporary, Ernest Hemingway, is the target of the poet's derisive quip. The last two lines, transliterated back into standard English, read, "Cow thou art, to bull returnest, was the words of little Ernest". Cummings, here, parodying the lines of Longfellow ("Dust thou art, to dust returnest / Was not spoken of the soul" - in A Psalm of Life) has made Hemingway, the butt of his witty satire.

Another element of Cummings' burlesque style, notes Friedman, is 'constituted of the mock-archaic, mock-formal or Latinate language, periphrases, and hyperbolic prefixes.' To heighten the ironical and sarcastic effects, the poet uses these devices quite frequently: "ponder, darling, these busted statues/of yon moth-eaten forum"; "Gay' is the captivating cognomen of a Young Woman"; "ye twang of little joe (yankee) gould irketh sundry"; "all history opened her teeming womb,"
“one wondrous fine sonofabitch”. Cummings does not shy away from using slang expressions and colloquialisms when the setting and situation of the poem demand them, as in the following examples: “waiting for the bulls to pull his joint,” “wouldn’t that/get yer goat” or “absolutely posolutely dead”. The kind of colloquialisms, used in his ‘Buffalo Bill’ poem, has always been the trademark of Cummings’ style:

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...........
Jesus
he was a handsome man
and what I want to know is
how do you like your blue eyed boy
Mister Death
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Spelling Manipulation:

Cummings is fond of playing with the spelling of words in his satirical compositions. He frequently puns on the names of important people: “Robinson Jefferson”, “Wouldwoe Washington”, “Clever Rusefelt”, “Algernon Carl Swinburned” etc. In one of the poems, in ViVa (No. XVII), by manipulating the spelling of words, the poet mocks at his own home state, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, which is mentioned in the poem as “UNCOMMONWEALTH OF
HUMANUSSETTS”. In the same poem, appears the famous dictum of Marx in a cryptic way—“religion is the opium of the people”.

“(relijinisde)o(peemuvdepipl”

His revulsion against the socio-political milieu of America is articulated in the most condensed form, through the typographical devices and spelling distortion, in the following poem (No. VIII, *IXI*):

applaws)

“fell
ow
sit
is’nts”

(a paws

The phrase ‘fellow citizens” has been broken into four words: “fell/ow/sit/isn’t,” suggesting ‘falling, pain, immobility and negation.’ The sense of ‘animality’ is figuratively evoked in the pause —“(a paws”— following the speaker’ introduction.7 This poem is one of the most successful satirical compositions of Cummings.
Syntactic Deviation:

Every reader of Cummings is struck by the formal experimentalism of his verse. His bold creative handling of language - both in the choice of lexical items and in the position of lexical items in the body of the text - is the main cause of initial difficulty for many readers. Equally striking is his genius for transcending the cleavage of language and the gaps in human noetic sentience. His stylistic devices, always, aim at an alignment of creativity with the deep emotional and instinctual drives. The flamboyant outburst of expressive forms in his poetry, can be seen as an emphatic assertion of the impulse towards emotional immediacy - as it has been the case with baroque art. Cummings' verse values deep feelings and intense expression. The poet has always shown a whole-hearted investment of temperament and character into the act of expression. 'Intensity' is one of the implicit cornerstones of the Cummingsian aesthetics. His versatility is clearly evident in his revolutionary use of the linguistic resources which effectively articulates his vibrant inner self. What follows is a discussion of Cummings' syntactic devices and their various rhetorical and aesthetic implications.
Cummings deliberately adopts some syntactic devices to integrate various components of his verse. There are several instances, where Cummings uses irregular syntax as a device of foregrounding, so that the poetic message, gets focused or acquires prominence in the midst of several linguistic units. In other words, the 'deviation' lends accuracy and precision to the poetic artefact. Sometimes, Cummings sustains, a given syntactic deviation through its repetition and creates a level of patterning within a poem. It must be noted that the syntactic structuration of linguistic signs within a text is determined by and dependent upon a complex interplay of various textual and discoursal elements. Hence, syntactic deviation in a poetic text has phonological, morphological, semantic and pragmatic implications. The syntactic dislocations in Cummings' verse, are most often well-calculated stylistic devices which serve a cohesive function. The following poem 'Me up at does' (No.12, 73 Poems), illustrates this principle:

Me up at does
out of the floor
quietly Stare
a poisoned mouse
still who alive
is asking what
have I done that
You wouldn't have
Here the speaker, after observing a poisoned mouse, is flummoxed; his confusion is articulated by jumbled expression. The emotional state of the speaker is conveyed by the deviant word-order. The poem begins with an inversion of the prepositional object - 'me up at', and the dislocation of the auxiliary - 'does'. In the fifth line, there is also an adverbial inversion - 'still who alive'. The poet has further dislocated the entire indirect object ('Me up, at') place adverbial ('out of the floor') and finite verb ('does') within the sentence, to emphatically place the matrix subject 'a poisoned mouse' at the centre so that modification can precede and follow. The syntactic deviations in this poem aptly play a supportive role in relating the structure with the theme and in securing the unity of the poem. In this poem, one finds a curious mixture of 'contradictory impulses' - human versus non-human, tangible versus intangible, and perceptual versus cognitive. The jumbled utterance of the speaker has been stylistically put against the imagined speech of the mouse, which is simple, concise and in standard form. The verbal design and the aesthetic significance of this poem depend upon the crucial nature of its syntactic distortion.

In several poems, Cummings' experiment with the syntactic component goes far beyond mere poetic anastrophe (i.e. an inversion
of the normal word-order). For example, the first poem in his volume

IXI, demonstrates a special kind of syntactic organization, which is not
easily discernible.

nonsun blob a
cold to
skylessness
sticking fire

me are your
are birds our all
and one gone
away the they

leaf of ghosts some
few creep there
here or on
unearth

The selections of deviation, in this poem, have been carefully
calculated to produce a precise and accurate portrait of nature. When
one reconstructs this poetic composition by analysing and synthesizing
its parts into normal order, one finds that it is a brief description of a
cloud-covered day in autumn. Though the lines in the text, are arranged
quite regularly, in the form of a quatrain, the syntactic structuration of
the lexical items seems to be fairly complex and opaque. The first stanza
describes the dim glow of the sun in an overcast sky. In the truncated
and compressed syntactic structure of the second stanza, lies the
expression: 'the birds, my birds, your birds, our birds, they are one and
all gone away'. Finally, the third stanza, refers to a few scattering leaves; when the lexical items in this stanza are rearranged in normal syntactic order, it reads: 'some few ghosts of leaves creep here or there on unearth'. This poem carries three typical Cummingsian coinages: 'nonsun', 'skylessness' and 'unearth'. Through syntactic disarrangement, the poem nicely captures the bleak, cold and desolate scene of autumn.

The syntactical distortions in Cummings' poetry are not incidental, but are crucial to the overall structure of the composition. With little effort, they can easily be reconstructed. The poet employs deliberately, the deviant syntactic structures to relate various levels within the poetic composition, as in the following poem 'a like a':

```
a like a
grey
rock wanderin
g
through
pasture
wom

an creature whom
than
earth hers

elf
could
silent more no
be
```

(No. 56, Xaipe)
This poem has been composed in the form of an expanded noun phrase, lacking a main verb or predicate. Having considered the space-bars interpolated between lines, the reader finds a systematic order at the strophic level - 3:4:3:4 relation in the distribution of lines. The theme and the verbal design of the poem have been cohesively synthesized by means of syntactic fragmentation. Irene R. Fairley (1980:244) suggests that 'a common method of dealing with fragments is to assume that a complete sentence is recoverable, and to seek the nearest equivalent, grammatical statement'. Various syntactic constituents in this poem, when reassembled, suggest three underlying sentential constructions, 'a woman creature is like a grey rock', 'she is wandering through pasture' and 'earth herself could not be more silent than her'. The first two sentences can be joined by relative clause embedding to form a matrix sentence and the third complex sentence can also be embedded into the matrix. To get the sequence of the poem, the whole sentence, then, can be nominalized and the main verb 'be' can be deleted. In poetry, the deletion of verb 'be', especially when it functions as a neutral copulative, is a device used to enhance the imagist effect of the composition.

The major ambiguity in this poem is caused by 'relative clause reduction'. As the participle construction in this poem occurs between
the two noun phrases, it is initially difficult to determine the head noun for 'wander'. Though in normal use, 'wander' as a verb requires an animate subject, the placement of the participle, makes 'rock' also a possible head noun. As I.R. Fairley rightly observes, 'both selections involve deviance, one conflicting features, the other impermissible word-order'. The ambiguity is also due to the distant placement of the noun-phrase 'woman creature'. Another important deviation in this poem is the dislocation of 'be', so that it closes the poem. It is interesting to note that though the main verb 'be' has been deleted in the poem, it is prominently placed in the last line, being a constituent of the subordinate clause. The poet has stylistically placed the matrix subject 'woman creature' at the centre so that it can be both preceded and followed by descriptive comparative clauses. All the distortions and deletions in this poem are carefully executed by the poet in order to relate the syntactic, semantic and visual components into a consistent and integrated whole.

The metataxemes and the isotaxemes - i.e. the linguistic units which are generated by the rule-violating and rule-enforcing operations respectively at the syntactic level - in Cummings' poetry, function aesthetically and conceptually. Sometimes, they are designed to produce
purely rhythmical effects. Consider, for example, the following two stanzas:

love our so right
is, all (each thing
most lovely) sweet
things cannot spring
but we be they'll

some or if where
shall breathe a new
(silverly rare
goldenly so)
moon, she is you

...........

(No. 68, Xaipe)

The poet has sustained the syntactic distortion in each stanza by taking recourse to the parallelistic device and the effect of this is primarily rhythmical. Any correction of the deviant sequences would cause a collapse of the poem's delicate rhythmic pattern. In all of the poems considered above, the syntactic deviation plays a significant role in creating the poems' unique verbal texture and in integrating various textual components into a cohesive aesthetic whole. However, there are instances, where his unusual transposition, deletion and clotting of linguistic signs create a maze of apparent oddities and obscurities in which the unwary reader gets trapped, and his sensibility gets threatened.
Figurative Design

In western classical tradition, the ‘figure of speech’ has originally been considered as a persuasive device in the Rhetoric, whereas in Indian poetics, alaṃkāras (or figures of speech) have been treated as the key ingredients of poetic discourse. There is a dialectical relationship between the ontological status of the poetic text and its figurative patterns. Figures are the devices which impart beauty to the poetic discourse. It should be noted that according to Ruyyaka, ‘alaṃkāra is the dharma of poetry and not a mere embellishment’. It constitutes an integral part of the conceptualization and cognition of the verbal aesthetic artefact. In this section, we shall briefly discuss the major figurative patterns in Cummings’ verse.

His early poetic enterprise is marked by rich tropological figures. One of the Cummings' early poems in his volume & (1925), begins with an exciting simile: “spring is like a perhaps hand”. The comparison of spring and hand is itself quite surprising and at the same time, the inclusion of “perhaps” as a noun-modifier brings in an exciting paradoxical effect. John Clendenning (1963:49) remarks: ‘Hands, ordinarily, are material and present, whereas “perhaps” is tenuous and future. A “perhaps hand” is one that promises to be, or one that
Cummings has sustained this sort of paradoxical effect by juxtaposing opposite ideas throughout the poem: "there a strange/thing and a known thing here", "New and/old things". The simile excellently captures the complex image of the poem and its aesthetic message. The device of grammatical shift has been adequately employed in the formation of this simile. Let us consider another brief poem (No. II, Impressions, *Tulips and Chimneys*):

```plaintext
the sky a silver
dissonance by the correct
fingers of April
resolved
into a
clutter of trite jewels

now like a moth with stumbling
wings flutters and flops along the
grass collides with trees and
houses and finally,
butts into the river
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The poem vividly and figuratively depicts, 'an April shower followed by mist' - as suggested by Friedman. The poet has used here four major figures of speech: (a) synaesthesia - transferring meaning from one domain of sensory perception to another, as in "silver dissonance"; (b) personification of April, as in "fingers of April", describing rain drops; and then (d) simile, as in "like a moth with stumbling wings".
describing mist. The description of ‘mist’ in this poem is given through an elliptical simile. The expression ‘like a moth with stumbling wings’ does not explicitly suggest what it refers to. There is a bundle of interrelated possibilities, and in translating the expression, into a simile, one needs to consider the reality that the composition as a whole signifies. All the figures - synaesthetic metaphor, anthropomorphic metaphor, elliptical simile etc. - in this poem, constitute a well integrated sign-complex, which aesthetically invokes the image of a monsoon day.

For the vivid figurative effects, Cummings' earlier poetry, which is much more conventional than the later poetry, relies a great deal on simile, metaphor, personification and synaesthesia. His later poetry is characterized more by symbol, allegory, word-coinage, typographical innovation and oxymoron. In terms of figurative patterns, Cummings' mature style reveals his preference for symbol over simile. Some of the important allegorical utterances in his later work, demonstrate his ‘vocabulary of ideas’, his moral vision and his superior artistic skills: “it’s no good pretending/befriending means loving’ (sighs mind : and he’s clever)”; “enters give/whose lost is his found/leading love/ whose heart is her mind)”. This kind of personified abstraction in action, is occasionally noticeable in his earlier compositions too: “let’s take the
train/for because dear/whispered again/in never’s ear”; ‘suppose/life is
an old man carrying flowers on his head/young death sits in a
café/smiling”.

There is plentiful symbolism, in Cummings’ verse. Through
symbols, the poet combines an image with a concept. Out of
commonplace, worldly objects, he creates his symbolic universe of
reflection and redemption, of mysteries and miracles, of love and dream,
of transformation and triumph. Most of the symbols that recur in his
verse, have their source in nature; flower, bird, mountain, snow, rain,
spring, moon, tree, ocean, night, and twilight are his favourite symbolic
objects. The salient characteristic of Cummings’ symbolism is its
lucidity and more so its dynamic quality. The following lines will
illustrate Cummings’ treatment of the flower as an erotic symbol: “the
warm long flower of unchastity”; “a fragile smile/which like a flower
lieth”; “those/twain perfect roses”; “thy forehead is a flight of flowers”;
“her eager body’s unimmortal flower”. For Cummings, the bird can be
a symbol for his lady’s eyes, as in “while/within the eyes is dimly heard/
a wistful and precarious bird”. Birds can also be associated with spring,
life, mystery, exultation, aspiration and with love. Take for example the
following stanza from his poem ‘if (among’:
........

love (by yes
every new
bird no bigger than to sing)
leaf is wing
and tree is voice
more leastfully than I am you
, we are spring

(No.XLIII, I X I)

In Cummings’ symbolic world, rain can transform the unworld
into the dream world; can create “blind full steep love”. In one of the
poems in No Thanks, the poet asks the rain to “strike/into form” the
realness of things by killing the “known” and establishing the“new”:

move
deeply,rain
(dream hugely) wish
firmly,splendidly advancing colour

strike
into form
(actually) realness
kill

(make
strangely) known (establish
new) come, what
being!open us open

our
selves create
(suddenly announce:hurl)
blind full steep love

(No. 39, No Thanks)
All these focal symbols serve as the means by which the poet expounds his aesthetic philosophy, synthesizing the outer and inner lives, articulating transitions and transformations.

Behind the verbal craft lies the poet's vision that it expresses and by which it is uniquely shaped. Here at times Cummings is obscure, perhaps consciously with deepseated artistic motif. He always intends to explore to the furthest limits the expressive resources of linguistic signs, arranged in strange and startling combinations, located in the most uncommon context. He uses paradox or oxymoron, a characteristic mark of his figurative design, to heighten his sense of modern man's enigma. To the naïve reader, sometimes, the enigma itself seems quite impenetrable. At the early stage of his career, his poetry reveals the use of oxymoron as a figurative device, with much greater frequency than his later compositions: "the dusty newness of her obsolete gaze", "peaceful terror", "a square murmur, a winsome flatulence". These early collocations of contradictory items hint at the poet's desire to transcend the 'discreteness' of the ordinary existence, the life of the unworld. In his later volumes, Cummings has employed paradox as an essential device for articulating the ineffable arena of the mystic's mind. Consider, for example, the following poem (No. 16, 95 Poems):
In time of daffodils (who know
the goal of living is to grow)
forgetting why, remember how

in time of lilacs who proclaim
the aim of waking is to dream,
remember so(forgetting seem)

in time of roses (who amaze
our now and here with paradise)
forgetting if, remember yes

in time of all sweet things beyond
whatever mind may comprehend,
remember seek(forgetting find)

and in a mystery to be
(when time from time shall set us free)
forgetting me, remember me

In this lyrical composition, built upon five stanzas in the form of tercets, Cummings has incorporated into the verbal structure of the poem a set of opposites in order to produce high degree of aesthetic excitement. The whole composition hinges upon a series of apparent contradictions which needs to be resolved by a rigorous process of retroactive reading. In an imperative tone, the poet teaches his lady how to respond to the world: forget to hanker after reason and remember to remain sensitive to things happening around you; remember that your conception of reality is the true reality, and forget its apparent
manifestation; forget your apprehensions and remember your aspirations; remember that the purpose of life is the quest for self-knowledge, and forget to find things somewhere else. In the last stanza, invoking the image of spring, which stands for dream, aspiration, growth, possibility, happiness, and more significantly the timeless world, the poet tells his lady to remember that phase of life, which through love and intense feelings, gives a sense of immortality and to forget that phase, the merely physical existence, which is banal and ephemeral. By using paradox as a figurative device in this composition, Cummings has drawn a distinction between the trivial and the transcendental, with superb artistic dexterity.

In Cummings’ verse, irony serves as an important tool of satire. The rhetorical function of irony is most often moral or ethical criticism. There are several instances where Cummings uses this topological figure in combination with other figures, as in “(really unreal world, will you perhaps do/the breathing for me while I am away?)” - (Poem No. XVIII, IXI). These lines combine the figure oxymoron with irony. Cummings also takes recourse to phonetically-spelled gutterisms to produce the irony of tone. In his poem ‘ygUDuh’, the poet creates a grim sense of irony by the use of New Yorkese:
The poem needs transliteration to make the ironical thrust comprehensible. In standard English, this poem in its entirety, reads: "You've got to - You don't - You understand - You don't know - You understand them - You've got to get - You understand them dirty - You have got to get rid of - You don't know nothing - LISTEN but LISTEN - Them goddamn little yellow bastards, we're going to CIVILIZE them". Here the device is ironic self-revelation, by which the poet portrays a despicable person who expresses his prejudices in his own characteristic diction.

The lexical innovations, especially by the process of grammatical shift, have figurative value in Cummings' poetry, as in "he sharpens is to am/he sharpens say to sing" (No. 26, Xaipe). In these lines, Cummings refers to a scissors-grinder and figuratively suggests the transformation of the common people by the redeeming personality of this scissors-
grinder: here “is to am” means that people are transformed from insignificant third-persons to unique first-person individuals; “say to sing” means that these people now inhabit the reflective world of poetry rather than the mechanical world of prose. Babette Deutsch has described Cummings’ novel coinages as follows: “Am” implies being at its most responsive, “if” generally means the creeping timidity that kills responsiveness, and “because” the logic of the categorizing mind that destroys what it dissects. Here is a new vocabulary, a kind of imageless metaphor. By the technique of grammatical conversion, Cummings has not only created new semantic space for several simple words, but also has made these words self-subsistent in terms of the poetic context in which they appear - for example in his poetry, ‘yes’ is used as a noun to represent all that is affirmative, positive and therefore admirable, ‘if’ to stand for all that is uncertain, incomplete, unstable. To most of these coinages, derived by grammatical shift, the meaning is ascribed in such a way that they represent significant conceptual oppositions based on the poet’s private convictions. Thus, “was” as a noun is negative whereas “is”, “am” and “become” are positive. “Who” is positive, but “which” is negative especially when it signifies impersons. “When” and “where” are both negative as nouns; to the poet ‘whenlings” and “wherelings” are pitiable creatures. Robert E.
Maurer, getting to the root of this conversion technique, comments that Cummings 'makes the words metonymical reductions for a whole set of concepts'. The success of these metonymical usages depends partly upon the poet's aesthetic world-view and partly upon the effects of freshness, precision and vitality his diction produces. When one reads such lines as the following, one finds that this composition is a successful one in both respects:

she laughed his joy she cried his grief
bird by snow and stir by still
anyone's any was all to her

In the second line, R.E. Maurer notes, the poet has used a traditional rhetorical pattern (little by little serves as a model for it), having superimposed a metonymous structure: 'bird and snow are metonymical reductions of summer and winter; stir and still of all manner of activities'. Here the aim is to use simplest words but to express a great deal. It should be noted at this juncture that there are many tropological figures which may not contain within themselves overt linguistic indications of their underlying significance. In these cases, the success of a poem relies heavily upon the reader's textual and aesthetic competence. Tropes cannot be treated as existential identities.
or oppositions; they are the semeiotic manipulation by the representative potentialities of the poetic materials. Hence the tropological figure, like metaphor for instance, is the 'exhibitive judgment' which acts on these potentialities. There can be only inferences, no conclusion can be permanently asserted. That is perhaps the secret of the significative power of a poem.

All of Cummings' poetry attests to his incessant search for new verbal designs and fresh modes of figurative expression. He has worked out extraordinary variations in his stylistic technique to record unerringly his inner voice - a voice in which a lover sings and a rebel screams.