

Tyler Knott Gregson Mimicry

And I want to be of the character
that trusts the bridge
because its Maker knows how to
fly.

And suddenly I realized:
I've been learning to drive all along
Simply by maneuvering crowded elementary school
hallways.

Your Lips:
Not tenacious, but
(I easily induce smiles)
A pliant curtain.

daughter rely on morning

Funny how her laughter
is the only thing that carries
through the vents of memory
into the hall of eulogy.
And maybe that's okay.

Remember The night comes in When we deny reality

To save our kisses
In a transparent, glass jar
Like precious fireflies

I'm the type of person
Who always orders a tossed salad,
But never pierces
 a piece of chicken
 and a leaf of lettuce
In the same motion.

Fear indicates life built up and strong.

Darling, these moments
are to be protected in
picturesque snow globes.

If I were to die today,
I would wish my soul to become the peach
of a sunset.

Then, every cliché about the sky being
a canvas,
a painter's blending experiment.
on fire,
orange hues warming the soul.

Every vague adjective about the sky being
mesmerizing.
captivating.
brilliant.
unlike this anywhere else.

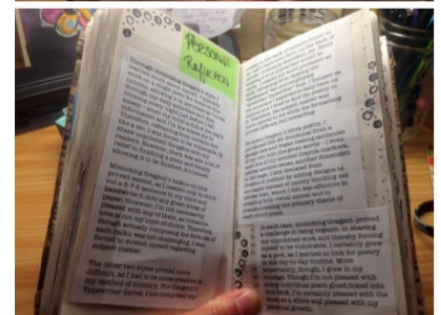
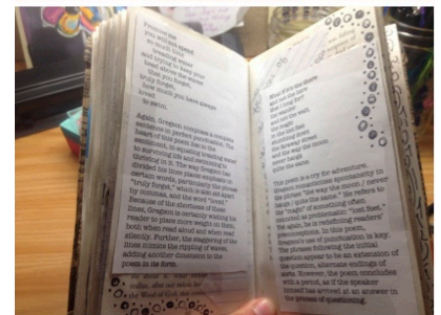
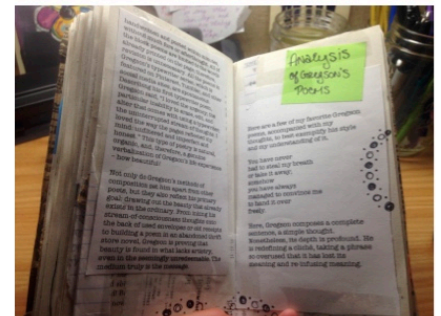
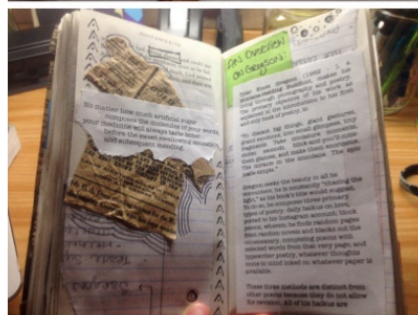
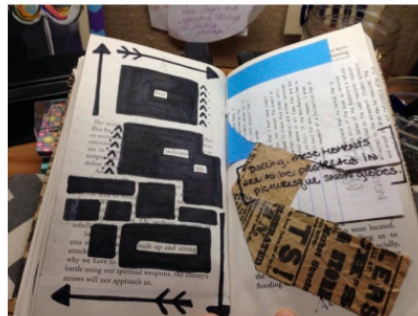
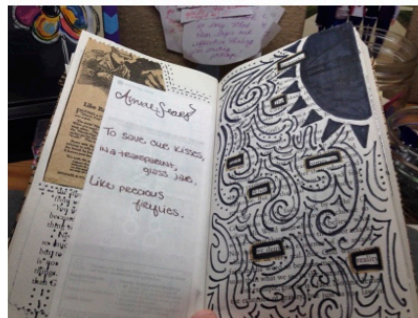
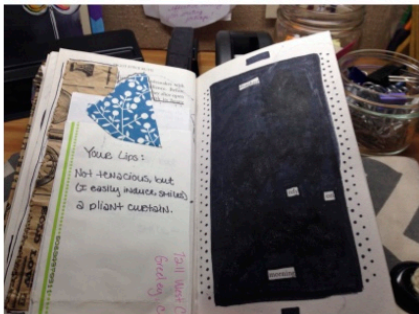
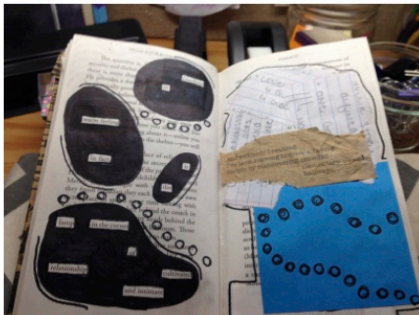
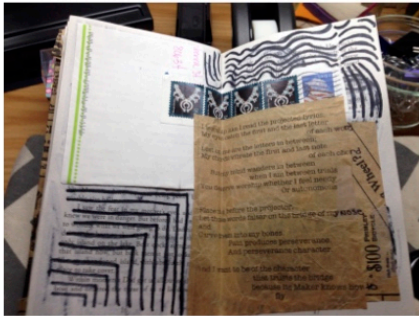
Would suddenly apply to me.

And when you saw me,
rendered speechless in awe
and that inability for words:
poetry.

That awe, more so than myself,
proof of the Artist.
the Pyro.
the Breath of Life
of Language.
of Poetry.

No matter how much artificial sugar
composes the molecules of your words,
your medicine will always taste bitter
before the sweet swallowing sensation
and subsequent mending.

Images of My Gregson Mimicry



An Overview on Gregson

Tyler Knott Gregson (1982 -), a Montana-residing Buddhist, makes his living through photography and poetry. The primary objective of his work as explained in the introduction to his first and only book of poetry, is to:

“Dissect big things, giant gestures, grand emotions,
into small glimpses, tiny fragments.

Take miniature moments, stolen seconds, blink-
and-you’ll-miss-them glances, and make them
enormous.

The miracle in the mundane. The epic made simple.”

Gregson seeks the beauty in all he encounters; he is constantly “chasing the light,” as his book’s title would suggest. To do so, he composes three primary types of poetry: daily haikus on love, posted to his Instagram account; block poems, wherein he finds random pages from random novels and blacks out the unnecessary, composing poems with selected words from that very page; and typewriter poetry, whatever thoughts come to mind inked on whatever paper is available.

These three methods are distinct from other poems because they do not allow for revision. All of his haikus are handwritten and posted within minutes, without much fore or afterthought. All of the block poems are limited to the words already printed on the page; therefore, revision is unnecessary. All the poems in Gregson’s typewriter series, which is featured on Pinterest, Tumbler, and other social media sites, are spontaneous. Describing his first typewriter poem, Gregson said, “I loved the urgency; the particular inability to erase, edit, and alter that comes with using a typewriter; the uninterrupted stream of thoughts. I loved the way the pages reflected my mind: unfiltered and imperfect and honest.” This type of poetry is natural, organic, and, therefore, a genuine verbalization of Gregson’s life experience – how beautiful!

Not only do Gregson’s methods of composition set him apart from other poets, but they also reflect his primary goal: drawing out the beauty that already exists in the ordinary. From inking his stream-of-consciousness thoughts onto the back of used envelopes or old receipts to building a poem in an abandoned thrift store novel, Gregson is proving that beauty is found in what lacks artistry, even in the seemingly unredeemable. The medium truly is the message, in Gregson’s case.

Analysis of Gregson's Poems

Here are a few of my favorite Gregson poems that best exemplify his style.

"You have never
had to steal my breath
or take it away;
somehow
you have always
managed to convince me
to hand it over
freely."

Here, Gregson composes a complete sentence, a simple thought. Nonetheless, its depth is profound. He is redefining a cliché, taking a phrase so overused that it has lost its meaning and re-infusing meaning into it.

"Promise me
you will not spend
so much time
treading water
and trying to keep your
head above the waves
that you forget,
truly forget,
how much you have always
loved
to swim."

Again, Gregson composes a complete sentence in perfect punctuation. The heart of this poem lies in the sentiment, in equating treading water to surviving life and swimming to thriving in it. The way Gregson has divided his lines places emphasis on certain words, particularly the phrase "truly forget," which is also set apart by commas, and the word "loved." Because of the shortness of these lines, Gregson is certainly wishing his reader to place more weight on them, both when read aloud and when read silently. Further, the staggering of the lines mimics the rippling of waves, adding another dimension to the poem in its form.

“What if it’s the there
and not the here
that I long for?
the wander
and not the wait,
the magic
in the lost feet
stumbling down
the faraway street
and the way the moon
never hangs
quite the same.”

This poem is a cry for adventure. Gregson romanticizes spontaneity in the phrase “the way the moon / never hangs / quite the same.” He refers to the “magic” of something often connoted as problematic: “lost feet.” Yet again, he is redefining readers’ preconceptions. In this poem, Gregson’s use of punctuation is key. The phrases following the initial question appear to be an extension of the question, alternate endings of sorts. However, the poem concludes with a period, as if the speaker himself has arrived at an answer in the process of questioning

Personal Reflection on Mimicking Gregson

Through mimicking Gregson's style, I learned much about myself. I typically work on a single poem for three or four months, allowing it to percolate as I move through my daily activities and then revising every night just before I fall asleep – when my mind is full of the day's information and I'm the wisest for it! Therefore, refraining from revision felt like a sin. I was forced to be vulnerable, to share unpolished thoughts with my readers. However, there was also a bit of relief in finishing a poem and simply allowing it to be finished; it's honest.

Mimicking Gregson's haikus on love proved easiest, as I needed only to count out a 5-7-5 sentence in my mind and handwrite it onto any given scrap of paper. However, I'm not necessarily pleased with any of them, as romantic love is not my topic of choice. Therefore, though actually composing the formula of each haiku was not challenging, I was forced to stretch myself regarding subject matter.

The other two styles proved more difficult, as I had to be more creative in my method of mimicry. For Gregson's Typewriter Series, I too composed my poems on the back of receipts found on my hall's bathroom floor, on the back of checks I'd already deposited, etc. Since locating a true typewriter would be costly, I treated my word processor as such, refraining from tapping the "backspace" bar and employing "American Typewriter" font. I focused on the mundane I experience daily here on campus and I tried to find the poetry in it. Therefore, the subject matter was more natural to me while the formatting proved difficult, but rewarding.

To mimic Gregson's block poetry, I purchased a \$2 devotional from a garage sale and began making sentences of my own with the given words – I even used one of my scented Crayola markers, adding another sense, another dimension to the page. I also deviated from Gregson's method by adding designs to my page instead of merely blocking out excess text, which I felt was effective in creating both visual appeal and in communicating the primary theme of each short poem.

In each case, mimicking Gregson proved a challenge in being organic, in sharing my unpolished work and thereby forcing myself to be vulnerable. I certainly grew as a poet, as I learned to look for poetry in the day-to-day routine. More importantly, though, I grew in my courage. Though I'm not pleased with every individual poem glued/inked into this book, I'm certainly pleased with the work as a whole and pleased with my personal growth.

ee cummings mimicry

midnight runs and desperate prayers

that twink
ling &

win king
mis cell any

{ connot
ing

ran
dom

im puls iv i ty

} was anything

but spon
tane
ously

breathed
into place

{ i am made of d u s t / in Your image . . . }

You (who breathed stars' illumination,
& life into d u s t)

are Dust

who You are,
in Pieces /

Particles (purposefully lost in
w a n d e r l u s t)

perched never grasped
on my fingerprint
after skating over
memory's surface
gone cold with time

a kiss of the thumb /
of the b r e a t h

(gifted to i /
to d u s t

by Dust itself)

returns You to the wayward w a n d e r l u s t
in which You certainly exist :

coating all creations of d u s t
especially those unnoticed

in w a n d e r l u s t,

You are l o s t to me -

except when i allow my hands to be d u s t y

{ . . . and to d u s t / to Dust i will return }

i used to spend my summers writing my name into the Wind
(an adventure always a memory & always a promise)
i used to spend my summers chasing the Sun
(a race to see who reached home first)

i now wonder
was i chasing the Sun
or
was he chasing me?

Time a cruel master:
unwavering unyielding consistence.
sure as the always of my adventures
the promise of a Sunset

i fly Westward
(my wheels spinning
or
my feet pounding on pavement)
please don't set before i'm home
(i'm not ready)

i lack preparation because
i run a-
head instead of running
alongside
cherishing the mystery
the obscure content of a
Tie (arriving home together we're)

an airport terminal is a banana split
(with caramel sweet hellos)
where chills of apart meet imissedyou's that fit
warmth of reunion melts creamy plateaus

the sprinkles the cherries the peanuts atop
make all seem confetti carefree
but we have to swallow before Time closes shop
& all that is left is the fee

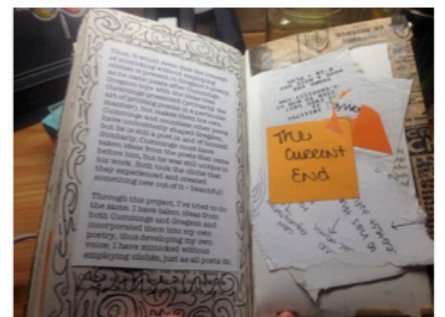
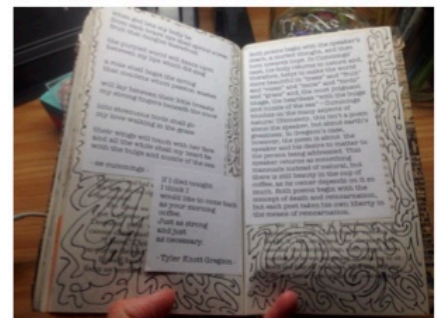
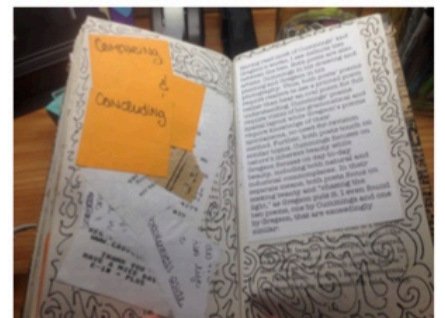
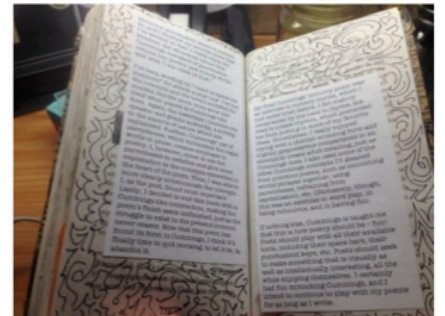
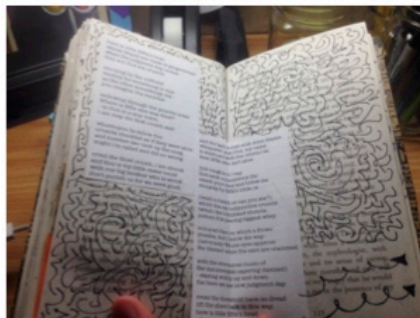
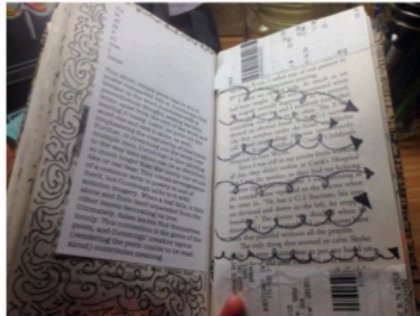
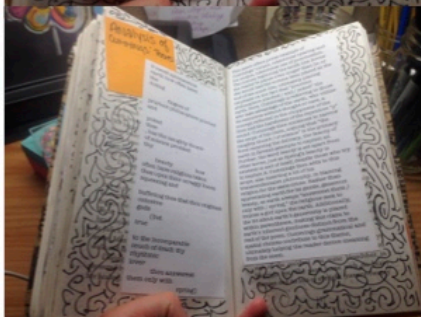
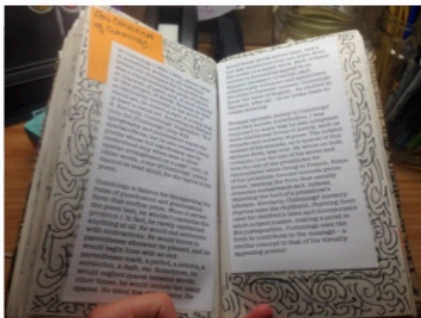
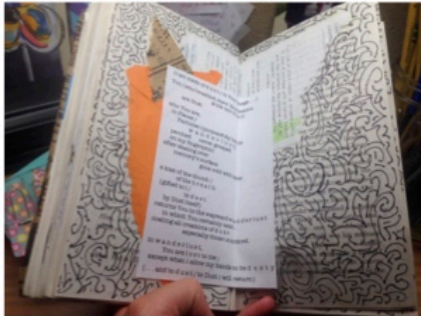
an airport terminal is a banana split
(with scoops of melancholy)
where a hug a tearful goodbye acquits
as emmamolly becomes Emma & Molly

"see ya soon ya big baboon"
(each layer now soupy remains)
two content tongues part & pocket their spoons
as the taste refreezes in two brains

and I admit
i repeatedly order and split this split
(one entity in dish's embrace
with a split banana for a base)

though i can't split goodbye from hello

Images of My Cummings Pages



An Overview of Cummings

ee cummings (1894-1962), whose name is sometimes written in all lowercase letters out of respect for his poetic style, was a transcendentalist artist of pencil, of charcoal, of paint, and, of most interest to this project, of words. Because he was so intimately involved in the world of visual art, he coined a style of poetry that is itself a visual art. According to Richard S. Kennedy, Cummings' biographer, "Not only did [Cummings] play with typography and punctuation marks for special effects, but he also created many poems whose full significance can be understood only when seen in their spatial arrangement on a page" (xvi). In other words, some of Cummings' poems cannot be read aloud, for the layout is the poem.

Cummings is famous for disregarding the rules of punctuation and grammatical form that confine prose. When it served the poem best, he wouldn't capitalize the pronoun *i*. In fact, he rarely capitalized anything at all. He would end sentences with contractions. He would throw in parentheses wherever he pleased, and he would begin lines with an end-parentheses mark, a period, a comma, a semicolon, a dash, etc. Sometimes, he would neglect spaces between words; other times, he would include too many spaces. He titled few of his poems. He would break words across lines, and a line was sometimes only one letter from the center of a larger word. Each of these choices in formatting appear to be flippant disregard; however, each intentionally enhances and symbolizes the poem's thematic content. Cummings knew the rules of English – he studied at Harvard, after all – so he broke them to create meaning.

Because sporadic poetry is Cummings' most well known contribution, I was surprised to learn that he also composed more traditional forms of poetry, such as sonnets and nursery rhymes. The subject matter of his sonnets, as it typical of this ancient form, was love. He wrote on both romantic love for one of his wives and love for one of the prostitutes he encountered while living in France. Some of his prostitute-focused sonnets prove ironic, twisting the form that usually connotes endearment and, instead, depicting the hurt of a prostitute's lifestyle. Similarly, Cummings' nursery rhymes take the rhythmic, rhyming form used for children's tales and incorporates adult subject matter, making a point in the juxtaposition. Cummings uses the form to contribute to the message – a similar concept to that of his visually appealing poems!

Analysis of Cummings Poems

“O sweet spontaneous
earth how often have
the
doting

fingers of
prurient philosophers pinched
and

poked
thee
, has the naughty thumb
of science prodded
thy

beauty how
often have religions taken
thee upon their scraggy knees
squeezing and

buffeting thee that thou mightest conceive
gods
(but
true

to the incomparable
couch of death thy
rhythmic
lover

thou answerest

them only with

spring)”

This poem offers prime example of Cummings’ unique, intentional spacing and his unique, intentional use of punctuation. The comma beginning the tenth line forces the reader to pause even longer than he or she would had the comma been placed at the end of the ninth line, ultimately placing emphasis on the fact that “prurient philosophers pinched / and / poked” the earth. Here, Cummings is referring to those who take advantage of the earth, who utilize its resources without thought or care, a concept reflected in the choppiness of the lines and the harshness of the repetitive “p” sound. Cummings then continues to narrow the scope of his claim, arguing that “the naughty thumb / of science” is the primary force removing the delicacy, the beauty of earth in fervent attempts to explain all. Further, the word *beauty* is set apart from other terms, just as Spring’s beauty is existent in and of itself, despite those who try to

explain it. Cummings then adds to this scope, also inserting a bit of his transcendentalist philosophy, in blaming religion for the same crime. Rather than appreciating earth for its gentle, generous beauty, as earth always “answerest them / only with / spring,” the religious seek to impose a god upon the earth. Additionally, the bit about earth’s generosity is placed within parentheses, making this claim to earth’s inherent goodness distinct from the rest of the poem. Cummings’ grammatical and spatial choices contribute to this theme, ultimately helping the reader derive meaning from the poem.

“l(a
le
af
fa
ll
s)
one
l
iness”

This short, simple poem has so much power compacted into it. Cummings first breaks up the word *loneliness* with a parenthetical thought, setting the first letter apart from the rest of the word and leaving it lonely. Later, he pulls out the word *one* and sets it alone, as well, emphasizing the singularity of loneliness. Further, in stretching out the word over multiple lines, Cummings is also alluding to the way time alone can be so stretched, so much longer than the lonely one would like or can bear. This visual arrangement of a common term is poetry in and of itself, but Cummings adds to it with autumn imagery. When a leaf falls, it falls alone and finds itself separated from the other leaves decorating its tree. Ultimately, fallen leaves find themselves lonely. This connection is the given of the poem, and Cummings’ creative layout (rendering the poem unable to be read aloud) contributes meaning.

“hate blows a bubble of despair into
hugeness world system universe and bang
- fear buries a tomorrow under woe
and up comes yesterday most green and young
pleasure and pain are merely surfaces
(one itself showing, itself hiding one)
life's only and true value neither is
love makes the little thickness of the coin
comes here a man would have from madame death
nevertheless now and without winter spring?
she'll spin that spirit her own fingers with
and give him nothing (if he should not sing)
how much more than enough for both of us
darling. And if i sing you are my voice”

This is an example of Cummings' sonnets, which are very loose sonnets (though this one is not ironic, as earlier alluded to). The poem uses 14 lines with ten syllables per line, but there is great deviance in iambs and slant rhyme is more common than true rhyme. Nonetheless, it is a sonnet. The poem opens with an oxymoron of sorts: “bubble of despair.” Bubbles typically connote lighthearted joy, but this bubble is heavy. Here, “despair” is rising up out of “hate” – a powerful image. In typical Cummings style, the third line begins with a dash, putting a pause a moment after “bang” instead of immediately afterwards. Isn't this true to life? Doesn't an explosion come out of nowhere and surprise us, followed by a moment of silent recognition? Cummings uses strangely placed punctuation to achieve this effect. The poem then settles in to its heavier themes, placed in parentheses for emphasis. Pleasure and pain both compose life, but we rarely experience both at the same time: “(one itself showing, itself hiding one)”. The gap between the pleasure and the pains, the heads and the tails on this coin of life is found in the thickness of the coin, which is made of love. Ultimately, Cummings is elevating love above both triumphs and hardships: “how much more than enough [of pleasures and pains] for both of us / darling. And if I sing you are my voice”. Notice that there is no question mark after “darling”, but a period. Again, Cummings uniquely uses punctuation just as much as words to speak.

“here is little Effie's head
whose brains are made of gingerbread
when the judgment day comes
God will find six crumbs

stooping by the coffinlid
waiting for something to rise
as the other somethings did--
you imagine His surprise

bellowing through the general noise
Where is Effie who was dead?
--to God in a tiny voice,
i am may the first crumb said

whereupon its fellow five
crumbs chuckled as if they were alive
and number two took up the song,
might i'm called and did no wrong

cried the third crumb, i am should
and this is my little sister could
with our big brother who is would
don't punish us for we were good;

and the last crumb with some shame
whispered unto God, my name
is must and with the others i've
been Effie who isn't alive

just imagine it I say
God amid a monstrous din
watch your step and follow me
stooping by Effie's little, in

(want a match or can you see?)
which the six subjunctive crumbs
twitch like mutilated thumbs:
picture His peering biggest whey

coloured face on which a frown
puzzles, but I know the way--
(nervously Whose eyes approve
the blessed while His ears are crammed

with the strenuous music of
the innumerable capering damned)
--staring wildly up and down
the here we are now judgment day

cross the threshold have no dread
lift the sheet back in this way.
here is little Effie's head
whose brains are made of gingerbread”

This is an example of Cummings’ nursery rhymes, which use the contrived rhyme, rhythmic syllabic patterns, and preposterous subject matter typical of nursery rhymes. However, Cummings’ nursery rhymes take a darker, more meaningful twist. For example, Cummings uses “here is little Effie’s head” to touch on what remains after death: may, might, should, could, would, and must. Our souls and our bodies may not remain (as Effie herself is no more, her head merely perishable “gingerbread”), but our thoughts (may, might, should, could) and our actions (would and must) have consequences that do remain. Further, it is these thoughts, actions, and consequences that speak to our character, that speak to God on our behalf as He decides who to bless and who to “damn” on “judgment day”: “don’t punish us for we were good”. This short, cute-sounding nursery rhyme holds vastly important content, as Cummings again uses form ironically.

Personal Reflection on Mimicking Cummings

I wrote “midnight runs and desperate prayers,” my first Cummings mimicry poem, without meaning to. I had been on a late-night run/prayer session, and I returned to my dorm with a head full of inspiration and fingers ready to type. I thought it might prove meaningful to scatter my words and syllables, both as the stars are scattered in the sky and as my prayers were a scattering of topics. The following day, I read Cummings’ “the sky,” which is almost identical, and I decided to infuse a few more of Cummings’ trademarks, such as parenthesis and the lack of space between “in” and “place,” indicating a locked security without wiggle room. In this case, Cummings’ stylized format fit my thoughts well.

I wrote my second Cummings’ poem intending to employ the lowercase i. Holding a Christian worldview, I thought it might be fun to toy with capitalization of all nouns/pronouns ascribed to God and non-capitalization of the nouns/pronouns ascribed to myself – especially i! I then began to play with spacing, and I found that placing spaces between the letters of words that connote fleeting, floating natures proved effective and visually appealing, as are all of Cummings’ poems! Lastly, I added abnormal punctuation where it seemed fit, and I finished my favorite poem that I’ve written to date. I really enjoy the freedom, the whimsical nature that Cummings disregard of grammar infuses into poetry, and it truly works well with “i am made of dust.”

I’ve been working on “i used to spend my summers” for almost a year now. I’ve had the concepts and the terms solidified for months, but the poem truly grew into itself when placed in Cummings-like form. Again, the lowercase i humbles the speaker and grants authority, a solidity to the aspects of nature which are capitalized. Further, Cummings’ use of parentheses, which diminishes the caged words in prose, creates emphasis in poetry. I, however, chose to use the parentheses to redefine and give more explanation to the concepts embedded in the heart of the poem. Thus, I was able to more clearly communicate the concepts I, as the poet, found most important. Lastly, I decided to end this poem with a Cummings-like contraction, making the poem’s finish seem unfinished, just as the struggle to exist in the present moment never ceases. Now that this poem has found its form in Cummings, I think it’s finally time to quit revising, to let it be, to abandon it.

My final Cummings’ mimicry poem was an exercise in nursery rhyme, which I had never tried before. I felt slightly constrained by the need to rhyme, the need to create rhythm, which prevented me from putting in some of my favorite ideas. Nonetheless, I really enjoyed toying with a childish sounding form and slightly preposterous comparisons in an attempt to create adult meaning, just as Cummings does. I also used some of the other Cummings concepts I’d gleaned from previous poems, such as smooshing words/phrases together, using parentheses, refraining from capitalization, etc. Ultimately, though, this was an exercise in word play, in being ridiculous, and in having fun.

If nothing else, Cummings is taught me that this is how poetry should be – fun! Poets should play with all their available tools, including their space bars, their punctuation keys, etc. Poets should seek to make something that is visually as well as intellectually interesting, all the while enjoying themselves. I certainly had fun mimicking Cummings, and I intend to continue to play with my poems for as long as I write.

Comparing and Concluding

Having read most of Cummings' and Gregson's works, I see definite ties between the two. Both poets are also artists, Cummings in his drawing and painting and Gregson in his photography. Thus, both poets' poems require readers to see a printed version for full understanding. Cummings' poems require vision of his grammatical and spatial layout while Gregson's poems require knowledge of their spontaneous, no-need-for-revision method. Further, both poets touch on similar topics. Cummings focuses on nature's inherent beauty while Gregson focuses on day-to-day beauty, including both natural and industrial commonplaces. In their separate means, both poets focus on seeking beauty and "chasing the light," as Gregson puts it. I even found two poems, one by Cummings and one by Gregson, that are exceedingly similar:

when god lets my body be
from each brave eye shall sprout a tree
fruit that dangles therefrom

the purpled world will dance upon
between my lips which did sing

a rose shall beget the spring
that maidens whom passion wastes

will lay between their little breasts
my strong fingers beneath the snow

into strenuous birds shall go
my love walking in the grass

their wings will touch with her face
and all the while shall my heart be
with the bulge and nuzzle of the sea

- ee cummings -

If I died tonight
I think I
would like to come back
as your morning
coffee.
Just as strong
and just
as necessary.

- Tyler Knott Gregson -

Both poems begin with the speaker's death, a morbid thought, and then turn towards hope. In Cummings' case, his body returns to nature and, therefore, helps to make the world more beautiful in "trees" and "fruit" and "roses" and "snow" and "birds" and

“grass” and, the most poignant image, the heartbeat “with the bulge and nuzzle of the sea” – Cummings touches on the many aspects of nature! Ultimately, this isn’t a poem about the speaker, but about earth’s greatness. In Gregson’s case, however, the poem is about the speaker’s desire to matter to the person being addressed. This speaker returns as something manmade instead of natural, but there is still beauty in the cup of coffee, as its owner depends on it so much. Both poems begin with the concept of death and reincarnation, but each poet takes his own liberty in the means of reincarnation.

Thus, it would seem that the concept of mimicking without employing clichés is present in Gregson’s poetry, as he came years after Cummings. Gregson toys with the ideas that Cummings presented, such as making the means of printing the message or writing about reincarnation, but makes them his own. Other poets have undoubtedly shaped Gregson, but he is still a poet in and of himself. Similarly, Cummings must have taken ideas from the poets that came before him, but he was still unique in his work. Through this project, I’ve tried to do the same. I have taken ideas from both Cummings and Gregson and incorporated them into my own poetry, thus developing my own voice; I have mimicked without employing clichés, just as all true poets do.