



# A Yearn for an Exquisite Life: A Study of E. E. Cummings' *If*

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## Abstract:

One of the most intrinsic parts of human life is desire. Every soul on earth desires for variety of things, may it be emotions or materialism. There is also a spiritual desire, where people long to know what would happen after death. Life is unpredictable and some situations are inevitable. E. E. Cummings also projects desires or wish of an individual to come true. The thought that the poem brings in the mind of the readers is 'If everything happens that can't be done'. Edward Estlin Cummings might have written this work to convey a message that life is inevitable and there is nothing such as a perfect world. It is just his desire of living in a perfect world, which actually does not exist. The most unique part of the poem *If* is that, it has three central themes. It consist Transcendental, Romantic and a realistic theme.

**Key Words:** desire, inevitable, transcendental, romantic and realistic.

E. E. Cummings was gifted to write poems at a very early age of ten and his mother was fond of his writings and documented them as much as she could. He was born on 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1894, in Cambridge Massachusetts. Though his name was Edward, he was not called by that name, as his father who was a minister and professor in Harvard University was called by that name. Therefore, people called him by his last name Cummings. Cummings left to France from America as a volunteer ambulance driver in World

War I. In a matter of five months he and his friend were put in the prison camp, by the French authorities in a suspicious case. The experience that he underwent in the jail, he wrote it in his biographical novel 'The Enormous Room', which was published in the year 1922.

The most interesting fact about Cummings is that he was not just an enormous poet, but was also a magnificent painter. But more than his paintings he is known for his poems, because he played wildly with forms, Spacing, punctuation, capitalization and overall Grammar. He had married two women out of which one cheated on him and the other married him for the sake of money. All this broke him and his feelings and experiences appeared in his writings.

After his death in the year 1962, his poems were the second most read in United States of America after the most famous poet and traditional poet Robert Frost. E. E. Cummings is known for his unique style of writing and his writing style reflects on his life.

'If' is a poem by Cummings that appears to be an ordinary poem in the beginning, when a reader reads it for the first time. Cummings had many different poems that had normal structures. The theme of this poem is 'If everything were any different, nobody would be the person they are today, so stop pushing the world isn't the way it is because sometimes life just isn't fair'. In this poem we can see the repeating of the words 'If', 'for' and 'I wouldn't be I' 'you wouldn't you' and 'we wouldn't we'. These words are an example of anaphora and paradox. He also uses metaphor to compare the unreal things with the reality. The use of comma is not seen in his poem lines, whereas he uses a dash instead of a comma. It might be because he wants to convey that there is a message beyond just the lines that appear in the poem.

The poem 'If' could be considered as a biography, where a person's life, their ambition and their personality traits are been revealed by the author in his or her poetry. If we consider this poem as a biographical poem, it is evident that E. E. Cummings is talking about his own life and he imagines a perfect world where he could enjoy the benefits of fulfilling his own desires. The poem consists of three stanzas, and there are six lines perceived in each stanza.

The word 'if' is written in the first person's point of view, which clearly states that the speaker is most obviously Cummings. The poem follows a strict form of a rhythm, and has a specific rhyme scheme, which is ABAAAB CDCDCD and the last stanza is EFEFEF. The most unique qualities of the poem is that

it has three central themes in total. They are realistic theme, romantic theme and transcendental theme. In this poem Cummings is not only giving a description of his desire of a perfect life, but he also desires for a perfect life for every human being in the entire world. He uses the word 'if' often in his poem in order to convey that all the pessimistic things in the world would become perfect if they are converted into optimistic things. He wants the negativity to be converted into positivity so that this world could be a perfect world. This shows that Cummings has gone through a lot of situations through which he wants to convert all the negatives of his life into positives.

For instance, when we see the fourteenth line of the poem where he says

“ a world where dirt was clean and tears were glee”

This style of writing would make any reader to stop for a while and question themselves as 'what kind of a world this would be if there was not a single thing such as bad?' Cummings also has made use of some realistic dialogues, which makes the poem as a realistic one and makes it just like a dialogue of a common human being. When we look at line two, we see that he uses a word such as 'warn't' which does not exist in English language. But, he uses the word 'warn't' in order to make the dialogue to appear more realistic in nature. This is evident in the line two of the poem,

“ And measles were nice and a lie warn't a lie”

As Cummings has faced a lot of heartbreaks in his love and marriage life, he romantically describes that an element such as love cannot exist in a perfect world. It is not very clear as to whom the poem was written to, but it gives a the reader a clear picture of a portrayal of a woman. This means that Cummings might be dedicating these lines to a woman.

If we perceive the poem in a transcendental aspect, we can see that Cummings wants to pass a message that every one of us would not be ourselves if this world was a perfect place. This is evident when we look at the following lines from the poem, where he says,

“ I wouldn't I...

You Wouldn't you..., and

We wouldn't we..."

Nonconformity and individualism are the two ideas that are brought into the poem as the specific ideas. Cummings gives us a clear idea that we should just be ourselves not be confirmed into the societal patterns and norms. Every individual has their own uniqueness and should not limit themselves just for the sake of the society. Every person must cherish their own uniqueness and celebrate it.

When a reader reads the poem two or more than two times, it makes clear the idea that Cummings does not actually wants to live in a very perfect world and be unhappy. Rather, he wants to live in a world that is not so perfect and be happy in it. According to Cummings, If things were just perfect in the world then it would just be a boring world without any climax and enthusiasm. It would end up being just ordinary. Cummings uses the rhyme schemes in order to express the deeper meanings in the poem. A rhyme in a poem increases the fascination of a reader to read as well as to understand the poem well. The rhyme makes a poem complete, fashionable and presentable for a reader. The two most recurring themes in E. E. Cummings poems that we can perceive are transcendentalism and romanticism.

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