

Capital Ideas

DILIGENT READERS MAY HAVE questioned what the editorial team was up to in the last issue.

Comings and goings among the editorial team led to an inadvertent change in Phyllis Reeve's review of the *De Monstris* exhibition in Toronto. When a reader pointed it out, we began to second-guess ourselves but soon realised we were not alone.

The change, of course, was to capitalise the initials of Edward Estlin Cummings, usually expressed—as the original text of the review did—e.e. cummings.

“Pity this busy monster,” we beg readers. Whatever initial fascination the poet's spelling of his name held for us when we first encountered it, and whatever licence it gave us to eschew capitals when we wanted to seem avant-garde (prior to the world of iPhones and other branded nomenclature, anyway), a quick glance online shows that everyone from Wikipedia to the Poetry Foundation and the *New Yorker* is capitalising the man's name. The poet Paul Muldoon even contributed an essay to the latter in 2014 mulling Cummings' relationship with capitals, tracing it back to William James, who “just happens” (Muldoon loves coincidences) to have lived on the same street as that on which Cummings was born, and in fact introduced his parents to each other. Guided by T.S. Eliot's view that “the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality,” Cummings (according to Muldoon) made his “I” an “i.” (With this in mind, one mulls with amusement the thought of our Society's namesake Alcuin developing Carolingian miniscule—the foundation of our lower-case alphabet, for an emperor, and one named, of all things, Charlemagne, or Charles the Great.)

Cummings died in 1962, and however Mister Death likes his blue-eyed boy in that hell of a good universe next door (to crib from two of his better-known poems), editors have reasserted typographical norms and restored the capitalisation he disavowed. Perhaps this, too, has effected the kind of self-effacement he desired in an era when the mix of upper and lower case lettering is deployed to raise awareness of one's identity rather than minimise it (poet and publisher Jay MillAr, for example, throws a capital ‘A’ into his surname to emphasise its correct spelling). Muldoon says Cummings' use of type stands in opposition to notions that typography was no longer relevant in an age when sound and video seemed poised to replace text. Yet, as Marshall McLuhan noted in 1967, “Each time a new environment is created to envelop the previous one, it tends to elevate the previous one into an art form.” And so typography is often a vehicle for self-expression while its more traditional deployment doesn't draw undue attention.

But these are deep thoughts for summer, and most readers have likely gone fishing. We're certain collector Justin Hanisch has, who treats us to a discussion in this issue of assembling an exhibit at Bruce Peel Special Collections in Alberta. Meanwhile, James Monro explores the creation of the photobook genre, conceived at a time when photography was coming into its own as a medium of fine art. To quote McLuhan again, “This is no mere power of reproduction but a making-new.”

~ Peter Mitham, editor