5-2020

The Typewriter and the Literary Sphere: An Analysis of Turn-of-the-Century Literature

Emma K. Holdbrooks

The University of Southern Mississippi

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by

Emma Holdbrooks

A Thesis
Submitted to the Honors College of
The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment
of Honors Requirements

May 2020

Approved by

Jonathan Barron, Ph.D., Thesis Adviser School of Humanities

Matthew Casey, Ph.D., Interim Director School of Humanities

Ellen Weinauer, Ph.D., Dean Honors College

Abstract

My thesis explores the typewriter's impact on early 20th century American literature. By providing authors with the means to produce work accurately and effectively, the typewriter changed the process of writing. Typewriters also created job opportunities for women, who often served as typists. The typist became the foothold position that changed America's perception of women in the work force and helped usher in a new social concept, "the New Woman." To illustrate my claim, I show how the typewriter allowed poets like E. E. Cummings to experiment with spacing. Cummings made the typewriter's standardization of text and spacing into a revolutionary technique for poetry. After Cummings, poetry was no longer just the text; the form that the text took created new meanings. In short, I show that the typewriter revolutionized American literature; it made literary production easier and enabled the production of standardized texts.

Key Words: Typewriter, Women, Authors, Literacy, Literature, Poetry

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my fiancé, David Hii.

David, you constantly inspire me to write harder, think bigger, dig deeper.

You have supported and encouraged me through every written word.

Thank you for pulling down stars just to watch me glow.

I cannot wait to marry you.

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank my thesis adviser, Dr. Jonathan Barron for his unwavering mentorship and support during this entire process. Words cannot express my thankfulness for him. He has been patient, encouraging, and kind during the entirety of this project. His dedication helped me persevere, and his expertise challenged me to create the best product I possibly could. From Dr. Barron's passion in the classroom to his personalized wisdom, I hope to impact my future students as much as he has impacted me.

I would also like to thank Dr. Nicolle Jordan for her encouragement from the time I was a freshman, terrified in my first English class, all the way to my capstone, ending my college career with her. Thank you to Professor Kinkopf, who has been such a wonderful role model and makes me want to be the best English teacher possible.

To my family: Dad, Mama, Kelsey, Davis, and Peyton. Thank you for being my biggest fans, my cheerleaders, my supplier of coffee, my people to call at any moment. To the Hii family, thank you for being my home-away-from-home, my sanctuary. I could not have done this without you. And to my college family, my Southern Miss cross-country team and Coach Kindt, thank you for running through this journey with me and pushing me to finish strong.

To the USM Honors College, thank you for your tireless support and resources throughout my time at Southern Miss. From the faculty, forums, and honors classes, I have grown in ways I have never imagined as a thinker, researcher, global citizen, and Golden Eagle.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The turn of the twentieth century in America was an era of both tremendous industrial expansion and dramatic social change. The beginning of the 1900s ushered in many modern and important innovations: airplanes, motion picture cameras, the assembly line, and even Aspirin. However, one invention, engineered in 1867 but not commonplace until the turn-of-the-century, transformed American society. The typewriter, a machine that contains keys for producing alphabetical characters, numerals, and typographical symbols on paper inserted around a roller facilitated economic, cultural, and social changes. Simply stated, the typewriter revolutionized the way in which Americans communicated and lived, and it has become a symbol of a massive shift in technology and correspondence that forever changed American history. Beginning in the 1870s, for example, the typewriter became widely used for communication; by the 1980s, the typewriter had led to the development of personal computers. In this period, the typewriter also influenced business, politics, and literature. In business, the typewriter allowed information to be recorded in a quick and legible manner. In an 1888 article about the benefits of the typewriter, researcher P.G. Hubert claims that "with the aid of this little machine an operator can accomplish more correspondence in a day than half a dozen clerks can with the pen, and do better work" (1). The typewriter thus transformed the American workplace, allowing clerks to be more efficient in producing all types of written work for employers. More than such efficiency, however, the typewriter also greatly impacted women in the early 20th century because it increased the number of women in the American workforce by creating paying jobs outside of the home. Specifically, the typewriter aided in creating jobs for women as female secretaries or stenographers. The female typist, empowered by the typewriter, could act in new ways in the business world, in her

romantic life, and in her geographical sphere. Therefore, despite some limitations, the typewriter facilitated the beginning of equal representation for women.

The typewriter impacted not only the women of American society but also authors and American literary production. Since the typewriter resulted in a standardized and efficient way to produce texts, authors could more easily dictate or create works in an approachable way. Some authors used the typewriter as it was designed—typing or dictating traditional manuscripts. Other writers were more avant-garde, using the typewriter to experiment in both form and function of literature.

In this thesis, I will examine the impact of the typewriter on American literature in early 20th century America. First, I will investigate how the typewriter provided new opportunities for reading and writing. To make that point, I will discuss how one of first authors to use a typewriter, Mark Twain, viewed and used the typewriter to aid in literacy production. Next, I will examine the role of the typewriter in early twentieth century fiction. In particular, I will investigate how a fictional female typist is portrayed in in John Dos Passos' *42nd Parallel*, a modern novel that depicts the typewriter girl as a "New Woman," a "typewriter girl." Finally, I will explore the typewriter's influence on language in the poetry of E.E. Cummings who used the typewriter to create experimental avant-garde poetry. My thesis will show that, through these avenues, the typewriter revolutionized American literature.

Typewriter Literacy and Mark Twain

Beginning in 1868, when it was first introduced into American culture, the typewriter became a tool for the development and propagation of literacy. First as a medium of literary production, then as a force in the workforce, and finally in the aesthetic world, the typewriter

became an agent that transformed how Americans were exposed to the reading and writing skills integral to capitalist America. In "Sponsors of Literacy," Deborah Brandt states: "Literacy looms as one of the great engines of profit and competitive advantage in the 20th century: a lubricant for consumer desire; a means for integrating corporate markets; a foundation for the deployment of weapons and other technology; a raw material in the mass production of information" (166). Brandt defines these "sponsors" of literacy as "any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy-and gain advantage by it in some way" (166). In short, such sponsors are the people who have the power to control literacy in some way. In this section, using Mark Twain as an example, I argue that the typewriter is itself a literacy sponsor, an agent regulating literacy. Twain, I argue, believed the typewriter would boost literary proficiency and circulation. As one of the earliest authorial users of the typewriter, Mark Twain marked a technological change in literary production by using a typewriter to create text rather than writing by hand.

The typewriter was an agent of change in the sphere of literary production, authorship, and American literacy from its arrival in 1868. By allowing authors and publishers quicker, more effective ways to generate texts, the typewriter ushered in a plethora of opportunities for more literature than ever to enter circulation in America. This increase in the number of texts produced had a direct effect on the literacy of American society. As sponsors of literacy, authors contribute to individual and community beliefs and skills. The typewriter, therefore, accelerated the ways in which people communicated and distributed the texts that fashion American culture.

Before discussing Twain's view of the typewriter as a literacy sponsor, I turn to the history of the typewriter itself to show that, from the very outset, the typewriter was designed to reform the way that words were produced, designed with literacy issues in mind: "In 1868,

Christopher Latham Sholes arranged the letters on the keyboard for better spacing between popular keys used in combination…this was the beginning of the QWERTY keyboard, which first appeared in 1872. The first typewriter machine found its way on the market in 1874 through Remington & Sons" (Samantha). In short, the QWERTY keyboard—still used as the main keyboard in the United States—was a product of one of the first typewriters to be introduced into the marketplace. This keyboard was intended to improve literacy through the agent of a functional and reliable typewriter that would allow for a consistent format in which text could be easily generated. The invention of the QWERTY keyboard enabled those who typed on the typewriter to quickly and efficiently produce more words than ever. According to Dennis Baron, this typewriter shifted the course of literacy through technology: "By making possible individual engagement in what is commonly understood today as word processing, the typewriter gave the writing body an immediate means of producing a standardized, seemingly completed, type-based text" (92). The typewriter allowed for text legibility and production efficiency, resulting in an easier time for authors to circulate texts.

The initial focus on literacy, however, soon expanded to more far reaching social areas. Paul Benzon declares, "In dictating, recording, replaying, and transcribing information, these bodies and machines distributed around the typewriter a network of textual production" (92) Here, Benzon describes how the typewriter helped to facilitate a new network of textual production. The efficiency of the typewriter in producing text helped to establish a new regulatory and disseminative network for texts, networks enforced by the typewriter. Authors with a typewriter could now spread a regulated collection of ideas. In other words, it soon became the case that only those who could produce texts with a typewriter would have access to the new literary networks now dependent on typewriters. Particularly, authorial typography soon

became a new kind of literacy and, as such, further regulated the literacy of American citizens. Brandt says, "As ordinary citizens have been compelled into these economies, their reading and writing skills have grown sharply more central to the everyday trade of information and goods as well as to the pursuit of education, employment, civil rights, status" (166). Therefore, the increase of societal literacy is a good thing, opening new opportunities for the American people. The history, however, is vexed. As Benzon asserts, "…the typewriter shows media history to be a history of friction and inconsistency rather than of standardized structures of transition" (105). It is here, where literacy is at once furthered through the invention of a typewriter and limited by the constraints of learning how to use it, that I come to Mark Twain. He was one of many authors who, at first, vehemently opposed the typewriter. Initially, he not only argued that it had a detrimental effect on literacy, he also found it a simply plain irritation.

I turn to Mark Twain because his biography (1835-1910) places him at the cusp of this new era of typography. In his career, Mark Twain balanced between the old and the new means of literary production, the traditional and the modernized method of authorship. For instance, Twain was one of the first and most well-documented authors to use typewriters. Mark Adams notes, "He owned an 1874 Sholes & Glidden Type Writer, over which he labored in the hopes of writing faster and neater. His enthusiasm waned, and he dispensed with it" (Adams). Rather than "dispense with it" entirely, however, Twain instead maintained a turbulent relationship with his typewriter: "He would boast that he had submitted *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* to his publisher as a typewritten manuscript, though he himself did not type it. His secretary, Isabel V. Lyon, prepared the manuscript, though not *Tom Sawyer*, but rather *Life on the Mississippi [1883]"* (Adams). By turning to the typewriter, Twain ushered in what I will call American

literature's "typewriter age," submitting the first typewritten manuscript, *Life on the Mississippi,* to an American publisher in 1883.

Twain's tumultuous relationship with the typewriter began with skepticism and critique but ended with acceptance and thankfulness for the machine. Even before he submitted his manuscript, Twain admitted that he spent a year struggling with his typewriter. In a letter to Densmore, Yost and Company, Twain uses humor to express his dissatisfaction with the typewriter:

> Please do not use my name in any way. Please do not even divulge that fact that I own a machine. I have entirely stopped using the type-writer, for the reason that I never could write a letter with it to anybody without receiving a request by return mail that I would not only describe the machine, but state what progress I had made in the use of it, etc., etc. I don't like to write letters, and so I don't want people to know I own this curiosity-breeding little joker. (*Mark Twain's Letters* 419)

Twain's humorous "testimonial" makes plain just how many people were fascinated with the machine in its infancy. Its humor also shows the profound ease of the typewriter as a means of communication. In keeping with Twain's humorous "praise" for the ease the typewriter made possible, Twain continues to offer off-hand "testimonials" in other letters. Later, in a letter to a friend, William Dean Howells, Twain refers to a typewriter he had gifted to Howells. Apparently, Howells had then gifted the typewriter to Bliss Perry, editor of the *Atlantic Monthly.* Twain comically declares,

> I have sent Bliss word *not* to donate it to a charity (though it *is* a pity to fool away a chance to do a charity an ill turn), but to let me know when he has got his dose, because I've got another candidate for damnation. You just wait a couple of weeks & if you don't

> see the Type-Writer coming tilting along toward Cambridge with the raging hell of an unsatisfied appetite in its eye, I lose my guess. (*Mark Twain-Howells Letters* 89)

This letter clearly relates Twain's thorough aversion to the typewriter during his earliest uses of the machine, likening it to damning technology. Twain possibly disliked the ease and speed of textual production, or perhaps Twain felt the machine impersonalized his writing. However, fourteen years later in a letter to the same friend, Twain writes, "If I could beget a typewriter--but no, our fertile days are over" (*Mark Twain-Howells Letters* 695). By relating his typewriter to a practical offspring and praising its ability to transform his literary production, Twain relents and now implies that the typewriter *was* a useful tool in his craft, allowing him to be more productive and efficient.

Twain was not the only person in the literary sphere to voice objection to the typewriter. Even seventy years after its invention, the typewriter continued to aggravate and challenge people's perception of writing technology. For instance, according to Dennis Baron, "So threatening was the typewriter to the traditional literacies that in 1938 the *New York Times* editorialized against the machine that depersonalized writing, usurping the place of 'writing with one's own hand'" (3). The editorial that villainized the typewriter addresses two issues: the mechanized form of writing and the efficiency of the typewriter in producing texts. The latter issue involves the ease with which texts can be produced. *The Times* did not believe any person should be granted the power that the typewriter made possible, as anyone who could type could quickly produce text. Such power, it should be said, was usually found among women who were the most likely, by 1938, to use the new machines. Additionally, the increased capacity for text circulation threatened the literary elite. In their minds, more material produced in a much shorter time was perceived as a threat. The editorial also objected to the typewriter because it was

viewed as a mechanism that "depersonalized writing" and so exacerbated the rising fear of industrialization. When writing could suddenly be produced by a machine rather than by the human hand, it disturbed the traditional means of written communication.

Regardless of his impressions, it should be noted that writers like Mark Twain did not themselves type but rather dictated to female typists. While this was a historic moment in literary production, it is worth noting that "a novelist at a typewriter would be a later phenomenon" (Adams). In 1883, it was still more common for many authors to dictate the material to a typist. Still, even dictating posed new problems due to the typewriter. For instance, Twain proudly proclaims:

> In the year '73 the young woman copied a considerable part of a book of mine *on the machine.* In a previous chapter of this Autobiography I have claimed that I was the first person in the world that ever had a telephone in the house for practical purposes; I will now claim —until dispossessed—that I was the first person in the world to *apply the type-machine to literature*. (*Autobiography of Mark Twain* 446)

In this entry, we see that the tools of writing were profoundly changing, and that Twain utilized the typewriter as an integral part of his literary production. It is also significant that he made use of a "young woman" to copy his hand-written transcript. As I will discuss in the following chapter, women were profoundly impacted by the invention of the typewriter, resulting in the newfound title of "typewriter girls." Female typists, such as Janey Williams in John Dos Passos' *The 42nd Parallel*, began to infiltrate the offices of authors, businessmen, and major corporations. The invention of the typewriter results in gendered hierarchies, placing women in service to male writers and typists in subjugation to male bosses.

Chapter 2: The Typewriter as Modern Woman in *The 42nd Parallel*

In *The 42nd Parallel* (1930), by John Dos Passos, a multitude of new phenomena and inventions compose an homage to the American experience in the early 20th century. The novel forms the first of a revolutionary trilogy that is one of the hallmarks of the Modernist era of American literature. The novel employs five characters to capture the true essence of modern America. Dos Passos utilizes different main characters and does not relate their stories in a linear progression; rather, he integrates fragments of perspectives interspersed with news stories ("Newsreels") and his own stream of consciousness autobiography ("Camera-Eye"). Dos Passos' innovative form allows him to bring history, individuals, and collective society into his novel. Wesley Beal argues that U.S.A "provid[es] a comfortable fictional body through which the historical and social developments resonate" (24). Dos Passos aimed to express the American experience and highlight that all moments depend on the time in which they occur; he took his observations of the American experience in "a rapidly industrializing United States" to produce "his interpretation of modern life" (Ludington 3). In addition to those formal innovations, Dos Passos also included one technological novelty, the typewriter. In this chapter, I will discuss that instrument's impact on American women, particularly on one of the five central characters, Janey Williams.

In what follows, I will show that Dos Passos' character is, in fact, one of the era's "typewriter girls," a new type of woman that "thrive[d] in the decades between 1890 and 1910" (Rainey 105). The impact that the typewriter had on these women typists cannot be underestimated, and Dos Passos elucidates both the triumphs and challenges of such women. For instance, in the early 20th century, typists and women in the workplace generally had little to no

social importance or status. By placing a typist as one of his main protagonists, Dos Passos engages the unimportant status of women and challenges this patriarchal system. Janey Williams in *The 42nd Parallel*, for instance, discovers that the typewriter transforms her female identity and livelihood, offering new opportunities financially, romantically, and spatially.

As a typist, Janey also represents the "New Woman" of early 20th century America and all that she encompasses. A "New Woman" was a product of turn-of-the-century United States, and she often challenged political, economic, and sexual barriers in ways that women dared not challenge before. However, despite the newfound freedoms of these "New Women," they still were subject to critique and even objectification. Granville Hicks says of Dos Passos that "his sympathies are wholly with the people who get pushed around" (97). Janey Williams is one of those people who "get pushed." Dos Passos unites the historical invention of the typewriter, the female entrance into the work force, and the idea of the "New Woman" to create Janey. In his novel, she becomes a character symbolic of the new age of women in the 1910s.

While Dos Passos places his sympathies with the women who are pushed around in society, it is imperative to grasp how strange his decision to include a typist as a serious main character in *The 42nd Parallel* was at this time. Published only eight years earlier than *The 42nd Parallel,* T.S. Eliot's monumental modernist work, *The Waste Land,* also features a typist as a main character. In "Revisiting *The Waste Land,*" Lawrence Rainey says, "It is difficult today to appreciate just how unprecedented it was to make a 'typewriter,' or typist, a key protagonist within a serious poem. Before *The Waste Land* typists had appeared almost exclusively in light verse that was humorous or satirical in nature" (53). Just like T.S. Eliot, Dos Passos uses a typist as a main character to express the serious changes happening in society for these women. It was extremely rare to critically engage a "typewriter girl" without satire or irony in a work of

literature at this time. Including a typist in *The 42nd Parallel* highlights through one individual, Janey, the collective experience of many women in the United States of early 20th century America. In what follows, I examine Janey as one such representative character. But before I discuss her characterization, I turn to the complex social role played by typewriter girls in the American office.

The New Woman and the Typewriter Girl

The typewriter is essentially a feminized machine, an object particularly crafted for women. An 1888 manual for the typewriter states, “The type-writer is especially adapted to feminine fingers. They seem to be made for type-writing. The type-writing involves no hard labor, and no more skill than playing the piano" (Harrison 9). The author of this manual describes the typewriter keys as designed for women’s smaller fingers and suggests that the work is not intended to be strenuous or skillful—thus appropriate for the “weaker sex;” women were subjected to typing information for their male employers. More importantly, the introduction of women into the workforce because of the typewriter allowed women to cultivate a new monetary self-sufficiency. By becoming a typist, a woman could enter the work force and begin to make an income for herself. This allowed some women to leave the domestic sphere. This economic stability is an empowering prospect that allowed women to break with the familial tradition if they so wished. Christopher Keep takes note of a prediction at the time that “the keyboard will startle them [women] from the torpor of domesticity and awaken them to the new possibilities of intellectual and financial independence” (410). Previously, women were expected to remain at home with their parents until they were married, but the typewriter changed that, giving women opportunities outside of the domestic sphere and the boundaries of the traditional home.

This new womanhood included a new professional space for women, a new career path for women in the early 20th century. Women could become part of the business world—a world that was previously exclusively male—in a large scale for the first time. The job of a typist was a freeing way for women to enter the business world and grow more aware of a place outside of the domestic sphere. Once inside the previously male-dominated world, women could begin their effort to achieve equal business representation. Meanwhile, as typists, they also became part of an intellectual and challenging sphere where they were privy to information before it became available to the public.

As mentioned in the introduction, the typewriter was also an agent of literacy, especially for woman typists at this time. Women typists now found themselves in print-rich environments and were taught ways to read and write to accomplish their clerical duties. Brandt remarks, "the daily duties of 20th-century secretaries could serve handily as an index to the rise of complex administrative and accounting procedures, standardization of information, expanding communication, and developments in technological systems" (180). Women, through this clerical work, began to lead society in complicated new processes and literate understandings, such as typing, sending and receiving information, and knowing the intricacies of a word-processing machine. The typewriter has a profound influence within the history of women's literacy, becoming the grounds on which women were exposed to more information and could disseminate this information in a standardized way.

Additionally, although not often considered, the new space that typists can occupy also allows women to think in more progressive ways than before, particularly regarding their romantic relationships with men. The typists, with more access to men and the world in general,

began to interact with men more freely. As a result, both women and men developed a more liberal and forward demeanor.

These positive aspects made possible by the typewriter, however, did not overcome the limitations on the typists that remained because of the gendered conditions of patriarchal society. Ultimately, the typists' position as "New Women" was hardly feminist or revolutionary. As Keep says, "she represented the desire for a career and independence in such a way as not to endanger those traditional feminine sensibilities…The Type-Writer Girl, then, was not a specific person, or even an aggregate of many persons, but a carefully conceived product" (404). According to Keep, women entering the workforce was a huge step, but it was hardly an end to patriarchy, since women still had to adhere to the careful dictation of powerful businessmen. The men of the business world could "carefully conceive" this new womanhood. Since the typist was a progressive but non-menacing woman, her form of the "New Woman" severely limited her role. She could be involved in the business world but only by working for the men that were really in charge. Jessica Gray agrees with Keep and states, "Although the typist's job is regarded optimistically as potentially freeing and desirable, independence and the possibility of self-definition are gradually revealed… to be limited" (491). Ultimately, then, even though the typewriter empowered women to enter the American workforce, a sphere that was traditionally male dominated, the typist still was often objectified and sexualized by the men in the office. In "Typewriter Girls in Turn-of-the-Century Fiction: Feminism, Labor and Modernity," Gray states that "the entry into the labour marketplace is hardly as freeing as initially imagined; and that typists are subject to objectification and sexualisation" (486). This susceptibility would haunt the advancements of typewriter girls, sometimes reducing their progression to objectification. Typists were neither wholly liberated nor utterly constrained and objectified; rather, the mixed

bag complexity of a typist's situation is illustrated in *The 42nd Parallel.* As it happens, John Dos Passos' novel reflects these same issues and conditions in his character, Janey Williams, to which I now turn.

Janey Williams and The Impact of the Typewriter

In *The 42nd Parallel,* Janey Williams encompasses many of the challenges and triumphs of the modern woman through her position as a typewriter girl. Janey is introduced early in her life to the work of typing: "At highschool she took the commercial course and learned stenography and typewriting… her fingers were quick and she picked up typing and shorthand easily" (110). Janey's ability at typing and shorthand enables her success as a clerk. The fact that she is female also helps Janey since she lives just at the cusp of a new age for women, an age facilitated by the invention of the typewriter. When Janey defends her brother Joe from her abusive father, Joe exhorts her for interfering. He declares, "Don't you do that again, see. I can take care of myself, see. A girl can't butt in between men like that" (110). As a child, Janey was taught that women could not do the same things that men could do or be involved in activities that were between men. However, Janey's job as a typist allows her to challenge the gendered constraints placed on her in her childhood.

During Janey's first job as a typist, Dos Passos writes a busy scene of the newly feminine sphere of the American workforce: "The typewriters would trill and jingle and all the girls' fingers would go like mad typing briefs, manuscripts of undelivered speeches by lobbyists, occasional overflow from a newspaperman or a scientist, or prospectuses from realestate offices or patent promoters, dunning letters for dentists and doctors" (117). This episode illustrates the broad amount of work that they typists would tackle during their workday. The "fingers [going]

like mad" highlights the busyness of the women and their importance in communication in both the American workforce and society in general, bringing women into contact with a new world of progressive ideas.

Janey's occupation as a typist allows her to leave her restrictive childhood beliefs to create a new identity for herself as a woman. In keeping with historians' view of the impact of New Woman typists, Janey too follows the same development as her real-life modern women peers. For instance, Dos Passos states of such women, "They took to smoking cigarettes and serving tea to their friends Sunday afternoon. They read novels by Arnold Bennett and thought of themselves as bachelor girls. They learned to play bridge and shortened their skirts" (131). Janey no longer limits herself to the traditional female role; she is free to smoke and be a "bachelor girl" if she desires. Dos Passos writes Janey into a vibrant character who takes the American workforce by storm as a woman armed with a typewriter.

Janey realizes after a few weeks at her first job that her typewriting skills are a financial asset, that "she was good at her work and that she could support herself whatever happened" (120). Just as Keep claims that typists could now find fulfilment so, too, does Janey find fulfillment in this new independence, both financially and mentally. This is especially clear when Janey leaves her second typing job. She is confronted with ridicule and opposition, such as when the woman at the desk of the employment agency argues that "girls ought to marry and that trying to earn their own living was stuff and nonsense because it couldn't be done" (224). Despite such social condemnation, Janey persists in her quest to support herself and to create purpose for her life. The meaning Janey finds in her work is most apparent in the few weeks when she is jobless. The narrator announces that Janey "got so that the first thing she was conscious of in the morning when she woke up was the black depression of having nothing to

do" (225). Classifying her joblessness as "the black depression" signifies that Janey had found joy and freedom in her previous work, and that without a job she no longer feels happy or satisfied. This newfound independence that Janey experiences is a direct consequence of the typewriter and the ability it gave to women to escape.

Janey's skill at typing allowed her to think outside of the family domain early in her life. Thanks to the world that the typewriter allows her to engage, Janey learns of alternatives to the domestic path of wife and mother for which she has been trained. For instance, she and her best friend Alice Dick "planned that as soon as they got through highschool they'd get jobs and leave home. They even picked out the house where they'd board" (115). This desire to immediately leave the home that the two young women manifest is a new possibility because of the work that the typewriter provides.

After Janey has her first job as a stenographer for a few weeks, her thoughts change from small-town minded to more liberated. She begins to acknowledge "that there was a great throbbing arclighted world somewhere outside and that only living in Georgetown where everything was so poky and oldfashioned… kept her from breaking into it" (119-120). Describing her hometown as "poky and oldfashioned" illustrates Janey's growing disillusionment with the domestic sphere; she is drawn to the more interesting world of politics, business, and men. Just as was the case with real women in the 1910s, so, too, in the case of Janey, the invention of the typewriter and access to the American office place introduced her to "metropolitanism" and "prestige culture," terms used by Lawrence Rainy. Metropolitanism, relating to large cities, can be linked to prestige culture. At this time, many women desired to move to a large city to prove they had moved on from the confining boundaries of small towns. It was an elevation of social status if a woman moved to a big city. Rainey explains that "the

female secretary was shorthand for a recognizably modern phenomenon… indelibly linked with metropolitan experience" (273). The American office supplied a woman a reason to move to a bigger city, as metropolitan areas boasted more employment opportunities. A woman demanded admiration from society for moving on to bigger places and grander experiences.

In keeping with her new-found discovery of a metropolitan experience, Janey begins to crave bigger and bigger cities, eventually ending up in America's largest place: New York City. When Janey first arrives there, she has many fears and claims, "It seemed terribly scary being all alone in the big city like that and she wondered that she'd had the nerve to come" (258). The independence and novelty of being a single woman alone in New York City overwhelms Janey. However, once again she finds her role and place there due to the typewriter. Before long, she is settled into her job as a typist. To draw attention to the importance of that job, Dos Passos writes, "Getting back to the office the next morning was like getting home" (262). This passage suggests a redefinition of "home" for Janey and, by extension, for women. Janey's transformation from leaving her home in Washington D.C.'s Georgetown, dominated by the traditional views of her parents, to finding a "home" in an office in New York City is also emblematic of many typists' experiences. Not only does the typewriter emancipate Janey, but it also emancipated many modern women from the chains of the home by introducing them to a larger world filled with opportunity. However, as I will discuss later, the male bosses that govern this new world of opportunity still enforce traditional expectations of womanhood.

Janey's story shows that the typewriter allowed modern women to redefine the traditional expectations of home and create a new femininity. For instance, Janey advocates for her job as a typist on the premise that it is intellectually engaging. She claims, "The work at the office was so interesting. It put her right in the midst of headlines" (261). Janey loves that she has a connection

to the world and current events as they happen, a role previously occupied almost exclusively by men. Again, when championing her job to her traditional mother, Janey draws on the riveting element of typing: "'But it's so interesting, mommer,' Janey would say when her mother bewailed the fact that she had to work. 'In my day it wasn't considered ladylike, it was thought to be demeaning.' 'But it isn't now,' Janey would say getting into a temper" (119). The intellectual challenge of the business world, with exposure to tons of new information, allowed typists to grow more business savvy. Also, Janey's declaration "But it isn't now" alludes to the cultural attitude toward the work of typists. American society accepted the work of the clerks as essential and efficient.

For all of that independence, however, there is also the issue of love, relationships, and the inequality between men and women in the workplace. Above, I mentioned how women's relationships with men changed once they entered the previously male-dominated world of business in the American office. These same gender and relationship issues also occur in Janey's case. In the course of the book, she makes a progression from a repressed woman into a more liberated woman. Dos Passos writes, "She wasn't afraid of men any more and kidded back and forth with young clerks in the elevator about things that would have made her blush the year before" (131). As Janey is around other women in her New York workplace, she gains a newfound confidence towards men. These progressive women encourage each other to become more liberal simply by speaking about their romantic lives at work. This is exemplified when Janey begins to see men after work, and "sometimes when she was getting ready to go out in the evening she'd put a speck of rouge on her little finger and rub it very carefully on her lips" (131). In the early 1910s, the act of applying lipstick is a new phenomenon of the modern woman. This "rouge" demonstrates a new attention to appearance that the "New Woman" illustrates.

While typists found newfound freedoms in many aspects of their lives, some were limited by sexist and patriarchal male bosses, as Keep and Gray claim. In other words, no matter how much independence the typewriter girl might seek, in the end, the patriarchal culture often triumphed. Janey illustrates this complication, as we can see in her relationship with J. Ward Moorehouse, business executive and Public Relations consultant. When she meets Ward, Janey warmly describes him to Alice: "Janey chattered like a magpie about… J. Ward Moorehouse and what a fine man he was, and so kind and friendly and had such interesting ideas for collaboration between capital and labor" (228). Janey's interest in Ward, her boss, leaves her vulnerable, allowing him to attempt to take advantage of her both personally and in the business world. This constraint is further represented when Janey is tricked by Ward to think that she is going to be a great businesswoman. Ward asks Janey to move to New York City to become his personal assistant, and, eventually, to be a great "business woman" in charge of her own corporation. Ward, failing at his own business, creates a fake business and instructs Janey that she will be in charge of it. Janey "told the Tingleys that she was going to be a director of the new corporation and they thought it was wonderful that she was getting ahead so fast" (272).

While Janey could be faulted for falling prey to Ward's manipulations, it is worth mentioning that Janey's desire for independence and power is what contributes to her actions. I argue that she moves to New York City primarily to further her opportunities in a metropolitan area; she is so interested in Ward's proposal to be a business director because she wants to be her own boss and make her own decisions. After she told her friends about the new job opportunity, "Eddy Tingley… drank a toast, 'To the new executive,' and Janey blushed crimson and was very pleased" (272). Janey's pleasure directly stems from her accomplishment of becoming an executive. However, due to the fabricated nature of Janey's situation, Ward keeps Janey in her

safe and weaker place as a typist; it would be too much of a stretch to allow a woman to really oversee a business when the patriarchal workforce is characterized by sexist bosses. In this way, the typewriter allowed women the opportunity to enter the business world and bring a feminine presence, but it sometimes restricted women's occasions for rising beyond the job of a clerk.

Ward asserts himself as a charming, powerful man even though he is desperate for an escape from his crumbling life at the end of *The 42nd Parallel,* employing Janey as a scapegoat for a fake business. Janey is less attracted to Ward than captivated by an opportunity for the supreme independence he falsely offered her. Nevertheless, Janey reasserts herself as a strong and independent woman through her relationship with another man, Barrow. After Barrow proposes marriage to Janey, she firmly rejects his offer, illustrating the deeply seeded desire Janey has to be fully autonomous. Janey's reply to Barrow's proposal, "LET'S JUST BE FRIENDS," is profoundly powerful and usher in a new age of womanhood (272). Even though she is misled by Ward, Janey's rejection of Barrow's proposal signifies a confidence and self-sufficiency that is only possible because of her job. She is no longer forced to marry as quickly as possible and can support herself through her willingness to work.

Even though the typewriter ushered in some problematic behaviors toward women, this powerful machine changed women's American identity. By linking Janey so closely to the typewriter, Dos Passos relates technology and industry to the essence of the progression of American individuality, particularly for women. The typist, empowered by the typewriter, could act in new ways in the business world, in her romantic life, and in her geographical sphere. Therefore, despite some limitations, the typewriter helped women begin to strive for representation in the American workforce. Allowing women to challenge the assumption of male dominance and to seize a viable alternative to the domestic sphere gave women a taste of

freedom that they never had before and would never relinquish again. In other words, the typewriter propelled women to unparalleled advancements which women would only continue to develop and demand. The typewriter sparked a voracious appetite for new freedoms, and women have never slowed down since.

The typewriter impacted not only the women of American society but also poets and artists. As the typewriter became more integrated into the literary sphere of America, there was a progression: authors dictated manuscripts to secretaries, authors began including female typists as characters, and finally, authors began to experiment with the machine to make new works of art. The typewriter resulted in authors using it to create new forms of poetry; therefore, the typewriter revolutionized yet another part of the literary sphere.

Chapter 3: The Standardization of Aesthetics and Typewriter Poetry

As the typewriter became an integral part of society, many writers began to utilize the machine to create new texts. While many men still relied on women to generate words on the typewriter, as did Mark Twain and as exemplified by the fictional Janey Williams, some male writers began to use the typewriter themselves. By personally using a typewriter to produce text, the author could "own the page, . . . dictate the visual structure without relying on the interpretation of a graphic designer, printer, compositor, or editor" (Tullett and Dowling 41). Many writers took advantage of this newfound autonomy in creating art, especially E.E. Cummings. In this chapter, I will discuss how the typewriter generated formal innovations in art, particularly poetry. Equipped with a typewriter, an artist could now create visual structures and produce standardized text that differed from handwriting, which is variable by its nature. Particularly, I will discuss how the American poet E.E. Cummings used the typewriter to produce a novel form of poetry that united visual aesthetics and syntactic meanings to construct "typewriter poems."

The Standardization of Writing and Aesthetics

The typewriter allowed for a standardized way of producing text, evolving from the fluctuating quality of handwritten texts. Using slugs of metal with raised letters on them, a typewriter can make neat, printed marks on the paper. The ability to space, capitalize, and indent adds uniformity to texts. Tullet and Dowling state, "These machines created a clean, universal format, allowing for the immediate, and modern, presentation and dissemination of thought in a way that handwriting never could" (11). Many writers now had access to a medium in which

they could create and propagate accessible text. The typewriter provided delineated letters, precise placement, and fixed regularity for composing.

While standardization was the goal of the typewriter, some writers used it to construct avant-garde work. Writers began to use "the development of the typewriter as a medium for creating work far beyond anything envisioned by the machine's makers" (Tullet and Dowling 19). One such avant-garde writer was E.E. Cummings, who utilized the typewriter's standardization of language to experiment with different visual structures. For instance, typical poetry—whether handwritten words on a page or not—is arranged in traditional structures, stanzas, and lines. In short, poetry as a literary art had its own coherent structure. Tullet and Dowling argue, "Some pieces have a definite and intrinsic linguistic structure that creates a visual meaning; others use a visual structure that in turn creates a new linguistic meaning" (19). The art of poetry is one such "definite and intrinsic linguistic structure." For E.E. Cummings, however, the typewriter offered new opportunities to play with, experiment with, and create new forms for poetry. In Cummings' poetry, the typewriter produces text that experiments with innovative visual structures.

The Typewriter Aesthetic of E.E. Cummings

E.E. Cummings, one of the most innovative modernists of American poetry, revolutionized the genre of poetry with his distinctive and innovative forms. His work is easily recognizable for its unusual qualities: words running together or abruptly separating, flurries of punctuation, type running fluidly from one line to the next, fragmented lines, and irregular spacing. Cummings combines language in unchartered ways, makes sounds that are uniquely his, and creates images not only with his words but with the form of the text. Richard Cureton

argues, “Cummings uses English morphology to do the work of traditional rhetorical devices such as symbolism, metaphor, personification, animation, semantic compression, aesthetic perception and universal statement” (214-215). This suggests that Cummings places a special emphasis on the form of his poetry. He elevates form such that it can convey the meaning and even help establish the images of his poems.

Cummings does this through the typewriter, which enables him to create unique forms. For example, the typewriter’s ability to space, indent, and capitalize in a standardized way allows him to visually structure a poem in an artful way. Cummings often used the unique typewriter glyphs of ampersand, parenthesis, percent, dollar sign, and the hashtag to construct poems with symbols in addition or in place of words. Thanks to the typewriter, Cummings’s works evoke a unique poetic atmosphere because they manipulate and experiment with the visual form and presentation of the words that comprise the poem. Rather than relying solely on his words to create meaning, Cummings also utilizes unique spacing to create a visual structure that itself formulates new linguistic meanings. In this way, one could make the case that Cummings is as much a visual artist as a literary one. Milton Cohen points out, “by April 1919, on the basis of his public work, he was more likely to have been known (if at all) as a painter than a poet” (56-57).

Cumming’s identification as a painter contextualizes his attention to visual form in his poetry. Drawing on the tradition of painting, Cummings’ devotion to images “emphasize[s] how profoundly Cumming’s visual imagination informed his poetry” (Cohen 67). This “visual imagination” was given a chance to shine when he began to construct his poems with a typewriter. Using the typewriter, Cummings combines painting and writing to create poetry that appeals visually, linguistically, and artistically.

Typewriter Poems

Cummings was certainly not the first poet to use the typewriter, as the typewriter was widely used in literacy production by the time that he wrote many of his "typewriter poems." However, Cummings "was the first to take advantage of its power to control the exact spacing and shape of every line, and thus to make a poem's visual appearance as important as its musical rhythms" (Kirsch). This concept is especially notable in the poem "one:"

One

t
hi
s

snowflake
(a
  li
    ght
  in
g)

is upon a gra
v
es
t

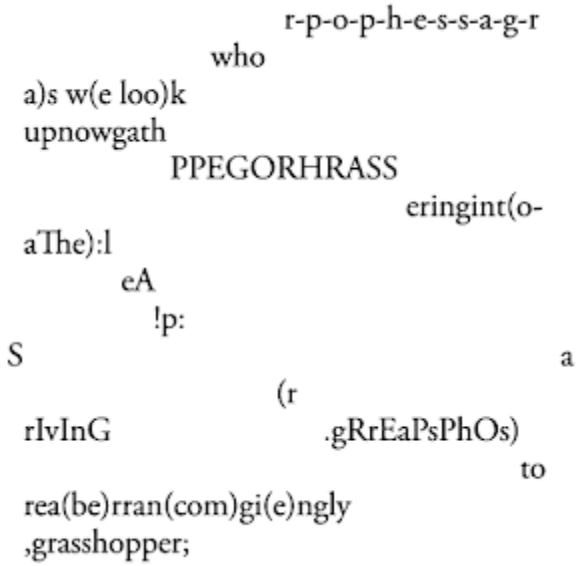
one

("one" 178-179).

In this poem, Cummings reveals his ability to use the typewriter to create a picture in print. After "snowflake," the word "alighting" slowly trickles down the page. This format produces an image of a snowflake twirling and descending until it reaches a place to settle, the gravestone. In contrast to the swirling snowflake, the gravestone is formatted by an extreme vertical. This poem invokes the purity and innocence of beautiful snowflake dancing to the ground, but it is met with the dark and harsh greeting of death. Richard Kennedy remarks, "as he [Cummings] sat at the

family typewriter trying out visual arrangements, he saw that there were immense possibilities for expressiveness in the combinations and the separations of the words on the page" (177). Cummings uses spaces between letters in the poem to combine and separate. With the typewriter's ability to control shape and spacing, the reader can perceive the poetic image through the visual image of the text itself, not just by what the words symbolize. Cummings is using the typewriter to invent a form in which typewriter symbols mirror the action and meaning of words.

With his experimentation with space and form, Cummings is challenging the genre of poetry, and even the criteria for what counts as literature, as in his poem "Grasshopper."



("Grasshopper" 41-42)

At first glance, "Grasshopper" is totally nonsensical. There is an overwhelming sense of play with visual experimentation. The punctuation Cummings includes—commas, semicolons, colons, parentheses, periods, dashes—also suggests that the form and shape of the ink contribute to the experience of the poem. John Freeman writes, "by dislocating punctuation marks from

their traditional moorings, he casts them adrift, opening a space for new usages." Cummings is interested in creating an immersive encounter by spatial experimentation. "Grasshopper" works to construct an experimental image in two ways: as a whole picture and in its fragmented form. When seen all at once, the poem is structured in a way that the letters form the shape of a grasshopper, a crouching insect perched with wings. The descending and bouncing letters reflect the movement that a grasshopper makes. Through this movement, Cummings "anticipates the contemporary practice of experimental writing known as codework" (Freeman). Through the typewriter and its keys, Cummings can encode the action of a grasshopper jumping. In this way, "Cummings transformed his mechanical typewriter into the equivalent of a hardware device supplied with the necessary software for running the poem as a program" (Freeman). Additionally, the fragmented nature of the poem and the word "grasshopper" act as a crossword puzzle. The first intelligible line of the poem is "who" and the last line is "grasshopper." The middle of the poem is a mixture of horizontal and vertical clues that lead to the answer to the "who:" "grasshopper." By utilizing this poetic form made possible by the typewriter, Cummings blazes the way for poets to use the machine aesthetically.

Turning next to his poem, "Buffalo Bill's," one finds that Cummings' line spacing acts as a way he can communicate with the reader instead of just relying on the words of the poem. Here is the poem:

Buffalo Bill 's
defunct
who used to
ride a watersmooth-silver
stallion
and break onetwothreefourfive pigeonsjustlikethat
Jesus

he was a handsome man
and what i want to know is

how do you like your blue-eyed boy
Mister Death

("Buffalo Bill's" 57)

In this poem, Cummings' lines are complex, functioning in the dimensions of both time and space. I argue Cummings' "literary devices" change from traditional devices like allusion, foreshadowing, and personification. Instead, he uses typographical symbols and spacing as his new literary devices to result in the disturbance of literary parameters. As the poem progresses chronologically, the line conveys this motion through its pace and spacing. The first two lines announce "Buffalo Bill's defunct" (57). The announcement of his death is slowed by the spacing created by the line break. The pacing then gradually accelerates as it recalls Buffalo Bill's dynamic life. Line six is the peak of the poem's acceleration, containing "onetwothreefourfive pigeonsjustlikethat" (57). The lack of spacing in between the words indicates the growing intensity of the poem, speeding up the pace to mirror the flurry of action Buffalo Bill performs when he is alive. Kennedy argues, "'one two three four five' in different spatial arrangements try to suggest the experiences of witnessing the marksmanship" (202). The poem climaxes in the one-word line "Jesus," shifted to the right margin of the poem in line seven. As the line shortens and returns to the left margin, the intensity of time diminishes, and the poem grounds to a forceful halt on "Mister Death" (57). The pacing and linear spacing work in synchrony to create the motion and speed of Buffalo Bill's life.

The unique spacing of "Buffalo Bill's" also works to control the poem's visual form. The line lengths and placements are apprehensible to the eye, resulting in linear dimensions that tell the story of the poem without even reading the words. The lines move spatially to the right until the poem reaches its extremity at the expletive "Jesus," and then retreats and shortens back to the left extremity of "Mister Death" (57). This progression and recession create an arrowhead image

when the reader views the poem in its entirety. The arrowhead is an appropriate shape to associate with “Buffalo Bill” because he is an “American scout and Wild West Showman” (57). The points of the arrowhead are the three main characters in the poem: Buffalo Bill, Jesus, and Mister Death. By purposely spacing the lines into an arrowhead, Cummings communicates these three main topics through a visual structure made possible by the typewriter.

Turning to “O sweet spontaneous” one finds that fragmented lines and unusual spacing also mark this poem:

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)

(“O sweet spontaneous” 18-19).

Written in seven untraditional stanzas, the poem creates an atmosphere of irregularity and distortion. As the speaker discusses the ways humans irresponsibly take advantage of the earth, Cummings forms the poem with asymmetric lines. Some lines are more traditional with regular spacing, such as “buffeting thee that thou mightest conceive” (18). Other lines are constructed by only one word or centered in the middle of the line. The lines are not evenly spaced or in the traditional order for most of “O sweet spontaneous.” It is also worth noting that the first letter of only one line is capitalized in this poem, marking a dramatic turn from traditional poetic techniques. Cummings “had for some time recognized the needlessness of capitalizing the first letter of each new line of verse: he had seen for years that the Greeks capitalized only the first letter of the first word in a poem and sometimes not even that” (Kennedy 178). Therefore, drawing on the Greek technique, Cummings only capitalized the first word of the poem, “O.”

The distorted form of the poem visually represents the ways humans distort the earth and its resources, and the rejection of a traditional structure mirrors the way the earth is resilient in misuse. The earth refuses to be restrained by humans and is liberated from these constraints. This is most evident in the last stanza of the poem: “thou answerest / them only with / spring)” (19). The most varied in spacing of all the stanzas of the poem, these last lines reflect the irregular answer of the earth to misuse: the beautiful, live-giving season of spring. The twirling and descending lines of the last stanza evoke the image of rain falling, providing a renewing substance to an undeserving people. Cummings forms the poem with irregular spacing to visually show the earth’s remarkable and free response to mistreatment.

Finally, in Cummings's poem "in Just-," he uses unorthodox spacing to visually create the image of children playing in the park on a spring day.

in Just-
spring when the world is mud-
luscious the little
lame balloonman

whistles far and wee

and eddieandbill come
running from marbles and
piracies and it's
spring

when the world is puddle-wonderful

the queer
old balloonman whistles
far and wee
and bettyandisbel come dancing

from hop-scotch and jump-rope and

it's
spring
and

the

goat-footed

balloonMan whistles
far
and
wee

("in Just-" 3-4).

In this poem, "Physical, visual image created by poetry exists only in the mind of the reader, who is able to decode the referential system and transpose it with the memory of an iconic presence" (Vernyik and Flajšar 6-7). Cummings uses the "physical, visual image" to create a sense of play,

reminding the reader of an "iconic presence" of children playing in the park. This poem contains elements of traditional poetic form, containing five stanzas of four lines each with a refrain in between each stanza. These traditional forms are experimentally rearranged into an avant-garde poem in which Cummings explores visual representations of action. Like in "Buffalo Bill's," this poem contains lines with a lack of spacing in between them. "[E]ddieandbill" and "bettyandisabel," the names of children playing in the park, are compressed together to reflect the excitement of the children (3). William Thompson argues, "'intensity' for Cummings includes many critical elements, one of which is compression'" (18). Cummings used compression to capture the essence of the poem's experience with as few words as possible; when children are excited, they usually speak faster and say words without pauses, just like Cummings reflects in "in Just-." The last refrain of the poem, "goat-footed," is centered and separated from the rest of the poem (3). Because it has its own line, this phrase is framed by distinctive spacing so that the reader will pay attention to it. "Goat-footed," describing the Balloon Man in the poem, is a reference to Pan, a god that is half-goat and half-man. The visual separation from the rest of the poem ensures the reader is attentive to this allusion to Pan. The spacing and visual structure of "in Just-" relates the profound power of the typewriter in creating poetry that conveys meaning through form and the memory of an "iconic presence."

Cummings also utilizes significant space between words and in the middle of the lines to produce the motion of games of "hop-scotch and jump rope" (3). The gaps between words at lines two, five, thirteen, and twenty-one reflect the action of playing a game of hop-scotch. These lines act as the lateral squares a child would jump on during the game. Norman Freidman writes, "the use of spacing… may be integrative, or also disintegrative in that metrical lines are disrupted or free verse strophes are distributed over the page" (122). This disintegration leads to

the poem visually mirroring the action of jumping rope in the last two stanzas, lines sixteen through twenty-four. These lines begin along the left side of the poem and progress to the far-right extremity with “whistles” (3). The poem then returns to the left margin. This visual arc of words created by Cummings reflects the movement of a jump rope as a child is playing. Cummings experiments with conventional poetic styles and transforms them to visually construct a poem that is moving with the childlike play it contains.

In his typewriter poems, Cummings radically utilizes experimental spacing to create a visual representation of the themes and topics in the poems. He binds visual and textual elements to create art that states its meaning through words and shows its meaning through form. Cummings’s attempt to reshape poetry through accessible language also culminated in a visual transformation. He could reshape poetry both figuratively and literally with the standardization of language because of the typewriter. Cummings blazed the way for dual function art, creating poems that appealed to both sound and sight. With Cummings’s ability to control shape and spacing through the typewriter, the reader can perceive the poetic image through the visual image of the text itself, not just by what the words symbolize. Using images and words, Cummings morphed painting and poetry to create avant-garde art that would forever change American ideas of what poetry is and what it means to be a poet using a typewriter.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

The typewriter created a major impact on different aspects of American literature: literacy advancement, authorial creation, the New Woman in literature, language standardization, and artistic experimentation. In sum, one can see that the typewriter is one of the most important tools of the modern era. A consideration of the typewriter's impact on literary production leads to an understanding of how a machine can influence a culture's access to reading and writing. It also shows the significance of the typewriter's ability to change the course of American history, particularly women's history. Because literature is often emblematic of the culture and time it is written in, John Dos Passos' representation of the "New Woman" typist is but one example of the impact this little machine had on American society. Finally, analyzing how the typewriter could physically produce language and the ways in which E.E. Cummings could experiment with typography shows that the typewriter could be elevated to its own kind of modernized, contemporary art form. In conclusion, then, the typewriter affected those who compose on it, the people who read texts from it, the women who type on it in an office, and the creators who experiment on it. In so doing, the typewriter became a foundation on which Americans could express big ideas and type out a better life.

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