The Yin Dynamic in Cummings' Poetry

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I

In a 1955 letter to Norman Friedman, Cummings writes that the masculine is superficial and the feminine is profound. The poet explains that this is so, because the male lover merely thinks of flowers, while the female lover feels them. If these statements are at once compelling and perplexing, it is at least partially because they go against the grain of various overt or covert assumptions. Perhaps one assumes that thinking is more important and progressive than feeling, while masculinity should be dominant. These and similar assumptions may form an epistemic and ontological complex that a poet may wish to unravel, expose, or rejuvenate through his or her art.

Throughout his engaging 1982 book entitled *The Turning Point: Science, Society and the Rising Culture*, the theoretical physicist and deep ecologist Fritjof Capra argues that the masculine has become too dominant in our progressive societies, to the detriment of the feminine and, most importantly, to the detriment of an overall, dynamic culture-nature balance. In a modern English appropriation of Chinese thought, Capra calls the masculine force *yang* and the feminine *yin*. By doing this, he is able to carry the important recognition that the feminine, or yin, is neither passive nor inferior. In fact, he is able to suggest that neither of the two forces are inferior —both are good and necessary, while sustained humanly-induced imbalance between them gives rise to bad results of ill health socially, individually and naturally (Capra 18; see also Palmer 19).

To allow a tiny wild flower to continue growing in accordance with its inner drive as a living creature within an immensely conflicting and ultimately also fragile reality called natural existence is as profound and important as it may be to chop down a tree for fuel and clearance—or economic growth. Leaving the flower or the tree to be, and appreciating its life, is a yin action on par with yang actions, such as dry, objective, intellectually-driven progress. Capra's master stroke, as in his quite different manner Cummings', is to see gender in the context of active wholeness as informed by a Western perception of Chinese values such as yin and yang—I shall return to this recognition.

Since progressive societies have sustained yang-domination to the ex-

tent of disease and its concomitant dis-ease, part of the solution to the crisis of imbalance, as Capra sees it, is the restoration of yin (30). This would entail, among other things, the active respecting of yin qualities, such as darkness, mud, flexibility, allowing a plant to prosper as a living, otherly soul or self, and so on. If Capra is right about this, Cummings has remained ahead of his time, since he persuasively provokes one to re-spect (reconsider or look again at) yin values, those supposedly less important things, such as mud (think of the marvellous neologism "mudluscious" [CP 27]), the moon rising, and so on.

Examining Cummings' tendency to restore yin values on strategic occasions will bring about a further critical appreciation of his ability to write a unique modernist poetry of rejuvenating natural wholeness. Restoring yin is therefore only one aspect of a larger picture when it comes to Cummings' poetry, but an important and relatively neglected aspect. The larger picture I have in mind, I shall term for the sake of a working definition Cummings' awareness of dynamic wholeness, and his effectiveness in conveying it. Not only is the poet innately attracted to dynamic wholeness in natural being, but his poems have a concomitant effect: they actively steer the reader into a sense of wholeness with and within the natural world. A variety and intensity of devices in Cummings' oeuvre serve to fulfil this vital quality of his poetry, including not only the overcoming of opposites, but also the occasionally startling and direct yin restoration to be examined here—for example, his insistence that the feminine feeling of the flower is profound, while masculine thinking about it is superficial.

The restoration gains its full impact only upon recognizing that it forms part of a remarkable and dynamic equilibrium of yin / yang values. A good starting point in considering this is to know that the decisively male Cummings enjoyed a fatherly love that set him free to see a necessary balance between the male and female worlds of experience. The Jungian therapist James Hollis writes in his book *Under Saturn's Shadow: the Wounding and Healing of Men* (1994) that Cummings is one of the few sons of his era who is able to bless his father (99). Quoting the last stanza of "my father moved through dooms of love" (CP 521), Hollis says: "in the elder's capacity to live his life fully, he modelled and activated that masculine potential in the son" (99). If we talk about Cummings' yin restoration, the paradox is that one must begin with his masculine sense of life.

To be sure, Cummings also encountered various troubles with his father—Richard S. Kennedy has pointed out sensitively and lucidly enough

the Freudian aspects of this struggle (102-104). Yet his father also left him with the deep joy of being fully masculine, as "my father moved through dooms of love" testifies. In a note that Kennedy unearths, Cummings summarizes the situation. He writes that his father was a true father who loved him, and because he loved him, Cummings was able to love him in turn: "first, as a child, with the love which is worship; then, as a youth, with the love that gives battle; last, as a man, with the love which understands" (quoted in Kennedy 103). The pattern of this reminds me of the Zen notion that we may first feel that the mountain is just an extension of our ego, then, in growing up, we may experience it as completely other, and then we may see the mountain as mountain again, but in active reconciliation. Although the process that Cummings sketches in a similar three-staged process with reference to his father did not work out in a neatly spaced and easy succession, as Kennedy points out (103), his perception of coming to active reconciliation with his father (within himself) testifies to a deep love that was active in our non-hero. It may be my perception only, but this kind of exchange of acceptance and love—at its deepest level an acceptance of the self—has become more difficult to negotiate among fathers and sons since then. And if it has become more difficult, at least part of the symptoms or reasons that centre on the difficulty is a distortion of the balance between fatherly yang and motherly yin. In other words: someone who experiences fatherly love, and perceives distortion between yang and yin as a consequence in the world around him (or her), will in all likelihood at least wish to restore yin. Should such a person be a poet, he or she may use the medium to communicate the restoration. As far as I can see, something of this nature occurs in the remarkable twentieth century case of Cummings.

The best illustrations of fatherly / masculine love are found in the Cummingsian space for which one should care most: his poetic world. As the first line of his fatherly praise poem testifies, the fatherly blessing is radically interdependent with experiencing (and not avoiding or subjugating) life's darkness, its yin side. His father moves through "dooms of love"—not through (say) "rays of manly sunshine" or by means of (say) "blindingly brilliant ideas of progress." Rays of manly sunshine may be implied, but the way in which his father gets to love must be considered. He is moved by, and moves towards, his loving manliness *through* (not simply despite) an apprehension of integration: his doom. Evidently this involves an enormous (but actual, not sublime) sense of overwhelming

darkness in fear of the unavoidable end of one's individual ego or "personhood" after a lifetime on earth. The yin qualities of darkness and integration imply that the life force is enormously larger than one's individual ego, and that it will outlast one—they point into integration, and the integrity that may arise from recognizing this.

And in Cummings' praise poem, the father's love actively connects manhood and the darkness of an engulfing doom. In fact, the plural "dooms" suggests that moving through darknesses is an everyday part of a full life. It is precisely this that makes the father's love full enough to be convincing. Cummings' yang as embodied in the fatherly love that he inherited (actively), and for which his speaker praises the father in this poem, results through a full recognition of yin—it is very far from an exclusivist yang. It is the very dynamic interplay, balance and connectivity of light and dark aspects, or traditionally male and female qualities, that make the father a complete and active father. Amidst the immensity of forces that Cummings suggests in this manner, there is the father's integrating capacity to be a total human being and, in his case, a man.

Powerful as it is, all this means that the father's wholeness as a man is non-dominant: it is not skewed in the direction of a "pure," exclusivist or isolated "masculinity." In other words, it is not skewed according to a patriarchal world view in which only yang elements must always enjoy the upper hand, usually to the persistent detriment of yin. This remarkable non-domination or democracy blooms in the son's poetry. As Brian Docherty writes, Cummings is able to compose poems of natural sexual love, without "a need to dominate the other person" (125). One could say that Cummings liberates his engagement with the female world, because he feels liberated in his masculinity. It is against this background that his yin restoration makes its fuller sense.

II

As has been mentioned, Cummings perceives in his progressive society a static hierarchy in which the shine and domination of a rational (but actually narrow and isolated) masculinity—a patriarchy—replaces and distorts the ongoing natural balance. Given the ongoing scale of what some term an ecological crisis, one must agree at least that humanity, a third pivotal force of being along with heaven and earth, has never before in history managed to distort the natural balance of light and dark forces to such a destructive degree.

Although not everyone would agree with a yin / yang framework,

voices continue to say (and sing) that progressive human destruction of the natural world and process has reached an unhealthy level. (I hasten to add: as a means of poetic precision, I see advantage in a yin / yang framework.) As the myrmecologist (ant specialist) and evolutionary biologist, Edward O. Wilson says in *Biophilia* (1984), "*human destructiveness is something new under the sun"* (122; my emphasis). Wilson writes that in our

> own brief lifetime humanity will suffer an incomparable loss in aesthetic value, practical benefits from biological research, and worldwide biological stability. Deep mines of biological diversity will have been dug out and carelessly discarded in the course of environmental exploitation, without our even knowing fully what they contained. (122)

Not only do we not *even* know what those slabs of rain forest removed so readily may have contained, we will not *ever* know, either. If we consider this situation of progressive human abuse of nature—or whatever we want to call it—not only in terms of its crucial physical component, but also in terms of its interrelated and deeper emotional, aesthetic and ethical terms, Cummings springs to mind, and so does his yin dynamic in particular. What Cummings sees is that a narrow perception of yin has to do, importantly, with narrow, overdriven yang—in which an imbalanced, rational "progress" must come at the cost of natural being. And although earth continues to overcome the imbalance, there is no guarantee that she must continue to do so in the face of an (in)humanly-imposed imbalance. Importantly, Cummings suggests that narrow yin has to do with narrow yang, while this continues to reinforce the narrowing of both. A conforming and static monotony of overdriven rational progressiveness bears the brunt of his often brilliant satirical poems, such as the sonnet "when serpents bargain for the right to squirm" (CP 620). The crux in that sonnet is that earth's creatures remain powefully and wisely spontaneous, in the sense of continuing to grow into their utter selves. And a certain male spirit (akin to Chronos or Saturn, as found for instance in Goya's painting "Saturn Devouring his Son") imposes the most unnatural grid on life. While trees grow and thrushes fail to fill in forms to justify their song, humans—supposedly so intelligent—end up signing on dotted lines, accusing others of "altitude," and so forth.

Fortunately Chronos fails to impose his grids, too, since earth shows resistance with her spontaneous continuance which embodies timelessness rather than a logical imposition of "time." While a certain male rationalism and / or "religiosity" continues to prod and pinch earth for "answers," she

responds astoundingly and simply enough with spring itself (CP 58).

From a poetic viewpoint, the progressive imbalance that takes for granted the enormous event of spring—while supposedly "enormous" advances of all kinds must simultaneously deserve all our attention—should be overturned at the right moments so that the direction towards healing remains visible. Such overturning may loosen up a little the yang-overdriven complex in order to begin to unravel it, for the sake of a greater, more poetic (but neither "vague" nor purely "idealistic") and more dynamic balance. And even in surprising moments, for instance at the end of the playful little drama depicting adultery entitled "may i feel said he," Cummings restores the yin element that we may term inclusivity and integration (as opposed to yang exclusivity and separation), as we see in the sudden, capitalized seriousness in the final line: "you are Mine said she" (CP 399).

III

I have suggested already that all this has to do not only with Cummings' sensibility of fatherly love and joyous masculinity, but also with his orientalism. The broader context of Cummings' yin dynamic—his tendency to restore yin values as part of an overall yin / yang balance—is probably also Taoist. On other occasions (Terblanche, *Ecology*), and following Friedman's characterization of Cummings as a Zen monk (173), I have delved into Cummings' textual Taoist leanings as found in his poetry, with some support and suggestions from his secondary writings. Suffice to say that the attraction that Taoism holds for Cummings is part of his poetic wholeness, and must be given all its historical and present poetic significance.

It is therefore worthwhile to linger for a while with the book ascribed to the father of Taoism, Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*. As far as we can discern from a text such as this, Lao Tzu equates his natural sensibility on a number of occasions with darkness, the mother, water, the emptiness of a valley, and so forth. He also laments on one occasion his apparent foolishness among men of the world. Men of the world are "bright, alas, so shining-bright," whereas Lao Tzu appears to himself as having "the heart of a fool: so confused, so dark" (35). In these moments Lao Tzu confirms the importance of stating one's darkness in response to a blinding and sometimes unhealthy progress. But in his case, these singular statements of actual darkness also find their place in the larger yin / yang process. For instance, he further states that active balance of yin and yang within oneself leads to seeing in the natural manner of a wise child—an understanding that is

knowing *and* spontaneous, and a knowing at complete ease with being part of everything *and* being utterly oneself:

> Whosoever knows his maleness
> and guards his femaleness:
> he is the gorge of the world.
> If he is the gorge of the world
> eternal Life does not leave him
> and he becomes again as a child. (Lao Tzu 39)

The extreme opposites of knowing one's masculinity (reason, light and valour) while keeping one's femininity (intuition, darkness and flexibility) blend into the wise child as one continues to find the way of nature, and live within it. From a level informed by continuation or eternity, one sees beyond merely interfering concerns of the ego—paradoxically, in this manner the ego finds its active and clear place.

After his visit to Russia, Cummings says that he perceived in himself a "dark poet;a blindman" who is in the process of "darkly communicating with impossible light" (quoted in Kennedy 333). In this lies various realizations: a Taoist acceptance of darkness as part of the life process is one of them, just as his father had to move through dooms to live the wholeness of love.

In his mature years he published this poem with its clear Taoist sense of childlike perception within natural continuation:

> who are you,little i
>
> (five or six years old)
> peering from some high
>
> window;at the gold
>
> of november sunset
>
> (and feeling:that if day
> has to become night
>
> this is a beautiful way) (CP 824)

This little poem acts as an indication of deeper layers in Cummings' project. At first glance, it looks dissimilar to the Lao Tzu translation about guarding one's femaleness and knowing one's maleness, and rightly so, since we are reading in the first place an American and Cummingsian poem. Yet Taoist elements inform it well. Formally, its "Chinese" aspect

occurs on the levels of blank space, and a crisp freshness of visually-oriented signs coming from the blank space. Thematically, this poem with its emphasis on the word "way" reflects a Taoist perception that yang (day) and yin (night) move into each other, retaining a dynamic equilibrium of huge, conflicting male and female forces. This continuing equilibrium is as much a part of the actual natural process as it may be part of one's perception: in the most brutal and yet also the most fragile sense, natural life continues to continue. Also: the poem takes this dynamic yin / yang givenness into a larger concern: that of growing old, so that every human being's day will also turn into night when his or her life gives over from being alive (through dying) to the doom of death (and reintegration). That it was published posthumously in 1963 probably reinforces this thematic reading. Preceded and followed by bright bird poems—"t,h;r:u;s,h;e:s" (CP 820) and the hummingbird poem (CP 827)—this way is also the way of nature, and of a natural lifetime on earth, so that the "little i" poem embodies acceptance of the mixture of youth and age within a lifetime on earth. A marvellous poem about the gold afterglow of sunset ["D-re-A-mi-N-gl-Y" (CP 838)] that I read in detail elsewhere (Terblanche, *Ecology*) carries a near-perfect hint of movement at the end of a day giving over to night, and the little-i poem cited here informs the afterglow poem with a rich Taoist context of acceptance. Both poems focus on yang giving over to yin, and radical human participation, as well as clarity of spontaneous and wise vision in this way. One of many paintings visible on Ken Lopez's website (http://www.eecummingsart.com) shows a tiny figure within a moving landscape of the gold afterglow as day becomes night—with a remarkable artistic quality of expression, the painting rewards study.

In these poems and paintings, and in the little-i poem, Cummings hints with just the right measure of suggestion at a mature, yet also wise-childlike, accepting of the darker, more inclusive, and even terrifying dying side of a lifedeath or a livingdying, thus restoring once more yin within the context of a brighter overall balance.

Incidentally, one of the main aspects that Capra mentions in his yin / yang critique of the disease within progressive societies is precisely their inability to incorporate the fact of dying into their overall patterns of making sense of life: the "matter of death is avoided as much as possible," he writes, and "death becomes simply the total standstill of the body-machine" (145), like a haphazard accident that abruptly ends the shining, climbing line of a material (but perhaps not very maternal) lifetime—a

shallow response to the mystery of death. Cummings' view and poetic approach to dying is far more sensitive to the actual complexities of the matter, as has been shown briefly here.

With reference to Cummings' "morality" play *Santa Claus*, Edith Everson shows how Cummings' concept of death includes a verbal "dying" which has "positive value as an experience that is natural to and inseparable from the ongoing process of life" (243)—this is what I have in mind with Cummings' restoration of the supposedly dark and to-be-avoided yin dynamic. Everson also points out that Cummings has a more negative and static employment of a more noun-like death, as embodied within the "conventions of society." She explains that Cummings believes that "these oppress the individual and inhibit his intuitive and spontaneous impulses" (243). As we have seen, Cummings' sense of nightfall as positive yin within the overall yin / yang continuation indeed involves a wise child who remains spontaneous even in maturity, of which dying is part, but of which static, death-like constructs of rationalism and progress remain to be doubted for as long as they appear to suppress the spontaneous and yin. That is: for as long as they represent a masculinity separated from and superior to the feminine, they remain unspontaneous and unable to accept nature in its full-empty dynamism.

IV

The overall sense in Cummings' work of the positivity of those forces that many may view as purely negative—such as doom, fate, integration, the night, downwardness, dying, and so on—fall in place against this yin / yang or Taoist background. Examples range from early poems to later ones. Early: in the 1922 volume *Tulips & Chimneys* lovers are turning "fatally" into their (innermost) selves (CP 283), and this gives positive value to the notion of "fate." In a 1926 poem, the female lover should send life out of the poetic speaker and the night "absolutely into" him (CP 303). This refreshingly restores night into a positive position. In another poem from the twenties, the speaker states that "this is the passing of all shining things," and that the soul should "lead us / into the / serious / steep / / darkness" (CP 49). An entire 1931 sonnet devotes itself to the positivity of the ocean, moonlight, darkness, twilight and reintegration—all of which move "beyond either," that is, beyond the static splitting of rational-relational, dualistic separation (CP 380). Other early poems indicate that humankind "achieves amazing doom" (CP 352): viewing doom positively once more, restoring it to an essential element of a meaningful life. A whole garden of

roses bows to the mother figure (CP 353) paying direct homage to the female aspect of existence. The "black bod / ies" of trees hide green leaves (CP 355): the poem holds black in a positive light for once. A later, "thin" poem within *50 Poems* (which echoes the still later leaf poem (CP 673) within *95 Poems*) gives the exclamation mark to "black" whereas for once "white" receives the question mark (CP 487). Perhaps many would allot these punctuation marks the other way round? Another poem equates night with a Nobody who comes slowly over the town to one's relief (CP 356). Sometimes entire poems should be read as poetic indications that understanding comes only with the positive reassessment of the yin side of being:

when rain whom fear
not children but men
speaks(among leaves Easily
through voices womenlike telling

of death love earth dark)

and thousand
thrusts squirms stars
Trees,swift each with its

Own motion deeply to wickedly

comprehend the innocently Doomed
brief all which somewhere is

fragrantly,

arrive
(when
Rain comes;
predicating forever,assuming
the laughter of afterwards—
i spirally understand

What

touching means
or What does a hand
with your hair
in my imagination (CP 357)

The poem concludes with the male speaker "spirally" understanding that just as rain and its "womenlike telling // of death love earth dark" lead

to a sense of the eternal ("forever"), so does touching a woman's hair in one's imagination. Understanding "spirally" is to understand finally, and yet not finally, because the spiral is in process, just as the poem "ends" in blank space without a closing parenthesis. And touching the woman's hair is vital: Cummings knows that celebrating yin / yang unity would be pointless unless the celebration enters concrete being, symbolized in his poetry by the lovers. The emphasis on "what" (repeated and capitalized) may well point to dying, since the word has the connotation of afterlife in Cummings' poem "rain or hail" (CP 568). At the very moment of beginning a new relationship, there is also a kind of dying of the self or ego. In these traditional terms, revitalized by Cummings in this context, the life process does not give masculine light without feminine darkness. In fact, masculine light turns meaningless and shallow without feminine darkness, so that what may have appeared to be merely complementary or logically presuppositional turns out to be fundamental.

Cummings does not attempt to restore the ecological innocence of darkness only, but also of moisture and flow. One poem suggests that (only) "noone" could be softer than the rain (CP 653): this immense flexibility of softness is to the speaker the equivalent of his deep respect and love for the lover. A subsequent poem, "little fish climb through the mind of the sea" (CP 665), associates intelligence and upwardness with fluidity, the ocean and sexual flow—and not in a strict sense with fixity / solidity / dryness, the sky or Helios. Cummings' non-logocentrism, a topic worthy of discussion in its own right, therefore also involves elements of non-heliocentrism. Another indication of how Cummings restores the yin sense is the relative lunacentric nature of his oeuvre, exemplified by the series of poems opening his great little volume *No Thanks* (1935), a lunacentrism in fine balance with a love for the sun. Furthermore, the overall nature of Cummings' oeuvre includes yang fixities and aridities into a heightened sense of the flexibilities and indeed the motions of nature.

Another poem states that ten thousand saharan centuries "are smaller than a rose's moment" (683), and this further includes the notion that real / true time is "neither reasoned nor unreasoned" (683)—it moves on beyond opposites of mind. These things indicate Cummings' awareness that the fixity and aridity of deserts and wastelands could be due to an overemphasis of qualities such as the "dry" intellect with its distancing of oppositional bent. And that restoration will occur in terms of flexibility, natural suppleness, fluidity—yin elements. To some extent this places Cummings in

counterpoint with mainstream modernist poetry of Eliot, Pound and Yeats—a topic for further discussion.

Later in his poetic career, in a poem published in 1958, Cummings asserts that the "nowhere" of earth's night is "prodigious" and "proud," and that a mother who has given birth has a silent smile "whose only secret all creation sings" (CP 714). Indeed, a Cummings poem views spring (CP 718) —traditionally a yang force—as female. The earth (clearly on the yin side of the "equation") is a person, furthermore, "who can never do wrong," and the poetic speaker urges us to do and be in the same way (CP 769). Here is the beginning of a vital instinct at the heart of the yin dynamic: participation in existence on earth. This return to earthiness is related to the restoration of ecological balance via the restoration of the yin-sense, as found in Taoism. As Martin Palmer writes, Taoists indulge in "cosmic liturgies" to restore natural yin / yang balance when they sense that the balance has been distorted (23), and Cummings' yin dynamic has the fine potential of playing a similar role in its uniquely individualistic and American manner.

Another poem introduces a sense of positive "nothingness" by means of an image of the "the great dim deep sound of rain" (CP 816). Dimness, deepness and rain all belong in the yin aspect of natural existence, here cast in positive light (or the relieving coolness of shadow on a blinding day, for that matter). In this poem yin restoration reaches a certain salience: the speaker goes as far as to state that he feels that "sunlight is…only loaned:whereas / night is given(night and death and the rain // are given;and given is how beautifully snow)" (CP 816). We have come full circle: this is a variant of saying that masculinity is superficial and femininity profound, while it is this very recognition that makes snow—with its mixture of male and female connotations—profound.

The poem furthermore ends with the notion that spring is that which "nobody may keep." We have seen that Cummings tends to suggest the positive where we may allocate the negative, and "nobody" could be meant positively here. It may well refer to the kind of person who does not see himself as a too-important "someone"—hence a nobody, also in this sense—who suffers less perhaps from interfering worries and thoughts, and who therefore *can* actually keep spring, precisely by doing nothing about it, but rather by being with or within it by seeing its natural clarity.

V

As has been indicated, Cummings writes of the beautiful way that day turns into night (CP 824): part of the Taoist perception is, importantly, the

restoration of the *active* yin sense of "non-doing." According to Lao Tzu, being at-one with or being at-oned to the inherent changes of nature as day moves into night involves the kind of non-doing that allows everything to fall into place by itself (48). As Capra explains further, it appears that the Chinese do not consider absolute stasis to be possible, and therefore the supposed "female passivity," better expressed as yin non-doing, is as vital and dynamic as the yang action of interfering with nature (27). It is as important simply and profoundly to be within nature, to allow nature to fulfil itself, as it is to chop a tree to clear space for a house or a shopping mall. William Blake writes in a letter to the reverend Trusler in 1799, that the tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the eyes of others only a green thing which stands in the way (403). Cummings' poetry imaginatively and precisely establishes the movement that Blake suggests—away from a merely objective perception of the tree as "thing."

In all of this, as the Hasidic teacher and Taoist reader Martin Buber stated early in the previous century, resides a vital lesson for Western progressive societies. According to him we are ready and ripe for the insight that progress cannot indefinitely destroy (interfere with) the natural way—we are therefore ready to learn from Taoism (124). However Buber equally stresses, as other orientalists have done before him, that we will have to learn this in our own terms from the perspectives of our own history (124). With the vital virtue of his seemingly easy adoption of a non-pedantic and highly alive poetic manner, Cummings offers a rich, effective, and economical set of dynamics which make this lesson more than accessible.

It remains to be said that the most engaging aspects of Cummings' yin dynamic with its potential of a non-pedantic lesson occurs on the formal level, where Cummings arranges his themes into a poetic blending of elements. To mention some of these: there is his formal creation of fluidity, a precise sense of mergence that may arise from a poem (or group of poems) to startle the reader. It is a mergence of words that somehow manages to create or re-create an original sense of being one with and within dynamic nature. Elsewhere I have mentioned osmotic propensities of the hummingbird poem (CP 827) as examples of how he steers signs so that the reader will discover a certain dissolving of linguistic boundaries into a radical, actively reawakened awareness of his or her natural being within earth (Terblanche, "Osmotic" 18). That one turns clumsy upon saying this in academic prose, despite the continuing effort to state it as clearly as possible, does not distract one bit from the precision with which Cummings

manages to do it in his poetry, as if with the greatest of ease—and surely this must be discussed if we wish to discuss a more complete Cummings.

Consider additional formal arrangements of the restoration. There is a rejuvenation of less-emphasized elements of significance, such as the left hand margin of the poem. Uniquely in poetry overall, the hummingbird poem opens out to the left in the shape of a funnel, thus to re-establish a vital link with the otherness of natural phenomena, such as the hummingbird and its minute little art work of a nest (see Webster 107). There is Cummings' famous or infamous foregrounding of visual elements, sometimes above the audial ground of the poem, something that R. P. Blackmur calls the "sin against the Holy Ghost" (71), and something that Jacques Derrida would have called non-phonocentric, and hence significantly against a main (logocentric) grain or groove of the progressive West. Combined with the tendency to create flow via visual re-arrangements, this non-phonocentrism goes against the direction of what has remained in the progressive outlook of an original Father. It goes against the grain, in other words, of an abstract voice-centredness, breath-centredness, and male hierarchy—in this way it is perhaps the deepest moment of the formal aspect in Cummings' overall yin dynamic, although it does not simply exclude voice.

VI

The formal level of the yin dynamic therefore alters and renews meaning, and the very directions of meaning. Cummings' flow, his restoration of the left hand margin, and his ability to create a sense of mergence with and within natural being are therefore far from quietistic moments in which poetry turns into a kind of weakness or jelly. They are moments that appear soft but—like water—have the tremendous capacity to change the way in which the world appears, besides quenching one's thirst for meaning. Consider (for example) the first of two moon poems that open *No Thanks*:

mOOn Over tOwns mOOn
whisper
less creature huge grO
pingness

whO perfectly whO
flOat
newly alOne is
dreamest

oNLY THE MooN o
VER ToWNS
SLoWLY SPRoUTING SPIR
IT (CP 383)

The moon is noticeably silent: it is a whisperless creature as the poem suggests. It is a "huge gropingness:" an enormous, climbing movement into night. Its arrival is not familiar, predictable or even probable: it is an immense confirmation of all that is possible, since it is perfectly new as it rises again. The speaker evidently knows his moon: even though it rises once more, it does (somehow) look brand new upon a careful look. Moreover, the moon is all-one and entirely itself: it is alOne. In this instance the upper case alteration serves two or three purposes at once—it highlights the orthographic miming of the moonshape in the letter "O," it underlines that the word "one" (unity) is at work within the word "alone," and it serves to break the word "alone" open to show that it also means all(is)one. In short, it does double or triple work as one sign, showing unity with all *and* singleness of being. The individuating economy that Cummings achieves here is dazzling.

The poem creates fertile ground for a unique meditation of dissolving movement, a merging floating and drift. I shall work roughly from the smaller contexts of this movement to its larger context. The first line plays strikingly with the iconic "O." It places a pair of double "O"s at each end of two separate, single "O"s, suggesting that the moon is able to combine the separateness of towns as it begins to float over them. Cutting the word "groping" at the "o" and capitalizing again the "O," Cummings achieves a sense that the moon is "growing"—"grO," implies "grow." So that the light and definition of the moon is growing, climbing (groping), establishing its rising singularity and its combining capacities at once: movement is the point, and the dissolving of what appears rationally as two or more separate actions—which the moon achieves, and which a poem should not dissect, but follow into its implications.

In the first stanza the "O"s also underscore two sets of sounds: [u:] (in the word "moon") on the one hand, and [oʊ] and [au] on the other (in the words "over" and "town"). The stanza links the [u:] sounds persistently with the iconic word "moon," as if in some sort of primitive praise sound towards it, confirmed in a dissolving of personhood and it-ness within the

twice repeated "whO" of stanza 2. And it links [oʊ] and [au] sounds with movements such as the moon appearing "over" towns, and such as the moon growing and "grO/ ping." These phonic exclamations or meditations blend marvellously with the iconic play of the remarkable "O," giving the overall sense that all kinds of movements come alive as the moon rises in correspondence with the poem creating *its* movement.

And as always in Cummings, one will hardly be disappointed when one continues to look for those further micro-events on the levels of sign-making which continue to confirm and carry the movement. By loading the word "flOat" with another iconic upper case within stanza 2, the poem creates a near perfect icon of the actual scene: the round, white ball of moon rises above the line of horizon, just as the word "flOat" now shows a higher round ball in its middle, literally-visually rising out from the remaining, creative coincidence of the word "flat." The line of the horizon is the "flat" part, of course, and the round "O" of moon arising from and breaking through this flatness is the newly appearing moon.

In the final stanza, the moon has grown smaller and brighter—as it does in a night sky on earth—and Cummings shows it by inverting the upper case and lower case scenario as the stanzas progress. By chopping up the final word "spirit" and accentuating the blank space, he concludes his variations on dissolving personhood (a personalized perception of nature) and the bright, seemingly self-creating "it"-hood of natural phenomena and events by showing that the word "spirit" contains the "it" or "id" of a dreamingly floating moon.

By focussing on the lunacentric element of natural existence, when light and dark swap roles (darkness becoming more dominant), and in particular by creating a floating or moving mergence of human perception and natural events, Cummings is able with the apparent ease of a poetic master to revitalize the enormous importance of supposedly "lesser" elements and events. This I have called his yin dynamic, of which this moon poem is an exquisite example; by using the yang procedure of chopping up our usual grammar with fine precision, he adds a necessary drive of the (perhaps traditionally) masculine to the equation, not to mention his ability somehow to manage all of this without becoming "heavy."

VII

At its deepest and apparently "darkest," the yin dynamic enacts a poetic moral: earth matters, the moon matters, and humans come to the necessary understanding of their lives only when they (in their individual man-

ners, and in maturity) recognize this as fully (or emptily) as possible. For Cummings "deathless earth's innumerable doom" (CP 821) is an utterance of positivity: it is what makes the voice of a little bird—who re-calls or re-sings the speaker back into acceptance of a natural lifetime—the "undaunted guest of dark most downwardness / and marvellously self diminutive" (CP 821). (One could say that this is how he at once works with and escapes from a modernist dialectic.) The recognition of living within darkness is the diminishment of self that paradoxically (hence upliftingly) brings about a moment of the most individualized self. Again the discomfort one may sense here probably arises because it goes so precisely against the supposedly individualistic grain of modern progressive life: perhaps one wants that there should be no darkness greater than the shining (and conforming) individual!

Perhaps one who is part of progressive society today ultimately further wants or needs the "little man" of Cummings' poem (CP 393) to stay "full of an important worry"—a situation that has undeniably led to ill health, literally and spiritually, on all kinds of levels, including the natural:

little man
(in a hurry
full of an
important worry)
halt stop forget relax

wait

(little child
who have tried
who have failed
who have cried)
lie bravely down

sleep

big rain
big snow

big sun
big moon
(enter

us) (CP 393)

Relatively plainly enough, the poem asks that one should replace cluttering and clogging worries with clarity of natural awareness: the patterns one's mind was made for. The blank space between the concluding (but really opening) words "enter" and "us" is a dynamic, iconic invitation of earth's vast and reassuring elements to return into human existence. But those isolated verbs ("wait" and "sleep") roughly at the center attract attention, and they reward attention informed by the yin dynamic. I believe they have to do consciously or unconsciously with the Taoist notion of non-doing, the paradoxical notion that by doing nothing everything falls into place as if by itself.

To put it bluntly: does Cummings have in mind, by emphasizing these "relaxing" verbs, that one should lead a laid-back, hippie-like life of smoking marijuana and lying around? Such notions embody a misconception of the sheer dynamism of what Lao Tzu may have in mind with non-doing. Rather, it appears that these active verbs point to the inherent dynamism of nature: moons rise and the trees grow of their own accord, whether one notices it or not, and this occurs along a way propelled by immense forces of conflict (such as yin and yang). Yin-action or non-doing is to appreciate this actively, actively not to interfere with the natural flow, and interactively to go along with it within one's (natural) spirit. Non-doing is therefore a profound and necessary action of inner and outer acceptance, a humility and vitality in health. Only ignorance can deny the activity of this kind of action, and although a flyfisher who forgets his worries while he feels relaxingly and forgetfully one with his surroundings may not wish to give this action a profound and strange-sounding name such as yin non-doing, that is probably not a bad name to give to his situation. After all, he can probably hear the silent singing of nature for once.

In any event, Cummings' little man poem says so brightly that non-doing is necessary for openness to return, also with its concluding see-saw, spontaneously childlike and maturely appreciative sounds of [I]-[ai] (big rain), [I]-[oʊ] (big snow), [I]-[ʌ] (big sun) and [I]-[u:] (big moon). Compellingly, in the latter word we cannot help but notice the two iconic moons

there, since Cummings has prepared this well with the mOOn poem preceding this by a couple of pages. Also, on the suggestive level of sign repetition, this big moon finds itself in fine equilibrium with the sunny notion (but not a heliocentric notion, that is, not a notion in violent favour of the sun) of the big sun that enters us.

Sensitively and powerfully aware of masculine and feminine sides in being on earth, the poet senses an imbalance, and he goes forth to create a poetry that has enormous potential to rejuvenate a dynamic, fresh, crisp balance. Cummings the poet is a blindman as he says, working with and through darkness into impossible light, indeed: the light of what the reader experiences upon reading English into the revitalization of a natural sensibility, also when it comes to the necessary restoration of what we call yin, in cautious and necessary reference to Cummings and Taoism.

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