

Poetry & Expanding the Ecological Self: A Contextualization of Cummings' Typographies within the Modernist Ecological Vision

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A poem is stored energy, a formal turbulence, a living thing, a swirl in the flow.

Poems are part of the energy pathways which sustain life.

Poems are a verbal equivalent of fossil fuel (stored energy), but they are a renewable source of energy, coming, as they do, from those ever twin matrices, language and imagination.

—William Rueckert, “Literature and Ecology”

I. Introduction

In “Literature and Ecology,” William Rueckert explores the energy within a poem by comparing poems to plants. First, he establishes the creative accomplishment of plants by reminding readers that the sun’s energy is “on its path to entropy.” A plant captures that energy, and turns it into a creative force. Then Rueckert suggests that “poems are green plants” and that their sun is the poet’s imagination (111). Just as a plant captures the sun’s energy, a poem captures the ideas from the poet’s imagination, thereby becoming a “matrix of stored poetic / verbal energy” (110).

In the midst of establishing the poem as stored energy, Rueckert arrives at his thesis. Anytime a person engages a poem, at any varying level of intensity, a portion of the poem’s energy is released:

Reading, teaching, and critical discourse are enactments of the poem which release the stored energy so that it can flow into the reader—sometimes with such intensity that one is conscious of an actual inflow; or, if it is in the classroom, one becomes conscious of the extent to which this one source of stored energy is flowing around through a community. . . The flow is along many energy pathways from poem to person, from person to person. The process is triangulated, quadrangulated, multiangulated; and there is, ideally, a raising of the energy levels which makes it possible for the highest motives of literature to accomplish themselves. These motives are not pleasure and truth, but creativity and community. (110-111)

Through the *poem as plant* metaphor, Rueckert presents a different perspective on what a poem is. A poem is a source of stored energy. However, the concept of “energy” is broadly set forth. As the spectrum of literary theory reveals, there are myriad energy flows that will emanate from a poem depending upon the reader’s critical stance. From an ecological stance, there is a specific form of energy that flows from the works of Emily Dickinson, William Carlos Williams, Elisabeth Bishop, and E. E. Cummings, and the energy involves what Arne Naess calls the ecological self.

My essay begins by recapitulating Arne Naess’ ecological ideas, specifically, how the ecological self expands through the process of identification. A sampling of Dickinson, Williams, and Bishop’s poems are then explored in the context of the Naess ecological self. Exploring each poem reveals the ecological theme of identification as part of its stored energy. Consequently, each time the poems are read, taught, or written about, the energy is released, which, in turn, has the potential to expand an individual’s ecological self. The final section focuses on the work of E. E. Cummings. Like Dickinson, Williams, and Bishop, Cummings’ poems release the energy of ecological identification and thus contribute to the expanding of the ecological self; however, his typographies are marked by an orthographical and syntactical upheaval, rendering them somewhat arcane. The gift of his poems is unique, and as we will see, they deserve their own space to be explored. The essay concludes not only by reminding the reader that these green poets are modernists, but also by suggesting that we recognize modernist poetry as one of the headwaters of eco-writing within the American literary tradition.

II. Arne Naess and the Ecological Self

The late Arne Naess, a philosopher and mountaineer from Norway, was a fervent activist for nonviolence, social justice, and Deep Ecology. *The Ecology of Wisdom*, a collection of Naess’ key articles, speeches, and presentations, reveals that the three movements of peace, social justice, and ecology all “converge” in a total perspective that he calls *ecosophy* (99-104), a philosophy permeated with ecological ideas such as interrelatedness, “Maximum Symbiosis!,” “Self-Realization!” (168-169), and the belief that every living being, human and non-human, has a “right to blossom” (103).

When Naess begins introducing the ecological self, it is within the context of his own process of identification with the alpine ecosystem sur-

rounding him. Naess created his personal philosophy, and named it *Ecosophy T*. The “T” represents Tvergastein, the name of the location and the hut Naess built in the Hallingskarvet Mountains of Norway. He identifies with the geography (46-48), the flowers (48-50), the animals (50-52), and the climate (55-56), and he asks several questions that demonstrate “Deep Ecology”:

What would the place require of me? What kind of lifestyle, activities, and ceremonies would be appropriate for this place? What would be a life worthy of Hallingskarvet and in solidarity with, and respect for, the other life-forms? (54)

The progression of Naess’ questions suggests that the ecological self begins by identifying with human and non-human life and expands to address the deeper questions concerning how the patterns of a lifestyle interrelate within the fabric of an ecosystem.

After establishing sufficient context, Naess defines the “ecological self” in an authentic way. The “ecological self” is never static; rather, it is always already in the midst of process. To further emphasize the importance of process, Naess explicitly uses a sentence to “define” the term:

I shall offer only one simple sentence that resembles a definition of the ecological self: The *ecological self* of a person is that with which this person identifies. The key sentence (rather than a definition) about the self shifts the burden of clarification from the term *self* to that of *identification*, or rather, the process of identification. (83)

A sentence is driven by grammatical time and thus is well suited to capture the idea that the ecological self involves a continuously expanding awareness of how the self exists in the midst of a host of interrelations with non-human and human life.

Later, Naess uses the metaphor of the “knot” to further elaborate the notion of the ecological self (196). A self who identifies with an increasing number of life-forms (human and non-human, animate and inanimate) consequently increases the threads connecting him or her to the ecosphere. The denser the knot, the more intertwined the identifications, and the metaphor thus provides a powerful image for the aspiring ecological self. Reflecting upon Naess’ *Ecosophy T*, the reader recognizes how Naess seeks to become a knot of interrelatedness within his own ecosystem. Naess’ process of identification with the Norwegian mountains is similar to John Muir’s identification with the Sierra Nevada mountain range and Rachel Carson’s identification with the ocean. However, the difference is that

Naess created an ecological nomenclature in order to describe the process of identification and in turn the “knot” of the ecological self.

III. Poetry & Expanding the Ecological Self

Modernist poets knew the importance of identifying with non-human life-forms. In fact, the poems to be interpreted each epitomize the concept of the ecological self who increasingly identifies with the surrounding ecosystem. A precursor of modernist poetry, Emily Dickinson, is known for her seclusion, and yet the following poems balance that perspective by demonstrating the sheer abundance of her identification.

In a letter to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Dickinson articulates a motif that recurs throughout her life’s work: “I know the Butterfly—and the Lizard—and the Orchis. Are not those *your* Countrymen?” (*Selected* 175-176). In an instant, non-human life is elevated to the status of human life, “Countrymen.” Her identification with non-human life is a theme in many of her poems, one of which speaks of various species as “people” (line 3):

The Bee is not afraid of me.
I know the Butterfly.
The pretty people in the Woods
Receive me cordially —

The Brooks laugh louder when I come —
The Breezes madder play;
Wherefore mine eye thy silver mists,
Wherefore, Oh Summer’s Day? (Johnson #111)

Dickinson not only identifies with animate life, but also the inanimate life of streams and wind. In other words, Dickinson sees herself within not only the biosphere, which is limited to animate life, but also the ecosphere, which includes the rocks, streams, mists, and breezes. Naess’ ecological “knot” of interrelations can be seen in another of Dickinson’s poems. “Some rainbow — coming from the Fair!” (J #64) epitomizes the “knot” as she references a rainbow, a peacock, butterflies, pools, the sun, bees, robins, snowflakes, orchis, and a bog, all within twenty-four lines. At the end of the poem, the terms “multitudes” (22) and “children” (23) encapsulate the animate and inanimate life within the previous stanzas and further the elevation of non-human life to the status of *countrymen*.

The theme of the ecological knot is also emphasized in a poem from which two lines are often quoted. Sadly, these quoted lines are the poem's first, and thus the ecological import of the poem is often missed:

If I can stop one Heart from breaking
I shall not live in vain
If I can ease one Life the Aching
Or cool one Pain

Or help one fainting Robin
Unto his Nest again
I shall not live in Vain.

(Johnson #919)

The poem lists four actions that would make the speaker know her life was purposeful, and it is noteworthy that the list uses the conjunction “or” rather than the word “also.” Any of the four actions suffice; there are no combinations, and there is no hierarchy. Identifying with and helping a robin achieves the same level of purposefulness as “cool[ing] one Pain” (4) of a human. Dickinson’s poem, as it ranges from human to non-human life, reveals her deeply felt identification with the life-forms surrounding her.

A final poem by Dickinson not only continues the theme of identification, but it also explores how identification expands the ecological self. The speaker of the poem has lost her sight, which in this context is somewhat fortunate. If the speaker could behold all that is around her, she “would split” (line 8) due to the sheer abundance of interrelated energy. Nonetheless, the speaker ultimately engages the world around her with her “soul” (line 17):

Before I got my eye put out
I liked as well to see —
As other Creatures, that have Eyes
And know no other way —

But were it told to me — Today —
That I might have the Sky
For mine — I tell you that my Heart
Would split, for size of me —

The Meadows — mine —
The Mountains — mine —
All Forests — Stintless Stars —
As much of Noon, as I could take
Between my finite eyes —

The Motions of the Dipping Birds —
The Lightning's jointed Road —
For mine — to look at when I liked —
The News would strike me dead —

So safer — guess — with just my soul
Upon the Window pane —
Where other creatures put their eyes —
Incautious — of the Sun —

(Johnson #327)

The speaker's identification with the *sky, meadows, mountains, forests, stars, noon, birds, lightning, and sun* is truly a Naess-like knot of interrelation, and the identification with the myriad life-forms inundates the speaker to the point of bursting.

The Dickinson poems explored above capture the theme of the ecological self who has identified with non-human life. Indeed, the myriad species Dickinson includes within her poems speak to the richness of her awareness of the life surrounding her. However, the ecological self can be explored with another approach. William Carlos Williams' "Iris" does not capture the Dickinsonian knot of interrelations; rather, it focuses on one specific moment of identification:

a burst of iris so that
come down for
breakfast

we searched through the
rooms for
that

sweetest odor and at
first could not
find its

source then a blue as
of the sea
struck

startling us from among
those trumpeting
petals

(Williams 30)

The setting of the poem is within a house, which captures one crucial principle from the Deep Ecology movement. Humans are always already in the presence of non-human life. Naess encourages aspiring Deep Ecologists to “think of one’s own community as part of the ecosystem” (141). This flower is part of the ecosystem, as is the family, and the poem captures when the two interrelate.

The verb “search” reveals that the family is in the midst of process. Something is dramatically different within their home, and they are expectantly curious as to what that something is. The process carries the family through several “rooms” (line 5) until they arrive at the “source” (10). It is noteworthy that the stanza break, “its // source” (9, 10), helps recreate the family’s anticipation and suspense for the reader, who must pause before the “source” is found. Of course, it is the iris that has filled the home with its “sweetest odor” (8).

The magic of the poem occurs in that the moment of multi-sensory identification, inundating four out of the five senses. The “sweetest odor” pertains to the sense of smell (line 7), while the phrase “blue as / of the sea” inundates the sense of sight (10-11). The next two senses are arrived at through synaesthesia. Though the verb “struck” captures how the color arrested the eyes, it also implies a sense of touch, and though one cannot hear blue petals, the auditory and visual metaphor of the trumpet suggests that the brilliant hue is actually audible. Through creating a poem with multi-sensory images, Williams reveals the immediacy and sheer energy of the “burst” (1) of iris during the precise moment of identification.

Similar to “Iris,” Elisabeth Bishop’s “The Moose” captures the mo-

ment of identification through two juxtapositions (Bishop 169-173). First, there is the world of the bus contrasting the world of the moose. This binary is established through the structure of the narrative poem's plot. The first twenty-one and a half stanzas, the exposition, focus on the world of the bus, while the last six and a half stanzas—the rising action, climax, and resolution—capture the bus riders' identification with the moose. This juxtaposition is further emphasized through the poem's final two smells: "then there's a dim / smell of moose, an acrid / smell of gasoline" (lines 166-168). The two smells emphasize that the poem explores the magic that occurs when the boundary between the two worlds is crossed.

The second juxtaposition becomes clearer if the reader approaches the poem from the ecological perspective of identification. During the exposition, a myriad of animate and inanimate life-forms are listed. Bishop mentions the "tides" (line 3); the setting sun (14); a "red sea" (15); "silver birches" (24); "crystals" of forming frost (43); "lupins" (48); "sweet peas" (49); "bumblebees" (52); "foxgloves" (53); and "marshes" (62), but this non-human life does not carry with it the Dickinsonian knot of interrelations or William's burst of identification. The tone is passive, deliberate and domesticated, as if the non-human life has become too familiar. However, as the bus travels towards Boston, it enters the New Brunswick woods, and Bishop foreshadows the imminent identification with the moose. The poem alerts the reader to the enchantment of the woods:

Moonlight as we enter
the New Brunswick woods,
hairy, scratchy, splintery;
moonlight and mist
caught in them like lamb's wool
on bushes in a pasture. (lines 79-84)

The stanzas that follow the entrance into the woods recount mundane conversations, highlighting the fact that the passengers do not yet fully identify with the world outside of the bus. Then, the magical word appears, *suddenly*:

—Suddenly the bus driver
stops with a jolt,
turns off his lights.

A moose has come out of
the impenetrable wood
and stands there, looms, rather,
in the middle of the road.
It approaches; it sniffs at
the bus's hot hood.

Towering, antlerless,
high as a church,
homely as a house
(or, safe as houses).
A man's voice assures us
"Perfectly harmless. . . ."

Some of the passengers
exclaim in whispers,
childishly, softly,
"Sure are big creatures."
"It's awful plain."
"Look! It's a she!"

Taking her time,
she looks the bus over,
grand, otherworldly.
Why, why do we feel
(we all feel) this sweet
sensation of joy?

"Curious creatures,"
says our quiet driver,
rolling his *r*'s.
"Look at that, would you."

Then he shifts gears.
For a moment longer,

by craning backward,
the moose can be seen
on the moonlit macadam;
then there's a dim
smell of moose, an acrid
smell of gasoline.

(lines 130-168)

The identification with non-human life enriches the passengers as it brings “this sweet / sensation of joy” (155-156), while the moonlight, established the moment the bus entered the woods, resurfaces—the moon shines on moose and asphalt alike, creating a lasting image within the minds of the passengers. One could criticize the passengers for their lack of imagination—they are captivated only by the large mammals of the ecosystem through which they travel. However, the passengers do identify with the moose, expanding their ecological selves, and one could hope that the joy of identification contagiously expands their awareness to include all the life-forms mentioned within the exposition of the poem.

Bishop and Williams focus with great intensity on the specific moment of identification with one life-form, while Dickinson's poems display an interrelated knot of identification with many life-forms. In the context of Bishop's and Williams' poems, one can see why Dickinson suggests that her being is too small and worries that it will *split* as a result of her expanded ecological self. If she has engaged robins, summer, rivulets, meadows, mountains, bees, butterflies, breezes, and storms—and all the non-human life referenced in her poems—with a multi-sensory approach similar to that of the people in “Iris” or the sheer awe of the people in “The Moose,” then *splitting* indeed captures the overwhelming richness the ecological self becomes.

IV. E. E. Cummings & Expanding the Ecological Self

In the context of Rueckert's idea of the poem as stored energy, readers who engage “The Moose,” “Iris,” and Dickinson's poems experience the energy of identification in a contagious way. Identification with the poems potentially inspires readers to identify with non-human life, increasing the knot of interrelatedness and expanding the ecological self. Another poet

who contributes to the energy of ecological identification is E. E. Cummings. However, his poetry exhibits an orthographical and syntactical upheaval to such an extent that a cursory glance may dismiss the poems as mere experiments in randomness. And yet, as Norman Friedman observed, often the disorder is supported by an exquisite order of counting (Friedman 130). Because Cummings' poems push language beyond what may have been thought possible, they require a unique approach. Consequently, this section begins by explicating one poem that offers a powerful clue to Cummings' poetics. Then it explores several poems that reveal Cummings' contribution to the process of identification and thus to the expanding of the ecological self.

Cummings took language and bent it, broke it, shattered and fractured it, and one poem that reveals the theory of such a poetics is "pieces(in darker." This relatively accessible poem creates the image of a broken mirror found on a city street:

pieces(in darker
than small is dirtiest
any city's least
street)of mirror

lying are each(why
do people say it's un
lucky to break one)
whole with sky

(CP 623)

If the reader focuses on the words outside the parenthesis, the poem reads *pieces of mirror lying are each whole with sky*, and this line captures the paradox of shattering. Before the mirror was broken, it reflected only one sky, which, in the context of Cummings' work, carries with it the infinity of the stars. After the wholeness is broken, each shattered piece reflects its own infinite sky. Paradoxically, a shattered mirror reflects numerous infinities and is therefore a richer expression of the already infinite sky. In the process of becoming nothing, the mirror becomes an infinite everything. Cummings, though, did not break mirrors. He broke language, and the reader who approaches Cummings' poetic aberrations in the context of looking at how the fragmented letters capture their own infinite wholeness will enter into a fecund world of identification.

The reader who gives the poem below a cursory glance may conclude that its typography is haphazard. However, counting the syllables per line reveals that Cummings has supported the linguistic aberration with the mathematical pattern of whole numbers, 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-9-8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1. The reader who moves from the form of the poem to its content realizes that Cummings continues the Dickinsonian concept that non-human life, in this case, nocturnal life, can be seen as *countrymen*. He uses the term “citi / zens” (lines 17-18):

hush)
noones
are coming
out in the gloam
ing together are
standing together un
der a particular tree
are all breathing bright darkness to
gether are slowly all together

very magically smiling and if

we are not perfectly careful be
lieve me you and i'll go strolling
right through these each illimit
able to speak very
softly altogeth

er miracu

lous citi

zens of

(hush

(CP 600)

The parenthesis of the last line is on the left, “(hush” (line 19), which encourages the reader to circle back to its symmetrical counterpoint at the beginning of the poem, “hush)” (1). The “(hush” of the last line refers to the nocturnal animals’ demesne while the “hush)” of the first line is an imperative to the people who are entering the nocturnal ecosystem. From the

perspective of the reader, the last line circling back to the first line, “(hush...hush)” is an invitation to enter back into the poem to identify with the content again. The poem suggests that the humans may become diminished if they do not hush, and merely “go strolling / right through these each illimit / able . . . altogeth / er miracu / lous” creatures thereby missing the moment of ecological identification.

Each of Cummings’ nature poems can be seen as additions to the list of *citizens*, but Cummings’ accomplishment is not simply in the expanding of the list, it is in the *how*. The poems that follow do not capture the moment of identification (as in “Iris” and “The Moose”); rather, they grant the reader an opportunity to identify with the worlds within the shattered words, which is a process of *textual* identification. Because the content of the poems focuses on non-human life, textual identification can inspire identification with the creatures themselves.

One poem that demonstrates the process of textual identification is “un(bee)mo.” The reader who counts recognizes that Cummings has supported the linguistic acrobatics with the balanced 1-5-1 lines per stanza:

un(bee)mo

vi

n(in)g

are(th

e)you(o

nly)

asl(rose)eep

(CP 691)

The words inside the parentheses read *bee in the only rose*, while the words outside read as *unmoving are you asleep*. Combining the two reveals the question, *bee, unmoving, in the only rose are you (only) asleep?* The fact that there is one rose suggests that the season is late autumn and that the rose has become the tomb for the bee who has died.

From the perspective of ecological identification, the speaker in the poem seeks to identify compassionately with the bee through asking it a question. Likewise, the typography of the poem places the reader in a similar posture. The reader must search through the disorder of signs in order to “read,” or identify with, what the poem is about. Such a reader will dis-

cover that the typography of the poem is a visual metaphor, for the parentheses represent textual petals that hold a textual bee in two places, “(bee)” and “)you(“ (lines 1, 5). The reader who looks at the poem from a distance discovers a third textual bee, the middle stanza that is nestled between the “petals” of the first and final line. As the reader undergoes the process of textual identification—and it is, above all, a process—the reader may experience a joy similar to identifying with the species of the natural world. Consequently, textual identification heightens the reader’s sensitivity to the splendor of bees and petals, which, in turn, may inspire identification with the life-forms in the natural world.

The next poem pushes the ecological self further as the identification is with the inanimate “life” of a snowflake.

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(CP 833)

Similar to “un(bee)mo,” the typography may seem random until the inter-

twining pattern of counting is discovered. The number of lines per stanza follows the symmetrical pattern of 1-3-1-5-1-3-1, and the number of letters per line follows the (almost perfect) symmetrical pattern of 3--1-3-1--9--1-2-3-2-1--10--1-3-1--3. The fact that the last two lines mirror the final two lines, “one / t . . . t / one,” further enhances the poem’s symmetry. The poem “reads” *one this snowflake alighting is upon a gravestone*, and the visual metaphor of the fourth stanza’s typography captures the flake’s graceful descent.

The poetics of the shattered mirror encourages the reader to look for what emerges as a result of the broken words, and it is here that the theme of ecological identification deepens. The snowflake announces its arrival through a fragment from *this*, a friendly “hi” (line 3), a greeting that addresses both the speaker of the poem as well as the person beneath the gravestone. It is as if winter grants a tribute to the person who died. The uniqueness of the moment is enhanced by the two “ones” (1, 15), the latter of which arises out of the fragmented word “gra // v / es / t // one” (11-15). The speaker of the poem identifies with the unity between the snowflake and the gravestone, and the reader identifies with the imagery of the *alighting* snowflake, with the “hi,” with the form’s symmetry, with the visual metaphor, and with the worlds within the fragmented words. As with “un (bee)mo,” the linguistic disorder and mathematical order inspires a multi-dimensional, textual identification that potentially inspires the reader to further identify with the snowflakes of the natural world. The ecological self has expanded as it identifies not only with butterflies, lizards, the orchis, nocturnal creatures, bees, and roses, but also with the dazzling acrobatics of descending snow.

Cummings’ snow poem is complemented by another poem that traces a feathery object descending through air, a leaf. The poem “!blac” is more abstract than “one,” since the reader must travel up and down the text in order to retrace the syntactical upheaval. The linguistic acrobatics are supported by the mathematical pattern of alternating stanza lengths, 4-1-4-1-4-1-4-1, while the content of the poem creates an image:

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(CP 487)

The image is that of a single leaf falling from a silhouetted tree—*black against white sky from which a leaf dropped, a leaf goes whirling, swirling, whirling, swirling*—a paraphrase I suggest for two reasons. First, the repetition of *whirling, swirling* is supported by the close proximity of the “s” to the beginning of *whirling* (line 17) as well as by the final period on the left-hand side of the last letter, “.g” (20). The reader is encouraged to continue falling—or rising—with the leaf. Secondly, the paraphrase repeats the words “a leaf” (*from which a leaf dropped* and *a leaf goes whirling*) because the repetition helps complete each half of the poem. In order to complete each phrase, the reader rises and falls unpredictably from line to line, which in turn is a visual metaphor for the path of the leaf caught in the turbulent gusts of wind.

The reader who continues to linger in the process of textual identification may discover another visual metaphor within the word “wh / Irll / n // .g” (lines 17-20). The line breaks shatter the word, but as the poetics of the shattered mirror suggest, the fragments are often *whole* with the essence of the poem. Here, the two capital I’s are suggestive of an upward burst, and thus they are yet another visual metaphor for the leaf caught in the turbulence of wind. The fact that the two I’s bracket the line further enhances the visual metaphor. One can infer that the leaf bursts up as the line starts, falls in the middle, and then rises again at the end of the line. As with Cummings’ other poems, the reader identifies not only with the imagery of the poem, but also with the visual metaphors and the worlds that arise out of the fractured language.

The process of identification continues from the nocturnal creatures, the bee, the petals, the snowflake, and the leaf, to a tiny flower emerging from between two stones.

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(CP 581)

Hopefully, the strategy of counting lines, looking for symmetry, and discovering visual metaphors makes the poem accessible. The text of the poem reads: *how tinely of squirming between two stones a greenest you becomes mysteriously white, one, thou.* The pattern of lines per stanza (1-2-3-3-3-2-1) and the last line's audible echo of the first line establish the sense of symmetry and balance. Suddenly, from the middle of the poem, a visual metaphor emerges that captures the floweret squirming from between the two textual stones: "t you b" (line 8). Not only does the strategic placement of the "you" establish a visual metaphor for the flower, but it also establishes the tone of apostrophe. The speaker of the poem speaks to the flower by addressing it directly, and it is this act of speaking to it that the theme of identification develops. The speaker is struck by the mystery of "how" a green plant blossoms into white, and Cummings creates an opportunity for the reader to identify with that mystery through the process of textual identification.

It is now time to turn to one of Cummings' most abstract accomplishments, "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r" (CP 396). A linguistic disorder composes the surface of this poem, and the strategy of counting lines or letters does not readily assist the reader in navigating the chaos:

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                                r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r
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aThe) :l
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rea (be) rran (com) gi (e) ngly
, grasshopper;

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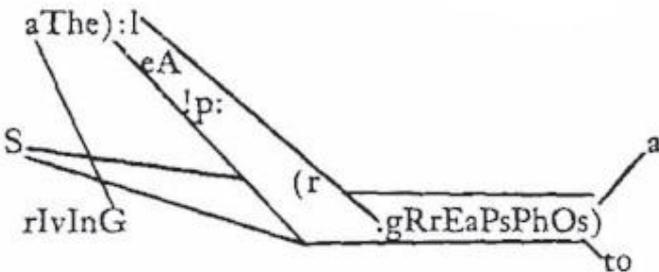
And yet, precisely because of the sheer intensity of this poem's fragmentation, it offers limitless possibilities for textual identification. As a result, it holds within it a tremendous amount of stored poetic and ecological energy.

The content establishes the poem's focus, which is the leap of a grass-

hopper, but the shattering of the language epitomizes the poetics of the shattered mirror. Myriad fragments contain visual metaphors for the grasshopper's leap. The four permutations of the word grasshopper each suggest a different "position" the grasshopper's body assumes during four moments of its leap. The first permutation contains within it the surprise of the leap, *pop*, "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r" (line 1). The second permutation complements the content of "gath // ering" (4, 6) as the two Ps and two Ss each gather to opposite ends of the word, "PPEGORHRASS" (5). The reader who lingers in the third permutation recognizes the precision supporting the seeming randomness. The letters for *grass* are lowercased, as is the first letter of *hopper*. However, the "O" rises up to the right only to "fly" back to the left, just like a grasshopper leaping, surprisingly, one way and then another, ".gRrEaPsPhOs)" (line 12, Webster 111). When the reader *arrives* at the final permutation, the once familiar word seems charged with an infinite strangeness, ".grasshopper;" (line 15). What else can this little word do?

Other visual metaphors emerge. Within the text of "l / eA / !p" (lines 7 -9) there are two. The exclamation mark signifies the sheer explosion of the little beast, and the uppercased "A" embodies it as well. *Embodies* is the operative word, for not only does the capitalization of it suggest the textual explosion up and out of the lowercase letters, but the upper half of it resembles a body while the lower half of it resembles legs. This interpretation is strengthened by observing that the "A" is situated at the end, or edge, of the line, just after the text of the poem stated the grasshopper was *gathering*. Another visual metaphor emerges from the third line's first parenthesis and its final "k," and it hints at the shape of a grasshopper's antennae and back legs respectively, "a)s w(e loo)k" (line 3). Ingeniously, this line contains the crucial word "(loo)k." Looking becomes essential to the experience of textual identification, and it becomes essential to the theme of ecological identification and expanding the ecological self.

Max Näanny took another look and arrived at:



He found that another surprising leap occurs as the reader continues to look at and identify with the textual motion within the poem. Instead of supporting the linguistic upheaval by counting syllables, lines, or stanzas, Cummings counted blank space; consequently, what may have at first been dismissed as sheer randomness is, in reality, the epitome of precision. In the final analysis, the seemingly random typography is supported by the order of a latent shape within the text itself.

The grasshopper poem allows the reader to enter into the process of textual identification, and because the visual metaphors revisit the leap of the grasshopper in several surprising ways, the reader is, hopefully, inspired to identify with the grasshoppers of the natural world. As part of the Deep Ecology movement, Naess encourages humans to identify not only with the large mammals that often capture the imagination, but also with all species that form part of the ecosystem. He urges us to “appreciate all life-forms rather than merely those considered beautiful, remarkable, or narrowly useful” (141). The stored energy within E. E. Cummings’ poetry, when released, contributes to the ecological vision within modernist nature poetry as it teaches the reader, through the process of textual identification, to look at and greet the fierce beauty of the often overlooked life-forms within the ecosphere.

V. Conclusion

These poems by Dickinson, Williams, Bishop, and Cummings epitomize the concept of stored ecological energy, for they contain within them the theme of ecological identification with non-human life. Each poem, when read, unleashes that energy, which, in turn, and in varying levels of intensity, contributes to the expanding of the ecological self. Dickinson reveals a fabric of interrelation between the animate and inanimate life of the ecosphere while Bishop and Williams capture the moment of identification. Cummings’ poems provide the reader with a unique experience to enter into the process of textual identification, which inspires a contagious identification with the animate and inanimate life within the natural world. These four poets, taken as a whole, reveal that irises, moose, bees, butterflies, storms, flowers, leaves, snowflakes, grasshoppers, rainbows, and nocturnal creatures can become *citizens* and *countrymen* if the ecological self enters into the process of identifying with them. All four of these modernists knew the joy that arises through ecological identification, and they pass that joy on to the reader through their poems.

It may be surprising that Dickinson, Williams, Bishop, and Cummings are four of America's modernist poets. Part of the aim of this article is not only to contextualize Cummings' typographies within the "greener" side of modernism, but moreover to demonstrate that our modernist poets had an ecological awareness that, when explored, offers great insight into how we may live today. The poems explored in this article represent a mere fraction of the stored ecological energy within modernist poetry, an energy waiting to be unleashed. The words of our poets have already contributed to the colossal ideological shifts concerning gender, race, and multiculturalism. There is no reason why we should hesitate to turn to our poets for insight during the environmental crisis.

To meet the environmental crisis, Arne Naess suggests that our ecological self must expand through the process of identification. Only then can we reach the goals of "Maximum Symbiosis!" and a sustainability that respects each species' "right to blossom." Arne Naess stresses the necessity of the expanding ecological self, and it is our poets who have already shown us how to become embedded within a dense knot of interrelations.

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