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Deconstructive Study of e.e. Cummings' Poems and Difficulty of Teaching of Them to the Non-English Students

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1. Introduction

Teaching of English and American Literature to the non-English students always has its own problems. Understanding semantics, discourses, cultural concepts, literary meanings, and rhetoric are the main linguistic and literary barriers that prevent students for better understanding and teachers for the better communication with their students for using the best teaching method for their courses. As you know, there are so many methodologies for teaching of foreign languages but there is no organized and coherent methodology for teaching of modern poetry to the non –English students, so this causes difficulty of the better understanding of modern literature and enjoying from it.

2. Deconstruction

As applied in the criticism of literature, designates a theory and practice of reading which claims to "subvert" or "undermine" the assumption that the system of language provides grounds that are adequate to establish the boundaries, the coherence or unity, and the determinate meanings of a text. Typically ,a deconstructive reading sets out to show that conflicting forces within the text itself inevitably dissipate the seeming definiteness of its structure and meanings into an indefinite array of multiplex, incompatible, and undecidable possibilities.

Derrida evolves his own radical claim that the features that, in any particular utterance, would establish the signified meaning of a word-since this significance is nothing other than a network of differences from other significations- are never "present" to us in their own positive identity. On the other than, neither can these identifying features be said to be strictly "absent"; instead in any spoken or written utterance, the seeming meaning is the result only of a "self-effacing" trace – self effacing because one is not aware of it – which consists of all the nonpresent meanings whose differences from the present instance are the sole factor which invest the utterance with its "effect" of having a meaning in its own right .The consequence, according to Derrida, is that we can never , in any instance of speech or writing, having a fixed and decidable present meaning. Derrida believes that the differential play (jeu) of language does produce the "effects" of decidable meanings in an utterance or text, but asserts that these effects are illusory.1 Several of Derrida's skeptical procedures have been especially influential in deconstructive literary criticism. One is to deconstruct the innumerable binary oppositions, which are essential structural elements in logocentric language. He shows that such oppositions constitute a tacit hierarchy, in which the first term functions as privileged and superior and the second term as derivative and inferior. Derrida's procedure is to invert the hierarchy by showing that the secondary term can be made out to be derivative from, or a special case of ,the primary term; but instead of stopping at this reversal, he goes on to destabilize both hierarchies leaving them in a condition of undecidability. The next one in his analysis of the inherent nonlogicality, or rhetoricity, that is, the inescapable reliance on rhetorical figures and figurative language, in all uses of language, including in what philosophers have claims to be the strictly literal and logical arguments of philosophy. Derrida emphasizes the indispensable reliance in all modes of discourse on metaphors that are assumed merely convenient substitutes for literal or "proper" meanings;

[1] .Abrams, M.H, Glossary of Literary Terms. Seventh Edition ó pp.225-230

then he undertakes to show, on the one hand, that metaphors cannot be reduced to literal meanings, but on the other hand, that supposedly literal terms are themselves metaphors whose metaphoric nature has been forgotten

Apply of Deconstructive Approaches and Views in the Critical Reading of E. E. Cummings' (e.e.cummings) Main Works for Teaching to Non-English Students

This paper is an attempt to study e.e.cummings' style ,forms and main themes base on the deconstruction theories and approaches to teach them to the non-English students who face with problems in understanding of his concepts. Most of the main themes of Cummings' are love, nature, society and wisdom which each of them can be studied elaborately. His love of the nature is amply evident in all of his writings and it is obvious that he had much chance to appreciate and enjoy the natural world when he was a child. In a Harvard lecture he commented on his own early love of nature; he always felt, he said, that many of the mysterious of the life could be revealed through nature. Understanding of this kind of view through suitable approaches for learning of them by non-English students is the basic way for solving semantic and stylistic problems which most of the non-English students encounter with them as they read his masterpieces.

He caused a great controversy with his insistence on the unorthodox spelling and punctuation , he refused to capitalize the personal pronoun (i) ,let his lines wander all over the page and in general refused to bend to the recognized rules of poetic grammar. Edward Estlin Cummings was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, October 14, 1894. He began writing poems as early as 1904 and studied Latin and Greek at the Cambridge Latin High School. He received his B.A. in 1915 and his M.A. in 1916, both from Harvard. His studies there introduced him to post modern and avant-garde writers. In 1917, Cummings' first published poems appeared in the anthology Eight Harvard Poets. The same year, Cummings left the United States for France as a volunteer ambulance driver in World War I. Five months after his assignment; however, he and a friend were interned in a prison camp by the French authorities on suspicion of espionage (an experience recounted in his novel, The Enormous Room) for his outspoken anti-war convictions. After the war, he settled into a life divided between houses in rural Connecticut and Greenwich Village, with frequent visits to Paris. He also traveled throughout Europe, meeting poets and artists, including Pablo Picasso, whose work he particularly admired. In his work, Cummings experimented radically with form, punctuation, spelling, and syntax, abandoning traditional techniques and structures to create a new, highly idiosyncratic means of poetic expression. Later in his career, he was often criticized for settling into his signature style and not pressing his work towards further evolution. Nevertheless, he attained great popularity, especially among young readers, for the simplicity of his language, his playful mode, and his attention to subjects such as war and sex.

During his lifetime, Cummings received a number of honors, including an Academy of American Poets Fellowship, two Guggenheim Fellowships, the Charles Eliot Norton Professorship at Harvard, the Bollingen Prize in Poetry in 1958, and a Ford Foundation grant. Nineteen ninety-four was the centennial of e. e. cummings's birth. He is surely one of the twentieth century's most variously loved and spurned American poets. Several editions of his poetry are currently in print, including George J. Firmage's invaluable centenary edition of Complete Poems, which adds 195 previously uncollected cummings poems to the standard 1972 Complete Poems. At the time of his death, September 3, 1962, he was the second most widely read poet in the United States.. He is buried in Forest Hills Cemetery in Boston, Massachusetts.

Modern art gets much less explanation than it deserves. The artist is too busy pioneering, the intransigent critic too busy fighting his own battles. Nor does any explanation come from the critics of the older school. They have a fear of tasting anything, which they cannot recognize at a glance, they refuse to understand anything, which is disturbingly new. But since they are house-broken only in their own traditions and would inevitably make a mess of themselves if they wandered a field, it is perhaps fortunate for the world that they make no attempt to understand the underlying aesthetic upon which these crisp and brilliant poems of e.e.cummings are built. For Cummings is not only a poet but also a painter. His knowledge of word value is as profound as his knowledge of color, and it is largely for this reason, because he has carried over the eye and method of art into the field of poetry, that the fresh, living, glamorous forms he has created seem so intangible. To many of those who do not understand this fact, this translation of one art into the technique of another, the poems of E. E. Cummings seem nothing more than verbal and typographical mannerism.However, it is not unapparent in his work that Cummings' approach to poetry has been

quite definitely through painting. The spatial organization of color has become the durational organization of words, the technical problem that of tempo. Words, like planes in abstract painting, function not as units in a logical structure, but as units functioning in a vital and organic structure of time. Logic and all its attributes of grammar, spelling, and punctuation, become subservient to the imperial demands of form. The words must come at the moment juste, the spark perfectly timed must ignite them at their fullest incipient power.

while in the battered
bodies the odd unlovely
souls struggle slowly and writhe
like caught. brave: flies;

In this quotation the verbal units fall, almost as if by fate, into a sharp relentless tempo that drives each into the highest incandescence of its meaning. There is no waste, the skilful orchestration of tempo forces each word to the final limit of its stress. But Cummings not only derives his technical organization from painting. The sudden and glaring accuracies of description with which his poetry abounds, are those of an amazingly adept draughtsman who has for the moment exchanged his own medium for that of words. In some cases this pictorial accuracy is that of a photograph taken with a lens of ice, brutally clear. But in many of his more recent poems, of which there are all too few examples in the present volume, this accuracy, deepened and sharpened by satire, cuts both ways. These poems, particularly the one published in the fourth number of Secession, have all the quality of Daumier plus that formal significance which Daumier never attained. It is a satire both in form and import far beyond the timid and retiring ironies of T. S. Eliot; a satire which reveals Cummings as completely inoculated against that galloping stagnation which seems to carry off so many of our younger American poets.

Of the grace of Cummings' poetry much has been written. But grace is an emanation, the residue or by-product of a means which has utterly realized its aesthetic or extra-aesthetic purpose. It is an ease which springs from the perfect economy of method. But since it cannot be its own purpose, since it can only be attained by way of a technique whose purpose is not grace itself, it necessarily extends beyond the reaches of analysis. Nevertheless it may be touched by a consideration of that purpose from which it emanates, and though one may be leading himself by the nose into a very doubtful territory of assumptions, one should say that the formal grace (one might as well say beauty and be done with it) of Cummings' work is largely due to the fact that the lines of his poems are built for speed. Their beauty is that of all swift things seen at rest.

In his best work this speed is evident; there exists in them an organized direction toward which each verbal unit functions at its highest velocity. Cummings seldom attempts to achieve momentum through the utilization of mass, the violent and often painful impact of his poems is the active manifestation of speed; their formal beauty has that quality common to racing cars, aeroplanes, and to those birds surviving because of their swift wings. But it is this speed, this sudden impact of his poems which turns so many people against them. Men do not like to be knocked down, particularly by some quality they admire. But if art is to have any of the contemporary virtues it must have speed, and though it is perhaps more pleasant to be softly overturned by the witching waves of Amy Lowell, or knocked slowly numb by the water droppings of Georgian poetasters, it is certainly more exhilarating to experience the sharp, the living, the swift, the brilliant tempos of E.E. Cummings.

Cummings' first book opens with a fanfare--there is a flourish of trumpets and a crash of cymbals in the resounding music of Epithalamion, a certain splendor of sound carried just to that point of blare which should match an exaggerated and half-satiric magnificence of mood. "Go to, ye classic bards," he seems to say, "I will show you what I can do with iambic pentameter, and a rhyme-patterned stanza, with high-sounding processional adjectives, long simile-embroidered sentences, and 0-thou invocations of all the gods!" And lo and behold, this modernist does very well with them--Picasso and the rest, turning from the chaos of cubism to the cold symmetry of Ingress, must not get ahead of him! He will be in the fashion, or a leap or two ahead of it--and the muse shall not outrun him!

Study two separate stanzas from this glorified and richly patterned spring-song, this earth- and-sky-inspired *Epithalamion:*

And still the mad magnificent herald Spring
Assembles beauty from forgetfulness
With the wild trump of April: witchery
Of sound and odor drives the wingless thing,
Man, forth into bright air; for now the red
Leaps in the maple's cheek, and suddenly
By shining hordes, in sweet unserious dress,
Ascends the golden crocus from the dead.
. . . . . .
0 still miraculous May! 0 shining girl
Of time untarnished! 0 small intimate
Gently primeval hands, frivolous feet
Divine! 0 singular and breathless pearl!
0 indefinable frail ultimate pose!
0 visible beatitude--sweet sweet
Intolerable! Silence immaculate
Of God's evasive audible great rose!

Cummings has an eccentric system of typography which, in our opinion, has nothing to do with the poem, but intrudes itself irritatingly, like scratched or blurred spectacles, between it and the reader's mind. In quoting him, therefore, we are trying the experiment of printing him almost like anybody else, with the usual quantity of periods, commas, capital letters, and other generally accepted conventions of the printer's art. In a more or less grandiloquent mood the poet swaggers and riots through his book, carrying off Beauty in his arms as tempestuously as ever Petruchio his shrew. The important thing, of course, is that he does capture her--she is recognizable even when the poet, like Petruchio, laughs at her, tumbles her up-to-date raiment, sometimes almost murders her as he sweeps her along.

She drops swift phrases in passing:
... Between
Your thoughts more white than wool
My thought is sorrowful.
Across the harvest whitely peer,
Empty of surprise,
Death's faultless eyes.
Softer be they than slippered sleep.
Thy fingers make early flowers of
All things.
And all the while my heart shall be
With the bulge and nuzzle of the sea.
Thy forehead is a flight of flowers.
The green-greeting pale-departing irrevocable sea.
The body of
The queen of queens is
More transparent
Than water--she is softer than birds.
The serious steep darkness.
Death's clever enormous voice [in war].
The Cambridge ladies who live in furnished Souls. . . .
They believe in Christ and Longfellow, both dead.

Some poems guffaw into grotesques leering with tragic or comic significance. The Portraits are mostly of this kind, and certain of the Impressions. Here the poet is often too nimble--he tires the reader with intricate intellectual acrobatics which scarcely repay one for puzzling out their motive over the slippery typographical stepping-stones. But even here the fault is one of exuberance--the poet always seems to be having a glorious time with himself and his world even when the reader loses his breath in the effort to share it. He is as agile and outrageous as a faun, and as full of delight over the beauties and monstrosities of this brilliant and grimy old planet. There is a grand gusto in him, and that is rare enough to be welcomed in any age of a world too full of puling pettifoggers and picayune. One might quote many poems in proof of this poet's varied joys. We shall have to be satisfied with two. The first is number one of the Chansons Innocents:

In just--
Spring, when the world is mud-
luscious, the little
lame balloon-man
whistles far and wee.
And eddie-and bill come
running from marbles and
piracies, and it's
spring,
when the world is puddle-wonderful.
The queer
old balloon-man whistles
far and wee.
And betty-and-isbel come dancing
from hop-scotch and jump-rope, and
it's
spring,
and
the
goat-footed
balloon-man whistles
far
and
wee.

The second of quotations is number two of the *Orientale* series:

I spoke to thee
with a smile, and thou didst not
answer:
thy mouth is as
a chord of crimson music.
Come hither--
O thou, is life not a smile?
I spoke to thee with
a song, and thou
didst not listen:
thine eyes are as a vase
of divine silence.
Come hither--
O thou, is life not a song?
I spoke
to thee with a soul, and
thou didst not wonder:
thy face is as a dream locked
in white fragrance.
Come hither--
O thou, is life not love?
I speak to
thee with a sword,
and thou art silent:
thy breast is as a tomb
softer than flowers.
Come hither--
O thou, is love not death?

It seems that cummings as one of the last true Romantic poets. He is more a troubadour, a lover, than a Modernist inquisitor is. However, this too: cummings knew more about science than most other American poets of his day did or ours did. He is enlivened by it, curious, occasionally exasperated, but never intimidated, drawing extensive images

and tropes from mathematics and physics for his own exuberantly demanding poems. Often his application of science serves as a foil to his persistent Romantic inclinations. In poems like "stand with your lover on the ending earth," "life is more true than reason will deceive," "pity this busy monster, manunkind," and dozens more, cummings employs images of progress, history, and science as negative counterpoints to his Romantic valorizations of self-reliance, passion, and intuition. These two sets of competing tropes give a sense of scale to cummings's dialectic. Typically in his poems, the boggling immensity of science, space, and the vastness of "time time time time time" shrivel to nothingness in the presence of love, imagination, and spirit: "love's function," he writes, "is to fabricate unknownness." Or, in another poem, the "hugest whole creation may be less / incalculable than a single kiss." In the 1920s, when cummings wrote some of his finest poems, physicists became embroiled in a similar debate, trying to correlate the mathematics of Einstein's relativity theory, on its massive scale, with the minute scale of quantum mechanics as described by Eddington. In many cases, the behaviors of one system did not jibe with the behaviors of the other.

Despite Cummings's affinity for avant gard styles, much of his work is traditional. Many of his poems are sonnets,and he occasionally made use of the blues form and acrostics. Cummings' poetry often deals with themes of *love and nature*, as well as the relationship of the individual to the masses and to the world. His poems are also often rife with satire. While his poetic forms, and even themes, show a close continuity with the romantic tradition, his work universally shows a particular idiosyncrasy of syntax , or way of arranging individual words into larger phrases and sentences. Many of his most striking poems do not involve any typographical or punctuational innovations at all, but purely syntactic ones. As well as being influenced by notable sources modernists including Stein and Pound, Cummings' early work drew upon the imagist experiments of Amy Lowell. Later his visits to Paris exposed him to *Dada and Surrealism* , which in turn permeated his work. He also liked to incorporate nature and death imagery into much of his poetry.While some of his poetry is free verse (with no concern for rhyme and scansion), many of his poems have a recognizable sonnet structure of 14 lines, with an intricate rhyme scheme. A number of his poems feature a typographically exuberant style, with words, parts of words, or punctuation symbols scattered across the page, often making little sense until read aloud, at which point the meaning and emotion become clear. Cummings, who was also a painter, understood the importance of presentation, and used typography to "paint a picture" with some of his poems.

3. Conclusion

Readers sometimes experience a jarring, incomprehensible effect because the poems do not act in accordance with the conventional combinatorial rules that generate typical English sentences. (For example "Why must itself..." or "they sowed their isn't [...]"). His readings of Gertrude Stein in the early part of the century probably functioned as a springboard into this aspect of his artistic development (in the same way that Robert Wasler's work acted as a springboard for Franz Kafka). In some respects, Cummings' work is more stylistically continuous with Stein's than with any other poet or writer. In addition, a number of Cummings' poems feature, in part or in whole, intentional misspellings; several feature phonetic spellings intended to represent particular dialects. Cummings also made use of inventive formations of compound words, as in *"in just- "*, which features words such as "mud-luscious" and "puddle-wonderful. Many of Cummings' poems address social issues and satirize society but have an equal or even stronger bias toward romanticism: time and again his poems celebrate love, sex and the season of rebirth.

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