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English 4300 Senior Seminar
The Social Grammar of American Modernist Poetry: Case Study of E. E. Cummings

Dr. Buck, Professor
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Office Hours: 8:00-9:00 and 1:00-2:00 MWF

Required Textbooks:
1. E. E. Cummings: A Biography by Christopher Sawyer-Laucanno
2. Selected Poems: E. E. Cummings (introduction and commentary by Richard S. Kennedy)
3. Songs of Ourselves: The Uses of Poetry in America by Joan Shelley Rubin
4. Forbidden Words: Taboo and the Censoring of Language by Keith Allan and Kate Burridge
5. A few items on Reserve in Booth Library

Course Objective: The aim of this course is to offer linguistic and literary tools that will allow you to do your own research and engage in intellectual debates related to language variation and style of American Modernist poets specifically of the 1920s. We will use E. E. Cummings as a case study for in-depth analysis and explication. We will examine the social functions of poetry and poetry reading in America in order to provide a framework for understanding implicit cultural assumptions that surrounded poets and their work at that time.

Course Evaluation: Grade for the course will be based on oral work and short folder writing assignments (scope 2 pages), a mid-term research paper (scope 5 pages), a longer research project (scope 10 pages), and a comprehensive final exam. Since this is a seminar, you will be presenting all of your work to the class and you will be leading discussion of assigned readings; failure to present your work orally on any assignment for an unexcused reason will result in a failing grade for the assignment. All written assignments must be turned in in person, in class; no electronic transmissions will be accepted. All writing assignments must be typed in MLA format.

Folder writing and oral work  30%
Final Exam  20%
Long research paper  30%
Midterm paper  20%

Grading Scale: Grading Scale for this course is always 100-90% = A; 89-80% = B; 79-70% = C; 69-60% = D; below 60% = F. Failure to complete any component of the course (including the final exam) will result in failure of the course.

Writing Assignments: You will need to purchase a paper manilla folder for this class. That is where you will be keeping paper assignments for the unit. You will turn the folder in to me at the end of each unit, but you will present each paper to the class as they are due. I will collect papers occasionally (unannounced) as they are due. Students who come to class unprepared on the day the paper is presented to the class will receive a grade of F for the assignment. Please always bring your folders to class with all your collected writing for the unit.
In all writing assignments, you will be evaluated on what you say and how well you say it (how well the question/issue is logically thought out, how insightful your reading is, how clear, developed, organized and technically sound your writing is). You must always write in full sentences and in paragraphs for all assignments (notes or fragments will not be accepted).

Folder writing assignments in general are two pages long (you may always write more) and must be typed. In-class writing must be legible. Papers must be organized neatly in your folder, each assignment including a header with date, the name of the assignment, and a title. Any assignment for writing or research that is an online assignment asks for credible, academic, published journal articles. No other online research will be accepted.

**Typing and Presentation:** Papers and at-home writing assignments must be typed (double-spaced) in MLA format.

**Late Assignments:** All written assignments must be submitted when due; no late assignments will be accepted. Papers are due when class begins on the designated dates. Make-up work will be permitted for excused absences only. All assignments must be turned in during class in print version at the designated times; no electronic versions will be accepted.

**Cheating and Plagiarism:** No one (not even the Writing Center, nor parents, nor tutors, nor friends, nor peers) may read, proofread, or edit your writing over the course of the semester; you may read sections of the paper out loud to someone for feedback but you must always keep your paper in your own hands so that you have control and responsibility over your own work. The English Department requires that instructors quote to all students the university's policy on plagiarism:

> Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—'The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's original work' (Random House Dictionary of the English Language)—has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignments of a grade of F for the assigned essay and a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.

Use or reproduction of any material or ideas off the internet without proper documentation is considered plagiarism and will be penalized as above. Respect for the work of others, in other words, encompasses all formats, including print, electronic, and oral sources.

**Tardiness:** You are expected to be on time for class; habitual tardiness is disruptive and disrespectful of other class members. I will be taking roll each morning as soon as class begins. If you come in late, it is your responsibility to notify me after class so that I take your name off the absence sheet. If you fail to notify me on the day you are late, you will be recorded as absent. Please do not ask me for a letter of recommendation if you are habitually tardy or absent from class or are unprepared with home assignments.

**Absence Policy:** See attached.

**Information for Students with Disabilities:** If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability
Services (581-6583) as soon as possible. If you require extra time on timed in-class exams, you must present a documented letter from the Disability Office.

Electronic Devices: No electronic devices of any kind, including laptops, may be used at any time during class; they will be counted as a disruption in class and as an unethical use of information during oral work conducted in class. After three occasions, the student will be reported to the judicial affairs office. Anyone with an electronic device not stowed away and out of use during an exam will receive an automatic F on the exam--no questions asked, no discussion. Anyone who leaves class to use a phone may not reenter class--you must wait until class has ended to get your belongings.

Classroom Behavior: According to EIU policy established by the judicial affairs office concerning classroom behavior, you are expected to remain seated at all times while class is in session, unless you have an emergency because leaving and reentering class distracts other students from their learning and concentration. If you must leave class, you may not reenter until the class is over to obtain your belongings.

What to do in Case of Emergency: If we have an emergency in class, go promptly to inform Jean Toothman, Department Secretary (Room 3135) and Dana Ringuette, Chair (Room 3341), and dial 911.

Where to go for Help with this Course: Come and see me in my office during my office hours or by appointment. The Writing Center is also a resource for you; graduate students may help you with planning, drafting, and revising your papers. Their phone number is 581-5929.
ABSENCE POLICY

The university states in its attendance policy that you are expected to attend every class as scheduled because teaching/learning requires dialogue and when you are not there you do not engage in scholarship with others and you miss out on the logic presented in class (learning that cannot be adequately made up outside of class). University policy states that you are expected to participate actively in the learning process: this expectation means that it is your responsibility to read assignments, take careful notes on the reading, do homework exercises as assigned and provide those answers in class, volunteer responses in class, and ask questions about the material. Students who come to class do a lot of work, in other words, both oral and written, and so those who choose not to engage in that process merit taking the consequences.

There are consequences to not being in class.

1. 3 or 4 absences in the course will result in lowering of the final grade. With three absences, the final grade will be lowered by one-third. That means that if the final grade is a B on exams and papers, it will be lowered to a B-; if the final grade is a B-, it will be lowered to a C+. With four absences, the final grade will be lowered by one letter grade. If your average is a C in the course on exams and papers, your final grade in the course will be a D.

2. More than four absences in this course will result in failure of the course, regardless of grades received on papers or exams.

3. Because the university considers class time essential to a student's learning, students who have excessive absences (more than 4, excused or unexcused) will be advised to withdraw from the class in order to facilitate their success when they take the class over again at a later date.

4. Only students with an excused absence on the day of any scheduled exam may take an alternative exam, of different format, within the week of the scheduled exam.

5. I will expect you to find out from someone in the class what you've missed so that you'll be prepared for the next class meeting. Worksheets will only be distributed once; it is your responsibility to photocopy assignments from another student if you are absent.

6. Please do not tell me your reasons for not coming to class unless they are excusable according to university policy and please do not ask me what documentation you need. I do not grant permissions, in other words, for any absence. It is your responsibility to make your own decisions and to supply the best documentation you can.

7. According to university policy, there are reasons why you may be excused from class. They are listed below. However, they will be excused only if you follow the procedures outlined here in the syllabus.

--For any excused reason, you must notify me by leaving a message on my voice mail at 581-5012 (not email) before class begins on the day of your absence.

--When you return to class at the next class meeting, you must bring me a sheet of paper with the following information: your name, the date of your absence, the reason for your absence, and attached documentation that documents proof of why you weren't in class. Any absence without appropriate documentation will not be excused.

Definition of excused absence on back
Definition, according to university policy, of an excused absence:

1. University obligation, in which case you will need to present me with a letter at the beginning of the semester explaining the purpose and date of your upcoming absence.

2. Your medical illness or emergency, in which case you will need to notify me by leaving a message on my voice mail at 581-5012 (not email) before class begins on the day of your absence. Routine medical appointments or non-emergency medical appointments should not be scheduled during class time; the health services on campus are here so that you will not have to leave town for medical reasons. In addition, students experiencing personal problems should seek help immediately through the counseling services provided on campus so that personal problems don't interfere with the responsibility of being in class.
UNIT I: CASE STUDY E. E. CUMMINGS
SL = Your textbook, Sawyer-Laucanno's Biography of Cummings

Week 1
August 20 Introduction to the class.

August 22 1. Folder Writing Assignment

**Biography and Controversy**--There is a current controversy that surrounds the publication of the textbook we are using by Sawyer-Laucanno. Find out by researching online what precisely the controversy is. Write in your own words a summary of your findings, making sure to cite and document your specific sources of who says what and why and when. What other biographies are available on E. E. Cummings? What role do they play in the controversy? Be ready to present your findings to the class.

Read SL, Chapters 1 and 2

August 24 2. Folder Writing--**Review How to Read A Poem**
When you encounter an obscure poem for the first time (like one by Cummings), what reading strategies do you use to tackle it? Explain the steps that you take, what you have learned in past classes about how to read, how to approach a poem you don't quite understand at first reading. If you use sources to answer these questions, you must document them.

Week II
Read: SL, Chapters 3 and 4

Oral Assignment: **Pick a theme.** In your textbook, *Selected Poems* by Cummings, edited by Kennedy, the poems are organized under 12 thematic headings. Select a theme that interests you and then select one poem within that theme that you would like to study. Find two articles or chapters in books that discuss the poem. Come to class with notes on your research and be ready to teach the class what you learned about the theme of the poem (what the arguments of the articles are, how the arguments differ). Record full documentation of articles. Clip notes and documentation to the articles and keep everything labeled with date and name of assignment in your folder.

Week III
Read SL, Chapters 5 and 6

Folder Writing Assignment: **Pick an -ism.** 1) Define in your own words one of the following terms: Abstractionism, Cubism, Dadaism, Surrealism, Expressionism, Fauvism, Impressionism. Your response should include the term's importance to the visual arts as well as to language. 2) Define the term, Modernism. 3) Who were the Pre-Raphaelites? Who was Dante Gabriel Rossetti? Christina Rossetti?

Sept 3 Holiday
Week IV
Read SL, Chapters 7 and 8

Oral Assignment: **Grammar and the Visual Arts. Pick a visual concrete poem** by Cummings you would like to study (different from any we've discussed in class so far) (one of *Selected Poems*, theme III, The Poetry of the Eye). Find two articles that focus on the technique of the poem, the poem as a painting, the poem in relation to the visual arts. Examine the relation between language, syntax and painting. Take notes on the articles and teach the class what you learned about the poem. Keep notes, documentation of articles, and articles in your folder.

Week V
Read SL, Chapters 9 and 10

Folder Writing Assignment: **Music, Syntax, and Meter.** Study carefully "in Just-" and "these children singing in stone a". Do an analysis of the meter in each poem using metrical terms that you know. What is the relationship between meter and syntax? Which poem is more musical? Explain your rationale.

Week VI
Read SL, 11 and 12 and 13
Read *Forbidden Words*, Chapters 1 and 7

Oral Assignment. Pick a poem by Cummings about **women, love, or sex.** Examine the poem in relation to what you learned in *Forbidden Words* about taboo in language. How are women's bodies presented? How does the speaker talk about women? What is Cummings' interest in writing vividly about such topics? What is his view of love in relation to sex? How do you, the reader, react to his use of taboo in language? Assess its purpose and effectiveness.

Week VII
Read SL, Chapters 14 and 15 and 16


Oct 5 Holiday

Week VIII
Read SL, Chapters 16 and 17 and 18 and 19
Final Revised Mid-term Paper due. Read paper to class.
Projects and Assignments

1. Researching Cummings thematically--In your textbook anthology, *Selected Poems: E. E. Cummings* edited by Kennedy, skim through the twelve thematic headings provided. Choose one theme that you would like to focus on for your research. Then choose one poem within that thematic heading that you would like to study. Read it first for understanding, look words up in the dictionary, etc. Write out for yourself your first impressions of the poem, what you notice about the presentation, layout, use of blank spaces, typography, and specific images. Always try to find the sentences in the poem--read for sentences. Find 3 lengthy and valuable critical articles on your poem (or chapters from a book). Write a paper in which you attempt a complete explication of the poem, one which includes a comparison and contrast of the main arguments from your critical sources. (Long paper compare/contrast 3 poems thematically.)

2. Creative Writing and Cummings--Write your own poem in the style of E. E. Cummings. Then write an attached annotation and commentary of your poem in which you explain your choices in detail. What kinds of decisions did you have to make? What was your thought process all the way through? What was most difficult? What did you struggle with? What turned out to be easy? What surprised you? Did you choose a particular poem as model? Why did you choose that one? Where is your voice in your poem, that is unlike Cummings? (Long paper write 3 poems.)

3. Teaching Cummings--Read Aubri L. Wood's article, "Adolescents Ignored: Perspectives on Teaching Cummings. Find at least 3 other teaching articles on Cummings. Write a lesson plan in which you demonstrate how you would teach two poems of your choice to freshmen or sophomores in high school, using ideas that you learned from the articles. You must include a commentary of your rationale of how you chose to introduce the poems in terms of the poet and the poem's cultural context. In other words, your paper should have two parts: Here's what I would do and why. (Long paper 3 poems)

4. Editing Cummings--Look through 10 general literature anthologies or more that would be used in a 1002 class or an introduction to literature survey class. Record the poems by Cummings that are anthologized. Then look at 10 Modern American Poetry anthologies or more that would be used in a more specialized class and again record the poem selections you find. Make sure to keep careful MLA documentation records for each anthology. Do counts of how many poems by Cummings are in each; in which ones is Cummings represented more than others? Look through any introductory sectional material to see where Cummings fits in: how is he contextualized and explained in relation to other poets? Do the anthologies include extra information to help the reader: questions on each poem, footnotes, commentary, annotations? Read all the poems and then write a paper in which you explain similarities and differences and analyze why certain editorial selection decisions were made and whether you agree with them or not. What other suggestions would you have for editors? Explain your rationale. (Long paper more in-depth analysis.)
5. Women's Studies and Cummings—Examine Cummings' corpus on his poems about women, generally love poems, but also many about sex and the female body (Complete Poems, on Reserve). Select three poems that you would like to focus on. Find research articles that help in our understanding of his treatment of women and how the poems should be read. Read selected relevant chapters from our textbook Forbidden Words by Allan and Burridge and use their linguistic theory as a frame for helping us to explain how and why the grammatical constructs Cummings chooses often lead us to confront our own linguistic sensibilities. Focus is comparison/contrast. (Long paper more sources and analysis)

OR pick 3 female Modernist poets of the period

OR—related interest is his use of obscenities. Again, use chapters 2 and 3 and 5 from Forbidden Words as a theoretical frame for helping to explain how he violates expectations because of assumptions surrounding taboo in language.

6. Music and Cummings—Are you a musician? Can you read music? If so, choose a poem of Cummings that has been set to music. Study and research the poem well before you proceed further; in other words, analyze the poem yourself first so you have an anchor or basis for your further research. Examine especially the relation between music and grammatical structure. Then find one or several musical recordings and scores. Write a paper in which you assess how the composers interpreted the poem musically. Did they miss anything? Did they interpret in ways that you would not have, etc. Try to find reviews or other articles about the scores or composers' interpretations. Consult Milton Cohen, PoetandPainter (on Reserve).

OR Research Cummings' views on language versus noise versus silence (consult Milton Cohen).


8. Literary Movements and Cummings—Research the following questions. Who were the Imagists? What was the Imagist Movement? Who were poets in American who were considered part of this group? Study 3 other poets, select one poem to focus on from each of them, and then discuss their connection to Cummings' poetry. Focus is comparison/contrast. (Long paper more sources and analysis.)
