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EH 202

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### Those Ladies Of Cambridge

Are Cambridge folk really all that snotty and conservative? Granted, I imagine people at Cambridge to be a bit reserved, but that isn't necessarily a character flaw. e.e. cummings' ["the Cambridge ladies who live in furnished souls,"] however, finds that the women of Cambridge are quite despicable. They live in "furnished souls" which is a harsh, albeit witty, metaphor. To accuse people of living "in furnished souls" is blatantly insisting that they are shallow, empty beings. According to e.e. cummings, these ladies are without depth and "are unbeautiful and have comfortable minds." Not only are these women abhorrent, they are content – even "comfortable" – with their attitudes. e.e. cummings' ["the ladies who live in furnished souls"] is a cleverly insulting poem revealing a society of artificial women.

Perhaps the largest attack from the poem is e.e. cummings' form which distorts the sonnet. For a supposedly learned bunch of uptight ladies, cummings' display of free verse mocking traditional form may even seem blasphemous. After all, these ladies are well-read in literature and religion; cummings uses allusions to the women's knowledge of "Christ and Longfellow." The poem does not rhyme, nor does it contain a consistent meter. Therefore, it lacks two basic components of a sonnet. Yet, the poem is comparable to a Petrarchan sonnet with

its fourteen lines and its break in thought at the end of the octave. “at the present writing one still finds / delighted fingers knitting for is it Poles?” cummings describes “the Cambridge ladies” until his break when he rambles away from the subject for a couple of lines. Then he continues illustrating the ladies. So, [“the Cambridge ladies who live in furnished souls”] resembles the Petrarchan sonnet in at least two significant ways.

It also acts a little like a Shakespearean sonnet with its fourteen lines and scattered lines of iambic pentameter. Although the poem’s meter is inconsistent, more lines tend to be in iambs than any other meter. Even still, the poem is not quite a Shakespearean sonnet, nor a Petrarchan sonnet. It is a rebellion of these traditional forms bastardizing the traditional, orthodox attitudes of the ladies to whom e.e. cummings refers.

The imagery in the poem is powerfully offensive, as well:

. . .the Cambridge ladies do not care, above

Cambridge if sometimes in its box of

sky lavender and cornerless, the

moon rattles like a fragment of angry candy

Throughout the poem, e.e. cummings paints a negative portrait of the ladies, but his most effective poetic device is the image of the “angry candy” moon in the “sky lavender and cornerless.” The image suggests that nothing disturbs the ladies. They are devoted to their lives in Cambridge and nothing else is worthy of their attention. The moon may become crazy attracting desire like a piece of candy, but it still hangs above Cambridge where it is unimportant.

I am thoroughly impressed with this poem and overwhelmed by the imagery of [“the Cambridge ladies who live in furnished souls.”] e.e. cummings truly understands how to use poetry in order to satirize women at reputable schools. His negative, insulting tone is clear in his form and use of imagery. It’s difficult to ignore his disposition toward “the Cambridge ladies.” I’m not familiar with anyone at Cambridge, but if I attended I’d surely be offended, which would probably just satisfy e.e. cummings.

[“the Cambridge ladies who live in furnished souls”]

the Cambridge ladies who live in furnished souls

are unbeautiful and have comfortable minds

(also, with the church’s protestant blessings

daughters, unscented shapeless spirited)

are invariably interested in so many things—

at the present writing one still finds

delighted fingers knitting for is it Poles?

perhaps. While permanent faces coyly bandy

scandal of Mrs. N and Professor D

. . . the Cambridge ladies do not care, above

Cambridge if sometimes in its box of

sky lavender and cornerless, the

moon rattles like a fragment of angry candy

e.e. cummings