

Her flesh came by e.e. cummings: sexuality in the poem

Literature



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Modernism does for poetry what it achieved in every other form of art during its span, in that it tore down the barriers of traditional poetry and erected the new rule: “ There are no rules.” Imagism is a prime example, wherein the simple description of the subject is all that is required of the piece, and nothing more. E. E. Cummings, however, often displayed a different departure from the norm in his poetry, and that was to manipulate the appearance of his poem on the page. One of his most striking poems in this regard is “ her flesh came,” a sexually charged piece about an erotic encounter taking place over the course of eighteen lines.

Visibly there is an obvious change in direction from normal poetry. At a glance, lines are indented in weird places; words are combined strangely, as well as separated and chopped up over more than one line; sometimes space is added between words; and some letters are wrongfully capitalized while others need capitalization. Fortunately, poetry is largely exempt from standard rules of punctuation, and most of this seemingly random disregard for writing has a purpose to be unlocked.

To establish the sexual nature of this poem, let us start with word meaning. Just about every last word serves some kind of innuendo. The first is made clear by the word “ Came,” which is, in slang terms, the past tense verb for “ ejaculate”; the word has a double meaning for approaching, and closeness, and the lines, “ her/flesh/Came/at/me...” implies the possibility of both meanings as the literal occurrence. Then the reader is assaulted with a series of nonsense words that can only be translated as, “ me as sand caving into a chute,” followed by the absurd, “ i had cement for her/merrily.” As it appears on the line, “ meassandca V/ingint/oA/chute,” certain dirty-minded <https://assignbuster.com/her-flesh-came-by-ee-cummings-sexuality-in-the-poem/>

readers may immediately pick up on the nonsense in the first line containing “ ass,” another innuendo achieved through word combination. There also appears to be a reference to cement mixing and sex, where “ cement” is a direct reference to ejaculation as, “ sand caving into a chute” references the process of cement mixing, or making love. As cement hardens, it could also be a reference to the penis, but this is unlikely, as cement as semen seems to be more accurate. The last line, “ concrete,” also makes reference to semen, as it becomes sticky if exposed to open air for too long, though this too could mean that the penis is erect and ready for another round of sex.

Further contributing to the innuendoes found in the poem is the way capitalization is handled. “ Came,” being the first capitalized word, seems to be important. If the above is the case and it is a reference to ejaculation, then that would certainly be important, as the climax is probably the most intense part of any sexual experience. Also capitalized and separated from its word is “ V,” on line five. V has significance because it appears to resemble the female reproductive organ in two ways: first, it takes the shape of the vagina, vaguely, and second, it begins the word “ vagina.” The only other capitalized letter is “ A,” on line seven. Apart from being the vertical reversal of V, A can be interpreted as having a resemblance to a penis, with a sectioned-off head and two lines descending diagonally, creating a shaft. It is unknown why it resides next to an “ o,” except it may resemble the anus. This is only disputed by the fact that it isn’t placed directly below the V, but the woman in question could be in any number of positions.

We also perceive significance in the way the lines are visually structured through spacing and indentation. One of the more important sections is the “slide” or “chute” that is created by “meassandca V/ingint/oA/chute.” At line five, the poem seems to teeter over a cliff (which is possibly an innuendo for the sexual “point of no return,” where the man cannot cancel his ejaculation), which is followed by the words tumbling down the aforementioned chute in lines six and seven and coming to an abrupt halt on line eight. Here, the poem starts to gradually slow down. Words are spaced further and further apart, and eventually become lines all by themselves, and by line seventeen, it comes to a complete stop. This indicates the rest period immediately following sex, and if the eighteenth line is to be taken as a re-gained erection, then the subject matter of this poem is ready to begin once again.

What we have here is a poem that pours so much sexual innuendo into its words that sex is almost treated practically. The spacing, indentation, punctuation, wording and separation of said wording in “her flesh came” all come together to create a piece describing sex in all its frank glory, linking it to such a thing as cement mixing all at the same time. This is a surprisingly deep and developed poem for a subject matter so primal. It’s no wonder why Cummings (note the hidden word) is such a famous poet.