

All was over but the fortune cookies. Pat drew first, and the others agreed it suited her perfectly:

You have a natural grace and
great consideration for others.

Dave unfolded his and was delighted:

You will always be
surrounded by true friends.

Norman opened his and sighed:

You will have a large family.

Dick fractured his cookie, withdrew his slip and refused to read it until pressured by the others. We all think he did'st protest too much:

Your heart is pure, and your mind
clear, and your soul devout.

Cummings' Cradle Song for Ernest Hemingway

Like others before him, Robert Wegner has asked (SPRING, 1982) for an explanation of Cummings' four-line epigram on Ernest Hemingway. I rush to oblige because it can be more fully enjoyed if one knows its background and the source of its lines of parody.

The so-called "Cradle Song" of Tennyson found in his poem, "Sea Dreams," begins

What does little birdie say
In her nest at peep of day?

--lines that Cummings must have heard from his mother, now handy for satiric purpose. But a stanza from Longfellow's poem, "The Psalm of Life," hovers more maliciously over the epigram:

Life is real! Life is earnest!
And the grave is not its goal;
Dust thou art, to dust returnest
Was not spoken of the soul.

When he was twelve years old, a pupil at the Peabody School, Cummings participated in a group recitation of "The Psalm of Life," in a centennial celebration of Longfellow's birth. As we know, lines like this echoed in his head for years, ever ready to be recalled for parody.

As for his opinion of Hemingway: however much Cummings may have admired the early work, he thought Hemingway had become a pretentious bore by the 1930s when he was publishing a series of articles in Esquire. (Most of them were on hunting and fishing, but one was a "Defense of Dirty Words" and another, "Notes on Life and Letters," an attack on William Saroyan.) In his only published comment on Hemingway, in a letter to Ezra Pound, April 4, 1935, Cummings remarked, of the Esquire articles, "Oinis is paid \$450, on dit, for his monthly crap." Nor did he care much for the macho pose that Hemingway adopted in the 1930s. Shortly after the publication of "The Green Hills of Africa," Cummings was writing to Morrie Werner, urging him to return from Washington, and he added that the close of the letter, "FLASH--Hem Kisses Lion's Pussy In Macy's Window--you'd better come back." The previous year he had enjoyed reading his friend Max Eastman's review of Hemingway entitled "Bull in the Afternoon."

It was, in fact, Hemingway's "Death in the Afternoon," especially those parts in which he pontificated about killing and death, that sparked Cummings to write his epigram. The passage that set him off was this:

Someone with English blood has written: "Life is real; life is earnest, and the grave is not its goal." And where did they bury him? and what became of the reality and earnestness? The people of Castille have great common sense. They could not produce a poet who would write a line like that. They know that death is the unescapable reality, the one thing any man may be sure of; the only security. . . . They think a great deal about death and when they have a religion they have one which believes that life is much shorter than death. Having this feeling they take an intelligent interest in death and when they can see it being given, avoided, refused, and accepted in the afternoon for a nominal price of admission they pay their money and go to the bullring. . . . (p. 266)

Thus came into being the cradle song for Hemingway with its warbled urban-notes mild, hinting at infantile views, a lack of manliness (cow thou art), and a propensity for bull-slinging (to bull returnest), while all the time implying that Hemingway's literary powers slept:

what does little Ernest croon
in his death at afternoon?
(kow dow r 2 bul retoinis
wus de woids uf lil Oinis

Richard S. Kennedy
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An Exchange with Walker Percy

The following letter responds to some psychiatric reprints Dave had recently sent Walker, who has contributed essays to Psychiatry for which Dave edits, and whose latest novel, The Second Coming, portrays a young woman who is schizophrenic, but charmingly also herself, as are all schizophrenic persons despite the