
Me up at does:

What immortal hand or eye/Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

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In E.E. Cummings' poem "Me up at does," a mouse (figuratively) asks the narrator "What have i done that You wouldn't have"—a request to think like a mouse for a moment. Cummings puts symmetry into many elements of the poem in order to say that the mouse and the man are more alike than not.

The imagery of the poem is symmetrical. The mouse stares at the narrator. The narrator must also be staring at the mouse in order for it to be seen. Another interpretation, which will be detailed later in the paper, makes this imagery even more symmetrical. The mouse does two things in the poem: it stares at the narrator, and it asks its question. These actions both occur two lines from the center of the poem, so they are symmetrical textually. Neither of them would literally happen—it is hard to see in what direction a mouse's eyes are pointing, and a mouse cannot speak. Both, therefore, require participation from the narrator in order to occur—the narrator must gaze at the mouse before disposing of it, and

the narrator must reflect on what the mouse would say, could it speak.

The syntax of the poem reinforces its symmetrical imagery. Cummings could write the first stanza “A poisoned mouse/quietly stares/out of the floor/up at me,” but he chooses to put the lines in exactly the opposite order: “Me up at does/out of the floor/quietly Stare/a poisoned mouse.” The reader is meant to wonder why Cummings chose to use such awkward syntax, and then to notice that the lines make more sense when read in reverse. The second stanza, in contrast, makes sense when read forwards. Therefore, the “head” of each stanza faces towards the other—the stanzas are “facing each other,” just as the mouse and the narrator do.

The poem’s rhyme scheme is also symmetrical: each stanza has an *abba* rhyme scheme, which is symmetrical about the stanza break. Other facets of the rhyme scheme are also interesting in interpretation. Each stanza has different rhymes, even though they are in the same pattern, and all of the rhymes are slant rhymes—that is, they are two different words that sound similar, but not the same. This use of rhyme mirrors the fact that the mouse and the narrator are two different creatures that are similar but not the same.

Other symmetrical elements include capitalization, syllable and word count, and visual arrangement. The two capitalized words in each stanza are arranged such that in the same place in the line, the same number of lines from the stanza break, there is a matching capitalized word in the other stanza. Each stanza has sixteen syllables and thirteen words. Finally, the visual arrangement of the words on the page is very symmetrical in terms of vertical whitespace. Cummings uses all of these elements to reinforce the poem’s message,

just as he uses the elements discussed earlier.

The mouse's question, "What have i done that You wouldn't have," is a plea for empathy and for justice, but since it is in fact the narrator who thinks of the question, it is a very introspective one, an opportunity for reflection. From the pervasive symmetry of the poem, the reader can infer that the result of the narrator's reflection is this: mice and men are really not very different. Men are less human than one would hope, and vermin moreso than one might expect.