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Nancy Mitford's Human Dragon-Fly: Love in a Cold Climate and the Creation of a Queer Figure

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Nancy Mitford's Human Dragon-Fly: *Love in a Cold Climate* and the Creation of a Queer
Figure

by

Ashley Pfeiffer

A Thesis

Presented to the Graduate and Research Committee

of Lehigh University

in Candidacy for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

English

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Nancy Mitford's Human Dragon-Fly: *Love in a Cold Climate* and the Creation of a Queer Figure
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Date Approved

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the methods Nancy Mitford's employs in her novel, *Love in a Cold Climate* to normalize the queer character, Cedric Hampton, and gain the audience's acceptance. Through Mitford's inclusive language and affection for the character, she positions Cedric as a likable character in the text, and his detractors as the unrealistic, unreasonable, or unlikable figures. Cedric is a successful character in the text, not only because of his author's obvious affection for him, but also because of his outcome in the novel. He gets a happy ending, one of the happiest of the novel. Unlike other queer figures of the period, Cedric Hampton enjoys acceptance and success.

Love in a Cold Climate, published in 1949, was Nancy Mitford's fifth novel. While critical of the climax of the novel, Mitford was still pleased with the text she had produced, especially after the reviews poured in (Acton 76). The responses Mitford received regarding her novel differed greatly between Great Britain and America, and Mitford reportedly couldn't be more thrilled at the novel's transatlantic success given her vocal disdain for America. Many of the negative reviews regarding *Love in a Cold Climate* in the U.S. picked up on the apparent frivolity of the text, yet in her letters to Evelyn Waugh, Mitford dwelt on the theme of sexuality. Here is one representative letter:

"My book is a great best seller so are you[Evelyn Waugh] impressed? Even in America, where the reviews are positively insulting, it is on the best seller list. I have a secret feeling that the other novels on the market can't be very fascinating at present, but this may be my native modesty. Anyhow, I shall never write about normal love again as I see there is a far larger and more enthusiastic public for the *other sort*" (Acton 77).

Mitford points to an important response elicited by the novel's homosexual character, Cedric Hampton. The novel's reviews in Britain either do not address this character or take issue with him, yet, Mitford points to moments in the American reviews where readers object to the appearance of a homosexual character that ends the novel as light-hearted and happy as he made his entrance. While Mitford's portrayal of Cedric fails to demolish stereotypes surrounding queer figures in popular literature, Mitford does create a homosexual character that while embodying a number of stereotypes of the time, also succeeds in the text. Cedric becomes the heir to the Montdore name and house without changing anything about himself. Cedric remains a "human dragon-fly" (Mitford 179) even as he changes the characters around him. Despite Mitford's audience's confusion and dislike regarding Cedric, *Love in a Cold Climate* sold remarkably well. She suffered through none of the obscenity trials that plagued other authors writing about similar topics. Instead, her comic tone, position in society, and the same frivolous attitude that critics attacked protected Mitford's novel from the attention of the censors. Through this protection and Mitford's willingness to

portray Cedric as a happy, interesting, and well-adjusted figure, Mitford's Cedric is able to remain an unchallenged figure within the text.

In her letter to Evelyn Waugh, Mitford emphasizes her desire to focus on Cedric's identity as a lover, not only as a queer figure. While these two identities may seem to be inherently related, Mitford does not distinguish Cedric's ability to love from Fanny or Polly's ability to love. When she draws attention to her desire to "never write about normal love again" (Acton 77), Mitford, is not just referring to Cedric as the "*other sort*" (Acton 77), but also the other representations of love and desire in the text. Polly's relationship with her lecherous uncle, Fanny's relationship with Alfred the Oxford don, Lord and Lady Montdore's married relationship: all these are connected Mitford's flexible version of love and desire. Rather than excluding Cedric and setting him apart from the other characters in the novel for a strange and unusual desire, Mitford acknowledges the constrictive boundaries of "normal love", and sets *all* characters outside this boundary. Cedric and his desires are not unusual in this text, they are just a little more interesting.

As *Love in a Cold Climate* was first published in Britain, the text was subject to the obscenity laws of this country first. In 1949, the obscenity laws of Britain were still dictated by the Obscene Publications Act of 1857, an act that remained unchanged until 1959 (Potter 5). Interpretations of this act were used to ban James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*. Critics have shown that the trial surrounding *The Well of Loneliness* in particular accounts for some of the more outrageous precedents set in obscenity rulings in the twentieth century (Travis 47). Hall's 1928 novel, which depicts the unhappy romance of a lesbian couple, contains a plea for tolerance of what were then called "inverts," but little explicit sexual material. Here is how critic Alan Travis describes Radclyffe Hall's unlikely status as a gay literary icon:

Hall's text "was designed to give a voice to British lesbians. In her case, as Diana Souhami documents, it was not a necessarily a particularly attractive voice. A wealthy woman who was a crypto-fascist and an anti-Semite, and whose claim to be among the most persecuted in the world has to be judged against a lifestyle of fine houses, stylish lovers, inherited incomes, villas in the sun, and the rearing of dachshunds. She is not at first sight a natural heroine of the modern-day struggle for lesbian and gay equality. (Travis 47).

Upon publication, *The Well of Loneliness* was immediately met with resistance from the censors because of Hall's portrayal of a lesbian relationship. Home secretary Sir William Joynson-Hicks launched a campaign

to have Hall's novel banned. However, Joynson-Hicks had to prove the novel contained obscene material; in order to this, he also had to provide a definition for obscene material. His method of determination can best be understood through his speech to the London Diocesan Council of Youth at Central Hall in Westminster on October 15, 1928.

I[Joynson-Hicks] am attacked on the one hand by all those people who put freedom of speech and thought and writing before everything else in the world, as if there were freedom in God's world to pollute the generation growing up. There must be some limit to the freedom on what a man may write or speak in this great country of ours. That freedom, in my view, must be determined by the question as to whether what is written or spoken makes one of the least of these little ones offended. (Travis 62).

Obscenity, according to Joynson-Hicks, can be determined through a text's effect on the younger generation. If the text contains material or subject matter that could be deemed to have a corrupting nature on the children, then that text is obscene. Joynson-Hicks is making use of the age old cry of "Won't someone think of the children?". *The Well of Loneliness* falls under his purview of obscenity because of the text's focus on lesbianism, allowing Joynson-Hicks to make the determination that if a child were to read this text and learn of the existence of lesbians or same-sex desire corruption would ensure. The tragic nature of the lesbian figure in *The Well of Loneliness* is a moot point in the obscenity case, the mere presence of the lesbian figure is enough to warrant censorship under the Obscene Publications Act of 1857 and the test of obscenity used by Joynson-Hicks.

If Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* was banned for the focusing on the lesbian figure and endeavoring to make the British public aware of such a figure, how was *Love in a Cold Climate* able to escape the wide brush of censorship that painted much of the twentieth century? This is an essential question to consider before analyzing the figure of Cedric, as Cedric is not the only component of Mitford's text that could be deemed obscene. To detail the numerous instances of Joynson-Hicks' defined obscenity present in *Love in a Cold Climate*, I will give a brief summary of the novel.

Love in a Cold Climate is narrated by Fanny Wincham, a familiar face from *The Pursuit of Love*. Uncle Matthew, Davey, and the younger Radlett siblings are also present throughout the novel as callbacks to *The Pursuit of Love*, and a pleasure to Mitford's fans. Readers are introduced to new characters in the form of the Lady and Lord Montdore, their daughter Polly, the heir to the Montdore name, Cedric Hampton, Lady Patricia Dougdale and husband, Boy Dougdale. While Fanny enjoys homemaking for her

Oxford don husband, Alfred, she acts as an observer and outsider allowing the readers access into the humorous and decadent worlds of the Montdore and Radlett families. Whereas *The Pursuit of Love* focused on Linda Radlett's journey for love and her overabundance of the feeling, *Love in a Cold Climate* focuses on the Montdore family and begins the novel with Polly Hampton, daughter of Lord and Lady Montdore, and her difficulty in feeling anything amorous. A conversation between Fanny and Polly sums up Polly's difficulty.

'Are they always having love affairs the whole time? Is it their one and only topic of conversation?'

I[Fanny] was obliged to say that this was the case.

'Oh bother. I[Polly] felt sure, really, you would say that. It was so in India, of course, but I though perhaps in a cold climate...! Anyway, don't tell Mummy if she asks you. Pretend that English debutantes don't bother about love. She is in a perfect fit because I never fall in love with people; she teases me about it all the time. But it isn't any good, because if you don't. I should have thought, at my age, it's natural not to.'

'I[Fanny] looked at her in surprise, it seemed to me highly unnatural, though I could well understand not wanting to talk about things to the grown-ups, and specially to Lady Montdore if she happened to be one's mother. But a new idea struck me.

'In India,' I[Fanny] said, 'could you have fallen in love?' Polly laughed.

'Fanny darling, what do you mean? Of course I could have. Why not? I just didn't happen to, you see.'

'White people?'

'White or black,' she said, teasingly. 'Fall in love with blacks?' What would Uncle Matthew say?

'People do, like anything. You don't understand about Rajahs, I see, but some of them are awfully attractive. I had a friend there who nearly died of love for one. And I'll tell you something, Fanny, I honestly believe Mamma would rather I fell in love with an Indian than not at all.' (Mitford 27).

Polly has no interest in love and feels no desire in the first portion of the novel. She sees nothing wrong with her lack of desire; instead, she is pressured to feel something, anything, by her mother. Fanny, on the other hand, views Polly's lack of desire as strange, and wonders if her time spent in India and her distance from English men is a factor in the dampened desire. Polly debunks this hypothesis, claiming that feelings for "blacks," "Indians," and "Rajahs" are common enough. Polly uses these terms to describe a single racial identity making no distinction between "blacks," "Indians" or "Rajahs." Polly's observations on the attractions between her young British friends and citizens of India does not result from shared reciprocal feelings of desire. Rather, Polly describes how "awfully attractive" the colonial subjects are. Her friends are gazing at them. This is not a moment of harmonious, balanced racial relations, but a continuation of the colonial practice of eroticizing the racial other. Mitford is uninterested in engaging with these practices. Instead, this is a moment to explore scandalous desire. The use of the colonial setting of India is important

because, rather than engaging with the complicated imperial questions, Mitford uses the language of the schoolroom and the scandal to draw our attention away from serious issues and questions of appropriateness. Polly and Fanny are debating complex issues of sexual desire called "love" here. In the above section Polly and Fanny are part of the younger generation, Joynson-Hicks seeks to shield from the terrors of obscenity, yet they are the ones introducing the talk that could be considered scandalous. Through using the language of gossip and the schoolroom, Mitford uses the language of the younger generation obscuring the instances of obscenity that may be present.

Polly and Fanny are not the only young characters in *Love in a Cold Climate* who discuss scandalous things. The youngest Radletts, Jassy and Victoria, who as Evelyn Waugh observes "are intoxicating & real, so real that every other character pales beside them except Cedric who deplorably is made to talk in places in exactly their idiom" (Mosley 109). While Jassy and Victoria obsess over sophisticated topics, they also take great delight in discussing these topics with school room idioms, rhymes, and words games borrowed from Mitford's own childhood. Their favorite topic and one they discuss at length is sex and desire. Jassy and Victoria expect their older sisters, Linda and Louisa, and their older cousin, Fanny, to share all their bedroom secrets now that they are married.

It is unfair nobody ever tells. Sadie [their mother] doesn't even know, that's quite obvious, and Louisa is an old prig, but we did think we could count on Linda and you [Fanny]. Very well then, we shall go to our marriage beds in ignorance, like Victorian ladies, and in the morning we shall be found stark, staring mad with horror, and live sixty more years in an expensive bin, and then perhaps you'll wish you had been more helpful.

"Weighted down with jewels and Valenciennes costing thousands," said Victoria. "The Lecturer [Boy Dougdale] was here last week and he was telling Sadie some nice sexy stories about that kind of thing. Of course, we weren't meant to hear but you can just guess what happened. Sadie didn't listen and we did."

"I[Fanny] should ask the Lecturer for information," I said. "He'd tell."

"He'd show. No, thank you very much. (Mitford 101).

Jassy and Victoria use their language to acknowledge the ridiculousness regarding the silence surrounding discussions of sex and desire. Now that Linda and Louisa, and even Fanny, are part of the married crowd, they exclude Jassy and Victoria from conversations regarding bedroom activities despite the camaraderie that existed regarding these matters before marriages. As a result of this exclusion, Jassy and Victoria reference the stereotypical image Victorian method of discussing sex, to not discuss it. Victoria and Jassy's exaggerated ridicule of the silence surrounding sex because of their age and unmarried status indirectly

deals with the problems surrounding Joynson-Hicks' obscenity test. What happens when the children don't want to be protected from what could be judged obscene or are the ones committing the obscene actions in the text? Jassy and Victoria want answers about the natural feelings related to sex and desire, Furthermore, Jassy and Victoria want these answers from those they consider comrades in desire, sisters, cousins, mothers; rather than through the awkward, inappropriate fumbling of the Lecturer. One of the things that make interactions with Jassy and Victoria so delightful is that they never receive a proper answer. They must continue to question, and each question means they must voice that which according to Joynson-Hicks' obscenity test should not be voiced or printed. Again, as in the section where Polly and Fanny discuss desire, Jassy and Victoria's discussion of a desire to understand sex uses the exaggerated threats and familiarity of children talking to older siblings or children talking amongst each other in the school yard. The topics the Radlett children discuss could certainly be categorized as obscene using the same judgment that categorized *The Well of Loneliness*. The children declare that without knowledge they will go mad during their first sexual experience as a result of the shock of the experience, certainly a thrilling promise for their grooms. In addition to this promise, Jassy and Victoria also make casual mention to Boy Dougdale's predilection for giving young girls "some great sexy pinches" (Mitford 14). Jassy and Victoria drop this so casually into the conversation that it is easy to miss the reference to Boy Dougdale's actions, although at this point in the novel it is already a well established character trait of his. By masking the lecherous actions of The Lecturer and the exaggerated desire for knowledge about sex in the language of the school yard, Jassy and Victoria's flirtation with obscenity is masked by their innocence. In order to charge these two characters with obscene language, thoughts, or actions, one would first have to acknowledge their ability to have obscene language, thoughts, or actions. As children, the figures Joynson-Hicks apparently is seeking to protect from obscenity, Jassy and Victoria could occupy the position of victims of obscenity, but not perpetrators, for this would give them an agency that would remove their status as victims forgoing the need for them to be protected. More importantly, these are the characters that report much of the scandalous events of the novel. Boy Dougdale's lecherous actions do not occur from the point of view of Boy; rather they occur from those that have experienced these wandering hands: the young Jassy and Victoria, Polly as a young girl and later as his wife. By using these characters, Mitford uses those

that would traditionally be portrayed as victims to celebrate the scandal and desire that might otherwise be ruled as obscenity.

The scandal in the novel, which consists of Polly running off with her uncle by marriage and her mother's lover, as well as the constant presence of desire in the form of Fanny's love for Alfred, Jassy and Victoria's curiosity, and Cedric's homosexuality, are protected from the obscenity act not just through Mitford's choice in characters' to describe these events, but also the language she uses. While some critics have not taken Mitford's writing seriously – thinking of her as more a gossip columnist than a novelist, in fact Nancy Mitford took great care with the presentation of sexuality in her writing. She received advice from her dear friend and longtime correspondent, Evelyn Waugh, while writing the novel and through her revision process. Here Waugh responds to Mitford regarding possible American reception of Cedric. Evelyn Waugh appeared convinced American reviewers would disparage Mitford for including a character like Cedric at all, and avoid the debate of his value or his complexity.

It has been a great delight to read your English reviews. I haven't seen the American but I expect they are as foolish as possible. You see Americans have discovered about homosexuality from a book called *Kinsey Report* (unreadable) & they take it very seriously. All popular plays in New York are about buggers but they all commit suicide. The idea of a happy pansy is inconceivable to them. (Mosley 139).

Aside from highlighting Waugh and Mitford's shared distaste for America, Waugh's predictions regarding American reviewers' reception of Cedric also highlights the traditional and accepted depictions of the homosexual figure in drama and literature. Tragedy is acceptable. Comedy is questionable. If Cedric were the subject of the comedy, the figure for the audience to laugh over, perhaps this would be as acceptable for those who "have discovered about homosexuality from a book called *Kinsey Report*" as tragedy. In both cases the figure would hold no place of power, regulated to suicide or clown. However, Cedric operates in a position of power in *Love in a Cold Climate*. He is the heir of Montdore. He charms and befriends most of those he meets, with the exception of some members of the Old Guard. He gives Lady Montdore a makeover, physically reshaping one of the powerful figures in the novel into something he finds pleasing, and eventually manages Polly's love affair to ensure that he is "having lovely cake and eating it, too, which is *one's* great aim in life"(Mitford 245). If anyone comes out ahead in *Love in a Cold Climate*, it is unquestionably Cedric.

In a correspondence with her sister, Diana Mosley, Nancy Mitford's sister recounts an incident where she meets the editor of *Woman's Home Journal* and discusses her sister's novel:

[Diana] said I couldn't *believe* they hadn't serialized your new book, as it was such heaven. So Mr. Gould [the editor], who is a terrific prig, said the subject is rather *unsavory*, something about a fairy, so I said 'unsavory, why in Europe we love them & always choose them out for friends'. He said what were you [Nancy] like & I lost my head & said 'Oh, she's wonderful, just like me'. Then he said wouldn't Cedric have a very limited appeal here so I teased by saying well it is Book Society Book of the Month AND *D. Mail*. He was shaken I could see. I wish I could think I had done some good. (Mosley 257).

While *Woman's Home Journal* never serialized *Love in a Cold Climate*, Diana Mosley's work on behalf of her sister's text proves useful for considering how fans and critics responded to figures like Cedric.

Interestingly, the editor of *Woman's Home Journal*, according to Diana's account, is only concerned by Cedric. Other possible controversies in the text, the frank discussion of sex by children or the pedophilia are not a concern. Mosley, while defending her sister, uses two important strategies. Firstly, she connects Mitford's character to a larger feeling of magnanimity towards homosexuality that Mosley claims exists in Europe. "In Europe we love them and always choose them out for our friends" (Mosley 257). Whether this feeling actually exists, could be debated, but the important thing in this passage is that Mosley claims this feeling exists. She uses this magnanimity to dismiss the editor's worries that an audience might be uncomfortable with Cedric's homosexuality. In Diana Mosley's version of Europe, Cedric is so popular as to be commonplace. Aside from using popularity to defend Cedric's homosexuality, Mosley also uses popularity to highlight *Love in a Cold Climate*'s ability to be a commercial success. Using two examples of previous magazine and newspapers that have already chosen to serialize the novel, Mosley again isolates the editor. He is not following the trends set by the tastemakers of Europe, nor is he acknowledging the commercial popularity that the novel could offer his company. Through Diana Mosley's defense of her sister, she highlights the novel's ability to be popular and inclusive. Mosley's defense describes the editor as "a prig," His inability to accept Cedric, for his popularity or for the commercial success he could bring, places the editor in a place of ridicule for Diana Mosley and Nancy Mitford.

While Mitford own feelings toward homosexuals were complex, she had a long history in the gay aesthete British community. One of her first serious love affairs was with Hamish St Clair Erskine. The affair was unhappy and tumultuous, partially because of Erskine's complicated sexual identity. He was "basically homosexual. In point of fact, what he responded to was admiration..."(Hastings 65). Aside from

Nancy's complicated relationships, she also ran in the same social circles as Brian Howard, Harold Acton, Mark Ogilvie-Grant, and Stephen Tennant (Hastings 45). Mitford was quite familiar with a certain kind of homosexual stereotype associating with these members of Oxford aesthetes and the Bright Young Things; however, in her other novels she rarely addresses the less visible nature of homosexuality or the physical nature of homosexuality in her work, and she avoids mention of lesbians unless a off the cuff insult from one character to another. So, since Mitford chooses to focus on one aspect of homosexuality, a very visible and easily stereotyped and abused aspect, is there any value to her portrayal of Cedric?

Unlike Mitford's response to reviewers disparaging her frivolous writing style, she seemed to take great delight in criticism towards Cedric, perhaps because it was something to share with friends without opening up her own ability to disparagement.

'America is taking exception to Cedric the sweet pansy,' she told her friend Billa [Lady Harrod], who had suggested 'the Waynflete Professor of Moral Theology' and perhaps his future as Ambassador. 'It seems in America you can have pederasts in books so long as they are fearfully gloomy and end by committing suicide. A cheerful one who goes from strength to strength like Cedric horrifies them. They say 'Cedric is too revolting for any enjoyment of the book.' So I write back ' how can you hate Cedric when he is such a *love*?' (Acton 77).

Mitford echoes criticism of the American reading public voiced by Waugh. However, she adds her own answer to a reviewer who is revolted by Cedric. Mitford's answer that Cedric is "*a love*" may appear insufficient, and feed into another stereotype just as problematic as the homosexual meeting a gloomy end by suicide. However, Mitford makes no promises for social change or multi-faceted characters. Instead, she has created a character that she likes. Despite Mitford's desire to not to just produce "photographs of existing people" (Mosley 111), she uses characteristics familiar to her from her time among the aesthetes and the Bright Young Things to create a character familiar to her and one that is "*a love*" Her familiarity with characters like Cedric breeds affection, and her affection leads her to defend Cedric as she would a friend.

While Mitford has faith in Cedric as a character, Mitford's faith in herself as an established author is unclear from her correspondence with her mentors, especially Waugh, and her credibility as a writer is something she questioned throughout her career:

I[Mitford] have re-written the *whole thing* once already you know. What I wonder is whether I can (am capable of) doing better. You speak of Henry James but he was a *man* of intellect, you must remember that I am an *uneducated woman* (viz punctuation) & that I have done my best & worked hard already. What you say about the minor characters I don't agree with. Your complaint

is they are not photographs of existing people, but one must be allowed to invent people if one is a novelist. I took the trouble to write to a don't wife about Norma [another character] & and she said quite possible.

Oh dear. You see I'm afraid that what you really criticize are my own inherent limitations.

Luckily you also find something to admire, that is one comfort. But I do feel quite sure that I am incapable of writing the book you want me to-- I can't do more really than skate over surfaces, for one thing I am rather insensitive as you know, & for another *not very clever*. (Mosley 111).

The language in this letter also helpfully identifies one of the most difficult aspects in judging Mitford as a writer. How seriously should readers take her? Is she writing enjoyable, but forgettable popular fiction? Is she trying, but failing to write something that seriously considers a number of issues? Could she be doing both at the same time? While Mitford deeply regretted her parents' choice of an antiquated schooling method, her brother Tom and her sister Unity were the only children sent away for schooling, the other siblings were educated at home, Nancy was by no means the "*uneducated woman*" she claims in her letter (Hastings 35). "In fact, thanks to her grandfather's library, she was, even when very young, exceptionally well read, and the PNEU system by which she was taught by her governesses was thorough and reliable" (Hastings 36). While Mitford's use of italics in her description of herself as an "*uneducated woman*" could easily be self-deprecating, she did, at times, view herself as uneducated especially in comparison to some of her formally educated peers, and was unhappy with her self-described status as uneducated. *Love in a Cold Climate* was also Mitford's first novel where the characters are not solely "photographs of existing people", rather, they are existing people, artistic creations, and a mixture of the two. Mitford's previous novels were mostly autobiographical in some form, and the creation of a plot and characters without connection to her life, was a worry for Mitford. However, she was also aware that this was part of her progression as an author, "one must be allowed to invent people if one is a novelist." By stating this Mitford identifies herself as novelist and states her willingness to grow as a novelist. She does not want to write the same novel for the rest of her life. However, although Mitford expresses desire to grow as an author and to use *Love in a Cold Climate* to work on this growth, she also expresses the real and natural fear of failing in this growth. While reviews for *Love in a Cold Climate* vary, the sales of the book support Nancy Mitford's ability to capture the public's attention while clouding the view of the censors. While Nancy was concerned with her ability as a writer to create realistic characters, and Waugh's advice focuses on this issue, the reviews for *Love in a Cold Climate* focus instead on the frivolity of the text.

In a letter to Anthony Powell shortly after *Love in a Cold Climate* is published, Mitford laments that she has "had a terrible drubbing in America 'no message & no meaning' adds up to nothing' 'adds up to nothing' etc, I've had to stop reading them so bad for my inferiority feeling" (Mosley 233). While in Britain, Mitford's frivolity allows her to escape the notice of the censors and the antiquated obscenity laws, that same frivolity draws the unwelcome negative attention of the critics in America. In a review from *Time* magazine the reviewer refers to Mitford's writing as "Waugh watered" and states that "the frosting on Author Mitford's story of the happily selfish Montdores is so light and fluffy as to leave the reader wondering whether she is really selling satire or simple nostalgia for the good old prewar and pre-Labor days in Britain" While another reviewer, Orville Prescott, of *The New York Times* offers a similar critique "Even after reading every one of Miss Mitford's carefully chosen words some doubts remain. Is this a satire of the advanced state of decadence reached by the aristocracy of England in this century, a light-hearted and occasionally witty burlesque, or just a lot of high-spirited nonsense? Whatever it is, 'Love in a Cold Climate' doesn't add up to much. It sags woefully between its outbursts of erotic merriment and is much less successfully sustained than its predecessor, 'The Pursuit of Love'" (Prescott). These two reviewers are confused as to the genre of *Love in a Cold Climate*: satire or popular fiction. Neither reviewer entertains the idea that Mitford's novel could occupy a place in both genres, only that it could be one or the other and the novel's failure to be easily identified is a failure on the writer's part. According to these reviewers, *Love in a Cold Climate* fails to be clearly caustic enough or have a clear subject to fulfill the need for satire. However, it is just caustic enough to interrupt the reader's uninhibited pleasure. While readers and reviewers make note and take issue with the frivolous tone used by Nancy Mitford, columnists also use their reviews to draw attention to another issue that many readers took issue with, the character of Cedric.

In the American reviews available regarding *Love in a Cold Climate*, reviewers avoid direct criticism of Cedric. Instead, they chose to criticize Cedric by regulating his role in the novel to a small, clichéd figure, identifying him by less than favorable names used to clearly mark his sexual orientation. Cedric is referred to as "scented, scintillating Cousin Cedric" (*Time*), a "lavender young esthete, an authority on furniture and decoration, a clever, witty, and loathsome hothouse flower" (Prescott), "a nance" (Kirkus Reviews), and a "pastel esthete" (McGinley). Even reviewers that focus on Cedric's status as an aesthete make the connection to his homosexuality using color markers. Even when a reviewer

acknowledges Cedric as "clever" and "witty", he also marks Cedric as a "loathsome hothouse flower" (Prescott). Prescott appears disgusted with Cedric through his marking him as "loathsome." He marks Cedric as an object by comparing him to a flower. he moves him from someone to something to be detested. None of these reviewers view Cedric as "a *love*" (Acton 77); instead, they view him as a type, an object, a figure of disgust and ridicule.

So, if Nancy Mitford views her character with affection and her reviewers view him with disgust, but the reading public is still buying and consuming her books, how can we reconcile these two very different reactions to one character? Like Polly and Fanny, Cedric concerns himself with desire, and like Jassy and Victoria, he uses the language of the schoolroom and the gossips to discuss the language (Much to Waugh's chagrin). However, unlike Jassy and Victoria, or Polly and Fanny, Cedric is not concerned with heterosexual love and desire, although he often dispenses advice for these affairs. Instead, he casts his gaze towards other men, some who return his gaze and some who react with horror. However, Cedric, like Jassy and Victoria, and Polly and Fanny receives protection from the language he uses. As long as he remains one of Mitford's "*love[s]*" (Acton 77), and is viewed by the commercial public as a "pastel esthete" Cedric is not a threat to youthful minds as Joynson-Hicks worries. If no one takes Cedric seriously, he can do as he like, he can inherit, he can control, he can "hav[e] lovely cake and [eat] it, too" (Mitford 245).

Cedric enjoys the sensations and ripples he causes throughout the English countryside as he resides with the Montdore and transforms Lady Montdore. Aside from an assault by Uncle Matthew with a *Vogue* magazine (Mitford 198), Cedric has an extraordinary ability to persuade and win support, sometimes unwilling, from those around him. While riding the train with a member of the Boreley family, one the staunchest opponents to his presence, Cedric convinces Jock Boreley to help him with his luggage.

'So according to Norma he[Jock] was in a perfect panic, sat with one eye on you and the other on the communication cord, because he expected you to pounce at any minute'

'Heavens! What does he look like?'

'You ought to know. It seems you were quite alone together after Reading.'

'Well, darling, I only remember a dreadful mustachio'd murderer sitting in a corner. I remember him particularly, because I kept thinking, 'Oh the luck of being *one* and not somebody like that...That's it. Oh so that's a Boreley, is it? And do you imagine people often make advances to him, in trains?'

'He says you gave him hypnotic stares through your glasses.'

'The thing is he did have a rather pretty tweed on.'

'And then apparently you made him get your suitcase off the rack at Oxford, saying you are not allowed to lift things...Yes and now he's simply furious that he did. He says you hypnotised him.'

'Oh, poor him, I do so know the feeling.'

'Whatever had you got in it[the luggage], Cedric? He says it simply weighed a ton....And now they are all saying 'There you are-- if he even fixed old Jock, no wonder he has got round the Montdores' (Mitford 205).

In this encounter with Jock, Cedric gets the help he needs simply by gazing at Jock. While the encounter is played for laughs, and certainly achieves them, beneath these laughs, Mitford also explores how Jock and the community's deep discomfort with Cedric allow Cedric to fulfill a number of his goals. While in the train car, Cedric apparently takes little enough notice of Jock that he needs to be prompted to remember the encounter by Fanny, while Jock is spreading his own version of the story throughout the countryside. Jock is in a "perfect panic" while riding the train, while Cedric pictures Jock as a "murderer", yet while Cedric gives Jock the appellation of "murderer", Cedric appears unconcerned with sharing the car with him. Cedric's version of the events appears to be playful drama, while Jock seems to be cowering in the corner in genuine anxiety lest he associate with Cedric. Yet, Cedric somehow manages to break through this barrier of anxiety that Jock has created and engage Jock in a needed service. While getting Jock to carry his bags may place Cedric in a feminized position, Jock's unwillingness to do this and unwillingness to ascribe any agency in his choice in unloading Cedric's luggage, puts pressure on Cedric and Jock's position. Cedric controls this interaction. Jock accedes to help Cedric, but his willingness is in question, or at the least his willingness to claim willingness. When he retells the story to family and countrymen, he claims to be "hypnotised." This emphasis on hypnosis identifies something in Cedric's gaze that both unsettles and mesmerizes Jock, something that Jock cannot name or does not understand. However, Cedric seems to be aware of the intentions of his gaze, wondering if people often "make advances to him [Jock]" connecting his own gaze to an advance. However, Cedric also appears to be admiring Jock's clothing, and identifying with his feeling of being hypnotised "poor him, I do so know the feeling." While talking to Fanny, Cedric admires Jock's clothing, disparages his appearance, alludes to making an advance on him, and sympathizes with his feeling of confusion. Cedric seems to understand that Jock's feeling of hypnosis is related to attraction, and may not be entirely willing, thus his sympathy. Also, Cedric does not clearly define his own clear feeling of attraction towards Jock, instead appearing interested more in his clothing and in the story Fanny is telling about his own new found ability to hypnotize the country boys. By demonstrating Cedric's discriminating and complicated feelings of desire, Mitford avoids the cliché of the hypersexual homosexual. Cedric can choose sexual partners; he is not attracted to all men. While, he certainly seems to

enjoy the attention he requires from Jock by asking for help with his luggage, this is the end of his relationship with him. Attention does not equal attraction, although for Cedric both can be pleasurable.

Pleasure and desire are goals for a number of characters in the text, but Cedric complicates this goal because of the preexisting tradition he is attached to. As both Waugh and Mitford point out in response to reviews, a homosexual character was acceptable if they ended unhappy or dead. While, it is unfair to generalize, the presence of queer and homosexual characters in texts has been complicated by a long, tragic history. As Heather Love observes in her text *Feeling Backwards*:

Whether understood as throwbacks to an earlier stage of human development or as children who refuse to grown up, queers have been seen across the twentieth century as a backward race. Perverse, immature, sterile, and melancholic: even when they produce fears about the future, they somehow also recall the past...The association with homosexuality with loss, melancholia, and failure runs deep; psychoanalytic accounts of arrested development and representations of the AIDS crisis as a gay death wish represent only a couple notable variations on this theme (Love 6).

While Cedric at times uses childish affectations not uncommon among the Bright Young Things in the 1920s and 1930s, he avoids the melancholy and failure that would mark him as a character in the queer canon. Even the label of perversion, which neighbors like the Boreleys and Uncle Matthew would be quick to label him, is avoided by Cedric as a result of Fanny's school girl-like narration. In order to describe perversion, Fanny must be able to identify it and be willing to discuss it; however, as evidenced by her conversation with Polly and her unwillingness to share marital bed secrets with Jassy and Victoria, Fanny cannot cross this boundary into what might be labeled obscenity. Cedric does recall the past, as a member of the aesthete community, he not only recalls the past, but glorifies it. Yet his relationship to the future is much more complicated. While the neighbors in the countryside are slow to be won over by his charm, the Montdores fear and dislike him while Polly is their cherished daughter. After all, he is the heir who prevents her from inheriting the family home. However, when Polly slips from her position as favored daughter, and Cedric appears, he appears as the Montdores hope for the future. "From the moment that the Montdores first set eyes on Cedric, there was no more question of his having come to Hampton for a fortnight. He was obviously there for good and all. They both took him to their hearts and loved him, almost at once, better than they had loved Polly for years, ever since she was a small child" (Mitford 189). While Cedric is again associated with a child, this association rewrites his past relationship with the Montdores replacing Polly as the favored child, with Cedric, and put Lord and Lady Montdore in a parental

position. However, Cedric's actions toward the Montdore's makes it clear that while their affection for him may be parental, he will tolerate no paternalism, as he controls almost all aspects of Lady Montdore's life reshaping her to what suits him. Instead of remaining in the position of a child looking toward the future, Cedric switches positions with Lady Montdore treating her like a favorite child, and claiming his position as heir ensuring that he can live in the present and look towards a comfortable future.

Upon meeting the Montdore's Cedric enters the text as an exotic figure, a "human dragon-fly"(Mitford 179). However, after introducing himself and speaking more with his new found family, Cedric becomes part of the Montdore household while still retaining the characteristics that make him different. Cedric forces the Montdore's to accept him as he is, rather than to undergo a process of change or annihilation to gain admittance into Hampton.

'My[Cedric's] needs are very simple, admittedly, but such as they are they have all been satisfied over and over again.'

'What are your needs?'

'I need a great deal of beauty round me, beautiful objects wherever I look, and beautiful people who see the point of *one*. And speaking of beautiful people, Aunt Sonia, after dinner, the jewels? Don't, don't, please, say no!'

'Very well then,' she said. 'But now, Cedric, won't you take off your glasses?'

'Perhaps I could. Yes, I really think the last vestige of my shyness has gone.' (Mitford 185)

During his interaction with Lady Montdore, Cedric concedes to remove his glasses, the markers that originally identify him as a "human dragon-fly." However, Mitford presents this removal as a request from Lady Montdore, an uncertainty from a usually fierce hostess; whereas, Cedric's desire to see Lady Montdore's jewelry is presented as a command. He needs beautiful things to survive; therefore if Lady Montdore wishes to see him survive and flourish, she must meet these needs. She must provide jewelry. She must make herself beautiful. She must surround herself with beauty in order to satisfy Cedric "over and over again." Lady Montdore is willing to satisfy these needs. Mitford's writing devotes no hesitation on her part. Lady Montdore gives herself over to making Cedric happy. In turn, Cedric concedes to removing his glasses. Cedric and Lady Montdore share an unequal reciprocal relationship, where they both request things of the other, but Cedric has more power in the relationship. Should his needs fail to be met, he can simply leave Hampton, leaving the estate with no heir and Lady Montdore with no one. Cedric's ability to bond with his aunt and control their relationship through their shared interests results from his ability and desire to share these interests. He does not simply view her jewels, he removes his glasses. He gives as well as

takes. He acts as confidante, friend, and family to Lady Montdore creating a space for himself in her life that cannot be challenged despite gossip from the countryside. Mitford emphasizes that Cedric is "a *love*" (Acton 77), which is important in understanding his likeability as a character. Cedric was "a *love*" because Cedric loved and was loved by those around him. Since Cedric's ability to love and desire was highlighted by Mitford and placed in relation to other character's ability, rather than considered an exclusive and unusual feeling to Cedric, he achieves one of the happiest endings in *Love in a Cold Climate*.

While Fanny and Lady Montdore adore Cedric, other characters relate to him differently throughout the text. Characters like Jock Boreley react with shock, horror, and curious mesmerism at Cedric's presence. Uncle Matthew reacts with extreme violence. However, Fanny's husband, Alfred's interaction with Cedric highlights Cedric's ability as a character to fulfill different roles for different characters. To Fanny, Cedric provides an advisor and confessor. To Lady Montdore, Cedric provides a family to spoil and pamper. However, to Alfred, Cedric provides an intellectual peer. The two interact in a space where Cedric's intellectual ability is highlighted, but so is his ability to please all audiences.

'Just a narrow edging of white...' I heard Cedric say, through the open door, as they came down the passage.

Later on I remembered to ask Alfred what could have led up to this remark, so typical of Cedric, but so un-typical of the conversation in that house, and he replied that they had been having a most fascinating talk on burial customs in the High Yemen.

'I fear,' he said, 'that you bring out the worst in Cedric Hampton, Fanny. He is really a most intelligent young man, interested in a range of subjects, though I have no doubt at all that when he is with you he confines himself, as you do, to remarks in the nature of 'And did you notice the expression on her face when she saw who was there?' because he knows that general subjects do not amuse you, only personalities. With those whose horizon is a little wider he can be very serious, let me tell you.'

The fact was that Cedric could bring out edgings of white to suit all tastes. (Mitford 223)

Cedric is well informed enough to carry on a discussion with Alfred and his peers about the burial practices in the High Yemen, a topic Alfred considers among the "general subjects." However, what Fanny, as narrator, chooses to comment on that her husband neglects is the positivity of Cedric's ability to blend with all audiences. Alfred describes Fanny and Cedric's conversations in limiting terms, "personalities" not "subjects", preferring his own discourse. When chiding Fanny for this method of conversation, he assumes that is limiting for Cedric to take part in, rather than a pleasurable exercise on his part. He leaves no space for the Cedric's amusement; instead, assuming that Cedric, like him must feel constrained by conversations Fanny participates. Through Cedric's ability to "bring out the edgings of white to suit all tastes," he is able

to connect with Alfred and Fanny simultaneously. Alfred feels a bond with Cedric through their shared intellectual interests and the an imagined commiseration with him over sharing what Alfred believes are inane conversations with the female characters of the novel, while Fanny connects with Cedric through an acknowledgement that he can fulfill many roles for many people. Alfred is won over by Cedric's intellect, just as Lady Montdore is won over by his affection and reciprocity, and Jock responds to mesmerism. Through this portrayal Cedric is not limited to one single type of characters. He bonds with all characters in the novel, some negatively, but most positively.

Cedric avoids looking backwards to his past in Nova Scotia. He is not tied to a single social group or stereotype. Instead, his only consistent defining characteristic is that he is "a *love*" (Acton 77). Cedric's focus must be on the positives of affection, desire, and love, not tragedy. Cedric eschews the tragic outcome of other queer figures. He gets a happy ending. However, his version of happy could impact the happiness of other characters in the text making for a rich and interesting life in the Montdore and Radlett households. Indeed what Cedric sees as a happy ending, one reviewer, Brendan Gill, from *The New Yorker* sees as act of revenge by Nancy Mitford. "In the end, Miss Mitford takes her revenge on the Montdore's by meting out a variety of harsh and astonishing punishments" (Gill). Mitford seems to be kind to her characters, as they all end relatively pleased with their positions. However, Gill's desire to highlight the cruelty of this ending draws attention to the ambiguity of happiness. Instead of viewing the ending of *Love in a Cold Climate* through a lens of normative happiness, what if we instead considered through an idea of queer optimism? Is this a better way of reconciling one reader's cruelty with another's happiness?

According to Michael D. Snediker's *Queer Optimism*:

What if happiness could outlast fleeting moment, without that persistence attenuating the quality of happiness? What if instead of attenuating happiness, this extension of happiness opened it up to critical investigations that didn't a priori doubt it, but instead made happiness complicated, and strange?...If the insights of the past few decades have mobilized shame, shattering, or melancholy as *interesting* (as opposed to instances of fear and trembling) what if we could learn from those insights and critical practices, and imagine happiness as theoretically mobilizable, as conceptually difficult? Which is to ask, what if happiness weren't merely self-reflexively happy, but interesting? (Snediker 30).

Cedric's happiness, while certainly interesting, complicates the happiness of a number of other characters in the text. Yet, Cedric makes allowances for these complications, appearing aware of the disruption he causes among country clans like the Boreleys and seems to delight in it, only making his happiness richer. Lady

Montdore's happiness results from seeing Cedric's happiness, it requires a visual confirmation, and she undergoes a transformation in the text that readers would think would cause unhappiness. Yet even as she wastes away on a fast or suffers through dying her hair blue, she smiles because Cedric is happy. While it is easy to dismiss Lady Montdore's happiness as an unhealthy dependence on Cedric and a desire to please, the novel becomes much richer if the reader considers Lady Montdore's happiness as a legitimate, complicated and strange feeling that needs to be studied for its merits and not dismissed. For to dismiss one happiness over the other, to dismiss Fanny's happiness over Cedric's or Lady Montdore's over Uncle Matthew's values one character over another, and inevitably marginalizes one.

Nancy Mitford's *Love in a Cold Climate* was a popular novel that fell into obscurity, despite the cult of popularity surrounding the Mitford family. However, the popularity and obscurity protected *Love in a Cold Climate* from censorship and criticism that could have resulted in the author making critical changes and queer fiction losing an important figure that links the need to look backwards and forwards. While a popular piece of fiction in her lifetime, *Love in a Cold Climate* avoided the broad, sweeping hand of the censors that caught other texts featuring queer figures. *The Well of Loneliness* and *Love in a Cold Climate* both use sentimental language, feature queer characters, and avoid the graphic descriptions of sex that modern audiences might consider obscenity, only *The Well of Loneliness* was the subject of a major obscenity trial. *Love in a Cold Climate* was a popular book club selection. Mitford's glib and frivolous language protected her novel and allowed the freedom to feature her characters discussing topics ranging from homosexuality, exogamous relations, and pedophilia. Through the creation of Cedric Hampton, Nancy Mitford created a character that was homosexual and successful. He may have been affected, and at times bordered on caricature: "a human dragon-fly" (Mitford 179). However, he was never a clear or cruel caricature. Instead, he was heir to a household, discriminating lover, dispenser of advice, and a "love" (Acton 77).

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Vita

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Love in a Cold Climate is a novel by Nancy Mitford, first published in 1949. The title is a direct quotation from George Orwell's novel *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936). *Love in a Cold Climate* is a companion volume to *The Pursuit of Love*. The time frame of *Love in a Cold Climate* is the same as *The Pursuit of Love*, but the focus is on a different set of characters. Fanny remains the fictional narrator. In *The Pursuit of Love*, Fanny narrates the story of her cousin Linda Radlett. In *Love in a Cold Climate* - Nancy Mitford. You've reached the end of this preview. Sign up to read more! Book Description One of Nancy Mitford's most beloved novels, *Love in a Cold Climate* is a sparkling romantic comedy that vividly evokes the lost glamour of aristocratic life in England between the wars. Polly Hampton has long been groomed for the perfect marriage by her mother, the fearsome and ambitious Lady Montdore. But Polly, with her stunning good looks and impeccable connections, is bored by the monotony of her glittering debut season in London. Having just come from India, where her father served as Viceroy, she claims to have hoped that society in a colder climate would be less obsessed *Love in a Cold Climate* and *The Pursuit of Love* are great fun. Nancy Mitford chronicles tales of eccentric English aristocrats in the 30's and 40's with great wit and style. And the best part is that most of it was patterned closely after her own family! Read *In the Pursuit of Love* first, then *Love in a Cold Climate*. You won't be sorry! Read more. 7 people found this helpful.