



eduresourceza.com

Glossary

Frail—physically weak
 Gesture—Movement made to communicate
 Descending—moving downwards
 Rendering—causing/making

Theme:

Travel/Man vs. natural world/love/power

Form:

No formal rhyme scheme
 5 quatrains (5 stanzas of 4 lines)
 Regular 4line stanzas + each deals with a new/separate point
 Last stanza regular rhyme scheme: ABAB

Ideas are simple but the following makes the poem seem complicated:

Diserted syntax
 Unusual punctuation
 New words/slang

Poetic/Language Devices:

Idea of closing + opening occurs:

'enclose' (L3)
 'unclose' (L5)
 'closed' (L6)
 'open' (L7)
 'close' (L9)
 'shut' (L10)
 'closes + opens' (L17-18)

Uses run-on lines/enjambment. L17 skips over Content brackets to find its objects L8.

Imagery

Similes + vivid personification, capitalization 'Spring'
 L7 'Rain... small hands' L20

Man + nature in harmony
 Man as nature
 Women are usually associated with flowers

Natural world:

Flowers
 Rain
 Seasons

Sound Devices:

Alliteration hard 'c' L15 power to words + draws readers attention
 'enclose' L3 echoed by opposite 'unclose' L5 beloved's power—both actions are equally wondrous
 Little rhyme used 1st 4 stanzas make use of rhyme in final stanza more noticeable

Never gave his poem titles so editors just used the first line.

somewhere i have never travelled

E. E. Cummings (1894 - 1962)

Modern Poet

Tone: (Author's attitude or feelings about the subject)
 Soulful/Captivated

Mood: (Readers emotions from reading the text)
 Hopeful/mysterious

Unconventional love poem—tries to understand beloved's power over him. Admits her appeal is intangible + difficult to pin-point. Images of nature + concept of travel to develop his ideas. The speaker isn't infatuated nor overcome by throes of violent passion. He believes love is transcendent/a religious conversion/connects us to something bigger/infinite + ultimately unknowable.

- 1 somewhere i have never travelled gladly beyond
 2 any experience, your eyes have their silence:
 3 in your most frail gesture are things which enclose me,
 4 or which i cannot touch because they are too near
- 5 your slightest look easily will unclose me
 6 though i have closed myself as fingers,
 7 you open always petal by petal myself as Spring opens
 8 (touching skilfully, mysteriously) her first rose
 9 or if your wish be to close me, i and
 10 my life will shut very beautifully, suddenly,
 11 as when the heart of this flower imagines
 12 the snow carefully everywhere descending;
 13 nothing which we are to perceive in this world equals
 14 the power of your (intense fragility) whose texture
 15 compels me with the colour of its countries,
 16 rendering death and forever with each breathing
 17 (i do not know what it is about you that closes
 18 and opens; only something in me understands
 19 the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses)
 20 nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands
- Unexplored place—depths of eyes
 Hard to read—this excites the speaker
 Personification: windows to the soul
 Has power
 Paradox: evokes mystery—mysterious power of love
 Assonance
 Simile: balled up fist/put up a wall
 Speaker describes himself as a flower
 Opens with small glances. She is emotionally closed up.
 Personification: Spring—nature goddess
 Sensual
 He gives her power over the physical world. She has the power to bewilder him
 Simile: easily understands him/delicate feelings
 Not sad but beautiful.
 Simile: closing of emotions
 Allusion to winter—unstoppable like seasons
 Paradox + Irony—weakness vs. godly power
 Synaesthesia: when senses mingle
 Alliteration
 Power = control life + death
 Extended metaphor—no idea of mysterious power she has over him
 Personification: more powerful than a rose. Can get lost in its pattern/eyes are deep + mysterious. He mesmerized—can't be read.
 Personification

Somewhere I have never travelled.

EE Cummings

Background notes of poet

E E Cummings was born in 1894, in Massachusetts, in the United States of America. He served as an ambulance driver in World War I, and was detained in France for several months. After the war he lived in France, studying art, and finally settled in New York. Cummings was one of the most experimental poets of the twentieth century, and the style of his poetry is unusual: he uses distorted syntax, unusual punctuation, new words and slang words. These elements make his poems look complicated, but the ideas contain in them are generally quiet simple.

During reading

1. Note the many 'errors' or deviations present in the poem.
 - (a) List all the 'errors' you can find in the poem. (Note: 'errors' are instances in the poem in which conventional poetry and language rules are broken.)
 - (b) What is your initial reaction to this rule breaking?
 - (c) Why do you think the poet deliberately makes these 'errors'?
2. (a) Think of synonyms for the word 'frail' (line 3).
 (b) Find other words and expressions in the poem that have similar meanings.
3. (a) What would be a more usual word to use in place of 'unclose' (line 5)?
 (b) What is the effect of the poet's invented word?
 (c) Identify the irony contained in the phrase 'the power of our intense fragility' (line 14).
 (d) Consider the theme of travel in the poem. Do you think the speaker is referring to a physical journey to a foreign country? If not, what sort of travelling is he talking about?

Title

Like many poets, Cummings never gave his poems titles, so editors just use the first line as the title of each poem. That said, "somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond" seems like a fitting title, because the poem takes on such a surreal, yet strangely happy voyage into the weird world of the speaker and his lover.

Theme

The piece is similar to many traditional love poems in that the speaker spends a lot of time talking about his lover's eyes, and in that the poem uses the well-worn symbol of a rose.

The speaker of "somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond" is a total slave to his lover. He goes on and on about how she has total control over his emotions and there's nothing he can do about it. Rather than this being a bad thing, though, the speaker is really seems to love her more the more power she has. She manages all this with subtlety and a mysterious grace.

This love poem takes it to a whole other level. The speaker of "somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond" isn't just kind of infatuated, or even in the throes of violent passion. His love is transcendent. He's so in love with this girl that it's like he's going through a religious conversion of some kind. His feelings for her connect him to something bigger than both of them, something that's infinite and ultimately unknowable.

The poem is full of images of the natural world. We've got flowers, rain, references to the seasons and all that good stuff.

"somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond" shows man and nature in a kind of harmony. The speaker actually describes himself as a flower, opening and closing with the seasons. So you could say that this isn't a poem about man and nature; it's a poem about man as nature.

Content

- Cummings uses unusual words, punctuation and sentence structure. Once the reader adjusts to the strange language use and relaxes, the emotional associations are not difficult to understand.
- This is a love poem, although it is quite an unconventional one. The speaker seems to be attempting to understand his beloved's power over him, but he admits that her appeal is intangible and difficult to pinpoint. He cannot work out why she has this ability to move him but he welcomes it nonetheless.
- The poet makes use of images of nature and the concept of travel to develop his ideas.

Form and structure

- ✓ Given all the unusual features of Cummings' writing, it might be surprising to see a definite form being used. The poem is composed of regular four line stanzas and each stanza deals with a new, separate point.

Poetic / language devices

- ❖ The idea of closing and opening recurs in this poem. The first stanza hints at this with the use of the word 'enclose' (line 3), which becomes more significant in the light of the later reference to 'unclose' (line 5), 'closed' (line 6), 'open' (line 7), 'close' (line 9), 'shut' (line 10) and 'closes/ and opens' (lines 17-18)
- ❖ The poem often uses run-on lines, or enjambment. In one instance the line could even be said to 'jump over' words to complete the thought, as in line 7 where 'Spring' skips over the content in brackets to find its object, 'her first rose' (line 8).
- ❖ The poet skilfully makes use of imagery, and expresses the images through the use of similes and vivid personification. This can be seen in the capitalisation of 'Spring' (line 7), and the rain's 'hands' in the final line.

Sound devices

- Notice the alliteration of the hard 'c' sound repeated in line 15 which gives extra power to the words and draws the reader's attention.
- The sound of the word 'enclose' (line 3) is echoed by its opposite 'unclose' (line 5). Perhaps Cummings is saying that in the context of his love's power over him, both actions are equally wondrous.
- The fact that there is little rhyme used in the first four stanzas makes the use of rhyme in the final stanza all the more noticeable.
- This trek deep into the mysteries of the universe—and the human heart—is helped by Cummings's constant use of the long O sound. It reminds us a whole lot of the "omm" sound people make when they're meditating. We also talk about the use of this sound in "Form and Meter," but throughout the poem, Cummings rhymes words like "enclose", "unclose", and "rose". He also connects it all with assonance by using "open" and "opens". So, all the way through our journey, we hear the meditative "ohh" sound, which is also a subtle sonic reminder of the sense of awe in our speaker, too.

Symbol Analysis

Touch

There is a lot of touch imagery in this poem. You'll find mentions of fingers, hands, mysterious touches, and textures. This motif is knit tightly with some others, like flowers and nature, with Cummings blending the images so well that it's hard to pull them apart. The motif also fits neatly with the poem's overall use of paradoxical images. Translation: you get a bunch of references to the speaker being touched by things that are untouchable. At first, it might not make sense, but then if you think of a time you were truly, madly in love, it totally does.

Lines 3-4: We spot touch imagery early on when the speaker describes his lover's "most frail gesture." Maybe she delicately tucks a lock of hair behind her ear? Whatever this tiny flick of the hand is, the speaker is totally awestruck by it. The speaker is so enraptured by all the things in his love's "frail gesture" that he isn't sure if it they "enclose him," or if there are things in them that he "cannot touch because they are too near."

First of all, how can a tiny gesture totally enclose somebody? And secondly, why can't he touch something that's so close to him? These are **deliberate paradoxes**. This touch imagery conjures contradictions that place us in the love-dazzled mind of the speaker.

Lines 5-6: The speaker says, "your slightest look easily will unclothe me/ though i have closed myself as fingers." The digits on our hands are probably the parts of our body we most often associate with our sense of touch. Here, the speaker uses a **simile** to compare the feeling of being closed off emotionally to the image of the closed fingers. He can't manage to stay closed off around his love. All she has to do is give him the "slightest look," and he opens up again. Notice that she doesn't even have to touch him to make this happen.

Lines 7-8: The touch imagery continues when the speaker describes his love as "touching skilfully, mysteriously." For one, we definitely get a sensual feeling from this line. Skillful and mysterious. Notice, though, that the lines equate this mysterious touching the way "Spring opens/ [...] her first rose." - It's with sunlight and rain. Again an image of him being opened without any literal hands being put on him.

Lines 13-14: Once again we hear about the speaker's love's "fragility," and once again it's related to touch. This time, the speaker says its "texture/ compels [him] with the colour of its countries."

Many paradoxes are found here. First, how can fragility have a texture? It's a quality of a person, not something that's tangible. Also, how can a texture have colours? A texture is something you can feel, not something you see, right? Not in the world of Cummings, where (senses mingle in a phenomenon called **synesthesia**) Here again, we see the speaker being touched by things you wouldn't be able to feel in a literal sense.

Line 17: Personification is found in the last line of the poem, saying "nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands." It's personification because he's giving human characteristics to something that isn't human. Once again, the speaker describes himself as being opened by some intangible thing about his love. He compares himself to a flower being opened again, but notice that it isn't the rain that opens him. It's some mysterious, subtle thing with even smaller hands than the rain.

Eyes

Lines 1-2: Cummings opens up the poem with the lines, "somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond/ any experience, your eyes have their silence." This could be interpreted to mean that the unexplored place the speaker is heading into is the depths of his lover's eyes. The fact that her "eyes have their silence" makes them seem even more mysterious and unknowable. BUT, aren't all eyes silent? They can't talk at all. In a way they can. You've probably heard somebody say that "the eyes are windows to the soul." You can look into a person's eyes and see what they're feeling and thinking, which could be described as a way of talking without words. Well, if the speaker's eyes are silent at times, we're guessing that means she can be really hard to read, which only makes her more exciting to the speaker.

Line 5: At the top of the next stanza, the speaker says that his lady's "slightest look will unclothe [him]." Notice that we've gone from inscrutable, silent eyes that don't seem to be paying much attention to him to ones that are at least sparing him a glance. Smitten, he goes crazy for this and opens right up to his illusive lady. The speaker gives his lover's eyes power by giving them power over the physical world. Metaphorically at least, she can open his tightly closed fingers with the smallest of glances.

Line 19: We have to hand it to Cummings. Lines like "the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses" make our heads hurt in a wonderful way. First of all, it's cool how this line brings us back to the silent eyes from line 2. Here, the eyes have a "voice," but it's not any typical voice. It's "deeper than all roses."

Roses wordplay conjures the image of a lady whose eyes are deep and mysterious. When the speaker looks into them, he can't quite read what's there, but he is mesmerized.

Roses

Cummings manages to pluck these flowers from the garden of clichés and replants them in fertile new ground.

Lines 7-8: The flower of love gets its first mention in the second stanza, where the speaker uses a simile to compare the way his lover opens him emotionally to the way spring opens roses. The already obvious love symbolism is taken to an erotic place with all this talk of spring "touching skilfully, mysteriously." Cummings also describes the speaker, who we assume is male, as the flower. It's probably sexist, but the popular perception generally relates women to flowers.

Lines 9-12: The third stanza carries the image of the rose through, but this time uses another simile to compare the way the speaker's lover can close him down emotionally to the way a rose shuts in winter. All the connotations from the previous line apply here, too. What's interesting is that this doesn't come off as a sad image at all. Instead, it's described as being beautiful. The act of it closing itself against the cold is celebrated.

Lines 17-20: The speaker ties up this extended metaphor of his lover being able to open and close him like a rose in the final stanza by saying that he has no idea how she has this mysterious power. He goes on to say that whatever this power is, it's "deeper than all roses." If we think about it like there's some deep natural force that make roses grow and if you stare into the folds of a rose's petals, it really can seem like you're staring into another dimension. You can get lost in the patterns of its design. The speaker says, "the voice of [his lover's] eyes is deeper than all roses [our emphasis]." So she's even more powerful and more mysterious than a rose.

Somewhere I have never travelled
gladly - E. E. Cummings.

• Love Song / Poem

Theme:

- Love is beautiful
- Love gives power to your lover.
- Mysterious impact of love.

Cummings uses incorrect syntax, grammar.
→ Key factor of modernism is the defiance of rules.

Rose → extended metaphor

Synesthesia → the production of a sense impression relating to one sense or part of the body by stimulation of another sense / part of the body.
→ 'voice in your eyes'

[He was a non-conformist].