



CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

About the poet:

Edward Estlin Cummings was born in October, 1894, and was an American poet, painter, playwright, and author. Inspired by Modernist art movements like Surrealism and Cubism which sought to reimagine art and break out of the traditional rules of painting, Cummings began writing poetry that similarly bent and broke accepted literary and poetic rules and structures. He experimented with punctuation, spacing, capitalisation, and syntax (the order of words in a sentence). Despite this inclination toward rule breaking, much of Cummings's work is still fairly traditional. Many of his poems are sonnets, and even the poem for study below - *somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond* - is structured into five neat quatrains and employs a traditional ABAB rhyme toward the end.

About this poem:

- E. E. Cummings married three times. His first marriage to Elaine Orr (who left her husband for him) lasted only 6 months. His second marriage, to Ann Barton was a stormy, passionate one lasting only a few years. He at last met Marion Morehouse, an actress, model, and photographer, whom he married and lived with for the remaining 30 years of his life.
- The poem 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 poem is full of images of the natural world: flowers, rain, references to the seasons. "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.

IMAGERY

EXTENDED METAPHOR – the speaker sees his lover as a powerful being who has the power to 'close' and 'unclose' him. Perhaps Cummings is saying that his lover has the power to open up the world of love to him and at the same time to close the same doors preventing him from entering into the wonderfully mystical and intoxicating experience of love.

PARADOX(a statement that appears contradictory but contains some truth) – 'somewhere I have never travelled' – he has experienced something similar but not in the fashion that he is embarking on now, and therein is the paradox and he is fully prepared to embark on this new 'journey'.

PERSONIFICATION – 'the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses' – he reads the messages in her eyes that are full of promise and mystery and sees the same in the 'rose' the universal symbol of love. He sees the beauty and nurturing nature of woman embodied in nature.

ALLITERATION – (line 7) 'petal by petal' reinforces the supremacy she has over him – like the children's game of 'he/she loves me' which shows a whimsical part to the author. This also shows that she is breaking down his defenses little by little.

(line 15) 'compels me with the colour of its countries' with implies that his love is patriotic in nature, ceaseless and unyielding, something he would sacrifice himself for.

SIMILE –

- (lines 5-16) 'your slightest look easily will unclose me...closed myself as fingers'. The speaker's lover is able to break down those emotionally protective walls he had built around himself at will. This is unusual for a man to be fragile hence the comparison to a flower.
- (lines 10 -12) 'my life will shut...this flower imagines' This is a reinforcement of the power she has over him – not a destructive power but a power that is also a 'journey' of self-discovery and enlightenment about the power and nature of love.
- (lines 17-18) 'you open always petal by petal myself as Spring opens'. Spring is seen as a Goddess(the Greek goddess of love, beauty and fertility[Spring] was Aphrodite) whose impact is almost magical on the speaker. She forces him to open up emotionally and display vulnerabilities like a flower opening up to bloom in Spring.

STRUCTURE • Free verse • Five stanzas / quatrains that each deals with a separate point • No formal rhyme scheme • Final stanza regular rhyme ABAB = resolution • The odd punctuation and syntax(word order) implies that the speaker is unable to express the effect of the person he is in love with, has on him. He has become a stuttering and blabbering fool so to speak. • The lack of capitalisation especially with the pronoun 'I' supports the poet's devotion to his lover placing them on equal footing, a seal on his selfless devotion to his lover.	THEMES • Love: similar to many traditional love poems, the speaker spends a lot of time talking about his lover's eyes, and uses the well-worn symbol of a rose. • Power: the poet highlights the inexplicable power of love and how his lover has total control over his emotions through her subtlety and mysterious grace, which gives her goddess like powers over him. • Awe: His feelings connects him to something bigger than the both of them and he marvels totally in awe at the power that love has. • Man & the natural world: References to flowers, rain and seasons are symbols of how Man and nature are and exist in harmony.
TONE/MOOD Mood: joyful/optimistic/inspired/amazed/powerful Tone: Bewildered/joyful/admirable/wondrous/revered • This poem combines bewilderment at love's mysterious power with a joyful acceptance of his love. • The speaker's tone is one of admiration, awe, wonder and reverence. He finds it amazing that the mere presence can overwhelm his senses, thoughts and emotions. The expression in her eyes conveys the intensity of her love for him. The usual connection the speaker makes between the senses suggests that even without words, there is communication an understanding between the lovers. There is the idea of love's being inexplicable, mysterious and spiritual. There is no logic to explain why his beloved is able to exert absolute power over him yet instinctively he is willing to accede to her.	DICTION • "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. • The 'journey into the mysteries of the universe—and the human heart—is helped by Cummings's constant use of the long 'O' sound. Throughout the poem, Cummings rhymes words like "enclose", "unclose", and "rose". He also connects it all with assonance by using "open" and "opens". So, throughout the poem, we hear the "oh" sound, which is also a subtle sonic reminder of the sense of awe the speaker experiences on his journey of love. The following Symbols are crucial in understanding the poem • Touch There is a lot of touch imagery in this poem. You'll find mentions of fingers, hands, mysterious touches, and textures. The motif also fits neatly with the poem's overall use of paradoxical images. • Eyes In a way they can: "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. • Roses 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, presumably a male, as the flower.