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somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond –

***e e cummings* (1894 – 1962)**

somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond
any experience, your eyes have their silence:
in your most frail gesture are things which enclose me,
or which i cannot touch because they are too near

your slightest look easily will unclose me 5
though i have closed myself as fingers,
you open always petal by petal myself as Spring opens
(touching skilfully, mysteriously) her first rose

or if your wish be to close me, i and 10
my life will shut very beautifully, suddenly,
as when the heart of this flower imagines
the snow carefully everywhere descending;

nothing which we are to perceive in this world equals
the power of your intense fragility: whose texture
compels me with the color of its countries, 15
rendering death and forever with each breathing

(i do not know what it is about you that closes
and opens; only something in me understands
the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses)
nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands 20



ee cummings reads 'Somewhere I have never travelled...'.mp4

THEMES AND MEANINGS

The narrator of this love poem tries to express the inexpressible, to describe the intensity of his emotions. He finds himself unable to meet the challenge except in paradoxical words that simultaneously express his surprise and wonder at the mystery of love.

The narrator describes the love as similar to a foreign territory, an area never before explored; the effect of the journey is stunning, evoking a disorientation which causes the senses to overlap. Yet at the same time he finds himself unable to delineate the specific elements which attract him; instead, he explores the inexpressible by saying that the sense of touch fails when objects are too near. Love can also bring about a beautiful and sudden seclusion, with the individual shutting out other demands in favor of love; the speaker depicts such a closing by using the image of a flower as it begins to close when it senses falling snow.

Cummings's descriptions of his beloved as having texture and color indicate her depth of character, but they also, when combined with the word "*countries*" at the end of line 15, suggest mapmaking and tie in with the poem's initial image of traveling. Just as explorers of new lands are awed by their initial discoveries, so the narrator reacts with surprise at the variety he finds in his lover, a woman who with her very breathing destroys or breaks down the fear of death and eternity.

The narrator reiterates his inability to understand exactly what it is about the beloved that possesses the power to open and close him. The image of the garden is repeated, as the flower (rose) symbolises both the narrator and his beloved, and the powerful final line states the incomparable quality of love. No body and no thing (lines 13 and 20) can truly attain the level of the narrator and his beloved. The rain, nurturer of the symbolic garden, though it is important, pales in importance to the small hands of the beloved, whose touch has moved the narrator to ecstasy, to a height of emotion never before experienced.

The five senses, emphasized and raised by the association with love, are combined with the traditional and archetypal symbols of a garden and flowers to serve as symbols for wordlessness, for the inexpressible expressed and given life by the poet's effort.

somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond

ANALYSIS

SYMBOLS, IMAGERY, WORDPLAY

ANALYSIS: FORM AND METER

FREE VERSE

This poem doesn't fall into any kind of established form or meter, but you can totally tell that Cummings wasn't just slapping random words on the page for fun. It might seem a little illogical at first, but the poem has a logic all its own. At first glance, the poem actually looks really tidy. Cummings doesn't do the crazy line spacing that you see in a lot of his stuff. Instead you've got five stanzas, each with four lines, making quatrains.

Despite the stodgy look of the lines on the page, most of the poem lacks a formal rhyme scheme. Still, Cummings has some fun with rhyming words. In the first two stanzas he rhymes "*enclose me*" (Stanza 1, Line 3) with "*unclose me*" (Stanza 2, Line 5). Then he ties all this talk about closing together by comparing it to the closing of a "*rose*" (Stanza 2, Line 8). In the second stanza, he also mixes in some **assonance** by using "*open*" and "*opens*" (Stanza 2, Line 7). These words may not rhyme exactly, but the long 'o' sound carries through it all, connecting this whole opening/closing motif he's got running through the poem.

Cummings brings the original rhyme back again in the third stanza, with "*close me*" (Stanza 3, Line 9). Then, in the final stanza, he pulls the most unexpected thing he could and gives it a regular rhyme scheme: a-b-a-b – where the letter represents the end rhyme sound of each line:

<i>(i do not know what it is about you that closes</i>	A
<i>and opens;only something in me understands</i>	B
<i>the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses)</i>	A
<i>nobody,not even the rain,has such small hands</i>	B (Stanza 5, Lines 17 – 20)

So, he basically morphs the "ose" rhyme from stanza 2 into the similar sounding "oses" rhyme in lines 17 and 19. Then, he ties it all together with this extended **metaphor** of the speaker's lover opening and closing him like a rose. The regular rhyme scheme created by rhyming "*understands*" (Line 18) with "*hands*" (Line 20) also gives a sense of resolution to the poem. It's like Cummings is saying, "Hey, in case, you didn't notice, we're at the end of the poem, and this kind of sums up what I was trying to get at the whole time."

ANALYSIS: SPEAKER

The speaker never tells us his name, but he does make one thing clear: he is totally, completely, head-over-heels in love. How do we know? Because he talks about it in every line of the poem. We can tell that he's kind of a deep guy, though; he's not in love with this girl for any superficial reasons like mega-hot good looks. Instead, the speaker

is entranced by the deep mysteriousness of her soul. He doesn't quite know who she is, and it's this mystery that keeps him hooked.

Another interesting thing to think about is the way the speaker constantly refers to his lover opening and closing him like a flower, as in the lines *"you open always petal by petal myself as Spring opens/ (touching skilfully, mysteriously) her first rose"* (Lines 7 – 8). Now, typically, this sort of image would be reserved to describe a female, because women are stereotypically associated with flowers. However, most critics of the poem always sort of assume that it's a male describing himself in typically feminine terms. Why would they assume that? It's probably because the poem was written by a male. At the time Cummings wrote this – in the 1930s – society was still pretty male-dominated, so the speaker could be using this gender switch to really emphasise the power his lover has over him. What makes this guy a bit different from the stereotypical males of his time is that the power she has over him only seems to make him love her more.

ANALYSIS: SETTING

Where It All Goes Down

This poem isn't set in a specific place, but its imagery definitely makes some beautiful settings sprout in our minds. There is so much talk about roses that we can't help but imagine a gorgeous garden that is just bursting with them. It's hard not to with lines like *"you open always petal by petal myself as Spring opens/ (touching skilfully, mysteriously) her first rose"* (Lines 7-8). Since it is a passionate love poem, we are imagining red roses, but other colors are nice too.

There is also some talk about the seasons in the poem. Therefore we imagine seeing the speaker and his lover standing in the garden with time passing around them. When spring comes around, the bright flowers gently unfold, and when winter comes they quietly close with *"the snow carefully descending"* around them (Line 12). The whole time, the speaker stands absolutely still, gazing intently into his lover's mysterious eyes.

In that way, then, the most steadfast setting of the poem can be understood as the relationship between the speaker and his lover. It is not only the entirety of the poem's subject matter, it is also the setting against which the speaker's observations and declarations appear.

ANALYSIS: SOUND CHECK

The speaker takes us on a journey into the eyes of his love. These eyes are deep, too – like portals into new dimensions. Our journey is not fast; we sail slowly with the speaker, like we are on the weirdest Tunnel of Love ride at the most surreal carnival that ever came to town. Cummings occasionally speeds it up for a second by blending words together like *"travelled, gladly"* (Line 1) and *"skilfully, mysteriously"* (Line 8). As we hit warp drive for a moment, we can almost feel reality blurring around us as we head deeper into uncharted territory.

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" (Line 3), "unclose" (Line 5), and "rose" (Line 8). He also connects it all with assonance by using "open" and "opens" (Line 7). 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.

(Note: if you listen to this recording of Cummings himself reading the poem, you can really hear the rhymes and the poet's own emphasis on sound.)

ANALYSIS: WHAT'S UP WITH THE TITLE?

Like a bunch of other 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 to us because the poem takes on such a surreal, yet strangely happy voyage into the weird world of the speaker and his lover. As a title, and as a first line, this really sets the stage by telling the readers to buckle their seatbelts.

ANALYSIS: CALLING CARD

Mr Avant: Garde

If you knew anything about Cummings before you started clicking through this guide, you probably knew that he's the poet who said "whatevs" to capitalization, or at least had a lot of fun breaking the rules of it. You might've noticed in "somewhere i have never traveled, gladly beyond" that he doesn't capitalize "i" when the speaker refers to himself. This is a major calling card for Cummings, and many have scratched their head as to why he chose to do this. Is it a gesture of humility? Maybe, maybe not. Of course, Cummings doesn't always use lowercase letters, and when he chooses to capitalize a word it really pops, like in this poem where he capitalizes "*Spring*" – one of his favorite subjects.

Cummings is also known for getting all *avant garde* with syntax, warping each sentence into his own weird world, not really caring if they make sense in a logical way. No mark of punctuation in a Cummings poem is safe from his experiments either. In "*somewhere i have never travelled,gladly beyond*," he does whatever he wants with commas, semicolons, and colons, bending them all to his unique artistic vision. Cummings also gets crazy with spacing, sometimes spreading words all over the page to create poems whose visual presentation is just as important as the words themselves. "*somewhere i have never travelled,gladly beyond*" is far from the most drastic example of this, but you get a taste of it in the way he smooshes words together, like in the title itself. You can also get more examples of his boldly experimental style [here](#) and [here](#).

GENERAL SUMMARY

We could summarize this poem really quickly by saying it's about a guy who's in love, like *really* in love. Of course, if you described it that way, you wouldn't really get the gist of just how deeply the speaker feels for his lover.

He starts off by telling us that he's off on some fabulous journey deep into his lover's mysterious eyes. We hear all about how she has amazing powers over him. This lady can open and close him emotionally with the flick of her hand or the smallest of glances. He seems to be just as happy being shut down as being opened up. Whatever she does is amazing to him.

The speaker takes it even further when he compares himself to a rose being opened and closed by the seasons. He even goes so far as to say that his lover can open him wide to the infinite: the universe, death, and whatever comes after. In the end, he admits that he has no idea what gives her so much power over him. But whatever it is, he's more than okay with it. He's obsessed.

STANZA 1 SUMMARY

Lines 1 – 2

*somewhere i have never travelled,gladly beyond
any experience,your eyes have their silence:*

- In the first line of the poem, the speaker tells us he's off on a journey to a place he's never been.
- The speaker is happy about his trip because he uses the word "*gladly*".
- Did you notice that Cummings compresses/compacts "*travelled*" and "*gladly*" together without leaving a space after the comma?
- By compressing these words closer together visually, he compacts the ideas they represent together too.
- Thus, the happiness that this journey brings is a fundamental part it.
- As we move down to the second line, we find ourselves in a predicament – of sorts. More specifically, there's some **enjambment**, where the line from before feeds right over to this one.
- We now find out the speaker is going "*gladly beyond any experience*".
- But where exactly is the speaker going and what kind of experiences is he expecting to have there?
- The speaker answers our burning questions by talking about how silent somebody's eyes are.
- This person is not going on a physical journey at all. Instead, he is staring into somebody's eyes and disappearing into her soul.
- All this talk about staring into eyes is starting to make us think that we are talking about a love poem.
- What's the deal with him describing the eyes as "*silent*," though? Eyes can't talk, so aren't they *all* silent?
- For some thoughts on that, check out the "Eyes" section in "Symbols, Imagery, Wordplay."

Lines 3 – 4

*in your most frail gesture are things which enclose me,
or which i cannot touch because they are too near*

- This is a love poem.
- Whoever's eyes the narrator is staring into have enormous power over him.
- All she has to do is make a tiny little gesture, and he's completely under her control. This lady's magical love powers make the speaker feel all kinds of confused emotions.
- He feels completely enclosed by them, but still can't seem to touch them because they are too close.
- So, how can you not touch something that's surrounding you on all sides? Could it mean that she's so close that she's a part of him?
- It's just your standard Cummings-style **paradox**, which evokes the mysterious unknowable power of love.
- Read more on this in the "Touch" section in "Symbols, Imagery, Word play."

STANZA 2 SUMMARY

Lines 5 – 6

*your slightest look easily will uncloze me
though i have closed myself as fingers,*

- We are back to talking about the mysterious eyes, which only have to barely glance at the speaker to have a major effect on him.
- He tells us that his lover's eyes "*uncloze him*", which translates to us as opening him up emotionally.
- Notice how, in a poem that uses very little rhyme at all, Cummings chooses to use the word "*uncloze*", here, which sounds a whole lot like "*enclose*" from the first stanza. The word "*open*" is what most people would probably say for this idea, but instead Cummings uses the weird word "*uncloze*".
- This really makes those words prominent to us, and we are guessing the ideas they represent are going to be pretty important as well. Let's just keep an eye on this for now.
- So, thus far the speaker has gone from being totally surrounded in the first stanza to being totally opened up by his lover in the second. We wonder what will happen next.
- Don't miss the effective **simile** for being closed off emotionally here when he says he has closed himself "*as fingers*".
- This brings to our minds the image of a balled-up fist that gradually relaxes and opens.

Lines 7 – 8

*you open always petal by petal myself as Spring opens
(touching skilfully,mysteriously)her first rose*

- Cummings launches another **simile** for being opened up emotionally by comparing the feeling to the way flowers open in spring.
- Did you notice the weird syntax here too?
- Why doesn't the speaker just say something like, "*You always open me like Spring opens her first rose?*"
- One reason is because that would be a much more boring way to say it. We think it is effective how line 7 opens with "*you open always petal by petal*," tricking us into thinking that he is talking about the girl.
- It is the unfamiliar structure of the line that highlights the gender reversal going on here.
- To us, this makes the speaker's lover seem even more powerful.
- Speaking of power, did you notice that we have come upon our first and only capitalized word? "**Spring**".
- Cummings was totally obsessed with spring and wrote a lot of poems about it.
- To us, it seems like the choice of using a capital "**S**" almost **personifies** Spring, making her into a being instead of an annual set of weather conditions. We imagine her as some sort of nature goddess with powers that mere mortals just can't understand.
- So, when the speaker compares the power of his lover over him to the power of this goddess, we are seriously impressed.
- We also notice that once again Cumming has compressed together some words with "*touching skillfully, mysteriously*", which blurs together the ideas there and seems to up the erotic undertones (especially with the inclusion of "*touching*").

STANZA 3 SUMMARY

Lines 9 – 10

*or if your wish be to close me, i and
my life will shut very beautifully, suddenly,*

- Now the speaker makes his lover seem even more powerful. Not only can she open him up at will, she can also close him back down again just by wishing it.
- What is crazy is that the speaker doesn't seem to mind at all. He says that this happens "*beautifully, suddenly*".
- It seems like this girl (and we're just assuming here that the speaker is male, the addressed female) can do no wrong in his eyes.
- Here again, we have a case of compressed words, where "*beautifully*" and "*suddenly*" become kind of the same idea.

Lines 11 – 12

*as when the heart of this flower imagines
the snow carefully everywhere descending;*

- Cummings brings back the flower **simile** here, connecting it now with the closing of the speaker's emotions.
- He also brings back the idea of seasons. While not actually using the word "*winter*", he alludes to the cold season by talking about snow.

- It's interesting that he says the "*heart*" of the rose is the thing that senses the cold coming.
- The word "*heart*", of course, arises in love poems just about as much as roses do.
- Though a literal heart's main job is to pump blood, metaphorical hearts pump love and every other emotion through our bodies.
- Here, the heart is not being all warm and fuzzy, though. It is advising the flower to batten down the hatches, because the bitter cold of winter is ahead.
- Once again, this allusion to the seasons seems to give the speaker's lover the same unstoppable power that the turning of the year has over flowers.

STANZA 4 SUMMARY

Lines 13 – 14

*nothing which we are to perceive in this world equals
the power of your intense fragility:whose texture*

- As if the speaker hadn't already made it clear that his lover has a lot of power over him, he takes it a step further here.
- Not only is she just as powerful as nature itself, he now says that her powers are beyond anything that we can even conceive of existing on earth. It's like he is saying that she's God, or the Universe, or whatever supreme-being or energy flow he believes in.
- What's interesting here is that it's her "*intense fragility*" that makes her so powerful. Usually, we equate fragility with weakness, but here it is the lover's fragility that attracts the speaker to her, which **ironically** gives her so much power over him.
- This is the second time a version of the word "*fragile*" comes up in the poem. Remember, we heard about her "*fragile gesture*" in Stanza 1, Line 3?
- The word is transformed here, though. It goes from an adjective ("*fragile*") describing a noun ("*gesture*"), to a noun in its own right ("*fragility*"). In fact, it even gets its own adjective this time: "*intense*".
- It's like the speaker is pulling out all the stops to let his lover know just how important this facet of her personality is to him.
- The word "*fragility*" becomes even more prominent because Cummings pulls another one of his compressed word tricks: "*fragility:whose texture*".
- Taking the space after the colon away highlights the fact that Cummings has chosen to use the word "*whose*". You could interpret this as implying that the fragility is a living breathing being all on her own.
- We should also point out that Cummings is using the colon in a different way here. If you were worried about proper grammar – which Cummings clearly wasn't – there would be a comma here.
- When he compresses/compacts words together earlier in the poem, he leaves a comma between them, but now it's a colon.
- Usually, a colon comes before a list or an explanation of some kind. Could it be that the next couple of lines are intended to be thought of as an explanation of this all-powerful fragility?

Lines 15 – 16

*compels me with the color of its countries,
rendering death and forever with each breathing*

- We continue hearing about the all-powerful fragility with this cryptic line, in which the speaker says that he's compelled by "*the color of its countries*".
- Some might say that Cummings chose these words just because he thought the alliteration would be fun.
- You've got three words starting with the same hard 'c' sound: "*compels*", "*color*" and "*countries*".
- However, the idea of colorful countries seems to totally fit in the poem to us, because it makes us think of distant, exotic lands.
- The stanza ends with a line that once more makes the lover sound like a full-out goddess.
- Anybody who can "*render death and forever with each breathing*" is not to be messed with and absolutely extraordinary.
- This divine lady seems to have control over life, death, and whatever comes after.

STANZA 5 SUMMARY

Line 17 – 19

*(i do not know what it is about you that closes
and opens; only something in me understands
the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses)*

- The speaker has taken on this journey into the mysterious realms of his lover's power, and here in the last stanza appears to throw up his hands.
- He has been trying to pinpoint exactly what it is that gives her so much power over him, but here basically admits that he has no idea. She can open and close him at will, and there's nothing he can do about it.
- He also admits that some deep part of him knows that he'll never quite know.
- Notice how he brings back the idea of the eyes having a voice – SYNESTHESIA – and, of course, the image of roses. Check out "Symbols, Imagery, Wordplay" for breakdowns of those elements.

Line 20

nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands

- With this last line we get a little more **personification** when the speaker implies that the rain has hands.
- However, once again we're reminded that his lover is more powerful than a force of nature.
- Once again her power is subtle, or you could even say fragile.
- Her hands are even smaller than the rain's, giving her the ability to open and close the speaker more deftly than the rain can open and close a rose. We are again

reminded of the **paradox** of the immense power this addressed person has over our speaker and her total fragility.

- We have more compressed/compacted words here too.
- First, there's "*nobody, not*". To us compressing these two negative words together seems to emphasise that *absolutely* nobody has got amazing small hands like the speaker's lover.
- So, a couple words later when "*rain, has*" comes up, it ironically emphasises what the rain doesn't have.

THE POEM SOMEWHERE I HAVE NEVER TRAVELLED, GLADLY BEYOND

This poem, like many by e.e.cummings, is experimental, abstract and irregular. He wrote in this unconventional style for most of his career and was unapologetic. A skilful artist, he also 'sketched' his often fragmentary poems on the page.

Some critics thought him childish and sentimental and claimed he was undermining the progress of poetry. But e.e.cummings stuck to his guns and at the time of his death in 1962 he was second only to Robert Frost in popularity.

Innovative, anarchic and playful, his poetry takes leaps and bounds where others dare to even tread. It's this spirit of adventure that endears him so much to those who prefer to stay outside of the formal 'regulations' of poetry.

For example, in *somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond*, the title is taken from the first line and is immediately controversial, a small i being used instead of a capital, to signify the self. No other poet attempted such radical rearrangement of grammar and form. But why?

E.E. Cummings spent some time in Paris and was influenced by none other than James Joyce and T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, who encouraged him to break away from genteel mainstream verse and go for something a little more idiosyncratic.

It's not difficult to see the stream-of-consciousness technique bubbling through the surface of his poetry at times. Think of the poet taking a deep breath, or lots of little ones, and discovering the intimacies of heart and mind, laid bare in difficult lines, upside down syntax and unique form.

Little wonder fellow poet Randall Jarrell called him a "*moonshiner of language*".

POEM: SOMEWHERE I HAVE NEVER TRAVELLED, GLADLY BEYOND**THEME**

The theme is without doubt love, but which kind of love? A lustful love? A romantic love? Familial love? Love for a friend?

Some say the poem was written following the birth of his daughter, hence the reference to frail and fragility. Some insist it was an ode to his second wife, Anne Barton. Others claim it to be an attempt to transcend sexuality, lust and love.

READ THROUGH

You have to have your wits about you when reading a Cummings poem! Take time to follow the unusual rhythms and don't be afraid to slow down if you get caught up in the spontaneous chaos of his syntax.

For starters, the **punctuation** can mislead the reader so scan with care. Read through twice, slowly, then read a third time at a more relaxed pace. By doing this the rhythms become more obvious, and internal rhymes and devices begin to show through. Note down any odd structural features – parentheses for example (brackets in the UK) and metrical irregularities.

Due to the **enjambment** and careful placement of colons, commas, parentheses and so on, the five stanzas could well be one long monologue whispered into the ear of an intimate. It takes time to get the breaks right but several attempts lead to much clearer understanding.

STANZA BY STANZA ANALYSIS**FIRST STANZA**

The speaker is trying to convey something that transcends normality – probably love, or the idea of love – which could be construed as a journey/travel, beyond words almost, taking us straight to the silent eyes of the lover. A “*frail gesture*” points to this being, a female lover, but despite this there's power enough to “*enclose*” – surround, shut in on all sides, encircle – the male, the speaker, the poet, who cannot use his sense of touch to try and comprehend.

SECOND STANZA

Again the visual aspect of this love affair is emphasised, the speaker suggesting that, although he is closed, (like a tight fist?), the slightest look will open him up. To enhance the imagery a rose, the supreme flower associated with passionate love, is introduced and it is the season of Spring opening it petal by petal. Note the parentheses with the adverbs, a sort of fine tuning.

THIRD STANZA

In contrast, the speaker now says that he will end his life should she wish it; he will fade away somewhat like the rose when it feels the cold kiss of snowflakes. Note the separate *i* and *my life* and the two adverbs in tandem, *beautifully, suddenly*. The **personified** rose gains a consciousness at the same time.

FOURTH STANZA

The speaker, in Shakespearean fashion, compares his lover's fragility to all the things of the world, which can never measure up. In each breath is death, and forever. So we have a profound mix of power, texture and colour combining metaphysically to force – compel – this lover into a kind of paradise rearranged.

Note the long vowels of the last line: “**rendering death and forever with each breathing**”.

FIFTH STANZA

Again the **parentheses** appear which suggests immediacy and reflection. The speaker has no clue as to why she has such an effect on him, like opening and closing, light and dark, winter and spring, something magical exists in her eyes that speaks mysterious but meaningful things, beyond the language of roses. The rain is not a thing but a body in a **paradoxical** universe.

TONE/MOOD

This is an in-the-moment love poem written for a special partner. Perhaps the speaker has fallen under the spell of love and is trying to put into words what it feels like to look into a special one's eyes.

And what an unusual and informal declaration we have here. It's both profound and mysterious.

Note the reference to the season of Spring, the traditional time of year when poets find their Muse, and also to the rose, the iconic flower, a symbol of love and dedication. It is a soulful, spontaneous outburst expressing the mystery and beauty of that elusive creature called love.

POETIC DEVICES

The first line suggests that the speaker is taking a journey, or not, somewhere, but only in the metaphysical sense, *beyond experience*. You could say this is not a road less travelled, it's a **metaphor** yet to be unraveled.

Note the closeness of the comma to **travelled and gladly**, as if the poet is trying to squeeze every last drop out of the line. Out of his relationship? And it's repeated twice in the third stanza, between **me and i** and **beautifully and suddenly**.

Cummings adds parentheses () from time to time, to emphasise the immediate feel of the words, as if the speaker is whispering an aside to a would-be audience.

There is no formal end rhyme in this free verse poem, except in the last stanza, but there is some internal rhyme which provides a thread from stanza to stanza. Note the use of *enclose/unclose/closed/rose/close/closes/roses*.

Personification is used in stanza two, *as Spring opens/(touching skilfully,mysteriously) her first rose* and again in the final stanza – *nobody,not even the rain,has such small hands*

Whilst the majority of lines are hexameters – 6 beats per line, 12 syllables – one or two are pentameters, with feminine endings, de-stressed, where the voice tends to quieten.

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THEME

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.

somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond'

Understanding the poem

- 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.

QUESTIONS:

- List the elements of nature that are referred to in the poem.
 - Quote the word that tells us that the snow is not wilfully destructive.
- Identify the figure of speech in 'though I have closed myself as fingers' (line 6).
- Explain how 'fragility' can have 'power' (line 14).
 - Describe the extent and ability of this power.
- Describe the atmosphere or mood of this poem.
 - How does the poet create this mood?
- Explore the metaphor of travel as it is used in the poem, and evaluate its effectiveness.
- Comment critically on Cummings' unusual use of punctuation and sentence structure.

ANSWERS:

- 'petals' (Line 7); 'Spring' (line 7); 'flower' (line 11), 'snow' (line 12); 'roses' (line 19) and 'rain' (line 20)
 - 'carefully' (line 12)
- This is an example of a simile.
- Although this seems like a paradox, something extremely delicate and seemingly vulnerable that excites such a strong reaction from the observer can have 'power' (line 14). This power could be to lead the observer to intervene, protect or any other emotive response in direct response to the quality of 'fragility'.
 - The subject's fragility provokes a strong response in the speaker:

He is inspired to appreciate her all the more as her tiniest gesture draws him in and causes him to declare his undying love for her, perhaps until death separates them. She has the power to move him, to cause him to experience a wide range of emotions he is unfamiliar with, and which he cannot explain or justify.

4. (a) The poem is full of mystery as the speaker attempts to articulate the inexplicable, intangible allure; there is a sense of magical enchantment at play.
- (b) The imagery of travelling into previously unknown territory contributes to the sense of the speaker trying to explain the inexplicable. The images of advance and retreat, opening and closing, and the wonder of the minute elements of nature all combine to create the sense of mystery, charm and magical appeal.
5. The speaker compares his metaphorical journey in this relationship to travelling in foreign, previously unknown lands. This is uncharted territory for him as he has clearly never experienced a connection to another in this way before. He appears willing to embark on this adventure as he 'gladly' (line 1) succumbs to her bidding to venture 'beyond' (line 1) the known. Her power to move him seems akin to opening up vistas of a new world with 'the colour of its countries' (line 15) compelling him to declare his devotion to her.
6. The unusual use of punctuation gives fresh significance to words, images and phrases, prompting the reader to take an active role to decode the possible meanings. For example, the use of parenthesis almost seems to have the opposite effect of its conventional use as we examine the 'touching skilfully, mysteriously' (line 8) and the confession-like whisper of the final stanza. The lack of capital letters renders the first-person 'I' insignificant, at the mercy of the subject's charms, while the capital for 'Spring' (line 7) awards the season with power and stature. The unusual sentence structure compels the reader to take time to unravel possible layers. For instance, 'you open always petal by petal myself' (line 7) give 'always' prominence, and suggests the careful painstaking opening she applies to reach the speaker and his inability to resist.

VOCABULARY

frail	delicate, fragile, weak, vulnerable, physically weak
gesture	movement of limb to convey feeling, movement made to communicate
enclose	surround, shut in on all sides, encircle
slightest	of little importance, smallest,

petal	each of the parts of the inner envelope (corolla) of a flower
skilfully	expertly, masterfully, brilliantly, accomplished
mysteriously	puzzling, baffling, uncomprehendingly, secretly
descending	to go or come down
perceive	see, observe notice
intense	of a high degree, extreme, passionate
fragility	delicateness, breakability, weakness, frailty
texture	the feel or appearance of a surface or substance, features, character, structure
compels	to bring about by force, rousing strong interest or attention
rendering	make, cause to become