

# somewhere i have never travelled,gladly



## SUMMARY

Looking into your quiet eyes takes me somewhere I've never been before, and is a joyful experience like nothing I've ever experienced. There's something about even your subtlest gesture that has the power to completely envelop me, though I can't put my finger on what exactly it is because I'm too wrapped up in it.

The smallest glance from you is all it takes to open me up. Even though I've closed myself tightly, like fingers clenched into a fist, you always open me petal by petal, just like spring delicately and mysteriously opens her first rose.

Or, if you want to me to close myself back up, I'll do so quickly and beautifully, like a rose that senses that winter's coming.

There's nothing in the entire world that can match the power of your extreme fragility. Your delicate nature, with all its vivid color and complexity, makes me love you, and contains death and eternity within each breath.

(I don't know what it is about you that has such a hold over me; it's just that looking into your eyes is more powerful than any love I've felt before). Nothing, not even raindrops, are as small and delicate as your hands.

The speaker can't explain the power his beloved has over him, however, and feels unable to "touch" whatever it is that's got him so heart-eyed because such things are "too near." It seems the speaker can't totally grasp the spell he's under while he's under it. There's no way for him to look at his love objectively, the poem implies, because he's too caught up in the *experience* of love itself, which is apparently much more powerful than the desire to *understand* it.

There is tenderness and beauty in the speaker's comparison of his beloved's influence over him to that of spring as it "skilfully,mysteriously" touches "her first rose," implying that part of what makes this love so extraordinary is the speaker's inability to put a finger on what it is that he finds so compelling about his beloved. When he says of this person, "your eyes have their silence," this seems to illustrate some mystery at the heart of their relationship—that there are things about this person that remain totally unknown to the speaker. And yet, that seems to be part of what's so exciting; even those silent eyes say something "deeper than all roses." The part of this person that the speaker doesn't understand seems to be more intoxicating to him than any other love he's ever known.

The speaker thus readily and joyfully surrenders to his beloved's power, forgoing understanding in favor of the mystery and intensity of his feelings. He isn't trying to protect himself or control what he doesn't understand; rather, he's allowing himself to feel this love acutely, trusting that its mystery and intensity is what makes it so special.

### Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-20



## THEMES



### THE MYSTERY AND INTENSITY OF LOVE

"somewhere i have never travelled,gladly beyond" is a poem about love—specifically, the kind of love that has the power to utterly unravel (and re-ravel) a person, even if they can't quite figure out why. The speaker is experiencing a love unlike anything he's ever felt before, described as a place to which he's "never travelled." The speaker doesn't quite understand the hold that his beloved has on him, yet surrenders to it willingly, simply reveling in the intensity of his feelings. In this way, the poem suggests that love is something that goes beyond rational understanding—that it's a force more powerful than reason itself.

The speaker is entirely at the mercy of his beloved, wrapped up in even the "most frail gesture" of this other person. In other words, even the littlest thing this person does—a flick of the wrist, a nod of the head—has the power to set the speaker's heart racing. If this person wants the speaker to "open," he's on it. Now the beloved wants the speaker to "close"? He'll "shut" up his entire "life"—and he'll do so without complaint, quickly and "beautifully" like a rose (not incidentally, a classic [symbol](#) of love) closing itself off from winter snow.



### LOVE AND VULNERABILITY

The speaker of "somewhere i have never travelled,gladly beyond" repeatedly calls attention to the fact his beloved is very delicate. The speaker is attracted to this "intense fragility," something that, rather [paradoxically](#), holds immense power over the speaker. In fact, it is this fragility that has the ability to quickly unravel all the speaker's defenses and coax him out of his shell. That is, his beloved's delicate nature seems to make the speaker himself more loving and emotionally vulnerable. In this way, the poem illustrates the transformative power of gentle, delicate love, which it implies can lead people to be their most tender, unguarded selves.

Despite the power the speaker's beloved holds over him, this person isn't physically imposing by a long shot; the speaker mentions this person's "small hands," their gentle touch and "frail gesture[s]," and, of course, their "intense fragility." All of

these things make the beloved even more compelling in the speaker's mind, and, in this way, the beloved's fragility becomes a source of power. In fact, this fragility is more powerful than anything else in the world, the speaker declares, going on to [personify](#) it as a sort of living entity that contains death and eternity itself in each breath.

Such power isn't terrifying or dangerous; on the contrary, the beloved's fragility elicits the speaker's own vulnerability. The speaker claims that this person's "slightest look easily will unclose" him—that is, open him up—despite the fact that the speaker has seemingly closed himself tightly like "fingers" balled into a fist. The beloved doesn't pry these [metaphorical](#) fingers apart with force, but rather tenderly opens the speaker in the same way that the spring opens the petals of a rose. In other words, the speaker drops his guard as willingly and as naturally as a flower blooms in the spring. Opening up to his beloved feels natural, gentle, and totally worth it.

Despite his joy in "opening," however, the speaker doesn't feel afraid of being "closed" by his beloved either. It seems that, in opening up to this person, the speaker has embraced the power that love has over him. There is a malleability to the speaker, who recognizes that loving this person means being open to being hurt by or losing them. Again, then, the poem links the experience of deep, consuming love to vulnerability, implying that the former is impossible without the latter.

#### Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-20



## LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

### LINES 1-2

*somewhere i have ...  
... have their silence:*

The poem begins with a [metaphor](#): the speaker is comparing the experience of being in love to a journey, and more specifically to a journey to a place the speaker hasn't been before. This metaphor invites a sense of adventure and thrill into the poem: traveling somewhere new may be challenging and frightening in many ways, but it's also exciting.

It seems the same goes for love, as the speaker is "gladly beyond any experience" he's ever had. In other words, the speaker is fully outside his comfort zone, and yet totally enjoying the thrill of the unknown. (Note that, while we're using masculine pronouns throughout this guide for the sake of clarity, the speaker is ungendered in the poem itself.)

The lack of space between "travelled,gladly" isn't a mistake, but a classic case of Cummings playing with traditional syntax and grammar in his work. Here, the spacing might suggest that the

speaker's journey is tied up with his happiness. The [enjambment](#) at the end of line 1, meanwhile, evokes this sense of traveling "beyond" the confines of the known, the line itself thrusting out into the blank space of the page.

Next, the speaker tells his beloved that their "eyes have their silence." Eyes are, of course, always silent; the speaker is being metaphorical again, essentially saying that there are things about his beloved that he doesn't understand. This person is somehow mysterious; the speaker can't read them, so to speak, but still feels transported to some exciting new land upon looking into their eyes.

The [consonance](#) and [assonance](#) in "experience" and "silence" create a subtle echo, as if to imply that the beloved's silence, or mystery, is the reason that the speaker finds himself "beyond any experience." There is something about this relationship that the speaker has never encountered before.

### LINES 3-4

*in your most ...  
... are too near*

The speaker admits that even the smallest or weakest thing his beloved does will affect him, seeming to wrap him up ("enclose me"). This "most frail gesture" might be something like a wave or simple nod; what matters is that it's a little, incidental thing that seems to overwhelm the speaker.

The speaker feels like he can't touch, or grasp, whatever it is within that "gesture" that drives him crazy because he's too close to it. This is a kind of [paradox](#), as one would think that something being closer would be *easier* to grasp, not harder. But the speaker is too caught up in the *experience* of love, the mystery and intensity of it, to be able to understand it rationally or objectively.

Notice that while the poem is written in [free verse](#) (meaning it doesn't adhere to set patterns of [rhyme](#) or [meter](#)), lines sometimes fall into metrical patterns. Here in the first stanza, the lines are all in hexameter, meaning that there are six feet per line (creating 11 or 12 syllables per line). Take lines 3 and 4 for example:

in your | most frail | gesture | are things | which en- |  
close me,  
or which | I can- | not touch | because | they are | too  
near

Line 4 can be read as roughly [iambic](#) (following a pattern of unstressed-stressed syllables), but line 3 follows no real pattern. This combination of structure from the hexameter along with the freedom of free verse contributes to lines that feel somewhat measured, but by no means rigid or predictable.

### LINES 5-6

*your slightest look ...*

... myself as fingers,

The speaker goes on to say that his beloved's "slightest look easily will unclose" him. Note the similarity between this line and line 3 ("in your most frail gesture are things which enclose me").

The use of [polyptoton](#) ("enclose" and "unclose") forces a comparison between these two sentiments. In the first, the speaker feels that his beloved's smallest or most insignificant gesture is enough to wrap him up, to encircle him. This suggests the speaker is bound by or held under the beloved's spell.

In line 5, however, the speaker almost contradicts himself, saying that his beloved's most subtle glance will make him "unclose." In other words, he'll drop his guard and become more vulnerable. The relationship between the words "enclose" and "unclose" suggests that the power of intimacy is that it holds its subject in such a way that they feel safe enough to be vulnerable, to open up. (There's also potential sexual innuendo with the word "unclose" and all the [imagery](#) related to things opening if the speaker is taken as being female.)

This idea is amplified by the speaker's confession that, before him beloved "unclosed" him, he had "closed [himself] as fingers." This [simile](#) evokes fingers balled into a tight fist, illustrating the speaker's guarded or self-protective state before the arrival of his beloved.

## LINES 7-8

you open always ...

... skilfully,mysteriously)her first rose

Line 7 is the longest in the poem, which makes sense given that it describes the slow and gentle way in which the speaker's beloved "opens" him "petal by petal." Through a [simile](#), the speaker is comparing the way his beloved opens him up to the way that a [personified](#) "Spring" makes flowers bloom.

The speaker feels as safe coming out of his dormant state as a flower does when the sun begins to shine in spring. The use of [diacope](#) in this line, seen in the repetition of "open" and "petal by petal," emphasizes the gradual nature of this process—the flower doesn't open all at once, but one petal at a time. Also note that roses are classic [symbols](#) of love (they're the flowers you give on Valentine's Day after all!), which reflects the fact that the speaker is being made anew, in a sense, by the love he feels.

There's an interesting parenthetical in line 8, where the speaker makes sure to clarify that the process of flowers blooming is a delicate one; "Spring" does her work "skilfully,mysteriously" (note how words get pushed together once again here), and the implication is that the speaker's beloved works in the same way. This person doesn't forcefully try to pry the speaker open. The speaker can't quite articulate how this person opens him up, in fact; all he knows that it's a mysterious process that the beloved does with skill.

The speaker's identification with the "first rose" of the season also seems to imply an understanding on his part that this "mysterious" process requires trust. The first rose of the season may very well open too soon and be subject to frost, but there is a profound sense of beauty and hope in this image—the first bloom of spring signaling an end to winter (here akin to the speaker's previous, closed-off state).

Although there is no real [rhyme](#) occurring across this stanza, there is a subtle sonic echo due to the combined presence of [consonance](#) and [assonance](#) in the words "unclose," "closed," "rose," and also the assonance of "open." All these long, round /oh/ sounds combined with the buzzing /z/ sound evokes the slow yet emotional process at hand.

Also note the [sibilance](#) here, in "myself," "Spring," "skilfully," "mysteriously," and "first," which, combined with /z/ consonance in this stanza ("always," "opens," "rose," etc), creates a gentle, hushed atmosphere.

## LINES 9-10

or if your ...

... shut very beautifully,suddenly,

In the third stanza, the speaker shifts gears. Despite the joy he feels in becoming more vulnerable and open, he now says that, if his beloved wants him to "close," he'd waste no time doing so. In fact, he'd take his entire life and "shut [it] very beautifully,suddenly."

In other words, the speaker is so spellbound by this love that even the thought of eventual pain is something he can only visualize as beautiful. There is a sense that, whatever happens, wherever this "journey" of love takes him, he's happy to be present for it.

[Consonance](#) and [assonance](#) add to the beauty of the lines. Take the repetition of /l/ sounds in "close," "life," "will," "beautifully," and "suddenly," and the repetition of long /ee/ sounds in "be," "me," "very," "beautifully," and "suddenly."

Also note there's yet another deliberate lack of space between words here. Again, such idiosyncratic use of punctuation and spacing throughout the poem is characteristic of Cummings's style. While it would be difficult to pinpoint exactly what the effect of these choices are individually, altogether they add up to a sense of urgency and difficulty of expression, as if the speaker is unsure of how to fit the intensity of this experience into conventional language and grammar. In particular, the pushing together of "beautifully,suddenly" seems to accurately reflect the speaker's feeling—the suddenness of emotional pain being not just described but evoked.

## LINES 11-12

as when the ...

... carefully everywhere descending;

The speaker continues by describing what it would look like for

him to be "closed" by his beloved, comparing himself to a [personified](#) flower whose heart "imagines / the snow carefully everywhere descending." In other words, the speaker would close himself up in the same way that a flower does to protect itself from winter frost.

Yet though this [imagery](#) is describing potential pain and heartbreak, there is something very lovely and peaceful about it. The reader knows that falling snow will make the rose close up (a [metaphor](#) for the speaker returning to a more guarded, self-protective state), yet the speaker doesn't express fear or bitterness; instead, he shows acceptance.

The speaker accepts that when it comes to his beloved, he too is fragile, like a flower subject to the weather (here, perhaps representing his beloved's affections). He has no control over what his beloved will do; he doesn't even have any control over whether he will open or close in response to his beloved—it seems all the power belongs to this other person.

Even so, the words "carefully" and "descending" have a very gentle and deliberate tone to them, again suggesting that the speaker isn't concerned about this lack of power. Rather, he seems at ease within his knowledge of what his beloved means to him.

The syntax (the arrangement of words) in line 12 is deft; a more conventional arrangement would have been: "the snow descending everywhere carefully." Simply by reversing the word order, Cummings allows the reader to slow down and pay attention to each word in a way they would be unlikely to do if the order were more familiar.

### LINES 13-14

*nothing which we ...  
... your intense fragility:*

Stanza 4 sees the speaker shift to the first-person plural ("we"). This invites the reader into the poem more directly, including them in whoever "we" is. The speaker might have said "nothing which *human beings* are to perceive," but "we" feels more intimate, which is in keeping with the poem's themes and tone so far.

And because of the shift to "we," there's a sense that the poem is making a broader assertion here. While the speaker is directly addressing a specific person, the poem itself seems to be saying, more generally, that the greatest power of all is in being vulnerable. There's nothing "we are to perceive in this world"—nothing we can see or know in the entire world—that can match "the power of your intense fragility."

This is of course [paradoxical](#). The beloved is "intense[ly] fragile," meaning that in some way or other, this person is extremely breakable, weak, or delicate. The beloved has no defenses—it seems just about anything could come along and hurt this person—and yet this defenselessness is precisely what gives the beloved power to disarm others, coaxing out of them a

desire to make themselves vulnerable in response.

### LINES 14-16

*whose texture ...  
... with each breathing*

"The power of your intense fragility" precedes the colon in line 14; everything that comes after the colon is an explanation or illustration of this concept.

The speaker envisions this fragility as something physical, something with a "texture" that "compels [the speaker] with the colour of its countries." This is a complicated [metaphor](#) for the way the speaker experiences his loved one's fragility. It seems to mean that this person's fragility isn't one-note but rather made up of many different metaphorical nations or territories, each with different histories and customs and landscapes. In other words, the speaker feels there is a whole vast world to be explored inside this other person, and he finds the prospect of that exploration endlessly compelling.

The [alliteration](#) in "compels," "colour," and "countries" not only draws a connection between the landscape of the beloved's fragility and the feeling of intense interest on the part of the speaker, but also adds some rhythm to the line, emphasizing the pleasure of the speaker as he imagines the prospect of getting to explore the "countries" of this person. This [imagery](#) also this relates back to the start of the poem, where the speaker described his love as a kind of journey.

The speaker goes on to say that the "texture" of the beloved's fragility "render[s] death and forever with each breathing." This is another moment of strange syntax (the arrangement of words) that forces the reader to slow down and perhaps feel or intuit the meaning of the words rather than logically understand them, just as the speaker himself is abandoning a rational understanding of love in favor of being swept up by the experience of it.

The loved one's fragility is given a kind of agency here, able to create "death and forever" every time it breathes. This speaks to the beloved's immense power over the speaker. It seems the speaker feels that intense vulnerability is both a constant reminder of death (whether literal or a more [metaphorical](#) reference to the end of a relationship) and somehow a way to experience eternity (by being present in the moment, and feeling everything at once). The poet might have chosen to end the stanza with the word "breath" rather than "breathing." While the logical meaning wouldn't have been much affected, the *feeling* would have—sandwiching the line with "ing" verbs gives it an ongoing effect, as if vulnerability is a kind of perpetual, ongoing state.

### LINES 17-19

*(i do not ...  
... than all roses)*

The last stanza begins with (and is primarily comprised of) a parenthetical statement. Inside the parentheses, the speaker admits to not knowing "what it is about [the beloved] that closes / and opens." In other words, though the speaker recognizes that his beloved has the power to make him open (i.e., be vulnerable) or close (i.e., put up defenses, be more guarded), there is uncertainty around the actual person who holds this power.

The speaker isn't sure about the inner workings of this power; he isn't certain what makes his beloved tick. This person is mysterious to the speaker. The speaker, too, may be wondering what kind of power he has over this person in return (what makes the beloved open and close? What compels this person to be vulnerable or guarded?).

The only thing of which the speaker is certain is that there is something about the beloved that he finds irresistible. The "voice of [the beloved's] eyes"—the parts that can't be understood rationally—call to the speaker in a way that is "deeper than all roses." The rose is again stereotypically [symbolic](#) of romantic love; the speaker believes this love goes beyond any experience or idea of love he has ever had before. This love is more real, more mysterious, than anything he could imagine.

## LINE 20

*nobody, not even the ... such small hands*

In its final stanza, the poem returns to rough hexameter (with about 12 syllables per line). Additionally, though the poem as a whole utilizes no [rhyme scheme](#), the final stanza does: it follows an ABAB pattern which, when combined with the reinstated meter, gives it a tidy and conclusive feel. The last line of the poem also stands alone in that it is the only line in the final stanza that operates outside the parentheses.

In this line, the speaker concludes much of what he's been meditating on—the fragility and vulnerability of his beloved—with an image: that of his beloved's hands. This pulls the poem back from its broader assertions about the relationship between vulnerability and the intense power of love to something specific and concrete. The speaker is located in the moment; his attention is fully absorbed by the object of his affection.

The syntax (or arrangement of words) combined with the use of the negative pronoun "nobody" singles the beloved out, placing this person on a pedestal. The [personification](#) of the rain ("nobody, not even the rain") suggests that it's not just that no other person is capable of making the speaker feel this way; not even nature has this power over him.

Of course, this statement is [hyperbolic](#); the beloved's hands aren't really the smallest hands in the entire world. It's just that, in the smallness or delicacy of this person's hands, the speaker sees a representation of what it is about the beloved that

moves him: their fragility, their defenselessness.



## SYMBOLS



### EYES

In this poem, eyes [symbolize](#) the parts of someone that can't be rationally understood. The speaker notes early on that his beloved's "eyes have their silence," an image that suggests that there are some things that exist in or between people that can't necessarily be articulated.

The speaker is drawn to this mystery, so much so that his beloved's "slightest look easily will unclose" him. In other words, the power of this mystery is so strong that even the slightest glimpse of it softens the speaker's defenses, compelling him to become more tender and vulnerable.

Finally, the speaker claims that "the voice of [the beloved's] eyes is deeper than all roses." As the "silence" of the beloved's eyes has already been established, it seems the speaker is trying to say that even though he doesn't understand the power this person has over him, he feels it is somehow more meaningful than any love he's ever experienced or imagined.

#### Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "your eyes have their silence:"
- **Line 5:** "your slightest look easily will unclose me"
- **Line 19:** "the voice of your eyes"



### ROSES

Roses traditionally [symbolize](#) romantic love, and the poem plays up these connotations. The speaker describes his beloved "opening" him "petal by petal" in the same way that a "Spring" opens "her first rose." This [simile](#) compares the speaker to a rose, with his lover compared to "Spring" ([personified](#) as a female being here, no less). Through this simile, the speaker is essentially identifying with love itself. In doing so, he relates the intensity of his feelings and the immense hold that his beloved has on him.

This also seems to speak to the utter vulnerability of the speaker; the first rose to open in spring is also the first to die if temperatures drop back below freezing! There is a sense of the speaker being exposed, then, but also being unafraid of this exposure. Should the speaker be hurt by this vulnerability, he imagines himself as "shut[ting] very beautifully" like a rose closing itself up in winter. The speaker is so enthralled by this person and this love that even the possibility of pain seems somehow beautiful.

In the final stanza, however, the speaker tells his beloved that "the voice of [their] eyes is deeper than all roses." Here, the stereotypical symbolism of the rose—the stock image of

romantic love—comes into contrast with the speaker's experience of love, which he feels is much more real and meaningful.

#### Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 7:** “you open always petal by petal myself ”
- **Line 8:** “her first rose”
- **Line 11:** “as when the heart of this flower imagines”
- **Line 19:** “the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses)”



### CLOSING AND OPENING

The poem utilizes variations of the words "closed" and "opened" throughout, with "closed" [symbolizing](#) being emotionally guarded and "open" symbolizing vulnerability.

The speaker is "unclosed" by his beloved, meaning that he was previously *closed*—basically, that he had lots of emotional walls up. He specifically says he was closed "like fingers," an image that calls to mind a fist and the speaker trying to protect himself from being hurt. The imager of the speaker being opened "petal by petal as the Spring opens [...] her first rose" speaks to the warmth of his beloved, who doesn't forcefully break down the speaker's defenses but rather gently compels the speaker to let go of them of his own accord.

The speaker goes on to admit that he doesn't "know what it is about [the beloved] that closes / and opens." This suggests that though he is allowing himself to be vulnerable with his beloved, he doesn't yet fully understand this person—how, exactly, this person affects him, or what causes the beloved themselves to become vulnerable or guarded. There is thus a sense that this love is still unfamiliar, that the other person is still mysterious.

#### Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 5-6:** “your slightest look easily will unclose me / though i have closed myself as fingers,”
- **Lines 7-8:** “you open always petal by petal myself as Spring opens / (touching skilfully,mysteriously)her first rose”
- **Lines 9-10:** “or if your wish be to close me,i and / my life will shut very beautifully,suddenly,”
- **Lines 17-18:** “(i do not know what it is about you that closes / and opens”

sounds lend a deep, soothing resonance as the speaker describes the mystery and excitement of his love:

somewhere i have never travelled,gladly beyond

The poem in general features many delicate and smooth sounds, which reflects the fact that this is a poem about deep, all-encompassing love.

The poem also turns to [sibilance](#) (in the form of both /s/ and /z/ sounds) at times to create a soft hush, quieting the speaker's language in a way that reflects both his reverence for his beloved and this person's fragility. Note the flurry of /s/ and /z/ sounds in stanza 2, for instance, which pair with /l/ sounds to create an intensely soothing passage (despite the fact that the speaker is talking about his beloved's immense hold over him):

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

The poem is filled with moments like this (in part due to the frequent repetition of some form of the word "close"), and thus feels gentle and lovely throughout.

A particularly striking moment of consonance—more specifically [alliteration](#)—comes in lines 14-15:

[...] whose texture  
compels me with the colour of its countries,

The hard /c/ sounds here add a sense of "texture" to the description of the beloved's fragility.

#### Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** “have,” “never,” “travelled,” “gladly,” “beyond”
- **Line 2:** “experience,” “silence”
- **Line 3:** “frail,” “things,” “enclose”
- **Line 4:** “cannot,” “near”
- **Line 5:** “slightest,” “look,” “easily,” “will,” “unclose”
- **Line 6:** “closed,” “myself,” “fingers”
- **Line 7:** “open,” “always,” “petal,” “petal,” “myself,” “Spring,” “opens”
- **Line 8:** “skilfully,” “mysteriously,” “first,” “rose”
- **Line 9:** “close”
- **Line 10:** “life,” “will,” “very,” “beautifully,” “suddenly”
- **Line 11:** “when,” “heart,” “flower,” “imagines”
- **Line 12:** “snow,” “carefully,” “everywhere,” “descending”
- **Line 13:** “nothing,” “perceive,” “world,” “equals”
- **Line 14:** “power,” “intense,” “fragility,” “texture”
- **Line 15:** “compels,” “colour,” “countries”



## POETIC DEVICES

### CONSONANCE

[Consonance](#) is used throughout the poem to add emphasis to certain moments and simply intensify the poem's language. Take the poem's first line, for example, where /v/, /l/, and /d/

- **Line 16:** “rendering,” “forever,” “breathing”
- **Line 17:** “not,” “know,” “closes”
- **Line 18:** “opens,” “only,” “understands”
- **Line 19:** “than,” “all,” “roses”
- **Line 20:** “nobody,” “not,” “even,” “rain,” “such,” “small,” “hands”

## ASSONANCE

[Assonance](#) adds moments of gentle rhythm and music to the poem, and also draws readers' attention toward certain words and phrase. In the first line, for example, the /ah/ sound in "travelled" is immediately echoed in "gladly"; this, combined with the fact that the words are pushed together (with no space on either side of the comma) emphasizes the speaker's feelings of elation regarding this love, which is "beyond any experience."

Assonance and consonance again combine in the next line in "experience," "eyes," and "silence," drawing attention to the relationship between the beloved's silence—and mysteriousness—and the intensity of this particular experience.

Starting in line 3 and continuing throughout the rest of the poem, the long /oh/ sound repeats in thematically important words: "enclose," "unclose," "closed," "opens," "rose," "only," "roses," and so forth. This is a round, open sounds that subtly evokes the speaker's own vulnerability.

Another striking moment of assonance (again combined with consonance) appears in lines 14-16:

[...] whose texture  
compels me with the colour of its countries,  
rendering death and forever with each breathing

The sudden intensity of sound here pulls the reader into the poem and creates a sense of momentum. This reflects what's being described here: the immense power that the speaker's beloved holds over him, the [metaphorical](#) "texture" of which "compels" (or pushes, drives) the speaker. The /eh/ and long /ee/ sounds of line 16 then feel especially rhythmic and musical, evoking the "breathing" being described as well as the power contained therein.

### Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** “travelled,” “gladly”
- **Line 2:** “experience,” “eyes,” “silence”
- **Line 3:** “enclose”
- **Line 5:** “unclose”
- **Line 6:** “closed”
- **Line 7:** “open,” “opens”
- **Line 8:** “rose”
- **Line 9:** “be,” “close,” “me,” “I”

- **Line 10:** “life,” “very,” “beautifully,” “suddenly”
- **Line 14:** “texture”
- **Line 15:** “compels,” “colour,” “countries”
- **Line 16:** “rendering,” “death,” “forever,” “each,” “breathing”
- **Line 17:** “closes”
- **Line 18:** “opens,” “only,” “understands”
- **Line 19:** “all,” “roses”
- **Line 20:** “small,” “hands”

## ENJAMBMENT

The poem uses frequent [enjambment](#) to create momentum and anticipation, pulling readers through the poem in a way that evokes the speaker being "compel[led]" by his beloved.

This enjambment is made all the more interesting by Cummings's unconventional use of punctuation. For instance, the first line is enjambed, and because of the way the words "travelled" and "gladly" are pushed together (with no space before or after the comma), the word "beyond" seems to stand alone, receiving a bit more emphasis than it might if the poem's punctuation and spacing were conventional. See:

somewhere i have never travelled,gladly beyond

Vs.:

somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond

It's a *slight* difference, to be sure, but certainly an interesting one!

The line break being where it is also means that this first line can actually be read two ways. By reading the line alone, the reader might understand the speaker to be saying that he has never travelled beyond this particular place (the place being a [metaphor](#) for the relationship he's in). In other words, now that he's here, he doesn't want to be anywhere else.

However, by using enjambment to push the completion of the thought to the next line, the syntax (or word order) expands the second clause to include "any experience." With this new information, the reader may understand the speaker to be saying that this place he has travelled to is beyond anywhere he's ever been before. The shift in meaning is subtle; the main effect of the enjambment is to undermine the reader's complacency, to push readers to pay close attention to each word of the poem.

This happens again in the second stanza, with the enjambment between lines 7 and 8:

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

Here, the enjambment works together with the strange syntax to stall the reader's understanding of the whole picture; information is doled out in such a way that the reader can interpret things multiple ways before having all the information. The phrase "you open always petal by petal" seems to imply that the beloved is the one "opening," but this is followed by "myself," so the reader then understands the beloved to be opening the *speaker*. Similarly, line 7 ends with "as Spring opens," so the reader is led to believe that "Spring" *itself* is opening, when in fact the reader discovers in line 8 that it is spring is opening a *rose*.

#### Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "beyond / any"
- **Lines 5-6:** "me / though"
- **Lines 7-8:** "opens / (touching"
- **Lines 9-10:** "and / my"
- **Lines 11-12:** "imagines / the"
- **Lines 13-14:** "equals / the"
- **Lines 14-15:** "texture / compels"
- **Lines 17-18:** "closes / and"
- **Lines 18-19:** "understands / the"

## PERSONIFICATION

[Personification](#) appears throughout the poem, as the speaker grants spring, a rose, fragility, and the rain itself a sense of identity and agency.

In stanza 2, for example, the speaker compares himself to a rose that "Spring" opens "petal by petal." Spring, here, is treated like a woman who touches the rose/speaker "skilfully" and "mysteriously." By personifying "Spring," the speaker connects the season to his beloved. Spring opens her flowers just as the beloved opens the speaker—who, in this summation, is akin to that "first rose."

The connection between the speaker and rose gets repeated in the next stanza, in what is another subtle moment of personification. The speaker says that, if his beloved asks, he'll close himself up like a rose in winter. More specifically, the speaker says that the rose has a "heart" capable of "imagin[ing]" winter snow. This image reflects the emotional nature of "closing" in the poem; the speaker is talking about closing his heart, cutting himself off emotionally.

Fragility itself then gets treated like an entity with agency of a sort in the next stanza; it breathes, and with each breath creates both "death and forever." This personification speaks to the immense power that the beloved's fragile nature has over the speaker.

Finally, in the last stanza of the poem, the speaker claims that "nobody, not even the rain" has hands as small as his beloved's. In this way, the rain is personified; it is implied that the rain, too, has hands. Perhaps this is a poetic reference to raindrops. In

any case, though there is something almost surreal about this image, the implication is that the beloved's touch is even softer and more gentle than the rain that falls on the rose, filling it with life.

By personifying nature, the poem deepens the connection between the mysterious workings of the natural world and the similarly mysterious workings of love—neither of which quite make sense to the speaker yet are beautiful nonetheless.

#### Where Personification appears in the poem:

- **Lines 7-8:** "as Spring opens / (touching skilfully,mysteriously)her first rose"
- **Lines 11-12:** "as when the heart of this flower imagines / the snow carefully everywhere descending;"
- **Line 16:** "rendering death and forever with each breathing"
- **Line 20:** "nobody,not even the rain,has such small hands"

## METAPHOR

This poem is [metaphorical](#) from start to finish. It begins with a metaphor that compares the experience of love to that of traveling to an unfamiliar place. Then, in the second line, the speaker describes the "silence" of his beloved's eyes; eyes can't literally talk, and this is simply a metaphor for the beloved's mysteriousness. The speaker then describes being "enclosed" by his beloved's "most frail gesture," a metaphor for the way the speaker is utterly captivated by even the littlest thing that his beloved does.

In the second stanza, the poem begins setting up its [extended metaphor](#) related to the idea of being closed vs. open. Though this stanza contains two [similes](#) ("i have closed myself as fingers," "you open always petal by petal myself as Spring opens [...] her first rose"), the similes work in service of the underlying metaphor, which is that love "opens," or makes vulnerable, the speaker who had once been "closed," or emotionally guarded.

This metaphor carries into the third stanza, where the speaker imagines what it would be like to be "closed" by his beloved. The poem again uses a simile ("my life will shut [...] as when the heart of this flower imagines") in service of this metaphor, which again relates the speaker's state of being "closed" or "open," guarded or vulnerable.

In the fifth stanza, the speaker describes his beloved's fragility through metaphor, saying that it "compels [the speaker] with the colour of its countries." In other words, love is as exciting, as various, as endlessly compelling as traveling the earth would be. There is an entire world inside the beloved that the speaker longs to explore. This echoes the metaphor of the first stanza, which also utilized metaphorical language around travel.

Finally, the central metaphor continues into the last stanza, where the speaker wonders "what it is about [the beloved] that closes / and opens." Again, the speaker is using the more



concrete language of something being "closed" or "open" to describe emotional states. The speaker then describes the "voice of [the beloved's] eyes," which echoes the metaphor from the first stanza about the beloved's eyes having "a silence." The poem ends in metaphor as the speaker describes "not even the rain" having "such small hands" as the beloved; in other words, nothing compels the speaker to vulnerability like his beloved does.

#### Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "somewhere i have never travelled"
- **Line 2:** "your eyes have their silence"
- **Lines 3-4:** "in your most frail gesture are things which enclose me, / or which i cannot touch because they are too near"
- **Line 5:** "your slightest look easily will unclose me"
- **Line 7:** "you open always petal by petal myself"
- **Lines 9-10:** "i and / my life will shut very beautifully,suddenly,"
- **Line 11:** "the heart of this flower"
- **Lines 14-16:** "whose texture / compels me with the colour of its countries, / rendering death and forever with each breathing"
- **Line 19:** "the voice of your eyes"
- **Line 20:** "nobody,not even the rain,has such small hands"

## SIMILE

There are three [similes](#) in the poem, all of which appear within the framework of larger [metaphors](#). The first is line 6, when the speaker says he had "closed [himself] as fingers." The simile compares being closed off emotional to fingers balled into a fist. In this way, the reader is able to visualize and viscerally connect to what being "closed" looks and feels like.

The second simile follows immediately on the heels of this image, as the speaker claims that his beloved "opens[s] always petal by petal myself as Spring opens [...] her first rose." Here, the simile allows the reader to picture what this emotional "opening" up is like: it's like a rose slowly blooming at the start of spring. Both of these similes serve the larger metaphor that's been established: the notion of the beloved being able to "open" or "close" the speaker at will.

The third simile appears in the third stanza, when the speaker describes his life "shut[ting ...] as when the heart of this flower imagines / the snow everywhere carefully descending." In this way, the poem illustrates that not even the idea of being "closed" by the beloved scares the speaker; rather, it is a soft and gentle image that reflects the beloved's fragility and the speaker's vulnerability.

#### Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Line 6:** "though i have closed myself as fingers,"

- **Lines 7-8:** "you open always petal by petal myself as Spring opens / (touching skilfully,mysteriously)her first rose"
- **Lines 9-12:** "i and / my life will shut very beautifully,suddenly, / as when the heart of this flower imagines / the snow carefully everywhere descending;"

## IMAGERY

There is not a huge amount of [imagery](#) in the poem; what imagery there is mostly occurs as a side effect of the poem's [similes](#)—meaning that it is not a literal description but rather meant to illustrate a point. For example, in the second stanza, the imagery of the speaker "closing" himself "as fingers" calls to mind the image of a clenched fist. The speaker is then able to associate the idea of being "closed" with being guarded and defensive. In contrast, the poem utilizes the imagery of spring and blooming flowers to illustrate the idea of being emotionally "open."

In the third stanza, when the speaker describes what it would be like to be "closed" by his beloved, the imagery is that of "snow carefully everywhere descending." The speaker places himself into the scene as a flower; the imagery suggests that being "closed" by the beloved would be sad but still somehow beautiful and natural.

#### Where Imagery appears in the poem:

- **Line 6:** "though i have closed myself as fingers,"
- **Lines 7-8:** "you open always petal by petal myself as Spring opens / (touching skilfully,mysteriously)her first rose"
- **Lines 11-12:** "as when the heart of this flower imagines / the snow carefully everywhere descending;"
- **Line 20:** "nobody,not even the rain,has such small hands"

## JUXTAPOSITION

The poem uses [juxtaposition](#) to show the way that love has changed the speaker. While the speaker had "closed" himself before meeting his beloved, this other person has the power to "unclose" the speaker with the "slightest look." The speaker's former guardedness gets juxtaposed with his current vulnerability, and the fragility of the beloved is juxtaposed with the *power* that fragility gives them over the speaker.

In line 3, the speaker notes that "in [the beloved's] most frail gesture are things which enclose" him. The frailty of the beloved is juxtaposed with their ability to "enclose," or surround, the speaker; this person is somehow both very small and delicate as well as powerful enough to envelop the speaker. In this way, juxtaposition works to reveal the [paradoxical](#) power of vulnerability.

In line 16, the speaker describes the beloved's fragility as

"rendering death and forever with each breathing." In other words, the defenselessness of the beloved constantly reminds the speaker of his own vulnerability, of the fact that he can be damaged or broken by his beloved's "breathing." At the same time, there is an expansiveness in being so open, an intensity to living in the moment that makes it feel eternal, the poem implies. Each breath the speaker takes with this person holds both of these contrasting feelings.

#### Where Juxtaposition appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "in your most frail gesture are things which enclose me,"
- **Line 5:** "your slightest look easily will unclose me"
- **Line 6:** "closed"
- **Line 7:** "open," "opens"
- **Line 9:** "close"
- **Line 16:** "rendering death and forever with each breathing"
- **Lines 17-18:** "closes / and opens"

## PARADOX

[Paradox](#) lies at the heart of this poem; the speaker cannot quite understand the power that his beloved has over him because this power seems to stem from fragility—essentially the *opposite* of power. This is both baffling and intriguing to the speaker, who describes the beloved's gestures as containing things the speaker "cannot touch because they are too near." This, too, is paradoxical; how can one not be able to touch something because it is too near?

The [metaphorical](#) statement makes more sense when considering the fact that a person can't touch something that they're tangled up in, because they cannot distinguish between *themselves* and *the thing in which they are entangled*. The speaker cannot see his beloved or this person's love objectively; he is too caught up in the *experience* of that love.

This paradox is repeated in the phrase, "the power of your intense fragility." It makes no sense that someone's weakness could be the source of their strength, yet that is exactly what the speaker is coming to realize. By having no defenses, the beloved compels the *speaker* to be defenseless too.

In line 16, the speaker expresses that every moment with his beloved seems to contain both death and eternity. This again speaks to the power of vulnerability; by being vulnerable, the speaker exposes himself to the possibility of death (even if just the metaphorical death of the relationship/the speaker's ego), but also experiences something that feels eternal, timeless, due to the intensity of the experience. If he walled themselves off from the possibility of pain, the poem implies, he wouldn't get to experience the intensity of love.

#### Where Paradox appears in the poem:

- **Line 4:** "or which i cannot touch because they are too near"
- **Line 14:** "the power of your intense fragility"
- **Line 16:** "rendering death and forever with each breathing"

## REPETITION

There are a couple different kinds of [repetition](#) present in this poem. The first is [polyptoton](#), as in the words "enclose," "unclose," "closed," "close," and "closes." By repeating words with the same root (in this case "close"), the poem draws attention to one of its central concerns: being emotionally vulnerable or guarded.

The choice to progress from "enclose" to "unclose" to "open" also illustrates the journey that the speaker is on: only in being "enclosed" by the beloved—that is, being wrapped up in them, surrounded by them—does the speaker become more open, more emotionally vulnerable. The word "unclose," while having the same literal meaning as "open," feels like an in-between step. The speaker doesn't "open" all at once; first he becomes "unclosed" by the beloved's glance, and then little by little he "opens" like a rose in spring.

This is where the second form of repetition comes in. In line 7 there are two instances of [diacope](#). The first is the repetition of the word "open," which almost bookends the line. The second is the phrase "petal by petal." This phrase again illustrates the gradual nature of opening up to someone—like the rose that opens up one petal at a time.

#### Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "enclose"
- **Line 5:** "unclose"
- **Line 6:** "closed"
- **Line 7:** "open," "petal by petal," "opens"
- **Line 9:** "close"
- **Line 17:** "closes"
- **Line 18:** "opens"



## VOCABULARY

**Frail** (Line 3) - Physically weak; delicate.

**Enclose** (Line 3) - Surround or encompass.

**Unclose** (Line 5) - Open.

**Fragility** (Line 14) - Frail; delicate; vulnerable; the quality of being easily broken.

**Compels** (Lines 14-15) - Drives, forces, moves.

**Rendering** (Line 16) - Making or causing something to be.



## FORM, METER, & RHYME

### FORM

"somewhere i have never travelled,gladly beyond" is written in [free verse](#), meaning that it doesn't adhere to any set patterns of [meter](#) or [rhyme](#). It doesn't follow a specific poetic form, apart from the fact that its 20 lines are broken up into five [quatrains](#) (four-line stanzas).

In a way, this steady stanza form might reflect the speaker being "enclose[d]" by his beloved. He's not entirely free as he finds himself spellbound by this other person, compelled by forces he doesn't quite understand.

### METER

The poem doesn't utilize [meter](#) consistently, instead being mostly written in [free verse](#). This keeps the poem feeling flowing and loose—open just like the speaker himself under the influence of love. Strict meter (or [rhyme scheme](#)) would feel too rigid and constructed for a poem like this.

That said, many of the poem's lines feature are about the same length and might be thought of rough hexameter (meaning they have six feet and around 12 syllables apiece). The first stanza is composed entirely in hexameter, for example, which lends itself to a slightly measured or paced feel. Because the feet don't follow a set beat, though, the meter adds *structure* without imposing a specific *rhythm*. (If the feet were consistently iambic, for example, there would be a noticeable rhythm of: da-dum da-dum da-dum da-dum.)

The second stanza is the most variable in terms of line lengths; line 6 ("though i have closed myself as fingers") is nine syllables long, the shortest in the poem, while line 7 ("you open always [...] as Spring opens") is a whopping 16 syllables—the longest in the poem. This subtly evokes the contrast between a "closed" speaker and an "open" one—under the influence of love, the speaker goes from being terse to being expansive.

Stanzas 3 and 4 are also variable in their line lengths, though starting with line 16, the poem returns to a more consistent hexameter. Notice the regularity of the stresses until the end, which creates a sort of galloping, falling rhythm—perhaps evoking the "breathing" being described:

rendering | death and for- | ever with | each  
breathing

The speaker thus uses meter to add emphasis to certain moments in the poem, but by and large it feels loose and free.

### RHYME SCHEME

The poem as a whole follows no set [rhyme scheme](#). That said, the final stanza does have a rhyme scheme, making it feel even more conclusive, almost like a summation of everything that

came before it. The rhyme scheme for the final stanza is ABAB ("closes"/"roses" and "understands"/"hands").

Throughout the rest of the poem, rhyme is noticeably absent, with only a couple of exceptions; the presence of [polyptoton](#) results in [internal rhyme](#) in lines 3 ("enclose") and 5 ("unclose"), as well as within lines 6 ("closed") and 9 ("close—all of which then rhyme with "rose" at the end of line 8. In addition to the polyptoton/internal rhyme in lines 3 and 5, there is the identical rhyme created by the repetition of the pronoun "me" at the ends of those lines. There is also a subtle internal rhyme between "all" and "small" in the final two lines of the poem.

These moments add blips of musicality without ever letting the poem feel rigid or predictable.



## SPEAKER

The poem's speaker is someone deeply in love. The object of his affection is a person he perceives to be very fragile—a lover, perhaps, though the speaker could also be discussing his deep love for his child or even something more [metaphorical](#), like a representative of God or a poetic muse.

The important thing is that this speaker has never experienced such a love before; it compels him to be more open and vulnerable, to be present to the intensity and mystery of love's effects. This person is utterly enthralled and "gladly" attuned to his beloved's most insignificant gesture—which has an extraordinary influence over the speaker, an influence that he can't rationally make sense of, but succumbs to willingly nonetheless.

Note that we've used male pronouns throughout this guide for the simple sake of clarity when it comes to discussing the poem's different subjects (the speaker vs. the object of his affection); the speaker in the poem itself is given no gender and can be read however readers see fit.



## SETTING

This poem is not set in the physical world so much as in the speaker's mind; there is no sense of where the speaker is located in actual time and space. The speaker references traveling and countries and spring and snow, all of which are used [metaphorically](#) rather than literally. The closest the reader gets to seeing the world the speaker is located in is the speaker's descriptions of his beloved: their eyes that "have their silence," their "most frail gesture," their "slightest look," and their "small hands." In this way, it would be most accurate to say that the setting of this poem is the beloved, or the speaker's perceptions of the beloved.



## CONTEXT

## LITERARY CONTEXT

This poem was first published in Cummings's 1931 collection *ViVa*. By this time, Cummings had already published several collections and was quite well known for his idiosyncratic style, which bucked conventional rules of grammar and punctuation (even while being applied to subjects that were considered rather outmoded or sentimental at the time). He was particularly known for his love poems, and despite his avant-garde sensibilities, his work became popular with a large readership, including people who didn't necessarily read much poetry.

In fact, while Cummings is considered to be one of the most important poets associated with the Modernist movement, his own work is much better understood as being in the tradition of the Romantics: his sentimental relationship to love, his awe and wonder of the natural world, and his elevation of the individual imagination all echo the core concerns of Romanticism.

His work was actually criticized by fellow Modernists as lacking seriousness or real "meaning" beneath the stylistic innovations that linked his work to the movement. While Modernism was defined by difficulty and complexity and seriousness, Cummings's work was playful, evoking a childlike sense of wonder and delight, highly novel on the surface yet seeming to lack depth.

Cummings himself, however, balked against the notion that art needed to contain deeper meaning; he believed that the point of art was to experience it rather than to understand it. During the staging of one of his plays, [he famously told the audience](#) to "relax, stop wondering what it's all 'about'—like many strange and familiar things, life included, this play isn't 'about,' it simply is." This is perhaps key to fully appreciating his work--the ability to relax and trust that nothing is expected of the reader outside their experience of the poem.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Edward Estlin Cummings (i.e., "E. E. Cummings") was born in 1894 in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He served in France during WWI; after the war, he returned to Paris, living there from 1921-1923. Upon returning to New York in 1923, his first collection of poetry—*Tulips and Chimneys*—was published. A second collection, *XLI Poems*, was published soon after, and he quickly became one of the most recognized poets of his time.

Like all Modernists, Cummings was affected by the massive societal shifts that happened in response to the rise in industrialization and advanced knowledge in science and technology, as well as the shift away from traditional values prompted by WWI. The world was suddenly gripped by

innovations in every sphere, from warfare to the home, and people's lives were changing rapidly. Art reflected this landscape of rapid change and innovation; artists sought to break with longstanding traditions, and experimentation and novelty were paramount.



## MORE RESOURCES

## EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- **Modernism** — An introduction to the modernist poetic movement. (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/collections/152025/an-introduction-to-modernism>)
- **Modernism, Part II** — Another brief introduction to modernism and modernist poets from Poets.org, for comparison's sake. (<https://poets.org/text/brief-guide-modernism>)
- **The Poetry of Love** — Oft considered one of the great love poets, Cummings's work naturally appears in this collection of renowned love poems. (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/collections/145134/love-poems>)
- **A Reading of the Poem** — Listen to a recording of the poem read by the author himself. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uWcuGo0rEFo>)
- **Biography of E. E. Cummings** — Learn more about the poet's life and work courtesy of the Poetry Foundation. (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/e-e-cummings>)

## LITCHARTS ON OTHER E. E. CUMMINGS POEMS

- [anyone lived in a pretty how town](#)
- [i carry your heart with me\(i carry it in](#)
- [next to of course god america i](#)
- [since feeling is first](#)



## HOW TO CITE

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