Classical Cummings: Sappho's Presence in the Poetry of E.E. Cummings

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(heart, can we bear the marvel of this thing?)

- E.E. Cummings, “if learned darkness from our searched world”

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Abstract

E.E. Cummings is often recognized as a poet of erotic or romantic poetry—but what happens when his conceptions of the "erotic" are read through the classics? Building upon recent work by J. Alison Rosenblitt and Anne Carson, this thesis examines how E.E. Cummings' classicism informs erotic poetry, tracing his engagement with Sappho within his sonnets to consider how it contributes to his modulation of the traditional expectations of Petrarchan discourse. Rejecting the "erotic" as synonymous with "sexuality," this thesis argues that Cummings' crafts a Sapphic voice to reach toward an eternal register to imagine union with the beloved as a transformative merging, resulting in a "compounded" self (Carson 35). Comparing Cummings' classical reception with his contemporaries situates him within the modernist moment, then focuses on the scholarship of H.D.'s Sapphic intertextuality to reveal the depth of Cummings' own engagement. These considerations culminate in an examination of how Cummings constructs settings within the "space" of the sonnet to imagine a divine beloved through ancient conceptions of eros inspired by Sappho. Ultimately, this thesis seeks to expand the account of both Cummings' classicism and his conceptions of the erotic.

Résumé

Souvent reconnu comme un poète érotique ou romantique, le corpus poétique de E.E. Cummings met ces écrits à la pointe - mais que se passe-t-il lorsque ses conceptions de « l'érotique » sont lues à travers les classiques ? S'appuyant sur la recherche récente de J. Alison Rosenblitt, cette thèse examine comment le classicisme de E.E. Cummings informe la poésie érotique, en retraçant son engagement avec Sappho dans la forme sonnet pour examiner comment il subvertit les attentes traditionnelles du discours pétrarquiens. Rejetant le terme « érotique » comme synonyme de sexualité, je soutiens que Cummings façonne une voix saphique pour tendre vers un registre éternel afin de décrire l'union avec l'amoureuse comme une fusion pour créer un sens du soi « composé » (Carson 35). La comparaison de la réception classique de Cummings avec ses contemporains le situe dans le moment moderniste. Ensuite, je comparerai les études sur l'intertextualité saphique de H.D. pour révéler la profondeur de l'engagement de Cummings. Ces considérations culminent dans un examen de la façon par laquelle Cummings construit des cadres dans l'espace du sonnet pour atteindre, à travers l'éros, une amoureuse divine, élargissant le registre du classicisme et des conceptions de l'érotisme de Cummings.

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Introduction

In *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (1929), Laura Riding and Robert Graves turn to American poet Edward Estlin Cummings (1894-1962) to examine the "'freakishness' of modernist poetry" (59). They quote a review of his poetry volume *is 5* (1926) that says of Cummings' work, "perhaps if they cannot survive as poems they can survive as puzzles" (Riding and Graves 76).[1] Various chapters of their book consider his poetry to be "not only a disregard of [readers'] intelligence, but an insult to it" (9), listing features of his poetry—such as the "idiosyncrasy [of] his refusal of a capital letter to each new line of the poem" (Graves and Riding 60), his use of punctuation (13), and that "There is no obvious grammar either of the prose or of the poetic kind" (13) as deficits to the quality of his work; however, they do credit Cummings with sharing "a deadly accuracy" (63) that they also credit to William Shakespeare. In the book's conclusion, they claim that "Mr. Cummings was never apprenticed to the new barbarism; he is a freebooter" (Riding and Graves 289).[2]

While puzzling is an apt word to describe Cummings' innovation, "freakishness" dismisses the depth of his work, and his constant reinventions of poetic forms and methods are what draw him to the centre of this project. Cummings has a *Complete Poems* housing over 1,000 compositions, including 164 published posthumously. Before his artistic career commenced, he completed two degrees at Harvard University where he studied in "Literature especially in Greek and English" (Kennedy 53), and his commitment to ancient Greece richly informs his writing. Cummings' "interest in Classical studies was largely confined to Greek, for he felt that Roman literature lacked intensity" (Kennedy 57), and the "intensity" he found in

[1] Riding and Graves' work does not identify who wrote the review.
[2] Norman Friedman's "EE Cummings and his Critics" recorded a bibliography of reviews on Cummings' work, separated by decade and further divided by Favourable, Mixed, and Unfavourable. Riding and Graves' is listed under "Favourable" for the 1920s.

ancient Greece is present in Cummings' various literary projects. What Riding and Graves call "no obvious grammar" in his work is partially generated by his extensive study of the grammar of multiple languages: he spoke five and was familiar with two more, allowing him to experiment with various syntaxes unfamiliar to the English tradition.[3] While he participated in many forms of artistic creation—countless paintings, drawings, two pseudo-memoirs, four plays, and a ballet—this project will turn its attention to his poetry, especially his first volume, *Tulips & Chimneys* (1923),[4] and the draft material published in *Etcetera* (1983) to examine his engagement the classics, which is perhaps his most understudied practice. J. Alison Rosenblitt's recent *E.E. Cummings Modernism and the Classics: Each Imperishable Stanza* (2016) and *The Beauty of Living: E.E. Cummings in the Great War* (2020)[5] expand the record of his classicism. In this thesis I will build substantially upon Rosenblitt's research, drawing the ancient Greek poet Sappho to the centre of the project to Cummings' engagement with her work.

The years following the Great War, especially the 1920s, saw the publication of many canonical modernist works—but the year 1922 saw T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), James' Joyce's *Ulysses,* (1922), and Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room* (1922). The succession of ground-breaking works emerging with a distinct "modern" identity is crucial to Cummings' place in the modernist moment; his first published work, *The Enormous Room* (1922) appeared this year while he was preparing the *Tulips & Chimneys* manuscript for print. It was published the following year in a reduced form. The *Tulips* offers a variety of poetic forms split into several sections, but the *Chimneys* contain three sonnet pseudo-sequences: "SONNETS—REALITIES,"

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[3] Cummings spoke and read, of course, English, alongside French, Latin, Greek, Italian, and German (Kennedy 39-40, 54-55, 60, 61). He also studied both Spanish and Russian "culture" (57, 62).

[4] Cummings' first publisher declined to publish all the poems and put out a reduced volume titled *Tulips and Chimneys,* removing the ampersand; his next volume—playfully named *& [AND]*—contains the rest. The original manuscript was later restored by two dominant Cummings' scholars, Richard S. Kennedy and George J. Firmage, in 1991, and will be used in this research (*Imperishable* 10-11).

[5] For clarity, these works will be referred to as *Imperishable* and *Beauty.*

"SONNETS—UNREALITIES," "SONNETS—ACTUALITIES" (*CP*).[6] In my reading, his sonnets both "[call] attention to sexual cruelty or depravity in the Petrarchan form" (Huang-Tiller 116), and "form a corrective to the genteel Petrarchan form of love without *eros*" (120). Rosenblitt claims that, of this collection's two parts, "*Chimneys* is far less classically engaged than *Tulips*" (*Imperishable* 188). Throughout each chapter of this thesis, I will prove that the *Chimneys* are deeply classical engaged by highlighting Cummings' Sapphic voice and the elements of grace and delicacy embedded within his work.

While Cummings is often associated with sexual or erotic poems, he wrote a myriad of love poems throughout his career, and in some many these, a "Sapphic eros" persists. Cummings "elevated the fragmentary Sappho to the noblest place among poets" (*Imperishable* 231) and called Sappho's "Hymn to Aphrodite" the "noblest poem ever written" (Cummings qtd in *Imperishable* 30). Sappho's influence begins to show in Cummings' early work, both from his days as a Harvard student and during his enlistment in the Ambulance Corps in France to avoid being drafted into World War I, where he was subsequently held as a prisoner by the French government, and which he recounts in his first novel, *The Enormous Room* (1922). It was in France that Cummings began to deeply explore themes of sexuality, eroticism, and love in his works.[7] Rosenblitt argues that it was in the Classical world that Cummings found a "sexual freedom, and an ability to talk about sex" he admired (*Imperishable* 39), breaking free from his "sexually repressive upbringing" (*Imperishable* 207) having been raised in a Unitarian household with a minister as a father (Kennedy 17). In the classics, there are no "repressive" upbringings—

[6] Whether or not the sonnets in Cummings sequences build on each other is unclear, and an argument could be made either way. This project does not assert a reading of the sequences, since the Sapphic eros is traceable even if the sequences are unconnected. As well, I will occasionally step out of the sonnet form for more concise examples of themes to be explored.

[7] Even before marrying his first wife, Cummings had a love affair with a Parisian prostitute named Marie-Louise Lallemand, which Rosenblitt's recent *Beauty* describes in greater depth than any previous biography.

only this freedom, and this turn to the classics for eroticism, specifically, is particular interest to this project. Sappho is, in my reading, gives him his particular freedom; Rosenblitt also mentions Cummings' encounters with Christopher Marlowe's translation of Ovid in his first year of studies, reporting that he was "glued to the page of thrillingly erotic verse" (*Beauty* 36), but even Ovid refers to Sappho's fragments (*Sapphic Modernism* 207), and Cummings was not a fan of Ovid's own "wretched Latin" (Cummings qtd in *Imperishable* 19). Kennedy claims that it was in Sappho that "Cummings' had an inspiration for the kind of direct and intense expression of love he gave voice to throughout his career" (55-56), but Kennedy's claim reduces Sapphic eros to "direct" and "intense" expressions of love, when Cummings' inspiration was much greater.

Through this ancient verse, Cummings' unites romantic love, physical sexuality, and spirituality in a nexus of transcendent desire, which Rosenblitt calls a "spiritual intimacy" (*Imperishable* 189). She identifies how the poem "of evident visibles" from his Harvard days "exposes Cummings's discomfort with the sexuality of the chase. Cummings embraced the pagan realm of the goat-footed more eagerly than any of his friends, but he worked to change the sexual dynamic within it" (*Beauty* 65). Ultimately, in his work, "A sexual awakening allows the man and woman to act upon each other" (*Beauty* 67), and "In this move away from the hunt and toward the mutuality of desire, Cummings gives the last word to the woman" (*Beauty* 67). Through Sappho and this ancient Greek erotic tradition, the pagan realm allows Cummings to engage these different representations of desire and erotic love. The aim of this thesis is to assert that this "mutuality of desire" is attributable to Sappho and her eros, which is expressed through Cummings' "Sapphic voice," which I will use to describe his engagement with her work throughout this project.[8]

[8] The word "Sapphic" can mean "Of, relating to, engaging in, or characterized by sexual activity between women or female same-sex desire" ("Sapphic 2"), or more broadly, lesbianism. Principally, though, "Sapphic" in this research

Both Sappho and her poetry are known to us in fragments.[9] Very few of her complete poems survive, and for the modernists, "the idea of a reawakened continuity—a Greek tradition rediscovered—was fuelled by the literal rediscovery of Sappho. The surviving Sapphic corpus was expanded considerably in the early twentieth century" (*Imperishable* 29).[10] To this generation, "Greek lyric generally, and Sappho specifically, could be taken to constitute a new standard of poetic authenticity" (*Imperishable* 29). While record of Cummings' literary relationship with Sappho is largely undocumented, her influence on the modernists is well-established, and this project will consider a few other authors to better situate Cummings' Sapphic voice in relevant scholarship.

Our understanding of Sapphic eros can be anchored in Carson's *Eros: The Bittersweet* (1986), where she demonstrates ancient Greek conceptions eros through Sappho's poetic. She claims that "The Greek word *eros* denotes 'want,' 'lack,' 'desire for that which is missing.' The lover wants what he does not have. It is by definition impossible for him to have what he wants if, as soon as it is had, it is no longer wanting" (Carson, *Eros* 10). In this, "A space must be maintained or desire ends. Sappho reconstructs the space of desire in a poem that is like a small, perfect photograph of the erotic dilemma" (Carson, *Eros* 26), and this creates "an act of reaching" (26). This space, this reaching, encompasses the eros that Cummings—through Sappho—employs. Sappho's "Fragment 31," as translated by Carson, "most clearly" (*Eros* 13) describes this desire:

> He seems to me equal to gods that man
> who opposite you

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will merely mean something related to Sappho's writings ("Sapphic 1"). "Erotic," then "[pertains] to the passion of love" ("erotic" A), or the Greek "'doctrine' or 'science' of love" ("erotic" B).

[9] Sappho lived from 630-570 BCE on the Greek island of Lesbos, writing lyric poetry that would have, usually, been accompanied by a lyre.

[10] When referring to Sappho's fragments, this thesis employs H.T. Wharton's translations that Cummings' would have likely known. He did also encounter her work in *The Greek Anthology* (Kennedy 55), and was able to both speak and read Greek himself.

sits and listens close
to your sweet speaking

and lovely laughing—oh it
puts the heart in my chest on wings
for when I look at you, a moment, then no speaking
is left in me

no: tongue breaks, and thin
fire is racing under skin
and in eyes no sight and drumming
fills ears

and cold sweat holds me and shaking
grips me all, greener than grass
I am and dead—or almost
I seem to me. (*Eros* 12-13)

Carson, by focusing on "Fragment 31," emphasizes a dynamic where "lovers should chase beloveds yet beloveds should not be caught" (*Eros* 24), showing how Eros, through Sappho, is a suspension, a dissonance, and a reach across an unspeakable void, where sight of the beloved robs the lover of speaking. The "lovely laughing" is always met with fire racing. When experiencing eros, "there appears within the lover a sudden vision of a different self, perhaps a better self, compounded of his own being and that of his beloved" (Carson, *Eros* 35).[11] Ultimately, "the boundaries of time and glance and I love you are the only aftershocks of the main, inevitable boundary that creates Eros: the boundary of flesh and self between you and me" (Carson, *Eros* 30), and these boundaries create a liminal space, or a perfect snapshot, of the moment of desire. The search for the compounded self, a wholeness, and the act of reaching are all crucial elements that connect Cummings' writing to Sapphic eros.

Through this examination of Sapphic voice, my thesis attempts to answer several questions: How does Sappho permeate Cummings' expressions of eros? Why does Cummings

[11] When referring to this concept of lover and beloved merging, this project will use the term "compounded self."

choose to write Sapphic voice into the sonnet tradition? How does his poetry make the beloved sacred? By focusing on Cummings' reception of Sappho, this project argues that erotic love becomes a type of faith in Cummings' poetry through the "compounded self" I find in his work.

Important to this study is the distinction between these conceptions of "eros," especially "Sapphic eros," and "sexuality," which will be largely considered in my first chapter. In many of his poems, Cummings' writes what I call a "Sapphic-blazon," which describes the beloved as a whole instead of a fragmented body like the blazon suggests. The elements of "Sapphism" this project will engage are Sapphic imagery, taken directly from her fragments, the Sapphic-blazon, Sapphic delicacy, *poikilos* which is "an adjective applicable to anything variegated, complex or shifting" (Carson, *Eros* 24), and, of course, Sapphic eros through depictions of desire.

This thesis will also engage facets of Petrarchanism through the (Shakespearean or Petrarchan) sonnet form, the sexuality of the chase, and the blazon to establish how Cummings draws the Sapphic into the sonnet to modulate this tradition and will be the main focus of this project's first chapter. Considering the "sexuality of the chase" alongside "Sapphic eros" in the sonnet is crucial to illuminate how Cummings subverts the expectations of the form. According to Forster, "Praise of the lady, however indirect, is the basic subject matter of the Petrarchistic poetry, as it was for Petrarch himself. She is physical and spiritual perfection which is impossible to express adequately; hence any attempt must be in superlative hyperbolical terms" (9), and in this dynamic, "If there is something of the masochist about the Petrarchistic lover, there is something of the sadist in his picture of the beloved" (15). Braden describes the Petrarchan tradition as "[wedding] a particular poetic form, the sonnet… to a particular subject matter: his all-consuming love for a beautiful but coldly distant woman called Laura" (250). Petrarch's descriptions of Laura "generally [provide] truncated blazons that dwell on just a few areas of

[Laura's] body… Her body is evoked through absence and emptiness, through a footprint rather than a foot" (Dubrow, *Echoes of Desire* 40-41). Vickers' influential article "Diana Described" highlights how Petrarch's "portrayal of feminine beauty became authoritative" (265), and how the love interest "is always presented as a part of parts of a woman" (266); she claims that "Petrarch's poetry is a poetry of tension, of flux, of alternation between the scattered and the gathered" (277)—but, as we will see, Cummings' work gathers the beloved into one whole being, that is usually—hopefully—merged with his own. Moore claims that "Aphrodite gave Sappho the sonnet" (813), reading the Sappho's relation to the sonnet as "the heart of the lyric tradition" (814). She also considers Vickers' notions of fragmentation and objectification, claiming, "The masculinity of the Petrarchan sonnet… *is wounded and open*, making space for feminine masculinities and masculine femininities that exceed and sometimes subvert the misogyny of the blazon's dismembering force" (816; emphasis own).

Of course, calling Cummings' move to create the Sapphic-blazon or modulate this tradition "anti-Petrarchan" is not my intention: according to Heather Dubrow, "a definition of anti-Petrarchism necessarily draws on that perilous enterprise of defining Petrarchism. Because [many poems] oppose Petrarchism at certain points and embrace it as others or oppose it with the ambivalence that characterizes Petrarchism itself, the very category anti-Petrarchism is itself often problematical" (*Echoes of Desire* 6). It is "Petrarch's difficult to define, always unattainable object of love" that bring into focus "The poet's desire—that sense of lack, yearning, and incompletion that might be well considered the troubled, changeful source of nearly all Petrarch's poetry" (Bermann 26). I suggest that Cummings modulates this discourse by engaging the whole sonnet tradition, and thus Petrarchanism—not Petrarch's work—to defy the love dynamic within it, attempting to abandon troubled desire.

In the second chapter of this thesis, I will compare poetry by Cummings and H.D. to expose their similar Sapphic intertextuality. Because research on Cummings' classicism is lacking and H.D.'s Sapphic engagement is well documented, scholarship on her work will be used to supplement the gap. Research by Diana Collecott, Eileen Gregory, Harriet Tarlo, and several other scholars will help us understand the role of Sapphic voice in H.D.'s work, which "is not only liminal but divine" (Collecott, *Sapphic Modernism* 193), to then trace its presence in Cummings' own poetry. This move is made by Rosenblitt, too, investigating "Cummings' Horatian, seasonal meadow by juxtaposing it to H.D.'s Sapphic, time-suspended shore" (*Imperishable* 138), but this project asserts that Cummings' work also depicts a "Sapphic, time-suspended shore." Through Sapphic eros, both poets can suspend time, creating an erotic liminality that is crucial for Cummings' attempt to recreate and preserve the compounded self.

Then, in the final chapter, this thesis will consider the spaces of Cummings poems, both in the settings he creates and the formal structures, to understand how the sonnet becomes a place of worship to preserve and protect the compounded self. To justify the seriousness with which Cummings' engaged Sappho, other poetic forms and authors will be considered to expose the elevated position that Sappho and her eros hold in Cummings' corpus. In Longinus' treatise "On the Sublime," considering Sappho's fragments, he writes that "implanted in our souls is an invincible yearning for all that is great, all that is divine" (Longinus). Divinity is integral to the elevated, compounded self, and upholds the "spiritual intimacy" of Sapphic eros. Whether he uses rigid forms or allows the poems to dissolve across the page, Cummings use of poetic space provides an arena to unite with the beloved and achieve the compounded self, while preserving the erotic liminality also seen in H.D.'s work. He reaches for "a connotation of infinity" (*CP* 150) for the lovers, eternally suspending the "reaching" of eros in his poems. Greek shorelines,

walled, nearly Edenic gardens, and the blooming of spring are all settings that preserve the "spiritual intimacy" of the sonnet space and allow the "compounded self" to exist eternally.[12]

The prevalence of Sapphic imagery and eros in Cummings' work shows how important her poetry is to understanding his worship of the beloved and treatment of erotic love as sacred. Cummings' beloved is not, however, objectified through this worship: he takes a distinct turn away from Petrarchanism—especially playing within the sonnet form—to focus on the beloved as an entire individual in a manner attributable to his Sapphic voice. Studying a modernist's engagement with Sappho is not an original move, but no study of Cummings and Sappho has been undertaken, and it is crucial to recognize how she richly she influences him. By reading expressions of Sapphic erotic love as religiosity in his poetry, this project will explore how Cummings conceives the beloved as divine.

[12] Cummings' *Complete Poems* will be referred to as *CP* for concision, and this project will adopt the standard practice of referring to Cummings' poems, when untitled, by their first line; citations will include line numbers followed by page numbers to adhere to both MLA format and conventional Cummings' scholarship.

Chapter One

"carefully slowly fatally turning into ourselves": Sapphic Eros and the Compounded Self

Étreinte / Embrace

> The gesture of the amorous embrace seems to fulfill, for a time,
> the subject's dream of total union with the loved being.
>
> - Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*

Despite Cummings holding Sappho's work in such a high regard, no one has completed an extensive study on her influence on his poetry. Apart from Rosenblitt's recent work, most of Cummings' classical engagement is largely undocumented—but the emerging field of classical modernism has increasingly considered the role of Sappho in the work of other modernist poets, which this thesis contributes to. Through careful distinctions between "eros" and "sexuality," the first chapter of this project will consider the Sapphic intertextuality in Cummings' poetics through his "Sapphic voice," especially in the sonnet form, to write erotic love. Aided by the tenets of the Sapphic voice and our understanding of Petrarchanism outlined in this project's Introduction,[13] we will trace how Cummings' early sonnets and free verse poems depart from the unrequited love or the chase dynamic in the sonnet tradition to seek, instead, a mutual and fulfilled union with the beloved.

As the area of classical modernism emerges amidst reception studies, as named by Miranda Hickman and Lynn Kozak in *The Classics in Modernist Translation* (2019),[14] scholars find that the moderns turned to the ancients to find a response "to a modern world fractured by war and cultural decline" (Hickman 5). Reception studies "[strike] a balance between exposing the alien qualities and contexts of classical poetry and building on the commonalities of suffering

[13] I will use "Petrarchanism" to point to the larger sonnet tradition, substituting for the work "Petrarchism," directly.
[14] Cummings also participated in translation practices like those discussed in Hickman and Kozak's work, but this research will focus on original compositions receiving classical images and ideals (*Imperishable* 25; 40-41).

shared by other times and cultures" (Hardwick 97). By repeatedly turning to the classics, poets throughout the history of English literature found an ability to express the phenomena they experienced through language unbound by their time. World War I's impact sent many scrambling to reconcile identity in this period, and Rosenblitt's own research largely considers Cummings' role as a war poet, especially through his engagement with Horace. My project examines Cummings' expressions of Sapphic eros in the sonnet form to consider how it reconciles expressions of erotic desire; instead of "building on the commonalities of suffering," or attributing this to sexual or erotic feelings, Cummings' remedies depictions of desire to seek reprieve from a repressive, fractured, modern world.

Part of Cummings' popularity in his lifetime came from his departure from other modernists "like T.S. Eliot, who pitched for an elite readership" (*Beauty* 193). Cummings even expressed disdain for T.S. Eliot's densely allusive *The Waste Land* (1922), describing it as a "betrayal" (Cowley qtd in *Beauty* 110). Allusion functions as a reference backwards to another literary text—but "modernist allusion is more properly dramatic than structural… torn between clarifying the reader's understanding and preserving a deliberate obscurity that is not… accidental or perverse but essential" (Bush 709). In his own work, "Cummings sometimes assumes literary knowledge among his readers, especially knowledge of the classical world. But the aim is not exclusionary" (*Beauty* 193), signalling that Cummings' Sapphic intertextuality or allusions do not intend to obscure meaning or rely on readers' knowledge to understand or enjoy his work.[15] Cummings' rigorous study and attention to detail within his work allows an informed eye to excavate Sappho's fragments from beneath the surface of his work that are placed without

[15] Malcolm Cowley, a friend of his from Harvard, wrote: "When *The Waste Land* appeared, complete with notes, E.E. Cummings asked me why Eliot couldn't write his own lines instead of borrowing from dead poets. In his remarks I sensed a feeling almost of betrayal" (Cowley qtd in *Beauty* 110).

"deliberate obscurity." This is, in part, because many consequent traditions of love poetry after Sappho's lyric, like the Petrarchan, modulate the "the symptoms of love" associated with her verse, occasionally allowing the origin of these images to go unacknowledged or unnoticed.

Cummings' friend Malcolm Cowley once called he and Cummings' group of Harvard friends "'pagans, in the sense that they invoked Greek deities—especially goat-footed Pan—more often in their poems than they invoked Christian saints' and 'fleshly poets, in revolt against Christian austerity'" (*Beauty* 61). Moving from this "Christian austerity," Cummings' "early explorations of erotic love engage with a Decadent fantasy of exquisite annihilation. This Decadent annihilation fantasy is, especially in [Victorian poet A.C.] Swinburne, already classically engaged: it is imagined as a recovery of the pagan eroticism of Venus or Sappho" (*Imperishable* 134). Swinburne's work "is still read as the most important Victorian reincarnation of Sappho" (Prins, *Victorian Sappho* 17). Recognizing that Sappho is present in Swinburne's pagan eroticism, it is important to note that, "From Swinburne's swirling world of deviance and desire, [Cummings and his friends discarded] some themes, like the motif of the femme fatale, who makes only rare appearances in their poems, while they homed in on others—especially the sexuality of the chase, a central note in their pagan realm of the goat-footed" (*Beauty* 63-64). But, as established in the Introduction, Cummings aimed to change the sexual dynamic of the chase, and "Swinburne presents himself a body *for* abuse, rhythmically scattered and recollected like the fragments of Sappho" (17). As we will see, Cummings does not scatter the beloved's body like the Swinburnian or Petrarchan tradition. Apart from Swinburne, another dominant Victorian influence on Cummings was the poet-painter Dante Gabriel Rosetti, through whom Cummings first encountered the sonnet form and "was enthralled by the music and by the calculated exaltation in Rosetti's treatment of love themes" (Kennedy 68). Kennedy mentions it

because it was not "only one more imitative phase that Cummings passed through" (69), but that Rosetti "continued to appear in his poems for the next decade. Whenever [Cummings wrote] a sonnet, the chances were great that the spirit of Rosetti would hover over him ready to descend and cloud his expression" (69). While I am not sure of Rosetti's presence in all of Cummings' sonnets, it is not a Victorian flourish but Sapphic eros dominating much of his early love poetry.

The tradition of the "scattered" beloved did not just stem from Swinburne's exquisite annihilation or Petrarch's truncated blazons. In *The Sappho Companion* (2000), Reynolds considers Sappho's writings as fragmented like the Greek statue Venus de Milo, whereby "the idealised perfection of the imagined whole inspires a nostalgia and longing that are greater than those directed towards any other object of desire that is present, intact and accessible" (6). This prioritization of the "idealized whole" instead of the present object is shown, too, in how "Erotic scenes on vases offer clear evidence that eros deferred or obstructed, rather than eros triumphant, is the favoured subject" (Carson, *Eros* 21), like Sappho's scattered fragments. The "imagined whole," however, encompasses how the "Ancient Greeks believed that "man offended the gods was cut in half as consequence. Ever since, we have constantly been searching for our missing half, our mate of body and soul, as it were, and Eros is labelled our deep longing to become whole again" (Iordanoglou 19), and "With Eros as our guide, we become godlike ourselves," (Iordanoglou 19). For Rosenblitt, Cummings' own description of Venus de Milo as "The woman nude; the goddess unashamed" (Houghton MS qtd in *Imperishable* 207) points her "to the liberation which Cummings found in Classical poetry and which was such a needed escape for him from his sexually repressive upbringing" (*Imperishable* 207). Cummings' liberation reworks this scattered, fragmented tradition to focus on the "imagined whole" he creates within his own work, often abandoning the tradition of "eros obstructed."

Where the words "fragmented" and "scattered" persist, how Cummings' "Sapphic-blazon" modulates the Petrarchan tradition is a crucial step to examining his Sapphic voice.[16] According to Page duBois, it is from Sappho's work and "symptoms of love" that the blazon sprang:

> The blazon, derived from the verses of the Tuscan poet Petrarch, catalogued the beauties of the beloved woman's body, one by one, from head to toe, and also became part of the vocabulary of erotic verse throughout Western lyric. But Sappho's erotic self-examination, her portrait of her own body falling to pieces, nearing death, as she gazed towards the beloved, offers another paradigm of erotic possession, looking outwards but feeling inwardly the effects of desire, in contrast to the Petrarchan lover's focus on the other. (141)

While "self-examination" is not what Cummings attempts to do, he does defy the "dismembering force" of the blazon by taking the "wounded and open" tradition of the sonnet and the corporeally scattered lover and writing a body that is made whole by the speaker's desire. Bermann's considers Petrarchan writing as metonymy, finding that "'Laura' is but the condition of possibility that allows the poet speaker to develop his quest for self, be this defined in terms of fame, eternity, understanding, or simply, peace" (Bermann 31). Writing the beloved to understand the self increases the tension between a "fragmented" or an "objectified" lover and how she can be reconstructed for the speaker's need—not just desire. Where Petrarch sequentially scatters the lover, though—with *Rime sparse* literally meaning "scattered rhymes" (Hainsworth 39)—any focus on body parts or synecdoche within Cummings' poetry does the opposite: focusing on one part of the beloved allows the speaker a clearer expression of love,

[16] "Sapphic blazon" is intended to encompass Cummings' constructive itemization of the beloved to reach toward an entire image, in place of the Petrarchan fragmentation or scattering.

compared to what Vickers and others regard as the Petrarchan avoidance of seeing the lover as whole.[17] In Sappho and her fragments, Cummings' can find a self that unites with the beloved to form one improved self instead of merely improving through her.

Cummings' work was also influenced by the Imagism moment, a rising poetic style that "prioritized a purity of image, built on language that was precise and stripped down to the essentials" (*Beauty* 63). The Imagists engaged deeply with Sappho's work, and in *The Pound Era* (1971) Hugh Kenner suggests that "[tiny] though they are, these Sapphic details can rub off on other writings like bits of red dye" (217). This red dye is present in the work of Imagist poet Richard Aldington and his study of Sapphic fragments at the British Museum, which influenced some of the poems included in *Des Imagistes: An Anthology* (1914), titled "To A Greek Marble," "Lesbia," and "To Atthis," with the subtitle "*(After the Manuscript of Sappho now in Berlin).*" In one of his later works, "Epigrams," published in *The Egoist* in 1919, Aldington alludes to three of Sappho's fragments: "Fragment 113," "Neither honey nor bee for me" (Sappho); "Fragment 94" "As on the hills the shepherds trample the hyacinth under foot, and the flower darkens on the ground" (Sappho); and "Fragment 3," in which "The stars about the fair moon in their turn hide their bright face when she at about her full lights up all earth with silver" (Sappho). The poem is split into two sections:

> 1.
> Your mouth is fragrant as an orange-grove
> In April, and your lips are hyacinths,
> Dark, dew-wet, folded, petalled hyacinths
> Which my tongue pierces like an amorous bee.
> 2.
> Your body is whiter than the moon-white sea,
> More white than foam upon a rocky shore,
> Whiter than a goddess born of foam. (Aldington 127)

[17] The blazon also stands in for the larger sonnet sequence; different themes scattered across the poems in each sonnet sequence mirror the fractured body contained across a poetic corpus.

The poem contains a dense allusiveness to Sappho, as "April" places the speaker in the fresh eroticism of spring, and the "moon-white sea" and "goddess born of foam" transform the springtime orange-grove into the shimmering nighttime shoreline of "Fragment 3." The beloved is the passive, feminine presence of "petalled hyacinths," which the (presumably male) speaker's tongue "pierces," phallic and penetrating. In the second part of the poem, there is only description of the lover's body, compared to the sea and the foam, associating the beloved with the wet, natural world in the moonlight. This body remains whole, unlike the itemization of the blazon, while the "moon-white" sea "lights up all earth with silver" in these epigrams. Sappho's influence on this poem rippled through the modernist poets: T.S. Eliot, who was the editor of *The Egoist* at the time of "Epigrams" original publication, presumably had this in mind when writing the of the hyacinth garden in *The Waste Land* (1922), linking April "with sexual desire and the symbolic weight of hyacinths" (McIntire 96). The episode to which McIntire refers in *The Waste Land* encapsulates a form of paralysis or sexual anxiety not seen in the work of Cummings but echoing the sensory failure of "Fragment 31." Though Eliot does not credit Sappho's fragments for this line of the poem, he does credit her elsewhere in the "Notes" to *The Waste Land,* emphasizing how the "red dye" of Sappho suffuses the Imagist movement.

These fragments also inform H.D.'s poetry, who engages the image of the bee in several poems. H.D.'s wrote in her essay "The Wise Sappho" asserts that "Sappho has become for us a name, an abstraction as well as pseudonym for poignant human feelings, she is indeed rocks set in a blue sea, she is the sea itself, breaking and tortured and torturing, but never broken" ("Vision" 68). A sustained comparison of Cummings' work to H.D.'s Sapphic engagement will be the focus of Chapter Two, but for now, the parallels of her poem "Orchard" with Aldington's "Epigrams" help to demonstrate Sappho's presence and the "poignant human feelings" of her

poetry in the work of modernists. "Orchard" uses periphrasis to refer to the bee as "the honey-seeking, golden-banded, / the yellow swarm" (*SP* 3-4, 9), while this active, "honey-seeking" bee looks for a place to enter, to land. The bee returns in "Fragment 113," based on Sappho's poem of the same title. She includes the fragment as the epigraph, opening directly with Sappho's words before modulating them:

> Not honey,
> Not the plunder of the bee
> […]
> not honey, not the sweet
> stain on the lips and teeth:
> not honey, not the deep
> plunge of soft belly
> and the clinging of the gold-edged
> pollen-dusted feet; (*SP* 1-11, 46)[18]

Here, H.D. writes a series of negations: it is *not* honey, *nor* the bee. She continues, "not the sweet / stain on the lips and teeth," suggesting the previous consumption of the honey left a stain, and "not the deep / plunge of soft belly" brings back Aldington's "piercing tongue"—though the "plunge" of the bee is gentler than the previous, sharp penetration. More clearly, though, is the "ee" sound, drawing out the fragment with "honey," "sweet," "teeth," "deep," "belly," and "feet," constantly returning to Sappho's internal rhymes of honey-bee-me with H.D.'s near-rhymes and assonance. These near-rhymes serve as another form of negation as the sounds never quite meet, suggesting the erotic tension of an "almost" union, just as the speaker never admits what is—only what is not. The whole poem is "reaching." Like Aldington's "amorous bee" penetrating the "dew-wet" hyacinth, the honey here is passive, feminized—but not acted upon: nothing acts at all. In the close of the poem, the erotic splendour becomes the focus: "if you turn again, / seek strength of arm and throat, / touch as the god" (*SP* 33-35, 46), and "heat, more

[18] H.D.'s *Selected Poems* will be referred to as *SP*.

passionate / of bone and the white shell / and fiery tempered steel" (*SP* 39-41, 46). While the poem is *not* about the honey nor the bee, it *is* about the power of eros, who brings the "fiery tempered steel" of erotic splendour. H.D.'s intention with her epigraph "clearly is not interpretation or representation, but rather invocation. 'Sappho' stands as a sign of announcing a certain conscribed and determined musing on states of passion" (Gregory, *H.D. and Hellenism* 152), but it is not merely alluding to Sappho that evokes these "states of passion." Through these images, Sappho's voice echoes in H.D.'s work—and these sexually charged images—to demonstrate how Sapphic eros permeates through these images into the modernist movement.

Cummings follows the erotic vein of Aldington and H.D., rejoicing in Sapphic eros. In "Songs II" from *Tulips,* Cummings presents sleepy, passive lovers through his image of the bee, which Rosenblitt considers in relation to the classicized theme of "exquisite annihilation" (*Imperishable* 134), incorporating "a Horatian *carpe diem* motif and a classically influenced pastoral setting" (*Imperishable* 134). In the footnote, she mentions that her analysis is not meant to be an "exhaustive discussion" of the influence on "Songs" in general:

> when life is quite through with
> and leaves say alas,
> much is to do
> for the swallow,that closes
> a flight in the blue;
>
> when love's had his tears out,
> perhaps shall pass
> a million years
> (while a bee dozes
> on the poppies,the dears;
>
> when all's done and said,and
> under the grass
> lies her head
> by oaks and roses
> deliberated.) (*CP* 1-15, 11)

Rosenblitt suggests that "The obvious metaphor of sleep for death is softened by Cummings into a bee which merely 'dozes,' but the sense is clear, since the poem offers a succession of images of death" (*Imperishable* 147), yet the conclusion "when life is quite through" leads to "when love's had his tears out," and "a million years" could pass. In ways that diverge from the imagery of H.D. and Aldington's poems, Cummings' "bee dozes / on the poppies," superimposing the bee upon the flower without any of image of penetration and removing the overt sexuality of the previous bees. What Rosenblitt figures as a deathbed, where "under the grass /lies her head… deliberated" by nature shows the erotic splendour of the bee, reclined within the garden. In the opening of the poem, "when life is quite through with / and leaves say alas," Cummings' seems to be idealizing the future; rather than craving death or being paralyzed by desire, the speaker desires a stasis whereby they and the lover can be at peace, preserving a moment of erotic liminality—but this is hardly as Sapphic as other poems this chapter will address.

Rosenblitt analyzes the "Songs" section of *Tulips* to consider its classical engagement with little mention of Sappho, but she does suggest that "There is more Sapphic grace and delicacy in 'Songs VII' than in any other of the 'Songs,' or perhaps any other of Cummings' poems" (*Imperishable* 157). I disagree: we will see, in the following pages, poems rich with this Sapphic delicacy. The idea of "grace and delicacy" comes from Collecott, who writes of H.D. that, "Signifying on her archaic Greek sources, H.D. finds English equivalents for words which—by virtue of reiteration—have special valency in their original contexts, achieving cultural translation of Sappho… Identifying this as 'the basis for Sappho's construction of desire', Jane Snyder summarises its three elements as: *charis,* 'grace,' *habrosune,* 'delicacy,' *poikila,* 'subtlety'" (*Sapphic Modernism* 16-17), signified by sweetness, lightness, and "softness, tenderness, even lushness" (17).

Important to readings of Sapphic delicacy in "Songs II" and all of Cummings' other poems is Tartakovsky's commentary on Cummings' use of parentheses, in which he splits the parentheses into seven potential functions. One of these is "Protection and Intimacy," where Tartakovsky notes, "Besides separating in an attempt to protect or convey the sense of a need for protection, as has been the case in the previous poems, parentheses through their delineation of a separate space also create intimacy" (225). The "parenthesized material is so intimate, secretive, and delicate that it is hard to imagine it said outside the protection afford by these parentheses" (Tartakovsky 226). Occasionally, too, the parentheses can be used to "[create] intimacy between his speaker and an other, by way of direct address" (Tartovsky 226), like a dramatic aside, sharing details with the audience. In "Songs II," though "under the grass / lies her head," implies she is buried in this space, as the moment is yet to be reached: the lovers are still protected by the intimacy of a walled garden space enclosed in the poem's parentheses, before the "million years" have passed. This method of protecting "delicate" or intimate moments recurs in many of the poems this project will examine.

The parentheses in "un(bee)mo" allow Cummings to create an Imagist snapshot in only 10 words. Cummings also drew inspiration from his own garden, frequently, to create his poems: in fact, the last entry in his journal from the day that he died was about his flowers (Kennedy 484). He drafted this poem 243 times ("Drafts"),[19] showing the precision with which Cummings' creates the Image:

un(bee)mo

[19] Another important detail to the significance of "un(bee)mo" having 243 drafts is the fact that Cummings likely had dyslexia. Research by Rosenblitt and Linda. S Siegel suggests this, based on their examination of his archival papers ("dyslexia" 1), and more. They clarify, "We do not mean to suggest, reductively, that Cummings' approach can be 'explained by' or 'attributed to' dyslexia. Cummings' attitude to language is, most fundamentally, his own response to the aesthetic and literary priorities of early modernism" ("dyslexia" 2), but in *Beauty,* Rosenblitt writes, "Dyslexia would have predisposed Cummings to process language differently. It may well have contributed to his remarkable syntax and to his ability to atomize words—that is, to see a word in pieces (letters or syllables) at the same time that he saw the word as a whole" (*Beauty* 41).

vi
n(in)g
are(th
e)you(o
nly)

asl(rose)eep (*CP* 1-7, 732)

Here Cummings fractures two phrases: "unmoving are you asleep," and "bee in the only rose." Both are five words, but most of them are fragmented by parentheses or enjambment, creating tension across each line and within each phrase. Despite this fragmentary structure, the images in the poem holding very little tension, static and passive, and relaxing the format. It is as though the phrases have come to merely rest on each other like the sleeping bee. This use of parentheses, too, leaves ambiguous whether the speaker is addressing the bee inside of the rose, or if the bee and rose are separate from the implied speaker and "you." With this fragmented structure, the bee and "you," are "unmoving" and "asleep," not "seeking" or "amorous" like in the poems of Aldington and H.D. Using the word "only" also places an emphasis on a romantic reading, highlighting that there is only one rose present in this space. The Sapphic fragment of the bee, and the fresh, springlike image of the rose, echo the floral and garden imagery of "Epigrams," "Fragment 113," and "Songs II." Unlike the earlier poems' penetrative language, while the bee invades, it mirrors the "unmoving" "you," merely resting "in" the rose. The parentheses splitting the scene and protecting the bee in the safe, walled space of the parentheses, while the "unmoving you" is left outside. This "inactive" reading affords Sapphic delicacy without the sexuality of the earlier Imagist poems—and, while there is still a sexual reading there, Cummings' gentle treatment of the images evokes Sappho.

The final consideration before delving into Cummings' Sapphic sonnets is how Cummings does evoke explicit—often graphic—sexual imagery that is devoid of what I read as

Sapphic eros or delicacy.[20] His so- *Erotic Poems* (2010) are "mainly taken from his three early collections and uncollected poems from *Etecetera*" (Huang-Tiller 110), and I agree with Huang-Tiller that the collection is are "carelessly edited" (110), although I find his Sapphic works in the same collections. It is also important to note that Firmage's conception of the "erotic" is not what this project asserts, but instead collects "sexual" poems. For example, Cummings' "n w" presents an eroticism distinct from the Sapphic eros of this project:

n w
O
h
S
LoW
h
myGODye
s s (*CP* 1-8,1091)

Similar to the bare Imagist lines of "un(bee)mo," Cummings' use of enjambment creates space for each line, which Heusser highlighted "in all likelihood… depicts a phallus" (19). The "O" of "now" stands alone, emphasizing a sensual "O" sound. Following, the word "slow" stretches across two lines. In the final two lines, "myGODye" rushes into the phrase, climaxing, before tapering into the hiss of "s s." Only 18 letters long, this poem is an erotic exclamation (by what I call a sexual rather than Sapphically erotic definition).

Perhaps the most popular of Cummings' *Erotic Poems* is the sonnet "i like my body when it is with your." The poem begins, "i like my body when it is with your / body. It is so quite new a thing. / Muscles better and nerves more" (*CP* 1-3, 232), and "i like kissing this and that of you, / i like,slowly stroking the,shocking fuzz / of your electric fur,and what-is-it" (*CP* 9-

[20] An argument could be made that the graphic sexuality develops in his poetry as his own does; it was Cummings' second wife, Anne Barton, who was "as he later remembered, his 'first real introduction to sex' and a welcome replacement for his idealized worship of [Orr]" (Kennedy 288).

11, 232). The final lines are separated from the body of the poem, concluding "and possibly I like the thrill // of under me you so quite new" (*CP* 13-14, 232). The "quite new a thing" captures the sexual tone Firmage must have had in mind when curating *Erotic Poems*—but it is notable that even in this graphic sexual representation, the focus of the sonnet is "you" and the parts of the "your body." Vickers observes that "to Petrarch Laura's whole body was at times less than some of its parts; and that to his imitators the strategy of describing her through the isolation of those parts presented an attractive basis for imitation, extension, and ultimately, distortion" (267). For Cummings—at least in this context—gentle fragmentation does not generate distortion nor reduction but a synecdochic expression of the entire beloved. In comparison, Cummings' Sapphic voice conjures union of love and sexuality, but is vaster. Not all Cummings' love poems suggest Sapphic eros, but neither do these sexual poems. This distinction is important to consider how Sappho offers a specific modality of desire in his poetic to achieve the compounded self with the beloved.

Why, then, will this project emphasize how Cummings depicts Sapphic eros in the sonnet form? By turning to Sappho and, in my reading, modulating the Petrarchan tradition, Cummings takes a modernist step of reinvention towards the form. In the Petrarchan sonnet tradition, "the lady is corporeally scattered; the lover is emotionally scattered and will be corporeally scattered, and thus the relationship between the two is one of mirroring" (Vickers 264); Cummings, however, pursues an erotic "compounded self," through "spiritual intimacy." Moore even suggests "Petrarch's foundational heterosexual love sonnets, then, are in literal terms imitations of a Lesbian original" (819).[21] In dismembering the sonnet, much as Petrarch does the lover,

[21] Moore even suggests that "Petrarch's foundational heterosexual love sonnets, then, are in literal terms imitations of a Lesbian original. In imitating Petrarch, English Renaissance sonneteers are thus repeating, obscuring, and yet perpetuating lesbian erotics as the precursor […]" (819).

Cummings turns away from the pagan or the Petrarchan chase, simultaneously rejecting Swinburne's body created for "abuse." While Cummings bee poems are vital to demonstrate how he engages a Sapphic fragment, Petrarchan discourse gives Cummings the form and Sappho's fragments give him the voice to write this desire.

The Petrarchan sonnet is generally made up of two quatrains composing an octave with a closed rhyme (ABBAABBA) followed by two tercets composing a sestet with interlaced rhyme (CDE CDE) (Fuller 2). According to Fuller, the relationship between octave and sestet "is of far greater significance than the fact that there are fourteen lines in the sonnet" (2), and this "bipartite structure is one of observation and conclusion, or statement and counter-statement" (2), violating "any expectation of stanzaic continuation" after the turn (3). The English sonnet, comparatively, is three quatrains, a turn, and a couplet, and Fuller writes that the more important difference is "where the couplet makes the English sonnet seem particularly summary or epigrammatic" (15). Fuller also notes on the term "Petrarchanism" that "Petrarch himself insisted on the genuineness of his passion for Laura" (6-7), but their love dynamic was still, biographically, one of the chase—not one of union. Braden claims that the sonnet still "keeps the trace of its Petrarchan imprint as the classic form for love poetry, and until the early seventeenth century the love of which it treated repeatedly resembles the love of which Petrarch wrote: hopeless love for an unresponsive object" (251). It is "Petrarch's difficult to define, always unattainable object of love" that bring into focus "The poet's desire—that sense of lack, yearning, and incompletion that might be well considered the troubled, changeful source of nearly all Petrarch's poetry" (Bermann 26). This "yearning" and "incompletion" is occasionally present in Cummings' work, but it does not guarantee the unattainability or the chase associated with the form.

Contrasting these "sexual" poems with his "Sapphic" conceptions of eros can be done through the sonnet "god gloats upon Her stunning flesh." This poem shows Cummings' characteristic play between majuscule and miniscule to bestow sacred status upon the lover and introduces several key elements of his Sapphic voice. The choice to use the miniscule "i" is a distinct feature of his work, but it also draws attention to the instances in which he does opt for the majuscule.[22] With both sexual connotations and Sapphic eros present, the beloved becomes an object of worship in the poems'14 lines:

> god gloats upon Her stunning flesh. Upon
> the reachings of Her green body among
> unseen things,things obscene (Whose fingers young
>
> the caving ages curiously con)
>
> —but the lunge of Her hunger softly flung
> over the gasping shores
> leaves his smile wan,
> and his blood stopped hears in the frail anon
>
> the shovings and the lovings of Her tongue.
>
> god Is The Sea. All terrors of his being
> quake before this its hideous Work most old
> Whose battening gesture prophecies a freeing
>
> of ghostly chaos
> in this dangerous night
> through moaned space god worships God—
>
> (behold!
> where chaste stars writhe captured in brightening fright) (*CP* 1-16, 153)

This Petrarchan sonnet, follows an ABBABBACDCEDE rhyme scheme and slightly modifies the traditional ABBAABBACDECDE form, interlacing the words "old" and "behold" around

[22] Cummings' name is frequently stylized in the lowercase, as e.e. cummings, in reference to his usage of "i." This stylistic change not his choice, but was assigned by his publishers later in his career (*Imperishable* "Preface").

and interrupting rhyming couplets. The Cummings use of enjambment also fractures the fourteen-line structure while maintaining the integrity of the metrical units. Bermann finds that "what Petrarch almost never subverts is the Italian sonnet's most distinctive and, in his hands, most self-reflective feature, the turn from octave to sestet" (45). With "god Is The Sea," the sonnet turns firmly from discussing the union of the lovers to the effects of it. The "counter-discourse" of this sestet is not truly countering, but describes the sublime effect of their earlier union. There are also intimations of Sappho's "Fragment 3," which reads "The stars about the fair moon in their turn hide their bright face when she at about her full lights up all earth with silver" (Sappho). The "bright face" of the moon is surrounded by stars subjected to the power of eros as they writhe, "captured," and frightened by the moon's silver illuminating them. This stunning, sublime "whitening fright" also evokes *poikilos,* a quality that Diana Collecott identifies in Sappho's work as "[connoting] the play of light and texture, what is shimmering, artful, variegated" (*Sapphic Modernism* 17). The delicacy of the silver moonlight and the erotic sublime temper the "obscene" sexuality, as the speaker's smile is left "wan" in the "frail anon," while the "terrors of his being / quake" before this extravagant sight. Here, too, the delicacy of the poem is tempered by effects of the stunning, erotic sublime and the "obscene" sexuality, as the speaker's smile is left "wan" and is in the "frail anon," and the "terrors of his being / quake." The Sapphic voice is restored by the closing *poikilos.*

This poem's lowercase "god" and uppercase "Sea," exemplify the religiosity suggested by erotic love, for they suggest "god" is inferior to "Her." As god gloats "Upon / the reachings of Her green body among / unseen things,things obsence," "Her green body" stands out from her "obsence" surroundings. With the early turn in stanza two, "Her" hunger is flung over "the gasping shores," evoking Sappho through the shoreline, like Aldington's body "whiter than the

moon-white sea." Upon this arrival, the lover's "blood stopped" from "the shovings and the lovings of Her tongue," as "Her tongue's" actions freeze the speaker, echoing Sappho's "tongue [breaking]" and blood stopping in "Fragment 31." The power of "Her" exceeds his, bringing chaos before "through moaned space god worships God—". Both lovers, here, are "god," with "Her"' holding the superior "godlike" position through eros. The poem then ends in a parenthetical comment, and by separting the final lines from the rest Cummings' em dash creates a dissonant conclusion. Cummings also honours the Petrarchan mode of remaining "semantically open, open to the extent of the speaker's self-questioning desire. It is only temporarily closed" (Bermann 49), ending on the parenthetical comment that does not resolve the following lines and the em dash. This enjambment increases the tension in the lines. Especially tense is the end of the line "softly flung," as "Her hunger" hangs in the air, and the later "freeing" hangs in the enjambment of the double line break before meeting "ghostly chaos." It is more than just a "moaned space" to worship, but a reach for a greater connection with the beloved.

Rosenblitt claims that this poem is "built on the eroticisms of pagan Harvard" (*Beauty* 188), referring to the "old cosmogonies… where earth, sea, sky, sun, winds and so on appear as gods or goddesses" (188). As she highlights, "the goddess Gaea, who is Earth, takes Ouranos, who is sky, as her lover"—and so the "'chaste stars' of the nighttime that 'writhe captured in brightening fright' inherit the fate of the chaste nymphs of the pagan sexuality of pursuit" (*Beauty* 188). Though this "sexuality of pursuit" is present, it is the stars that are captured, not the sea or the shore. Rosenblitt notes that "'god gloats' and its transgressive portrayal of God in a lascivious sexual union with the Sea… is not just sexual union, but sex down and dirty" (*Beauty* 194). She is correct about the "sexual union," but the Sapphic imagery lingers in the "freeing // of ghostly chaos" of this union. The sublime "chaos" created in the "dangerous night" still

manages to make the "moaned space" sacred. Through these images, the "god" worshipping "God" brings the sexuality of the "shovings and lovings" of her tongue to the beloved. Then, the "chaste stars writhe captured in brightening fright" move from the sexual image back to "sexual union," the "mutuality of desire," the erotic sublime, and Sapphic eros.

Another Petrarchan *Chimney*, "when citied day with the sonorous homes," evokes imagery of ancient Greece and Sapphic delicacy while depicting the yearning hinted at within "god gloats upon Her stunning" without the register of sexuality. The poem reads:

> when citied day with the sonorous homes
> of light swiftly sink in the sorrowful hour,
> thy counted petals O tremendous flower
> on whose huge heart prospecting darkness roams
>
> torture my spirit with the exquisite froms
> and whithers of existence,
> as by shores
> soundless,the unspeaking watcher who adores
>
> perceived sails whose mighty brightness dumbs
>
> the utterance of his soul—so even i
> wholly chained to a grave astonishment
> feel in my being the delirious smart
>
> of thrilled ecstasy,where sea and sky
> marry—
>
> to know the white ship of thy heart
>
> on frailer ports of costlier commerce bent (*CP* 1-16,163)

Again, Cummings' holds the Petrarchan mode's rhyme scheme, writing an ABBAABBA CDECDE pattern that is gently fractured by his use of enjambment to emphasize certain words. Recalling Rosenblitt's introduction of Gaea and Ouranos, the gods of sky and sea linger as the "unspeaking watcher" looks towards the sea, yearning for "the white ship of thy heart." Within

this sonnet, the speaker dreams of union; they are not whole while they "lack" the lover. In the imagery, the coming of dawn mirrors the "light swiftly [sinking] in the sorrowful hour," bringing the day to a close as "thy counted petals O tremendous flower / on whose huge heart prospecting darkness roams." The beloved, made "tremendous flower" with "huge heart," and who must be intimately known by the lover—having previously "counted" the petals—is out of the speaker's reach, "[torturing] my spirit with the exquisite froms / and whithers of existence." Again, eros threatens separation with the "prospecting darkness" stemming from the beloved. Then, the speaker "wholly chained to a grave astonishment"—or the "astounding" erotic sublime—is a prisoner to bad news, feeling "the delirious smart / of thrilled ecstasy, where sea and sky / marry—". The "thrilled ecstasy" of erotic splendour causes a "delirious smart," stinging the lover with desire. The floral and seascape images, the suspended desire, and the delicacy—especially the "white ship of your heart"—evoke Sappho, both in imagery and eros, as the lover and beloved are in the liminal space of desire, waiting for the moment of union.

The speaker's request to "torture my spirit with the exquisite forms / and whithers of existence" desires the Swinburnian annihilation through this "thrilled ecstasy." This sonnet's pseudo-turn brings the "i" into the poem and, like "god gloats," turns towards the sublime effect of the octave's yearning, but the transition is not as rigid. At the close of the poem, the speaker wonders "to know the white ship of the heart," there is an inversion, transforming the vaginal image of the beloved flower into a vessel offshore: the white ship could be another location or thing to be entered, but could also be the thing that enters, approaching "frailer ports" than the speakers' own. This also suggests resounding insecurity on the part of the speaker, wondering if the beloved's heart is bent on "ports of costlier commerce," as though the ship may choose another "port" other than his own. The sonnet does not permit the reductive fragmenting or

objectifying of the lover's body, which becomes an entire ship or "tremendous" flower, nor does it seek a sexual means to an end. Instead, Cummings paints desire as gentle, distant, and tremendous.

In my readings, Cummings' use of synecdoche addresses the beloved's body in a fragmentary manner without the effects of objectification associated with the blazon tradition, which again offers to repair the "wounded and open" sonnet. In "when my love comes to see me it's," for instance, Cummings' encompasses multiple senses to describe the connection between the lovers' bodies:

> when my love comes to see me it's
> just a little like music,a
> little more like curving colour(say
> orange)
> against silence,or darkness....
>
> the coming of my love emits
> a wonderful smell in my mind,
>
> you should see when i turn to find
> her how my least heart-beat becomes less.
> And then all her beauty is a vise
>
> whose stilling lips murder suddenly me,
>
> but of my corpse the tool her smile makes something
> suddenly luminous and precise
>
> —and then we are I and She....
>
> what is that the hurdy-gurdy's playing (*CP* 1-15, 166)

Cummings uses a double entendre in "the coming of my love emits / a wonderful smell in my mind," representing both the literal arrival of his love and her fragrance and as well as smell of sexual climax in the room. Both are "wonderful" to Cummings: "all her beauty is a vise // whose stilling lips murder suddenly me, // but of my corpse the tool her smile makes something."

Shakespearean in form, the sonnet's turn offers the summary of the lovers' union, becoming I and She. This poem signals, again, the rigorous intention with which Cummings employs capital letters in his poetry: in "when my love comes to see me it's," the only capitals in the poem are reserved for "I" and "She" after her smile "makes something" of his corpse. The lover is transformed in the beloved's presence, until "we are I and She," giving space for the "imagined whole" the Petrarchan tradition does not allow, introduced through the majuscules. Through this encounter, they are both transformed and elevated. The majuscules hold them in the regard of deities, "godlike" through eros. Here, the sublime is again evoked, since "nothing is as conducive to sublimity as an appropriate display of passion" (Longinus). Rosenblitt's "exquisite annihilation" returns us to Sappho's "Fragment 31," as the speaker's heart-beat "becomes less," the "stilling lips" of "her beauty" are the "vise" responsible for his "death" upon their union, upon her "coming." Until: "her smile," a physical attribute, makes something of his corpse, finding it "suddenly luminous and precise." This evokes *poikilos* in the illumination of the speaker's "corpse" through eros. The rhyme scheme of this sonnet is harder to trace due to the fragmentation, relying on the alliteration of the "l" ("love," "little," "like," "lips," "luminous") in the first half and the "b" ("heart-beat," "become," "beaty," "but") for connection. While this sonnet is less Sapphic in the images, delicacy, or union than other *Chimneys*, it demonstrates the spirit of affirmation with which the lovers approach this seemingly fatal union, and leads to the compounded self.

Cummings' Sapphic voice is only not contained to the *Chimneys,* lingering in many of his early works, which we will turn to for succinct examples of the Sapphic-blazon.[23] A poem

[23] Many of these poems are inspired by his first wife, Elaine Orr. One afternoon, in Paris, "his first glimpse of [Orr] walking toward him in the Tuileries Gardens was an experience that he remembered as 'my life's most magical moment'" (Kennedy 240). When Cummings first met Orr, she was betrothed to his friend Scofield Thayer. She and Cummings did end up married, and she was the mother of his only child.

written from this time—published in *Etcetera*—"conveys his experience of being another self through [love]" (Kennedy 240), perfectly demonstrating the Sapphic elevation of the self:

> look
> my fingers,which
> touched you
> and your warmth and crisp
> littleness
> —see?do not resemble my
> fingers. My wrists hands
> which held carefully the soft silence
> of you(and your body
> smile eyes feet hands)
> are different
> from what they were. My arms
> in which all of you lay folded
> quietly,like a
> leaf or some flower
> newly made by Spring
> Herself,are not my
> arms. I do not recognise
> as myself this which i find befor
> me in the mirror. i do
> not believe
> i have ever been these things;
> someone whom you love
> and who is slenderer
> taller than
> myself has entered and become such
> lips as i use to talk with,
> a new person is alive and
> gestures with my
> or is it perhaps you who
> with my voice
> are
> playing. (Kennedy 240-41; *CP* 1-23, 1061)

Cummings' employs what I identify to be the Sapphic-blazon, turning the lover into a litany of body parts without structuring the poem as reductive, like the traditional blazon; the speaker mentions their "wrist hands" and the beloved's "body / smile eyes feet hands," adding all of these parts to equal the "someone whom you love." Instead of scattering the beloved into a

categorical or scattered figure, the entire body is instead created from these fragmentary images: Cummings is constructing the lover, rather than deconstructing. The speakers even claims, “I do not recognize / as myself this which I find before me / in a mirror,” failing to believe they “have ever been” this version of themselves before the beloved. Present, too is “Spring / Herself,” a deity responsible for the Sapphic delicacy rendered in the adjectival play: “crisp / littleness,” “quietly,” “newly made,” “slenderer.” The result is a “new person,” and likely a “better self.” This does contain a hint of the Petrarchanist betterment through the lover, but it is through their union and connection that this occurs, not just the lover’s desire; the speaker wonders if “is it perhaps you,” assigning agency to the beloved in this transformation.

Hints of such a compounded self appear in his other early writings, such as “because” from his third poetry volume, *is 5*. The poem is void of the sexual imagery from *Erotic Poems,* exemplifying, again, how Sapphic voice articulates erotic desire in Cummings’ work:

> because
> you go away i give roses who
> will advise even yourself,lady
> in the most certainly(of what we
> everywhere do not touch)deep
> things;
> remembering ever so
> tinily these,your crisp
> eyes actually shall contain new faeries
>
> (and if your slim lips are amused,no wisest
>
> painter of fragile
> Marys will understand
> how smiling may be made as
> skilfully.) But carry
> also,with that indolent and with
> this flower wholly whom you do
> not ever fear,
> me in your heart
>
> softly;not all

but the beginning

of mySelf (*CP* 1-21, 313)

In this poem, Cummings is anticipating a separation from his beloved, yearning amidst the pronounced absence of the beloved, like in "when citied days with sonorous homes," which opens with the premise "because / you go away." Parenthetically, Cummings remarks on "(of what we / everywhere do not touch)," focusing on what is not in this scene, which, like H.D. in "Fragment 113," introduces the erotic tension of "reaching." Again, the adjectives evoke Sapphic delicacy, like in "look," describing the beloved as "crisp," "smiling," "indolent," "soft," and "flower." This speaker, too, highlights how the beloved's "slim lips" could not be made by "wisest // painter of fragile / Marys." Cummings likely references the Virgin Mary and traditional Christian art when suggesting these painters cannot understand "how smiling may be made as / skilfully)," for they are unable to recreate the beloved's beauty, and he evokes the pagan with the "new faeries" of her eyes. Creating a beloved who cannot be replicated brings us to the turn of the poem, as the speaker asks the beloved to carry with the delicate flower of "me in your heart // softly:not all / but the beginning // of mySelf." Cummings asks the beloved to keep part of him "in your heart" before saying it is "but the beginning // of mySelf." Through the beloved's heart, the speaker's new self is born, kept in the beloved's heart.

This is the erotic climax of the poem: the capital "S" in the centre of "mySelf," the only majuscule in the poem apart from "Marys," elevates the "beginning" self above the previous "i" and "me" of the poem, originally represented by miniscule letters. Like the majuscule play in "god gloats upon Her stunning flesh," the importance is shifted to the "Self" in the otherwise miniscule poem. In Cummings' work, Webster identified that the lowercase "I" is crucial to many of Cummings' writing conventions, noting that his use of the capital "I" "[depicts] the

(e)mergence and realization of a multiple self at one with the natural, actual world, whether ambient air, sun, the eye of a bird, or the self of a lover" (107).[24] He then notes that "this lower-case "I" persona may be found (and revealed) hiding in (or spatially detached from) an entire world—or it may show up as someone else's "I"—the individuality of the other. Cummings also occasionally places a capital I in the poems to refer to himself, to another self, or the merging of the self with the other" (Webster 111). Webster misses that this "merging of the self" is not simply a merging but an elevating, as the "compounded self" emerges through Sapphic eros.

Combining every aspect of Cummings' Sapphic voice, the poem "sunlight was over" from *is 5* is the most Sapphically erotic of all of his poetry that I have read. It employs the Sapphic-blazon, *poikilos,* delicacy, Gaea and Oronous, and the compounded self:

> sunlight was over
> our mouths fears hearts lungs arms hopes feet hands
>
> under us the unspeaking Mediterranean bluer
> than we had imagined
> a few cries drifting through
> high air
> a sail a fishing boat somebody an invisible spectator,
> maybe certain nobodies laughing faintly
>
> playing moving far below us
>
> perhaps one villa caught like pieces
> of a kite in the trees,here
> and here reflecting
> sunlight
> (everywhere sunlight keen complete
> silent

[24] He continues that "In *i:sixnonlectures*, Cummings promises to present his audience with 'one whole half' (63) of his aesthetic self" (Webster 108), but "the self's multiplicities and the nature of language may prevent us from naming that self, for Cummings, an 'individisble' or 'not divisible' (43) whole may nevertheless be made of different parts" (Webster 109).

and everywhere you your kisses your flesh mind breathing
beside under around myself)
by and by

a fat colour reared itself against the sky and the sea

...finally your eyes knew
me,we smiled to each other,releasing lay,watching
(sprawling,in
grass upon a
cliff)what had been something
else carefully slowly fatally turning into ourselves...

while in the very middle of fire all

the world becoming bright and little melted. (*CP* 1-27, 301)

Sunlight evokes Sappho's "Fragment 79," translated by H.T. Wharton as "I love delicacy, and for me Love has the sun's splendour and beauty" (Sappho), and, of course, *poikilos*. This rich splendour of Love "was over" the lovers, for their "mouths fears hearts lungs arms hopes feet hands" (2). While the traditional blazon reduces the lover into fragments, Cummings' encompasses and constructs the lover with this litanizing technique, both physical and internal, connecting the "being" of them both. Not only their mouths, feet, and hands, but their vital organs—hearts, lungs—and intimate details—fears, hopes—are shrouded by the sun's splendour, just as in "look / my fingers" develops the "beginning" of themselves. This recurs in lines 14-17, where the speaker notes that there is "(everywhere sunlight" and "everywhere you your kisses your flesh mind breathing / beside under around myself)." Here, the lover is separated into "kisses," "flesh," and "breathing," but encompass the speaker completely: "beside," "under," "around." Within the poem, too, the lovers are literally elevated above the setting on the cliff,

highlighting the elevation achieved through Eros. The speaker notes "under us the unspeaking Mediterranean bluer / than we had imagined" (3-4), is "playing moving far below us" (9). Below the lovers, too, is the variegated "reflecting / sunlight" that is "playing" on the water, highlighting *poikilos,* and the lovers travel over the sea through Sappho's "Fragment 31," where the lover "puts the heart in my chest on wings." The presence of Gaea and Orounos echoes from "god gloats upon Her stunning flesh" or "when citied sonorous homes," finding themselves "against sea and sky."

The location of the lovers is described parenthetically in three different sections of the poem, protecting them. The first parentheses describe the sunlight surrounding the lovers "everywhere," and the second, crammed into two and a half lines, reads "(sprawling,in/grass upon a/cliff)." The cliff stretches out in the fresh, natural, even pastoral world. Comparing the parenthetical syntaxes, though, puts pressure on the location: other than the enjambment and lone word "silent" in the first aside, the only commas or pauses in the poem are in the second parentheses, allowing the sunlight to surround the lovers uninterrupted—but this space is crammed, with short, choppy lines. The description of the two "sprawling" is not sprawling at all, as though hurriedly added in to reluctantly ground the lovers in a physical setting. A third, pseudo-parenthetical section encompasses the lovers, again separated from the rest of the poem by the ellipses. These pauses slow down the rushing, comma-less lines of the poem, reaching a climax with the arrival of "…finally." In this space, the lovers can finally know each other, "releasing," and "carefully slowly fatally turning into ourselves." The safety of the elliptical space protects the two from the rest of the world, "fatally" transforming them into a compounded, unified pair.

There is almost the division of a Petrarchan sonnet with the ellipses slicing the poem to separate the final eight lines which, like "when my love comes to see me," ends with the summary of the lovers' union to indicate their transformation. As the poem closes, the intensity of the sunlight overpowers the lover: "while in the very middle of fire all / the world becoming bright and little melted." This evokes yet another Sapphic fragment, "Fragment 130," where "Eros the melter of limbs (now again) stirs me—/ sweetbitter unmanageable creature who steals in" (Carson, *If Not: Winter* 265). Carson claims that, "eros is an experience of melting" (*Eros* 39), and this creates a paradox, since "In experiencing and articulating the melting threat of eros, the Greek poets are presumably also learning something about their own bounded selves through the effort to resist dissolution of those bounds in erotic emotion" (*Eros* 40). To prevent the melting and "to save the ice, you must freeze desire" (Carson, *Eros* 116). Cummings, however seems to push against this: instead of being dissolved by the power of eros and burned up by desire, Cummings' images are graceful and solid, unharmed by the melting. The speaker and lover become themselves in the centre of Love's splendour, dissolving the "boundary of flesh and self" to achieve an "imagined whole." Basking in the glory of eros and the sunlight, Cummings creates an erotic power that sacralises the two, surrendering to and harnessing the power of eros. By turning "carefully slowly fatally" into themselves, the lovers achieve a transcendent sense of self through this Sapphic eroticism. As the two compound, sharing in "ourselves" and the list of their physical, mental, and spiritual elements, the two finally know each other.

Through each of these poems, the distinctions between Cummings' writing of sexual images, love poems, and actual engagement with Sapphic eros become clear: the rigorous detail with which Cummings employs Sapphic fragments widen the boundaries of our understanding of

how his classicism influences his work. Using *poikilos,* the litany of the beloved of the Sapphic-blazon, and the symptoms of love from "Fragment 31," we can bring his allusions to the surface. By working with the sonnet form, Cummings cleverly displaces the sexuality of the chase which he personally rejected, remedying Petrarchan discourse and a pagan pursuit to reach towards the "better self" through a "mutuality of desire" and erotic love. While his "sexual" poems are, indeed, some of his most important innovations, his popularities and idiosyncrasies have led scholars to dismiss the depth of his engagement with the classics. My research, prompted by Rosenblitt, offers opportunity for a reconsideration of his classicism in other facets of his work—especially the role of Sappho in his conceptions and writings of erotic desire.

Chapter Two

"the tremendous yonder": Erotic Liminality in H.D. and E.E. Cummings

> It was not lust; it was not love—it was some vaster,
> mightier thing that needed neither touch of body nor thrill of soul.
> It was a thought divine, splendid.
>
> \- W.E.B. DuBois, "The Comet"

After briefly introducing H.D.'s engagement with Sappho in the first chapter, this thesis will now focus on comparing H.D. and Cummings' uses of Sapphic eros in their writings of desire. Research on Cummings' classical engagement is lacking, and the same has been said of the classicism of H.D.'s poetics: Gregory notes that "until recently, critics have dismissed the classical allusiveness of her poems as trivial or contrived, and the critical climate has not existed in which either her lyricism or her hellenism could be taken very seriously" (*H.D. and Hellenism* 137).[25] As Gregory and others have since suggested, for H.D., Sappho is "the deepest classical presence in her writing" ("H.D. and Translation" 151). As I make a similar argument about the significance of Sappho in Cummings' work, I will turn to scholarship on H.D.'s classicism to supplement what is missing on Cummings; the overall function of H.D.'s Sapphism can be seen in Cummings. Collecott finds that "H.D. is not merely alluding to Sappho, nor signifying on her songs, but absorbing the aesthetics of an archaic *eros* into her own poetic" (*Sapphic Modernism* 17). [26] It is "Sappho's fragments [that teach H.D.] the radicals of intimacy in the erotic address to an imagined other" (Gregory, *H.D. and Hellenism* 136), helping to expose the Sapphic intertextuality composing H.D.'s "archaic eros." Cummings' radical intimacy is founded on this archaic eros, too, as this chapter will show.

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[25] Also important will be the work of Eileen Gregory, Harriet Tarlo, Rachel Blau DePlessis, Susan Stanford Friedman, Miranda Hickman, and J. Alison Rosenblitt.

[26] "In contrast to the sometimes perfunctory preservation of Sappho's art in the prose of classical grammarians and rhetoricians, H.D.'s re-membering of Sappho is also a reincorporation in a lyric context, a lesbian poetics" (Collecott 10).

Rosenblitt's pursues a comparison of Cummings and H.D. aims to "[bring] out both shared and divergent aspects of their respective Hellenisms" (*Imperishable* 8), but this chapter will instead consider converging aspects of their respective Sapphisms. As mentioned in Chapter One, she reads H.D.'s *Sea Garden* against Cummings' "Songs" from *Tulips,* arguing that "H.D.'s *Sea Garden* achieves its emotional intensity partly through its submerged Sapphism" (*Imperishable* 165). Rosenblitt claims:

> In *Sea Garden,* H.D. looks for a violent and fractured dissolution against a pastoral landscape defined by the crashing sea. In 'Songs,' Cummings looks for a peaceful and suffused dissolution within a pastoral landscape defined by the meadow. The many points of comparison between Cummings and H.D. can sharpen our sense of the underlying contrast between fractured, seascaped dissolution and suffused, meadowed dissolution. Reading Cummings against H.D., we can appraise more exactly the nature of Cummings' Horatian, seasonal meadow by juxtaposing it to H.D.'s Sapphic, time-suspended shore. (*Imperishable* 138)

What Rosenblitt's focus on Horace bypasses is how Cummings' work articulates a Sapphic, time-suspended shore, suggesting liminality and edging towards eternity through the transcendent power of eros. While "Songs" might be defined by the meadow, *Chimneys* engages multiple settings, including a "crashing sea" from works like "god gloats upon Her stunning flesh" or "when citied day with the sonorous homes." His poetry suggests a "submerged Sapphism" that it is not always "violent and fractured," defined, broadly, by Spring. She claims that "H.D.'s Sapphic ritual time offers an imaginative removal from ordinary, cyclical, seasonal time" (*Imperishable* 163), which I also find in the work of Cummings. Reading the poets together, we see how Cummings' Sapphism compares to H.D.'s—but "dissolution" is the only

word Rosenblitt leaves common between the poets, and I find an "archaic eros" to be what unifies them.

How much of H.D.'s work Cummings encountered in his lifetime is unclear, although he would know some of the work of her first volume *Sea Garden* (1916) from its early forms in the anthology *Des Imagistes* or the periodical *The Dial* (*Imperishable* 138). Regardless of their familiarity with one another, their similar engagement with Sapphic eros, spring, and garden imagery illuminates their constructions of the beloved and the impact Sappho's lyric had on both poets. Collecott also makes a same observation to Rosenblitt's about the presence of Swinburne's "'mutilated fragments'. Far from presenting a diminished female body, H.D.'s doubling of herself with the Lesbian poet [Sappho] covertly opposes men's power as writers, editors and critics with an empowered lesbian body" (*Sapphic Modernism* 15). The turn both poets make from the Victorian tradition and Swinburne's body for abuse show their dissatisfaction with Victorian Sapphic reception, sending both poets to the classical source.[27]

In their accounts of desire, both poets evoke a liminal space before the "melting" or the moment of "reaching" that Carson outlines. By "articulating the melting threat of eros," the "bounded selves" resist being dissolved in erotic emotion. In their poetry, Cummings and H.D. both seek to "freeze desire," to "resist dissolution," creating effects that seem to suspend the moment of liminality. According to Gregory, "Perhaps the most remarkable quality of Sappho's imagined Lesbos is [its] 'liminality,' the threshold quality" ("Rose Cut in Rock" 529). Recalling H.D.'s own description in "The Wise Sappho" of Sappho as a "pseudonym for poignant human

[27] According to Collecott, H.D. often engaged H.T. Wharton's 1885 translations, and used his numbering; "It also clearly indicates that, despite her familiarity with Wharton, H.D. worked direct from the Greek, resisting previous translations and engaging with newly discovered material" (*Sapphic Modernism* 10), finding that "Consequently, she responded both to Sappho's holistic aesthetic and to the scattered state of her texts. H.T. Wharton's *Sappho,* a close companion throughout H.D.'s poetic apprenticeship, represented extremes of both integration and disintegration…" (13).

feeling," this project will argue that Cummings, too, absorbs an archaic eros, yet without H.D.'s notions of a "tortured" or "breaking" Sappho.

While Rosenblitt's research does not engage very deeply with *Chimneys,* she does note that, compared to *Tulips,* "In [Sonnets] 'Unrealities,' there is more spiritual intimacy between lover and lady, which may result in bowing graciously to time—'i do excuse me,love,to Death and Time'—or in dreaming beyond it, of 'a connotation of infinity'" (*Imperishable* 189). These concepts of "spiritual intimacy" and "dreaming beyond" time allow us to focus on how Sapphic eros conjures a "threshold quality." "Liminality" in crucial to desire, and the liminal settings created by H.D. and Cummings in their poetry, as this project argues, generate the suspension of desire's erotic tension. In her discussion of how H.D.'s translation of Euripides' *Hippolytus* seeks to "reinvents eros," Hickman notes that "the discourse of shame through which eros is often culturally understood" (106) helps to guide H.D.'s work, allowing her to "[suggest] that as new cultural roles and spaces for women emerge, [psychic] strategies must take into account the dire force of Sappho's 'sweet-bitter' *eros*… alive in H.D.'s emotions during these years as more painful… than sweet" (108). Emerging from the "discourse of shame," H.D. uses Sapphic eros to keep her emotions alive, while preventing Spring's departure from occupying the liminality of erotic desire. Cummings' works against the "discourse of shame" and the repressive upbringing Rosenblitt identifies, but he reaches for this spiritual intimacy of Sapphic eros.

Both H.D.'s and Cummings' poems are frequently set in Spring or garden spaces, which offer liminal moments like "The brief time of the opened flower," (Gregory, "Rose Cut in Rock" 533). It is, in part, often through imagery of flowers that Sappho enters their poetry:

> In no other light can we see the choice of the flower as the key symbol of [Sappho's] work: it is beauty in its freshness, its immense and terrible delicacy, its perishability,

> which the image suggests—that brief moment when the beautiful shines out brilliantly and assumes, for all its perishability, the stature of an eternal condition in the spirit if not in the body. (McEvilley 269)

The floral images in Sappho's work indicate how the "eternal springtime" creates an effect of an "eternal condition," which allows Cummings to use Spring to preserve the moment of erotic union within his *Chimneys.* It is this "brief moment when the beautiful shines out brilliantly," this fleeting moment of erotic splendour, that both Cummings and H.D. attempt to capture. In Sappho's fragments, apart from a few mentions of dawn or sunlight, the temporality is often unclear, as she describes "a timeless world where the season, if it is suggested at all, is the poetically eternal springtime of young girlhood, characterized by symbolic flowers. And this is an internal season, really" (McEvilley 270). The liminal season of Spring is generally associated with eros, for "Within [a] thematic complex of death and life, winter and spring, Eros is the symbol of nature's vital force, of procreation and fertility, closely connected with spring conceived as the season of change, awakening and growth" (Westburg 195). As these poets engage Sapphic imagery, like Chapter One's bees, the "[flowers] in Sappho [are] thus a kind of metonym of divine, especially Aphroditic, presence" *(*Gregory, *H.D. and Hellenism* 157)—suggesting that this freshness and delicacy highlights a space for growth or transformation.

Apart from Spring or garden space, both poets manipulate temporality to evoke liminality. McEvilley notes that "Sappho likes full-moon nights" (269), although time is usually left ambiguous or goes undeclared (270) in her poems. Several Sapphic fragments do reference the night, where "the moon shines by reflected light … it nourishes night-time rather than day time flowers, so she nourishes dreams, rather than acts, of love" (McEvilley 275). Sappho's "Fragment Three," as examined in the first chapter, shows the silver light of the moon, and

"Fragment Fifty-Two" represents a tortured, isolated yearning, where "The moon has set, and the Pleiades; it is midnight, the time is going by, and I sleep alone" (Sappho). In the first fragment, the stars and moon act together, turning from the moon's brilliant light to cast the world in silver; in the second, the moon has gone, leaving Sappho's lyric speaker alone in the darkness. The "in-between" settings of nighttime, whether it be arriving at twilight or departing at dawn, allow these poets to suspend the lovers in the "threshold" of the day, increasing the liminality of these in between settings. In some instances, the night means the separation of the lovers—but it also offers an intimate, protected space like Tartakovsky's parentheses or a walled off garden.

Spring is also contrary to the "winter *topoi,* with their sad associations" (Holmes) that Petrarch favoured, "when the coldness of the lady and the impenetrability of her defenses correspond to the poet's taking on of exceptionally 'hard' and repetitious verse patterns" (Holmes). Instead of depicting a beloved "hardening into ice" (Holmes), these poets figure love and eroticism as fresh and even fluid, free from a "hard" or repetitious form. Gregory notes that "The [garden] is traditionally the place of consummation of love. In H.D.'s [*Sea Garden*] poems the garden is still a place of love, but love washed with salt" ("Rose Cut in Rock" 538). Apart from the garden, "an image of the secluded meadow in Greek literature… [signals] an erotic invitation or sexual dalliance" ("Virginity" 142), echoing the "meadowed dissolution" Rosenblitt examines. Cummings' own temporality is cyclical, often evoking a "thematic cycle from opening, to enclosing, to closing, to unclosing (and back to opening again) … his lover is—simultaneously—goddess, bride, queen, and muse" (Cureton 10). As a goddess, "the lover opens him up, gives him life itself, makes him feel reborn, like a flowering spring… And, as the muse, the lover uncloses him, gives him that more: poetic knowledge, timeless, transcendent vision" (Cureton 10). To best capture these fleeting moments of "unclosing" and "enclosing," Sapphic

images help Cummings hold the beloved on the page, capturing this "perishability" in an "eternal condition." In the sonnet form, Cummings' moment of opening "like a flowering spring" is suspended by his verse, like in H.D.'s *Sea Garden* and other poems.[28]

Turning to the poetry, Cummings' sonnet "it is so long since my heart has been with yours" suspends the lovers in an erotic "almost," where they yearn to be. In the sonnet, eros is present through the characterization of "Love":

> it is so long since my heart has been with yours
>
> shut by our mingling arms through
> a darkness where new lights begin and
> increase,
> since your mind has walked into
> my kiss as a stranger
> into the streets and colours of a town—
>
> that i have perhaps forgotten
> how,always(from
> these hurrying crudities
> of blood and flesh)Love
> coins His most gradual gesture,
>
> and whittles life to eternity
>
> —after which our separating selves become museums
> filled with skillfully stuffed memories (*CP* 1-15, 316)

In this poem, Cummings invokes eros directly, as "Love / coins His most gradual gesture //and whittles life to eternity," emphasized through his use of the majuscule. The speaker has "perhaps forgotten / how, always" Love does this, since it is "so long" since they have been with the beloved. In this memory, their unity creates *poikilos,* being "where new light begin and /

[28] "…thin images of flowers, autumns, meadows, and such, acquire a depth of emotion through their felt (if not always understood) relationship to the classical pastoral and seasonality of Horace" (*Imperishable* 165).

increase." This space of their desire demonstrates the "lack" of eros. In the centre of the poem, the speaker even dismisses mundane sexuality, moving away from "these hurrying crudities / of blood and flesh." The physical "crudities" are the place from which Love carves eternity from—and, once he is finished, the memory makes "museums" of their love. The image of the museum glimpses "eternity," too, as the memories will continue beyond their own lives. The "mingling arms" encased in "darkness," void of *poikilos* connect—but the register moves away from eternity. Without a rhyme scheme to unify the lines or the liminality to preserve the lovers' union, the memory adjusts to the obscuring of the darkness, and the lover must cling to the "almost" of this memory.

The image of being "stuffed" skillfully with memories clatters amidst the delicacy of this memory as the liminality is broken by Life's "whittling." Cummings uses similar language in "who's most afraid of death?thou" (*CP* 1, 161), concluding the poem with, "(and drawing thy mouth toward // my mouth,steer our lost bodies carefully downward" (*CP* 17, 161). The connection of their mouths, steering "lost bodies" downward, offers a sexual reading, but also a form of *katabasis* as the lovers move towards some form of eternal descent. Indeed, "our most separating selves" in the previous sonnet move away from the "compounded self" that Sapphic eros strives to form. Cummings' anticlimax, ending on a deflationary note, trivializes the Sapphic register employed earlier in the poem. His consonance in the final lines—"after" and "filled," "which" to "with," "separating selves" and "skillfully stuffed" before "museums" and "memories"—bring an unsatisfactory resolution to the "eternity" for the lovers' hearts. Does this suggest the "dissolution" Rosenblitt identifies in "Songs"? If the memory of this Sapphic eros is not sufficient, it does begin to dissolve without the preserving liminality.

Introducing Eros in "Fragment Forty," H.D. begins the poem with a Sapphic epigraph. It reads "*Love ... bitter-sweet. – Sappho,"* (H.D., *Collected Poems* 173). The whole fragment translates to "*Now Love masters my limbs and shakes me, fatal creature, bitter-sweet"* (Sappho). Sappho "first called eros 'bittersweet'" (*Eros* 3), and Collecott reminds us that, "In Greek, *glukupikron* ('sweetbitter') implies that Eros brings sweetness and then bitterness, in that order" (*Sapphic Modernism* 193). H.D. invokes this tone from the opening of her poem:

> Keep love and he wings,
> with his bow,
> up, mocking us,
> keep love and he taunts us
> and escapes. (H.D., *Collected Poems* 1-5, 173)

This love is mocking, taunting, and not to be kept: love, as a character, is ripe with negative action towards the "us" of the poem. Love later becomes "sick with imprisonment" (H.D., *Collected Poems* 22, 173), since he is not meant to be contained. The speaker, knowing that love is both bitter and sweet, asks, "but which is more sweet, / the sweetness, / or the bitterness?" (H.D., *Collected Poems* 34-35, 173). In this musing, the speaker begins to collapse the divide between sweetness and the bitterness; as they fuse, the speaker asks, "Is it bitter to give back / love to your lover / if he crave it?" (H.D., *Collected Poems* 40-42, 174) wondering, "Is it sweet / to possess utterly?" (H.D., *Collected Poems* 49-50, 174). This space between the words becomes indistinguishable as they compound and the tension between builds. In the close of the poem, love radiates:

> What need of a lamp
> when day lightens us,
> what need to bind love
> when love stands
> with such radiant wings
> over us?

> What need—
> yet to sing love,
> love must first shatter us. (H.D., *Collected Poems* 69-77, 174)

The paradox continues as the lovers, enshrined in the light from Love's "radiant wings" in the light of day—without need of a lamp, or to "bind love"—must "sing love," first "[shattering] them." The deliberation between sweetness or bitterness, freedom or binding, and whole or fractured encompasses the danger of closing the distance between beloveds or trying to possess Love himself. "Shattering" is a necessary step of achieving the radiance of love. In her essay *Notes on Thoughts and Vision,* H.D. observes that "The body consumed with love gives off heat" ("Vision" 42), mirroring the glow of the couple as they are lit by the day and the power of Love. Liminality surrounds them, as the urgency of love's mocking suspends the lovers' decisions about imprisoning love, caught between the opposing forces of erotic desire.

Alternatively, H.D.'s "White Rose" anthropomorphizes flowers while considering the departure of spring, which is crucial to preserving the perishable beloved. The poem is written in four stanzas and the second and fourth are parenthetical and italicized, which creates an ambiguous "other" standing apart from the reader. H.D. scholarship shows that her use of the chorus, or—"choral 'I'"—often mimics Euripides,[29] showing that "The roots of the choral 'I' are in the divine human epinician ode praising heroes and victors. In Greek poetry Sappho and Pindar perhaps more than any others achieve this enlarged sense of presence within a deliberate poetic fiction of divine service, wherein every image and thought, however intimate, relates to the life of the god" (Gregory, *H.D. and Hellenism* 147). Though Gregory is writing of H.D.'s translations of Euripides, her use of the chorus in her poetry to speak of the "White Rose" evokes

[29] "The speech of the choral 'I' in Greek tragedy presents a paradox: it is at once one and many, a single identity with a single complex of emotion and thought, and at the same time, a multiple entity, projecting a kind of experience by consensus" (Gregory, *H.D. and Hellenism* 145).

a "divine human" or intimate relation to "the life of the god," specifically Eros, in this poem. The speaker says, "white rose / you are a stricken weary thing, / shaming the spring" (H.D., *Collected Poems* 12-14, 284) before the white rose is given "a moment to repent / once Love is fled." The chorus then says:

> *...for spring is dead,*
> *Love having kissed the mouth,*
> *the mouth of youth*
> *again!)* (H.D., *Collected Poems* 37-40, 284-85)

In this poem, the Love's actions—and closing of the space between Love and "the youth"—brings the end of spring, and the realization of desire. The speaker's forceful language towards Love that suggests the rose must repent the sin of bringing spring's end make his presence again negative: once "Love [has] kissed the mouth" of the youth, meaning that "spring is dead." These intimations of pagan sexuality in H.D.'s "White Rose," especially in relation to Euripides, demonstrate the spectacle of Love's corruption, forcing the rose to "repent" for causing spring to die. We are again reminded that beloveds are to be chased, but not caught. Through embracing—or being kissed by the love—the moment of erotic desire is lost, as the suspension ends, and the "white rose" must repent for bringing Spring's end. This is not what we saw in the hesitating memory of Cummings' "it is so long since my heart has been with yours," but a more disillusioned reading of the love's power.

Moving away from a personified Eros and into the liminal settings, Cummings' poem "my lady is an ivory garden" (*CP* 1020) from *Etcetera* grants the beloved the liminal temporality both of twilight and of Spring within a garden space.[30] Twilight is liminal, between night and day, and a "garden" usually exists in the space between a house and the outside world. The

[30] This poem is from the section titled "Poems for Elaine Orr 1918-1919."

lover's lady becomes not just a flower but an entire "garden" through Sapphic voice, for she is "filled with flowers" (*CP* 2, 1020). She radiates Sapphic delicacy and "perishability" in her whole body; images describing "her shoulders are smooth and shining / flowers" (*CP* 12-13, 1020), or how "upon her whitest belly there is a clever dreamshaped flower" (*CP* 17, 1020) evoke *poikilos*, for they imagine the lady's body as shining and radiant. Cummings' Sapphic-blazon persists, too, describing her "hair," "ear," "her nostrils," as flowers; even "her / eyes and her mouth are three flowers" (*CP* 4, 5, 6, 9-10, 1020). He travels down the beloved's body—"her hand is five flowers," "and her wrists," "her feet are slenderest"—before the only majuscule in the poem begins an almost sexual description of her body:

> Her thighs are huge and firm flowers of night
> and perfectly between
> them eagerly sleeping
> is
>
> the sudden flower of complete amazement
>
> my lady who is filled with flowers
> is an ivory garden.
>
> And the moon is a young man
>
> who i see regularly,about twilight,
> enter the garden smiling to
> himself. (*CP* 24-35, 1020)

"Her thighs," bearing one of only two majuscules in the poem, hold the "complete amazement" of the flower sleeping between her legs, like the dozing bee from "un(bee)mo." "the moon is a young man" who the speaker sees "regularly, about twilight, / enter the garden smiling to / himself." The sexual nature of the smiling man entering the garden, penetrating the threshold and thus entering the beloved, which is also emphasized by the flower "eagerly sleeping," as though she waits in a bed for night fall so the personified moon may enter her space. Yet the would-be

graphic description of the "young man" as the moon entering his beloved is tempered by the Sapphic delicacy with which Cummings creates the scene, far from graphic the "shovings and lovings of Her tongue" or the image of "n w." The time being "about twilight" adds to the liminality of the "in-between" space during which the lover and beloved—or the moon and the garden—can be together. The "dreamshaped flower," too, suggests the liminality and perishability of blossoming—a time-honoured topos since a dream itself is fleeting. Once the "young man" of the moon enters, reaching the "firm flowers of night" of "Her thighs," the moment of entrance—and moment of unity with the garden—suspend her blossoming. The beloved as a garden emphasizes her freshness and natural role, protecting Spring, and allows the lover celebration each part of the beloved's body instead of scattering her.

Cummings' use of "ivory" also hints towards how "Whiteness is central to Cummings' early erotic sensiblilty" (*Imperishable* 207), which Rosenblitt links to how classical marble statues "powerfully reinforced the broader Western heritage of whiteness" (*Imperishable* 207). The crucial "whiteness" of Greek eroticism is considered, too, in Walter Pater's *Renaissance* (1873) and marble statues, where Pater writes, "That white light, purged from the angry, bloodlike stains of action and passion, reveals, not what is accidental in man, but the tranquil godship in him, as opposed to the restless accidents of life" (Pater qtd in Gregory, *H.D. and Hellenism* 93). For Cummings, though, the "whiteness" of the beloved "ivory garden" does not holds the rigid, inanimate beauty of a statue—especially not one fragmented or disfigured like Venus de Milo, the "goddess unashamed": instead, he figures a fresh, delicate beloved. Similarly, in H.D.'s work, white "symbolises a female independence not unrelated to lesbianism" (Tarlo 97).[31] Gregory claims that the "erotic configurations of Pater's writing help to shape

[31] "White and blue [can] be read as an encoding of lesbian desire; red as the colour representing heterosexual passion, and gold as passion between an immortal and a mortal or love so elevated between humans as to seem

H.D.'s fiction of Greece" (*H.D. and Hellenism* 93). Thus, the whiteness in "my lady is an ivory garden" and in the earlier poem "White Rose" represent a purity or "tranquil godship" bestowed upon the lover, which Cummings' transfers to the beloved through his Sapphic register.

H.D.'s poem "The Master" similarly describes the beloved's body with flowers, evoking this same fleeting temporality and employing "whiteness" while introducing colours apart from just "ivory." Published posthumously in 1981, "The Master" recalls her experience with psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud in the 1930s.[32] In his analysis, "Freud identified [H.D.'s] desire buried in 'the deepest unconscious or subconscious layers of my being, to be the founder of a new religion'" (DuPlessis and Friedman 418). Remembering that both poems were published posthumously, and thus never encountered by each other, we must consider how similarly H.D.'s beloved is presented to Cummings' "ivory garden":

> there is purple flower
> between her marble, her birch-tree white
> thighs,
> or there is a red flower,
>
> there is a rose flower
> parted wide,
> as her limbs fling wide in dance
> ecstatic
> Aphrodite,
> there is a frail lavender flower
> hidden in grass;
>
> O God, what is it,
> this flower
> that in itself had power over the whole earth?

---

divine" (Tarlo 96). Similarly, there is a "…white, unhuman element, containing fire and light and warmth, yet in its essence differing from all these, as if the brittle crescent-moon gave heat to us, or some splendid scintillating star turned warm suddenly in our hand like a jewel, sent by the beloved" ("Vision 57-58).

[32] The poem was published in *Feminist Studies* by Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Susan Stanford Friedman, claiming in "'Woman Is Perfect': H.D.'s Debate with Freud" that "'The Master' is not subtle, not coded. It directly addresses the compelling questions of identity that H.D. brought to Freud, but that she did not reveal in her public accounts of analysis: her anger with Freud, her rejection of the prescriptive bias in his theories of female sexuality, her love for women, her bisexuality, and the relationship of womanhood to her destiny as poet-prophet" (419). See also (Collecott, *Sapphic Modernism* 75-79).

> for she needs no man,
> herself
> is that dart and pulse of the male,
> hands, feet, thighs,
> herself perfect. (“The Master” 178-98)

Her “marble, her birch-tree white / thighs,” echoing Cummings’ thighs of “huge and firm flowers of the night,” reveal to open a flower, and reflect “ivory” in the “birch-tree white.” Instead of being “dreamshaped,” or of “complete amazement,” H.D.’s flower is imagined as “having power over the whole earth.” DuPlessis and Friedman characterize this section of the poem as “a lyrical and erotic celebration of woman’s physical being, where the woman’s ecstatic dance fuses the human form to earth, tree, and flower; where the women’s erotic mysteries connect sexuality, fertility, and spiritual renewal” (422). H.D., too, uses a Sapphic-blazon style of addressing the beloved’s body in “hands, feet, thighs” as she merges the images together, into “herself perfect” to celebrate her. The “flower” defies the central whiteness of Greek marble, instead relying on Sapphic imagery to describe her sexuality; the flower being red or purple evokes Aphrodite (Collecott, *Sapphic Modernism* 20; 207). Placing the lovers in “The Master” in this garden space full of flowers—evoking an Aphroditic grove through the colours—shows how the “grove is interiorized to become the space of the longing body and the innermost shrine of the goddess” (Gregory, “Rose Cut in Rock” 532). As Gregory suggests, this shows “paradoxical, threshold quality of Sapphic eroticism, both virginal (cold streams through apple branches, the meadow of spring flowers, fresh breezes) and sensually charged (smoking incense, shadow of roses, quivering leaves, the gold cup waiting to be filled)” (Gregory, “Rose Cut in Rock” 532). H.D.’s “longing body,” then, is coloured with Greek whiteness, Aphroditic grace, and Sappho’s voice.

H.D. “[thinks] of the words of Sappho” as such “colours, or states rather, transcending colour yet containing… all colour” (“Vision 58”), emphasizing her choice to describe the

beloved in these colours. Even before the beloved's "birch-three white thighs," desire is largely described in these Aphroditic colours:

> I did not know how to differentiate
> between volcanic desire,
> anemones like embers
> and purple fire
> of violets
> like red heat,
> and the cold
> silver
> of her feet: ("The Master" 84-92)

The "purple fire" and "red heat" of the flower contrast between the "silver" and "birch-tree" colour of the beloved's body, where eventually "white heat / melts into snow-flake / and violets / turn to pure amethysts" ("The Master" 108-11). The "white heat" of erotic desire "melting" emphasizes transformative eros, as the beloved and "volcanic desire" cause a change of states, the "purple fire" and "red heat" contrasting with the "cold silver" of her body. Through Aphrodite, Sappho's work "dissolves boundaries between the inner and outer self, between self and other" (Gregory, "Rose Cut in Rock" 530). Dissolving boundaries through Sappho and Sapphic eros enables H.D.'s lovers, too, to achieve the compounded self, melting in the "white heat" of "volcanic desire," and echoing the "dissolution" from Rosenblitt and Carson that we did not see in the peaceful twilight of Cummings' "ivory garden."

The final—and, for this project, perhaps the most important—intersection between these poems comes from Collecott's suggestion of the Sapphic tradition mediating the Petrarchan, where she considers how "The Master" evokes the erotic sublime. She notes that "'Longinus' celebrated Sappho as 'uniting opposites,'" (Collecott, *Sapphic Modernism* 78) before claiming that "In 'The Master,' [H.D.] recomposes the dismembered female body":

> H.D. knew this ancient essay [by Longinus] and knew, too, that the Sapphic predated the Petrarchan tradition… This love poetry assumes the male body—that is, the body of the speaking subject who is also the active sexual partner—as the place where contradictions are overcome; it is in the 'icy fire' of masculine passion that woman comes into writing […] The process by which 'the lovely she' is re-embodied in the masculine script involves disembodiment for the female beloved as the parts of her body are itemised for praise and thus fragmented by the male gaze. (*Sapphic Modernism* 78)

Through Sappho, H.D. finds an escape from the logic of the Petrarchan tradition. By replacing the "speaking subject who is also the active sexual partner" with a woman, she reclaims her desire and protects the beloved from the "fragmentation" of the male gaze, which mirrors Cummings' Sapphic-blazon strategy. On the Petrarchan blazon, Dubrow wonders "suggests that Petrarchism "blurred what was left of the boundaries between male and female" (*Echoes of Desire* 55), and that "The appeal of anti-Petrarchism stems in part from its attempts to re-establish firm definitions of gender" (55). But Dubrow's idea of gender dismisses the blazon tradition and "masculine passion" that disembodies a female beloved, which both Cummings and H.D. seek to avoid. Indeed, "The Master" traces the beloved's body like "my lady is an ivory garden," and resembles previous poems analyzed in this project, thus emphasizing how the H.D., too, turns to the Sapphic to remedy a Petrarchan itemization of the beloved. Both poems, unpublished until the 1980s, use similar imagery to describe this eroticism, and one dominant voice connects the two: Sappho. This, too, hints towards Freud's perception that H.D.'s desire founded a "new religion," presenting an opportunity for the lovers to transcend the boundaries of mere "sexual" desire.

Another garden of H.D.'s, more specific than the Aphroditic grove of "The Master," is her *Sea Garden,* which is rich with Sapphic intertextuality. For H.D., "[Sappho] *is* feeling, *is* a rocky island retreat for the lover of beauty… She is the goddess who guards [the garden], the sea that washes it, and the spirit informing the poet who suffers her ecstasies within it" (Gregory, "Rose Cut in Rock" 536). H.D. makes it "a *sea* garden, inimical to all but the most enduring. The sea represents here the harsh power of elemental life, to which the soul must open itself, and by which it must be transformed or die" (Gregory, "Rose Cut in Rock" 538). Enduring this Sapphic shoreline and its climate leads to a "transformed" soul, or the "compounded self," since the speaker experiences this erotic yearning in the liminal garden space of "Sea Rose":

> Rose, harsh rose,
> marred and with stint of petals,
> meagre flower, thin,
> sparse of leaf,
>
> more precious
> than a wet rose
> single on a stem—
> you are caught in the drift… (*SP* 3)

In the logic of the poem, the "harsh," "marred," "meagre" flower is "more precious" because of its resilience. The "you" of the poem is "caught in the drift" of the sand, while the rose can resist the elemental forces, which Gregory calls the "near annihilation of elemental power" ("Rose Cut in Rock" 539). According to Collecott, "[H.D.] resisted the rose-imagery of the dominant masculine tradition" ("H.D.'s Sapphic Fragments" 4), such that H.D.'s sea rose is not fleeting nor perishable; in fact, it gains value from its enduring and eternity, where "there is no one figure of god or goddess who represents a Muse. But beyond the figures within the poems there is a latent mythic presence: Sappho herself, the first love-possessed lyricist, who carries for H.D. an authority for her own marginal explorations, and for her sustained spiritualized eroticism"

(Gregory, "Rose Cut in Rock" 529). The "sustained spiritualized eroticism" of H.D.'s poetics—echoing, again, "spiritual intimacy"—and in this seascape "and other poems reveal the spiritual potency residing in a surrender to the process of 'sea-change.' The flowers represent, like those of Sappho, a pure openness to life" (Gregory, "Rose Cut in Rock" 539-40).

Does the "sea-change" of H.D.'s poems indicate an opportunity for a "compounded self"? If washing the garden with sea and salt offers the speaker resilience and fortitude, then surely the resulting self is "better," to use Carson's other word. Indeed, H.D. is working against a "dominant masculine tradition" of the rose image, transforming it through her seascape, much as Cummings' sonnets offer a reparative reading of the Petrarchan tradition.[33] By turning away from the "sexuality of the chase," these poets write very similar forms of spiritual, erotic desire—even in their differing sexualities or desires. Through Sapphic eros and these images from her fragments, both poets employ a Sapphic voice that dissolves the boundaries between self and other, compounding the lovers, and suspending their desire amidst these liminal settings.

Reprising the meeting of the young man of the moon in ivory garden is Cummings' moon poem from the volume *is 5*, "here is the ocean,this is moonlight:say." Instead, the beloved becomes the moon, emphasizing her liminal temporality and suggesting a fleeting presence that the lover tries to capture:

> here is the ocean;this is moonlight:say
> that both precisely beyond either were—
> so in darkness ourselves go,mind in mind
>
> which is the thrilling least of all(for love's
> secret supremely clothes herself with day)

[33] H.D. offers a transformative reading of desire through Sapphic eros, which Cummings himself felt; his first girlfriend, Doris Bryan, was "a victim of the early twentieth-century sexuality of the chase with its idealization of the male sexual hunter and the chaste shrinking virgin. 'Nice' girls like were under pressure to show no sexual side of themselves" (*Beauty* 70).

i mean,should any curious dawn discuss
our mingling spirits,you would disappear
unreally;as this planet(understand)

forgets the entire and perpetual sea

—but if yourself consider wonderful
that your(how luminous)life toward twilight will
dissolve reintegrate beckon through me,
i think it is less wonderful than this

only by you my heart always moves (*CP* 1-14, 406)

The "entire and perpetual sea" suggest permanence, "perpetually" existing even once "this planet // forgets." The beloved is otherworldly and celestial, instead of possessing the fresh delicacy of the "ivory garden," and the moonlight suggests *poikilos.* Within the darkness, the lovers go "mind in mind," joined mentally—playing on the physical "hand in hand." This is "least of all" thrilling to the lover, making physical connection inferior to how the beloved's life "toward twilight will / dissolve reintegrate beckon through me." The lover becomes the medium through which the beloved's life moves and "dissolves" before "reintegrating," transforming and thus compounding the two. The speaker also explains that love's secret "supremely clothes herself with day," as though only the night offers the lovers safety to tell love's "secret": the speaker knows that "any curious dawn," or coming of day discussing "our mingling spirits"—or, this union—would cause the beloved to disappear. Instead of hiding like Sappho's stars, the "luminous" life draws *poikilos* into the poem through the reflection on the ocean. Although time is not quite suspended in this poem, that is the lover's dream: the moonlight is the celestial force by which the lover moves, causing him to consider what life would be in an "entire and perpetual sea" of the beloved and the night: "how luminous."

Continuing to explore the liminal, temporal beloved, Cummings' "the ivory performing rose" considers the dawn while reaching back to images of flowers and whiteness. Once again, the speaker yearns for time to stand still:

the ivory performing rose

of you,worn upon my mind
all night,quitting only in the unkind

dawn its muscle amorous

pricks with minute odour these gross
days
when i think of you and do not live:
and the empty twilight cannot grieve
nor the autumn,as i grieve,faint for your face

O stay with me slightly. or until

with neat obscure obvious hands

Time stuff the sincere stomach of each mill

of the ingenious gods.(i am punished.
They have stolen into recent lands
the flower
with their enormous fingers unwished (*CP* 1-16, 179)

Cummings opens with not just a rose, but one "performing" its colour before the lovers must quit in the "unkind / dawn." Neither the "empty twilight" "nor the autumn" can grieve as the lover grieves; these spaces do not have the same agency nor liminality. They must wait for "Time" to stuff "the ingenious gods." In the tenth line, the speaker asks the beloved to "stay with me

slightly.” using the first period of the poem; the full stop is followed by an amendment, an option, “until” hands “stuff the sincere stomach” of some “ingenious gods.” “Time” is responsible for stealing this rose and satisfying the appetite of these gods, emphasizing both the perishability of “you” and the speaker’s desire to stop time. It is the speaker who is “punished,” grieving as the morning comes and erases the space the lover and beloved can inhabit. Then, in the last few lines, the single, unfinished parentheses cuts the lover off from the beloved, emphasizing the punishment the speaker endures as the god steals “you” away. Ending on the dissonant note of an unclosed parentheses suspends the reader in a moment of “almost,” as the flower is “unwished,” and leave the poem hanging on the page. The interrupted erotic union is dictated by time, emphasizing the eternal “reaching” of erotic desire.

Echoing the earlier poems “it is so long since my heart has been with yours,” and “the ivory performing rose,” the nighttime, syntax, and Eros all suspend the lovers in “when the proficient poison of sure sleep.” Love returns in this dissonance of the poem’s setting:

> when the proficient poison of sure sleep
> bereaves us of our slow tranquilities
>
> and He without Whose favour nothing is
> (being of men called Love) upward doth leap
> from the mute hugeness of depriving deep,
>
> with thunder of those hungering wings of His,
>
> into the lucent and large signories
> —i shall not smile beloved;i shall not weep;
>
> when from the less-than-whiteness of thy face
> (whose eyes inherit vacancy) will time
> extract his inconsiderable doom,
> when these thy lips beautiful embrace
> nothing
> and when thy bashful hands assume
>
> silence beyond the mystery of rhyme (*CP* 1-15, 155)

As the "poison of sure sleep" that will separate the lovers threatens, Love, the poem's majuscule character, leaps from "the mute hugeness of depriving deep" with "hungering wings." Sappho's "Fragment 31" is present once again. This building tension as the couple moves through time also resembles H.D.'s "Fragment Forty," for it offers the reader flashes of time that separate the two and evokes ivory through the "less-than-whiteness" of the beloved's face. Though it falls short of H.D.'s shattering, the "hungering" wings of Love approaches the *poikilos* of the "lucent" space, ascending as the couple approach "inconsiderable doom." The lover promises not to smile, nor to weep; when this doom takes the beloved's face their lips "embrace / nothing," and the poem arrives at silence. In the end, however, like the unclosed parentheses of "the ivory performing rose," Cummings never resolves what will happen once "when" arrives: the lovers are left hovering in a "when," leading nowhere. Though they are safe from "inconsiderable doom," they are left in the "huge muteness" "beyond the mystery of rhyme." Are the lovers protected by this muteness? The poem leaves it ambiguous, but it does show the erotic tension that emerges between when and where, moving into the space of the question but not through it and leaving the lovers suspended in irresolution.

H.D.'s "We Two" suggests a similar sense of union as the previous two poems, but it moves from attempts to "freeze desire" and glimpses of eternity to a successful suspension of the lovers. Instead of leaving the lover alone in the night, like Sappho's "Fragment Fifty-Two," "We Two" marvels at the beloved's influence, where "great petals of white rose, / force by the heat / too soon to break" and leave "We two" behind:

> We two are left:
> as a blank wall, the world,
> earth and the men who talk,
> saying their space of life

is good and gracious,
with eyes blank
as that blank surface
their ignorance mistakes
for final shelter
and a resting-place.

We two remain:
yet by what miracle,
searching within the tangles of my brain,
I ask again,
have we two met within
this maze of daedal paths
in-wound mid grievous stone,
where once I stood alone? (H.D., *Collected Poems* 164-65)

Whereas Cummings sonnet takes place "as this planet… forgets the entire and perpetual sea," "We Two" is situated after the planet's forgetting: "We two are left" where the world is blank, and where men say that "their space of life / is good and gracious"—yet their resting-place is a "blank surface." For Collecott, "the blank part of the page may be… a space in which voices resonate" (*Sapphic Modernism* 176), and so in "We Two," the "blank" faces "[defy] the erasure of lesbian existence by countering the oppressive structures of men's incomprehension of the maze" (178).[34] The speaker wonders "by what miracle" they have found each other in "this maze of daedal paths." Transformed from when "once I stood alone," the lover feels it is a "miracle" that they remain, seeing what "the world, / earth and men who talk" can not. It is worth mentioning, again, that H.D.'s use of the word "men" who talk could refer to her bisexuality. In her lifetime, "[H.D.] made no attempt to publish the texts which lucidly reveal a lesbian eroticism" (423 Blau DuPlessis and Friedman, but by turning to Sappho, H.D. could engage a same-sex tradition—at least in the language—that avoided masculine traditions, like the

[34] Collecott's reading focuses on H.D.'s bisexuality (176-81), which, though not relevant to Cummings, is crucial in considering how she constructs space and desire, as seen in "The Master."

Petrarchan. Through their union, the compounded lovers of "We Two" find an eternal union—as though the "miracle" gives them a hint of forever, remaining once the rest have gone.

Finally, to best demonstrate how Cummings suspends time, "a connotation of infinity" demonstrates the power of this erotic liminal suspension that H.D. gestures towards in "We Two" and I have identified in other poems.[35] The erotic "compounded self" is eternally in this photograph of the erotic dilemma, glimpsing immortality through the ephemeral moment when the lovers unite, and the melting is frozen:

> a connotation of infinity
> sharpens the temporal splendor of this night
>
> when souls which have forgot frivolity
> in lowliness,noting the fatal flight
> of worlds whereto this earth's a hurled dream
>
> down eager avenues of lifelessness
>
> consider for how much themselves shall gleam,
> in the poised radiance of perpetualness.
> When what's in velvet beyond doomed thought
>
> is like a woman amorous to be known;
> and man,whose here is always worse than naught,
> feels the tremendous yonder for his own—
>
> on such a night the sea through her blind miles
>
> of crumbling silence seriously smiles (*CP* 1-14, 150)

This is one of Cummings' most compact sonnets, following iambic pentameter over 14 whole lines, instead of fragmented units, and carrying the regular Shakespearean rhyme scheme of ABABCDCDEFEFGG. Through this form, Cummings can precisely articulate his Sapphic voice, adhering to this traditional form without employing his usual enjambment or

[35] The title of the poem, too, suggests William Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," as though Cummings created the title with a thesaurus. This was one of his mother's favourite poems, and his own—he quoted it in one of his *six:nonlectures* ("nonlectures" 15).

fragmentation to emphasize how serious this "connotation" is. Dubrow suggests that Petrarch's "sonnets are so often not only located in a present moment but locked within in: they involve obsessive meditations from which the speaker cannot escape" ("The Sonnet"), but Cummings' meditation tries to immortalize the "compounded self" of speaker and beloved; the liminality "sharpens" the night, rejecting "frivolity." The final couplet shows how the sea smiles at this connotation, uninterrupted. If the other *Chimneys* can serve as a guide, this "gleam" of souls and "poised radiance of perpetualness" suggest *poikilos* and delicacy in "eternity" and in the "temporal splendour" of this night. While each person's "fatal flight" still leads them towards "eager avenues of lifelessness," this "connotation of infinity" wonders about these "souls" who did not achieve erotic suspension. What lives "in velvet beyond doomed thought" wants to be known, "like a woman amorous." Cummings reach for eternity in this union with the beloved, in the Sapphic perpetualness, is void of mischief or experimentation: it is deliberate and serious.

Rosenblitt's notion of "spiritual intimacy" is represented by Sapphic eros and the sense of erotic desire suspended, "crumbling" but not yet crumbled. This is a connotation but not a denotation: it is not permanently eternity, but a hint of liminal eternity. Through the moments of suspension explored in this chapter, whether it be from unresolved parentheses, questions of "when" without answers, Springtime settings, the perishability of flowers, or fleeting snapshots of erotic union, both Cummings' and H.D.'s turn to Sapphic eros to describe this eternal desire. Through this liminality—since eros, itself, depends on suspension—the poets create settings that offer a "perpetualness." Through H.D.'s Sapphic intertextuality, I emphasize Cummings' similar moves through Sappho to show how her "archaic eros" exists in both of their poetics.

Chapter Three

"my love is building a building / around you": How E.E. Cummings' Liminal Sonnets Become Sacred

> Actually, you said *Love, for you,*
> *is larger than the usual romantic love. It's like a religion. It's*
> *terrifying.*
>
> - Richard Siken, "Litany in Which Certain Things Are Crossed Out

The final pages of this thesis will examine how, by treating the beloved like a divine entity, the act of loving becomes akin to religious worship in Cummings' poetry. Cummings used this language in his own journals, not just his poetry; he spent most summers of his life at his family property Joy Farm, in New Hampshire as a reprieve from his busy life in New York City. In the summer of 1944, Cummings' third wife, Marion Morehouse, could not join him at the farm, and he wrote in his journal, "I realize, being up here alone, how a pagan must have felt after christianity had marched noisily into his favourite grove and blessed away the protecting spirit whom he silently worshipped here" (Cummings qtd in Kennedy 395). His articulation of Morehouse's absence from his own life as the disrupted pagan grove, without his worshipped "protecting spirit," echoes the erotic idiom that he sustains through his career. The word "worship" is apt for Cummings' personal relationships—before marrying his first wife, Orr, she was betrothed to Cummings' friend Scofield Thayer, and Cummings "convinced himself he was satisfied to worship her from afar in the self-abnegating style of a medieval courtly lover" (*Beauty* 73). Through this erotic idiom—his Sapphic voice—Cummings creates space for lover to worship beloved, and his poetry offers moments of liminality wherein the lover and beloved can compound. Where "eros" denotes a "lack," Cummings tries to close this space—catching the beloved who is not supposed to be caught—to preserve the moment of union for eternity. This chapter is about the creation of that poetic space: to draw upon language from his poems, these

spaces are the moments where the sea marries the sky, where the flower blossoms, and the brief ecstasy of the lovers' union. Through this register and union with the beloved, a "compounded self" can be created, and holds the "perpetualness" of infinity.

With this project's second chapter establishing the role liminality of erotic love that Cummings draws from ancient Greece, the final chapter will consider how the poetic space affirms the religiosity in this desire. We can see the development of this voice in some of his draft materials, both through other forms and his engagement with other canonical authors. Cummings "long-standing engagement with the sonnet form is not a mere modernist experiment or desire to innovate the traditional forms and themes but is rather a self-reflexive structuring that bares the bones of the genre itself, conveying a larger theme of the relation of form to cultural reality" (Huang-Tiller 156). His poetry "[demonstrates] an almost militant dedication to love, [and] also to the very notion for a modern world. [His] reworkings of the love poetry conventions show not only a complex understanding of the sonnet's form, but a thoughtful consideration of the underlying politics of that form" (Sychterz 10-11). This "militant dedication" to love is reflected in the subversive desire Cummings' writes through the Sapphic voice, and cleverly twists the "underlying politics" of the form. Each of the *Chimneys* presents a 14-line space for worship, but some sonnets have more integrity—often in a visual sense—than others, and the varied forms alter the reading of the love described within them. Pairing his use of this form with the content, including the liminal settings of Sapphic Spring or, broadly, the garden, all contribute to the suspension of time and how Cummings' uses this to reach the sacred register of eros.

Apart from the sonnets, various drafts from *Etcetera* show Cummings' early forays into creating this erotic idiom, or what I call his Sapphic voice. Given Cummings' education at

Harvard, his decision to root his Sapphic voice in the sonnet form was surely deliberate and, I suggest, intentionally responding to Petrarchan discourse.[36] Cummings' engagement with Sappho was much more serious than his many of his other literary influences, and this seriousness indicates to us how highly regarded her; recalling Rosenblitt's claim that he saw Sappho as one of the "noblest" poets, it is surprising to me that no one has examined their literary relationship.

Cummings' engagement with Sappho began early in his career. The poem "I have looked upon thee—and I have loved thee," published in the Harvard era section of *Etcetera* under "LOVE POEMS" is written in Sapphic stanzas. The Sapphic stanza is the same metre for three lines of eleven syllables, with a shorter fourth line of five syllables called the Adonic, "like a refrain, to make a quatrain that can be schematized" (Prins, "Sapphic Stanzas" 250). Where the Greek used long and short syllables, the English substitutes stressed and unstressed syllables. Thus, "In reading and writing 'Sapphics,' [authors] perform different ways to think about the relation between meter and rhythm, stanza and line, form and content" ("Sapphic Stanzas 251). Questions about rhythm are central to "when Sappho was increasingly read as the very personification of lyric and the Sapphic stanza as rhythmic perfection" ("Sapphic Stanzas" 251). This poem points towards Cummings' early foray into Sappho's divine eroticism while exploring the Sapphic form. Three pages later in the *Etcetera* section of *Complete Poems* is a work titled "Sapphics," which is written in Sapphic metre and was published in *The Harvard Monthly* in 1916. The poem dwells neither on romance nor erotic love, but regardless, his experimentation with these Sapphic images and with the Sapphic stanza portrays her early influence in his work.

[36] Cummings' second degree was an A.M. in composition (Kennedy 71).

Of course, the divine beloved is not unique to the Sapphic or Petrarchan—but as Carson suggests, this discourse is from Sappho's lyric, and here we can see Cummings' early experimentation with her work.[37] Within this form, the poem engages several Sapphic images central to this project:

> I have looked upon thee—and I have loved thee,
> Loved thy mouth, whose curve is the moon's young crescent,
> Loved thy beauty-blossoming eyes, and eyelids
> Petal-like, perfect;
> I would brush the dew in a flashing rainbow
> From thy face's twain mysterious flowers,
> And, supremely throned on the lips' full luna,
> Soar into Heaven. (*CP* 1-8, 968)

The first image is Cummings' ever-present acknowledgement of the mouth, turned into the curving moon, with the "beauty-blossoming eyes," suggesting the young man of the moon and fresh beloved from "my lady is an ivory garden." The shorter line, "Petal-like, perfect" is attached to the beloved's eyelids, but the final, shorter line "like a refrain" encompasses the entire description of the speaker looking "upon thee" as petal-like and perfect—an image Cummings maintains throughout his poetic corpus. Effects of *poikilos* even appear in the dew of "a flashing rainbow." The fresh, perishable beloved is surmised in the first half of the poem. Then, the poem moves past the present, having "looked," and now pondering what the speaker "would" do. The early morning dew "from thy's face," and royal, "supremely throned" lips then "Soar into Heaven," elevated through the splendour of this winged eros. Through love for the beloved and her fresh, perishable, Sapphic delicacy, the speaker can not only reach Heaven, but "soar" valiantly. Cummings does not evoke the topoi of the compounded self here, but the transcendent power of love is still present in these lines.

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[37] Departures from the sonnet form—though the sonnet is integral to the argument—are crucial to succinctly identify themes across Cummings work, especially his early draft material.

These images recur in the poem "LONGING," comprised series of Wordsworthian sestets published in *The Harvard Monthly* in 1915. Opening with "I miss you in the dawn" (*CP* 1, 918)—invoking a Sapphic longing as the night ends—Cummings' describes how "The Christlike sun / Moves to his resurrection in rejoicing heights, / And priestly hills partake of morning one by one" (*CP* 4-6, 918). The speaker's longing moves towards "The immense heaven, a vase of utter silence, towers / Vastward, beyond where dreams the unawakened moon, / Holding infinity and her invisible flowers" (*CP* 10-12, 918). Even in 1915, the "unawakened moon" is responsible for "holding infinity" and is associated with the "flowers" of the beloved. Amidst this day, "So do I want you, when in heavenly spaces God / Slips His white wonders on the silent trail of time" (*CP* 25-26, 918), and "Heaven unto her heart / Holdest sublimities afar from touch of day" (*CP* 31-32, 919). The beloved's heart transcends the "touch of day," while God fills the spaces of time. The integral relationship between God's position, the lover, and the day lead to Cummings' proclaiming in the final stanza, "O thou whose patient face is nearest unto God" (*CP* 38, 919). Far "from touch of day," the beloved reaches heaven. This echoes my earlier analysis of the necessary liminality of night to protect the lovers' union.[38] Why Cummings' never included the poem in any of his collected works is unclear—perhaps because it was from his Harvard days, or because he had moved on from the Wordsworthian style in which it was written—but the early experimentation with these Sapphic images in his erotic idiom illuminates the divine power of love which Cummings absorbed in these early years.

Cummings use of spiritual diction is not always attributable to Sapphic eros, either: in "she being Brand" (*CP* 261), one of Cummings' most popular "erotic"—or, according to this

[38] Repeated references to dawn also evoke the aubade genre, which is "an early-morning song whose usual motif is an urgent request to a beloved to wake up" (Abrams 205), but Cummings' engagement with this time of day suggests liminality and transition to me, more than the imminent parting brought by daybreak.

project, sexual—poems, where the woman is likened to a car the speaker is driving, he describes how, "just as we turned the corner of Divinity // avenue i touched the accelerator and give // her the juice,good" (*CP* 21-23, 261). Then, the two arrive at the "internalexpanding / & / externalcontracting" (*CP* 30-32, 261), before reaching a "stand-/;Still)" (*CP* 37-38, 261). The power of this mechanic scene, ending with the pulse of an orgasm—expanding and contracting before achieving standstill—reaches "Divinity // avenue," as the sexual encounter itself is transcendent; even touching "the accelerator" shows a reach towards eros. The irony in mechanizing the woman—I hesitate to call her the "beloved" because of the poem's tone—is also humorous; sexuality is reduced to an artificial practice, controlled by the man, with no "mutuality" of desire. During the 1920s, "[Cummings'] poetry increasingly championed the cause of the feeling and loving individual against all mechanistic collectivities" (Cohen 595), emphasizing the mischievous tone with which he likely wrote this poem, and marking the multitude of attitudes he displays towards sexuality and eroticism. While this project addresses many poems, this analysis is by no means exhaustive; instead, it intends to highlight once again that Cummings' sometimes jocular attribution of religious diction to sexuality's "Divinity / avenue" in no way encompasses the "erotic" this project traces.

Cummings did draw inspiration from many other authors across literary history, and *Etcetera* includes a section of "Literary Tributes." The poems are addressed to Geoffrey Chaucer, Dante Aligheri, and John Keats, and the fourth, titled "Helen," seems to refer to Virgil. Chapter One of this project considered his introduction to the sonnet form through Rosetti and the influence of Imagism, and Rosenblitt's analysis considers much of his engagement with Horace. Sometimes, though, did not realize his own engagement, which makes his high regard for Sappho that much more significant.

Cummings' poem "Tumbling-hair," first published in *Eight Harvard Poets* before being included in *Tulips & Chimneys* (*CP* 33), describes the rape of Persephone, but this is only made clear when the poem is cross-referenced with Satan remarking on Eve in John Milton's *Paradises Lost* (Rosenblitt 83, 143; Kennedy 108-09). [39] When Cummings' first biographer Charles Norman mentioned that to Cummings, he "expressed genuine surprise" (Norman qtd in Rosenblitt 83). Rosenblitt finds "Cummings' approach to Milton is read both through and against Blake's own epic *Milton,* with admiration for a Blakean spirituality over materialism, but with a classical subject matter and celebration of sexual licence which runs directly counter to it" (*Imperishable* 235). Even with Blake's mediation, Cummings' failure to remember the influence of Milton's work is not a small detail; she writes that "It does not really matter whether Cummings had forgotten the literary context in which he had written or if he was never conscious of the relationship: that is the point of taking an intertextual approach" (*Imperishable* 83), since the poem is also influenced by Shelley, Swinburne, and Homer. But Cummings was not careless in his poetic composition, and forgetting his engagement with Milton indicates, to me, a lack of regard for Milton's work.

Rosenblitt also considers the "Miltonian sound" (*Imperishable* 233) of some of Cummings' other poems alongside his mischief, further demonstrating Milton's subliminal presence in Cummings' writing. She analyzes "in heavenly realms of hellas dwelt," a "classical myth in translation," to consider how the sound of the image of "'heavenly realms' and 'celestial host' [in the poem] is reinforced with the distinctive paradox of 'shining' and 'dark' in 'shining realms of regions dark,' which recollects Milton's famous 'darkness visible'" (*Imperishable*

[39] "Tumbling hair" will not be discussed in this project, but to emphasize his engagement with Milton: "The scene [in "Tumbling hair"] is the rape of Persephone, but the poem is opaque and (as other scholars have noted) requires cross-reference to a passage from Milton's *Paradise Lost:* 'Not that fair field / of Enna, where Prosperin gathering flowers, / Herself a fairer flower, by gloomy Dis / Was gathered' (IV.268-71)" (*Imperishable* 83).

233). These oxymorons may be the only thing that Cummings purposefully gleaned from Milton's corpus, and Petrarchanism is rich with oxymorons, too.

Why, though, does Cummings not turn to *Paradise Lost*? It engages the classical world, describes sensual, celebratory love, and engages a depth of spirituality that I introduced in the first chapter of this thesis. It seems like an appropriate influence for his work and early thinking. Let us consider Cummings' own "erotic retelling of the central episode from Milton's *Paradise Lost*" (*Imperishable* 229), titled "devil crept in eden wood" (*CP* 1085) and published in *Etcetera.* Rosenblitt calls this retelling far enough from Milton's writing that it is "easy and unburdened" (*Imperishable* 237), refocusing any potential "anxiety of influence" from Milton, but the Miltonic is still present—and, even in its distance from Milton his move to retell the Fall demands to know why he chose engage Milton at all:

> devil crept in eden wood
> (grope me wonderful group me good)
> and he saw two humans roaming
> —hear that tree agroaning
>
> woman chewed and man he chewed
> (open beautiful open good)
> and their eyes were wet and shining
> —feel that snake aclimbing
>
> lord he called angel stood
> (poke me darling o poke me good)
> with a big thick sword all flaming
> —o my god I'm coming (*CP* 1-12, 1085)

The Fall is rewritten in three condensed quatrains, each following through the same process: the first lines are the three main actions of the story; "devil crept in eden wood," as Satan enters Paradise, "woman chewed and man he chewed" to describe their disobedience, and "lord he called angel stood" as the two are caught and punished. Then, within the parentheses are the

erotic actions, as the lovers "grope," are "open," and "poke." There is a dominating mischief in the carnal desire depicted in this penetration and openness. In the third lines, the active "humans roaming," eyes "wet and shining," and "big thick sword all flaming" move towards the stanza's climaxes.[40] The final lines articulate the consequences: first, the devil's presence causes the tree to groan; second, the snake climbs after watching woman and man chew; and, in the end, the climax of "o my god I'm coming" carries both the literal sexual climax of the lovers' erotic play in Eden, as well as it draws the speaker into the poem, and the Fall, "coming" into Earth as they are expelled from the garden. Cummings' allusion to Milton is in the "big thick sword"; though it is phallic and ludic, it eliminates a reading of this as Genesis. After the Fall in *Paradise Lost,* Michael sets up a watch of cherubs with "a sword the flame / Wide waving" (XI. 120-21) to protect the Tree of Life, and when Adam and Eve are being banished from Paradise, they are told to "see the guards… at whose front a flaming sword, / In signal of remove, waves fiercely round" (XII.590-93). With the angel's fire burning at the gates, Adam and Eve are expelled from Paradise, just as the "angel stood" in Cummings' poem. The flaming sword shows Milton's Eden in this playful "retelling" of the Fall. By including Milton in this project, I aim to demonstrate that it is the Fall itself that disinterests Cumming; his playful twist on Milton's work reveals the purity of Sapphic eroticism, participating in tradition that never has a "lapse" to exist in relation to. Cummings' conceptions of eros are rooted in a time before "christianity marched noisily" into the grove of pagan worship, and before the "devil crept in eden wood."

Within *Paradise Lost,* representations of sexuality and erotic love are transformed by the Fall. In Eden, "the only two / Of mankind, in the happy garden placed" (Milton III.62-63) are seen "Reaping immortal fruits of joy and love, / Uninterrupted joy, unrivalled love, / In blissful

[40] The "big thick sword all flaming," likely referring to Gabriel, could also reach to Eros' great shining wings, too, as cited from *Paradise Lost's* Book IV.

solitude" (III.64-67). Within Paradise, "Straight side by side were laid, nor turned I ween / Adam from his fair spouse, nor Even the rites / Mysterious of connubial love refused" (Milton V.741-43). In Adam and Eve's bed, "Love his golden shafts employs, here lights / His constant lamp, and waves his purple wings, / Reigns here and revels" (Milton IV.763-65). For Milton, "love refines / The thoughts, and heart enlarges" (VIII.590-91). In this world, love "is the scale / By which to heavenly love thou mayst ascend / Not sunk in carnal pleasure" (Milton VIII. 591-93). If Adam and Eve remain above "carnal pleasure," the two achieve the spiritual intimacy pictured through Sapphic eros, and "heavenly love," with their heart's refined and enlarged. The problem, of course, is in the Fall, where desire transforms; Dubrow writes that "Petrarchism repeatedly rears its ugly and serpentine head in the episodes associated with the Fall" (*Echoes of Desire* 269). The desire is transformed:

> …but that false fruit
> Far other operation first displayed,
> Carnal desire inflaming, he on Eve
> Began to cast lascivious eyes, she him
> As wantonly repaid; in lust they burn (Milton IX.1011-15)

As the earlier forbidden "carnal desire" flames, and the two begin to "burn" in lust, it is the "false fruit" responsible for bringing on this desire. Once they gain knowledge, their desire transforms: with "amorous intent" (Milton IX.1035) and Eve's "eye [darting] contagious fire" (IX.1036), "Her hand he seized, and to a shady bank / …He led her" (IX.1036-38). Once the two have moved out of the "Love's splendour" in the sun, "they took their fill of love and love's disport / Took largely, / Of their mutual guilt the seal" (Milton IX.1046-47). Their "mutual guilt" takes their fill of love, like they did of "that false fruit." Adam and Eve's "carnal desire" damages their once pure desire, for there is no mention of Love or their hearts present in their postlapsarian state, replaced by a "burning" in lust.

Both Dubrow and Bell suggest that Milton's postlapsarian desire indicate how "Petrarchism repeatedly rears its ugly and serpentine head in the episodes associated with the Fall" (*Echoes of Desire* 269), despite the purity of the prelapsarian love. Milton's Adam and Eve are in conversation, "conversation that is simultaneously verbal, spiritual, and physical. Indeed, their dialogue is much like that of all lovers: they share experiences, establish intimacy jockey for power, and all the while they talk of love, until they are in the mood for making love" (Bell 95). In Bell's reading, "Eve's narrative [is one] of those revelatory moments which differentiates *Paradise Lost* from the Petrarchan and biblical texts whose traces it contains" (Bell 100). Petrarchan love "is riddled with *if onlys,* with desire that is always already impossible. For Petrarchan man and woman, like Lacanian man and woman, and like Milton's Satan, there can be lust or love but there is no loving sexual relation, because desire is defined by lack, absence, frustration. For Adam and Eve, as for the couple in the Song of Solomon, there is no lack; and the natural abundance makes desire as satisfying as fruit and honey" (Bell 95). There is indeed a "mutuality of desire" in the prelapsarian scenes, where Love "lights / His constant lamp" over the lovers, and they remain above "carnal pleasure" of these *if onlys.*

Milton was quite aware of Petrarch's work (Bell 95), though, and Petrarch's influence does appear after the "false fruit" is consumed. Bell claims that "Renaissance love poetry could be Petrarchan or anti-Petrarchan or pseudo-Petrarchan (by twisting Petrarchan vocabulary to seductive purposes) but not a-Petrarchan; for Renaissance writers use Petrarchan discourse whether they endorse, challenge, parody, or exploit the Petrarchan posture" (81). Milton's postlapsarian world seems to endorse, and "After the Fall, Adam and Eve enter the abyss of Petrarchism that they have heretofore skirted and resisted" (Bell 114), and the change in their conversation and behaviours "warns ups that the Satanic temptations of Petrarchism make

mutual, conversational love all the more vulnerable in the postlapsarian world" (114). Bell concludes that "Their fall inscribes Petrarchism in human love and discourse, but their salvation reclaims conversations as an active alternative for postlapsarian relationships" (Bell 116). This still necessitates the existence of a "postlapsarian relationship," and Dubrow echoes Bell:

> The prelapsarian world [in *Paradise Lost*] is graced by a love that is contrasted with the values of Petrarchism—and praised by a poet who can, however partially and inadequately, recover a vision of that world precisely by distinguishing modes of love. The postlapsarian world, in contrast, is ushered in by means of Petrarchan rhetoric and characterized by its consequences: frustrated love, misleading language, multiple versions of desire rather than one pure, ideal one, and the erosion of distinctions. In a sense the Fall is a fall into Petrarchism. (*Echoes of Desire* 270)

Through Sapphic eros, Cummings achieves a purity of desire that cannot exist in Milton.[41] Although Cummings' does not remember writing "Tumbling-hair" with the Miltonic in mind, something kept him from engaging with *Paradise Lost;* with his understanding mediated by Blake and his preference for the classical, the inevitable return to Petrarch or Petrarchanism and lapsed desire is what I suggest turned him from *Paradise Lost.* Sapphic eros, too, is separate from the "carnal desire" of the postlapsarian encounter, emphasizing how the Sapphic tradition allows ascension to "heavenly love," especially through Spring-like, garden images without the threat of lapse. What Milton does not offer Cummings is the purity of erotic union or protection of these spaces, since prelapsarian eroticism is predicated on the Fall—but through Sappho,

[41] I do not have sufficient evidence to assert that Cummings was dissatisfied with Milton's lasparian world specifically because of the Petrarchism Dubrow and Bell find within it, but it does support my claim that the transformation of desire in postlapsarian Adam and Eve represents a type of desire Cummings rejected.

Cummings' can work with an eternal form of this Edenic, prelapsarian "heavenly love," tempering "carnal desire," to elevate the lovers in his work without the looming lapse.

In part, I suggest that Cummings' rejection of Milton and distaste for a lapsarian love tradition reaches beyond his "sexually repressive upbringing" and rebellion against the Unitarian faith in which he was raised to find a purer tradition. Foucault notes that we are often reminded of "the countless procedures which Christianity once employed to make us detest the body" (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 159) in the role of modern repression. This early tendency to "detest the body" is rooted in Original Sin, where "In the Christian doctrine of the flesh, the excessive force of pleasure had its principle in the Fall and in the weakness that had marked human nature ever since" (Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure* 50). Foucault claims that "Tomorrow sex will be good again" (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 7):

> What sustains our eagerness to speak in terms of repression is doubtless this opportunity to speak out against the powers that be, to utter truths and promise bliss, to link together enlightenment, liberation, and manifold pleasures; to pronounce a discourse that combines the fervor of knowledge, the determination to change the laws, and the longing for the garden of earthly delights. (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 7)

In Sappho, Cummings exceeds a "longing for the garden of earthly delights," moving beyond a tradition marked by Original Sin or the societal repression Foucault examines: for Cummings, it is still yesterday. His turn away from the unsatisfactory Christian tradition represented in Milton further shows how the Greek gave him a conception of desire free from this . Instead of representing a "weakness," Cummings turns a playful attitude towards Eden—however, while Cummings is playing with Milton's words, his work is still indebted to *Paradise Lost.* Eden itself is not repressive, but it is ephemeral.

The tension between ephemeral and eternal can be seen across Cummings' poetic, as Chapter Two of this project considered. Liminal spaces or temporalities offer a suspension of the fleeting, but they also offer a preserved, eternal moment amidst the perishability of the beloved or the setting of the poem. The "Chimney" is itself is also a liminal space: neither within nor outside of the home, a chimney connects the house to the outdoors, and chimneys are even a place for rising when smoke exits. It is also worth suggesting that Tulip is a vaginal and perishable symbol while the Chimney is phallic and fortified—a solid, manmade structure; the title of the volume connects these. Regardless—Cummings' *Chimneys* are a structure for erotic liminality and for these compounding bodies. In *Transcending Spaces,* Olson considers Cummings' ability to construct space in his novel *The Enormous Room* (1922), quoting Foucault's *Des Autres Spaces* that "The person in a transcendent place has survived a spiritual crisis and his or her 'deviance' is actually the fulfillment of a widespread cultural desire to attain 'enlightenment and freedom'" (Foucault qtd in Olsen 26). Cummings' poetics construct a space of "enlightenment and freedom" permitting a transformation into the "compounded self." Olsen claims that "Cummings recognizes the web of forces interacting at physical sites and also the mental web that we create out of our experience of space… Cummings translates the interactions of physical elements into an even richer cognitive space" (Olsen 74). Through spatial construction, "Instead of considering cognitive and physical space as separate, Cummings' looks at the interdependence between cognition and physicality" (Olsen 74). Of course, the length of *The Enormous Room* affords more development than a sonnet, but "Our habit of thought leads us to conceive of interior spaces as static entities (a 'room' has a predictable dimensional shape')" (Olsen 20), and Cummings' "suddenly and entirely alive" (*Enormous Room* 158) enormous room defies a "predictable dimensional" space. Rosenblitt found that "His notes map his

attempts to find an artistic aliveness and, in that search, he consistently reached for Greek terms" (*Imperishable* 198), since "Aliveness was a quality which Cummings sought and praised in the work of others" (198). The settings that Cummings constructs can appropriate the "physical site" to create an "even richer cognitive space" of "aliveness" for the compounded self.

The "aliveness" of the garden space, too, allows the sonnets to preserve Spring and its liminality. This is what shows us the "lady through whose profound and fragile lips / the sweet small clumsy feet of April came // into the ragged meadow of my soul" (*CP* 13-15, 325). The "lady" and her lips are what bring "April," or the Spring, into the lover's soul—which is, itself, a garden-like space. Recalling Gregory's notion that the meadow is an "erotic invitation," Cummings invites the beloved into his soul, further transcending boundaries of space, time, and physicality in the "ragged meadow" of his soul. This is more than just a space for erotic play, but for the union of these lovers. In this project's discussion of "sunlight was over," the similarly sacred space of a Sapphic, Greek shore sustains erotic desire, since lovers are above the "unspeaking Mediterranean." "Sunlight was over" is almost entirely without rhyme, full of enjambment, and scattered across the page—but while there is no safety amidst the poetic structure Cummings creates, the lovers remain delicately held in the setting of the poem.[42] The tension between the formal settings and these constructed, consecrated spaces consequently give rise to an effect of suspended time.

Recalling Webster's claim about the merging of the self he writes that, "Cummings' self is like his poetry—tactical, a bodily whole of the moment. Each poem is a body on the page, a whole taking up a position, a 'here'" (Webster 109). This "body" on the page, or this moment of "here," is a suspended moment of eros, offering an "aliveness" for worship. In "some ask praise

[42] More specifically recalling some of Chapter 1's discussion, the lovers *are* protected by their transcending, "fatally carefully becoming ourselves," and in the parenthetical descriptions of the setting (Tartakovsky).

of their fellows," Cummings emphasizes his role as the creator of the beloved, and " the // painter of your voice—" (*CP* 14-15, 310):

> myself is sculptor of
> your body's idiom:
> the musician of your wrists;
> the poet who is afraid
> only to mistranslate
>
> a rhythm in your hair.
> (your fingertips
> the way you move) (*CP* 6-13, 310)

In this vision, the lover crafts the beloved as an art piece: but there is the delicate fear of the speaker to "mistranslate" her, echoing the poem "because" from Chapter One and the "beginning of mySelf," where the speaker claims that no painter could recreate the beloved's smile. He claims to be "content should any / by me carven thing provoke / your gesture" (*CP* 18-20, 310), or "any painting (for its own // reason) in your lips / slenderly should create one least smile" (*CP* 21-22, 310), as though "provoking" her image satisfies his desires to capture her beauty. Most importantly, the lover seeks accuracy in sculpting the lady's "idiom."

Returning to the sonnet in this search for "aliveness," we can consider how Cummings' modulation of the form reinforces the importance of Sappho's presence in his poetic. In "my love is building a building" (*CP* 177), Cummings' dissolution of the sonnet form emphasizes the space erotic union creates for the lovers. The couple no longer relies on the structure of the poem, allowing the sonnet to dissolve across the page, yet preserving the "compounded self":

> my love is building a building
> around you,a frail slippery
> house,a strong fragile house
> (beginning at the singular beginning

of your smile)a skilful uncouth
prison,a precise clumsy
prison(building thatandthis into Thus,
Around the reckless magic of your mouth)

my love is building a magic,a discrete
tower of magic and(as i guess)

when Farmer Death(whom fairies hate)shall

crumble the mouth-flower fleet
He'll not my tower,
laborious,casual

where the surrounded smile
hangs

breathless (*CP* 1-17, 177)

As the stanzas shrink from quatrains to lines to individual words that stretch across the page and "[hang]" "breathless," there is no rhyme scheme to hold the pieces of this tower together. Only two lines of the poem are iambic pentameter—lines seven and eight, but the reconstructed final lines uphold this metre, if "laborious/casual" and "hangs // breathless" join the preceding lines. The agency of "my love" builds around the lover's body, "(beginning at the singular beginning // of your smile)," and "around the reckless magic of your mouth)." Cummings' language for the building evolves from a "strong fragile house," to "precise clumsy / prison," to a "discrete / tower of magic." The oxymorons of strong and fragile house, precise and clumsy prison, or discrete and towering space present unlikely unions in the structure, mirroring the fusion of "thatandthis." Where the speaker is "(building thatandthis into Thus)," the "that" of lover and

"this" of beloved move from being held together without spaces between the words to becoming one, compounded entity—denoted with majuscule "Thus."

This "aliveness" and the encompassing experience of eros in Spring suspends time in "And this day it was Spring":

> And this day it was Spring.... us
> drew lewdly the murmurous minute clumsy
> smelloftheworld. We intricately
> alive,cleaving the luminous stammer of bodies
> (eagerly just not each other touch)seeking,some
> street which easily tickles a brittle fuss
> of fragile huge humanity....
> Numb
> thoughts,kicking in the rivers of our blood,miss
> by how terrible inches speech—it
> made you a little dizzy did the world's smell
> (but i was thinking why the girl-and-bird
> of you move.... moves..... and also,i'll admit—)
>
> till,at the corner of Nothing and Something,we heard
> a handorgan in twilight playing like hell (*CP* 1-15, 189)

In this Spring day, the "murmurous minute clumsy / smelloftheworld" are urgently crammed together. Time is loud and "clumsy," emphasizing the urgency with which the poem tries to move; however, it is, hiccupping over commas where words are without spaces, stepping into parentheses, pausing for the enjambment or ellipses, or hesitating on the lone word "Numb." The "intricately / alive" couple is seeking something other than this numbness, and in the "cleaving the luminous stammer of bodies" we see the couple in the—sexual and—erotic moment, variegated and "luminous." The oxymoron of a delicate, "luminous" body clumsily "stammering" emphasizes this playfulness in Cummings' descriptions of this day in Spring. And the "stammer" of bodies implies a sexual repetition of motion as the repeated contact between them is "[cleaved]" apart—in an almost violent division. The scene lacks grace, clumsy and

stammering, and it holds the earlier playfulness of "devil crept in eden wood." As the two "(eagerly just not each other touch)," they are parenthetically protected in their exploration. The "kicking in the rivers of our blood" also evoke "Fragment 31," where the blood sings, and "the world smell" makes them "dizzy," leading them to lose their senses. The poem's resolution, marked by the volta in the word "till" shows the two arriving at the corner of "Nothing and Something," two non-places—thus trapping the lovers in liminality. The final image of the "handorgan in twilight playing like hell" brings urgency to the earlier numbness. As the handorgan plays like hell, rushing to get the notes out, the "brittle fuss / of fragile huge humanity" grows nearer to the lovers search for this corner of "Nothing and Something," "intricately alive" on this Spring day.

To trace the "transcending spaces" or eternal settings of the *Chimneys,* then, this project turns to a pseudo-Eden in "i have loved,let us see if that's all". Echoing the opening line of "Sapphics" "I have looked upon thee—and I have loved thee," Cummings' Sapphic lines are reformed in the sonnet structure:

> i have loved,let us see if that's all.
> Bit into you as teeth,in the stone
> of a musical fruit. My lips pleasantly groan
> on your taste. Jumped the quick wall
>
> of your smile into stupid gardens
> if this were not enough(not really enough
> pulled one before the vague tough
>
> exquisite
>
> flowers,whom hardens
> richly,darkness. On the whole
> possibly have I loved….?you)
> sheath before sheath
>
> stripped to the Odour. (and here's what WhoEver will know
> Had you as bite teeth;

i stood with you as a foal

stands but as the trees,lay,which grow (*CP* 1-16, 168)

The seriousness of "Sapphics"' images are lost in this sonnet: why dissolve the Sapphic delicacy alongside the strictness of the sonnet form? The sonnet features one half-line with the sole word "exquisite" as its own stanza, and, visually, the poem has sixteen lines. The poem also employs Cummings' Sapphic-blazon, itemizing the beloved's taste, sight, and smell as the speaker consumes of the beloved—with pleasure and a "groan." The "stature of an eternal condition in the spirit" suggested by these delicate moments is replicated in the brief experience of the lover's teeth sinking into the beloved's "musical fruit," which also alludes to the garden of Eden and the "false fruit." Here, again, the beloved is a garden, as the speaker jumps the "quick wall // of your smile," entering through the beloved's mouth. There are "vague tough // exquisite // flowers," all "stripped to the Odour," enveloping the lover in a sensory experience that transcends the mere visual. In this setting, though, there is no Fall, and no consequence from the fruit. The previous image of "petal-like, perfect" from "Sapphics" grows into full "exquisite // flowers," but these "stupid gardens" deflate the Sapphic grace. Were it not for our knowledge "Sapphics," an Edenic reading would dominate the "musical fruit"—but seeing how the ideas have developed, Cummings' Sapphism mixes with this traditional Christian or Miltonic image to soften highlight the mischief in this poem.

Returning to a discussion of eternity, the speaker yearns to feel the moment of union with their beloved in "it is at the moments after i have dreamed," where the lovers fail to suspend time or capture their "connotation of infinity":

it is at moments after i have dreamed
of the rare entertainment of your eyes,

when(being fool to fancy)i have deemed

with your peculiar mouth my heart made wise;
at moments when the glassy darkness holds

the genuine apparition of your smile
(it was through tears always)and silence moulds
such strangeness as was mine a little while;

moments when my once more illustrious arms
are filled with fascination,when my breast
wears the intolerable brightness of your charms:

one pierced moment whiter than the rest

—turning from the tremendous lie of sleep
i watch the roses of the day grow deep. (*CP* 1-14, 157)

Cummings remembers the liminal moments, "after I have dreamed," when "I have deemed," or "when the glassy darkness holds," but among these, "one pierced moment whiter than the rest" stands out. Split into two- or three-line stanzas, the poem almost holds a consistent structure except for the individual line of "one pierced moment," which disrupts the pattern. Apart from lines 11 and 12, the poem is written in iambic pentameter, but the line "wears the intolerable brightness of your charms" has an extra syllable—barely disrupting the iambic—and "one pierced moment whiter than the rest" is missing it, as though the sublime *poikilos* of the "intolerable brightness" overwhelms the metre. The poem, too, follows a Shakespearean rhyme scheme, with the volta playfully indicated with the word "turning." This turning, though, is from "the tremendous lie of sleep," where the moments after dreams disrupt the speaker. Remembering how "your peculiar mouth my heart made wise"—or the moment of erotic union that led to a "compounded self"—the speaker wishes they could capture the moment "whiter than the rest." Through dreams, the "glassy darkness holds // the genuine apparition of your smile," showing a Miltonic oxymoron of "darkness visible," since an "apparition" is a

supernatural image. The beloved's smile is made otherworldly, and it is impossibly held by darkness. Why, then, is this sonnet true to its traditional 14-line form? The sanctity of the true sonnet protects them: the speaker is attempting to trap this moment of eternity in the safety of the 14 lines, like Tartakovsky's parentheses. Without a sacred, safe setting, the beloved could escape from the lover. There is no discrete, magic tower built around the lovers to protect them, no walled garden or shoreline to suspend time—there is only the faltering memory of the beloved's "intolerable brightness" held by "glassy darkness."

Finally, the lovers in "stand with your lover on the ending earth" are protected from both the ending earth and the power of time in their neat, 14-line sonnet. Although this was not published in *Chimneys,* it encapsulates the necessity of the sonnet in relation to "timelessness," where this sonnet has no rhyme scheme or consistent pattern of stanzas, but instead is separated and supported by metre:

stand with your lover on the ending earth—

and while a(huge which by which huger than
huge)whoing sea leaps to greenly hurl snow
suppose we could not love,dear;imagine

ourselves like living neither nor dead these
(or many thousand hearts which don't and dream
or many million minds which sleep and move)
blind sands,at pitiless the mercy of

time time time time time

—how fortunate are you and i,whose home
is timelessness:we who have wandered down
from fragrant mountains of eternal now

to frolic in such mysteries as birth

and death a day(or maybe even less) (*CP* 1-14, 786)

The shore of the "whoing sea" is safe in the rectangle of the *Chimney,* tracing iambic pentameter throughout the poem—except for the break in the centre to follow the pulse of "time time time time time," a perfect half line. "Time" is the only thing that can disrupt the lovers upon the ending earth—both figuratively and formally—but the lovers are safe in their home of "timelessness." Here, Cummings leads into this moment of liminal, suspended annihilation, standing "on the ending earth," while the "whoing sea" is hurling itself onto the shore, capturing the "greenly" colour of the water as the wave breaks. Because they love, the couple is between life and death, like those sleeping, dreaming—then, the beat of "time time time time time" in the ninth line, like the constant pace of a wave against the shore, reveals that the speaker's "[supposing]" is separate from their declaration: "how fortunate are you and i,whose home / is timelessness." In this moment of "timelessness," where they have wandered from "eternal now," standing together, the world does not end. They have reached beyond an "eternal now," to a space where "now" does not exist: they can "frolic in such mysteries as birth / and death a day." Safe in the space of the sonnet and its iambic pentameter, time hiccups into the poem at the mercy of the couple, who, wholly alive in the moment, live in a moment of "timelessness." They cannot be reached by the ending of the earth and demonstrate another "connotation of infinity."

Through his use of setting and careful construction of form, Cummings' poetics reach toward an eternal register for the beloved, transcending the space of a 14-line sonnet to surround the lovers in a Sapphic, Springtime setting. Within these spaces, just as in the intimate protection of parentheses, Cummings' Sapphic voice leads the lovers towards the compounded self, allowing love to "building a building / around you," which protects the beloved and this moment of union from Time, Death, and any other threats. His descriptions of this protection yearn for

eternity, as the “spiritual intimacy” of these unions achieves divinity, worshipping—without objectifying—the beloved. Despite his hints of playfulness with “Divinity / avenue” or his retelling of “when devil crept in Eden wood,” Cummings’ treatment of the Sapphic is serious and careful; he modulates the Petrarchan tradition with various disruptions of form and content, but his reach for preserved liminality and uninterrupted union with the beloved is safe in the space of the sonnet.

Conclusion

Although this project in no way encompasses Cummings' Sapphic engagement, I have begun introducing new considerations of his work and its Sapphic intertextuality. Often recognized for his *Erotic Poems,* my aim to remedy Cummings' own conception of the "erotic" as richly informed by Sapphic eros and separate from portrayals of carnal desire is a crucial step in expanding the account of his classicism. Carson's claim that "Sappho reconstructs the space of desire in a poem" transfers directly to Cummings' work in the sonnet tradition, wherein he creates a "perpetualness" and "timelessness" of union between the lovers that reaches towards an eternal position of divinity. It is the "longing to be whole again" that Cummings grapples with across his early poetic, crafting the Sapphic voice excavated in the previous pages.

By avoiding the blazon's "dismembering force," Cummings' move from the fragmentary tradition of the sonnet, and many forms of Greek art reaches for a whole, constructed beloved. Modulating Petrarchanism by not scattering the beloved within a poem but by gathering the beloved's body and soul, Cummings represents her as an entire being that merges with own. His employment of *poikilos* washes Sapphic delicacy and the light of Love's splendour over the settings of his poems, variegating the beloved's body. Engaging Sapphic fragments directly through images like the bee, the rose, or the moon invokes her presence, though the "symptoms of love" from "Fragment 31" are often mediated by other literary traditions, such as the Petrarchan. Furthermore, with Eros as a god, the lovers become "godlike" themselves: the divine inspiration that Cummings pulled from his own biographical lovers in part fuelled the popularity that allowed his Sapphism to remain submerged. It is Sappho's "musing on states of passion" that achieves this level of sacralization.

As illuminated by H.D.'s Sapphic intertextuality, the ability to "not merely allude to" Sappho but also "absorb this archaic eros," associated with Sappho, as noted by Collecott, also occurs in Cummings' poetics. Both poets use liminal spaces to suspend the erotic tension, employing what Gregory calls the "radicals of intimacy" in Sapphic eros. While the settings of their poems are not always liminal spaces, the "threshold quality" of twilight, dawn, or the moonlight can suspend a Greek seascape, garden, or grove. The common presence between each of the settings is Spring, reaching to an eternal freshness and perpetually erotic seasonality. Through these manipulations of temporality, the erotic writings—occasionally represented by Love himself—lead to a "sustained spiritual eroticism" in H.D.'s work that reflects Cummings' own "spiritual intimacy," which he achieves through these spaces of almost or in-betweens. The "perpetualness" of this desire leads to the "compounded self," or a "sea-change" of the lovers.

Then, considering how Christianity "noisily" interrupts his pagan worship of the idealized beloved alongside the ways his poetry addresses a divine entity and elevates the beloved to achieve this divinity, we can see how these settings reach for the "aliveness" of a "richer cognitive space." An Edenic or Christian reading of the garden settings merge with readings of Spring to emphasize the religiosity of these conceptions, making the beloved "holy" or "a kingdom" for the speaker to worship. The protection afforded by these settings increases the intimacy of the union, like Tartakovsky's parentheses, and reveal the underlying conventions of the desire written into the sonnet tradition without a "wounded and open" reading of the desire. Instead, the lovers reap Milton's "immortal fruits of joy and love," making "timelessness" their home. As the lovers stand on the ending earth, their "connotation of infinity" is achieved, transcending the boundaries of both flesh and self to find themselves eternally connected.

Of course, this thesis is deeply indebted to the work of Rosenblitt, who touches on many areas of Cummings' classicism that are deserving of greater attention. Pursuing a deeper reading of this Sapphically erotic and "sexual freedom" and his other classical influences would surely reveal more about the distinctions among Cummings' "sexual," "erotic," and "romantic" poetry. Regardless, his life philosophy towards love was carefully crafted and eternally binding. In the conclusion to his autobiographical Charles Norton lecture series at Harvard in 1953, called *isixnonlectures,* Cummings said, "I am someone who proudly and humbly affirms that love is the mystery-of-mysteries, and that nothing measurable matters 'a very good God damn'" (*i:sixnonlectures* 110). Thus, through Sappho, we can glimpse Cummings' quest for the "mystery-of-mysteries," and its immeasurable quality.

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