

The three poems reproduced here illustrate aspects of Cummings's early development as a poet. For a discussion of these poems, please click on the audio-file, 'Cummings: a pagan modernist'.

SAPPHICS

When my life his pillar has raised to heaven,
When my soul has bled and builded wonders,
When my love of earth has begot fair poems,
 Let me not linger.

Ere my day be troubled of coming darkness,
While the huge whole sky is elate with glory,
Let me rise, and making my salutation,
 Stride into sunset.

(published in *The Harvard Monthly*, January 1916)

All in green went my love riding
on a great horse of gold
into the silver dawn.

four lean hounds crouched low and smiling
the merry deer ran before.

Fleeter be they than dappled dreams
the swift sweet deer
the red rare deer.

Four red roebuck at a white water
the cruel bugle sang before.

Horn at hip went my love riding
riding the echo down
into the silver dawn.

four lean hounds crouched low and smiling
the level meadows ran before.

Softer be they than slippered sleep
the lean lithe deer
the fleet flown deer.

Four fleet does at a gold valley
the famished arrow sang before.

Bow at belt went my love riding
riding the mountain down
into the silver dawn.

four lean hounds crouched low and smiling
the sheer peaks ran before.

Paler be they than daunting death
the sleek slim deer
the tall tense deer.

Four tall stags at a green mountain
the lucky hunter sang before.

All in green went my love riding
on a great horse of gold
into the silver dawn.

four lean hounds crouched low and smiling
my heart fell dead before.

(published in *Tulips and Chimneys* (1923) in the section 'Songs')

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)

(published in *Tulips and Chimneys* (1923), in the section 'Sonnets—Unrealities')

Note—

The authoritative text of *Tulips and Chimneys* is now *Tulips & Chimneys (1922 Manuscript)*, ed. George James Firmage and intro. Richard S. Kennedy (1976).