

O Captain! My Captain!

by Walt Whitman

Walt Whitman's masterpiece, *O Captain! My Captain!* has been analyzed in this section from diverse aspects in order to include the moods, undertones, political climate and personal opinion regarding the events in consideration. The poem moves with sheer melancholic [tone](#) throughout its entirety. Walt Whitman is the new-age poet, poised with breaking away from the shackles of established poetic practices and forming new ones just as America is created for a different purpose, tearing away from the yoke of colonialism and steering clear of undermining the proletariat class.

On the other hand, [Walt Whitman](#) uses similar poetic devices as that of [William Wordsworth](#) and Dante Alighieri. Speaking in the language of ordinary men, Walt Whitman aspired to become the voice of the nation, speaking on behalf of American population at the time. As a result, he has recorded the events, moods and spirit of the time magnificently. Saddened by the results of the first American civil war, Walt Whitman wrote an elegy in memory of deceased American President Abraham Lincoln in 1865. An elegy is known as a mourning poem. The civil war occurred during his lifetime with Whitman a staunch supporter of unionism through and through.

Poetic Form:

Most of Walt Whitman's poems use repetition and rhythm for rendering a spellbinding poetic beauty. He uses [anaphora](#) constantly as several verses begin with the same word/ phrase. For instance '[When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomers](#)' uses 'when' 4 times to render a [lyrical](#) sound. Anaphora is generally used for joyous chants and rendering celebratory feelings in a poem's entirety. *O Captain! My Captain!* makes use of 'father' and 'heart' to mourn the death of assassinated Abraham Lincoln.

Poetic Structure:

The poem, 'O Captain! My Captain!' consists of 3 stanzas in total, having 2 quatrains in each. A quatrain is a stanza consisting of 4 lines.

Historical Perspective:

'O Captain! My Captain!' was authored by the famous American poet [Walt Whitman](#). It is alluded to President Abraham Lincoln's death in 1865. The poem was a part of his controversially famous collection of poems '**Leaves of Grass**'. The poetic collection continuously was revised to add new poetic pieces from Walt Whitman as a result.

Analysis of the poem:

First Stanza:

*O CAPTAIN! my Captain! our fearful trip is done;
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won;
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,*

*While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring:
But O heart! heart! heart!
O the bleeding drops of red,
Where on the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.*

Analysis:

In this stanza, the [speaker](#) shouts with sheer excitement to ship's captain about making it home safe and sound. The ship after enduring tough storms and impenetrable winds made it back on the dock. Jaded and exhausted after a tiresome journey, the mission has been a roaring success. Although the ship is yet to arrive safely in the harbor, but 'land ahoy', 'land ahoy' as the ship is close by and people are seemingly exulted by its sight. The church bells are ringing and people act animatedly as the ship nigh the shore. The excitement escalates as the boat nears the harbor. The keel has been thrown in to steady the moving ship. Keel can also be referred to the 'ship' as well, same as 'all hands on deck' means all people should be ready.

As the ship draws near the harbor, the poem takes on a dark turn, foreboding something unfavorable to be revealed. 'Grim and daring' are the terms referring to the twisting [mood](#). The would-be ghost ship carries some unwanted news for the awaiting crowd.

Now he speaks from the heart. The heart has shattered and torn over the death of the ship's captain. The breakdown of emotions is surging from the sailor as the fallen comrade lies beside him, in all his glory but dead. Drops of blood are flowing on the ship's deck, the blood of Abraham Lincoln.

Second Stanza:

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
Rise up-for you the flag is flung-for you the bugle trills;
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths-for you the shores a-
crowding;
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;
Here Captain! dear father!
This arm beneath your head;
It is some dream that on the deck,
You've fallen cold and dead.

Analysis:

The sailor implores the now dead captain to rise from the dead. The act of talking to the dead is known as apostrophe. Reason being, the people ashore await their prized captain to lead the way and stamp his mark on history. The crowd is jubilant as they celebrate using a number of devices such as raising flag in victory, holding flowers and cheering for the captain. The crowd is getting restless, as anticipation

rise in order to catch a glimpse of their ship's captain. Alas! He's no longer with them.

In actuality, the ship's captain is not his biological father, but truly his respect and reverence for him stands greater than his actual father. The sailor looks at the fallen comrade and wishes this nightmare was just a dream. Alas! As the reality sets in, the sailor realizes, the damage is irreparable.

Stanza 3

*My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still;
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will;
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done;
From fearful trip, the victor ship, comes in with object won;
Exult, O shores, and ring, O bells!
But I, with mournful tread,
Walk the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.*

The sailor looks sadly at the dead captain in pure agony. He observes his lips to have paled a la that of a corpse. The captain fails to respond his cries of helplessness. The liveliness from the captain's face has drained now. His pulse has stopped and he's unlikely to move from now on. The ship has landed safely in the harbor with its anchor thrown in. The voyage is now complete. The sailor reminisces about the trip to be extremely arduous yet they crossed the line with a trade-off.

The concluding lines of the poem explicate the fact that sailor has some bad news to share with the awaiting crowd. He appeals directly to the loud jeers, cheers and ringing bells for the much awaited captain. Again, the poet uses synecdoche to represent entire American [audience](#) at large as the poem relates to death of Abraham Lincoln. The sailor feels uncomfortable as he needs to relay the bad news to the populace at large, as the victory celebrations come to a standstill eventually

Personal Commentary to *O Captain! My Captain!*

"O Captain! My Captain!" at the time of its publication became an intensely popular poem for classic, read in schools over the years to come. For Whitman, the praise was redundant by all means. Commenting on his own poetry, he said that audience of his time appreciated poetry with form, rhyme and meter, still unfamiliar to free-verse concept. The poem moves its reader with utter undertones of remorse and sadness over the conclusion of the Civil War and its dramatic ramifications later, rendering a powerful period poem in the process.

The fallen ship's captain is a reference to Abraham Lincoln, whereas the ship is also an [allusion](#) to United States of America during its early years of independence. The

speaker's coming to terms with the death of his fallen comrade is the focal point of the poem at hand. At the start of the poem, the speaker attempts to come to reality as he observes his dead captain on the deck. Slowly and gradually, he realizes that the change is permanent and life must go, regardless. The end of Civil War was supposedly a moment of rejoice for American populace, instead it became an event of mourning. The conclusion of the Civil War has brought with itself national mourning and period of reflection.

His poems emphasize the importance of self in majority of his poems, ranging from "*I hear America Singing*" to others, he prizes the American populace to believe in themselves. More so, he even uses symbolical allusions in order to drive home a point. He may use inanimate objects for that end.