

Date 3 / 2 PV Log: (circle one) Poem / Movie / Picture / LyricTitle "O Captain! My Captain!"Author / Director / Walt Whitman

Context (Where Found / Viewed / Read?)

I first heard fragments of the poem "O Captain! My Captain!" in the movie *Dead Poet Society* as a freshman in Theology I. I was prompted to do a log on the poem after watching the movie once again recently.

Content / CD / Summary / Precis (Say? "Plot? Setting/Situation? Key lines/phrases scenes, etc?)

Walt Whitman wrote "O Captain! My Captain!" when the United States was on the verge of the Civil War. In the poem, a sailor sings a song, almost an anthem, that praises his captain for leading him and the other crew members to land after risking his life in a dangerous and tempestuous voyage. The speaker can see the people on shore "all exulting," but suddenly he looks down and sees "bleeding drops of red, Where on the deck [his] Captain lies, / Fallen cold and dead." The speaker urges the captain to wake up from his death and to see all of the people rejoicing and praising him for his success in the voyage, and he wishes that the captain's death was merely a dream. Nevertheless, his "Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still," and the people on the shore keep on celebrating, as the speaker walks mournfully upon the deck where the captain has fallen dead.

Content / CM / Meaning? / Theme(s)?

Although it is not apparent, it is actually Abraham Lincoln to whom this poem is a tribute to and whom Walt Whitman deeply admired. Whitman not only speaks for himself but he also speaks for all of those people who strongly admired Lincoln as the leader of the country, who held the nation together through the worst crisis in its history, a task only a few brilliant people could ever have been able to accomplish. Lincoln not only led the country to victory and won the Civil War for the North, but he also legally ended the institution of slavery in America. He is viewed, not only in Whitman's eyes but also in the eyes of the nation as the savior of the American Union, the rescuer of the foundation of a nation that has gotten people to the fortunate state they are living in today. Without this leader and this captain, who knows how and where the United States could have ended up today. This poem, however, is not simply a one sided celebration of the victory of the Civil War for the North. The poem declares urges people to avoid conflict at all costs, and it condemns the national disruption that the Civil War directly led to. In a patriotic context, the poem encourages people to maintain their personal interests in the success of leaders and the path the country itself takes no matter what party or policies they support, because, ultimately, everyone is in the same boat together.

Form (Diction? Construction Terms? Symbolism?)

"O Captain! My Captain!" appears in the poetic form of dirge, or a mournful song for the dead. It is written in iambic pentameter and broken into three stanzas with each stanza containing a verse, containing rhymed couplets, and a chorus. In the poem, the "captain" obviously is referring to Abraham Lincoln and the "victor ship" as the Union in the Civil War. The death of the Captain alludes to Lincoln's assassination soon after the end of the Civil War.

Commentary (What do you want to say? Why like? Questions? Synthesis / Allusions-Connections / Relevance to personal experience, to literature, 20Q's? etc.)? "Poetic" Traits?

"O Captain! My Captain!" is probably one of the most well known poems in society today, especially because of its relatedness to the American Civil War and Abraham Lincoln and because it is even referenced frequently in popular culture today, such as in the movie *Dead Poets Society* and in a multitude of television shows. The main purpose of the poem, though obviously a mourning song for arguably one of the best and most brilliant men in history, seems to be to show the horrendous repercussions and drastic consequences of conflict and war. Lincoln was a much loved man of his time, as was considered the savior of America and its future as well as the "Great Emancipator." He accomplished significantly more with his life than many could probably have ever even imagined, and thus his legacy will reign with Americans essentially perpetually and forever. Nevertheless, Lincoln was unfortunately and unfairly assassinated because evil and malicious people still despised his efforts to make the world, particularly the United States, a better place. Lincoln's death shows how conflict and war can cost the lives of even the most innocent and honorable people in society. War is never the option because it puts the lives of those that deserve to live at risk for even the most insignificant of reasons. I think this poem is poetic because it tries to get people to understand how much pain and suffering can arise from conflict and chaos, no matter how necessary the struggle may seem. Of course, there comes a time when people must fight for what is right, but never should the intention of the conflict ever be aimed at destruction.

over (do not mix logs; e.g., no poem log in front, and movie log on back)